

LEADING
EDGE

INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
IN ASIA

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1. INTRODUCTION: THE LEADING EDGE IN ASIA

i. The Leading Edge: International Development in 2020

In 2011, Trócaire published its third 'horizons scanning' report on the future of international development.¹ Based on the finding of interviews with 77 experts on development, and the political and economic context within which development happens, the research aimed to identify the 'Leading Edge' of international development. We asked experts what they saw as the major trends which would shape development in the coming decade – and how International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) should adapt to take on these challenges.

The Leading Edge 2020 established a number of key trends which experts agreed would characterize the coming decade of development. The world would experience a dramatic shift in power from the established global North to emerging states including China, India, Brazil and Russia. Climate change would lead to increased political and economic instability, including a potential rise in conflict stemming largely from land migration and water scarcity. Pressure on the soil, water and land would result from growing populations, environmental constraints and the shifting geopolitical context. Transnational corporations, backed by states, would continue to increase their stake in resource rights in the poorest countries. Civil protest over each of these trends would become more common place, accompanied by a gradual closure of the democratic space within which protest happens. Finally, the report predicted that inequality would widen significantly over the coming decade, most particularly within countries experiencing rapid economic growth.

Trócaire has built on this research by examining how these and other 'key trends' will play out in South and Southeast Asia over the coming decade, and what challenges they pose for those working in the field of development in the region. The Leading Edge Asia sets out to examine how INGOs are adapting to a rapidly changing environment, in a region where the traditional 'rules of engagement' between global North and South have perhaps altered more quickly than anywhere else.

ii. Methodology and Report Structure

Methodology

The report's methodology is structured around the key trends which emerged in the global Leading Edge 2020 report,² with questions limited primarily to those areas which emerged in that report. The only exception to this was our questioning on natural disasters: we included this area because of its particular importance in the Asian context. While it is undoubtedly possible that major trends for Asia did not emerge in the global report, most of our interviewees in Asia did identify the same major trends as global interviewees, unprompted.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out in person or by phone with eighteen interviewees with expertise on the development context in South and Southeast Asia. Interviewees were all asked the same questions, though a number declined to answer questions that were outside their own area of expertise. Follow up questions were asked in some interviews to elaborate on emerging trends across interviews.

¹ Trócaire (2011) *Leading Edge 2020: Critical Thinking on the Future of International Development*
<http://www.trocaire.org/sites/trocaire/files/pdfs/policy/LeadingEdge2020websizedfinal.pdf>

² *ibid*

For reasons of practicality, the report was necessarily limited in its geographical scope, and we chose to focus on South and Southeast Asia, primarily due to the experience of Trócaire in those areas compared with East and Central Asia.

Criteria for interviewee selection

In selecting interviewees, we sought individuals with exceptional expertise within their sector, influence, and capacity for insight into future developments. An initial list of interviewees with these qualities was compiled through consultation with INGOs in the UK and Ireland, academics with Asia expertise in Ireland, the UK and Australia, and Trócaire staff in Asia. Suggestions were then assessed according to their professional background, depth and breadth of work within the region, capacity to represent a broader group, history of influencing/identifying major changes in their sector and assessment by peers, to produce a shortlist.

This shortlist of interviewees was narrowed using the following criteria;

i) Sectoral spread

Particular consideration was given to ensuring that the research organisation's own perspective (a Northern INGO working in partnership) was challenged sufficiently. We aimed to include;

- 5- 6 academia
- 3 - 5 government / donor
- 3 - 5 regional Asian platforms / networks
- 3 - 5 international NGO (based in region)
- 1 - 2 international organisation
- 1- 2 other civil society
- 1 - 2 private sector

ii) Regional perspective

Preference was given to interviewees with the capacity to comment on the regional picture, rather than specific countries. For this reason, local NGOs are not heavily represented, in spite of their obvious significance. We also attempted to represent South Asian and Southeast Asian expertise equally.

iii) Broad thematic expertise

Since the primary objective of interviews was to elaborate the regional implications of many of the thematic trends identified in the Leading Edge 2020 report, and not to examine these trends in any major depth, we did not interview large numbers of people with narrow expertise. Instead, we sought a cross-section of expertise; this included natural resource rights, land rights, environmental justice and climate change, population changes, immigration, work, labour and employment, health, geopolitics and regional governance, and knowledge of civil society.

iv) Gender considerations

We included three interviewees with particular expertise in gender equality, and 50 percent of interviewees were female.

Report Structure

The report begins with a brief overview of the current Asian context, and the 'top line' trends identified as being of greatest significance in Asia by our interviewees. The next four chapters examine our eighteen interviewees' analysis of the four thematic areas which emerged in the global Leading Edge 2020 report as being the most significant trends for international development: Shifting Geopolitics, Demographic Shifts, Climate Change and Pressure on Natural Resources. Each

chapter is broken into three separate areas, which examine; how each issue might emerge in Asia over the next decade, what steps INGOs might take to respond to the emerging changes, and finally what specific implications each trend might have for humanitarian work. Two issues of particular significance – China’s role in Asia, and natural disasters – are examined in detail.

In the report’s conclusions, we examine our interviewees’ analysis of what role INGOs are likely to play in the future of international development in Asia, and whether and how INGOs can play a meaningful role in the emerging number of middle-income countries (MICs) in Asia. Finally, we examine some of the most predominant recommendations for international NGOs made across our interviews.

iii. The Asian Century?

“The coming decade – and indeed century – belongs to Asia.” – *International Organisation, Europe*

There is little doubt that the majority of current commentary on Asia focuses on growth, growth and growth, with most of it happening in MICs. Estimates from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) show that, if trends continue as currently predicted, by 2050 per capita income in Asia will have grown by six times, to reach parity with income in Europe.³ With that growth, the region would double its current share of global GDP to some 52 percent.⁴ Its urban population will have jumped from 1.6 billion to 3 billion, with all the cultural change, consumer demands, agricultural shifts and demand for employment which that brings.⁵

The standard narrative includes, of course, significant omissions. The absolute numbers living in poverty in South Asia in particular continue to rise despite the growth of India, the dominant economy in the subcontinent. The percentage of people living on less than \$1.25/day in South Asia rose from approximately thirty to 45 percent between 1990 and 2005, and continues to rise.⁶ South Asia also continues to account for 44 percent of all those living in conditions of multi-dimensional poverty⁷, compared with 29 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁸

There is little evidence either of any ‘trickle down effect’ between countries of unequal growth levels, from the much-touted MICs to Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The ADB predicts that, under a ‘best case scenario’ for sustained prosperity in Asia, by 2050 seven countries would lead the region’s expansion – China, India, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. These countries would account for a massive 91 percent of all GDP growth in Asia.⁹ Even allowing for the significant populations of these countries, there is little doubt that the standard vision of prosperity in Asia continues to assume the dominance of a small number of nations. In Asia, where regional structures remain underdeveloped and politically problematic, the knock-on effect of growth from one economy to another is doubly uncertain. The ADB emphasises the importance of increased regionalisation to ensuring this happens,¹⁰ but political circumstances in South Asia in particular would appear to limit that possibility.

³ *Asia 2050: Realizing the Asian Century* 2010: Asia Development Bank (3) <http://www.adb.org/publications/asia-2050-realizing-asian-century>

⁴ *Asia 2050*, p.3

⁵ *Asia 2050*, p.6

⁶ Sumner, Andy (2010) *Where do the poor live?* p.5 <http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/GlobalPovertyDataPaper1.pdf>

⁷ The Multidimensional Poverty Index is an international measure of acute poverty which complements income-based poverty measures by measuring deprivations across health, education and living standards.

⁸ Sumner *Where do the poor live?* p.6

⁹ *Asia 2050* p.10

¹⁰ *Asia 2050* p. 8

Finally, setting aside economics, to date it is uncertain whether newfound wealth will translate into greater political freedoms. In China, indeed, it is often speculated that ensuring citizens' economic wellbeing is in part a conscious strategy to prevent dissent. The ADB named poor governance as one of the major, and growing, threats to wellbeing and stability which exists in "almost all" Asian countries.¹¹

Nonetheless, the point remains that the simple fact of Asia's newfound wealth is a game-changer for how international development can be effective in that region – if only in bringing an end to assumptions from donors that with aid dollars comes influence.

