

Penyampai : Y.BHG. TAN SRI SAMSUDIN BIN OSMAN  
Tajuk : THE EVOLVING ROLE OF URBAN MANAGEMENT  
Lokasi : KOTA KINABALU, SABAH  
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Assalamualaikum wbrt and Good Morning.

Y.Bhg Kol. Datuk Haji Abdul Ghani Haji Abdul Rashid,

Mayor of Kota Kinabalu City Hall

Distinguished Guests, Conference Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First and foremost I would like to thank the organizers of this

seminar for giving me the opportunity to address you on the

evolving role of urban management in the context of urban social

transformation .

2. I have been informed that the objectives of this Conference are three-fold, namely, to create a better conceptual understanding of the process of urban social transformation; to identify social challenges in the urban setting; and to identify strategies towards more effective management of urban change.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. Our cities are expanding rapidly and have turned into major growth centres that act as catalysts to national economic growth and development. Such rapid urban growth has in turn led to many dilemmas in urban management. A critical challenge facing urban managers lies in striking a balance between economic and social

needs in order to ensure that the beneficiaries of urban development, namely the various sections of the urban community, are able to enjoy a good quality of life. Challenges arise from the make and fabric of the urban environment, which are complex and ever evolving. Indeed we have come to a stage where the urban manager's role is not only focused on physical development and expanding the economic base of cities or the beautification of cities, but also in managing the underlying social implications of urban development in all spheres. The face of our towns and cities has been transformed. New urban lifestyles have led to changes in social values and behaviour. We have transformed urban habitats from humble settlements and simple living to elegant city structures and modern lifestyles.

4. I am certain that in the wake of such a transformation, urban managers are also aware that there are disparities and inequities in opportunities as well as in the distribution of facilities and services in urban areas. There are still many pockets of needs or under served areas in the cities despite our best efforts to ensure equitable urban development. We need to actively monitor these pockets and identify their needs and the service gaps that exist. Left unattended, these pockets can evolve into zones fertile for the perpetuation of social ills.

Ladies and gentlemen,

5. Urban managers certainly need to understand the complex characteristics of their cities, if they are to serve their

clients better. As we all know, towns and cities are places of contrasts. They contribute to human development as much as they constrain it. They represent centres of affluence but contain concentrations of poverty as well. They bring out the best in human enterprise but also the worst in human behaviour and habits. They provide some of the most sophisticated services and yet they are also hosts to many social ills. This is not characteristic of Malaysian cities alone but represent global urban trends that have well been documented in many international publications such as the UNDP Human Development Report.

6. These social issues and problems have arisen from the manner in which our cities have so rapidly developed. The

continuing flow of even more people and activities into the confines of towns and cities reflect upon the onerous tasks that confront the urban manager. Urban managers need to understand from the outset that their mission is to manage and improve both the economic and social dimensions of urban growth and development. Planners and managers in the respective local authorities, working in tandem with development and implementing agencies, must not only cope with the physical development of urban areas and the promotion of economic activities, but also have to address the issues of urban poverty, the demand for adequate public housing, the provision of social amenities and recreational facilities as well as a host of other urban social phenomena that are now part of the transformed urban fabric.

Ladies and gentlemen,

7. If our cities are also to be our homes, we face the challenge of managing urban growth while improving living standards, including safety and environmental health. Measures taken should be socially just; ecologically sustainable; politically participatory; economically productive and culturally vibrant. These are values that have guided our vision for urban development over the last decade or so. How well these have been translated within the urban setting on the ground may well vary and is a matter that this Conference may wish to discuss in the course of your deliberations.

8. While urban managers may have traditionally focused on

physical development and the provision of urban services, they

have also been sensitised to the social dimension of urban

management through the implementation of the 'healthy cities',

'safe cities' and Local Agenda 21 programmes. Successful pilot

projects have been undertaken in Kuantan, Kerian, Miri and

Petaling Jaya and I am sure Kota Kinabalu is a strong advocate

of these programmes as well.

9. The experience gained from the implementation of the Local

Agenda 21 programme, which has been guided and followed through

by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, not only serves

as a platform for community dialogue and participation, but is

also a programme of action that deals with community and social

needs. Similarly, the adoption of the Social Impact Assessment

by the Government provides yet another tool for local authorities to ascertain gaps and weaknesses in a particular development effort that can signal potential sources of social ills or alternatively, social benefits arising from the effort.

