**Paragon Regional Governance Programme (PRGP)**
Participatory Action Research to Advance Governance Options and Networks

Sustainable human development increases choice. Humane governance strengthens the enabling environment for sustainable human development. There are no set formulas for realising these objectives. Societal action learning is required. The Paragon Regional Governance Programme will develop governance policy options for the following components : Rights and development, public and private sector accountability, and decentralisation and local empowerment. Action areas with strong synergies vis-à-vis these components and each other are: freedom of information and transparency; parliamentary, judicial, governmental, media, and civil society oversight mechanisms; contracting and procurement systems; local financial capacity; humane governance training; and, indices and indicators for benchmarking advances in governance. Participatory action research activities include policy analysis and advocacy, implementation support for innovative governance projects, and learning experience case studies. Within each national and sub-regional context, as well as at the regional level, a small set of components, action areas and activities will be selected. These will be undertaken and utilised by parliamentarians and media personnel committed to work for humane governance for sustainable human development, as well as by other individual and institutional change agents.

1.1 **Background**

Lack of respect for human rights, government and corporate corruption, and centralisation and low levels of possibilities for effective community participation, are three significant impediments to humane governance for SHD in Asia and the Pacific. They form part of the "crisis of governance" in South Asia. They contributed to the financial and economic crisis in South East Asia and/or to the intensity of the consequences of the same. They are among the principal obstacles to transformative processes in the transitional societies. They corrode the social cohesion necessary for Pacific island societies to adapt to the impact of globalisation.

Corruption can be reduced through measures that promote integrity, transparency, and public and private accountability, subsequently to be referred to simply as **accountability**. The empowerment of local populations through **decentralisation** can correct the negative effects of excessive centralisation. **Rights** as values, attitudes, the basis for social relations, and legal and institutional norms, can reduce prevailing levels of social inequity. Improvements in accountability, decentralisation, and rights can significantly strengthen humane governance for SHD. These entry points are also interrelated.
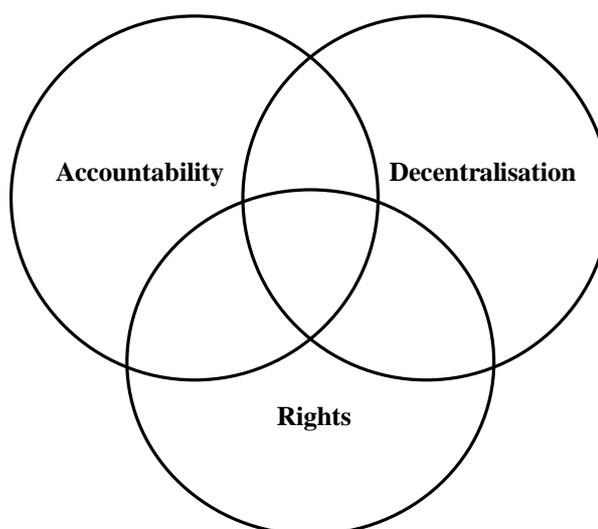
For example, low levels of accountability condition high levels of corruption that are prejudicial to rights. Decentralisation under appropriate conditions can improve accountability and hence enhance rights. These points of intersection create opportunities for strong synergies between the entry points. This constitutes part of the definition of "high leverage". It also opens the possibility for the identification of "high leverage" activities that can simultaneously contribute to two or even all three of the strategic entry points. Of course there is nothing mechanical about these relationships. The potential for synergies is there but effective realisation requires vision, mission, networks, and resources to undertake effective actions in accordance with the prevailing conditions.

1.2 Components, Action Areas and Rationale

The components of the programme are:

a. *Rights and Development*
b. *Public and Private Sector Accountability*
c. *Decentralisation and Local Empowerment*

Since each of these components still cover a range of issues, further focus is achieved for the PRGP by concentrating on a set of action areas. Action areas with strong synergies vis-à-vis these components and each other are:

1. Freedom of information and transparency;
2. Parliamentary, judicial, governmental, media, and civil society oversight mechanisms;
3. Contracting and procurement systems;
4. Local financial capacity;
5. Humane governance training;
6. Indices and indicators for benchmarking advances in governance.