And indeed it is interesting that in this context the interviewees in Leading Edge Asia challenge INGOs to begin to more carefully distinguish between two separate problems: political will and poverty. The common thread running through our interviews is that, whether in relation to urbanisation, food scarcity, employment, or climate change, the specifics of current problems are of less consequence than the absence of political will to address them. In Asia, political will at both national and international level, rather than inevitable trends, is the issue of the day. As the leverage which accompanies dollars and euros decreases in newly wealthy countries, INGOs are faced with considering what impact they can have in bringing about that absent political will.

iv. Top Trends in Asia, 2020

The bulk of the interviews which we carried out focused on issues been identified by experts in the global Leading Edge research. However, we began each interview by asking our experts what they felt would be the three major trends which would impact on development in Asia over the coming decade. Through this, our interviewees in Asia were given the opportunity to identify those issues which hadn't been covered globally.

On the whole, and without our prompting, the majority of issues identified remained consistent with our global research. There was strong consistency across interviews in the trends mentioned, and they were as follows;

1. Continued economic growth, with accompanying risks of growing inequality, and an increase in unskilled, uncertain employment;
2. Shifts in geopolitical power, in particular greater regional cooperation, and a stronger China and India;
3. Shifts in demographic make-up, particularly increased urbanisation and migration, and greater social mobility;
4. A continued increase in the impacts of climate change;
5. A rise in violent conflict, exacerbated by the war on terror, and an increased tendency towards shocks/crisis – whether resulting from climate change, political upheaval, or economic crisis;
6. Resource depletion and unequal access to resources;
7. Finally, interviewees with humanitarian expertise named the growing self-confidence of developing countries to respond to disasters as the major trend shaping humanitarian response in the region.

¹¹ *Asia 2050* p.4

2. KEY TREND #1: SHIFTING GEOPOLITICS

i. Shifting geopolitics in Asia, 2020

Does economic growth equal political power?

“This is a zero sum game, and those that have power currently are going to be reluctant to pass it over” – *Economist, South Asia*

In Asia perhaps more than any other region, our interviewees emphasised that any changes in geopolitical power would come as a consequence of economic shifts and growth. Increased consumer demand will lead to a shift towards more intra-regional trade, led by exports from India and China. The private sector is already responding to the new Asian consumer; one interviewee from the private sector identified that the dramatic rise in smart phones purchased in China is, for example, already shifting the focus of manufacturers and designers away from the preferences of the Western consumer.

While there was broad agreement amongst interviewees as to the speed of economic growth – India and China’s economies will be second only to the US in terms of size within a decade – there was far less consensus as to whether economic growth would translate into increased political influence at a global level. Interviewees pointed out that the balance of power in global forums hasn’t shifted, partly because emerging powers haven’t yet stepped up to demand a greater role. In others, such as the World Bank and IMF, the same old players continue to dominate.

Leadership in Asia

In thinking about the type of global role which Asia will have over the next decade, the dominating ‘unknown’ mentioned by interviewees was what ‘balance of power’ will emerge within Asia itself. Though China is often touted as the obvious ‘emerging power’ within the region, more of our interviewees’ attention focused on the potential of regional blocs to serve as a credible counterbalance to China. Whether or not regional integration solidifies in South or Southeast Asia was identified as a critical factor in determining the extent to which China will be able to pursue its interests in the region unilaterally.

“If ASEAN begins to co-operate in a way which is meaningful for the poor, then I see real hope for the landless labour, or the farmer in Southern Burma”- *INGO, South Asia*

Southeast Asian regionalisation emerged in interviews as the most realistic contender to provide this counterbalance. An increase in intra-regional trade, resource sales, and investment was seen as inevitable. Less certain was the likelihood of increased mobility of labour and streamlining of labour policies. While there was agreement that ASEAN has to date limited cooperation to economic affairs, several interviewees pointed to evidence that the structure’s remit was increasing. ASEAN’s recent engagement with human rights issues in Myanmar was one such example cited.

Cooperation in the area of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) was identified by actors in the humanitarian sector as a non-controversial area demanding cross-border coordination, which might serve as a forerunner to increased political regionalisation. The emerging disaster response coordination centre in Jakarta, a non-economic regional forum which will act at a global level, was seen as early evidence of this.

“The South Asian community will just learn to find some common ground because they have to, they don’t have any choice” – Donor, Southeast Asia

In South Asia, regional integration was considered limited by continued tension between India and Pakistan. That relationship was consistently mentioned as the biggest potential conflict trigger in South or Southeast Asia, complicated further by Afghanistan. Even a continuation of the ‘Cold War’ status quo between India and Pakistan would leave South Asian regionalisation highly unlikely. Our interviewees’ analysis, however, was that were Indian-Pakistan relations to improve, a strengthened South Asian bloc would provide the most formidable regional counter-balance to China.

The two big players: India and China

Even when prompted specifically to consider alternative powers, there was agreement from interviewees that only India or China could credibly expect influence at a global level. There was little unity in predicting the likely relationship between China and India. Some predicted that competition between the two would have a major impact on the stability of South and Southeast Asia, exacerbating conflicts involving Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. Others though argued that the two countries appeared to be developing an understanding of sorts, evidenced for example by the apparent ‘carving up’ of resources in Myanmar.

Others argued that India would not challenge China as a regional leader over the coming decade. Economically, interviewees pointed to India’s fragility, its deficit, and its boom-driven economy. Politically, growing civil society mobilisation – anti-corruption movements were mentioned a number of times – was seen as evidence that India, a democracy, could not depend on domestic opinion to implement dramatic policy shifts. One interviewee pointed to the Indian government ‘outsourcing’ its work on the G20 as evidence of the low priority given to global affairs. In a context where a number of interviewees emphasised that internal politics, rather than the reach on the global stage, would determine the fortunes of the marginalised in emerging ‘superpowers’, India’s continued internal flux might be read, then, as a positive sign for attempts to ensure growth translates into reductions in poverty.

Will geopolitical shifts help the poorest?

“The North has not been good for development - that is certain. So the changes can only be good.” - Economist, India

Our interviewees formed two bodies of opinion on whether the increased global significance of many Asian economies would be positive for the poor. There were worries that any shift in power away from the global North would add legitimacy to a lower human rights ‘status quo.’ One interviewee for example commented on the danger that African governments would seek to replicate Chinese domestic policies limiting political freedoms, seeing this as the new development ‘norm’.

Others though questioned whether we are really moving away from a positive model at all. One interviewee pointed to the fact that the dominant development model of the past century has been so destructive that emerging powers simply have to be different; they physically cannot pursue the same resource-demanding growth strategies that Northern counterparts have. Another stated definitively that “The North has not been good for development - that is certain. So the changes can only be good.” China, for example, was seen as too easily placed as the ‘evil’ cousin; rather, its expansionist, resource-hungry policies are simply replicating the standard development model, but with potential for dividends regionally.



WHAT WILL THE ROLE OF CHINA IN THE REGION BE OVER THE NEXT DECADE?

“China is just the latest ‘evil empire,’ like Japan 40 years ago or Russia more recently. I think we’ll see the Chinese, eventually, are not so irrational or brutal or evil, as they become real global players” - INGO, South Asia

“People just put China into this big, evil box, and don’t try to understand what it really is”
- Donor, Europe

The impact which China is likely to have in South and Southeast Asia over the coming decade was identified as owing more to its sheer scale, and the vast resources which it will require to provide basic services to its population, than to any particular ideology. Yet, while the world waits to see what China’s next move will be, our interviewees were less convinced that China has any grand plan to increase its space at the global table. One commentator argued that China itself has been taken aback by how quick its economic growth has been and is unsure how to use its newfound influence. Major challenges of internal stability remain before, interviewees argued, China steps up to the global stage. China remains ‘very reticent’ to take on issues not of direct consequence to its own interests, something seen as a key difference between it and existing powers.

“China depends on securing a future for a country that cannot survive by itself” –
Regional NGO, Southeast Asia

The alliances which China develops globally were identified as being critical to how it exerts influence. A number of interviewees pointed out that careful alliances and a multilateral attitude were a necessity, because the Chinese economy is structured in such a way that it can’t survive by itself. China needs food, resources and the global economic system to grow and survive. Despite growing demand within Asia, China’s economy remains highly dependent on consumption in the EU and US. This will limit its willingness to challenge the global economic status quo in ways which might undermine traditionally strong economies. Conversely, interviewees speculated, alliances within Asia might allow China to pursue a strategy of enabling growth within the region, to develop markets in such a way that China becomes less reliant on the EU and the US. The rapid growth of China’s middle classes is already beginning this process by providing new markets for Asian products. The route China takes here will determine a huge amount of the outcome.

“You can make profits and bring benefits to the local people” - Local NGO, Southeast Asia

A number of interviewees emphasised the potential for a win-win situation in the region *vis-a-vis* China: investment and support for economic activity, including demand for resources, is not necessarily a bad thing. The Chinese private sector could increase inter-dependence and as such regional stability.