Urban managers should examine how best they can utilise the Social Impact Assessment tool to pro-actively address the social enhancement agenda.

#### Urban Management Issues

10. Urban events revolve around the workplace, homes, recreation, entertainment and other activities. The management of these events and activities that involve people and resources call for varied approaches in an urban setting. These must be

undertaken in a structured manner. In most cases, market forces

may dictate the choice of actions by urban managers. However, in

making these choices it is also important to strike a balance

between the economic proposition and the social need.

Consequently, the urban manager has to deal with competing needs

and interests, for instance, between those proposed by the

business community vis a vis those of the low-income groups.

11. In this regard, the question arises as to how we identify

and prioritise urban management issues. Social challenges in the

urban environment relate to factors such as the characteristics

of the population, access to and distribution of services and

facilities and their impact on social equity. Presently these

issues and the strategies to address them are identified and

formulated at the national level. They are then translated into action plans on the ground. In such a scenario, the sources of information for action on the part of the urban manager are many. They range from Government policies and directives, reports and views of recognised organisations, special interest groups, professional bodies, media reports and discussion forums such as this Conference.

12. Today, with the 'people agenda' at the forefront, public and community participation will be increasingly important in shaping the role of urban management institutions and their delivery systems. This calls for the strengthening of the mechanism for community participation including effective ways to identify, prioritise and deal with the issues systematically.

13. In order to do this, the urban manager cannot hope to resolve problems from within the confines of his or her office but must instead adopt a hands-on approach to get a feel of the situation on the ground. Communication with the client community will be a key component before appropriate strategies can be devised and actions can be executed efficiently.

Ladies and gentlemen,

14. The development of healthy, safe and liveable neighbourhoods has been a natural priority for urban managers. Yet the urban community and concerned stakeholders point to the many social problems afflicting our cities. I do not

intend to list and discuss at length the many social issues that are prevalent in the urban environment. A cursory review of media reports will point to some of the pressing issues such as crime and public safety; urban poverty; overcrowding and squatter settlements; broken families; lack of civic consciousness; and vandalism to name a few. I am sure the Conference will be making reference to these issues in the course of your many discussion sessions.

15. What is clear is that the local authority will be looked at as a principal player in managing these social ills. Urban managers in the local authorities will play the role of coordinator to facilitate meetings and mediate between different groups in order to agree on appropriate measures to

resolve problems. There is broad consensus that many social issues in the urban areas cannot be dealt with through law enforcement alone. Instead all the relevant sectors of the urban community need to be mobilised for effective results.

16. For example, the problem of public safety is best addressed when community members feel a sense of ownership over their own neighbourhoods. This is further strengthened when they have the support of their local authorities to carry out community-based public safety programmes. Local authorities can encourage and co-ordinate the kind of community-wide strategies that can help to prevent crime and promote security.

17. One important aspect in urban management is the question of

compliance. An essential premise in urban management is that

urban citizens pay for their amenities and adhere to the rules

and regulations that have been enacted for the common good.

Local authorities have indeed formulated the necessary rules and

regulations that encompass various aspects of urban life. The

typical response to the failure to comply has been to enact more

regulations with higher penalties, enforce higher standards, and

deploy more enforcement personnel. Perhaps we should also

examine other avenues to ensure compliance, particularly in the

context of participatory management. Urban managers will need to

experiment with more creative educational and awareness

strategies as well as study the possibility of introducing

social and economic incentives to enhance compliance with rules

and regulations. Thus urban managers should consider the question of compliance in a more creative fashion. However, where necessary, the full measure of rules and regulations need to be enforced to safeguard public interest and ensure conformance to stipulated requirements.

18. The effectiveness of strategies and action plans to combat various urban management issues is dependent on the quality of information available to urban managers. Inadequate, inaccurate and outdated information will be costly and detrimental to the efforts of the urban manager to address or resolve a particular urban problem. Knowledge management and information sharing are essential if the urban manager is to understand the urban community's needs, plan effectively, target resources

appropriately, monitor the effectiveness of strategies and predict trends for the future. Thus it is imperative that local authorities upgrade and improve their capacity to collect, collate and analyse information that will drive decisions to implement specific programmes.

#### Urban Management Focus Areas

Ladies and gentlemen,

19. Having discussed problems and issues faced by urban managers that have evolved over the last decade or so, we should also examine the approaches that may be necessary to resolve them. In this regard, there are several focus areas of urban

management that require our attention. I wish to highlight five

focus areas although they are not meant to be exhaustive.

