

## Episode 1: Smart Societies

Hello, I'm Barry Clarke from Radio Australia and welcome to 'Smart Societies'. In this 11 part education series, we'll ask a range of people what they think it will take to be truly 'smart' in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We've come to think of 'smart' as having a digital connotation with the development of 'smart cards', 'smart cars' and even 'smart fridges'. So when we asked people around the region, all specialists in their own fields, what they think constitutes smart societies, their responses were quite diverse.

**VARIOUS VOICES:** "We need a radical shift to create smart societies in agriculture, in urban settlements that create more welfare, more products, more well-being, it is not only about future generations, it is about today. We are in a deep crisis now and that crisis can only be solved by keeping in mind the future generations and their entitlements and keeping in mind other species that don't have a voice and those parts of the human family that don't have a voice."

**CLARKE:** "What do you think we need to do to become a smart society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century I guess in terms of education anyway?"

**MALE VOICE:** "Well I think we must be able to ask the hard questions and grapple with the answers. We don't have all the answers but that's really part of what the challenge is. So it's not just technology, it's not just particular kinds of ways of learning, but it's actually grappling with those hard questions with whatever resources you have."

**MALE VOICE:** "The cricket which is common between Australia and India and Australia's given a pretty good bashing to Indians. How? There's also smart playing, there is a methodology of playing, why do you have coaches? That is also smart, so smart societies; are smart in so many ways."

**CLARKE:** For you a smart society?

**FEMALE VOICE:** "A smart society is one that doesn't just have a citizenry that have a lot of information and knowledge or even have the skills to acquire that. A smart society is one where your citizenry understands the social implications of everything they do and have a vision of making the world a better place basically, that they understand the global responsibilities they have."

**CLARKE:** So when young people representing the ethnic diversity of multi-cultural Australia and with links to the Asia Pacific came together for the launch of the Young Professionals Project, we canvassed their views, which you'll hear shortly. The Young Professionals Project is a networking and skills development program that attracts interest from the corporate, government, non-government and university sectors. It's an initiative of RIAP - the Research Institute for the Asia Pacific at the University of Sydney. The project was launched by a former Australian Prime Minister, Bob Hawke. So what does he think this generation needs to do to build smart societies?

**BOB HAWKE:** They've got to have a very clear understanding that we're living in an increasingly competitive world and make decisions which are going to increase their capacity to exist. Now that means particularly sensible decisions in regard to research and development and education. The second thing is you've got to have a sense of equity because you will not have a stable and competitive society if you're not giving people within that society a fair go.

**CLARKE:** In this program we hear from three people who are a part of RIAP's Young Professionals Project. They participated in a public forum that addressed the question, 'What makes a smart society for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?' Introducing them is RIAP's Director, Dr Stephanie Fahey.

**DR STEPHANIE FAHEY:** This forum is a joint initiative of the University of Sydney and ABC Radio Australia. There is much of last century that we can be proud of - technological and economic advancement, the declaration of human rights and the eradication of smallpox. But we also carry the burden of the shame of two world wars, and our failure to stop the spread of AIDS amongst the poor in the developing world. Our speakers this evening will reflect on some of these issues - what can be learned from the century we left behind, and what do we choose to hold on to for life in the 21st century?

So what is smart? A few years ago I had the opportunity to meet one of the world's leading thinkers and visionaries, Canadian John Ralston Saul. In his book, which many of you will know, 'On Equilibrium', he suggests that there are six human qualities that are essential to create smart societies - ethics, reason, common sense, intuition, memory and imagination. He argues, however, that when certain human qualities are worshipped in isolation they in fact become weaknesses, even forces of destruction. Some would argue that the baby boomer generation worships reason at the expense of ethics and common sense, and that this is impacting adversely on the younger generations.

Although the panelists have diverse backgrounds and interests they share a number of characteristics, they are all relatively young, aged between 25 and 35, they're successful, they're politically engaged and not surprisingly they have all led incredibly fascinating lives.

So I'd like now to introduce our first speaker for the evening, Randolph Ramsay. Randolph's a journalist and an editor; currently he edits 'Business Asia Magazine' and 'Overseas Trading'. These two magazines are part of the stable of the Charlton group. Randolph was born in the Philippines and grew up in Australia. This evening Randolph will remind us of the power of the pen, or should I say, of surfing in cyberspace.