THE GLOBAL LEADING EDGE: SHIFTING GEOPOLITICS

Similar to the current study, the global Leading Edge 2020 report identified a shift in power away from the established order. There were, however, differences in predictions as to what a new order might look like.

The G20 was certainly considered to be a more significant player in the global research, compared with interviews in Asia. This may be a reflection of the time difference of the reports – our interviewees stressed that the G20 had played an important role in responding to the financial crisis, which was current to the global Leading Edge 2020 research. Respondents in the Asian report, however, clearly argued more strongly that the G20 would have a limited role beyond that crisis, where global respondents saw it as a future forum of authority.

Global interviewees emphasised the likely role of China and India in leading any ‘new order,’ speculating about a possible ‘G-2’ order in which the US and China would have the final say in global affairs. By strong contrast, the possibility of new regional blocs emerging as a counterbalance to these nations was absent from the global research. This is perhaps the biggest difference between the findings of both reports, and as a result, the role of China is seen as far less significant in the current report.

Finally, both global and Asian reports emphasised that the shifting world order would not necessarily deliver for the poorest. The global report expressed concern that the new order might threaten the current development model’s emphasis on poverty reduction. By contrast, interviewees in the Asian report were less certain that the current development model has, in fact, proven to have poverty reduction at its core.

ii. Reflections from the humanitarian sector

“We would be foolish to assume that the international humanitarian system that exists will not be influenced and changed by changing geopolitical power dynamics” – International Organisation

Geopolitical struggles are an obvious source of conflict, and interviewees listed deteriorating relations between Israel and Iran or India and Pakistan, and any destabilisation of North Korea, as the potential ‘sparks’ for conflict in the region. Beyond conflict, our interviewees noted that geopolitical shifts would hold implications for the humanitarian sector through the emergence of increasingly confident ‘new donors’ in Asia and new potential for regional coordination of relief efforts.

New economies as new humanitarian donors

Interviewees from the humanitarian sector acknowledged that the changing geopolitical makeup would inevitably impact on the humanitarian status quo. The geopolitical trend cited as most significant for humanitarian relief in Asia was the likely emergence of ‘new humanitarian actors’ in the form of increasingly assertive governments in the region. Increasingly, governments see providing emergency response within their own borders as a core aspect of delimiting their sovereignty. Furthermore, having a humanitarian programme is seen as a key element of becoming a ‘global player’. Interviewees welcomed such independence, while noting challenges.

The most obvious of these challenges is to the humanitarian principle of neutrality. Interviewees commented that in a country like China the army is regarded as the logical respondent to an emergency. While this may be unproblematic in a simple relief effort, it inevitably complicates the idea of ‘neutrality’ in more complex relief efforts. Interviewees did note that the ‘Chinese’ model of humanitarian relief seemed to be diversifying somewhat away from government to include private companies and a small number of philanthropic foundations, a possible pre-cursor of a greater role of sorts for civil society.

Interviewees also argued that the increased political and economic power of emerging economies will likely lead to changes in the logistics of emergency response. It was anticipated that any relief mechanism within ASEAN would employ a far stricter definition of ‘sovereignty,’ and require far more explicit consent from recipient governments, than is the case with the UN.

Regionalisation and disaster relief

Heightened regionalisation was welcomed by those in the humanitarian sector. ASEAN’s cooperation on humanitarian response, and in particular DRR, has the potential to really push forward regionalisation. It is a non-controversial, non-political area that clearly demands cross-border coordination and therefore is a front runner in terms of increasing regionalisation.

iii. What role for International NGOs?

“If we’re going to have South-South cooperation, can it be something other than a bunch of elite southerners who come together to say this is our model of world domination?” - Regional NGO, South Asia

“The influence of donors from the West is dropping fast. Their budgets relative to national economies are dropping, and Asian governments have good reason not to listen to donors anymore.” - International NGO, South Asia

The consensus amongst interviewees was that INGOs have largely ignored the drastic shifts in power across Asia. Amongst recommendations for how INGOs can adapt to the shifting context were;

1. INGOs must consider how best to influence governments, as their leverage as donors decreases;

As Asian governments grow in wealth and confidence, the ability of traditional OECD donors to use their role ‘holding the purse strings’ to influence policy will decrease.

2. INGOs must build the capacity of local civil society to advocate that new power on the global stage be translated into new welfare for the poor;

In particular, this might translate into strategic alliances with civil society in emerging superpowers, rather than traditional donor-recipient relationships. One interviewee noted for example the tendency for countries to underestimate the potential of Chinese civil society to hold China to account, which results from over-simplified notions of Chinese civil society.

3. INGOs need to educate and build awareness that power is shifting, and that “a shift in global power needs to be accompanied by a shift in global accountability;”

A number of interviewees emphasised that INGOs operating in MICs needed to begin questioning whether they could effect change if they continued to focus advocacy efforts towards traditional powers in the global North. Some saw the need to simply step back from advocacy and let local civil society take the lead, while others felt the response was to increase engagement with the most significant emerging economies; for instance through locating high level INGO advocacy positions in Brazil, India, Russia etc.

4. INGOs must consider the political implications of how they fund their work, as global power shifts

Geopolitical shifts can alter the implications of funding which we accept. A number of interviewees pointed to the political implications of funding, heightened by the ‘war on terror’ with the implications of accepting funding from USAID in Afghanistan singled out. One INGO in South Asia cautioned that “funding sometimes becomes God for NGOs” who ignore the politics of the money they accept.

5. INGOs should build understanding of the meaning of humanitarianism amongst new ‘emerging power’ donors

INGOs must recognise the change in power shifts, and plan humanitarian relief accordingly. This could involve, for example, INGOs decentralizing decision-making authority to local affiliates, or directing greater resources towards building the capacity of local agents to deliver relief. While increasingly wealthy and influential donors see humanitarian response capacity as a core part of becoming a global player, interviewees noted the absence of any clear understanding amongst government or civil society of the meaning of humanitarianism.

3. KEY TREND #2: DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

i. Demographic Change in Asia, 2020

“Demographic shifts are the single most significant trend in Asia: almost everything else follows from there” – Economist, International Organisation

Demographic change in Asia is no longer centred on growth in numbers, our interviewees indicated. Instead, the issues raised most frequently were urbanisation and aging. It was the rapid pace of these changes in population make-up, rather than the changes themselves, which would challenge development in Asia, according to interviews.

Linked to this, commentators consistently highlighted the significance of government policy in determining whether demographic changes have positive or negative impacts within and across countries.

Urbanisation

“Pro-poor development in Asia requires a concerted effort to think about how to organise productivity so there isn’t overcrowding in urban areas” – Economist, International Organisation

“Rural sectors are very static. In urban settings, tomorrow doesn’t look anything like today: you can work in a slum today, and when you return tomorrow, it’s gone” – Academic, South Asia

Interviewees agreed that unplanned, unaddressed urbanisation was a negative trend, despite accompanying benefits such as closer exchange between differing cultures, broadening horizons and access to waged employment. Beyond that broad agreement, interviewees were divided as to whether prevention of migration to urban areas or adequate planning for urbanisation should be the priority in terms of government and INGO response.

A number of policy options were identified which would actively keep people in rural areas. Interviewees pointed to countries, such as China, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, where governments were already pursuing policies of increased investment in rural areas, leading, for example, to waged labour for the first time. One commentator advocated shifting rural policy towards the provision of non-farm employment (manufacturing, service jobs etc.), arguing that agriculture cannot provide the level of employment and income required to keep people in rural areas. Given the rapidly increasing demand for jobs due to changing age profiles in the region, the need for rural employment to prevent massive, unplanned urbanisation would become ever greater.

Others emphasised that government policy regulating land concessions and land grab is often actively pushing people out of their land when they do want to stay.

A second group of commentators pointed to the significance of how governments handle urbanisation when it does take place. In particular, whether urban migrants transition from cheap labour with no rights or services, to full urban citizens, was identified as determinant of the ‘quality’ of urbanisation.

The qualitative difference in the skills and knowledge required to effectively respond to urban needs – provision of health services, infrastructure, water, traffic management – was seen as a major challenge to governments' capacity to effectively plan for urbanisation.

Migration to urban areas, while often leading to nominal increases in the numbers classed as 'employed,' was recognised as presenting distinct challenges for women in particular. Interviewees noted that migrant employment tends to be highly informal. They also emphasised the importance of planning for gradual transitions towards more sustainable employment models. Women migrants tend to be overrepresented in informal sectors, such as domestic work and the sex industry, and as such are often excluded from progressive regulation of the formal employment sector.