20. The first focus area is regarding the issue of co-

ordination. Local authorities and urban managers are not the

only players involved in addressing urban social issues. As

discussed earlier, issues identified and remedial strategies

formulated at the federal or state levels need to be translated

on the ground. Various public sector agencies are tasked with

the responsibility of implementing these strategies for target

groups that physically come under the jurisdiction of urban

managers. Undoubtedly, local authorities and urban managers play

the role of coordinators and facilitators in enabling the

successful implementation of strategies and programmes to combat

social ills. Thus the issue of coordination between public sector agencies who are armed with their own programme objectives needs to be addressed very carefully. At the same time, urban social programmes increasingly require collaboration with the private sector and non-Governmental organisations (NGOs). This too involves the element of coordination.

21. Against this backdrop, the coordinating role of local authorities is indeed a critical one. Urban managers in local authorities have been performing this role over the years because of their unique position on the ground. Given the integrated approach to the planning, design and implementation of urban management programmes and initiatives, we should be having a sufficiently high level of coordination, especially

between public sector agencies. However, it is important to assess the effectiveness of the existing channels of coordination and examine methodologies to improve the level of such coordination.

22. The second focus area involves networking. I am aware that there have been concerted efforts to provide an information network that is meaningful for urban managers. Such networks allow for information exchange related to specific issues including the fostering of support groups for urban managers on an informal basis. Given the impact of developments that affect the urban community and the continuous discussions of solutions to urban management issues, there is certainly a need to enhance

information sharing and networking for urban managers. Improved

databases will enable greater capability and readiness for

collaboration in managing problems that involve different

jurisdictions. Networking takes on even more importance in the

context of the wide range of clientele and stakeholders that the

urban manager needs to deal with on a daily basis. Undertaken

strategically, networking will contribute towards better and

more effective management of change and development in urban

communities. In this respect, it will be advantageous if the

urban manager's management style is one that is networking

friendly and open to ideas from various sources.

23. The third focus area relates to the issue of planning.

Feedback from the urban community continues to cite inadequate

planning as a contributory factor for problems affecting sections of the urban community. This is despite various efforts to ensure an integrated planning approach at the local government level. It appears that capacity and expertise remain major issues for local authorities and other implementing agencies in managing the urban environment. The key factor here is that while physical planning may be less of an issue, planning in relation to the management of social issues offers a different set of problems. This is again complicated by the presence of many different players and interest groups. There is a need therefore to identify specific aspects of the planning requirement where expertise and capacity need to be upgraded and enhanced.

24. A fourth focus area relates to the issue of evaluation. It goes without saying that the efficacy of programmes and projects that have been implemented for the urban community need to be evaluated on a continuous basis. Urban managers in particular have an important role in providing such an assessment as implementers or facilitators to these programmes and in their capacity as guardians of the urban community. In this regard, one best practice adopted by many agencies is to implement new initiatives on a pilot basis. The advantage of the pilot approach, whether undertaken solely by the local authority and public agencies or in collaboration with the private sector and NGOs, is that the pilots can be tested, assessed and improved before replication on a wider scale.

25. A fifth focus area that we have dealt with at some length is that of participatory management. The global agenda is now increasingly focused on governance and the need for the community to be consulted on programmes and projects that involve them. This element takes on added importance in urban management as the urban populace is generally more aware, educated and vocal about their needs and attentive to problems in the urban setting. As stated earlier, our efforts in participatory management are not new. For example, Malaysia has been an active partner of the Urban Management Programme for Asia and the Pacific (UMPAP) programme that was undertaken under the auspices of the United Nations in January 1993. The four-year initiative provided exposure to knowledge and best practices in participatory urban management. The initiative is

now into its 12th year and would have provided useful lessons and direction in involving the participation of communities in urban management. Urban managers should by now be familiar with a variety of participatory methods such as focus groups, community dialogues as well as other communication and mediation methods.

26. This people-centred approach also forms a bedrock component of the Local Agenda 21 Programme and the pilot projects coordinated by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government would have given further insight into effective participatory management. In addition, the legally mandated requirement for public participation and feedback in the drafting of Local and Structure Plans has also enabled local authorities to involve

the community in the urban management and planning process.