The rationales for the selection of the action areas follow.

Freedom Of Information And Transparency

Open access and the free flow of information can contribute significantly to the promotion and protection of rights, as well as to accountability and anti-corruption. Where there are low levels of transparency rights may be little known and little respected. The possibility of citizen recourse and redress are also limited by a lack of information. Corruption abhors transparency. Accountability is responsibility for actions based on transparency about actions and their results.

Decentralisation does not automatically guarantee greater levels of transparency. However, one of the keys to local empowerment is precisely citizen access to information. When there is a lack of transparency information is power. When there is open access and free flows of information, transparency can empower. Hence decentralisation with local empowerment requires transparency.

The freedom of information whether through constitutional provisions, parliamentary acts, or other legal instruments, elevates access to information to the level of a right in and of itself. This right will become increasing important in the ongoing transition from the industrial age to knowledge age.

Parliamentary, Judicial, Governmental, Media, And Civil Society Oversight Mechanisms

Transparency permits oversight. The more actors there are with access to information fulfilling their oversight roles the stronger rights and accountability tend to be.

Parliaments generally have a dual role, legislative policy analysis and decision-making on one hand and legislative oversight on compliance and effectiveness on the other. The latter provides an important source of feedback for the legislative process. The Auditor General or Comptroller General organisms in most countries report to parliament and contribute another level of oversight, not only in the financial field but also increasingly through management, ecological, gender and social auditing.

The judiciary exercises oversight over the administration of justice in general, including respect for rights, accountability, and ant-corruption. The civil and political, economic and social rights, that underpin citizen empowerment may also be protected and advanced by legal means.

Governmental oversight entails numerous regulatory functions usually exercised through commissions. These may include official human rights commissions, independent commissions against corruption, and internal auditing functions, among others.

The role of investigative journalism and civil society monitoring of processes, policies, practices, and cases has proven to be increasingly important in recent decades. Transparency, accountability, and rights have all been defended and promoted through these mechanisms. Independence vis-à-vis the prevailing power structure is frequently their value added. Providing voice for those with least power is another frequent contribution.

The synergies between these levels of oversight are very important. The end effect of much media or NGO oversight is to activate official oversight mechanisms that are not adequately doing their job. Mutual oversight between the oversight entities is the answer to the classical dilemma of "who polices the police". Both formal and informal checks and balances (such as those exercised by the media and civil society) can be most important.

Many societies are characterised by strong positive synergies between all of these forms of oversight. Other are characterised by weak or negative synergies. These virtuous or vicious circles create "rich get richer and the poor get poorer" types of situations. To break out of vicious circles is always a challenge. However, recent historical experience indicates that even a single oversight mechanism can activate all of the others. (For example, the Milan group of judges in Italy).

Contracting And Procurement

One of the most significant sources of corrupt transactions between public officials and private sector actors involves contracting and procurement processes. All of the issues of integrity, transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption come into play in these processes. The advantages of this entry point is that ample international and national experience exists, new and innovative solutions to improve the situation are already available, and dialogues on the issues involved condense into positive actions

Local Financial Capacity

There has been significant transfers of functions and programmes to the local level in recent years in many countries. However, they have frequently not been accompanied by the transfer of the resources needed to assume them effectively. Financial dependence on the centre also reduces the capacity of decentralised governance to set and achieve objectives at each level (provincial, municipal, sub-municipal). Local empowerment increases in significance with increases in local financial capacity. There now exists an emerging practice of new and innovative options to improve local financial capacity.

Humane Governance Training

In recent years, there has been an accelerated introduction of the concepts of governance, good governance, and humane governance in many countries. These concepts are now frequently an integral part of public debate. However, speed has outpaced understanding. The curricula and training programmes of judicial, civil service, and media training institutions also tend to have a time-lag vis-à-vis public discourse. There is also the challenge of operationalising these concepts into instrumental action. Training can contribute to ameliorate these situations. Finally, training can provide the opportunity to systematically disseminate among key actors the policy analysis and advocacy, support project, and learning experience case studies generated by the project. Special modules will intensively cover issues on the prioritised action areas: freedom of information and transparency , oversight mechanisms, contracting and procurement, local financial capacity, and indicators and indices to permit benchmarking.

