

Global Network Conference Report
The Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation
John F. Kennedy School of Government
April 2005

Overview

One-hundred and eighty international leaders, scholars, and practitioners gathered April 12-14 at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government for the first biannual Global Network Conference of the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation. The conference, titled "Making Democratic Government Work: Connecting Principle and Practice," discussed, debated, and shared examples regarding the best ways to harness government innovation and promote and sustain democratic governance.

The format of the conference endeavored to take full advantage of the wisdom and expertise of the attendees, many of whom were leading thinkers and senior members of governments, NGOs, corporations, and academia. Thus, the traditional conference format was replaced with "interactive sessions" that centered on specific exemplar "cases" which were discussed and debated through round-table and facilitated plenary discussions. The format produced rich insight in each of the four thematic sessions summarized below:

1. Innovations in Structure, Law, Policy for Democratic Governance in Divided Societies

This session, convened by Jane Mansbridge, Adams Professor of Political Leadership and Democratic Values, Kennedy School of Government, and G. L. Peiris, former Minister of Constitutional Affairs, Sri Lanka, focused on constitutional innovation. Faced with "an extraordinary moment in history," the panelists argued that democracies in divided societies needed non-institutional as well as institutional innovations to ensure security, peace, stability, and justice. The panel discussed three such innovations:

1. Inclusive redistricting in eThekweni (Durban), presented by Mike Sutcliffe, Ethekewini Municipal Manager, South Africa.
2. Representation and cultural identity among the Cherokee in the United States, Chief Brad Smith, Cherokee Nation.
3. Land reform, decentralization, and participation in Bolivia, Ronald McLean Abaroa, former mayor of La Paz and former minister, Bolivia.

The session discussions raised several key issues warranting further pursuit. With the advent of democracy came also the "democratization of corruption." How can we prevent this linkage? In many cases, democratization has been accompanied by decentralization. However, more must still be done to rationalize authority and budgetary capacity with

responsibility at the local level. An issue underpinning much of the discussion of democracy was its definition: What is the core “package” of what we consider democracy? “Liberal” democracy adds to elections and the ideal of equal power the elements of a bill of rights, judicial independence, and the rule of law. Good governance, while not part of any formal definition, seems crucial. In the economic and social realm, many are asking whether democracy benefits the poor; is there a positive correlation between democracy and poverty reduction? Finally, as all three of the cases discussed in this session demonstrated, protecting, preserving, and incorporating cultural identity should be an integral part of building democracy in plural societies.

2. Innovations in Citizen Involvement

Faced with the need to create a more effective and accountable government, Mayor Jesse Robredo of Naga City, Philippines, asked himself the question: “Should we impose or should we engage?” As with Naga City, many governments are experimenting with new modalities for enhancing governance through participation. Two such efforts were presented in this session, moderated by Yu Keping, Director of the China Center for Comparative Politics & Economics, Center for Chinese Government, and Archon Fung, Associate Professor of Public Policy, Kennedy School of Government:

1. The Citizen’s Charter and Charter Mark, presented by Roy Stephenson, Deputy Director in the Office of Public Services Reform in the Cabinet Office, Citizen's Charter, UK.
2. I-Governance, presented by Jesse Robredo, mayor, Naga City, Philippines.

Discussion throughout the session centered on whether and how structured citizen engagement impacts public service delivery and governance issues such as transparency. Some stressed the information that citizens can provide to government, while others emphasized the importance of mechanisms for citizens to hold officials accountable, demonstrated by the UK's citizen's charters. Another argument was that engagement can set into motion a “feedback loop” that drives internal improvements in government. Such a loop has been effective in Naga City, as citizens there can communicate directly with responsible municipal officials on service-delivery concerns. The participatory budgeting experience in Porto Alegre (Brazil), for example, seems to have led to greater tax compliance and, hence, more revenues for government services. Toward the end of the session, participants raised broader issues, such as the role of traditional representation in the face of the emergence of participatory mechanisms, the intrinsic and instrumental value of participation, and the roles of citizens, consumers, and clients in these mechanisms. Finally, Yu Keping posited that, at least in the Chinese experience, citizen engagement seems to occur in regions with lower socio-economic indicators; what, then, might be the correlation between poverty and participation?

3. Innovations in Service Delivery Aimed at Reaching the Poor and Excluded

The human toll engendered by global poverty was described as a “silent tsunami.” What innovations can be promoted that help stem this tragic tide? This session, co-convened by Erna Witoalar, UN Special Ambassador for the Millennium Development Goals, and Michael Walton, Lecturer in International Development, Kennedy School of Government, examined three examples of such innovation and raised a number of critical questions facing policy makers concerned with improving service delivery to the poor and excluded:

1. Improving Educational Opportunities in Tanah Datar, Indonesia, Masriadi Martunus, Bupati, Tanah Datar.
2. Engaging the Poor for Safer Cities in Dar es Salaam, Anna Mtani, Coordinator of the Safer Cities Dar es salaam Program.
3. Improving Lives in Bogotá, Antanas Mockus, former Mayor, Bogotá.

