



# **Local Democracy in Asia: Representation in Decentralized Governance**

## **Research Proposal**

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## 1 Introduction

In the Asian region, local representative institutions constitute for many citizens one of the most important avenues for participation in governance and for influencing decision-making of direct relevance and consequence to their livelihoods. The fairness and adequacy of the representation has long been an issue of some concern, but it is only in more recent years that studies have been undertaken to investigate the degree to which different groups have been able to secure representation and the extent to which their representation is reflected in local government decision-making.

The majority of countries in the region are developing countries possessing quite different experiences of decentralized local government with considerable variations in the state of local government reforms and not least the degree to which powers, responsibilities and resources have been devolved to local government. In so far as participation in local government has been addressed in policies and programmes, the focus has tended to be on the participation of citizens in local agencies responsible for service provision and resource management and not so much on the need to secure greater citizen influence in decision-making in the elected local government bodies.

There is some evidence in the Asia region that changes to the type of electoral system in place and the nature and state of a country's political parties have had positive consequences for the form and degree of representation for groups accustomed to social exclusion and economic marginalisation. These improvements have also been supported by affirmative action targeting such groups to increase their representation in elected local government bodies. How representation translates into influence and then into positive outcomes from local government is less clear. While research on electoral systems and affirmative actions has studied the legislation and the representative nature of the local government bodies that it gives rise to, less work has been undertaken into how that representation can secure influence in decision-making in these bodies.

In the broader community of research institutions and donor agencies a number of studies undertaken in individual countries have documented the ways in which institutional and structural factors prevent or hinder the ability of socially excluded and economically marginalized groups to influence decision-making in elected local government bodies. However these tend to have been isolated studies, often based on a detailed analysis of local government bodies in one locality, identifying the factors influencing representation and the degree to which representation has shaped outcomes including those of social exclusion and economic marginalisation. A comparative study of specific mechanisms that can secure improvements in and from representation in local elected authorities across Asia and the Pacific region would make a significant contribution to knowledge and policy on decentralized local governance in the region.

The UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok has taken an important step in this direction with the drafting of a background paper: *Local Democracy in Asia: Representation in Decentralized Governance* (June 2005). This paper documents the current state of the electoral systems in place in six countries of South Asia: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and five countries in Southeast Asia: Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Timor-Leste and Vietnam. The study also explores the situation with respect to different forms of party political engagement in local elections as well as the outcomes that different electoral systems and affirmative actions can have in terms of improving participation and representation.

The Background Paper provided the basis for a two day workshop on Representation in Decentralized Local Governance held at Hua Hin, Thailand June 22-23. At the workshop the country evidence that laid the basis for the Background Paper was taken up and discussed in greater detail. It was agreed that the combination of election modalities opted for in a country's electoral system could influence considerably the representative nature of local government bodies. So too could the state of political parties and the 'party-basis' of the elections held at different levels of local government (village, district etc.). The ways in which representation secured through election could also be secured in the regular functioning of local government bodies were not so clear. While a range of mechanisms could be identified, how they worked in practice was less apparent, not least due to the role of many other factors that shape the context for local government in the different countries.

A common theme that emerged during the discussions was the important role that improved representation can have on the accountability of local government bodies to those traditionally denied influence on the one hand and the ways that accountability might facilitate and secure improved influence over representatives on the other. For example, the presence of a set of different types of accountability mechanisms, designed to support the objective of securing more inclusive and representative local governance, was seen to be a necessary condition for more effective, responsive and equitable local government.

The workshop pointed to the need for a more systematic collection and appraisal of the evidence in order to study the links between representation and accountability, both the ways that electoral modalities can improve representation and the types of accountability mechanisms that can secure adequate representation. Building on the work undertaken for the Background Paper, this would require studying the ways in which representation has been made more accountable through electoral reforms and affirmative actions in the different countries and an analysis of the types of accountability mechanisms in place and asking what works to secure better representation where, when and how.

## **2 Research objective**

The objective of the research is to explore the different types of mechanisms that can affect the degree of accountability present in local governance and with respect to local government in particular. The analysis of these mechanisms in the different country contexts will contribute significantly to policies that aim to develop inclusive system of representation.

The overall research question is:

- ❖ In what ways can representation be made more accountable in decentralized local governance?

The research will seek to achieve its objective initially through a set of country studies conducted by the country offices of UNDP and their partners in the Asia region and coordinated by the Regional Centre in Bangkok. Guiding questions for these country studies are:

- Which groups face particular difficulties in gaining representation in local governance, and what mechanisms exist to create accountability for such groups?
- Which actors can hold local government to account?

- What mechanisms can they individual citizens and disadvantaged groups draw upon?
- Under which conditions do these mechanisms work best and when are they un/under-utilised?
- Which mechanisms have lead to a greater responsiveness on the part of local government to citizens/disadvantaged groups?
- What other actors, mechanisms and measures could increase local government's accountability and responsiveness in the future?

The country studies will provide the basis for a comparative analysis of the ways in which different systems of representation in local government affect its accountability and as to how accountability instruments might be used to achieve a more effective and equitable system of decentralized local governance.

