CONCLUSION OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC PANEL

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During the IIAS Conference on e-governance, this Asia Pacific Panel examined the three concrete cases of the NGO use of ICTs in Republic of Korea, Hong Kong, China, and Japan; how their roles and operations of NGOs have been impacted by the use of ICTs in their service delivery, and in their relationships with the government, and the client citizens.

Panel's keynote speaker, Prof. Hiromitsu Kataoka set the "Asian" tone by sketching the common portrait of the traditional Asian society still observable now in China, Korea and Japan that was influenced by Confucius and Buddhist teachings on the state and family orientation. However, as Prof. Kataoka denoted, these countries have been ruled and developed by strong centralized bureaucratic systems, and even in modern era, these countries did not experience much of the growth of NGOs/NPOs in their governance systems; their roles have hitherto been marginalized in governance. Only recent years these countries initiated policies for the increased role of NGOs/NPOs in their governance process. Their current ICT policies were strikingly invigorating their business and government sectors. On the other hand, use of the ICTs in the NGOs has been of little significance.

As Prof. Kataoka put it, non-governmental sectors are particularly organized around information and communication networks rather than around hierarchy; then why non-government sectors and the civil society take advantage of the advanced ICTs which are vigorously used in other sectors. When government is now delegating many public service functions to non-government sectors, strengthening of the NGOs can be imagined by the extended use of ICTs. Enhanced e-Governance could be pronounced for the NGOs/NPOs. Panel cases, however, experienced not so straight –forward response.

From the Korean case, Prof. Jai Chang Park extracted his in-depth analysis of the particular experience of the Korean Council of YMCAs, one of the four biggest NGOs in local movements: decreasing roles of NGOs as an intermediate between government and citizens were evident. Individual client citizens of the NGOs started direct contacts with professional experts and government, rather than through YMCAs. This changed pattern of access posed a risk of decreasing the role of these NGOs as intermediary between the citizens and the government. While NGOs role as gatekeeper filtering citizen's opinion and identifying social issues will remain, Prof. Park concluded the danger of conventional discourse that the ICTs built social capital by enhancing the effectiveness of community level NGOs as the watchers of the government. The Korean case also demonstrated the widening gap between the NGOs with advanced ICTs and those with outmoded technologies.

Hong Kong experience presented by Dr. Jin Wook Choi was the case of NGOs working in the Social Welfare Sector. He alerted the serious and numerous digital divide issues arising between the NGOs and other sectors, and the needs for both government and the NGOs to widen the use of ICTs particularly to empower the service recipients and the NGOs involved in social service delivery. Hong Kong's NGOs increased in number since the 1997 handover, but their financial resources remained excessively dependent on the government (90 %). While the financial situation of NGOs demonstrated the

governance issue itself in Hong Kong, the digital promotion for the citizens and NGOs are much sought realistically, according to Dr. Choi, by government campaign and training programmes of ICTs.

Mr. Takahiro Nanri, from Sasagawa Peace Foundation, an internationally active and leading NGO in Japan, focused on the search of effective use of ICTs in CSO operation particularly to improve their accountability, legitimacy and transparency. He pointed out that CSOs in Japan and in several Asian countries must develop their own strategies for better use of ICTs to improve not only their operations or relationships with the government, but also their own accountability and transparency. Mr. Nanri pointed out the existence of serious deficit in governance responsibilities in the NGOs and government in the use of e-governance that could be enhanced to its potential.

Mr. Nanri as well as the panel organizer Prof. Kaneko made remarks on the recent Japanese experience of local governance reforms which largely opened avenues for the civil society to participate in local public service delivery. Increased utilization of civil society organizations means that CSOs need to tap ICTs to their potential capacity for CSO's planning, communication, and administrative tools to improve their roles in the local public service delivery. Particularly the Japanese community has to improve the social services for rapidly increasing number of older people who now occupy more than 20 % (65 years of age and over) of the country's population. In this connection, Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, in May 2004 announced the policy idea of "u-Japan" (ubiquitous Japan), to mean citizens are encouraged to enjoy the benefits of ICTs every where and any time, for the e-governance to protect safer and better quality of life of all people.

