



Regional Expert Network

Local Democracy in Asia and Pacific: Representation in Decentralized Governance

Background

In the Asia-Pacific region, local representative institutions constitute for many citizens one of the most important avenues for participation in governance and for influencing decision-making. In this context, the systems for representation at the local level have implications on the overall governance agenda through their influence on the nature of representation and accountability and impact upon wider public outcomes. The UNDP initiative [*Local Democracy in Asia: Representation in Decentralized Governance*](#) takes an important step in analyzing the framework for representation in elected local governments as critical mechanisms for shaping local democracy. The aim of the initiative is to assist policy-makers and other government and non-government actors in the design and reform of representation arrangements in decentralized governance.

In its first phase, the initiative has documented the current state of the electoral systems and explored the situation with respect to different forms of party political engagement and provisions for affirmative action in local governance in sixteen countries of Asia-Pacific, ([*Concepts and Issues Paper, 2006*](#)). Building on these findings the aim now is to explore the different types of mechanisms that can affect the degree of accountability with respect to local governments in the region, and in the particular Asian case studies. The analysis of these mechanisms in the different country contexts will contribute to policies that aim to develop inclusive systems of representation.

A regional retreat (June 2005) on [*Representation in Decentralized Governance and Service Delivery for MDGs at the Local Level*](#) served as a first step in consolidating the existing knowledge in this area, and helped to identify questions which needed to be further researched. The meeting revealed the demand for increased knowledge and the need for a more systematic collection and appraisal of the experiences on the above-mentioned issues in the region. A Regional Expert Network composed of regional and UNDP experts was conceptualized to act as a key mechanism to facilitate further knowledge sharing, that would complement the continued regional research.

Members

Members of the Network include policy-makers, central and local government representatives, international experts, national experts from the research institutes in the countries participating in the ongoing study, and professionals from UNDP and donor agencies working on decentralized governance in the Asia-Pacific region. Whereas research is being undertaken in a limited number of countries, the issues are analyzed and discussed within a broader group of professionals from countries facing similar challenges in the region.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of the Regional Expert Network is to enhance the regional expertise and knowledge in the area of decentralization and local governance with a primary focus on issues related to development of local democratic institutions and the design and reform of representational arrangements in decentralized governance.

Objectives

1. To build a regional network of experts in the relevant area
2. To provide relevant practitioners in the region with a forum for sharing and acquiring “cutting edge” knowledge, products, services, activities and research that will enable them to build their expert capacities. For practitioners the forum will seek to increase their capacities to provide better policy and programming support.
3. To transform individual expertise and experience into institutional knowledge through systematic knowledge sharing, codification and development tools for decentralization and local governance programming.
4. To increase UNDP’s institutional knowledge linked to decentralization and local governance.

Strategy

The Regional Expert Network functions as a tool for sharing and disseminating the relevant professional experiences, facilitating knowledge development, codifying good practices, adding value to the expertise of its members, and for dealing with the related activities.

These activities include:

1. Regional Retreat (Hua Hin June 2005)
2. Regional Research Paper Phase I: *Representation in Decentralized Governance, Concepts and Issues* (February 2006)
3. Web-based codification of background materials and knowledge generated by the research embedded in a shared workspace available for all members (June 2006)
4. Creation and facilitation of a web-based discussion forum (June 2006)
5. Production of the Regional Research Paper Phase II: *Representation in Decentralized Governance* (June 06- February 07)
6. Discussion of the Regional Research Paper (March 07)
7. Regional meeting of the Network members (2007 second quarter)

Management arrangements

The Regional Expert Network will be facilitated, as part of the wider regional initiative on Representation in Decentralized Governance, by the Decentralization and Local Governance team in the UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok.

Resources

Financial and human resources will be drawn from the budget of the regional initiative.

Further Readings

The following materials have been produced as part of the initiative until now:

- *Representation in Decentralized Governance, [Concepts and Issues Paper](#)* (2006)
- [Full Report](#), Regional Retreat: *Representation in Decentralized Governance and Local Service Delivery for MDGs* (June 2005, Hua Hin, Thailand)
- Human Development Viewpoint: [Inclusive Local Governance, Representation and Affirmative Action](#), 2005
- Human Development Viewpoint: [Presidentialism In Decentralized Governance: More Local Leadership But At What Cost?](#), 2005