

Introduction

Globalization and the advancements in information and communication technology (ICT) during the 1980s and 1990s facilitated the growth in knowledge or learning networks.¹ These networks have significantly contributed in creating and expanding knowledge-based economies and societies² wherein performance culture and higher productivity are maintained through continuous build up, diffusion, and utilization of information and knowledge.

Learning or knowledge networks are increasingly referred to in the innovation literature as “soft infrastructure” required to support innovation systems as opposed to “hard infrastructure” of traditional organizations/enterprises.³ Effective networks bring about faster development of new ideas, products, and services and better optimization of research and development investment. They also maximize the knowledge potential of an organization/enterprise as well as its responsiveness and adaptability.

Further, knowledge networks provide development practitioners with access to cutting-edge advice and information in their respective fields and across sectors and disciplines. Typically these networks are established as a result of, or lead up to, a learning program or event although they can stand alone. Through the aid of information and communication technology, they bring together communities of practice in a wide range of subjects providing electronic discussions and websites to encourage research and disseminate best practices and lessons learned.⁴

The success of knowledge networks depends on their development into a space for innovation, experimentation, and learning. These networks can boost the knowledge base, learning processes, and civil society actors’ capacity to generate and advocate proposals. Development practitioners claim that capacity development, institution building, advocacy, and societal change are unthinkable without considerable investment in improving networking and learning among relevant development actors. This is why development agencies invest in networking among their partners to enable civil society both globally and locally to play a strong role in shaping the ideas and knowledge that determine our future.⁵ In line with this thrust on networking, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) supported the creation of a regional network focusing on cross-learning and knowledge sharing. We elaborate on this in the following section.

Emergence of NAPSIPAG

Recognizing the potential of schools and institutes of public administration as potentially powerful advisory resource to strengthen governance and public management in the Asia-Pacific Region, ADB fostered the Network of Asia-Pacific Schools and Institutes of Public Administration and Governance (NAPSIPAG). Driven by its Governance Policy of 1995,⁶ ADB perceived that such a network would bring together regional institutions whose strength was inherent in their acceptability, influence, and local knowledge that could make them locally sustainable and powerful change agents in the region. NAPSIPAG, as it is popularly known, is emerging into a thriving network of schools and institutes of public administration that seeks to enhance the quality of public administration in the Asia-Pacific region by enhancing the capacities of its national [and subnational] governments to promote good governance, through practical, relevant, and responsive training, education, and research.

Furthermore, ADB, by supporting such a network to address the knowledge management and regional cooperation gap within the region, fulfilled its mandated role to catalyze greater regional cooperation and exchange of good practices for development.

After 2 years of regional dialogue and exchange, NAPSIPAG was launched in December 2004 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia with over a hundred institutions committing to such an enterprise.⁷ NAPSIPAG aims to transform into a regional hub with the capacity to: (i) support effective capacity-development interventions with member institutes on a sustainable basis; (ii) encourage the sharing of expertise and good practices; (iii) assist the member institutes in the continuing expansion of the frontiers of public administration through research, knowledge-sharing and other initiatives; (iv) and foster collaboration between and among the member institutes and individuals with common objectives and interests. The long-term goal of creating the network is to enhance the capacities of public administration schools and institutes as well as research organizations and think-tanks in the region to enable them to transform their respective governments as effective agents of good governance.

The 2005 NAPSIPAG Conference Proceedings

This volume brings together a selection of the papers presented at the 2005 NAPSIPAG Annual Conference, held in Beijing, the People's Republic of China (PRC), from 5 to 7 December 2005. The theme of this conference, selected by its interim steering committee, was the Role of Public Administration in Building a Harmonious Society. Hosted by the China

National School of Administration, this conference was attended by 159 participants from 26 countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

The discussions during the conference centered on six subthemes: (i) citizen participation and local autonomy, (ii) public administration strategies, (iii) innovations in governance and public service, (iv) conflict resolution and peace building, (v) constraints and challenges arising from demographic transitions and imbalances, and (vi) health care for the poor. There was also a special session on the teaching of public administration and policy.

