

Conclusion of the Asia-Pacific Panel

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For the past three years, the Asia Pacific Panel has been organized as an annual series of reviewing the experiences of national governance in Asia and Pacific countries. This time, with the focus on the roles of the NGOs, three cases were presented from Thailand, the Philippines and India. Since the national governance particularly of developing countries has involved IGOs (Inter-governmental organizations) as important actors of national development, the panel was fortunate to have representatives of two IGOs, one from OFPA, representing the African region (Mr. Jacques Nzouankeu), and another from the United Nations (Mr. Guido Bertucci) as discussants. It has been understood that only together with the appropriate role sharing and networking with NGOs and IGOs, the state can better perform their business of national development. The issue in discussion was to identify “in what” and “how” the roles to be shared and “what” factors would determine for the optimal collaboration.

The keynote speaker, Mr. Akira Iriyama set the tone for this discussion by clarifying these “what’s” and “how”. He advocated the legitimacy (representative-ness), and accountability as determinant factors with which the NGOs can possibly contribute in three roles, public service delivery, capacity building and advocacy at national and even global levels. He reminded the panel of important cautions that there were many myths and fallacies about the relationships of NGOs with the government such as “NGOs can fill the gap of what the government does not do” or “NGO represents good while the government cannot be trusted.”

Three cases presented at the panel showed very different modalities and magnitudes of the three roles of NGOs, namely public service delivery, capacity building and advocacy, played in each country. Thai experience as

presented by Prof. Dr. Chindalak Vadhanasindhu indicated the very limited scope in the role of the NGOs, with the role largely in community development and moral building, and yet those NGOs were acting in compliance with or supportive to the government for improving the public service delivery. In contrast, the Philippine experience as reported by Dr. Isagani Serrano characterized the strong NGO roles as symbolized in the peoples empowering (even enabling the reshuffle of the government when it exposed corruption.). Philippine experiences also demonstrated the extensive NGO roles played in public service delivery, and capacity building including engaging in projects financed directly from the ODAs and IGOs. The government cannot ignore the NGOs/CSOs (Civil society organizations), and the appropriate modalities of partnership appeared to be under scrutiny. The case from India as presented by Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan demonstrated unique roles played by the NGOs in pursuing democracy in governance and further to improve its capacity. The Indian cases touched upon the interesting argument on the respective independent roles (rather than partnership with government) played in political process.

It was obvious from these cases that all the three roles of NGOs played for national development have been rapidly growing, but that we can presume that in “what” and “how” the roles to be played can be found in the different national contexts. Mr. Jacques Nzouankeu from OFPA added the case of African experience, in which the relationship of the NGOs with the state can be characterized as more in defiance than in cooperation. NGOs were credited to have played the advocacy role by mobilizing the people to make government observe civil rights and do better national management. Despite these varying roles and relationships in these cases, it was clear that the legitimacy (representativeness), and accountability of NGOs were commonly left to be yet questioned in all these cases for the purpose of screening NGO contribution and benefits for national development.

The panel was much benefited by extremely active audience in discussing these legitimacy and accountability questions of NGOs. For the question of legitimacy, particularly in relation to the role in advocacy, the appropriate check of the representation of each NGO was found necessary, as each NGO was representing only the interest of its constituents, while the government

must represent the interest of all. International NGOs were playing increasing roles in advocacy in global scenes, but the public must judge the legitimacy of these NGOs (to check to whom the NGOs were responsible with what contribution), as Mr. Iriyama cautioned. Mr. Guido Bertucci proposed to create a proper mechanism to examine not only the legitimacy but also the accountability. There should be a rule of cooperation between the government and NGOs, while over-regulatory framework (Mr. Bertucci) must be avoided, as much as the excessive financial control of the government on the NGO resources (Mr. Nzouankeu).

It was argued that the NGOs existing in Asia Pacific were not the substitute of the government and that government can be strengthened in order to enable institutionalize more useful partnership with the NGOs for national development. It was expressed that the need for assessing the contribution and benefits of NGOs more systematically. For the purpose, more research on the experiences of NGOs would be needed in the future. Further analysis in such research would not only assist in creating “what” and “how“ to share the roles for national development (whether in compliance or defiance), between the two actors, but also in constructing appropriate indicators to evaluate the contribution of NGOs.