### **3 Background: decentralized local governance in Asia**

Developments with respect to governance in the countries of the Asia and Pacific region have mirrored the more general trends amongst poorer countries in the world, namely that state-centered and market approaches to social provision and to support pro-poor development have gradually been replaced with strategies that aim at strengthening decentralized local governance and the role of local government in particular. Today decentralization is seen to be an integral element in programmes seeking improved poverty reduction and for making progress towards poverty reduction in general and the Millennium Development Goals in particular.

Decentralized government reforms have been implemented in the majority of poor countries in the region. Also service provision across a number of key sectors such as education, health and agriculture is increasingly being provided through local government institutions supported by the active engagement of non-government organizations, user groups, self-help groups, and other organizations. However a tendency remains for these reforms to focus more upon the technical needs of securing effective service provision through participation of beneficiaries than on a more fundamental change in local government – citizen relations. In addition, there remain in some countries and some areas significant differences between access for citizens generally and access for specific disadvantaged groups such as indigenous peoples, religious and ethnic minorities, women, refugees/IDPs and others.

Most recently the development strategies of a number of donor agencies and national governments in the region have turned towards approaches that stress the need to strengthen citizens' rights as part of a broader strategy for nationally owned and sustainable pro-poor development and economic growth. Whether this will lead to a more substantive change in the nature and process of local governance with local government bodies becoming sites of citizen influence over policy and programme implementation is not certain. Experiments with local government designed to strengthen the status of clients as citizens are currently being pursued in several countries in the region in attempts to implement a more citizen-centered approach, for example the introduction of Gram Unnayan Samitis in West Bengal<sup>1</sup>. As yet these remain experiments and the requirements for achieving greater accountability and responsiveness in local government cannot as yet be said to be fully understood.

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<sup>1</sup> Gram Unnayan Samitis (GUS) are constituted by election and nomination at a level beneath the previous lowest elected council –the Gram Panchayat (GP). The primary role of the GUS is to identify specific needs and problems with the onus being on the GP to ensure technical and other services are delivered to meet these wherever possible.

#### 4 The conceptual and analytical framework for the research

The proposed study is looking at ways and means by which the functioning of a system of decentralized local governance can better meet the needs and aspirations of those it represents and those it serves.

The particular focus of the study is on the instruments available for making elected and administrative officials in local government accountable to those they represent and serve. An assumption underlying the study is that better representation can improve accountability and that greater accountability can encourage responsiveness to citizens' voices and thereby enhance the capability of individuals to make choices and to influence local government decisions towards desired actions and outcomes on the basis of those choices. For the socially excluded and marginalized amongst today's polities, this would represent a fundamental change in their political status.

##### 4.1 Factors shaping representational influence in local government bodies

Factors that influence an individual's capacity to engage in and influence collective decision-making in local government can be discussed in terms of three dimensions: the structural, the institutional and the individual citizen. Not only do these provide a framework for analysing factors that shape the nature and degree of representation in decentralized local governance in a particular context, they also provide a means for assessing the impact of measures designed to improve representation.

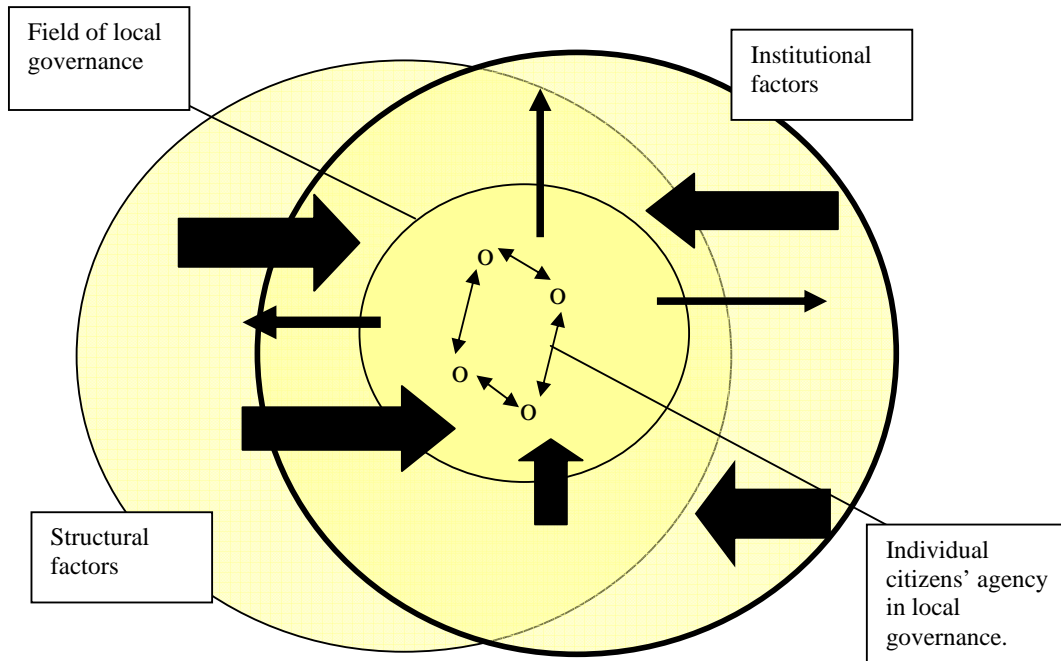
Structural factors are those that affect the capacity to participate or to be adequately represented in local governance. Included amongst these are factors of gender, ethnicity, caste, religion, class and age. Factors impacting on the capacity of disadvantaged groups to participate include education levels, social biases etc.