“Urbanisation could easily lead to the extermination of an entire class of people – foragers, pastoralists and so on – simply by virtue of their occupation” – Regional NGO, South Asia

Urbanisation's cultural impact was noted by a number of interviewees. Changing social patterns, brought about by greater access to media and the internet, and increasingly diverse populations, would inevitably result from urbanisation. One interviewee pointed to the shifting cultural identity which would accompany urbanisation – the threat, for example to the identity of the 'peasant' in many countries. A second cultural shift relates to the increased economic independence of women migrants to urban areas: interviewees noted the shifts in the structures of families which would occur as women began to take up employment, often leading to falling fertility rates and, over time, a shrinking labour pool.

Asia's shifting age profile

Countries in South and Southeast Asia are split between those experiencing rapid aging and those with rapidly increasing working-age populations. Again, the importance of government policy responses to these new challenges was emphasised by interviewees. Aging demands a social safety net and youth demands employment generation, neither of which are currently in place.

In Southeast Asia, our interviewees argued that the implications of increasing numbers of older citizens have been largely ignored. China's 'one child policy' is swiftly moving it into this category too. The 'dependency ratio' will change, putting pressure on younger people financially and in terms of how they use their time. Interviewees emphasised that governments can't necessarily rely anymore on traditional family structures to support elderly relatives.

Sex-selective feticide was recognised as being particularly worrying. Beyond the clear ethical issues it raises, it will exacerbate gender imbalance over time. Interviewees linked this trend to inadequate security for older populations and the resulting preference for a son capable of providing for parents.

“South Asia has already created 800,000 jobs per month over the last decade, but a 50 percent increase on this would be required to satisfy demand.” - International Organisation, Europe

Meanwhile, a younger population in South Asia will place major pressure on the jobs market. Over 1 million entrants to the jobs market are predicted every month for the next 20 years globally. 30-40 percent of the increase in the global labour force will come from South Asia.

Working age populations were seen as ideal for rapid development but interviewees questioned whether governments have adequately considered the implications of the demand for jobs. More relaxed immigration controls would be one possibility to provide for the massively increasing job demand. Yet, interviewees noted the current absence of policies to facilitate this or to invest in productive employment. These will be critical, interviewees argued, to encouraging young people to pursue their potential at home.



THE GLOBAL LEADING EDGE: DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

Urbanisation is a clear area of concern in both the global Leading Edge 2020 and the present report, along with the challenges which this presents to INGOs who continue to work predominantly in rural areas. By contrast population growth, emphasised by several global interviewees, was largely absent from interviews in Asia, although populations continue to grow in the region.

The clearest difference between the Asian findings and the global Leading Edge 2020 report is the emphasis placed by interviewees in Asia on employment – both quantity and quality – and the role of the state in providing for the aged. Neither of these issues emerged in the global research. Here, it is possible that the prevalence of MICs in Asia has shifted the focus of development experts beyond the provision of basic services such as education and health, and towards enabling people to provide for themselves in a sustainable manner.

ii. Reflections from the humanitarian sector

“With a disaster in an urban area, you drive into a city and you can’t really tell who is affiliated to whom. They might not even know each other. But they might spend an awful lot of time with someone a few streets or districts away. It’s not intuitive, as it is in rural areas.” – Humanitarian INGO, Southeast Asia

Rapid urbanisation coupled with low building codes means that increasingly large, increasingly condensed populations in cities are exposed to devastating natural disasters. The megacities of Kathmandu and Manila, for example, are overdue an earthquake, and these type of cities are the most devastating places such events could happen.

Interviewees from the humanitarian sector emphasised the weakness of humanitarian response in urban settings. Two separate issues in particular were identified. Most significantly, traditional humanitarian responses rely on established social networks in rural areas, to gain access and negotiate with communities. This doesn’t exist so easily in urban areas; networks are much more fluid and complex.

A second difficulty particular to urban areas is land rights. Land rights are more complex in urban areas, which makes building shelters doubly complex. Adapting to the particular challenges posed by the rapid urbanisation of areas and communities vulnerable to disasters in Asia will be particularly important for the humanitarian sector over the coming decade.

iii. What role for International NGOs?

“In a rural area you can turn up in a village and you can probably assume that people know each other, and that there’s some kind of hierarchy. In a city, it’s much more complicated than that. This has huge implications for how INGOs carry out their work.” – INGO, Southeast Asia

“NGOs are still doing what they’re familiar with, which is community based development in rural areas. There is a question whether that’s really the most important thing in Asia now.” – INGO, Europe

“INGOs are very, very ill prepared for working with young people. Extremism is a reality, and we are sitting idly by and watching a generation moving towards disaster.” – INGO, Southern Asia

1. INGOs need to increase their own capacity to respond to need in urban areas

Perhaps the most consistent recommendation to INGOs was that while the continued need in rural areas is unquestionable, growing needs in urban areas must be met by someone. INGOs will need to carefully consider the sector’s overwhelming emphasis on community-based rural development, as urbanisation and migration become so prevalent. One interviewee highlighted that, in Asia-Pacific, the ILO is the only organisation working on the impacts of migration. There was consensus that the lack of INGOs operating in urban areas was due more to a lack of capacity than a strategic decision. Even in countries such as Vietnam with high capacity governments, interviewees cited strong urban planning as an area where transfer of technical expertise was badly needed.

Humanitarian response capacity in urban areas was considered to be equally underdeveloped. Two distinct absences of capacity amongst INGOs were identified; provision of advice on disaster-proofing urban planning, and rapid engagement with communities in relief efforts in complex urban environments. Technology such as Facebook was cited as potentially addressing this gap.

2. INGOs must consider how to work with growing numbers of educated, unemployed young people

Younger populations in a number of countries are accompanied by a very welcome increase in education standards. Yet, a number of interviewees highlighted the potential for conflict given high unemployment levels which this might produce. In many places, this was linked to a rise in extremist movements attractive to inactive, disillusioned young people. Interviewees recommended that INGOs consider how they can better engage young populations across all programme areas.

3. INGOs should consider the new supporter base which is emerging in the shape of growing middle classes in MICs

A number of interviewees mentioned the potential for INGOs to benefit from the growing disposable income of the new middle classes in Asia. Equally, some interviewees wondered whether the emerging middle classes might be considered as targets for awareness raising and campaigns in a similar way to citizens in the global North.

4. INGOs must disaggregate emerging data regarding demographic changes to ensure that new inequalities are uncovered

Interviewees highlighted in particular the importance of disaggregating the impact of demographic changes in relation to gender. A focus on an increase in absolute employment numbers, for example, hides the reality of precarious, informal employment which women migrants in particular tend to fall into when moving to urban areas.

4. KEY TREND #3: CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURAL DISASTERS

i. Climate Change in Asia, 2020

A vulnerable region

Interviewees noted both the specific impacts of increasing climate change over the next decade, as well as the broader social and political significance which climate change would have. Natural disasters would be particularly damaging given the region's tropical and subtropical location, with effects exacerbated by massive populations in urban areas. The Philippines, Bangladesh, India, Vietnam, Pakistan and Nepal were mentioned as the countries which would likely suffer from the impacts of climate change.

Interviewees emphasised Asia's reliance on rain fed agriculture as exacerbating the threat to food security posed by the increasing unpredictability of drought, flooding and monsoon and typhoon seasons. This vulnerability is compounded, interviewees noted, by rising sea levels. One interviewee pointed to Vietnam's status as the world's third biggest exporter of rice and the implications for this of predictions that sea levels were set to rise and cover 80 percent of viable rice-growing land, impacting on food prices and hunger well beyond Vietnamese borders.

Specific also to Asia, several interviewees pointed to the as yet unknown impact of the melting Himalaya glaciers over the coming decade on water and food security and resource production, particularly the generation of electricity. Large tracts of South Asia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bhutan, are reliant for their current way of living on the Himalayan glaciers, which are now changing in highly unpredictable ways.

The “absence of justice” in the climate discourse

“Climate Change is not a natural phenomenon ... but a relation between people, between powers, and in terms of resource management” – Regional NGO, Southeast Asia

A number of interviewees mentioned that the pertinent problem to be addressed over the next decade is not climate change as such, but an absence of broader justice. Vulnerability to climate change will be determined by vulnerability in all other sectors of society. The broader rights of women in society, for example, will determine how powerfully they feel the effects of climate change. One interviewee pointed to Indonesia where women have strong entitlements to land ownership. As a result, women temporarily displaced by flooding there have had far greater legal recourse following displacement than in countries where women do not have these entitlements.

