

SURENDRA SHRESTHA
Vice President for Development
Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)



Surendra Shrestha is currently holding the Vice President for Development at the Asian Institute of Technology. He brings with him over twentyfive years of experience and expertise mobilizing political and financial support and leading multi-disciplinary teams in the areas of capacity development, planning, assessment, policy development and multilateral agreements at the regional and global level.

Shrestha joined UNEP in 1993 and he has been involved with UN in the following senior positions: Director of United Nations Environment Programme's International Environmental Technology Centre (UNEP IETC); Special Advisor and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Focal Point in New York; Director at the Strategic Resource Mobilization and Special Initiatives in Nairobi; and Regional Director and Representative for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok. Prior to joining UNEP, he previously held senior positions at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) and the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

A Nepali national, Surendra Shrestha holds a degree in Development Economics and Computer Science at the Keele University, United Kingdom and completed his postgraduate studies at AIT. He provided intellectual leadership for the establishment of the global secretariat for Atmospheric Brown Cloud and Black Carbon consisting of over 35 institutions and 250 scientists; the UNEP Eco Peace Leadership Centre in Seoul in 2006; the Asia Pacific Sub-regional Environment Policy Dialogue (SEPD) in 2003; the UNEP-Tongji Institute of Environment for Sustainable Development in 2002; the Regional Resource Centre for Asia and the Pacific (RRC.AP); UNEP presence in Central Asia.

Surendra Shrestha has served in the following elected positions at AIT: Student Union President; AITAA-Nepal Chapter President; AITAA-Mother Chapter President; and in this capacity served in the AIT Board of Trustees for six years.

All of us are together in this Association because we all have a **shared experience on AIT Campus**. I believe alumni (23,000) are the major stakeholder. AIT's continued growth is of critical importance to the alumni.

AIT Brand is known and respected in the region. The political and socio-economic dynamics of the world outside of our Institute has evolved and changed. Some of these **mega-trends** that impacts our Institute include: economic center of gravity is moving West to East; the public sector priority on SDGs, climate change and urbanization (technology & engineering); the private sector move into Industrial Revolution 4.0. AIT will need to constantly evolve to be relevant to the region for its continued growth.

The **higher education landscape** is also undergoing transformative changes. Post Google, internet savvy students have better access to knowledge. Professors are needed to guide discussions towards innovative solutions to current problems. Many have transformed from a Professor focused to a student focused classroom. To address the current challenges, holistic and integrated approach, moving away from silos, is being adopted both in curriculum design and research. Countries in Asia have increased national budgets for higher education and research. The middle income countries provide full scholarships for studies abroad. Almost all countries are embarking on establishment of a World Class University (WCU) with more autonomy. Host country, Thailand, has embarked on an ambitious reform of higher education reform and establishment of new international campus in the eastern economic zones. The 21st Century higher education is taking shape: holistic technical depth with critical thinking skill set; and soft skills of leadership, communications, empathy; and digital literacy to work with clones, avatars and big data.

After the floods in 2011, our Institute went through an existential threat. The rescue by the current leadership (the Board of Trustees and the Institute) is recognized. The generous contribution of the Royal Thai Government is currently the only significant donor. There are many **challenges and opportunities**. Challenges include: diversification of funding sources; confirmation of the international status to attract international and regional governments; governance structure more in line with WUC; move to a student focused classroom with holistic curriculum as well as formal soft skills instruction. Some of the opportunities include: \$ 1.2 trillion p.a. projected infrastructure build-up; national and ODA focus on SDGs, Climate Change and Urbanization; focus to build capacity for WUC build up - offering AIT Brand; enhanced communication and partnerships with alumni for in-country marketing, resource mobilization, quality student recruitment, and mentorship. A back of the envelop calculation shows it would be possible to at least double the revenue from current about \$ 18m within two years.

Some of the **positive and concrete actions AITAA** could undertake within two years include: mobilize full scholarships from governments and ODA sources; establish a network of alumni business (energy-solar, wind; IT; urban infrastructure; ..) with an aim to contributing part of the profits for the endowment fund; develop Life Long Learning program and target alumni for new skills learning and providing feedback on relevance on campus.

I believe our Institute is at the cross-roads. Our Institute could continue on the current path and watch potential new markets and future Asia pass us by. Our Institute could develop AIT 2.0 to be part of the future as Asia of 21st Century which will establish new norms, standards and story. AIT 2.0 could be developed and implemented to realize the true potential AIT (autonomous, international premier graduate institute networked and supported by the region for capacity building services). As the major stakeholder, **collective and united AITAA** support for AIT 2.0 will be imperative. With many new WUCs and enhanced state universities will be established within two years, time is going to be the critical factor.