

## **Integrated Human Capacity Building in the Age of Decentralization**

### **Editorial Note**

Local Autonomy College (LAC) is the research and training arm of the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication. It houses the Local Government Center of Eastern Regional Organization for Public Administration (EROPA). Located in Tokyo, the Center is one of three research hubs for EROPA members, along with one in South Korea and another in India. The Tokyo Center has been active in promoting and deepening knowledge and understanding of public administration, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.

As a part of an academic project, the EROPA Local Government Center publishes a monograph series, *Comparative Public Administration*, every three years. To date, LAC has published a total of ten volumes dealing with such pertinent issues as democracy, development, civil society, fiscal issue, etc., primarily in the context of local government and governance. As in the past, LAC organized a small committee to consider an umbrella theme for the eleventh volume. The committee is made up of: Professors Osamu Koike (Yokohama National University), Akio Kamiko (Ritsumeikan University), Masao Kikuchi (Meiji University) and Akira Nakamura (Meiji University), the last being the chair of the meeting. After a number of discussions, the members of the committee decided to organize the eleventh volume around the issue of 'integrated human capacity building in the context of decentralization' for a number of compelling reasons which will be elaborated on later in this section.

In this coming issue, a total of eight manuscripts from eight different countries have been submitted. The manuscripts are printed in the volume according to the alphabetical order of the name of the countries. In addition, after consultation with LAC, the committee decided to invite Professor Tony Bovaird of the Institute of Local Government Study (INLOGOV) and Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham, to be a special guest contributor to the volume. Professor Bovaird, a frequent traveler to Japan, is a noted scholar of public management in Europe. In this volume, he has contributed a highly intriguing product, striving laboriously to define what capacity building is about. He has introduced a number of theoretical tools to highlight the significance of the capacity building idea. Hence 'the market-based view,' 'the resource-based view' and 'the organizational learning approach' are central to his conceptual contribution to the notion of capacity building. With this theoretical overview, Bovaird has provided several pragmatic examples by taking the UK as a reference point. His British perspective certainly helps enrich understanding of the problems in the Asia-Pacific region.

Some short background information is first in order to explain the umbrella theme of the current eleventh volume. The countries in the EROPA region have

been facing a host of daunting challenges — some of these are political, while others are either economic or societal. In fact, some are hard pressed to prove their very legitimacy, needing to consolidate democracy and entrench a good governance framework. Other countries are likewise required to deal with improving the quality of 'governance.'

A comparative survey of democracy, *The Democracy Index*, measures this issue by monitoring 60 different criteria in a sum of 167 countries. The result indicates that, as far as the Asia-Pacific region is concerned, the average democracy index for the entire area stands at 5.51 out of a total score of ten. The region is ranked fourth out of seven in the world following Northern America (8.59), Western Europe (8.40) and Latin and the Caribbean countries (6.35). In the Asia-Pacific region, some are classified as countries with 'Full Democracy.' However, many are grouped in the sub-category 'Flawed Democracy.' Still others in the region come at the lower end of the democracy rating; these are designated in the sub-category 'Authoritarian Regime.' Many states in the area seem to have much to be desired to improve the quality of governance, which ought eventually to become on par with the expanding scale of economy of the countries.

Aside from political issues, the states in the region are confronted with economic challenges. Countries in Asia have experienced rapid economic growth and several statistical data confirm the changing economic outlook of the region. During the 1970s, the agrarian sector consisted of 35% of the total industrial structure in Asia, while the manufacturing sector accounted for only 29%. By the year 2000, farming had been reduced to 16%, while the manufacturing and the service sectors had increased to 32% and 36%, respectively. In addition, urbanization has similarly become conspicuous in the area, with the total urban population increasing from 19% in the early 1970s to 37% by the turn of the 21st century.