**RANDOLPH RAMSAY:** Thank you. Now the question before us tonight is what makes a smart society? As a journalist it may be no surprise to you all that my immediate response to that is that a smart society is one that places a great deal of emphasis on being an informed society. That is a society that gives or allows its population access to a wide range of information through a wide range of mediums on an equal footing for all. Now while that definition is nice and neat it actually means that none of the countries in Asia can really qualify as being a smart society, not yet anyway. While some countries may have some pieces, I'd think you'd be hard pressed to find one with all of them.

There is no country in Asia I believe, including ours, that can say its people have that wide access to information, as well as having the ability to deliver that information through a range of mediums, as well as having that access available to all regardless of their wealth or whether they live in an urban or regional area. Now I believe what we do to address these challenges, what we do to answer these questions, will be an integral part of what makes smart societies going into the future.

When it comes to freedom and access to information there are still instances of media freedom being curtailed or public access to information being stifled in Asia. China is an example that comes directly to mind, journalists are still being jailed there, websites and newspapers are still being shut

down for saying the wrong thing. In terms of having that wide spread of mediums and platforms to deliver information, I think a lot of it has to do with the technology infrastructure present in each economy. And in this regard Asia is in an unusual position of being both a world leader and a follower at the same time. Now Asia right now is home to the second largest single population of internet users in the world, and the largest single group of mobile phone customers in the world, and that's in China. South Korea has one of the highest broadband penetrations in the world, Filipinos are possibly the most voracious users of mobile phone text messaging on the planet, sending about 160 million messages a day. Korea, Japan and Taiwan also continue to be leaders in global IT.

At the same time, however, the ability for Asians to access telecommunications infrastructure is severely impaired in many cases. Vast tracts of China don't even have basic phone lines, as do some parts of Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines and other developing Asian countries. While much is being done to alleviate the problem there definitely exists in the region a wide digital divide. Now this digital divide doesn't just exist across countries, but within them as well. Equality of access within a society so the have and the have-nots, city dwellers and country residents have the same ability to use and access technology is possibly one of the toughest challenges we face. Even in Australia I don't think we can say that our ability to offer services is the same in the city as it is even 150 kilometres out of Sydney. In some of Asia's developing nations the technology we're talking about is obviously not the same but the concept of having that equality of access is still the same.

Now I've talked so far about information and access. What is equally important I think and probably a bit more so is the ability of a society and its people to be able to digest this information and to be able to make the best use of it. This is where education comes in. I think you can make a very strong case to say that governments and the business sector and I think we all throughout the region need to ensure that their communities are sufficiently literate and have the ability to take advantage of current and emerging technologies, and I think the main goal with this moving forward is to make sure that no one gets left behind.

So what can be done? There are positive signs out there, mobile phone networks are proving popular with developing nations that allows them to cheaply provide services to people, which basically means they can leapfrog traditional wire line phones which are a lot more expensive to put in place. Countries and large multilateral organisations like APEC have recognised the digital divide and are working at overcoming it. So while there may be no smart society in Asia today, I believe we're taking some of the right steps to get there. Thank you.

**DR STEPHANIE FAHEY:** Thank you Randolph. You make the point that many Asian societies don't have free or an unrestricted access to information. So are you saying that some Asian societies only want to be half-smart? They're prepared to allow access to information, which contributes to economic growth, but at the same time restrict messages which may be seen as subversive. Will free access to all types of information by all types of people challenge the very identity of many Asian societies?

**RANDOLPH RAMSAY:** I think culture and national identity; these are things that develop over hundreds of years, thousands of years in some cases. I don't think they're fragile things. There are several examples within the region of fairly high tech societies that have a very open media or a very

open access to information for residents that have a very strong culture. I think Japan is a prime example of that, Korea as well, the Philippines as well. I think censorship is an issue that should be tackled by each society. Each society should be able to decide what is acceptable and what is right in their views. The only caveat, censorship is fine as long as it actually is society's members making the decision, not governments or a small elite.

(applause)

**CLARKE:** This is Radio Australia and the first program in our series, 'Smart Societies'. Alumni of the University of Sydney's Research Institute for the Asia Pacific addressed a public forum on what makes a smart society for the 21st century. RIAP's Director, Dr Stephanie Fahey.

**DR STEPHANIE FAHEY:** I'd now like to introduce Andrea Woodhouse. Andrea was born in Burma, grew up in Pakistan, Zimbabwe, Jordan and the United States. She studied politics, philosophy and economics at Oxford University where she won the Ernest Walker Philosophy prize. She later studied international relations at the London School of Economics. Andrea has extensive development experience in South East Asia, having worked with the UN and the World Bank. She's currently consulting for the World Bank on issues of legal reform in Indonesia. Tonight Andrea's speaking in a personal capacity and is not representing any organisation.

