Asian governments embraced decentralization with a great deal of enthusiasm and optimism in the late 1990s. In the ensuing years, many governments in the region devolved not only their rowing but also their steering role in public services in the belief that lower levels of governments and external agencies were better placed to manage the implementation process. The results of these decentralization efforts were varied but often were disappointing.

In recent years, governments in the region have begun to reassert their role in the decentralized sectors. However, this reassertion is not meant to return to status quo ante. Rather, the emerging arrangements suggest a desire for more pragmatic partnerships in delivering public services based on the partners’ (lower level governments, NGOs, social enterprises, and private firms) different but complementary capabilities.

The Conference will explore the decentralization-centralization dynamics in Asia and beyond with the purpose of assessing the current situation and developing workable (“best practices”) arrangements for partnerships. It is expected that papers will highlight the ways in which the relationship between central and local governments is being redefined and recalibrated to more effectively deliver public services. The papers will not only describe and evaluate decentralization efforts and how they are being modified in sectors such as education, health care, housing, irrigation, transportation, and energy, but will also situate the discussion within the larger theoretical context of public management and administrative reforms. Issues that will be particularly relevant to the conference include identifying the preconditions for successful collaborative governance, the new challenges to implementation capacity posed by decentralization and de-concentration, and the manner in which policy innovations diffuse through policy learning and transfer.

The refereed Conference is being organized by the Centre for Governance and Citizenship, the Hong Kong Institute of Education. Partners include Research Committee on Comparative Public Policy (RC30), International Political Science Association, and the journals Policy and Society and Journal of Asian Public Policy.

Participants presenting papers will be exempt from registration fees. A limited number of conference attendance grant is available on a competitive basis. Please indicate in your email submitting the abstract if you will need the grant to be able to participate.

Please send an approximately 500 word abstract to cgc@ied.edu.hk by 1 July 2011. The abstracts will be reviewed by a panel and results of the review will be announced in mid-July 2011.