Participatory management is here to stay and urban managers will

need to seek innovative methods to ensure effective people

participation in urban management.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Support Measures for Urban Management

27. There is of course a need to ensure that support measures

are in place to assist local authorities and urban managers in

facing up to the focus areas that have been outlined. The first

measure is related to human resource. The human resource

development will have to take into consideration the core

competencies and skills for urban managers. In fact this will also encompass the required competencies for personnel in collaborating public sector agencies. The relevant human resource development programmes should be planned to complement institutional networking and collaborative approaches. A critical component is of course the training and nurturing of leadership at the local authority level as a long-standing effort to enhance the capabilities and strengths of our urban managers.

28. Similarly, information and communication technology (ICT) and related technologies must be leveraged effectively to ensure better management of urban issues. I have already highlighted the benefits of information sharing and networking for urban

managers. ICT will prove to be a strong enabler towards this end by helping to build the necessary database on issues and problems as well as to track and monitor implementation programmes. At the same time ICT can be deployed to ensure effective communication channels and information sharing with the local community in promoting participatory management. Local authorities should incorporate these requirements into their respective ICT Strategic Plans (ISPs). This would be in line with the idea of information-rich cities with extensive public information networks and monitoring systems that serve their urban constituents effectively.

29. The Government is currently undertaking a study that is aimed at streamlining and strengthening the management and

provision of urban services by local authorities. While the study does not focus on the social issues related to urban management, its recommendations related to human resource management and the use of appropriate technology can have a positive impact on the role of urban managers in addressing social ills in the urban environment.

#### Service Delivery

Ladies and gentlemen,

30. The Government has given much focus to the issue of service delivery by public sector agencies. As front line entities, local authorities have naturally come under the scrutiny of the

urban community as well as other clientele. Several major improvements have been implemented by local authorities to enhance service delivery. The implementation of initiatives such as One-stop Centres to process applications for building plans and certificate of occupation (CFO), deregulation and the adoption of reengineered procedures for approving CFOs, improved licensing requirements and other related efforts are aimed at establishing more efficient service delivery by local authorities.

31. At the same time, streamlined systems and procedures eliminate the avenue for abuse and corruption and help enhance the image of local authorities. Improved service delivery and a corruption-free environment result in positive spin-offs for

urban managers who are involved in managing social ills in the urban environment. Efficient work processes will free up urban managers from having to deal with service delivery issues and focus on equally pressing issues such as managing urban social ills. Local authorities with a clean image will find that they have the integrity that is necessary to lead and collaborate on efforts to manage and reduce social problems within our towns and cities.

32. Having said all of this, I must emphasise that even as this Conference focuses on issues related to urban social transformation, the litmus test for the effectiveness of local authorities continues to lie in their ability to provide basic urban services to the urban community. Despite the various

initiatives to upgrade the capability of local authority entities to render more efficient urban services, generally, the urban clientele seems far from satisfied with the performance of their local authorities. The recurring complaints about uncollected rubbish in residential areas, poor garbage disposal, woeful maintenance of public and recreational facilities, clogged drains, filthy public toilets, enforcement issues and a whole host of other urban deficiencies paint an abysmal picture of local authorities. We may lay the blame for such a perception on the overly high expectations of ratepayers or allude to a few black sheep among the local authorities for their poor services. But I think we need to acknowledge that there is some basis to this perception as the performance of local authorities in providing essential services has been

found wanting on too many occasions.

33. It is important that local authorities take the necessary steps to rectify the situation. In this respect, the Government will examine the findings of the current study on the management of local authorities to determine how best they can be assisted to upgrade urban service delivery systems. However, whatever the improvements and assistance rendered, urban managers in local authorities must take the lead to put in place the necessary support measures to ensure the provision of services at acceptable performance standards - whether it involves basic urban services to ratepayers, licensing and permit requirements for the business sector or approvals related to plans for development within the jurisdiction of local authorities. When

local authorities are able to meet these core requirements

consistently, then they will also have the credibility to manage

their larger role in urban social transformation.

## Conclusion

34. As our towns and cities evolve into more advanced physical

and economic entities, the current management framework for

addressing urban social problems needs to be re-examined and

enhanced. Urban managers are best placed to respond to this

requirement. I believe that this Conference will deliberate on

the burning issues related to managing social ills in the urban

environment and recommend practical strategies and action plans

that can help establish wholesome urban communities as part of

our on-going efforts towards achieving the objective of a fully

developed nation under Vision 2020.

35. On that note, I thank you for your kind attention and wish

you every success for a fruitful Conference.