“The only reason countries in the region are paying attention to climate change and the environment is because its being pushed down their throat by international organisations” – Private Sector, Southeast Asia

Similarly, interviewees pointed out that ‘adaptation to climate change’ policies enacted by government had the potential to be as destructive to the vulnerable as climate change itself. Governments are reacting; that is clear. However, whether they react in a manner which is people-friendly is not at all clear.

A similar problem was identified in donor policies. One interviewee argued that governments in the region are frustrated with the labelling by donors of a range of vulnerabilities – food insecurity, for instance - as ‘climate change.’ They see the ‘climate change’ label, often necessary to attract funding, as obscuring more fundamental global inequalities, such as how to use resources or produce energy in a more equitable manner. There is now a feeling that if challenges aren’t labelled as ‘climate change’, you will not get funding for them.

There was divergence, however, on whether it would be helpful to politicise the debate on the impacts of climate change. Some argued that it was unhelpful to discuss the environment as a ‘justice’ issue, arguing that many countries, China for example, remain engaged with the issue at a global level precisely because it remains seen as relatively politically neutral. Framing it as a rights issue might push some away from the table.

Tensions between climate change and growth: ‘It’s not really about climate change at all’

“Climate change demands a whole new way of thinking and living: not just doing what we’re doing now but naming it green” – Regional NGO, Southeast Asia

Of greatest significance for our interviewees, however, and subject to far greater disagreement, was the question of the incompatibility which remains between policies to mitigate against climate change and the continued pursuit of economic growth in Asian economies. Our commentators were divided between those who called for the need to ‘decouple’ growth from development, and others who argued that now was not the time to question a model which, for all its faults, continues to increase the standard of living of many in the region.

The former group argued that current attempts by Asian governments to address climate change amounted to little more than window dressing. Solutions of, for instance, promoting a ‘green economy’ are nonetheless based on an ‘old paradigm’ of resource-driven growth which, ultimately, will prove unsustainable. This group advocated the work of activists attempting to shift the debate away from one narrowly focused on mitigating or adapting to climate change, towards one which questions the growth/development coupling more broadly.

“We cannot lose sight, in climate change debates, of the fact that we have very large populations that are denied even the basics of what would be seen as a minimally decent life.”
– Academic, South Asia

The larger group amongst our interviewees, however, emphasised the continued importance of a growth-based model in the Asian context. One interviewee highlighted the need to recognise that Asia still does not provide basic needs to around 40 percent of its population. An interviewee in Vietnam argued that citizens and government are generally in agreement that pollution is a necessary component of the growth which their economy requires at this point.

“A country like Vietnam wants to pollute because they believe that it’s at a stage in development where they need to pollute to get somewhere ... everybody else was allowed to do it, and no one has shown them any other way of doing it” – Donor, Southeast Asia

Interviewees emphasised that the Northern discourse on climate change is not sufficiently cognisant of this fact, and that talk of ‘decoupling’ growth from development remains a broadly Northern agenda. Indeed even an interviewee broadly critical of the resource-dependent growth model

acknowledged the very real dilemma posed to those concerned with climate change by the industrial, employment and infrastructure needs of the poor.

According to this group of interviewees, while reduced emissions are a necessity, it is not reasonable or likely to expect poorer countries to choose a low-carbon path. A definite, tested model from international organisations, Northern countries and INGOs must be developed to show poorer countries how a lower carbon development can get them the same results.

“I don’t think there’s much prospects for, at the moment, many developing countries single-handedly deciding to follow a low-carbon development path, because no one has really demonstrated what that looks like.” – INGO, Europe

Perhaps what this dilemma demonstrates above all is the need for leadership from those countries not faced with the massive development needs of Asian economies. As long as investment by Northern governments in environmentally destructive infrastructural projects continues, it is absurd for donors to fund ‘climate change’ projects under the guise of environmental sustainability, interviewees argued. Civil society in the South won’t tolerate this.

In arguing that for any ‘new model’ to be taken on board, the private sector would have to see the economic sense in it, one interviewee from the private sector underlined the need to explore such alternatives first in wealthy countries. Governments, she argued, must start by placing an economic value on environmental impact and associating a cost with it, and levying this cost from the private sector accordingly.

The government’s role in addressing climate change

Interviewees proposed quite uniform practical responses to climate change. A number emphasised the importance of cross-border cooperation in determining how well positioned Asia was to respond to climate change. This would be of particular importance in responding to disasters. The need for cooperation across borders around energy production, dams, and hydroelectrics would also increase in significance as the impacts of climate change are felt.

As in the area of demographic change, a number of interviewees emphasised the changing requirements that climate change would bring in terms of social protection. How will governments insure people living on increasingly marginal lands? What security net will be available for those displaced due to the effects of climate change? Interviewees agreed that the ‘ability to cope’ with these new shocks will be the major determinant of how climate change plays out – not the science of climate change itself.



THE GLOBAL LEADING EDGE: CLIMATE CHANGE

On the whole, the findings of the global Leading Edge 2020 report resonate strongly with what interviewees in Asia told us. There is a similar sense of the tension emerging between the very real need for growth to address poverty in developing countries and the need to mitigate the worst effects of climate change. Global interviewees, like their counterparts in Asia, also identified the need to consider, not simply 'green' ways of doing things we are already doing, but whether our fundamental model of development is in fact viable. Finally, both reports brought out the strong links between increasingly erratic climate and the importance of increased disaster preparedness and risk reduction.

The issues of global negotiations, and global solutions to climate change did not emerge strongly in the Asian Leading Edge, when compared with the global research. This may simply reflect the more locally focused nature of the research. It is worth noting though that the global Leading Edge 2020 also found interviewees in the North more likely to discuss international policy agreements, than their counterparts in the global South.

ii. Reflections from the humanitarian sector

“For humanitarian actors, it’s climate change ‘plus.’ It’s an addition to the vast confluence of vulnerabilities, and how we respond to all of them together.” – International Organisation, Europe

“Do humanitarian organisations have a mandate to work on these emerging, likely long-term, mega-disasters? Are they to be dealt with as humanitarian problems, or is it a question for development?” – International Organisation, Europe

The most significant analysis coming from our interviews with the humanitarian sector was that, while of huge importance, the real impact of climate change was that its effects would be felt in conjunction with a large number of other vulnerabilities: increasing water scarcity, increased populations and marginalised urban populations. Given the likely scale of such vulnerabilities, interviewees also pointed to the high potential for conflict as the effects of climate change become felt.

One of the few certainties noted was that the impacts of climate change, and in particular the high vulnerability in Asia to natural disasters, would inevitably demand massively increased humanitarian response levels. Interviewees noted that humanitarian assistance has always been provided on a short-term basis, with an exit strategy. If, however, a rapidly changing natural environment means that disasters are simply the 'new normal,' this has serious implications for how we view humanitarian work in the context of broader development.

iii. Responding to Natural Disasters in Asia

“We are seeing a very Asian story of climate change: too much water in the wrong place at the wrong time in a way that we’re not able to cope with.” - International NGO, Southeast Asia

“The most commonly felt impact of climate change: communities might not understand emissions, but they feel it when there’s drought, when there are floods.” - Regional NGO, Asia

There was a clear trend across interviews of discussing the impacts of natural disasters in Asia as a core part of climate change.

Interviewees pointed out the real potential, on a continent lauded for its dramatic development gains, for natural disasters to reverse these overnight. They emphasised again and again the inconsistency between government concern with economic growth and wellbeing, and most governments’ failure to adequately prepare for and mitigate natural disasters. This is in spite of the massive losses, to both government and private sector, which a disaster can bring. Urbanisation compounds the likely economic impact of a natural disaster.

Investment in long-term DRR strategies is far less costly than financing the impact, physical and financial, of a future disaster. As is the case across other areas of this report, political will was identified as preventing progress in the area. This was all the more so in the case of an investment for which the ‘return’ may never be seen.

But while investment remains low, multiple interviewees pointed to the growing unwillingness of increasingly confident Asian countries to ask for or accept extensive external relief. Interviewees often viewed this as a justified response to chaotic invasive international responses to a number of prominent crises in recent years. Overall, capacity for response was considered to be increasing. Bangladesh in particular was cited as having reduced its own vulnerability significantly through the adoption of a high quality early warning system.

Interviewees repeatedly emphasised that natural disasters in Asia would be compounded by the impacts of climate change and resource scarcity in a ‘complex of crises’. Mega-disasters in overpopulated areas would likely be accompanied by the sort of massive technological failure that has never been faced previously. As mentioned earlier, both Kathmandu and Manila were named as being ‘overdue’ for such a disaster.

How can we respond?

