



■ In Profile – Preeta Lall, LOGIN Asia



Preeta Lall is the Executive Director of the Local Governance Initiative and Network (LOGIN). Set up in 2013, she has accompanied the growth and transition of LOGIN to an independent network from the beginning. Prior to working with LOGIN, she was a Senior Thematic Advisor at the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation in India managing the portfolio of partnerships and programs in the area of decentralization and local governance.

She has studied Economics and has earned a Masters in Rural Management from the Institute of Rural Management, Anand, India.

Dear Preeta, first of all thank you for giving us this interview. We appreciate you taking the time. This year, LOGIN Asia joined the DeLoG network as a new Strategic Partner. Therefore, we would like to begin by asking you to introduce LOGIN Asia and to give us a short overview of your work.

I thank DeLoG for reaching out to LOGIN and providing us a space to share information on our work, current preoccupations and aspirations.

LOGIN is an Asia centric transnational knowledge exchange and peer learning network of member institutions focusing on furthering reforms in aid of decentralization and local governance. These diversely mandated institutions come together as a learning community and change coalition to advance just, democratic, transparent and inclusive governance. The membership of LOGIN includes civil society organizations working on issues of local governance, state ministries and departments in charge of local governments, training institutions, think tanks, local government associations and any other institution that champions the cause of local governance.

LOGIN sets and supports learning and change agendas to enable improved ways of working for its member institutions. The network enhances member effectiveness through peer connectedness, knowledge provision and adaptive learning support. The knowledge functions of the network extend from demystifying concepts, to building shared understanding on key themes across geographies, political economic contexts and different types of institutional stakeholders. The network enables access to globally sourced solutions for local needs and development priorities, also working at the cross section of policy, practice and conceptual frames and in doing so, enables collaborations for ‘glocalising’ sustainable development agendas.



Over the years, what have been LOGIN Asia's main insights with regard to Decentralisation and Local Governance in Asia and how can the other DeLoG members benefit from these findings?

At the risk of repeating what is often stated, contextual factors play a significant role in terms of understanding decentralization reform trajectories in all the Asian countries which are represented in LOGIN. The disaggregated drivers influencing the pace and trajectory of decentralized governance range from market transitions, change in leadership and ideological positions of ruling regimes, political or economic crises; post-conflict dynamics and demands; historical legacies (e.g. unitary or federal systems, transitions from military or authoritarian rule, etc.) and economic development strategies. That said, there are a number of issues that resonate across the decentralization journeys of Asian countries. This applies predominantly to the inadequate devolution of functions, finances and functionaries to sub-national or local levels. There is uneven alignment of legislative frameworks for sectoral service delivery with the legal frameworks for decentralization, leaving little space for local governments to decisively intervene in service delivery with sectoral ministries and departments. Even in cases where the decentralization process is backed by a strong legal framework, there is often lack of clarity on the range of functions devolved to different levels of local governments.

Some common concerns across countries of South, South-East and East Asia are shortfalls in institutional, human and technical capacities of local governments on the one hand, and difficulties of policy coordination between different levels of government and with sectoral departments, ministries and authorities on the other. Inadequate efforts towards fiscal decentralization and use of own revenue resources also lead to resource deficits for local governments. From the 'demand side', lack of space for citizen participation in local planning, implementation, monitoring as well as weak systems of transparency and accountability in local governments – where such mandates are in place – represent persistent challenges to democratic development at the local level.

LOGIN, with the diversity and reach of its membership, can provide a valuable platform for DeLOG to access a cross-section of institutions and country perspectives in the Asian DLG context. We would be happy to share granular insights and evidences from the work of LOGIN member institutions with DeLOG.

What topics would you like to focus on in your cooperation with the DeLoG network and why?

LOGIN has been keen to learn from successful cases of public private partnerships for decentralized infrastructure development and service provision to better understand the drivers and enablers in order to leverage this modality. The network is seeking evidence of vertical and horizontal partnerships across local and subnational governments to deliver services, which require scale and proportion of planning and delivery far beyond the capacity of one or few local governments. The network could benefit from good practices and successful experiences of innovative partnerships (multi-stakeholder, public-private) in support of effective service delivery towards the localisation of the SDGs.



LOGIN is also interested in contributing and benefiting from grounded insights on improving effectiveness of local governments in fragile and post conflict contexts.

How has LOGIN Asia benefited so far from its participation in the DeLoG network?

DeLoG serves as an invaluable space for deliberating on policy priorities and programme strategies of development partners and partnering with international institutions. This year LOGIN collaborated with the DeLoG Secretariat and DeLoG member ADB as well as DeLoGs strategic partner UCLG to organize a joint workshop on 'Enhancing Capacities of Local Governments in localizing the SDGs'. Moreover, LOGIN has participated in DeLoG webinars from time to time. Our network has also been represented in the joint learning event on local governance and sustaining peace organized by the DeLoG Secretariat and the DeLoG members UNDP, UNICEF and SDC and hosted by the Belgian Development Agency ENABEL. The E-course offered by DeLoG has been publicized to LOGINs members and it is hoped that institutions will benefit from DeLoG's learning offers.

What do you see as the main challenges for knowledge platforms working on effective decentralisation and local governance such as the DeLoG network and LOGIN Asia?

As a knowledge platform on decentralization and local governance, it is a constant challenge to create visibility for the outcomes and thereby the effectiveness of the work we are invested in.

Given that the Network relies on harbouring knowledge exchange as the main means of capacitating its members, it implies investing significantly in creating a safe, non-competitive space for debate, deliberation and analysis. There is also reliance on tools and methods that balance the need for comparability while allowing for adequate contextualization and nuance.

Focusing only on Decentralization and Local Governance, the network needs to be constantly attentive to political economic complexities and DLG drivers across the countries that are represented in LOGIN.

The challenge also lies in engaging and making evident the wealth of tacit knowledge available with the seasoned and grounded practitioners and policy makers that are represented in LOGIN. It is a constant preoccupation of the network to identify and select knowledge management tools and learning methods that prove relevant in problem clarification, facilitating the 'right' peers to come together, managing exchange and enabling the subsequent application and adaptation of learning.

Costs of face to face engagement, uneven digital capacities and environments, pockets of resistance to virtual engagement, language barriers across a regional network and of course the range of interests that are being served through a network as LOGIN are some other points of concern and are in need of attention.



Before we close, is there anything that you would like to add?

We look forward to intensifying our engagement with the DeLOG members concerning the current workplan, which we hope will add to ongoing efforts at all levels to strengthen DLG systems and processes. The focus on SDG localization also gains more relevance as we enter 2020, marking 5 years of the 2030 Agenda.