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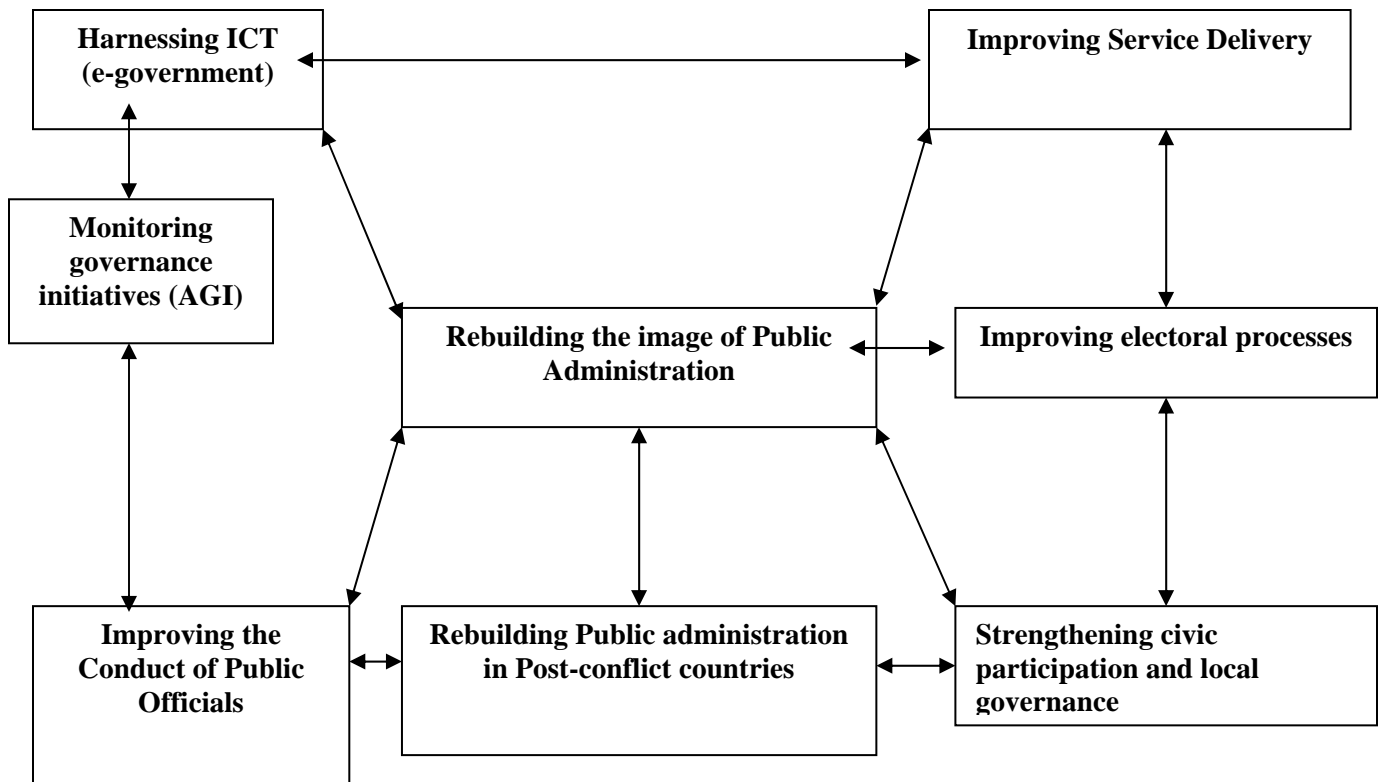


**REGIONAL FORUM ON REINVENTING GOVERNMENT IN
AFRICA: BUILDING TRUST IN GOVERNMENT**
United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC)
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia,
11-13 December 2006

Aide Memoire

November 2006

BUILDING TRUST IN GOVERNMENT



Regional Forum on Reinventing Government in Africa: Building Trust in Government

Introduction

In preparation for the Seventh Global Forum on Reinventing Government scheduled to take place at the United Nations Office in Vienna in June 2007, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in partnership with other UN agencies and external institutions, plans to organize a 3-day Regional Forum at the United Nations International Conference Centre, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 11 to 13 December 2006. The theme of the Regional Forum will be *Building Trust in Government*.

In the paragraphs that follow, this aide memoire anticipates and attempts to answer a few salient questions about the upcoming event. It begins by tracing the evolution of the Global Forum on Reinventing Government and by acknowledging the contributions made by various sponsors to the organization of the biennial Forum. It proceeds in the second section to examine the context in which the 2006 Africa Regional Forum is being organized and the significance of, as well as the rationale for, the choice of the Forum's theme. In the third section, the aide memoire examines the objectives of the Forum, prior to focusing in the fourth section on the topics to be discussed at plenary sessions and in working groups. The methodology that the Forum hopes to adopt in achieving its objectives will be described in the fifth section, and the Forum's target group in the sixth. Organizational (focal point and related) issues are taken up in subsequent sections.

