

Advancing Good Governance Seminar

8 June 2012 -- 15.00 – 16.30

Closing Plenary: A Future With Good Governance

The key focus of this plenary was to look at embedding systems of mutual accountability and consensus based decision-making in governance processes in international development. It was agreed that organisations ought to adhere to the standards of transparency that they demand from other institutions. It was also agreed that approaches to governance in development must be tailored to specific circumstances, specially because governance is not a self-contained process and is susceptible to a variety of external influences. Governance, also, ought to always consider the benefits of approaches that emphasise consensus building.

Key Points from the Plenary

1. **Situating governance in development.** Three primary themes: (a) politics, (b) fragility and (c) transparency must be kept in mind whenever one considers the role of governance in the development sector. These themes are important because (i) politics is fundamentally at the core of all issues related to governance and development since it affects the distribution of power and allocation of resources; (ii) governance is especially relevant and poses special challenges in environments such as post-conflict states (fragility and poverty are closely intertwined); and (iii) transparency must be at the heart of institutions undertaking development work, both for the culture it helps create and so that all stakeholders have access to critical information.

Governance is not a quick-fix solution, and is not amenable to a template approach; while certain principles may be applicable across the sector, every organization will have unique governance requirements, because the context in which an organization operates is hugely important. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind that governance is susceptible to external influences, including changing economic circumstances, conflict situations, etc, and these influences will need to be considered when formulating a governance structure for a given organization.

2. **Consensus as governance.** Neither the public nor private sector have all the answers when it comes to governance. Social movements, with their emphasis on consensus building processes, collaboration and accountability, offer a useful model that doesn't get sufficient attention in the international development community. Critical in this is that within social movements, accountability – principally horizontal, as opposed to vertical, accountability – is a tool for the empowerment of the other members of the movement.
3. **“Open Social Sector Partnership.”** In a context where the beneficiaries of development assistance are not in a position to “throw the bums out” when assistance is ineffective, what is needed is a joining together of a community of organizations who will work toward the development of standards against which organizations will be held accountable. While governance is not amenable to a template approach, what is needed is not standardization, but standards.

Emerging Questions

1. What, if any, are the governance principles that apply to organizations across the sector? Is each organization *sui generis*, and hence defying of any common

Linklaters

principles/shared learning, or is there a core set of principles/questions that can be of value across the spectrum of civil society?

2. What are the other models civil society organizations can look to in order to model their approaches to governance? Clearly social movements, in their more horizontal nature, are a critical counterpoint to the more vertical private sector models to which civil society has been increasingly looking in recent years. What are others, and how can organizations ensure they are accounting for various approaches?
3. Should CSOs come together to decide standards of governance to which they could be held accountable?
 - how to get beneficiary voices reflected in the development of any standards?
 - what, if any, should the enforcement mechanisms underpinning such standards be?