**ANDREA WOODHOUSE:** In thinking about smart societies I thought about a town called Japara that I went to about two years ago. Now Japara is a small town in Indonesia that not many people have heard of. It's small, it's hot, it's the kind of place where there's not that much to do except to sit on the side of the street and watch the trucks go by. Now three years ago a group of young men in Japara stole a motorbike belonging to a woman from a group of migrants in the village. This theft was the latest in a series of thefts in the village. But this one was different. It was different because by midnight that night hundreds and hundreds of villagers had gathered in front of the houses of these men. They carried kerosene cans, rags and long lighted wooden torches. They intended to teach these men and other criminals in their town a lesson. But things got out of control that night and by the morning they had burned down 70 houses. And if you went to Japara as I did two years ago you'd see that some of those houses are still there burned out and empty.

Now nobody there can explain why things got so ugly that night, but they can tell you a few other things. They can tell you that no one in their town can find jobs, and that as a result young men drink too much and are restless and steal. They can tell you that there's inequality in their town and that the local people resent the migrants because the migrants are doing better than they are. They can tell you that the police in Indonesia are corrupt and they don't protect them and that they feel unsafe and so take justice into their own hands. But above all they can tell you that they feel the world is passing them by, that they are excluded from it.

Now the reason I'm telling you this story is because Japara could be any town in almost any country. If you take out the vigilantism and some of the corruption it could be a housing estate outside London or an indigenous community in Australia. I picked it because it illustrates what can happen to the social fabric of a community when you have poverty and when you have alienation and when you have institutions of government that have failed people. Thinking about Japara made me think that we need to reconceptualise what we mean by a smart society. I think we have a tendency to

think about technology and wealth, progress and modernity. But we need to think more broadly than that. Building smart societies is not just about those things, it's primarily about building socially cohesive and just societies. It's about making sure that the most disadvantaged members of our societies are included, and that all members of society can participate meaningfully in the decisions that shape their lives.

Now this isn't just a moral imperative. It's also smart, because when people are poor and when they are dispossessed it breeds violence and it breeds extremism. And with an interconnected globalised world, what happens in one society or the failures of a state have spillover effects in our own.

So what does this mean? Well I think it means a few things. First of all I think it means that young leaders shouldn't value growth or technological advancement for their own sake but should see them as tools for building socially cohesive societies in which everyone can live lives that they value.

Second, it means that we need to think on a global level about building smart societies. If we look around the world we see a globalised and interconnected world but we also see a fragmented one. We see one in which billions of people are excluded from the benefits of globalisation. We have a world where we make great leaps in cancer care, but where 30,000 children in the developing world die every single day of diseases that could very easily be prevented. That's like 60 jumbo jets full of children crashing every day. I think that's shameful. I think as Stephanie has pointed out our failure in the 20th century to prevent the holocaust of AIDS in Africa is shameful. We need to prioritise these kinds of issues; we need to prioritise poverty reduction and equity. But importantly we need to get smart about doing it; we need to get smart about foreign policy and about aid, to spend the money better, to make sure that our foreign policy aims are not undermining our wider aims. We need I believe to devote more resources towards aid, but more importantly we need to spend it better in ways that avoid the mistakes of the past.

**DR STEPHANIE FAHEY:** Thank you Andrea. You make the point that our future leaders should not focus on growth and technological advancement for its own sake, rather economic growth should be seen as a tool for building socially cohesive societies in which people can live meaningful lives. As a consequence we need to get smart about our foreign policy and aid. In a country like Papua New Guinea we recognise that all is not right. But what should Australia do? Should we be sending in the police as we are, or should we be sending in other organisations?

**ANDREA WOODHOUSE:** If you look at the experience of aid programs around the world and all the research that's been done on aid effectiveness, you find that although foreign aid does work in countries that have strong institutions, it basically has no measurable impact in countries that are very corrupt and have weak institutions. So as a result aid organisations have to think of new ways of delivering that aid so that poor people in those countries with weak institutions don't suffer. If you give it to their governments it doesn't get down to them. And some of the ways in which aid organisations have been doing that, or one of the things they've been doing is to work directly with NGOs. But something that most people don't realise is that NGOs are basically an urban phenomenon and so although you have them in the capitals of countries or in district capitals you tend not to have them in extremely remote rural areas. And so another way to do it that aid organisations have been experimenting with is basically to send the money directly down to villages

themselves through collective bank accounts where those villagers actually make democratic decisions about how to spend the money. And I think that for a country like Papua New Guinea is probably the way forward.

