

## Advancing Good Governance Seminar

June 13, 2014 – 9:00-10:30am

### Plenary: Building Accountability Networks – the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in the Arab World

The Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in the Arab World (“**ANSA-Arab World**”) links member organizations from seven countries across the region to bring together citizens’ voices to demand greater accountability from their respective states. It benefits from the members each speaking Arabic as a common language. Whilst efforts were commenced in 2010 to create it, it was only with the impetus of the Arab Spring that it was established in 2012. It formed as a result of the work of the World Bank Institute, following similar ANSAs in Africa and East Asia. The panel considered in particular the experience of ANSA-Arab World in Egypt, and highlighted challenges and opportunities in influencing change.

#### Key Points from the Session

- 1 Promoting social accountability in the masses requires persistence over a long time to achieve results.** It was recognized that funding grass roots social movements can be successful if it is done in a strong and sustained way. Donors are looking for “quick wins” in the Arab world, but need to understand that they must commit to the long term and act in a coordinated way. Problems may arise if initiatives are undertaken only for a short time, as they can create a demand for change without living up to the expectations that have been created. Whilst society may be mobilized and ready, changes in the social and political environment may constrain action by society, and may cause donors and the government to fail to engage with social groups. In that context, ANSA-Arab World faces a challenge to decide whether to work with grassroots civil society, which is not well organized or knowledgeable, or with well organized but highly centralized and elevated non-governmental organizations. The panel noted that social media can provide a method to bridge the gaps between centralized organizations and the masses.
- 2 Creating trust and understanding between government and civil society is a critical step to a functioning accountability network.** At times, civil society organizations refuse to engage with government. Some organizations avoid engaging with government on the basis that the government is using the accountability network as a “fig leaf” to conceal their real lack of accountability. Other organizations suspect governments of only choosing to engage with those organizations whose agendas they support and so do not engage with government. At other times government refuses to be present and engage with civil society. Their resistance may arise from a perceived lack of sophisticated awareness of citizens of the processes of government budgeting. There is a need for education of both the government and civil society of the importance and possibility of dialogue and mutual accountability. Freedom of speech and freedom of association were considered to be the two cornerstones of accountability. Transparency and access to information assists in creating trust between citizens and government. The right to associate to work collectively in assessing information allows the citizenry to contribute positively to public debate. Dialogue with governments can be particularly challenging when it relates to human rights. The panel noted that the optimism of the Arab Spring in Egypt has not been matched by a

recognition of human rights since then. ANSA-Arab World has sought to operate by working on issues that the government can support, and therefore in focusing on service delivery. Through that, a dialogue can be commenced on how services are offered, to promote freedom of association through the meetings to discuss services, and to promote freedom of speech when seeking transparency on budget allocation.

- 3 For its long term sustainability it is important for the accountability network to become self-sufficient, but there are challenges in ensuring that can occur.** Over time, the World Bank intends to phase out its support for ANSA-Arab World, so that it becomes self-sustaining. ANSA-Arab World to date has contributed to outreach and establishment of the idea of social accountability. However, it has not yet been able to embed itself into the operations of government or to obtain financial support from it. Whilst ANSA-Arab World benefits from being a platform for dialogue, that also presents a challenge as it cannot legally be registered in its own right. This presents a particular constraint on its perceived legitimacy and ability to act which will need to be resolved for its long term sustainability.
- 4 The private sector may play a role in social accountability, but it has been limited to date.** The panel believed that the private sector's primary focus has been on internal corporate social responsibility policies, rather than promoting broader social accountability. In countries where crony capitalism is rife, it may be particularly hard to work effectively with the private sector. They asserted, however, that the private sector's championing of issues that concern them, such as taxes, could be harnessed for issues of more general concern to society.

#### **Emerging Questions**

- 1** To what extent could ANSA-Arab World create coalitions with other ANSAs elsewhere in the world, and how far would that help its cause?
- 2** Given the long time periods that it can take to establish social accountability, are platforms such as accountability networks the most effective way of promoting that change?
- 3** In Egypt, the promotion of democracy and the reduction of corruption have not occurred in parallel. Are those processes complementary or conflicting?