



## GOOG GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY, AND DECENTRALIZATION

### I. Good Governance

All around the world, we hold certain ideals that steer us to that which is good, not just for ourselves, but for the rest of society. These ideals guide and lead us to demand from our leaders integrity and honour in the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented. They move us to work and demand for good governance.

#### ***But what is governance? And what is good governance?***

“Governance’ is the exercise of power or authority – political, economic, administrative or otherwise – to manage a country’s resources and affairs. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. ‘Good governance’ means competent management of a country’s resources and affairs in a manner that is open, transparent, accountable, equitable and responsive to people’s needs.”<sup>1</sup>

#### ***Good governance is based on the following principles:<sup>2</sup>***

- a. Good governance is focusing on the organization’s purpose and on outcomes for citizens and service users
- b. Good governance is performing effectively in clearly defined functions and roles
- c. Good governance is promoting values for the whole organization and demonstrating the values of good governance through behavior
- d. Good governance is making informed, transparent decisions and managing risk
- e. Good governance is developing the capacity and capability of the governing body to be effective
- f. Good governance is engaging stakeholders and making accountability real.

#### ***Good Governance...***

- *Is effective and equitable*
- *Promotes the rule of law*
- *Ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on a broad consensus in society*
- *Ensures that the poorest and most vulnerable members of society are heard in decision making over the allocation of development resources.*

<sup>1</sup> The Australian Government’s Overseas Aid Program (AusAID). August 2000. *Good Governance: Guiding Principles for Implementation*. Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), Canberra.

<sup>2</sup> The Independent Commission on Good Governance in Public Services. 2004. *The Good Governance Standard for Public Services*. OPM and CIPFA.



These principles if applied in the way governments make and implement decisions will reveal the following characteristics:

a. **Participation**

In a government where good governance is the norm, citizens can actively participate in the process of decision-making, directly or indirectly through groups or agencies that represent their interests.

b. **Rule of law**

Good governance enables laws, particularly human rights, to be implemented fairly and impartially.

c. **Transparency**

Transparency is built on the free flow of information. Processes, institutions and information are directly accessible to those concerned with them, and enough information is provided to understand and monitor them.

d. **Responsiveness**

In a government exercising good governance, agencies promptly serve and respond to the needs of its constituents.

e. **Consensus orientation**

In any society, interests and opinions are varied. Good governance strives to mediate these differences so that a broad consensus on what is best for all is always achieved.

f. **Equity**

All men and women, regardless of age, gender or status in life have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being.

g. **Effectiveness and efficiency**

A government exercising good governance produces results that meet the needs of its people while making the best use of resources.

h. **Accountability**

In good governance, decision-makers in government, the private sector and civil society organisations are answerable to the public, as well as to institutional stakeholders.

i. **Strategic vision**

Leaders and the public have a broad and long-term perspective on good governance and human development, along with a sense of what is needed for such development.

Good governance is an ideal which is difficult to practice and more especially to demand, especially in a society where alongside noble values run dirty politics and corruption. Furthermore, citizens, most of the time, mistakenly perceive good governance as a value attached merely to public officials. For good governance to be a reality, people should realize that it is not a practice exclusive to government.

Making good governance work is necessary, although difficult. But it is a must. Accountable governments are essential in the fight against poverty. They protect human rights, provide security, promote economic growth and deliver essential services, such as health and education.<sup>3</sup> Good governance leads to growth and progress for all. It ensures sustainable human development.

<sup>3</sup> 2007. Governance. In the Data Report. Available at <http://www.thedatareport.org>



Citizens are well part of government – they are not mere beneficiaries or recipients; they are the electorate. It is the citizens that put people in office, and it is their efforts that keep them there. They should play an active role in making good governance work. They should move to make governments accountable. One way to do this is through social accountability.

## II. Social Accountability

What is social accountability? It is citizens working together, to ensure their governments are managing their resources effectively, transparently, and meeting their community’s needs. The people themselves become the key to strengthening the demand for government services.<sup>4</sup> In social accountability, the people ensure that their government works for them. It enables people to ensure that government is working for the growth and progress of all its constituents.

