**Advancing Good Governance Seminar**

**8 June 2012 -- 13.30 – 14.45**

**A Case Study on Self-monitoring Agents**

The focus of this session was to look at organizations which assist donors and civil society organizations (CSOs) by intermediating between them. It was agreed that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) needs to be proportionate based on the size of the organization and program. Self-monitoring agents generally provide donors with comparisons and guides, notably to assist individual donors in deciding which organizations to give funding to.

**Key Points from the Panel**

1. **Appropriateness of evaluation criteria.** Self-monitoring agents are principally a service to donors, by assisting donors in deciding which organizations to give funding to. During the panel, it was debated whether the criteria often used to evaluate CSOs might detract from their ability to achieve long-term goals, as those criteria often emphasize short-term successes – which may look better to donoros – as opposed to long-term societal change. That said, while the measurement of outcomes may distract a CSO from its primary mission, examining short term outcomes does help assess project impact on an ongoing basis. It is essential to be clear with donors that milestones have a limited, albeit important, role to play in measuring long-term impact.
2. **Limitations.** Self-monitoring agents tend to evaluate organizations based on metrics that are easy to quantify, such as how the organization is being run, whether it is achieving clearly measurable goals, etc. For instance, the effects of malaria nets or intestinal pills are relatively easy to measure, and as such, the approach of the self-monitoring agents may be better suited to these kinds of organizations. Self-monitoring agents are less well suited to measure societal change, education of children, etc, and as such, they have a more limited ability to evaluate organizations working in arenas such as these.
3. **Stakeholder representation.** Donors tend to be represented on the boards of these monitoring agencies but not the CSOs or the beneficiaries themselves, largely because these agencies are one step removed from the CSOs and two steps removed from the beneficiaries.

**Emerging Questions**

1. Given the valuable role played by self-monitoring agents, what changes can be made with respect to evaluation criteria that would minimize the potential negative impact on organizations' long-term goals? Is there an inherent tension in this that cannot be overcome, or is it possible to develop a system of measurement that will meet the self-monitoring agents' objectives while not negatively impacting an organization's core mission?
2. What impact would increased stakeholder representation have on the work of the self-monitoring agents? Would their presence detract from the valuable role to be played by self-monitoring agents, or would it improve it by, among other things, bringing into the evaluation calculus the perspectives of the beneficiaries of the CSOs?

3. Generally, is there a way to make the self-monitoring agents better attuned to the interests of the beneficiaries, or is their role best limited to serving the interests of donors?