Institutional factors are those that can be seen in the institutional configurations that enable or disenable individuals from influencing decision-making in local governance. These are not just mechanisms that affect the degree of representation in the daily functioning of local government, but also access to other institutions that help to secure a fairer and more adequate representation. Public hearings, councillor surgeries, representation on sub-committees, quotas, recall supported by means of public, political and legal recourse managed through other institutions are examples of the elements found in many developed countries, but not necessarily a part of the institutional configuration present for citizens in many poorer countries.

Individual citizen factors are those that address the agency of individuals and social groups as citizens possessing rights. They influence the degree to which these actors can express agency through their actions both within local governments and upon local government from without. Structural and institutional factors provide the opportunities for such agency, but can by no means ensure it. Taking up this dimension is to go beyond the notion of citizens as rights holders and to stress the importance of the decision to assert agency, to pursue their interests through the channel of representation in the institutions of local governance.

These factors are presented in the diagram 1 below. The arrows denote influences that different types of factors have on the working of institutions in decentralized local governance and the capacities of citizens to assert influence over decision-making and its outcomes:

**Diagram 1: the factors of change**



Local government reform in the region has tended to focus on measures directed at changing the institutional factors affecting participation and representation in local government including the heads of elected bodies, through adjustments of the electoral system, the political party system, and measures designed to bring civil society organisations and other non-government actors into the framework of decentralized local governance.

Some measures have sought to compensate for structural factors; for example affirmative actions targeting specific groups have been quite widely used. As yet it remains inconclusive as to whether such positive discrimination can in the longer term weaken the structural causes that give rise to social exclusion and marginalisation and their consequences for representation.

Recent attempts to place greater emphasis on the agency of the poor in local governance include citizen-centred and rights-based approaches that aim not just to empower poor and marginalised groups, but also to change fundamentally the relationship between local government and citizens. Not least this involves a major shift in the disposition of local government officials responsible for providing social and technical services. Such a shift is as much a question of personal attitudes as of institutional requirements. To date such measures have not moved substantially beyond a focus on local government service delivery however, and the aim of the research is also to point at entry points for changing more fundamentally the relationship between local government and citizens.

#### 4.2 Conceptualising accountability

The analysis of accountability in the proposed study needs to address accountability as a means by which to secure fairer and more adequate representation in local government bodies. In its strict form accountability denotes a relationship between a bearer of a right or a legitimate claim on the

one hand and a duty holder responsible for fulfilling or respecting that right on the other. The most basic form of accountability relation is that between a person or agency (i.e. local governance institution in this study) entrusted with a particular task or certain powers or resources, and the 'principal' (i.e. citizen) on whose behalf the task is undertaken, on the other. As outlined above, the study works with the hypothesis that accountability mechanisms can strengthen the impact of measures designed to secure better representation in local governance institutions.

In developing a conceptual framework for the study a number of other dimensions of accountability need to be taken into account. These include the following:

Answerability and enforcement: those who are held to account are required to explain and inform on actions taken and the processes that lie behind these. They are not the same actors as those who enforce accountability, adjudicating as to whether the government agents have met their obligations to the principal (e.g. service recipient) and applying sanctions where they have not. It is important therefore that any study captures the broader institutional configuration that accountability mechanisms encompass, not least if the capacity for recourse is to be included.

Accountability and capacity: failure to undertake measures designed to secure greater accountability or failure to respond to a specific claim to a 'right' might not be rooted in a lack of motivation or concern, but a lack of capacity. For example, failure to consult relevant groups before taking a decision in a council or a committee might be rooted in a lack of human resources and time constraints rather than from a lack of commitment. Therefore a study of accountability must take into account a range of factors that shape actions between rights holders and duty bearers.

Systemic accountability: Other agents than the principal can expect and demand accountability as part of a broader commitment to a system of good governance. This broadens the frame beyond the local government - citizen relationship and introduces a range of instruments that can also seek greater accountability on the part of government. Several distinctions can be made here including that between formal and informal accountability relationships, the latter often being *de facto* relationships rooted in informal social institutions as opposed to *de jure* relationships between local government and citizens.

