



The Asia Pacific Governance and Democracy Initiative (AGDI)

Context

Asia Pacific is the fastest growing region in the world. Despite its high rates of growth, many developing countries within the region are not making significant progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially those dealing with child mortality, maternal health, gender equality, the fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and environmental sustainability. Weak governance has constrained the achievement of development objectives within the region, and, consequently, the inability of governments to sustain policies and programs.

Effective democratic governance continues to be one of the greatest challenges of the Asia Pacific region as countries cope with demands of the global economy and pressures from citizens for increased transparency and participation. The countries in the region are at different stages of democratic governance ranging from the relatively effective and democratic governance in Japan and the Republic of Korea to new and restored democracies such as Indonesia, Pakistan, Thailand, and Mongolia. However, all are interested in sharing experiences and good practices as they work to further strengthen democratic governance capacities.

Key Components

Effective democratic governance is central to the East-West Center's mission of promoting a peaceful, prosperous and just Asia Pacific region through the creation of Asia Pacific community. The multi-year Asia Pacific Governance and Democracy Initiative has and will concentrate on bolstering national and regional institutional and leadership capacities by focusing on the following five dimensions of democratic governance:

1. Civil Society Engagement in Democratic Change

Civil society organizations in the region play a vital role in promoting inclusive governance at the local, national and global levels by recognizing that improving the quality of the democratic governance process requires actions at multiple levels. At the local level, civil society organizations have particularly been active in mobilizing against privatizations based on their perception that privatizations do not serve the interests of the population at large, but only serve business interests. At the national level, civil society organizations in Asia perform watchdog functions to improve the quality of electoral and parliamentary process and responsiveness of parliamentarians to the interests of minorities, poor and marginalized groups. At the global level, civil society organizations perform advocacy functions for such global public goods as debt relief for the high debt and Least Developed Countries, climate change, implementation of the UN conventions and treaty bodies dealing with civil and political rights, transparency in global governance, and increased foreign assistance from the donor community.

This component of the Initiative examines the impact of civil society organizations on democratic change in the region. It reviews the emerging issues and good practices in the region, the modalities of the civil society's interface and engagement with the governments, and its capacity and accountability.

2. Cross-border Governance for Regional Actions

Asia Pacific countries have also become more interdependent as a result of globalization. Information, ideas, culture, people, resources, capital, and crime all move across borders in larger numbers than ever before. As such, problems and challenges that face one nation often have a rippling effect throughout the region. Cross-border issues are those which cannot be resolved successfully by isolated policy action at the national or sub-national levels. The list of cross-border issues is long and growing, and includes cross-boundary water management, human trafficking, trade integration, illegal migration, and regional health risks. Each of these issues requires significant cross-border policy coordination between national governments, as well as good institutional systems in place to enable consultation with other stakeholders and collaboration between national and local governments.

This component of the Initiative examines four specific governance dimensions of the cross-border issues – review of institutions and structures, policies and policymaking, legal and equity frameworks, and the role of vital actors such as the civil society and media – in order to promote regional cooperation in responding to the issues.

3. Electoral and Parliamentary Processes to Sustain Democracy

The third component of the Initiative aims to promote an inclusive electoral and parliamentary process in three Asian countries to confer political legitimacy, promote representation and oversight, and provide mechanisms for participation and accountability. Its focus is on the participation of women, minorities, and marginalized groups in democratic processes by strengthening national and local capacities to engage in ensuring free and fair elections and accountability of parliaments and legislatures to the constituents. Specifically, it will promote voter registration, electoral monitoring, and dialogue with parliamentarians. It will also support community based organizations, gender sensitive budgeting, use of media to promote inclusion, training of women local leaders, information-sharing and awareness raising.

4. Transparency and Anti-corruption Strategies to Promote Trust in Government

Transparency in governance and combating corruption are major challenges facing many Asian countries today. In order for citizens to have confidence and trust in government, civil servants and elected officials must conduct themselves according to the highest standards of public accountability and behavior. Adherence to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), in addition to the implementation of national legislative and administrative measures is critical. Also needed are strengthening the transparency of policy processes, improving enforcement mechanism, increasing public awareness and strengthening anti-corruption institutions. Recognizing the above, many countries in the region have launched new and highly innovative transparency and anti-corruption initiatives. This fourth component will examine the impact of these advances.

