

Advancing Good Governance Seminar

June 12, 2014 – 12:00-1:15pm

Rwanda and New Governance: A Case Study

This session explored the relationship between new governance theory and the anti-corruption measures employed in Rwanda. New governance theory can be defined as a school of thought that espouses state and non-state stakeholders collaborating in decision-making processes and regulation enforcement rather than a traditional top-down approach or pure self-regulation. Despite some recent governance challenges, Rwanda has been lauded for its offensive on corruption and repeatedly ranked by independent indices as the least corrupt country in the East African region. Some of Rwanda's successful anti-corruption measures, which involve mobilizing the citizen base to establish new cultural norms, reflect principles of new governance theory.

Key Points from the Session

- 1 Collaboration among different institutions, including private actors, and a culture of anti-corruption.** The Office of the Ombudsman of Rwanda, which is tasked with combatting corruption, has partnered with private and other public entities, including through the sponsorship of (a) anti-corruption clubs in high schools, which teach students how to identify corruption, and (b) internet cafés, which provide citizens a means to report corruption.
- 2 Decentralization of anti-corruption efforts.** In practice, the Office of the Ombudsman acts as a coordinator of decentralized power more than as a traditional top-down, regulatory enforcement agency. Traditional top-down enforcement requires reliance on police and other representatives of the state who may be corrupt themselves and does not address the cultural and social norms, which may not stigmatize corrupt acts. By explicitly coordinating with and empowering private actors, the state has enlisted numerous “watchdogs” to identify and report corruption and injustices and made clear that corruption is intolerable.
- 3 Continual monitoring and learning.** In line with new governance theory, in order to successfully combat corruption, a society must encourage constant evaluation and adaptation in designing anti-corruption measures that are effective and responsive to current issues. Despite its success on the anti-corruption front, Rwanda remains a country in transition with substantial challenges.

Emerging Questions

- 1** The 1994 genocide left Rwanda without viable institutions: cultural, governmental or otherwise. This vacuum arguably contributed to the opportunity to embed anti-corruption principles into Rwandan culture. How can other countries revolutionize cultural norms around corruption without such a cataclysmic event?
- 2** How has reducing corruption affected the market economy of Rwanda?
- 3** It has been widely reported that the government of Rwanda exhibits dictatorial tendencies. How do we reconcile those tendencies with the successful anti-corruption efforts of the government?