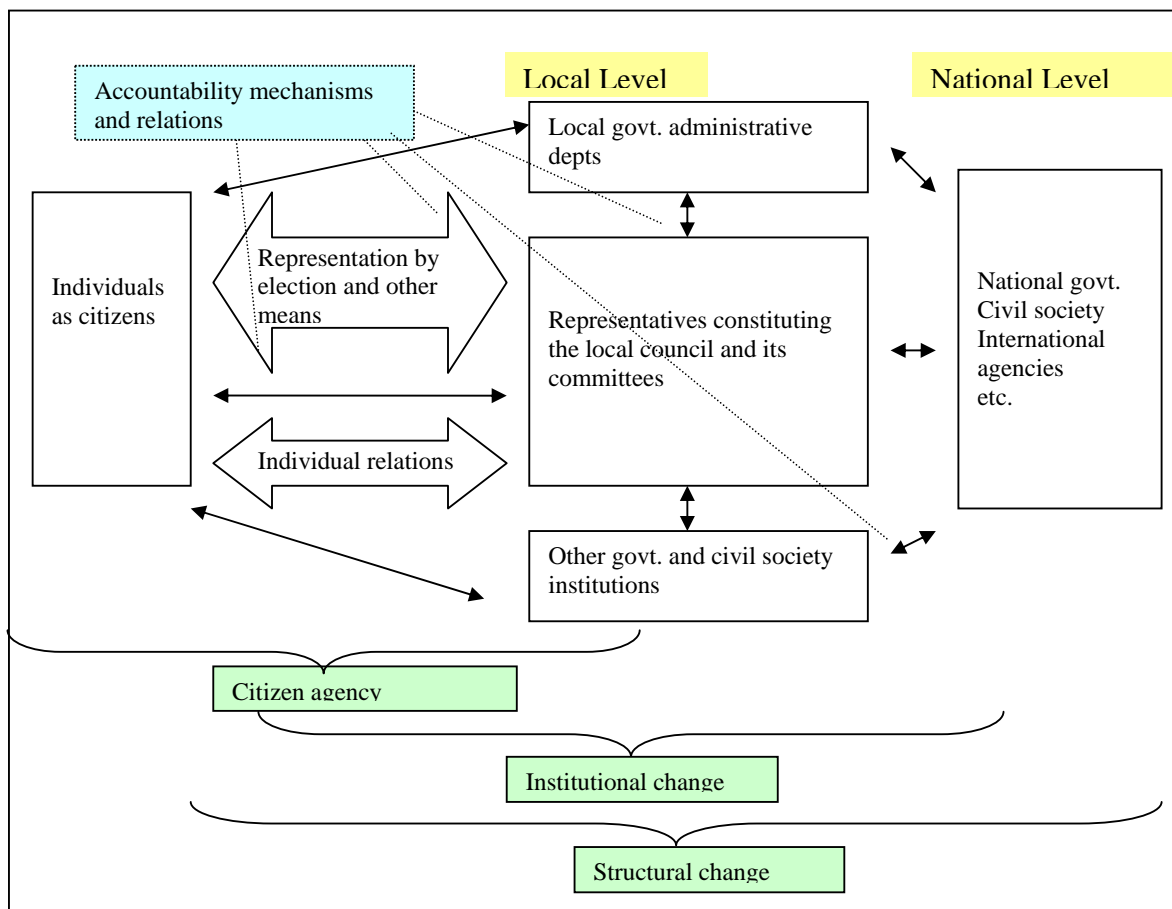
Accountability and responsiveness: Administrative officials are accountable to their managers who in turn account to higher levels including to the legislature, to the executive, to financial auditors, to higher court judges. They are expected to be responsive to members of the public. For their part politicians are accountable in a narrow sense to those who elect them, but many expect them to be responsive to the concerns of all those within the constituency that they represent. This is not least an important strategy for re-election. The instruments for demanding better accountability are not necessarily the same as those for securing greater responsiveness. In assessing the form and functioning of accountability relationships, it will be useful to broaden the analysis to include responsiveness as a separate dimension. The distinction is useful for looking at a broader range of formal and informal mechanisms that can affect accountability and responsiveness of local government.

### 4.3 The field of study

The following diagram seeks to summarize the field of study. The actors are grouped in three different levels with the principal focus being on the local level where decentralized local governance functions. The study focuses upon the accountability flows and relations that link

elected and administrative local government bodies with other institutional actors at the same level, citizens below and national government and national organizations above.

**Diagram 2: The analytical field of study**



In Diagram 2, the three possible sources of change raised in are also indicated: citizen agency, institutional change and structural change in order to illustrate the ways in which different types of reform can have an impact. For example affirmative action that changes the representation of women can encourage women to stand for election, change the orientation of councils and departments in areas such as natural resource management or health provision and push national policy making towards being generally more gender sensitive. It might begin as a set of institutional measures, but their effective implementation over a longer period can lead to more fundamental socio-economic and cultural changes that are structural in nature. The sustainability of this dynamic rests on such factors as the motivation for reform at the national level, the willingness to assert agency at the individual level and not least the types of accountabilities that sustain the momentum for change on the institutions present at the level of local governance.

The accountability mechanisms that secure representation and influence can be divided into two main forms: *formal* accountability mechanisms rooted mainly in institutional rules and guidelines framed in legislation and *informal* mechanisms rooted in many things ranging from good management practices that facilitate citizens' voices to be heard at the decision-making table

through to patron-client relations that ensure some elements of the clients' problems are represented.

A second set of characteristics concerns the direction of accountability: *upward*, *downward* and *horizontal*. Upward accountability is classically found in local government bodies implementing programmes to meet targets set by national departments and ministries or in individual in cases where individual officials are merely striving to meet the expectations of higher level party of administrative functionaries to secure personal promotion. There can also be strong upward accountability within a political party with a strong centralised structure. Downward accountability is central to participation and representation, not least in a requirement to be responsive to one's constituencies, whether these are constituted through democratic processes or by factors of ethnicity, gender, location etc. Finally horizontal accountability can be seen in the ways that different institutional actors shape and influence the workings of local government within its administrative area; for example other government institutions such as the local judiciary, the local media or civil society organisations including local NGOs.

