

UNDP Enhancing the Leadership Capacities of Asian Young Leaders on Democratic Governance



A member of the new Afghan Parliament who used to work with the marginalized youth and women in the country, intent now on introducing and supporting laws that “*promote gender equality and non-discrimination of ethnic groups*” in the country. A youth leader from Cambodia who believes that “*effective governance needs a strong contribution from the youth who must have the commitment and self-confidence*” to voice their issues and ideas. An NGO worker from the Philippines who believes that effective “*local governance and autonomy entails policy reforms, capability building and development of governance technologies readily accessible not only to local government units but as well as civil society advocates*”. The head of the legal policy department at the Ministry of Justice in Mongolia intends to provide responsive, professional, timely service to the government and to the public. An activist from India who “*has led many rallies and awareness camps for the cause of the environment and who has a passion to lead groups working for a noble cause*”. A human rights lawyer from Nepal who believes that “*it is necessary to represent all voices in decisions and policies of the state through broad participation and to enhance capacities of stakeholders to participate constructively*”. Representing diverse sectors -- government, civil society organizations, media, academia, and the private sector – and interests – human rights, gender and women’s rights, indigenous peoples’ rights, civil service reform, environmental advocacy, efficient public service delivery, they all arrived with their individual issues and concerns, and all came out with the full knowledge and realization that they share their idealism, energy and commitment with other young leaders from their own countries and from across the region.

These are only a few of the 131 Fellows of the Leadership Course undertaken by the Asian Young Leaders in Governance (AYLG) initiative of the UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok and Regional Centre in Colombo. Supported by four regional programmes – Capacity2015-Asia (programme of the UNDP Capacity Development Group), Asia Regional Governance Programme, the Asia Pacific Gender Mainstreaming Programme, and the Regional Indigenous Peoples’ Programme – the AYLG aims to strengthen the leadership capacities of young leaders in the region towards making them even more potent advocates of change. In partnership with and using leadership modules pioneered by LEAD International, participants were trained on systems thinking for transformational change, cross cultural communications and leadership, conflict resolution and negotiation, and leadership styles tools, as well as on thematic modules on anti-corruption and leadership, gender and leadership, capacity assessment for leadership development, and indigenous peoples and development. The one-week training courses included presentations, interactive group discussions and exercises, regional and country leadership action planning, and simulations. The balance between theory and practice has allowed participants to absorb the modules, and its interactive nature likewise allowed UNDP



to learn from the various experiences and substantive knowledge of the participants towards further improving the course.

Since the AYLG initiative started in 2005, it has conducted one regional leadership course, a leadership training of trainers, and two sub-regional leadership courses. Nine of the Fellows have also been trained as Leadership Trainers, and have been involved in the delivery of the sub-regional leadership courses. Fellows have started e-networking and sharing information and discussing issues. A sub-national rollout of the leadership course has been completed in Bangladesh using their own funding, with Fellows from the country coordinating and facilitating the course. A sub-national rollout is likewise planned in the Philippines in December 2006. In addition to regional initiatives, each country delegation to the course has likewise developed national and sub-national leadership action plans that are expected to take place in 2007.



Receiving very positive evaluation from the participants, the success of the initiative so far can probably be summed up by one participant's remarks: *"Success! The course has made us reflect on our own leadership styles and abilities, and promoted inspiration and energy to aspire to cultivate these qualities in ourselves. Cultural diversity of the group was very enriching and contributed greatly to my learning. Good networking and positive energy all around."*

The initiative has also received support from the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF), which approved a proposal from the UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok for broadening the initiative by building on the experiences and lessons learned from AYLG. A regional adaptation workshop is expected to take place in February 2007, to further adapt the leadership modules to the Asian context, bring in more Asian case studies, and catalyze leadership innovations in the region.