Indices And Indicators For Benchmarking

The evaluation of governance advances requires conceptual and methodological instruments. To the extent that their epistemological basis is relatively standardised information and analysis becomes more comparable. Therefore, the PRGP can contribute inputs along these lines for sub-national, national, sub-regional, and regional actors. A continual consultative process and dialogue to ensure that the products generated are useful for the purposes of these actors will also elevate their effective utilisation of these products.

2. Programme Strategy

The vastness and diversity of Asia and the Pacific, and even of the sub-regions, as well as the breadth of humane governance and the components, even as specified into action areas, make necessary a rigorous selectivity and prioritisation at every step of the programme strategy. Selectivity, prioritisation, and synergies are required for the operationalisation of the components, the countries in which activities are to be undertaken, the identification of actions, and the incorporation of actors. The programme

strategy is also oriented by the criteria for regional programmes of UNDP's Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (RBAP).

Not all of the components or all of the action areas should necessarily be applied to all countries. They constitute a menu to focus the programme. The specific focus in a particular country depends on the opportunities and constraints that condition the possibilities for positive results. Mechanical applications of the conceptual framework should be avoided.

Countries

Given current budgetary levels the programme contemplates core execution in 8 countries. The initial target is for two countries to participate from each of the four sub-regions:

> -South Asia (includes West Asia)
> -South East Asia
> -North East Asia
> -Pacific

Country Selection Criteria Substantive programme activities, such as support to innovative pilot projects, development of policy analysis papers and documents, and production of learning experience case studies will only be undertaken in those countries that meet the following criteria : (a) The host government endorses the programme document (b) Committed national partner organisations already doing work within one of the six action areas (c) The UNDP Country Office in that country indicates that the programme either complements, or strengthens its own national governance programme and (d) The UNDP CO shows its commitment to the programme by agreeing to spare some professional staff time and effort towards furthering the goals of the programme. Countries that do not match this criteria are, of course, not precluded from attendance at regional and sub-regional meetings, or the receipt of programme documents, for learning experience purposes. Additional countries for core activities above and beyond eight will only be possible with co-financing from other donors. It is important not to dilute the already limited programme resources by over-extension.

Actions

No cost and low cost activities will be prioritised over those that require significant expenditures. The no cost and low cost activities are possible in relation to networking, alliance building, advocacy and lobbying activities. Support for new emerging actors will also be prioritised for these types of activities. Activities that require significant expenditures will be subject to even greater selectivity, prioritisation, and synergy requirements. They must relate to key policy lacuna or debates, be creative and innovative, as well as preferably combine two or more thematic areas of focus and multiple actors. This is the case with the support to innovative projects, learning experience case studies, and policy analysis documents. The number of these activities to

be budgeted will be limited (See Section on "Implementation Strategy"). Competitive mechanisms will be employed to generate multiple proposals and select the most promising.

Training activities will be focalised differently. Training packages will be prepared in a standardised fashion in such a way as to provide for adaptation in different countries. One of the mechanisms for this purpose will be the preparation of country and sector specific case studies, in addition to the use of international case studies for comparative purposes. These packages may be adapted for parliamentary, judicial, civil service and media personnel. Distribution and the training of trainers from relevant institutions will be "wholesale" rather than "retail" to the extent possible. In other words, it will be through professional associations and groupings that cover the entire region or sub-regions.

For regional, sub-regional, and national-level meetings partnerships will be established, where possible, that will include as one of their tenets the sharing of costs. The magnitude of cost sharing criterion will be one criterion, among multiple others, in the selection of activities through competitive processes.

