

Young Leader

Yumiko Noda

The Japanese PERSPECTIVE



Yumiko Noda, a partner of PwC Japan and former Deputy Mayor of Yokohama city, is a pioneer of public-private partnership projects in Japan. In this interview with CLC's Hazelina Yeo, she shares the Japanese perspective and suggests how cities can become more resilient by developing their soft infrastructure, including social and cultural competencies.

● **Why is investing in risk-resilient infrastructure important?**

With climate change and urbanisation, cities are increasingly vulnerable to natural hazards. One extreme weather event can cause significant human and economic losses. Based on our experience in Japan and a range of analyses, we have found that spending on recovery far outweighs spending for resilience.

Devastation from disasters may also undermine the trust of citizens and business communities, leading to the flight of talents and investors. Rebuilding that trust takes time. Investing in resilience will protect your city's "brand" and prosperity.

● **What role can the private sector fill in building a city's resilience?**

The private sector has increasingly begun to own critical infrastructure, such as telecommunications, which plays a crucial role in the aftermath of disaster. The private sector can bring smart technologies, innovative ideas and funding solutions through public-private partnerships, and they can play an integral role in disaster response. The greater the disaster, the less government can do.

● **You have highlighted Sendai as a great example of a resilient city – tell us why.**

First, Sendai has continuously fortified its key infrastructure, including highly elastic pipes and "redundancies" to ensure continuity in water and energy supplies. This enabled a swift recovery from the Tohoku earthquake that occurred on 11 March 2011 (also known as the 3.11 earthquake).

Second, the city actively engages the private sector, carrying out regular joint physical

exercises and fostering a “crisis mentality” for better preparedness.

Third, the city encourages social inclusion. Certificates are given to condominiums that develop measures to protect elderly citizens at risk and maintain stockpiles of food, water and medication.

● **You have interviewed several mayors and authorities for a report on resilience. What is one key lesson distilled from that?**

I would say “human resilience.” Investment in infrastructure is vital to protect cities. But many mayors and officials stressed that investment in “soft infrastructure” – social, cultural, and educational competencies – is vitally important. Akihiro Ohta, Japan’s Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, told me that disaster-prevention education and training with simulated drills among diverse stakeholders contributed substantially to the recovery from the 3.11 earthquake.

● **Name one unique way that Japan has adapted its environment for its super-ageing population.**

For our “compact city” initiative, Toyama city leads the way. By investing in light rail and circle trams in the downtown, Toyama strives to create an elderly-friendly, “walkable” city. The effects are significant – environmentally, socially and economically. Greenhouse gas emissions will decrease by reversing an over-reliance on cars. Elderly

citizens go out, enjoy, and spend more. In return, healthier lifestyles bring down social welfare expense.

● **How did Yokohama cut its waste by 30% in just five years?**

Three ways: clear vision, strict policy, and citizen engagement. In 2003, then-mayor, Hiroshi Nakada, initiated a G30 plan to reduce solid waste by 30%. An unpopular policy of segregating waste into 15 categories was implemented. But the city made extensive efforts to communicate with its citizens through more than 10,000 briefings, 600 campaigns and 3,300 early-morning sessions!

What is most effective in reducing waste is changing people’s mindsets and behaviour, particularly transforming the urban lifestyle of mass consumption into that of environmental consciousness.

● **What is one initiative that best helps to increase urban resilience?**

The government could enter into “collaborative agreements” with the private sector to secure immediate assistance during natural disasters. Densely populated urban areas

with high daytime populations will face massive confusion with “commuter refugees” who cannot go home. Tokyo experienced this on 3.11. Many Japanese municipalities sign agreements with companies so that convenience stores, shopping malls, rail stations and gas stations will provide food, water, shelter and fuel in the event of an emergency.

● **What is your greatest takeaway from being in the World Cities Summit Young Leaders network?**

It is such a stimulating platform. The greatest lesson for me is that there are so many common issues and solutions that can be shared among city leaders – regardless of culture and stage of development.

Whilst Japanese cities are advanced today, we suffered serious urbanisation problems in the late 20th century. Such experiences can be shared with rapidly developing cities. At the same time, emerging cities are making “leap-frog” progress, from which we can learn a lot.

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