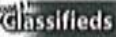




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SEVENTH ANNUAL ASIAN CITY JOURNALISTS' CONFERENCE IN JAPAN:

**Media's role to show loopholes**

By Anuradha Kodagoda

The 7th Asian City Journalists' Conference was held this year too in Fukuoka Japan with the participation of Journalists from seven south Asian countries. The Asia City Journalists' Conference is held every year with the aim of bringing journalists in Asia together to exchange opinions and share knowledge.



Chris Radford

In this year's conference, the scribes discussed how communities in Asian cities can secure safe and sustainable water, restore healthy rivers and ecosystems. They shared important information and discussed issues that the respective cities faced in terms of water and sanitation and the roles of journalists and the media on how they could support to improve the current situation. The Asian City Journalists' Conference is organised by the UN-Habitat Fukuoka office with the advocacy of the Nishinippon Newspaper, Fukuoka Prefecture, Fukuoka City. "In the modern world dissemination of information plays a big role as a result of which the world is much more connected than before.

Therefore, journalists have a crucial role to play and we have recognised the importance of establishing partnerships with journalists which is a good reason to have the Asia City Journalists' Conference in Fukuoka Japan annually," said Chris Radford, the Acting Director, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific - UN Habitat. "Although we have excellent techniques and methods to solve the problems it is important to have a closer relationship with journalists in the region because we can share the knowledge and get more information and mainly learn from each other.

We believe the media's role should be to show the loopholes and advocacy in terms of the government being aware of what works and what doesn't work and feed into their policies," he said

Radford said: "I was quite impressed by the presentations of every journalist representing the seven Asian countries namely India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, China, Vietnam, Philippines and Japan. Although none of them possessed technical expertise on water related issues, they could come up with excellent presentations about the given topic.

"However, the challenge is, with all the information, how would you use this knowledge to overcome the existing issues that you have in your cities? For example, as Arun Katiyar stressed in his presentation about the water mafia in Mumbai and the Journalist from Indonesia, Famega Syavira Putri, stressed about the transparency and the accountability of the water operators in Jakarta, it is important to find a mechanism to deal with these issues, especially when making public awareness.

"It is a known fact that while the Asia-Pacific Region has achieved rapid economic development and many countries have seen vast improvements in social infrastructure, residential environment, and standards of living, these changes have come at a cost of great burdens for the natural environment.

"This region continues to experience a rapid population growth; in the next 25 years, it is estimated that the population will grow by over 1 billion.

As most of the growth is predicted to center on cities, it has become critical to find solutions to issues such as sanitation and water infrastructure, waste management and energy and larger scope of issues such as industrialisation and climate change. For the Asia-Pacific region to continue enjoying stable economic growth, aside from economic development, the approaching urban challenges from social and environmental perspectives and forming sustainable urban development are paramount.

"Since the mid-1980s, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) has implemented environmentally-sound urban development projects in nations around the world and engaged in research and policy advocacy regarding the intersections of development and environment; resource management for sustainable development; and the governance needed to enable such management.

In Asia and the Pacific region, the activities of UN-Habitat span from poverty and slum reduction programs to large scale post-conflict and post-disaster reconstruction projects, and to promoting urban policy through environmentally sustainable concepts and methods. "UN-Habitat's academic and government partners in Asia at both national and local levels have increasingly expressed their interests in learning from Japanese experience, know-how, and implementation of environmental technologies.

Fukuoka is home to a cluster of distinctive environment related technologies, know-how and urban policy expertise. These resources are leveraged by local governments, research institutes, businesses, and NGOs, and by partnering with them, UN-Habitat hopes to disseminate this technical expertise and information through its network. "Since 2009, UN-Habitat Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) has organised an environmental technology expert group meeting inviting representatives from local governments, environmental NGOs and UN-Habitat experts from both Fukuoka and Asia and the Pacific region. So far fruitful discussions were made on water and sanitation energy and sewage introducing a number of environmental technologies, from water conservation technology to water purifying blocks, heat insulating paint, irrigation water wheels and sewage treatment bacteria.

As an output of intensive discussions by the panelists, six demo projects have been conducted successfully in Mongolia, Nepal, Philippines, Laos, and Sri Lanka," Chris said.

Therefore, this year, parallel to the Asia City Journalists' Conference expert group meetings were held and international journalists were invited to participate as observers.



This year's expert meeting focused on the topics of water and sustainable urban development over a span of two days; on day one, water technologies related to drinking water and recycled and reuse of water such as water conservation technologies, rainwater harvesting, and small scale desalination technologies practised by local governments and private sector companies were introduced.

Day two was dedicated for the theme of sustainable urban development and both public and private sector experts on both conceptual and technological aspects of achieving sustainable urban development were invited.

On both days, the representatives from Asia talked about their current sanitation situations, issues and potentials for collaborations with the technologies.

By introducing water related problems and needs of various countries and cities, the current progress of their work, the meeting aims to illuminate potential challenges and possibilities for collaboration and partnerships, through follow up workshops and small scale pilot projects.

It provided an opportunity for the experts from Fukuoka as well as the general public, to learn about the current situations and challenges faced by many cities in Asia.

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