(applause)

**CLARKE:** You're listening to the first program of Radio Australia's education series, 'Smart Societies'. Stephanie Fahey again.

**DR STEPHANIE FAHEY:** I'd now like to introduce our last panelist Carl Solomon. Carl works for the New South Wales government in the area of environmental and social policy, and is a director of UNHCR here in Australia. Carl has worked in challenging developing countries from Angola, Kenya to Nepal and East Timor.

**CARL SOLOMON:** My experience of living in refugee camps not only in Kenya but all over the world I guess has been a starting point for exploring what is just in our society, and it's led me to believe that the most important thing that we need to do in terms of making steps towards a so-called smart society is to acknowledge that issues are complex. In order to encourage innovation and creativity we need to recognise the challenges that we face on a global scale. We can't simply make our solution somebody else's problem.

Let's take climate change for example. We have clean industries here in Australia, yet the developed world consumes by far and large the most of the world's resources. The impact of Australian consumption on the resources of developing countries within our region is huge. We are in fact part of the problem on a global scale. We need to be part of the solution. To encourage innovation and creative responses to this challenge we need to recognise the complexities. Take for example what are the things that enable and motivate a country to enforce cleaner production? Can we simply rely on market forces? We need to consider the livelihood needs of those people, of those communities that are involved in polluting activities, and consider how our survival and quality of life may depend on relationships we have at a global scale. Environmental impacts can no longer be considered local. We've got to a stage in the evolution of the world where global is what we need to be thinking.

Let's reflect on biodiversity and the protection of biodiversity. There's already been a huge loss across the world in terms of our biodiversity. The impact of that is felt so great at a local level. It really has an impact on communities and their quality of life. Just recently I was up in East Timor and I'm helping to establish or helping the East Timorese government to establish a protected area network. Its aim is to protect the globally threatened and globally important species. In the same place there are communities that rely on a daily basis on the resources of the forest and non-forest products. The link between humanity and environment is more than inherent; it's what sustains us. By involving communities at a local level in seeking solutions to real problems societies provide a platform for learning, for innovation, for creativity, for imagination, encouraging new ways of thinking that are sustainable and place people at the core of our future.

**DR STEPHANIE FAHEY:** Thanks Carl. You've reminded us that at the global scale problems are complex and challenging, yet at the local scale policies can be parochial as decision makers lose sight of the global question. You use the dilemma of refugees. Often the local response is to put up

barriers to people movement. In Australia an issue that has cut to the core of Australian society is our current response to refugees. My question is should nation states have the right to maintain their sovereignty, protect their borders and fragile environments from over-population in the face of political persecution of others?

**CARL SOLOMON:** I guess I'd like to throw back a question and I'd like everyone to reflect on it, and that is do we value some people over others? My response to that is no, that's not just. We can't isolate ourselves I don't think, I don't think it's as simple as being able to close borders and ignore the issues of trans-boundary movements of people. I don't think it's sufficient for us to pull up the drawbridge and ignore that other people live in situations of poverty. It also ignores the fact that environmental issues can be no longer considered simply on a local scale. Think about deforestation for example, we can sit back and criticise Brazil for example for depleting its forests and cutting its timbers, yet we have some of the largest land clearing operations in the world. When you then look at it on a global scale you have land clearing in many places all over the globe that contributes to some of our bigger global issues that we need to address on the environment agenda, such as climate change and what does that mean.

For us here in Australia well it comes back to that very simple issue, we need to take a humanitarian based approach, we need to think of people at the core and not place inappropriate value judgements on who's more valuable and who's less valuable. And certainly not make judgements about the person's character or individual people's characters until we actually know those people. And I think that's the challenge for us perhaps as policy makers today is to remove the barriers of labeling such as refugees, and think about these people as people, as humans.

(applause)

**CLARKE:** Carl Solomon. Also taking part in the forum were Randolph Ramsay and Andrea Woodhouse.

In forthcoming programs we'll hear from young men and women in the Asia Pacific on a range of issues and ideas.

In the next program we look at the rise of English as a global language.

**JIM DAVIDSON:** Many more people speak Chinese, and you'd have to say that Spanish and Russian are also extremely significant world languages. But of course all those three groups have this in common that they're geographically concentrated. Whereas the thing about the British Empire is that alone among the great colonial empires it was established on all six continents.

**CLARKE:** 'Global English' next on 'Smart Societies'.

This series is produced by Sue Slamen and Barry Clarke, from Radio Australia.