1. INGOs must begin to link fundraising appeals for disaster relief to the lifestyles of those in the North, and communicate that *“the three cars which a family have purchased are linked to the appeals people contribute to so generously;”*
2. Aid directed towards natural disasters must become more locally sensitive and more carefully routed to remain within local economies. Similarly, in providing technical expertise, INGOs should remember that the most advanced comparable expertise is often available regionally, rather than in the global North;
3. INGOs should no longer consider disasters to be discrete humanitarian events. The rapidly increasing frequency of disasters, the likelihood of ‘mega-disasters’ particularly in urban areas and the impacts of climate change necessitate that DRR be built into all INGO long-term development work;

4. INGOs must begin to reconsider the distinction between humanitarian crises and longer-term vulnerabilities. Often what now manifests itself as a natural disaster is in fact the long-term impact of development, rather than an ‘emergency’ with a start and end. There is not necessarily the mandate for a humanitarian response to growing groups of highly vulnerable populations living in such circumstances;
5. INGOs need to start grappling with the increasing wish of traditional ‘aid recipient’ countries to respond to crises within their own boundaries. While a welcome trend, it challenges traditional assumptions around the impartiality of humanitarian response efforts.

iv. What role for International NGOs?

“There is a general perception that the North, which has a very clear, very large ecological debt, is unwilling to make even the most minimal concessions” – Academic, South Asia

“There has to be a way to make the private sector buy into climate change – and the private sector, always, is motivated by the dollar” – Private Sector, Southeast Asia

“My question to donors is, while we in India are fighting our government for a responsible climate change policy, you guys are giving aid to countries because you want your countries to be able to go and mine coal. So why should we side with you?” – Regional NGO, South Asia

The clear emphasis in interviewees’ recommendations was on advocacy in the global North, rather than technical solutions in the South. In this regard, there was a clear feeling from the majority of our interviewees that no action at local level would be effective without recognition by Northern governments of the need for systemic change in their own countries to mitigate the effects of climate change.

1. INGOs need to put pressure on their own governments and populations to change their own behaviour

A clear majority of interviewees felt that the single most important thing INGOs could do to mitigate against climate change was to put pressure on their own governments to adopt more sustainable economic growth policies. Alongside this, a number of interviewees also called on INGOs to raise awareness amongst Northern populations about the principle of historical responsibility for climate change.

A number of interviewees pointed also to the inconsistencies within donor, and sometimes INGO, policies regarding development. Donors provide increasing amounts of funding which are ring fenced for climate-related activities, but continue to advocate that governments in the global South pursue resource-dependent, intensive economic growth strategies which are directly contradictory to this work.

2. INGOs need to resist co-optation into the policy solutions of the North – the ‘commodification of the atmosphere’ through carbon trading

Interviewees cautioned that some of the advocacy pursued by INGOs to date had allowed itself to be ‘boxed in’ to talking about climate change as a discrete entity, rather than the broader economic policies which are at the core of the matter.

3. INGOs must articulate a model of development for North and South which mitigates against climate change and delivers basic needs of the worlds' poorest

There was a sense from a number of interviewees that even those INGOs engaged in advocacy on the more systemic causes of climate change have not fully acknowledged the current conflict between pro-poor economic growth and the need to protect the environment. INGOs must engage more directly with the basic dilemma that the current growth model, for its flaws, is the only one proven to be capable of bringing large populations out of poverty.

4. INGOs should provide technical solutions to the problems emerging as a result of climate change

A smaller group of interviewees emphasised the role of INGOs in providing technical support particularly in relation to climate change adaptation. Some felt, indeed, that there was little role for INGOs in terms of promoting political and economic shifts to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

In this regard, a number of interviewees cautioned against INGOs repackaging development work as 'climate change'. One interviewee felt that a large portion of what were termed climate adaptation 'pilot' programmes were, for example, simply reformulated livelihoods programmes, with little evidence of real innovation.

5. INGOs won't be in a position to respond to climate change. This simply has to come from the private sector

Finally, for all that INGOs might do, some interviewees emphasised that given the imperative for a shift in economic thinking, it would have to be the private sector, incentivised by government, who ultimately enabled a shift in policies towards climate-friendly policies.

5. PRESSURE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

i. Pressure on Natural Resources in Asia, 2020

Resources and economic growth in Asia: public good versus individual right?

“What do you do when countries are growing and populations are growing? We (the INGO community) are supporting development, and development requires resources.” – *International NGO, Europe*

That the resources fuelling development and growth in Asia are coming under increased pressure was the strong consensus from our interviewees. Water, whether for consumption, production and energy generation, was cited most frequently by our interviewees, and highlights well the extent to which the region’s economic fortunes are tied to resource availability. As an example of this, one interviewee pointed to the extent to which Bhutan’s economy is intertwined with the Himalayan floodwaters. As glaciers melt, the electricity which Bhutan currently generates from the floodwaters will decline massively, removing Bhutan’s greatest source of revenue.

In different ways, our interviewees emphasised the ‘high stakes game’ that is the scramble for resources in the region. The biodiversity within the region was seen as ‘upping the stakes’ of the battle for resources, since the net loss and gain is of real consequence. Others emphasised the very real link between resource demand and improvements in people’s wellbeing. In such instances, a more important question than ‘resource scarcity’ is what to do with people and countries that are simply growing. We have not yet articulated a model of how to accommodate such growth without high resource usage. Interviewees emphasised that those with a ‘conservation’ agenda should not dismiss such practical considerations lightly.

Interviewees though differed as to how governments ought to manage the inevitable clash between collective needs for increasingly scarce resources, and individual rights. Who should prevail, for example, when claims to traditional ownership of forests, come into tension with the public good of using such fertile land for food production? Some argued that, if well managed, development would require that governments have leeway to appropriate certain resources in the interest of the broader population. Others argued that state appropriation of resource rich land had lead, in effect, to military occupation of large swathes of India, China and Indonesia.

A problem of scarcity or a question of distribution?

While interviewees were in agreement as to the extent and impact of resource pressures on development in Asia, they questioned whether scarcity of resources was in fact the problem. More interviewees pointed to distribution of resources as being at the core of the issue of resource pressure. Interviewees emphasised the importance of a state role in resource distribution especially for women, who don’t traditionally have a strong role in local decision-making processes in many places. Some commentators pointed to a simple lack of government capacity to distribute and manage resources effectively. They argued that mismanagement, rather than scarcity, is the problem here. One example given was that India has in fact got enough water for the economy and agriculture if managed properly. In a similar way, adequate management of resources would require cross-border cooperation around rivers, which to date is absent.

“Before, when you talked about development work, you thought of things like building potable water for communities: now you can’t even do that, because water is owned by companies. It’s hard to know what is left to do.” – Regional NGO, Southeast Asia

However, other interviewees pointed out proper management is absent not just because of lack of capacity, but because the very principle behind government management of resources is under threat. Here, it is the model of development being pursued which is at the core of the resource problem in Asia. The problem of scarcity, under such an analysis, cannot be easily solved by discrete policy innovations, without challenging the economic model itself. Whether or not resources actually are scarce is irrelevant if people can’t access them.

“The state has to be the allocator between rich and poor, urban and rural, between ethnic groups, class groups and gender groups. Tensions are unavoidable, and the state has to be the one to deal with them.” – Academic, South Asia

A number of interviewees argued that the increased concentration of food, water and land in a smaller numbers of hands has centralised production, distribution and trade of goods to a limited number of private corporations. These corporations then have full discretion as to the future use of these resources. In this manner as resources concentrate, scarcity increases, and that scarcity leads to reactionary policies promoting further concentration. Chief amongst the detrimental impacts of such concentration of power over resources is the threat to the very concept of common access to resources. Again, interviewees argued that lack of access to resources is not simply a negative side effect of development policies but in fact the logical consequence of the development paradigm itself.

What should a government response look like?

“Changes in policy will fix this problem. What is needed is an understanding of the politics of why clearly beneficial reforms haven’t taken place.” – International Organisation, United States

Whether following the logic that resource pressure is a question of mismanagement or of economic ideology, interviewees agreed that pressure on resources is a political rather than a natural resource problem. And following from that, if there is political will, there are political solutions to the problem. In Thailand, one interviewee pointed out, repeated droughts led to government policies of diversified crop selection, which has proofed agriculture against the effects of drought. It’s a positive example of how pro-active government policy can manage resources effectively and equitably. Every country, from dictatorships to democracies, will have to grapple with who gets what. The state can remain the ultimate arbiter.