## **5 Methodological approach**

The research will be undertaken in a selected sample of countries in the region and in selected localities within each of the countries. The country studies consist of a desk study and a three-prong research strategy at the local level. Hence, the methodology for the research will center upon five activities:

1. A desk study of the existing legislation, rules and guidelines with respect to local governance
2. Case studies in 2 or more localities (districts) in selected countries to study
  - a. The ways in which representation in the local governance institutions is accountable to local citizens, the different roles played by the institutional actors with respect to local government bodies and the accountability mechanisms that they utilize.
  - b. The capacity for local government responsiveness to citizens' voices
  - c. Citizens' perceptions and experiences of local government
3. A comparative analysis of the country studies' findings

The five tasks covered in the desk and case studies are summarized in the table 1 below:

### **5.1 Selection of countries**

Country selection will be based upon a number of criteria that enable possible explanatory variables in the functioning of decentralized local governance to be explored in the comparative analysis. These would include:

- the type of electoral system in place (in particular majoritarian vs. proportional representation, modality for election to upper level of local government and direct vs. indirect election of chairs)

**Table 1: Summary of Research activities and methodology**

	Activity	Methodology	Time Schedule
1	Desk study of local governance representation and accountability mechanisms	Review of local government legislation, guidelines and rules Review of the same with respect to 1 – 2 decentralised sectors located with local government (education, health, water supply and sanitation, housing etc.)	March-April 2006
2a	Study of local institutions in decentralized governance and the accountability mechanisms utilised with respect to local government bodies	Selection of two or more field study sites Identification of public – civil society – market institutional actors Interviews with local officials and representatives from these three groups Possible focus on 1 – 2 sector programmes located with local government (education, health, water supply and sanitation, housing etc.)	April-May 2006
2b	Study of local government ‘responsiveness’	Focus group discussions with ‘front-line workers’ from the previously selected sectors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- perceptions of relationship to higher levels of government/administration and to citizens</li> <li>- experiences of administrative (formal) forms of accountability</li> <li>- experiences of informal forms of accountability (political, social, customary etc.)</li> <li>- identification of problems with and obstacles for responsiveness faced in their work in local government</li> </ul>	June-July 2006
2c	Study of citizens’ relations to local government and other institutions of local governance	Focus groups possibly supplemented by a local survey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- experiences of accessing elected representatives (actors, resources, institutions, networks etc. utilised)</li> <li>- experiences of access failure/denial</li> <li>- perceptions of local governance institutions’ accountability and responsiveness</li> </ul>	July-Aug 2006
3	A comparative analysis of the country studies covered in 1, 2a-2c	Senior researcher to support the RCB policy advisor in analysing the country studies and draft the comparative analysis, and prepare a paper of max 25-30 pages.	Sept-Oct 2006

- the status of political parties in local government (i.e. covering countries with no political parties in local governance, 1 or 2 with ‘one party’ systems, and countries with multi-party local governance systems)
- Additional considerations with respect to the representational arrangement (e.g. the possibility of studying the ongoing shift towards direct election of chairs in Pakistan and Thailand; analyzing the impact of the legal requirement of national parties in local governance in Indonesia etc.)

To the extent possible, the selection of countries takes into account:

- the level of human development and economic growth (i.e. LDCs and non-LDCs)
- the history and devolved status of local government in the country (e.g. ‘beginners’ countries with traditions of local government but little real devolution, and countries with substantial devolution of responsibilities and resources)
- the social and cultural constitution of the electorate (i.e. selecting to capture the influence of factors of religion, ethnicity and other minorities on politics through political parties and other forms of associational activity).

It is envisaged that eight countries are selected from across the region.

## 5.2 Desk study of accountability mechanisms in decentralized local governance

As outlined in Table 1, the first research activity or study is based upon existing legislation, rules and guidelines for local government bodies and other local institutions involved in decentralized local governance. Core areas of responsibility will be identified in order to explore the links between representation and accountability through specific examples. Possible areas include the preparation of local development plans, conflict resolution, service delivery, natural resource management. Their selection would be dependent upon the responsibilities of local government, the need for cross country comparison and possible relevance for the Millennium Development Goals and for poverty reduction. The legislation and rules and guidelines for local government activities in the selected areas would also provide important data on coordination and harmonisation between actors and sectors and as to how this impacts on the functioning of local government with respect to accountability and responsiveness.

One important output from the case study should be the identification of the actors at different levels that possess a capability to seek accountability from local government through representative bodies. Given the secondary sources of data drawn upon, these will be primarily formal in nature. However there may be documentation pointing to informal accountability mechanisms used by various actors.

Table 2 below provides a format that a country study can use to categorize the main actors involved.