In some cases, decentralization has played a central role in bringing services “closer to the poor” has been successful, as was the case in Tanah Datar district. However, as was illustrated in the Dar es Salaam experience, new local responsibilities (such as in policing) without the commensurate resources to carry them out has the reverse effect. Thus, a central question for ongoing discussion is how decentralization processes should be designed to ensure they benefit the poor and historically excluded.

A second area, vividly illustrated by former Bogotá mayor Antanas Mockus, is how services such as water, can be structured to expand their coverage to include new (poor) citizens. Bogotá accomplished this task by first building trust among citizens to encourage collaboration in rationing and cross-subsidization of services.

4. The Innovations Process

This session drew from the worldwide network of innovations awards programs in order to provide a framework for understanding innovation processes. The session was co-convened by Erwin Schwella, Professor of Public Leadership of the School of Public Management, Stellenbosch University, South Africa, and Marta Farah, Project Director of the Public Management and Citizenship Program at the Fundação Getulio Vargas, Brazil. Examples of innovation were presented by: Rhoda Kadalie, Executive Director, Impumelelo Innovations Award Trust, South Africa; Tonatiuh Guillén, Executive Coordinator, Local Government Award, CIDE, Mexico, and; Gonzalo de la Maza, Executive Director, Citizenship and Local Management, Chile.

At its broadest, innovation is a “creative response to a public problem.” Yet, as several conference participants pointed out, innovation is not inherently democratic. Many

authoritarian regimes have been highly innovative. Hence, it is important to be clear about the *ends* to which innovations is a *means*. These ends can be thought of as the values associated with innovation...*innovation for what?*

At the process level, panel and table discussions examined in depth the drivers for innovation as well as the requirements for their sustainability and dissemination. In Mexico, for example, according to Tonatiu Guillén, both internal reform, and external social pressures (such as by NGOs) push innovation. Elsewhere decentralization and democratization have opened new spaces and new demands for innovation. In addition to contextual factors, what is the role of leadership in ushering innovation, especially in the face of political or bureaucratic resistance? We heard an excellent example of such leadership in the South African Impumelelo award winner Rural Mobile Community Service Centre, in which Mohammed Wahab single-handedly fashioned new outreach vans from junk yard scraps after repeated rejections for funding to reach rural and marginalized populations with government services. Finally, many asked whether all government levels and all scales are equally conducive to innovation. For example, the Chilean award program's experience is that innovation occurs more at the periphery and less from large-scale, top down agency actions. Others argued that innovation occurs at all levels and scales, albeit with different characteristics.

Cross-cutting Issues

Several “tensions” related to innovation and democratic governance threaded through all of the conference sessions: the relationship between the center and periphery; between government and the private and social sectors; and between citizen and government. Many of these issues relate to the blurring of boundaries brought on by globalization and decentralization, whether manifested by local governments' needs to take on service delivery previously provided by national government or by NGO implementation of “government” services. Embedded within all of these tectonic shifts we found, in this conference, myriad examples of innovation, for example, in social control techniques that ranged from “horizontal solidarity” in cross-subsidizing water provision to citizen-led policing at the local government level.

Another common denominator found in nearly all case discussions was the primordial role of context in both understanding the problems and in crafting the innovations to solve them. Given our conclusion that context underpins innovation, how, then, do we embark on the dissemination of innovation? What points enable the adaptation of innovation from one local context to another? Participants identified as means to promoting innovation leadership, social networks, and the ability to take nuanced and complex events and give them a narrative “story” that others can listen to and understand. Finally, it was clear that innovations are value-neutral. It is up to people to shape them into instruments of social, economic, and political benefit to society.

Next Steps

The concluding conference session introduced the Global Network and invited participants to form themselves into groups to identify topics and activities for further exploration. Four groups have been formed and will begin developing activities:

1. Innovations Process
2. Service Delivery to the Poor
3. Forms and Mechanisms for Citizen Involvement
4. Modalities of Democracy

The preliminary activities of these groups may lead, depending on their momentum and impact, to fully formed communities of practice. Additionally, non-conference participants will be invited in subsequent outreach efforts to join this and other Global Network activities.

The next Global Conference sponsored by the Ash Institute will take place in 2007. Its thrust will be informed by the outcomes of this conference and the ensuing activities of the Global Network.