How then, should governments respond? In Asia, where the public good often trumps the individual good, a number of interviewees pointed to the likelihood that government responses could involve such things as the resettlement of communities in the interests of better planning and resource distribution. This may well be in the public interest but regardless of how well planned, will inevitably disrupt individuals livelihoods and cultures. This could result in huge cultural shifts for people used to, for instance, subsistence living.

“We must remember human beings’ innate capacity to adapt” – *International Organisation, Europe*

Finally, a number of interviewees pointed to the potential of technological innovation to mitigate the crisis of resources. Despite generally negative predictions of upheavals resulting from resource depletion, many interviewees did emphasise what one commentator termed ‘the innate capacity to adapt.’ It was remarked that the negativity around resource depletion often obscures the very likely technological advances that will be made. Interviewees cited evidence of East Asian countries compensating for resource deficits by investing heavily in human resources, demonstrating the capacity to innovate in terms of how we respond to the problem, to simply do less with more.



THE GLOBAL LEADING EDGE: NATURAL RESOURCE PRESSURES

Interviews done for both the global and Asian reports demonstrated the strong connection between natural resource pressures, climate change, population changes and political shifts. The emphasis placed by this report on the importance of good governance for equitable resource use and distribution also resonates strongly with the findings of the global report. Both reports point to the clear link growing between increasing demand for resources and the criminalisation of civil protest.

Conflict emerged more strongly amongst global interviewees, as a consequence of pressure on resources, than in the Asian report, in particular conflict resulting from mass displacements by governments that sell off rights to their countries resources. By contrast, some interviewees in the current report suggest that government acquisition of resources, when done responsibly, may in some instances be a necessary step for the common good.

ii. Reflections from the humanitarian sector

“There is a danger that continuing to respond to resource crises in the traditional manner will create a condition where relief encourages people to stay in a place which simply isn’t viable anymore ... humanitarian actors will be accused of simply keeping people alive with no bigger plan.” – International NGO, Southeast Asia

In some places, scarcity is manifesting itself in terms of making places entirely unlivable, to the point where traditional humanitarian responses to hunger and thirst might appear to have no ‘end point’. Somalia and Kenya are the most prominent situations of such a protracted crisis, and interviewees from the humanitarian sector predicted similar scenarios in areas affected by the Himalaya river basin. Interviewees questioned whether it was either sustainable or manageable to continue to provide relief for people in areas which, owing to massively increased scarcity, it is increasingly unlikely populations will ever sustain themselves in. Are we simply ‘keeping people alive longer with no bigger plan’? Scarcity on this scale cannot be responded to in the traditional crisis mode way. A real response requires that we consider these scenarios as the new, long-term norm, rather than a particular, short-term crisis.

iii. What role for International NGOs?

1. INGOs should act as a ‘watchdog,’ monitoring the activities of private companies in acquiring natural resources, resisting the corporatisation of natural resources

Interviewees pointed out the unique transnational position of many international NGOs, which puts them in a strong position to monitor the activities of private companies working across borders. This position also strengthens their ability to create a narrative which links local issues to broader, international trends – whether towards forced eviction, unjust purchases of resources, or privatisation of resources. Many of these interviewees felt INGOs should explicitly reject the privatization of resources.

A small number of interviewees flagged, however, the need to ensure that INGO interventions do not focus solely on the rights of the vulnerable. These interviewees advocated that INGOs consider more carefully the larger economic context, within which privatization or sale of resources might be important to the security of a country as a whole.

2. INGOs should work more closely with governments to plan sustainable, rights-oriented policies for resource acquisition, in particular around resettlement

In recognition of the very real clash between the need for countries to acquire resources to provide for the basic needs of their citizens and the individual rights of the traditional owners of those citizens, a number of commentators recommended that INGOs begin to work more closely with governments in planning for such conflicts of interest. The issue of resettlement of communities in particular was seen as something which may be unavoidable given the resource needs of many developing countries, and INGOs were seen to have the potential to influence the development of adequate, rights-based plans for such large-scale resettlements. Again here, INGOs received some criticism for failing to examine the broader context within which the rights of the poor exist.

3. INGOs should ensure that scarcity and resource rights are mainstreamed across all programming, in terms of the approaches and models which they advocate

Similar to points raised in relation to climate change, a number of interviewees argued that INGOs and donors alike adopt inconsistent approaches to their work. While perhaps carrying out specific projects targeting, for example, community rights to natural resources, their broader work is not sufficiently built on a principle of conserving resources. In particular INGOs were criticised for continuing to accept the dominant model of economic growth, which is inherently at odds with much INGO work on natural resource rights.

In turn, interviewees saw a further role for INGOs in lobbying donors to adopt policies which do not escalate the degradation of resources, in particular the ADB.

4. INGOs should increase local community ability to influence the political processes which decide resource distribution

More than any other area, resource distribution was recognised as an issue driven by highly politicised decisions. As a result a number of interviewees emphasised the role for INGOs in increasing the poor's understanding of and access to the processes of political decision-making in their own countries.

5. INGOs must examine and articulate a response to the tension between resource conservation and the growth which development demands

Finally, and similar to climate change, interviewees pointed to the critical role for INGOs in articulating a model of development which does not continue to depend on the depletion of finite resources.

¹² *Asia 2050: Realizing the Asian Century* 2011: Asia Development Bank, p.3
http://asianbondsonline.adb.org/publications/adb/2011/Asia_2050-Realizing_the_Asian_Century-Executive_Summary.pdf

6. CONCLUSIONS: WHAT NEXT FOR DEVELOPMENT IN A GROWING ASIA?

That the role of government policy emerged so strongly in our interviews is fitting in a continent where, if current rates of growth continue, 3 billion additional people on the Asian continent will be classed as ‘affluent’ by 2050.¹² Such denomination tells us nothing, of course, about inequality or rates of poverty within those societies. Nonetheless, the new wealth at the disposal of governments and authorities across Asia points to a new challenge to INGOs, to ‘do’ development in contexts where politics, not poverty, is the problem.

We questioned our interviewees as to the role that international NGOs could play in the emerging context in Asia. In particular we focused in on the role, if any, which INGOs should continue to play in MICs. How can we ensure that we don’t weaken pressure on governments to rise to democratic challenges in their country?

INGOs in Middle Income Countries

“Money is no longer a big deal. You can’t just come bearing money and expect to achieve something, anymore. You need to make a smarter contribution than that.” - *Economist, South Asia*

“In many middle income countries, governments aren’t spending money on the poor, because there isn’t the politics that forces them to spend. The development sector has played some role in inadvertently allowing that to continue.” - *Economist, South Asia*

It is worth noting the significant ambiguity from interviewees as to whether INGOs could add value in middle income countries at all. On the one hand, many are home to vibrant civil societies themselves, giving rise to the question of whether international NGOs have anything to add, if money is no longer in such short supply. Interviewees flagged the very real danger that competition might increasingly emerge between local and international NGOs for funding in particular but also for political space, both in negotiating with governments and in campaigning activities with the emerging middle classes. Indeed, it is interesting that a number of other interviewees in fact saw the growing middle classes in ‘middle income’ countries as a potential fundraising boon, something likely unwelcome with local civil society.

Similarly, some interviewees questioned whether INGOs would be willing to begin taking ‘the lead’ from local civil society in terms of policy direction and questioned whether this had happened sufficiently in the past.

A second point emerges in relation to the danger that funds provided by INGOs in countries where there is wealth may weaken the impetus for redistribution of resources towards the poor in unequal societies. One interviewee flagged the growing number of billionaires in India, something which INGOs, whilst mindful that such wealth has little immediate impact on the poor, cannot turn a blind eye to. In this context, the most significant role identified by interviewees for INGOs was strengthening critical social movements that could ensure pressure to bring such redistribution about. By funding ‘frontline’ service provision, while leaving more critical elements of civil society unfunded, INGOs have at times altered the shape of civil society in a way that limits its ability to hold government to account.

Even when INGOs are not needed financially, interviewees pointed to the usefulness of the transnational face of INGOs and their potential to mobilise citizens and opinions across borders. They are uniquely situated to address the inherently transnational challenges facing the region. This might take the shape of facilitating south-south exchange amongst civil society actors, particularly between MICs and LDCs, strengthening social movements across borders or building platforms for exchange of knowledge on specific themes: International Financial Institutions, for example. Interviewees recognized that this has not been a role which INGOs to date have played particularly well, tending to work discretely within individual countries.

A number of interviewees brought the 'international mediator' role of INGOs to a another level again, advocating the furthering of a type of 'globalised South' inclusive of the poor in the UK, in Asia, and globally, building solidarity between, for example, those who see their welfare eroded in the UK, and those being prevented from protesting on the streets of Cambodia. These interviewees pointed to the responsibility of international NGOs to get directly involved in the causes of the oppressed in the global North: the more conservative the policies of governments in the North, the more challenging life in the global South.

