Human Development and Human Security Issues in Northeast Asia: Initiatives by and the Role of the UNDP

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WHAT IS NORTHEAST ASIA?

The question "What is Northeast Asia?" may be redundant, but it is still a necessary one. What geographic area constitutes Northeast Asia (NEA)? The UNDP under its Tumen River Area Development Programme has commissioned a map to answer this question. Whether this is an authoritative delineation will depend on how many different partners for development in the NEA subregion will accept it. But as you will see later on, it is important to determine which parts of Asia are considered to belong to this sub-region. Six countries belong to Northeast Asia, four in their entirety and two partially. Three have a common border in the Tumen area, hence the selection of the Tumen area as a focus of special attention for regional cooperation.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY VERSUS HUMAN POVERTY

I was originally asked to speak about human resource development and poverty alleviation in Northeast Asia. As you have seen from my brief outline, I have changed the title and will be speaking about human development and human security instead. Why this change? There are several reasons for this change.

The human development concept has always been central to the UNDP's work. Since 1990, the UNDP has published annually a global *Human Development Report* (HDR), and in many developing countries national human development reports are also periodically published. In NEA, Mongolia, China, and Russia have published such reports; they can be accessed on the UNDP website, and some can be purchased commercially. They have become important sources of information for development practitioners, as they advance a different approach toward measuring and assessing development potentials, threats, and challenges. The human development index (HDI), for instance, measures the access that people have to education and safe drinking water. It also measures the health conditions using life expectancy as the key indicator. Interestingly enough, in our 1999 national *Human Development Report*, which looked at the changing role of the state in China during the transition period, two of the Chinese provinces that we include in NEA—namely, Liaoning and Jilin—score higher on the provincial HDI rankings than on the ranking by GDP per capita. All four provinces—namely, Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia, Liaoning, and Jilin—are

among the better-off provinces in terms of both human development as well as general economic development. This means that in basic terms the human resource base in those Chinese provinces, which we count as part of NEA, is well developed. In the global HDR, other parts of NEA—in particular Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and, until the mid-1990s, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)—also counted in the global rankings of countries with a high degree of human development. Neither Mongolia nor Far Eastern Russia, especially the Primorsky Territory, are among the areas in the world with low human development. In fact, according to our 2000 global HDR, Japan, the ROK, China, and Mongolia score better on the HDI than on their GDP per capita ranking, although Russia does not. Unfortunately, no recent data are available for the DPRK since 1998. But we know that not all is well there either. Hence, I believe we should discuss human development issues in this part of the world from the angle of human security (HS). The concept of human security was the main theme of our global report in 1994. Japan in particular has adopted this concept proactively and aims a major part of its development cooperation funding at enhancing or restoring human security in developing countries.

But what is "human security"? In our view, HS has two major aspects: safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression; and protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the pattern of daily life, whether in homes, in the work place, or in communities. The loss to HS can be slow or abrupt. It can be caused by bad public policy choices, by the force of nature, or it can be a combination of both. Human security thus has seven aspects: economic, social (especially as it relates to food and health), personal (as it relates to income), environmental, cultural (in particular as it relates to the stability of the community), and political. I guess, by now you will see and understand why HS is a more conducive concept to understand the situation in NEA. While it is tempting to go through the list of the seven aspects and debate them in detail, neither will I have the time nor is this really the place to do so. Therefore permit me to stay at the macro-level.

We all are familiar with the rapid global economic and political changes that have occurred since the beginning of the 1990s. NEA has been affected by them, as have other parts of the world. Globalization and the integration of their economies into the international trade regime have given China and the Russian Far East unprecedented economic growth rates. However, this has also forced them to restructure their economies and industries to make them competitive in the global market place. Japan and the ROK, while integrated into the global economy for much longer, have felt the pinch of adjustment and are still facing more structural changes to their economies. Particularly hard hit were Mongolia and the DPRK. While laid-off government employees in Mongolia had hoped to weather the changes by going back to traditional animal husbandry, two natural

