

Preface

Several chapters in this book were first published in a special issue of the journal *Public Organization Review* (POR, December 2013). As well as containing revised versions of some of these texts, the book contains several new texts. The book therefore addresses a wide scope of contemporary policy and governance issues in South, Southeast and East Asia. In the chapters, the issues are addressed from the angle of specific countries and through comparative studies of several countries (naturally, not all the Asian countries are discussed). Furthermore, the issues are researched using several theoretical perspectives and methods. Many of the chapters were presented at the conference “*Governance and Public Policy in South and South East Asia*”, which was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh and organized by the Master in Public Policy and Governance program at North South University.

Governance is a highly contested concept and the discourse on it encompasses a wide range of issues. Governance can include top-down administrative practices prescribed by national authorities or by transnational and multilateral institutions, but also inclusive practices that allow for greater representativeness and participation by more than just government actors. Sometimes governance practices involve central-state steering or the building of state capacity to arrest the hollowing out of the state; in other contexts the practices may involve decentralizing state power and setting up partnerships with non-governmental actors.

The regions of South, Southeast, and East Asia provide interesting cases to study from governance and policy perspectives because of their diverse nature, not only in terms of size, culture, and geography, but also due to socio-political and economic developments. Some have been very efficient in using state initiatives, combining them with market mechanisms to promote rapid economic development. The Southeast and East Asian nations have been in the forefront of rapid economic development, with China following closely on their heels. The South Asian case, however, presents a puzzle: despite high economic growth, these countries fare poorly on most governance indicators. They display weak redistribution of wealth and thus are failing to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor. As a result of weak governance, South Asia’s citizens suffer from a lack of security and safety, and human development has been poor. Generalized trust in society is weak, and citizens’ trust in some public institutions has been low. This has negatively affected the prospect

of inclusive and representative governance. South Asian civil-service organizations present a case where politicization has caused neutrality, representativeness, and the quality of government to deteriorate.

The chapters in this volume focus on a number of challenging issues ranging from the paradox of good governance, trust in public institutions, administrative reforms, network governance, women in public administration, and the World Bank's worldwide governance indicators and their implications for human development.

The book is a result of scholarly networks that have developed over a number of years. The networks, which have contributed to building North-South and South-South collaborations, have spawned numerous research projects, publications, conferences, and seminars. In this regard, there are several institutions and individuals to whom we owe deep debts of gratitude. We would like to thank the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) for generously supporting programs such as the Norwegian Program for Development, Research and Education (NUFU), Norad's Program for Master Studies (NOMA) and now the Norwegian Program for Capacity Development in Higher Education and Research for Development (NORHED). This support has been crucial for bringing together scholars from the North and South, all of whom have contributed to the capacity building of higher institutions of learning, especially in the areas of teaching, research, and knowledge dissemination. We would like to thank our colleagues and friends at University of Bergen in Norway, Tribhuvan University in Nepal, North South University in Bangladesh, and University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka for the cooperation and support that led to building North-South as well as South-South academic networks. These networks now also extend to Southeast and East Asian regions. All who are involved in the collegial networks share an interest in governance and policy issues, both in terms of conducting research as well as sharing findings with stakeholders.

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Trends, Issues and Challenges

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