Social accountability sprang from peoples’ aspirations for human development and the core goals of promoting poverty reduction and effective and sustainable development through citizens’ participation in governance. It requires public officials, private employers, or service providers to answer for their policies, actions, and use of funds. It is an approach, initiated by civil society or the state, towards building an accountable and responsive government by relying on civic engagement.<sup>5</sup>

For social accountability to be effective, four building blocks or pillars are needed. These are access to and effective use of information; organized and capable civil society organizations or citizen groups (mobilizing public support, advocating, and negotiating change); an enabling environment (in terms of policy, structure, champions in government, mechanisms, and platforms) and cultural resonance (i.e, it has to be context specific, responsive, and transformative).

Citizens and the government are the most important players of social accountability. The government has the duty to facilitate access to all information while the citizens must assert their right to participate in governance. This means citizens must organize themselves to be able to engage in this kind of participation.

Social accountability happens in the entire cycle of democratic governance. The idea is that citizenship should not only be exercised during elections when citizens cast their votes. The social accountability approach calls for citizens to remain constantly vigilant and watchful over the performance of elected leaders, bureaucrats, and service providers.

<sup>4</sup> The World Bank. No year. *From Shouting to Counting: A New Frontier in Social Development*. World Bank, Washington D.C.

<sup>5</sup> Arroyo, Dennis. December 2004. *Summary Paper on the Stocktaking of Social Accountability Initiatives in Asia and the Pacific*. World Bank Institute Community Empowerment and Social Inclusion Learning Program.



Social accountability covers an extremely broad array of actions that citizens can potentially take to hold government officials and bureaucrats accountable. These actions may be carried out by a wide range of actors (e.g., individual citizens, communities, parliamentarians, CSOs, media), occur at different levels (e.g., local to national), address a variety of different issues (e.g., public policy, political conduct, public expenditures, service delivery) and use diverse strategies (e.g., research, monitoring, participatory planning, civic education, media coverage, coalition building).<sup>6</sup>

The social accountability approach presumes, first, that government keeps the door open for people’s participation and, second, that citizens are willing to engage the government. The dynamics of the relationship is constructive government-citizen partnership where citizen groups and nongovernment organizations are willing to expand the range of actions for engaging – or working together – with government in order to assure that government lives up to its duty of delivering services, improving people’s welfare, and protecting people’s rights. Decentralization is one avenue to enable citizen groups to make their governments accountable.

### III. Decentralization

Decentralization is an act by which the central government formally cedes powers and authority (to plan, make decisions or manage public functions) to actors or institutions at lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy.<sup>7</sup> Thus, decentralization can be an avenue where citizens can practice social accountability to demand good governance from their own local government officers.

There are two major forms of decentralization. These are deconcentration wherein decision-making and management responsibilities are assigned to agents of the central government; and devolution wherein services and functions are assigned to elected bodies with some degree of local autonomy.

Decentralization c most service delivery functions of national governments to local government units. Management and administration functions are also assigned to local offices. Through decentralization, people do not have to guess which public office failed or succeeded to fulfill its mandate; they can more easily see, since the obligations lie at the hands of their own local officials.

#### Decentralization is...

*the restructuring or reorganisation of authority so that there is a system of co-responsibility between institutions of governance... thus increasing the overall quality and effectiveness of the system of governance, while increasing the authority and capacities of sub-national levels (UNDP).*

*transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to intermediate and local governments or quasi-independent government organizations and/or the private sector (World Bank).*

<sup>6</sup> Malena, Carmen with Forster, Reiner, Singh, Janmejy. 2004. Social Accountability: An Introduction to the Concept and Emerging Practice. *In Social Development Papers*. The World Bank.

<sup>7</sup> Tucker, Stevens. May 22, 2007. Decentralization – Core Concepts and Challenges. Paper presnbeted at the Workshop on The Theory and Practice of Decentralisation and Deconcentration (Social Sectors), Phnom Penh.