Leading papers: Two papers at the plenary session were presented to open the conference theme. In his keynote paper, **Marsh** discusses recent developments in seven states, all of them democracies in their infancy that experienced rapid economic development. A democracy derives its legitimacy from all (and not just a few) people who come to participate in governance as equals. In the seven states, however, the ideologies and institutions through which ordinary people can have a larger role in governance are only slowly emerging. In this challenging environment, public administrators must develop new skills—in advocacy, policy, and institutional design—to contribute to building a more harmonious society. **Guili** highlights the need for deepening administrative reforms in the PRC to solve deep-rooted problems that not only hinder economic and social development but also government capability to build a harmonious society. Governments must have a clearly defined jurisdiction and its functions must be kept separate from the roles of nongovernmental and enterprise sectors. Guili holds that the government structure should be further streamlined to establish an efficient public administration. Further, the government must become more open, fair, incorruptible, and concerned about the people's welfare.

Citizen Participation and Local Autonomy

Papers in this category emphasize the role of citizens working through local governments and civil society organizations to create harmonious societies, thus contributing to national development and global cooperation.

Kumara and Handapangoda argue that the size of the local government institution is an important determinant of participation by citizens. Smaller local governments tend to have greater potential for direct participation. Size is equally important in countries like the PRC, India, and Indonesia, where there are much wider variations in area and population than in Sri Lanka. Decentralization has brought significant changes and challenges, but the process of participatory planning in Solo municipality, Indonesia, as described by

Widianingsih, gives hope for successful cooperation among local communities with promising trends for the future.

Yadamsuren stresses the importance of citizen participation in local budgeting, while lamenting the fact that it is ignored by politicians and administrators in Mongolia. Lack of information, transparency, skills, and accountability blocks popular participation in local financial management. What is the optimal level of participation in local administration and development? **Bhattacharyya** argues for qualitative participation, citing the example of the total literacy campaign in West Bengal, India, which has increased the awareness and participation of the rural population in local government elections and decision making.

Several papers deal with the importance of gender participation in local government and development. India reserves a third of the elected membership and leadership of local government institutions for women. Bangladesh, which has had a woman prime minister for more than a decade, requires at least three directly elected women members in each local council. The Philippines has city and municipal councils where more than half of the members are women, and sets aside 5% of the social welfare budget for women. For all countries, the education of women is an important priority.

The role and activities of nongovernment organizations (NGOs) were discussed as well. **Songyan** analyzes nonprofit, voluntary, registered societies in the PRC and the large numbers of unregistered organizations that are neither profit making nor political. Their effectiveness as links between government and the citizens is, however, limited by governmental control. **Singh** talks about successful entrepreneurial networks of NGOs, local government institutions, universities, and citizens cooperating in poverty alleviation projects in the Indian states of West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat, achieving together what they would not have been able to achieve separately. Drawing these stories together, Singh argues that NGO networks are powerful tools for enhancing societal harmony.

Reporting on recent African history, **Njunwa** explains how public administration can create the conditions for societal harmony, citing examples from Tanzania. The society's commitment to the citizens' safety and security, participatory decision making, a sense of identity, education and training, and sustained economic growth and trade are all important for societal harmony.

Public Administration Strategies

Baulderstone singles out nonprofit community service organizations for their significant role in service delivery to disadvantaged or otherwise needy members of society. Australia, Baulderstone said, has long supported such organizations through funding, preferential taxation, and acceptance of the sector's role in influencing policy and planning decisions. But widespread public sector reforms in the 1980s and 1990s had unfortunate consequences for these organizations, as explored in the paper, which also identifies factors that would support the emerging partnership between the public and community services sectors.