**Table 2: Sample analysis - actors with a capability to seek accountability in decentralized local governance institutions:**

	Public	Market	Civil society
International	UNDP .....	International media .....	Foreign investors
National	Legislative assembly .....	Business and labour organisations ....	National media, national NGOs .....
Local	Local political parties, local government & administration....	Local traders' associations, Local banks Cooperatives	Community based organisations, local media .....
			Family, caste and similar networks and associations .....
			Local elites
			Customary authorities

## 5.3 The case studies

The selection of the localities should be guided by contextual criteria that will permit different dimensions of the country's local political contexts to be explored. These include social and cultural factors in the country's demographic make-up; different local combinations of electoral modalities present; the status of political parties in local governance, different levels of economic and human development; rural and urban contexts. The size of locality will be dependent upon the structure of local government in the country, but will primarily be based upon geographic area of administration and type and extent of responsibilities and resources devolved.

An example of a country case study would be:

- (i) 2 districts (or equivalent) selected on the basis of the following criteria:
  - urbanisation (1 high, 1 low),
  - level of economic growth and human development (1 high, 1 low)
  - political party control (1 with the same party as in national government, 1 not)
  - different electoral modalities if these are present e.g. specific affirmative measures due to ethnic or regional factors
- (ii) 2 localities in each district covering the lowest tier of effective local government (based on devolution of responsibilities and resources) selected on the basis of the following criteria:
  - One locality with a closely balanced political party representation, 1 with a clear dominant political party
  - One locality with a well integrated economy closely linked into market structures including urban employment, 1 economically less developed and more isolated
  - in addition, to the extent possible, the two localities should capture different social and cultural demographic factors.

The case studies in the selected localities will comprise of three steps. The first step is to identify the different actors that play a significant role in decentralized governance in the locality, their representative nature and what formal or informal capabilities they possess to secure accountability in the functioning of local elected and administrative government bodies. The subsequent steps will permit a closer examination as to how accountability is practiced, by whom and to what effect. An important element will be the actors' perceptions of local government accountability. For these narratives centring on specific experiences will be an important source of information.

### **5.3.1 Study of accountability mechanisms in local representative bodies**

As outlined above, the first step is a mapping exercise of the institutional actors in the system of decentralised governance present in the selected case study localities. The representative nature of decentralized local governance institutions will be assessed on the basis of their legal constitution supplemented by evidence from sources such as electoral data, minutes from meetings, interviews with key informants. A second element for this part of the study will be the identification of the formal and informal forms of accountability practised by the different institutional actors with respect to (a) local elected and administrative government bodies and (b) citizens. The accountability mechanisms identified will then be categorised according to a set of general types. As discussed in 4.2 above, the mechanisms linking or influencing local representatives' accountability to citizens can be grouped into three types: upward, downward and horizontal. Each of these can in turn be categorised as formal or informal.

When identifying these mechanisms it is important to include those that might not strictly be termed mechanisms of accountability, but are actions or activities that nevertheless require local government to consult and in some way include the voices of some or all citizens. In intention they aim to increase the *responsiveness* of the local governance institutions to citizens and to the socially excluded and marginalised in particular. Examples of 'mechanisms of responsiveness' would be the obligation to present publicly a budget for the forthcoming year or to permit members of the public to attend council meetings. These are not strictly speaking accountability mechanisms as they do not require an action beyond the requirement. However as their intention is to influence the way representatives behave and relate to the public they should be included in the mapping exercise. .

Table 3 indicates how such accountability mechanisms could be categorized with examples that include requirements that seek to institutionalise responsiveness on the part of decentralized local governance institutions.

**Table 3: Mapping types of accountability mechanisms affecting local governance institutions**

Direction of accountability	Upward	Downward	Horizontal
Formal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review by the Ombudsman</li> <li>- Auditing of accounts</li> <li>- Civil service performance through incentives and sanctions including HFTP</li> <li>- human rights and electoral commissions</li> <li>- anti-corruption agencies</li> <li>- requirement to present needs based plans</li> <li>- requirement to facilitate PRSP and other policy planning processes</li> <li>- training</li> <li>- mandates</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participatory budgetary planning</li> <li>- Public meetings (budgets and accounts)</li> <li>- Recall</li> <li>- Freedom of association and organisation</li> <li>- Voter registration</li> <li>- Formulation of needs based plan</li> <li>- Re-election</li> <li>- Nomination processes and criteria (affirmative actions)</li> <li>- Training</li> <li>- Information</li> <li>- Legal aid schemes</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Civil society with representation in LG</li> <li>- Customary authorities with formal roles in conflict management &amp; resolution, resource management etc.</li> <li>- Coordinating mechanisms between sector departments</li> <li>- Budgetary planning and allocation systems</li> <li>-</li> </ul>
Informal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Political party control</li> <li>- Naming &amp; blaming in the national media</li> <li>- Monitoring from NGOs</li> <li>- Campaigning NGOs</li> <li>-</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peer group pressure</li> <li>- Local patron-client reciprocities</li> <li>- Social group mobilisation</li> <li>- Obligation to give information</li> <li>- Obligation to give justification</li> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Local media</li> <li>- Local civil society</li> <li>- Customary authorities with informal roles</li> <li>- Peer group pressures</li> </ul>

### 5.3.2 Study of local governance responsiveness

Responsiveness goes beyond the requirement to listen, as it includes the capacity to listen (and comprehend) and the desire to listen. It is behavioural in its manifestation - both on the part of the duty bearer and the rights holder, but is structurally and institutionally driven in its nature. While the study outlined in 5.2.1 will capture requirements that aim to secure responsiveness through rules, guidelines and expected norms on the part of local governance institutions and their elected members and administrative officials, it will not capture the responsiveness as practised and experienced by these persons.