The actions to be undertaken can be divided into three basic categories:

(a) Policy Analysis and Advocacy
(b) Implementation Support to Innovative Projects (Selection Criteria in Annex IX)
(c) Learning Experiences/Case Studies

Support for the countries of the region may be undertaken through all three actions in succession, or one or two of them separately, depending on the situation of the action area in that country. Assistance to each country will be tailor made within the framework of the menu of actions, types of activities, and action areas. For example, in regard to the actions:

-If there is no policy and/or law or if the policy, and/or law requires revision, the starting point is Action (a).

-It there is a policy and/law but it is not being implemented, or if it is being implemented deficiently, the starting point is Action (b).

-If there are both a policy and/or law and implementation is acceptable the starting point is Action (c).

The types of activities that may be undertaken in a participating country with regard to the actions are the following:

a) **Policy Analysis And Advocacy**
   - Policy analysis documents
   - Model policies/laws
   - Workshops

- Advocacy activities (direct, media)

b) Implementation Support to Innovative Projects
- Implementation strategies
- Resource allocation analysis/recommendations
- Trouble-shooting consultancies
- Workshops
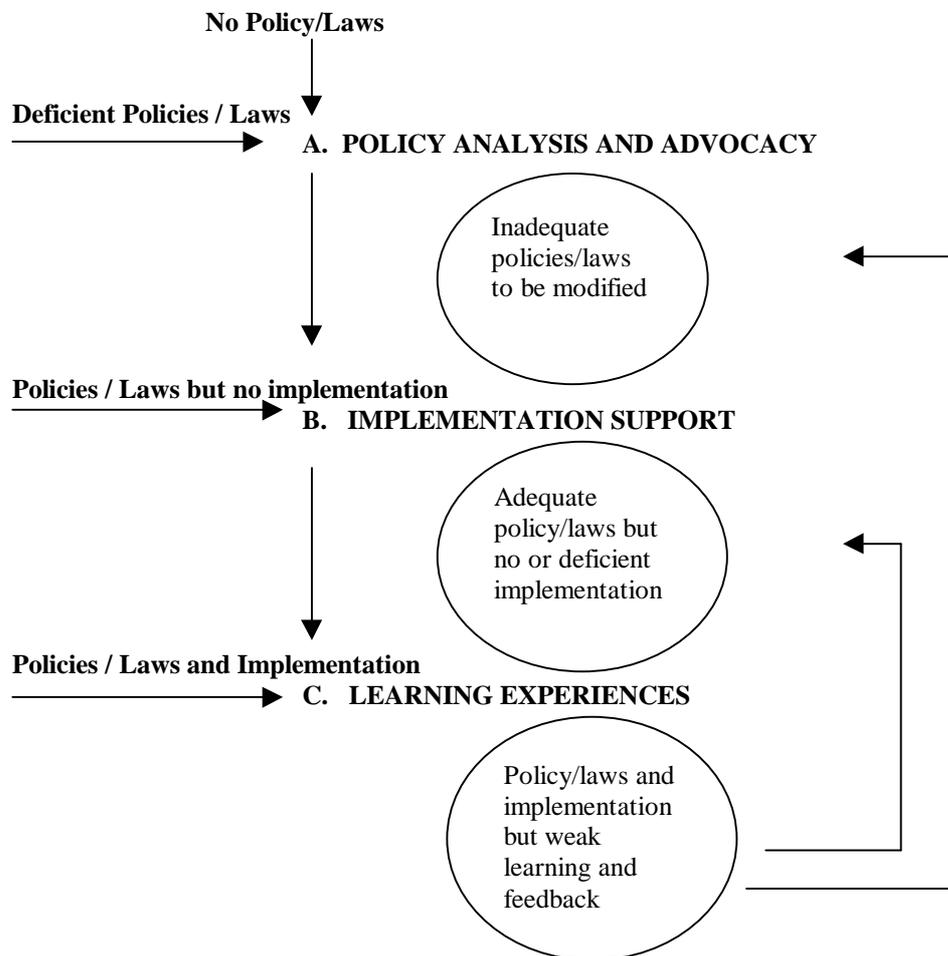- Implementation advocacy activities (direct, media)

c) Learning Experiences
- Case studies
- Evaluations
- Learning experience analysis/recommendations
- Workshops
- Learning experience advocacy (direct, technical publications, media)
- Book on global learning experience of the PRGP

The types of activities to be undertaken depend on the analysis of the situation of a country as compared to the menu.