Information, **Jain** points out, is increasingly viewed as a vehicle for rural participation in governance and development. ICT, increasingly available at declining cost, can facilitate access to development-related information. But for ICT projects to succeed, there must be coordination between levels of government; public regulators and administrators must work together with private service providers. Civil society has a critical role in coordinating between the public and private sectors. Jain's case studies from several states in India assessed key areas of influence and action for public administrators in providing rural ICT access.

Direct poverty alleviation programs carried out by the Indian Government to generate employment in rural areas through infrastructure development are misdirected, as contended by **Saha and Kakani**. Many in the countryside are unemployed and poor because they have been "deskilled" as political power has shifted to the urban metropolis. Re-empowering local government, regenerating skills, and building institutions for skills development can reverse the process, the authors said.

Anand examines the impact of the large targeted public distribution system in the state of Kerala, India and shows how even the best-intentioned public administration strategies, when carried out the wrong way, can lead to even more inequality and poverty. The issues of poverty and exclusion, as well as the success of programs that try to deal with these issues, are inextricably linked to governance—as **Dhakal** emphasized in his study of Nepal—thus, emphasizing the role of good governance in creating societal harmony.

Economic efficiency is the real—though seldom explicitly stated—objective of most public sector reforms, according to **Khan and Akif**. Responsive institutional arrangements have a vital role in realizing economic potential, supporting innovation, and achieving social development targets. **Gonzalez** discusses the need to accommodate diversity in public management by providing equal and nondiscriminatory public services. Poor or unconstructive management of diversity can quickly lead to instability within

states. Citing the case of the Philippines, Gonzalez adds that diversity management strategies must be developed and local government policies should be made more inclusive and culture-sensitive. Communities and NGOs should be empowered to safeguard their rights and participate in governance. Indigenous groups, their advocates, and international partners should be linked in a “concerted global political constituency.” The extent and availability of government services in priority indigenous peoples’ areas must be monitored.

Significant and increasing differences in socioeconomic development between regions in Uzbekistan, according to **Yunusov and Yunusov**, have had negative consequences that reinforce social tensions and mistrust of governing bodies. The main goal of regional policies in Uzbekistan is the efficient use of regional factors and competitive advantage to ensure the sustainable economic development of the country, raise living standards, and lessen the socioeconomic disadvantages of regions.

Innovations in Governance and Public Service

By far the largest workshop in the conference dealt with this topic. **Alam, Mian, and Smith** analyze how, because of uncontrolled corruption, political instability, and inadequate investment infrastructure, and despite liberalization and microeconomic reforms, government has failed to create the business conditions that could induce investors to invest in Bangladesh. **Guojun** reviews the evolution of entrepreneurial ecology in the PRC starting in 1979. **Damiran and Pratt** find a mixed model of government reform in Mongolia without the much-needed balancing of conflicting elements. **Yiseang and Thomas** focus on the four criteria set by ADB for assessing governance—accountability, participation, predictability, and transparency—while drawing attention to the innovative tools for public service management implemented in Cambodia.

Niu, Ho, and Jun Ma argue that budgeting reform would depend not only on the managerial and technical capacity of the bureaucracy but also on the political will of the leadership to tackle sensitive political questions such as intergovernmental fiscal arrangements. **Shannon** reviews the performance-based management system in Malaysia and suggested its use in validating and improving the credibility of impact assessment and monitoring.

Developments in ICT have helped governments transform their operations and service delivery systems. Using the experience of India, **Pathak and Prasad** conclude that e governance can be effective in the fight against corruption in developing countries. **Hoque** looks into how far citizen’s interests have been served in e-governance initiatives in Bangladesh. In Malaysia, according to **Siddiquee**, e-government has had limited impact because of infrastructure constraints and slow implementation.

Mishra, Mishra, and Kirinmai discuss participatory governance reforms in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. Innovations like the *Janmabhoomi* (serve the motherland) Program, water users' associations, watershed development program, and *vana samrakshana samithis* (community forest management groups) have fundamentally transformed the government-people interface, the author said, but implementation has been far from effective.