To this end, a study of the perceptions and experiences of those at the interface of local governance-citizen relations will bring considerable explanatory value to the other findings in the country studies. It is proposed that focus group discussions be held with local representatives and with local

government staff to explore their perceptions and experiences in meeting with and responding to the needs, problems and demands of local citizens. The focus group discussions, held separately for the two categories, would take up perceptions of their relationship to higher levels of government and administration; their experiences of administrative (formal) forms of accountability; their experiences of informal forms of accountability (political, social, customary etc.); the identification of problems with and obstacles for responsiveness faced in their work as elected and administrative officials. Two central issues to be pursued through these discussions are (i) the extent to which they have flexibility to adjust their actions to meet demands from below, i.e. their 'room for manoeuvre', and (ii) their perception of citizens as rights holders. The latter will need to explore social and cultural attitudes as well as perceptions based on more formal obligations.

### **5.3.3 Study of citizens' relations to local government and other institutions of local governance**

The third element of the local study is to capture the ways in which individuals and social groups within the locality experience the functioning of local governance institutions and thereby to explore their relationship to local government in particular. The approach will be to focus on areas of local government responsibility and to identify the ways and means through which individuals have sought to access advice, support, resources, etc. with respect to these. Possible areas upon which to focus could be conflict resolution, education, health, housing, water supply and sanitation, agricultural or veterinary services. They should reflect any previous selection made in the study, for example in the desk study.

The study would focus upon experiences of access to local government officials (elected and administrative) and other representatives in decentralized local governance bodies, perceptions of local government's accountability and responsiveness to needs, and the possibilities for recourse when experiencing problems and failures with respect to local government.

The methodologies used would include structured focus group discussions supplemented by local sample-based surveys, time and resources permitting. Focal group discussions will be designed with mixed groups and/or separate groups made up by specific disadvantaged groups according to the topic addressed and the context.

## **6 Research outputs**

### **6.1 Country Studies**

Country studies will provide an improved knowledge basis as to the functioning of local government with possibilities for policy advice including

- measures that could make the present representation more accountable to citizens
- proposals for the introduction of other possible agents and agencies into these or similar accountability mechanisms and practices
- improved linkages between measures directed at accountability and measures aimed at increased responsiveness to citizens' voices
- improved linkages to measures directed more generally at the electoral system, political parties' roles and the use of affirmative actions to improve representation in local government

## **6.2 Regional study**

The Regional study will be drafted by the international/regional partner in close collaboration with the regional and country offices, and local partners. This comparative analysis of the country studies will draw conclusions on a regional level as to the status of representation and of accountability mechanisms in decentralized local governance and local government bodies in particular, the trends and developments found to be present and the policy recommendations that can be drawn from these.

The purpose will not be to identify a single set of best practices for promoting good governance centering on representative local government, but rather to focus on the nature of the processes behind the present status of representation in decentralized local governance (i.e. in relation to structural, institutional and citizen dimensions) and the ways in which accountability mechanisms have enhanced the representative nature of local government in the different country contexts. The aim is to identify good practices that have facilitated fairer and more responsive representation in different contexts and that can serve to inform future policy discussions in the individual countries. As with the country studies, one of the important purposes of the comparative analysis is to be able to link measures directed at changing structural and institutional factors for more representative decentralized local governance to specific measures directed at securing the accountability of local government to its citizens.

## **6.3 A 'Policy Brief'**

The Regional Study will provide the material for a short Policy Brief that can serve as an input to future policy discussions at a country level.

## **6.4 A country and regional 'data base'**

The country studies/regional analysis will provide a bench mark study for subsequent work on local government accountability and responsiveness at the regional level. In addition it will provide an invaluable input into international research and policy debates on the ways in which decentralized governance can better promote poverty reduction including pro-poor economic growth and service delivery.

## **7 Dissemination of outputs**

The country studies will be presented at a country workshop for relevant stakeholders. This will be supported with a presentation of the regional study. The regional study will be presented at a regional workshop with key stakeholders.

Subsequent dissemination could include a regional seminar at which related studies from inside and outside the region can be introduced. This could be structured around a set of core issues on local government and decentralized local governance emerging from the Regional Study. Wider dissemination would be through publications including articles published in international journals.