It is also easier to demand transparency when there is none, because government, through decentralization, is now closer to the people. This is why decentralization is often praised. It has moved government closer to its citizens and provided opportunities for participation in decision making.<sup>8</sup>

The opportunities for participation opened by decentralization then, has to be maximized and emphasized. “Decentralization has, not only an administrative value, but also a civic dimension, since it increases the opportunities for citizens to take interest in public affairs...”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, decentralization offers more than a chance to freely participate, it gives people an opportunity to help secure and ensure that growth and progress can be had by all. It is a good means for sustainable human development.

That is why more and more countries are also moving towards decentralization, primarily to improve resource allocation and service provision. Previous experience of other countries has also shown that it makes government more responsive, citizens more participative, and encourages both groups to practice good governance.

However, various literature and experiences related to decentralization have also shown that “it will not always achieve the goal of making local governments more responsive and accountable. They are often susceptible to elite capture: that is, public decision-making often reflects disproportionate influence by well-off and well connected groups. In many countries, officials exploit the opportunities offered by decentralization to promote their own commercial activities.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, it is important that the civic dimension of decentralization be maximized, and one way to do this is through the use of social accountability and its vast range of methods to ensure good governance at the local level.

#### **IV. THE ROLE OF SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN DECENTRALIZATION**

Effectiveness of service delivery at the local level is highly enhanced and can only be sustained if certain conditions are met by the decentralized system of governance. These conditions include a range of parameters including institutional structures, resources, skills and capacities both at the central and local levels, participation, partnerships as well as local leadership among others. Since it has been found that even with decentralization, good governance may still be glaringly absent, society must find a way to ensure that services and entitlements due them are granted.

---

<sup>8</sup> Wong, Susan and Guggenheim, Scott. No date. Community-Driven Development: Decentralization’s Accountability Challenge.

<sup>9</sup> A. de Tocqueville. 1835. Democracy in America. Reprinted 2003. Penguin Classics.

<sup>10</sup> Wong, Susan and Guggenheim, Scott. No date. Community-Driven Development: Decentralization’s Accountability Challenge.



Social accountability and its wide range of methods can be a tool citizen groups can use to ensure good governance in the local level, and consequently, in the national government.

The following are some social accountability methods, along with examples of how these methods have been practiced by various communities and citizens' group in different parts of the world:<sup>11</sup>

- a. Participatory Planning and Policy Formulation: Simply put, this method allows citizens to take an active role in the government's decision-making process.
- b. Participatory Budget Analysis: Citizens, through this method, may look at the impact and implications of the government's budget allocation, and raise awareness on budget-related issues.
- c. Participatory Expenditure Tracking: This method enables citizens to monitor and track where the government puts taxpayers' money.
- d. Citizens' Surveys/Citizen Report Cards: This method essentially gathers feedback of citizens which are aggregated and presented to the general public as a report card on the performance of officials on a range of different issues.
- e. Citizen's Charters: This is an explicit statement of what a public agency is ready to offer as its services and the corresponding rights and entitlements of the people, as well as the remedies available to them should conflict arise. It outlines the roles and responsibilities of service providers, and citizens measure the performance of the former through the standards set by the charter.
- f. Community Score Cards: This method is used to assess service delivery in a participatory manner at the community level.
- g. Grievance Mechanism: This is a tool for general stakeholder engagement process and dialogue that can help in dispute prevention, dispute management, and dispute resolution. It provides an alternative channel through which citizens can gain recognition for legitimate concerns, engage in a process to secure acceptable solutions, and share in the ownership of that process with the government.

Social accountability, as seen from the various experiences of citizens who have practiced its methods, undoubtedly gives tremendous benefits and positive changes to government processes and practices. These methods are basically conducted and implemented by citizens and citizen group. Social accountability and its accompanying methods can pave the way for good governance in local governments, and consequently in the national government.