A number of specific areas for intervention in middle-income countries were noted. The first is the issue of sustainability: while countries are inevitably growing, whether this happens in an environmentally sustainable manner is not inevitable, and as such this was noted as an area where there is *increasing* need for intervention. The second is gender equality. Here, our interviewees argued that even equitable economic growth is insufficient to deliver the rights of women. More broadly, they emphasised the need for INGOs to consider what progress *won't* automatically come through economic growth, such as respect for human rights, and focus their work entirely in these areas. Finally, one interviewee emphasised the tendency for new 'exclusions' to occur within middle-income countries, even when growth is well distributed; for example the increase in groups such as domestic workers and migrants within wealthy economies.

If current rates of growth continue, 3 billion additional people on the Asian continent will be classed as 'affluent' by 2050.¹³ The new wealth at the disposal of governments across Asia challenges INGOs to 'do' development in contexts where political will, not poverty, is the problem. Placing *Asia 2020* beside the findings of Trócaire's global Leading Edge, this emphasis on political will and decision-making is the clearest distinctive feature coming from Asia. The challenges which emerged in our interviews were met by potential policy solutions every time, if political will were present.

It is notable, though, that interviewees reflected on the very real danger that the presence INGOs in countries where there *is* wealth may in fact serve to weaken the political will needed for Asia's growth to benefit the poorest. Given the significance of political will in addressing Asia's challenges over the coming decade, the greatest challenge for International NGOs in Asia, now, is surely to plan their work as 'Asia's century' begins with this to the forefront of their minds.

¹³ *Asia 2050: Realizing the Asian Century* 2011: Asia Development Bank, p.3
http://asianbondsonline.adb.org/publications/adb/2011/Asia_2050-Realizing_the_Asian_Century-Executive_Summary.pdf

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Sector	Name	Institution/Organisation	Geographic specialism
Academia			
	Saleem UI Huq	IIED	South Asia
	Theresa Devashayam	ISEAS, Singapore	Southeast Asia
	Sarah Cook	UNRISD	South Asia, China
	Jayati Ghosh	Jawaharlal Nehru	South Asia
International NGO			
	Nick Finney	Save the Children	South Asia Southeast Asia
	Marvin Parvaiz	Church World Services	South Asia
	Steve Price-Thomas	Oxfam	Southeast Asia South Asia
	Kevin Hartigan	CRS	South Asia Southeast Asia
Regional NGO			
	Dorothy Grace Guerrero	Focus on the global South	Southeast Asia South Asia China
	Shalmali Guttal	Focus on the global South	South Asia Southeast Asia
	Arjun Karki	South Asian Alliance for Poverty Eradication	South Asia
	Antonio Tujan	IBON	South Asia Southeast Asia
Local NGO			
	Daxing Xhao	CANGO	China
Donor			
	Margaret Gaynor	Embassy of Ireland in Hanoi	Southeast Asia
	Dr. Ursula Schaefer-Preuss	ADB	South Asia Southeast Asia
International organisations			
	Dr. Kalpana Kochhar	World Bank	South Asia
	Oliver Lacey-Hall	OCHA	Southeast Asia South Asia
Private Sector			
	Rowena Guerin	Emerging Markets	Southeast Asia

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Section A: The next decade for development in Asia

1. Can you tell me, what do you believe will be the two or three major trends which shape development in South and/or Southeast Asia over the next decade?

Section B: Global Trends in 'Leading Edge 2020'

Natural disasters and humanitarian crises

1. As a region, Asia is more likely to suffer from a natural disasters and humanitarian crises than is the case globally. What sort of impacts might this have over the coming decade?
2. Are International NGOs responding appropriately to the issue in Asia? How will they need to adapt in order to best respond to this issue over the next decade?

Climate change

1. Can you tell me what impact you see the issues of climate change and environmental justice having in Asia over the next decade?
2. Do you think civil society, and in particular international NGOs is responding appropriately to the issue of climate change? How will they need to respond, in terms of programming and policy, over the coming decade?

Shifting Geopolitics

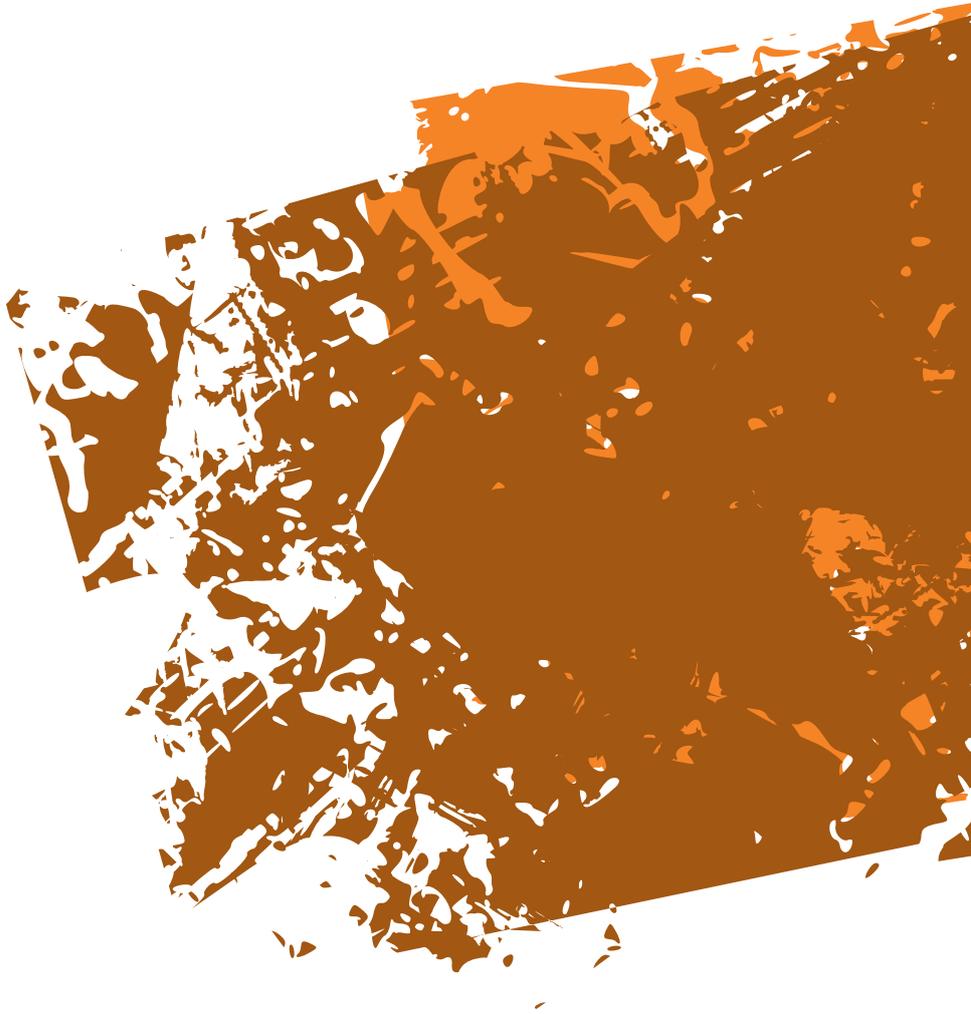
1. How do you see the shifts in geopolitical power (the rise of the G20, China and India; increasing regionalism, are a few examples) altering the political/economic/social context in Asia over the next decade?
2. Can you speak a little more about the potential role of China in the region over the coming decade?
3. Do you think civil society is responding appropriately to the changing geopolitics in Asia? How will they need to respond, in both programmes and policy, over the coming decade?

Demographic Changes

1. Demographic changes, in particular the urbanisation of poverty, major increases in migration, and population growth, were cited in our research as a major external trend which would significantly alter the international development landscape. What impact will these trends have in the Asian context? Ten years from now, how will things look different?
2. Given this, how will the changes in demographic moves impact on how INGOs work? Are we working in the right places etc.?

Section C: Civil Society in Asia

1. What particular challenges or opportunities do you think exist for faith-based organisations, in particular Catholic organisations, in multi-faith contexts in Asia?
2. A broad question now: given the large middle classes across Asia, the rapid economic growth, the capacity internally within the region: I'm interested to hear your opinions on how international NGOs can add value in the region?
3. Many commentators in our Leading Edge research felt that the environment within which international NGOs operate is posing new challenges: civil space is shrinking, there's an increased emphasis from donors on results, and growing challenges to financing development. How do you feel this changing environment will impact on the context within which international NGOs work in Asia?



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