This rapid economic transformation has frequently resulted in several critical challenges to government. A growing income disparity is one of them — in some of the Asian states, income inequality between the urban and rural populaces has become tangible. Poverty has mainly developed extensively in the agrarian sector. An increasing number of underprivileged abandon the rural area and move to the congested megatropolis. In some countries of the region, the government is required to extend both financial help and human resource support to these troubled rural sectors.

Given these problematic circumstances, human resource capacity building has developed to be one of the critical issues in many countries particularly in the EROPA region. Although fast growing, many of them still remain at the developing state stage. In some countries, economic growth has been quite rapid; however, the speed of expansion does not often come in tandem with human resource development. A serious discrepancy would frequently result between the societal changes inextricable from the economic growth and the lack of competent government personnel who would resolve the problems generated from the speedy expansion. The papers on China, Indonesia, Nepal, Thailand and the Philippines unilaterally point to this schism in their respective treatises.

Unfortunately, in some states, in lieu of the solidifying government management with a group of competent public officials, the expanding scale of the economy invites government corruption and other wrongdoings, thereby expediting a sharp decline of public trust in government. For this reason, too, governments in the respective areas are urgently required to nurture a group of competent public personnel to manage the operation of state administration. In order to achieve this, as the South Korean paper points out, both education and training of new recruits are highly important. With innovative methods, highly-trained public personnel would begin to commit themselves to the growth of governing and governance in their respective states. Likewise, characteristics such as determination and fortitude and most importantly a strong sense of nation-building mission would be improved. Taking these eminent issues in mind, the eleventh volume of *Comparative Public Administration* essentially addresses the critical theme of integrated human capacity building. This issue becomes one of the cores of the volume.

In addition to the growing income gap described above, decentralization has also developed to become an international agenda. Many global organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF stress the importance of decentralization, especially for developing nations. From the perspective of these organizations, decentralization appears necessary to improve the quality of democracy and governance. Consequently, many countries have initiated decentralization and begun to delegate social service delivery functions to local units of governments.

Often, however, decentralization efforts tend to generate a number of impediments in these developing environments. In the Indonesian manuscript, the authors disclose the expanding inequality of human resource development even among neighboring communities. In one area, overstaffing is the case, while understaffing may be simultaneously conspicuous in a different community. Although the degree and quality of the problem may differ, Nepal, the Philippines and Thailand often encounter similar issues.

In various instances, the lack of human resources and capacity building institutions has been compounded by historical reasons. Due to the colonial legacy, many regions have experienced centralization and not decentralization of government. A history and tradition of neighborhood government is relatively new in these regions. In many cases, a host of pressing issues is taken care of by the center and rather than by local governments: hence well-trained human resources tend to be clustered in the national government. These are one of the common threads in the political system of the region including China. Many local areas would not have enough qualified personnel to deal with a large score of perennial issues that are inextricable from the decentralization rhetoric.

As a result, developing states often times face a serious dilemma — on the one hand, pressure from different international organizations has required a decentralized system of government. On the other hand, however, they lack the human resources to meet this mandate. Developing a horde of trained personnel to be involved in local government management and practice has thus become a critical issue in various countries. In short, a central theme of this current volume is: The

role of central and the function of local units of governments in alleviating the shortage of human resources in the context of decentralization. Many approaches have spun off from this core question.

The editor of this volume feels extremely privileged to have received such excellent papers. These monographs will certainly help government decision makers in the region to reconsider the importance of capacity building. Similarly, these leaders will hopefully give another thought to examining the personnel issue against the background of the ongoing spread of decentralization. In October, 2013, Japan is expected to host a general assembly of the EROPA meeting. It is expected that the forthcoming Tokyo conference will become an additional platform for the discussion of human capacity development in the field of decentralization. Last but not least, the editor would like to thank all contributors for their time and effort. He would also like to reiterate his utmost appreciation to Professor Tony Bovaird for his contribution to this volume. On behalf of the Local Autonomy College, I hope this volume will be able to contribute the development of public administration in the Asia-Pacific region.

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