## **8 References/Bibliography**

A consolidated bibliography is included in the Background Paper on Local Democracy in Asia: Representation in Decentralized Governance (UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok, June 2005)

## 9 Timeframe

- a) National research proposals: March 3, 2006
- b) Draft of Component 1) *Desk study of local governance representation and accountability mechanisms*: April 28, 2006
- c) Draft of Component 2a) *Study of local institutions in decentralized governance and the accountability mechanisms utilised with respect to local government bodies*: May 30, 2006
- d) Draft of Component 2b) *Study of local government 'responsiveness'*: July 7, 2006
- e) Draft of Component 2c) *Study of citizens' relations to local government and other institutions of local governance*: July 31, 2006
- f) National Study: August 15, 2006
- g) Regional Study Draft: September 31, 2006-02-21
- h) Regional Study final: December 2006

**Annex 1 - Outline of work time allocation and time schedule**

	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Time Schedule</b>	<b>Work allocation</b>
	National Research Proposal	March 3, 2006	N/A
1	Desk study of local governance representation and accountability mechanisms	Max. 15 workdays i.e. three weeks March-April, 2006 Draft deadline: April 28, 2006	One Senior Researcher 15 days assuming <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- researcher is a competent researcher with several years of research experience and report writing</li> <li>- researcher is well versed in the field of decentralized local governance in the country</li> <li>- has ready access to legislation, rules, guidelines on local government and other documentation</li> </ul> <p>Report will be maximum 20 pages plus annexes</p> <p><b>TOTAL</b> <b>15 Senior Researcher workdays</b></p>
2a	Study of local institutions in decentralized governance and the accountability mechanisms utilised with respect to local government bodies	28 days , i.e. approximately 6 weeks of research  Six weeks in April-May, 2006  <b>Draft Deadline: May 30, 2006</b>	Team of 2-3 researchers. 28 Senior Researcher workdays  Per country <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2 days preparation</li> <li>- 4 days for drafting final report (14-18 pages plus annexes)</li> </ul> Per district <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- district level (or equivalent) 3 workdays</li> <li>- 2 sub-district localities 4 workdays each</li> </ul> Assumptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the senior researcher undertakes the ‘field work’</li> <li>- that s/he a competent senior researcher with several years of research experience including field work and report writing</li> <li>- senior researcher is well versed in the field of decentralized local governance in the country and has a network of contacts to facilitate entry to district and local government institutions.</li> </ul> <p><b>TOTAL</b> <b>28 Senior Researcher work days</b></p>
2b	Study of local government ‘responsiveness’	Work will be spread over 21 work days in total, sequenced to commence some 10 days after 2a has commenced in order to draw upon and follow up on the information generated in 2a.  Five weeks in June-July 2006  <b>Draft deadline: July 7, 2006</b>	District and sub-district localities. Location of focus groups will depend upon the delegation of responsibilities in the areas of governance practise selected for the case studies  It is envisaged that in each district there will be 2 FGDs with elected officials, 2 FGDs with administrative officials and 2 FGDs with representatives from other local decentralized governance institutions in the district and/or local level involved in the fields of governance e.g. local NGOs, local ‘traditional’ leaders, relevant local associations etc.

			<p>FGDs will require both a Senior Researcher plus a research assistant for note taking and transcribing recordings</p> <p>Per Country (2 district localities, 4 sub-district localities):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 5 senior researcher work days for general preparation of FGD materials, arranging meetings/Focus Groups etc.</li> <li>- Additional 4 senior researcher days for writing the summary report (12 -14 pages plus annexes for tables etc)</li> </ul> <p>Per FGD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1 senior researcher day and one research assistant day for FGD (3 hours) and collating the findings</li> </ul> <p>Assumptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the senior researcher is a competent researcher with several years of research experience including work with FGDs and report writing.</li> <li>- the senior researcher is well versed in the field of decentralized local governance in the country</li> </ul> <p><b>TOTAL</b>  <b>21 Senior researcher workdays</b>  <b>12 Research assistant work days</b></p>
2c	<p>Study of citizens' relations to local government and other institutions of local governance</p>	<p>Work will be spread over 16 work days in total, sequenced to commence some 20 days after 2a and has commenced and 10 days after 2b has commenced in order to draw upon and follow up on the information generated in 2a. and 2b</p> <p>Two + weeks in July-August 2006</p> <p><b>Draft Deadline: July 31, 2006</b></p>	<p>Maximum of 6 FGD per district (2 in each sub-district locality) These will be based on male – female separate structured groups.</p> <p>Per Country (2 districts and 4 sub-district localities)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 4 senior researcher work days for preparation</li> <li>- 4 senior researcher work days for writing the summary report (12-14 pages plus annexes for tables etc.)</li> </ul> <p>Per FGD</p> <p>1 senior researcher day and one research assistant day for FGD (3 hours) and collating the findings</p> <p><b>TOTAL</b>  <b>16 Senior Researcher workdays</b>  <b>4 Research assistant workdays</b></p>
	<p><b>National Research Paper (including 6-8 page executive summary)</b></p>	<p><b>Deadline: August 15, 2006</b></p>	
3	<p>A comparative analysis of the country studies covered in 1, 2a -2c</p>	<p>Approx four weeks in September-October 2006</p> <p><b>Draft deadline: September 31, 2006</b></p>	<p>25 Senior researcher work days to analyse the country studies draft the comparative analysis and prepare a paper of max 25-30 pages.</p> <p><b>TOTAL</b>  <b>25 Senior Researcher work days</b></p>

**Notes:**

- each report will contain an executive summary and conclusion addressing policy implications

- Senior researcher denotes a researcher with considerable experience in field working, a working knowledge of local government in the country, a knowledge of more general issues of decentralized local governance, and a strong track record in preparing research-based reports and other forms of publications
- It is possible that activities 2a – 2c can be undertaken by a group of researchers working in close collaboration with one another. This could reduce the number of total work days, but not significantly.