5. Civil Service Reform and Resource Management to Foster Economic Development

The capacity of governments at multi-levels to design and implement development programs that effectively manage human, physical, technological and financial resources is essential to meeting the rapidly increasing expectations of citizens. In the context of the economic transitions that Asia Pacific countries are experiencing, a premium rests on strengthening and restructuring institutions to govern and support market forces and capital accumulation. For example, adequate competencies at local, regional and national levels for both raising revenues and making balanced decisions on spending these revenues must be assured by increasing the accountability for results of the civil service.

This component examines innovations in civil service reform and resource management, leadership in the public sector, and their impact on delivery and access of services to citizens.

Modalities and Partnerships

The Asia-Pacific Governance and Democracy Initiative

- undertakes policy relevant research on the foregoing aspects of democratic governance practice,
- organizes capacity development and leadership workshops and senior level dialogues among scholars and policymakers,
- documents and analyze emerging regional trends, innovations, and issues in governance,
- publishes research findings for dissemination in the region and globally, and
- undertakes strategic outreach activities at the country level.

The implementation strategy of the Initiative is based on a two-pronged approach: research, dialogue and dissemination at the regional level; and country outreach activities in the People's Republic of China, Indonesia, and Pakistan. The Initiative is funded by a consortium of multilateral and bilateral institutions. To complement East-West Center's resources and expertise, the activities will be designed and implemented in partnership with leading regional, national and global institutions. The Institutional Partners Group (IPG) has been established including the following national, regional, and global institutions:

National Institutions	Regional and Global Institutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ China – China Center for Overseas Social and Philosophical Theories (CCOSPT) and China Center for Comparative Politics and Economics (CCCPE) ➤ Republic of Korea – Yonsei University and Seoul National University ➤ Japan – Hosei University, Tokyo University ➤ Indonesia – University of Indonesia, Partnership for Governance Reform ➤ Malaysia – Universiti Sains Malaysia ➤ The Philippines – National College of Public Administration and Governance Institute for Political and Electoral Reform ➤ Thailand – Thamassat University ➤ Bangladesh – Centre for Policy Dialogue and BRAC University ➤ India – Administrative Staff College of India, Institute of Local Government ➤ Pakistan – Pakistan Institute for Legislative Development and Transparency, Beaconhouse National University, Lahore University of Management Sciences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ United Nations University ➤ Asian Development Bank ➤ Harvard University ➤ UNDP Regional Centre for Asia and the Pacific ➤ Transparency International ➤ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance ➤ Soka University of America ➤ School of Governance of the University of the South Pacific ➤ Association of Southeast Asian Nations

Outcomes: Dialogue and Publications

During the three years of AGDI implementation, three of the five components launched the following activities: Civil Society Engagement, Cross-Border Governance, and Building Trust in Government through Innovations. Technical workshops and policy dialogues were organized at the regional and country levels. Research studies were undertaken in collaboration with the Institutional Partners Group, leading to the publications listed below. Country outreach activities were organized in China and Pakistan.

WORKSHOPS

- **Promoting Trust in Government through Innovations in Governance in Asia and the Pacific** (January 28-30, 2008, Honolulu)
- **Civil Society Engagement in National and Global Governance** (July 14-16, 2008, Honolulu)
- **Regional Stakeholders Consultation on Cross-Border Governance in Asia and the Pacific (in partnership with UNDP,** May 18-20, 2009, Bangkok)
- **Governance for Sustainable Development: Global Practices and the Chinese Experience** (May 25-26, 2009, Beijing)
- **Electoral Reforms in Pakistan** (April 26, 2010, Lahore)
- **Roundtable on Governance and Development in the Central Asian Republics** (March 22, 2010, Honolulu)
- **Sustainability and Policy-making (in partnership with UNU/June 30-July 1, 2010 ,Honolulu)**
- **Roundtable on Governance for Human Development in South Asia** (forthcoming)

PUBLICATIONS

- **Policy Brief: Governance through Civil Society Engagement in Asia** (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2009)
- ***BUILDING TRUST IN GOVERNMENT: INNOVATIONS IN GOVERNANCE REFORM IN ASIA***, Edited by G. Shabbir Cheema and Vesselin Popovski (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2010)
- ***ENGAGING CIVIL SOCIETY: EMERGING TRENDS IN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE***, Edited by G. Shabbir Cheema and Vesselin Popovski (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2010)
- ***CROSS-BORDER GOVERNANCE IN ASIA: REGIONAL ISSUES AND MECHANISMS***, Edited by G. Shabbir Cheema, Christopher A. McNally, and Vesselin Popovski (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2010)

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