The panel was enriched by three discussants who were outside the Asia Pacific, Dr. Demitrios Argyriades from the United Nations, Prof. Fannie Cloete from South Africa and Dr. Oladipupo Adamolekun from the World Bank.

Dr. Argyriades remarked on the powerful potential of the use of ICTs by a non-governmental and financially handicapped sector that can promote networks among the governance actors if this potential is satisfied. E-Governance impact on the relationships among the government, NGOs and the citizens can be more researched in order to build better strategies to find adequate public service delivery by the NGOs to the recipient citizens.

Prof. Cloete emphasized the issues of digital divides (plural) in different social sectors, and different countries and among NGOs, which are common in many societies. Both government and NGOs need to tackle the   conditions and expectations for e-government, in order to rectify the digital divides and to promote the potentials of e-governance. Capacity building approach for the e-governance is a needed strategy for these "divides" issues.

ICTs can make access more direcly to information and knowledge from any place. In a short term, Prof. Cloete, after having examined the three cases, warned that NGOs need to revise their strategies to create appropriate relations between NGOs and the

government, and between NGOs and the client citizens. However, NGOs' potential in empowerment of the civil society as evidenced in WTO, environment or human rights issues, globally and locally, can be the essential issues in governance, and hence the issues of e-governance can be more seriously attended by NGOs and other governance actors .

Dr. Adamolekun made remarks on the social networks to be facilitated by the use of ICTs. ICTs capability to enable direct contact and with speed are changing the relationships to be brought about between the government and the citizens, in which NGOs if their roles were intermediary, need to be seriously addressed. He pointed out the danger of such capability, as there is a risk involved by direct communication to be made available between the citizens and the government in a certain society. He asserted the basic need of the NGOs to function in a society, and in governance, whether it is real or virtual. As regards the cost of e-governance, it can be born by tax payers, as in the case of Hong Kong. In certain country like Democratic Congo, when the government could not provide public services or e-governance, it was the NGOs (to bear the cost of e-governance). The "divides" of NGOs among countries need to be addressed in order to make the appropriate use of the e-governance in each country.

In this panel, we learned that e-governance is not devolved as yet in many countries, particularly in the civil society organizations. The NGOs and CSOs are still in incipient state in the case countries, despite advanced ICT utilization in these countries in other sectors.

The panel demonstrated three key emerging issues of NGOs when they work in e-governance: (1) inferior position of NGOs among other actors of governance; (2) acute need for capacity building for e-governance in both NGOs and the recipient citizens; (3) changing relations among governance actors that are becoming the threats to some type of NGOs and the civil society. Sound governance, whether real or virtual, need to attend these issues so that the governance can be improved.

The Panel felt that there is a need to improve the knowledge and information on the experience of NGOs in e-governance by learning more cases. To facilitate such learning, the organizer, Prof. Kaneko made a proposal as a conclusion, to organize a global network of information on the roles of NGOs in e-governance. This proposal was unanimously supported by the panel.

The Asia Pacific Panel has been organized as an annual series of reviewing the experiences of national governance in the Asia and Pacific countries. The first meeting of the panel was held under the theme of "Regional Cooperation and Integration Efforts in Public Management in the Asia-Pacific Region -A Comparative Approach-" in 2000. It discussed the experiences and future perspectives in the Asia-Pacific Region under the theme of "From Government to Governance" in 2001. The third meeting in 2002 was convened under "Role Sharing and Collaboration between Governments and NGOs for National Development." The panel has always been making efforts to focus on the civil society in the governance context, to enrich the knowledge about the Asia-Pacific governance and to promote mutual understanding among different countries and regions.

Knowledge and information about the Asia-Pacific governance is very scarce because of some political and cultural reasons. Thus, the meetings of the Asia-Pacific Panel have contributed greatly to accumulate the valuable knowledge and information on the Asia-Pacific governance.

By constructing the above-mentioned global network, these knowledge and information accumulated already and in the future by the meetings of the Asia-Pacific Panel can be better utilized for further understanding of the governance situation in the Asia-Pacific region.