Some of these types of activities may also be replicated at the sub-regional and/or regional level. Some may also be undertaken at the sub-regional or regional level when their sensitive nature makes this more desirable, when economies of scale are required (for example, countries too small to take viable stand-alone actions), and when comparative analysis between different countries and sub-regions is highly useful. Another aspect of the regional and sub-regional nature of the project is that all of the learning experiences will be widely disseminated throughout the region for the benefit of all of the countries.

A chart follows which depicts the basic relationships described above:

No Policy/Laws

Deficient Policies / Laws

A. POLICY ANALYSIS AND ADVOCACY

Inadequate
policies/laws
to be modified

Policies / Laws but no implementation

B. IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT

Adequate
policy/laws but
no or deficient
implementation

Policies / Laws and Implementation

C. LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Policy/laws and
implementation
but weak
learning and
feedback

Actors

Parliamentarians, media personnel, and change agents from the state, civil society, and private sectors, as well as civil service entry level and staff college trainees, are prioritised actors in the PRGP.

Parliamentarians and mass media personnel are considered to be particularly strategic for the potential advancement of humane governance in the prioritised areas of human rights, accountability, and decentralisation. The executive has direct responsibilities, and at times vested interests, in relation to these areas. Parliament and the media, as well as civil society can be effective social instruments for lobbying executive transformations. External co-operation has supported these reform efforts in many countries. The additionalities that parliamentarians and the media can bring to these efforts are considerable, both in relation to the executive branch of government and the rest of society.

In change management it is well known that external drivers are important for the initiation of reform processes, as well as for keeping them on track. Parliament and the

media are here again well positioned to play this role with the support of other social actors. Executive involvement in judicial reform should be limited to preserve the independence of the powers of State. Legislative involvement is inevitable given that judicial reform invariably requires multiple levels of legislative approvals. The power of public opinion that can be mobilised through the media can also be crucial in motivating the initiation, orientation, and continuation of reform efforts.

The potential synergy between parliamentarians and media personnel working in the same direction on key issues is considerable. That potential may be further enhanced through synergies with key change agents in government, civil society, and the private sector. That is the configuration that can produce truly national public policies with broad based support throughout society (as opposed to state policies supported by all powers of state and parliamentary parties, parliamentary policies supported by the majority, governmental policies supported by cabinet, and ministerial policies supported by one or more ministries).

These three groups (parliamentarians, media personnel, and other change agents) will be formed in networks that can meet separately or together as a network of networks, at the national, sub-regional, and regional levels. The initial numbers of these groups in project activities will be small. It will be the reproductive capacity of the networks themselves that will determine their ultimate dimensions.

High-level governmental decision-makers, however, are not absent from the logic of the programme despite not being prioritised actors. **Policy analysis documents** will be directly disseminated among governmental, civil society, and private sector decision makers who affect the policies of their organisations. Parliamentarians, media personnel, and other change agents may employ these PRGP products for their decision-making, advocacy, and lobbying efforts. The **Paragon Groups** may attempt to influence governmental decision-makers, as well as other sectors, in their alliance building, advocacy, and lobbying efforts.

Training Packages are highly focussed. They concentrate on entry level and staff college civil and judicial service trainees and media personnel. It is considered that civil service training institutions are an effective mechanism to reach the civil service as a corps. Media personnel are defined as journalists, editors, managers, and owners. Prior experience in involving the media in reform processes indicates that managers and owners in addition to journalists and editors must become involved in the change process if media contents are to be supportive. These same training packages could also be extended to other sectors, always with the necessary adaptations, if additional resources were to be mobilised.

Policy support documents and training packages activities will be sub-contracted to policy think tanks, academic and NGO research institutes, and educational and training institutions, from within the Asia Pacific region. They will thus constitute another level of programme actors denominated "partner institutions".