<sup>11</sup> Misra, Vivrek. 2005. Framework for Government Accountability. CGG



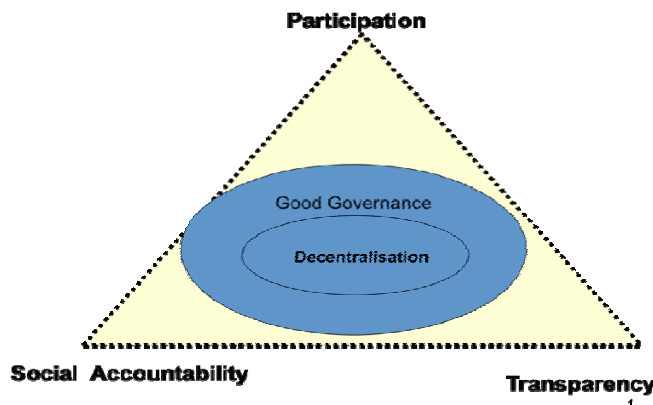
## V. GOOD GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND DECENTRALIZATION

The roots of good governance, decentralisation and social accountability are derived from the aspirations for human development and the core goals of promoting poverty reduction and effective and sustainable development through citizens' participation in governance.<sup>12</sup>

Good governance in government is a must if we are to hope for a better future for all. However, it is a value not always present; often it must be demanded from officials. Social accountability is one way citizen groups can demand good governance from their officials, and also to practice good governance as well as they also play a significant role in making government work.

Improved governance will require not only strengthened central and local governments but also the involvement of other actors from civil society organizations and the private sector in partnerships with government at all levels through social accountability. Citizens and the government are the most important players of social accountability. The government has the duty to facilitate access to all information while the citizens must assert their right to participate in governance. This means citizens must organize themselves to be able to engage in this kind of participation.

For social accountability mechanisms to be effective on the long run, it needs to be institutionalized and linked to existing governance structures and service delivery systems. Effectiveness of service delivery at the local level is highly enhanced and can only be sustained if certain conditions are met by the decentralized system of governance. These conditions include a range of parameters including institutional structures, resources, skills and capacities both at the central and local levels, participation, partnerships as well as local leadership among others. Through decentralization of governance, civic engagement for social accountability can be more focused and its impact easily felt.



<sup>12</sup> Robertson Work, “The Role of Participation and Partnership in Decentralised Governance: A Brief Synthesis of Policy Lessons and Recommendations of Nine Country Case Studies on Service Delivery for the Poor, (UNDP New York).



---

## References

2007. Governance. In the Data Report. Available at <http://www.thedatareport.org>

A. de Tocqueville. 1835. Democracy in America. Reprinted 2003. Penguin Classics.  
Wong, Susan and Guggenheim, Scott. No date. Community-Driven Development: Decentralization's Accountability Challenge.

Arroyo, Dennis and Sirker, Karen. 2005. Stocktaking of Social Accountability Initiatives in the Asia and the Pacific Region. World Bank Institute.

Arroyo, Dennis. December 2004. *Summary Paper on the Stocktaking of Social Accountability Initiatives in Asia and the Pacific*. World Bank Institute Community Empowerment and Social Inclusion Learning Program.

Malena, Carmen with Forster, Reiner, Singh, Janmejy. 2004. Social Accountability: An Introduction to the Concept and Emerging Practice. *In Social Development Papers*. The World Bank.

Malena, Carmen with Forster, Reiner, Singh, Janmejy. 2004. Social Accountability: An Introduction to the Concept and Emerging Practice. *In Social Development Papers*. The World Bank.

Misra, Vivrek. 2005. Framework for Government Accountability. CGG

Robertson Work, "The Role of Participation and Partnership in Decentralised Governance: A Brief Synthesis of Policy Lessons and Recommendations of Nine Country Case Studies on Service Delivery for the Poor, (UNDP New York).

The Australian Government's Overseas Aid Program (AusAID). August 2000. *Good Governance: Guiding Principles for Implementation*. Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), Canberra.

The Independent Commission on Good Governance in Public Services. 2004. *The Good Governance Standard for Public Services*. OPM and CIPFA.

The World Bank. No year. *From Shouting to Counting: A New Frontier in Social Development*. World Bank, Washington D.C.

Tucker, Stevens. May 22, 2007. Decentralization – Core Concepts and Challenges. Paper presented at the Workshop on The Theory and Practice of Decentralisation and Deconcentration (Social Sectors), Phnom Penh.

The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank. 2005. Social Accountability in the Public Sector. Washington DC.

Wong, Susan and Guggenheim, Scott. No date. Community-Driven Development: Decentralization's Accountability Challenge.