Sumarto focuses on natural resources conflicts and the challenges to government in Indonesia. Awareness of the need for sustainable natural resources management is crucial as it may lead to more rational and transparent natural resources management, Sumarto states. He adds that curriculum development is an efficient way of building awareness. Social engagement, more often than not associated with economic reforms in response to a crisis, has become a strategic option for governments in different parts of the world, argue **Yaacob and Mansor**. But where other countries dissolve the consultative mechanism after the crisis, Malaysia is institutionalizing it and making it part of the governance processes.

Conflict Resolution and Peace Building

Papers from this workshop address conflict at three levels: societal (threats to domestic peace), social and individual levels (civil dispute between individuals, groups, neighborhoods, and businesses), and political/policy. **Rahman**, using a cultural model, discusses why Bangladesh is threatened by internal violence even without large ethnic or religious divisions and suggests useful ways to move forward. **Agarwal** discusses how the *lok adalat* (people's court)—an alternative means of dispute resolution in India—have succeeded in making inexpensive, efficacious, and speedy justice accessible to the public. **Durning** proposes the use of Q-methodology⁸ to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of contending interest groups and to help identify mutually acceptable solutions to difficult policy problems.

Constraints and Challenges from Demographic Transitions and Imbalances

In a marked shift from the population explosion and increased life expectancy of the 20th century, a new set of demographic trends is emerging: sub-replacement fertility, leading to long-term population decline; ageing of the world's population; and decreased life expectancy.⁹ These trends will have a profound impact as they will change employment patterns, place major stresses on social security programs and family relations, create migration pressures, and pose challenges to existing patterns of gender relations.

Mogilevsky deals with the social and economic consequences of labor migration in the Kyrgyz Republic. While acknowledging the reality of permanent and long-term migration from the country for lack of limited economic opportunities, Mogilevsky states that emigrants should be given every opportunity to return home and should be encouraged to retain their ties to home and their sense of national identity.

On a different note, **Khawaja** explores a range of issues arising from demographic transitions and imbalances in Pakistan. Defining “demographic imbalance” as a mismatch between resources and population, the author looked particularly at population movement from rural to urban areas, but also discussed migration due to environmental catastrophes and other factors. Both papers expressed concern about the availability of accurate, reliable, and up-to-date statistics.

Health Care for the Poor in Asia

In less-developed Asian countries, the poor generally do not get adequate health care. Government does not devote enough resources to the sector, and what little it spends is often mismanaged. Hospital services and medicines are priced beyond the reach of the poor. For lack of good health care, the poor cannot get or keep a decent job, and they stay poor or become even poorer.

The papers in this session had three common themes: the privatization of health care; sharing of the financial burdens of health care with social organizations; and decentralization of health care. Although health care for the poor in Asia has greatly improved, much still needs to be done. Governments should change the way they perceive health, the participants suggested. People’s health is too important to be ignored. Governments should invest more to improve their health-care systems and make them more efficient. Social organizations can join in the supply of health care.

A good health-care system, **Sarfraz H. Khawaja** points out in his paper, should be equitable, efficient, and effective. Citing examples from Pakistan, his analysis brings out the essential features of a workable health system. **Ghuman and Mehta** examine health care for the poor in India, particularly in the state of Punjab, where the promised benefits to the poor from major policy reforms have not materialized for various reasons. To give the poor better access to health-care services, Ghuman and Mehta suggest that the government should spend more on health care; the poor should be made more aware about their benefits; entitlement procedures should be simplified and made more transparent and time-bound; the government should make it mandatory for super-specialty hospitals to meet their targets for poor patients; and health

service delivery should be made pro-poor, more vigilant, transparent, and better regulated.

