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Three Crucial Issues in the Local Governance System in Cuba

by

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Cuba

1. Identification of the Issues

The "Local Governance" course, organized by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Local Autonomy College (LAC), has proven to be instrumental in both my professional and personal development. Drawing insights from the Japanese experience, I have identified three key issues that are highly pertinent to my home country, Cuba. Currently undergoing a significant decentralization process, where powers and resources are being transferred to municipalities, these issues are poised to reshape our governance system: administrative reform, the establishment of public-private alliances, and the promotion of urban development.

Administrative reform plays a pivotal role in enhancing the efficiency of local government operations. Japan has been actively pursuing administrative reform since the 1980s, employing various strategies, including:

- A. Restructuring of organizations and frameworks.
- B. Adjustment in the size and selection of personnel, as well as their salary and allowances.
- C. Reevaluation of functions and tasks within the administrative framework.
- D. Outsourcing certain activities to third-party entities, such as garbage collection or the administration of community centers.

These measures collectively contribute to the ongoing evolution of Japan's administrative practices, fostering greater effectiveness and adaptability in local governance.

2. Reforming the Government in Cuba

The Cuban Government currently boasts a substantial size with a multitude of personnel, some of whom may lack the requisite qualifications or training in government management. Transforming this structure necessitates an initial comprehensive plan, encompassing the following key components:

- A. **Personnel Reduction and Transition to the Private Sector:** Streamlining the government involves reducing personnel, with a strategic focus on transferring individuals to burgeoning roles within the expanding private sector.
- B. **Structural Reorganization:** Simultaneously, there should be a reduction and merger of existing structures, facilitating a shift from a vertical organizational model to a more horizontally aligned one. This reorganization is poised to enhance government management effectiveness and subsequently improve overall outcomes.

Such transformative measures not only enhance governance but also address the high fiscal deficit, mitigating macroeconomic distortions in Cuba.

In the context of the governance system, fostering strategic public-private alliances and initiatives is imperative for Cuba. Drawing inspiration from the Japanese model, collaboration between local governments and private enterprises is pivotal for essential activities such as infrastructure development, promotion of industrial ventures, and provision of digital services to citizens. In the future, embracing the win-win principle, local governments and private entities in Cuba engage on equal terms. Local governments delineate their development priorities and spearhead specific projects to attract private investment, employing mechanisms like the construction of industrial parks. This collaborative approach not only bolsters local development but also fortifies the overall economic landscape with attractive bonuses (e.g., Yokkaichi industrial park), financial support for local businesses (e.g., support from Mie Prefecture to small fishermen or support from the city of Nagahama to companies in the silk industry), etc.

In Cuba, the current situation is of utmost relevance. The government's active promotion of small and medium-sized businesses has led to a significant expansion of the private sector within society, causing a restructuring of economic relations and collaboration with the public sector. Drawing insights from the Japanese experience can provide valuable guidance on ensuring transparency in these transformative processes.

3. The Need of Decentralization and Delivery of Local Services

In Japan, the decentralization of urban development powers to local governments plays a crucial role in guaranteeing the efficient design and implementation of socioeconomic development strategies. This approach allows each city to harness its unique potential and advantages to attain specific growth objectives. Japanese citizens actively participate in various aspects of city planning, as exemplified by Makuhari City. Furthermore, local governments provide services that streamline daily life for residents, such as timely news updates and digital procedures in Otsu City.

Japan's advanced waste collection and management system, exemplified by the Clean Authority of Tokyo and Yokkaichi City, underscores the high environmental awareness among the population. Additionally, stringent environmental legislation effectively addresses concerns related to pollution from industries, contributing to the preservation of the urban environment and enhancing the aesthetic appeal of cities. By incorporating these lessons from the Japanese model, Cuba can navigate its evolving economic landscape with a focus on transparency, citizen engagement, and sustainable urban development.

In Cuba, a significant concentration of powers remains within the central government. To foster local autonomy, a comprehensive initial program is essential. This program should prioritize the following:

- A. Granting greater participation to municipalities in city planning, with a focus on aligning it with a comprehensive provincial plan.
- B. Implementing digital processes and services for the population to streamline administrative procedures, thereby reducing bureaucracy and saving time.
- C. Decentralizing the waste collection system and managing it in a business-oriented manner, involving private and cooperative support.
- D. Enforcing existing environmental laws and systematically raising citizen awareness on environmental issues.

These key initiatives represent transformative steps that can enhance Cuba's governance model, making it more efficient and participatory. They emphasize the crucial role of local government at both provincial and municipal levels and harness the contributions of non-governmental actors, such as the private sector and universities, to drive development. Additionally, the approach provides citizens with a platform for consensus-building regarding

the urban development of their localities.

4. Evaluation of the Current Training Program and Suggestions for the Future Project

As Cuba undergoes a decentralization process, drawing inspiration from Japan's experience becomes particularly pertinent. Despite geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic disparities, Japan's experiences offer valuable insights that can inform and enrich the ongoing decentralization efforts in Cuba. The program has been meticulously designed to effectively integrate theoretical knowledge from lectures with practical insights gained through technical visits. During each visit, the application of classroom-learned concepts is thoroughly examined. The interactive engagement with Japanese counterparts, including teachers and officials, facilitates seamless communication and clarification of trainees' queries. Notably, the program features esteemed lecturers, who are renowned academics from Japanese universities. The added value lies in the fact that some have served as government officials at various levels, providing firsthand perspectives on the challenges covered in the course.

My paramount takeaway from this experience is a firm conviction in the imperative for Cuba to advance in decentralizing powers to local governments. I would particularly recommend this course to officials at both local and national levels in my country. For future courses, I propose considering the inclusion or deeper exploration of topics common in underdeveloped countries collaborating with JICA.

First is the promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Given that SMEs form the core of our economic and social fabric, emphasizing the pivotal role of local government in encouraging and developing them would be valuable.

Secondly, recycling system in Japan is another significant issue. While the course primarily focuses on waste incineration and destruction within the 3R paradigm (reduce, reuse, and recycle), delving into the intricacies of Japan's recycling system would provide pertinent insights.

Third issue is policies for low-income, vulnerable individuals, and poverty reduction. Recognizing that social and economic inequalities are prevalent in underdeveloped countries, understanding Japan's approach to managing these issues at both central and local government levels is relevant.

Fourth issue of significance is the agricultural system in Japan. Given the significance of the agricultural sector in our economies, dedicating a specific conference to comprehensively discuss various aspects of Japan's agricultural system would be beneficial. While isolated topics have been covered in different exchanges, a dedicated session would provide a more in-depth understanding.

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