

## EXPLOSION OF YOUTHS AND THEIR EMERGING PROBLEMS IN ASIA

**Dr. Haryono Suyono**

Member of International Advisory Committee  
Asian Urban Information Center of Kobe (AUICK)

### **Abstract**

The Asian Urban Information Center of Kobe (AUICK) was officially established in 1989 in a cooperative agreement between the City of Kobe and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The aim of AUICK is:

*to contribute to the suitable development of cities through the collection and collation of information, and to study and research problems commonly shared by various cities in Asia, while extending cooperation in a relationship of mutual trust.*

Prior to 1989 there were two activities that led to, and were an integral part of the Center's activities. One was a comparative study of Kobe and Singapore, with comments on Tomakomai in 1985/6. Following this, in 1987 Kobe hosted an international conference of urban administrators from medium-sized cities in Asia. Each played a role in shaping AUICK.

One of the enduring characteristics of AUICK has been its focus on urban administrators as what have often been called the front line managers of the urban scene. AUICK has been concerned with listening to what the urban administrators have to say about their problems, the strategies and tactics they develop to address those problems, and the kinds of assistance they need to do a better job of addressing those problems.

AUICK has been trying to share the experience of Kobe and other Japanese cities in solving urban population issues with Asian cities in the spirit of promoting the South-South exchange of information and experience. Furthermore, AUICK has, especially since 2004, helped to develop a critical mass of expertise in nine selected Asian cities to deal with urban population and development issues, in line with ICPD Program of Action and MDGs, in particular through the City-and-University Partnership.

AUICK has also been concerned with developing effective training programs for urban administrators throughout Asia to understand their problems and to learn or to share work together of ways how to solve the problems.

AUICK has been supported by the City of Kobe and about three-fourth of its budget comes from the City and the rest from UNFPA mainly to cover the training program for Asian city managers.

Because much of what was done and learned flowed sequentially, with experience guiding next steps throughout the process, this report will summarize what was learned along the way about youth and their problems in these areas. We may not have all the answers, but from the projected population can be seen a rapid growth of the young people in these areas which eventually bring about problems and challenges.

Common knowledge has it that the demographic transition in developed countries required a longer process, such that the governments had sufficient time to take strategic actions to prepare appropriate services for the various segments in need, such as for the under-fives, the adolescents,

the adults and even for the elderly. The long transition process gave them time to meticulously plan, and not be intimidated by time pressures, and hence the process of adjustment took place in smooth progression.

On the other hand, the developing nations, especially those in Asia, were thankful of the advent of medical technology in the West which spread rapidly to the developing world. The resultant phenomena was a far more rapid mortality rate decline. On parallel course, successes were recorded in family planning programs to prevent the fear of population explosion. These happened since the 1960s and began to gain ground and acceptance in the developing countries. The net result was the apparent rapid fertility decline, often preceding the marked mortality declines.

Further end-phenomena was that demographic transition which took 100 years in many European countries, required less than one generation to occur in many Asian countries. The apparent consequence was the rapid decline in population growth, characterized by significant changes in the age structure, i.e. producing a larger segment of the younger population, and more strikingly is the significant magnitude of the surviving elderly. The younger segment exploded two, three, or even four times compared to the conditions before the drastic and concurrent declines in fertility and mortality rates.

The emergent and urgent issue facing many governments, particularly municipal governments is the demand for quality education which should be begun at earlier years, to prepare the younger generation for eventual stringent competition for employment opportunities. Corollary issues are providing those employment opportunities, and gender mainstreaming in the labor force, the emerging new ethnic composition of the work force, the imbalanced rural-urban employment balance, and the upward social mobility occupying positions which in former days were reserved for the elites of the society.

The rapid declines in mortality rates also gave rise to the increased life expectancy, such that persons who would have been deceased at their younger years are still surviving at an advanced age. These old-age survivors are not facing their employment position, further resulting in compelling the younger cohorts, who are better educated, to wait longer until they can occupy positions of their dreams.

The changing structure of the youth and adolescents which is happening at the moment in Asia will have far ranging and concern-raising impact into the future as it is rapid, far beyond what the developed nations have experienced, and virtually uncharted by empirical studies. Furthermore, policy decision-makers are faced with a new political environment heavily laden with new democratic values, the rise of human rights issues, sustainable development; all demanding transparency, higher participatory management, and particularly higher accountability and stringent use of the ever-decreasing public resources.

All of those would in turn demand comprehensive reforms, and in turn requiring the innovativeness of researchers to look into strategic issues, also demanding candid and open international cooperation. All will be done to formulate policies and programs with high flexibility, ever placing population at the central of empowerment in facing future challenges never before envisioned. AUICK stands committed to forge such cooperation.