Bautista discusses opportunities in public health governance in local government units in the Philippines and improvements that still need to be made, especially given the large number of the poor who rely on this system for their needs. National and local health offices must engage in continuous advocacy with local government officials to get them to commit to the delivery of health services that meet the needs of the community and the users of primary health care. National and local health offices should also use local information systems and other available technologies for governance to define community needs, allow targeted service provision, facilitate planning and monitoring and evaluation, and achieve commitments like the Millennium Development Goals.

Zhang and Zhang examine the public health system in Jiangxi province of the PRC, in light of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome epidemic of 2003 and the measures taken since then by the PRC Government to forestall similar public health emergencies. The authors analyze existing policies and propose policy shifts required to strengthen the system of preparedness for public health in the PRC.

Teaching of Public Administration and Policy

O'Neill introduces Australian and New Zealand School of Government's new Executive Masters of Legal Public Administration Program. Australian and New Zealand School of Government's innovative application of problem-based learning principles—which develop problem-solving skills by challenging participants to solve real-world problems—is an emerging paradigm in the teaching of public administration, O'Neill states. **Sy-Aves** highlights the problem-based learning approach adopted by Capitol University in the Philippines. He shows how such an approach leads to embedding innovative methods of instruction.

Raagas describes a problem-based data analysis course that reinforces understanding of the use of research and statistics in public administration among Master of Public Administration students. This course gives students practical experience by using actual public administration cases and focusing on the data analysis aspect. **Huang** discusses the findings of his research study in Taipei, China, which applied exercises commonly used in assessment center simulation as instructional tools in public personnel management. There were also two teaching demonstration sessions where the participants “learned by doing,” with professional guidance.

This collection of papers reflects the diversity of “grounded” voices to be found in the region. While the approaches are different, a distinguishing feature is the depth of local knowledge they exhibit and the manner in which innovation from within the Asia-Pacific region is highlighted. Moreover, the selection presents findings that policy makers will find useful when tackling the enigma of promoting good governance and achieving development effectiveness.

Raza Ahmad¹⁰

Endnotes

- ¹ Knowledge or learning networks consist of organizations, institutions, and individual actors working together around a common concern.
- ² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 1996. *The Knowledge Based- Economy*. See www.oecd.org/dataoecd/51/8/1913021.pdf.
- ³ Innovation Expedition 2004. *The Changing Nature of Networks and Recognition of Their Growing Importance*. October. [www.innovationexpedition.com/103104%20\(B-KN\)%206.2%20Nature%20Networks.pdf](http://www.innovationexpedition.com/103104%20(B-KN)%206.2%20Nature%20Networks.pdf).
- ⁴ World Bank – Knowledge Networks website. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITEEXTERNAL/WBI0,contentMDK:20102172-pagePK:209023-piPK:207535-theSitePK:213799,00.html>
- ⁵ Cummings, S., and A. van Zee. 2005. *Communities of practice and networks: reviewing two perspectives on social learning*. *KM4D Journal* 1(1): 8–22.
- ⁶ Asian Development Bank. 1995. *Governance. Sound Development Management*. Manila.
- ⁷ NAPSIPAG has a five-member Steering Committee (SC) that provides direction to the Network and comprises: 1) China National School of Administration (CNSA); 2) National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN)-Malaysia; 3) National College of Public Administration and Governance, University of the Philippines; 4) Institute of Public Enterprise, Osmania University, Hyderabad; and 5) Department of Management, Monash University. The SC is chaired by CNSA while INTAN serves as the Network Secretariat. Further details are available at www.intanbk.intan.my/napsipag/.
- ⁸ Durning states that Q-methodology “provides policy analysts with a research tool for studying systematically the subjectivity of one person or a group of people. It enables them to explore and understand in more depth the subjective perceptions of stakeholders, decision makers, and even themselves about the policy issues they are investigating.”
- ⁹ The declining average life expectancy in Central Asia over the last one decade was highlighted as a critical issue facing the region with serious social and economic implications.
- ¹⁰ The author works as the Governance and Capacity Development Specialist at the Asian Development Bank.