Advancing Good Governance Seminar

June 12, 2014 – 2:15-3:45pm

Feedback Networks 2014 – What is Working?

This session explored the concept of client feedback in the development sector. The session focused on specific feedback mechanisms and methodologies, including community scorecards in Malawi and the multi-donor program "Making All Voices Count". The panel also considered the uses and limits of technology to collect feedback and examined whether feedback has become a central feature of the development landscape. The panel concluded by discussing whether governments and development agencies should institutionalize feedback mechanisms in their agendas.

Key Points from the Session

1   **Structures of power and accountability influence whether feedback is effective.** Feedback mechanisms do not generate system change on their own. The success of these programs is linked to the power of various stakeholders and the responsiveness of governments. Giving citizens a voice does not lead to change or empowerment if nobody is listening. Governments need to engage and listen which they will do if they see the benefit of being seen to respond to their citizens.

2   **Technology can be a helpful tool but is not always appropriate.** Feedback mechanisms can benefit from the use of technology in certain contexts. However, where clients are not familiar with technology, the use of complex methods for collecting feedback can create more problems than it solves. Organizations should think critically about when and how technology can be used to solicit and analyze citizen feedback. Technology should be seen as a tool but not as a substitute for soliciting and listening to the views of citizens.

3   **Feedback for course correction.** It is vital to seek feedback during the course of a project or program, as the best means of improving the likelihood of success of the project or program is to seek feedback and adjust the project or program accordingly. Successful feedback mechanisms can be predictive of program outcomes.

4   **Building trust is critical to establishing an effective feedback loop.** The relationship between a development initiative and its clients determines the effectiveness of feedback loops. Where clients do not trust the mechanism or organization, feedback mechanisms are unlikely to provide accurate or effective information.

5   **Feedback mechanisms are still developing.** The use of feedback mechanisms is still developing and there is debate about the accuracy and effectiveness of the information that is provided.

Emerging Questions

1   What are the best ways to build trust and confidence in clients on an inclusive basis?

2   In a landscape of multiple development programs, how can different organizations coordinate the use of different feedback mechanisms?

3   How does the process of collecting feedback from clients influence community norms and expectations?