



Essay Form

Student Name:

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Country:

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Theme: The roles of my country and of Asia in the future.

Length: Maximum of 1,000 words

Language: English

World economic growth is currently propelled by Asian countries. In 2015, while world GDP grew by only 2.5%, the developing economies of Asia, as a group, grew by about 6% (World Bank database). Along with China and India, most Southeast Asian economies grew at impressive rates of 5% or higher. Apart from the region's contribution to recent world economic expansion, Asia is home to a rich diversity of both natural and human resources that has brought about very dynamic cultural, political and social transformations. With opportunities and challenges that go hand-in-hand with this diversity, adequate measures must be put in place to ensure that the opportunities are fully explored and that gains are safeguarded for the benefit of all.

With Asian economic growth and stability expected to continue in the next couple of years, we have to reflect on the past growth path our countries have taken and to pave new paths for the future based on lessons learned in the past as well as on unprejudiced assessments of the mix of strengths and weaknesses we have as individual countries and as a region. As the leaders and policy makers of the future will be no one but us, the youth of today, it is imperative that we gather together and establish a network as early as now to foster mutual and deep understanding and appreciation of our varied history, culture and tradition, and capabilities. This hopefully will lead us to a productive and mutually beneficial collaboration that is geared toward the development of a sustainable society.

The prospects and challenges the Asian region faces are immense, and each country in the region must take part in addressing these challenges to realize the potentials. I see three areas where I, my country, the Philippines, and the Asian region can play a role in the important task of shaping the future of our world.

First is in the area of sustainable development. Economic growth can have serious repercussions on the environment. Sustainability is being able to provide adequately for present and all future generations. A sustainable society is one that progressively tries to develop technologies and finds ways to reuse and recycle so that resources are preserved for all generations.

There are a variety of ways by which we can contribute towards the creation of a sustainable society. In the case of my country, the Philippines, and many other countries in Asia, shifting to renewable sources of energy is a viable option. The topography and climatic conditions in my country offers much potential for wind and solar power. Developing the technologies to efficiently utilize these energy sources will not only prepare the region for the eventual depletion of the earth's fixed supply of fossil fuels but also and more importantly, reduce carbon dioxide emissions that pollute the air and cause global warming.

Second is in the area of building up resilience to natural disasters that have become more frequent and more severe with global warming. Some of the damages that have been inflicted on our environment by the drive towards economic growth and industrialization are not completely reversible. Such are the consequences of climate change that we face now. The option we have is to reduce our vulnerability to these natural disasters. Efforts in this direction include the rehabilitation and preservation of our watershed that serves to prevent or minimize the strength and impact of flooding for instance. We have to put a stop to the irresponsible cutting of trees and the conversion of our forest lands to other uses. In the Philippines and probably other Southeast Asian countries endowed with rich tropical forests, the upstream portion of the watersheds are still inhabited by indigenous communities that are bound by tradition and culture to protect their forests. We have to help preserve these communities as we can rely on them to safeguard and conserve our forest resources.

Apart from mitigation, we have to learn how to adapt to changes brought about by climate change. We can form and strengthen social institutions - groups that will assist public officials mobilize people and resources in times of disasters. My country has experienced floods and earthquakes that has taken several hundreds of lives. The loss of lives could have been minimized had we been more ready, had people listened to the warnings and call to evacuate. Thus, I believe that public information and education campaign is the first necessary step. We, the youth of today, can do this as early as now.

The role of technology and the need for physical infrastructure cannot be ignored. We have to develop instruments for climate forecasting and detection of impending climate and volcanic events. Collaboration among Asian countries at different stages of technological advancement will speed up the process. Southeast Asian countries, for instance, can look up to Japan for earthquake-related technologies.

The third area concerns inclusive development. All efforts I mentioned above must prioritize the most vulnerable countries and segments of our society. Inclusive development means that development efforts must be equitable and benefit all.

I am currently the president of the Student Council of the Ateneo de Manila Junior School. Our school's main thrust is to develop "persons for others". Hence, our student organizations and special class projects are aimed at improving the life of particular segments of the Philippine society. We have regular zero-waste programs, waste segregation and recycling programs. We also have save the environment cum fund raising (e.g.: used paper drives) projects for the benefit of natural disaster victims. Our science projects are aimed to address a specific sustainable development goal. Last year, my group investigated plants in the Philippines that can be used as a phytoremediation agent, a natural method of removing toxic chemicals in lakes and rivers.

I believe that our efforts can be intensified further, and to do so, more collaboration with others inside and outside the Philippines is important. After all, we all have the same objective of protecting life and the universe we live in.