

The Hidden Face of the Asia Pacific Economic Community (APEC) Summit: Tri Hita Karana, Bali's Bold New Model for Sustainable Development

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When you arrive in Bali, the most diverse and popular of Indonesia's 7000 plus Islands, you are immediately confronted with a just constructed state of the art vast airport with an arrivals area designed to accommodate thousands of visitors and conference delegates.

It had its inaugural run a week earlier for the Ms. World contest that brought bevvies of beauty queens and their entourages to the Busa Dua Convention Center that, this week, plays hosts to far less popular government leaders of the 21 member APEC—Asia Pacific Economic Community. Later as foreign leaders arrived, the new airport was shut down—ostensibly for security reasons far inconveniencing 17,000 travelers.

Predictably, there were more photos in the press of the victory of a smiling and vivacious Ms. Philippines than all of the self-important politicians scurrying for credentials. The news in America focused on one issue: Obama's no show and then John Kerry standing off to the side for the official photo., and what he was wearing.

Once again, it was all about us. What the rest of the world cares about was barely touched on.

Political interventions are not new in Bali. Ten years ago, a small group of homegrown terrorists attracted the kind of attention politicians hate by blowing up a night club, leaving bodies and chaos in their wake.

Earlier, back in 1908, in an incident deeply embedded in Bali's history—a country known today for peaceful interreligious harmony—Dutch invaders slaughtered resisters to their colonial invasion in an even bloodier massacre that was followed by survivors committing suicide rather than live under foreign domination. Bali doesn't like being pushed around!

Today's visiting leaders were drawn, like tourists the world over, to the beautiful beaches and scenic flora/fauna that is part of the reason tourism in Indonesia is the 4th highest foreign currency earner for the country. More than 8 million visitors flocked here in 2012, and an additional million are expected this year.

No wonder that foreign investment in hotels and restaurants hit a record \$729.7 million last year. The investors may be happy to welcome smiling tourist with credit cards, but environmentalists worry that this deluge is already unsustainable. Perhaps, that's why the

opening conference in the run-up to APEC 2013 dealt with sustainable development with a special focus on tourism.

It had few of the big guns that draw CNN and sound alike TV news outlets, perhaps because unlike the posturing politicians, this one was about a matter of real substance. And, hence, was ignored.

I didn't know that world tourism is now recognized as the planet's biggest industry, generating 231 million jobs, or nearly one of out twelve jobs globally. This according to one of the speakers, Professor Kelly Bricker, chairman of the Global Sustainable tourism Council (GSTC).

This side meeting that brought leading academics, government officials, environmentalists and business people was endorsed by Indonesia's President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a military General who became a reformer and was provoked by Indonesia's very dynamic Minister of Tourism And Creative Economy, Mari Elka Pangestu.

Other leading participants included the Prime Minister of New Zealand, the President of Peru and Professor Jeffrey Sachs of the Earth Institute of Columbia University in New York and Special representative of UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon.

The US government didn't seem very interested in attending, perhaps because US firms have a reported \$65 billion invested in in 35 major companies in Indonesia.

Like many governments, the pay lipservice to environmental change but seem more committed to the agendas of business. China Daily described the Conference as committed to "Building a free market economy," a neo-liberalism that I was surprised to see China endorsing.

The room was packed with environmental activists, researchers conservationists, NGO's and a sprinkling of business leaders. Some were there to showcase innovative community-based people-oriented development projects. One group won a contest

with a prize of 300 million Rupiah, the local currency (or \$30.000) to encourage their work.

Despite its vast biodiversity Indonesia is menaced by environmental dangers as we see in the frequently active volcanoes, flooding and the 2004 tsunami.

Many fear climate change can play havoc with this island nation where there is already an erosion of biodiversity and an escalating loss of natural resources amidst growing urbanization. All of this puts sustainability at risk even there is both growth in economic development and, at the same time, inequality and desperate poverty.

The Conference discourse included discussion of Marine conservation, ending illegal logging and insuring forest preservation, as well as providing incentives for people and corporations to act in environmentally responsible ways.

To facilitate all this, Indonesia has joined the global Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and is a hub for promoting sustainable practice throughout South East Asia. The network, connecting top universities and research centers, will encourage countries to create Sustainable Development plans and goals.

But beyond that, there was something new this year that excited the delegates and offered a promising way to inspire environmental activism. In Development parlance, this is known as inspirational and aspirational goals.

The spiritual foundations of Bali itself—a philosophy of happiness called Tri Hita Karana, a belief in harmony between man to man, man and nature and man and creation—is driving the redevelopment of an island inside Bali as a prototype of how sustainability can be achieved.

The project is called Kura Kura Bali and will begin as creative campus and then phase in programs to preserve the environment with ecologically sound housing and a new state of the art village adjacent to nature preserves. We will see if a project that will ultimately be sold to high net worth consumers can also benefit struggling communities. The developers who believe in socially responsible investment believe they can.

Behind the initiative is a dynamic Indonesian-born woman visionary and business lead, Cherie Nurasalim, who came up with the concept and attracted support from the local government, universities, MIT among them, and business partners including Microsoft.

During the conference they launched their ambitious creative campus concept that is expected to grow into the largest of its kind in the world. There was a dinner on the Island in an impressive bamboo structure called “Three Mountains” for a lively ceremony and event that brought locals and foreigners together to enjoy local cuisine and displays of traditional dance.

Enthusiasm for the development is already drawing global attention. Alongside developing their project, they also work with the local community on agricultural and garbage recycling projects. I spoke to members of that community and found many had overcome their doubts to embrace a project that will also generate jobs and income for them. “

I met farmers of Moslem and Hindu backgrounds who are working together to build a new future for their communities.

Seeing the work at the grass roots added a reality to some of the high falutin’ rhetoric at the conference and demonstrated that new possibilities are stirring among people who are bringing their own wisdom and energy to sustainable development concepts that we are used to hearing more about in academia than on the ground in the real world.

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