disasters in a row have shown how vulnerable they have become and that this is not a durable and sustainable solution. Hence Mongolia is still faced with hard choices to be made in order to secure a sustainable livelihood for its people. Of all the countries in NEA, the DPRK is undoubtedly the hardest hit. Economic changes in China and Russia disrupted its economic linkages, which were established in the 1950s. Simultaneously, changes in political leadership and the fact that the country technically is still at war have not helped to define the necessary reforms and structural adjustments speedily. On top of all this, several natural disasters have ravaged the natural resource base of the country. All these factors combined have clearly resulted in a dramatic drop in living standards and have wiped out earlier gains. An understandable national pride and commitment to find the appropriate responses to these challenges by relying on their own knowledge and capacity, while in principle commendable, appears under the dire circumstances over-ambitious and out of step with the rest of the world. One can only hope that the cooperation which in particular many European countries are now offering will be accepted and bear fruit so that the country gets back on its feet and that the economic constraints under which the people of the DPRK have to live at present will be successfully removed.

IS REGIONAL COOPERATION AN ANSWER TO ADDRESS HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NEA?

Do the six countries that form NEA—four in their entirety and two only partially—have a commonality that would justify and in fact even beg for a regional response? Is there, in spite of great differences, politically, culturally, and economically, something that could form a common base to overcome the remnants of a hostile past and forge a community that is vibrant and mutually beneficial to all participating countries? We in the UNDP believe there is. We believe that only regional cooperation will position NEA to successfully compete in a globalizing world and assist it in overcoming its status as an economic cooperation backwater and a geographically remote location. Let me demonstrate the following. First, if you redraw a global map and put NEA, rather than Europe, at its center, then you will notice that NEA is at equal distances from Amsterdam and Seattle. In other words, "far" is defined by what one chooses as the center. In these days of ever more rapid means of transportation, and of information technology (IT), which make geography disappear, distances of several thousand kilometers are truly no longer a challenge. Hence, a change of mindset may make all the difference. Secondly and more importantly, each country on its own, and even Northeast China and the Russian Far East, cannot develop on their own as rapidly as they could in a sub-regional context. Each of their industries is too small and vulnerable to external shocks. Each of their

markets is too small to justify a greatly diversified economic and industrial structure. Each country on its own will not overcome the constraints it faces, some of which I have outlined above. Together and on the basis of well thought out and negotiated common approaches, they could develop their natural resource bases, which hold massive untapped gas and oil reserves; together they could make accessible a magnificent natural and cultural heritage for tourism in an unspoiled environment. They could better use a currently underutilized human resource base and, last but not least, leave behind a past that has often pitted the countries against each other in wars and hostility.

As a political scientist by training, I would like to encourage the political economists in our midst to study and analyze what might be the most suitable regional cooperation decision-making mechanism. The border areas are invariably far away from the capitals, and the local governments often see opportunities for cooperation where central governments are hesitant because of national concerns. Stronger consultation mechanisms need to be developed in order to strike a better balance between regional and global, local and central interests.

With its mandate and mission to help people create their own future, the UNDP has pioneered Northeast Asian regional cooperation in the Tumen area, and we are faced daily with these contractions and frictions. As a consequence, results to date are not optimal and fall short of expectations. But then these expectations may have been too optimistic for too short a time span. Today, in a world that is faced with a growing global population, of whom 20 percent still live in abject poverty, and a relatively shrinking natural resource base, the world needs development in NEA in order to face the challenge of halving global poverty by the year 2015, as was decided by the September 2000 Millennium Summit in New York, in which 185 world leaders participated. Maybe NEA can still for its own sake continue its slumber, but I am afraid the world will need NEA to pick up and be on the go as are other parts of the world. Regional cooperation is in fact the only promising modality to advance human development in this part of the world and elsewhere in an efficient and effective way. It is hard work and a demanding task, but in other regions it has helped to generate unprecedented socio-economic development and an improvement in the living standards of people, and it has promoted peace. There is no reason to believe that it will not be true in NEA, as well.