1. Origin, evolution and sponsorship of the Global Forum

The Global Forum is a major event organized by the United Nations every two years. It derives its mandate from the United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/57/277 of 2002. Bringing together cabinet ministers, high-ranking Government officials, eminent public administration scholars, corporate leaders, representatives of international organizations, donor agencies, and civic organizations, the Forum has served as a powerful medium for the exchange of ideas on public policy and management challenges facing the different regions of the world. The opportunity that the Forum provides for cross-cultural comparison of perspectives has proved invaluable in spotlighting the strengths and weaknesses of dominant public administration paradigms, and in suggesting rethinking in contemporary public policy.

The first Global Forum took place in Washington DC in 1999 and focused on the generic theme of Reinventing Government. The Second one was held in Brasilia, Brazil in 2000 on the theme, "Democratic States and Governance in the 21st Century". The Third one took place in Naples, Italy, in 2001 and examined the subject, "Fostering Democracy and Development through e-Government". The Fourth Forum held in Marrakech, Morocco in 2002 discussed the theme of "Citizens, Businesses, and Governments – Partnership for

Development and Democracy”, while the Fifth Forum held in Mexico City (in 2003) focused on “Innovation and Quality in 21st Century Government”. The Sixth Global Forum held in Seoul, Korea, in May 2005, focused on the theme “Towards Participatory and Transparent Governance”. The Seventh Global Forum is scheduled to take place in Vienna, Austria in June 2007, and is expected to address the theme “Building Trust in Government”.

Since 2001, the Government of Italy has provided financial support for the organization of capacity development workshops and exchange of good practices among senior officials from developing countries. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has also been consistent in its support to the Forum, and has made substantive as well as financial contributions since the inauguration of the series in 1999. In addition, the 7th Global Forum is expected to benefit from the assistance provided by the Governments of Austria, Canada, France, and the Republic of Korea.

2. Global Context

The Africa Regional Forum which is planned to take place in Addis Ababa Ethiopia from 11 to 13 December 2006 is one of a series organized in different regions by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the UNDP and other partners, in preparation for the Seventh Global Forum holding in Vienna in 2007. It will be hosted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and organized in collaboration with the United Nations development Programme (UNDP) and the Africa Governance Institute. Besides providing a regional perspective on the theme of the 7th Global Forum, the Regional Forum hopes to solicit the views of participants on measures to adopt to renew and strengthen citizen faith in public authority.

The choice of the Forum’s theme, “Building Trust in Government”, is informed largely by a trend noticeable in recent years – that is, the widening gap between governments and their publics. Whether in the developed or the developing regions, the signs of fissure between state and civic institutions are visible – voter apathy and declining voter turn out at general and mid-term elections, widening support for extremism, increasing appeal of populism and demagoguery, growing cynicism, and, particularly in societies embroiled in, or emerging from conflict, declining faith in the reliability, professionalism, and impartiality of state institutions, including institutions charged with the responsibility for maintaining order and enforcing the law.

The Regional Forum provides a good opportunity to interrogate the remote and the visible causes of public distrust in government. The Forum’s underlying premise is that trust begins with the assurance that government is able and willing to exercise its authority to protect the life and property of the citizen regardless of his/her ethnic origin, religious belief, political party affiliation, or socio-economic standing. The *raison d’etre* of organized government comes into question where the responsibility for the provision of this (law and order) and other public goods is abdicated by duly authorized agents and opportunistically usurped by unaccountable vigilante groups and vested interests.

Naturally, the experience of one region or country is not the same as that of another. While public distrust of government is a reality that many countries face, it is particularly acute in post-conflict countries. This is understandable. When civil government disappears in the wake of conflict, survival hinges not on reliance on state institutions but on recourse to individual self-help. Unless and until state authority is re-established (to allow the resumption of normal government operations), the citizen cannot expect to live down the traumas of conflict, or place his/her life and well-being in the hands of government agencies. In an immediate post-conflict environment, the mentality that prevails is “God for all, every one for himself”. In such an environment, issues of ethics, professionalism and accountability become secondary to that of personal survival. For instance, whatever is left of the police force in a post-conflict setting cannot be trusted to protect life and property, for the simple reason that the force has either ceased to exist or it has come under the influence of a group or groups with scores to settle. In effect therefore, the preoccupation with survival in a post-conflict environment erodes the citizen’s confidence in government, promotes narcissism and self-aggrandizement, and gives racketeering a free rein.

In the absence of a swift and decisive response, unbridled pursuit of self-interest in society at large would gradually extend to the public service, thus eroding its (public service) values and undermining its capacity to provide quality service to its diverse clientele. The more entrenched corruption becomes, the more difficult it will be to stem it and re-establish citizen trust in government. Indeed, even when post-conflict reconstruction activities proceed fast on some fronts (e.g., reconstruction of damaged infrastructure, rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced persons, and provision of emergence relief), getting the people to trust the government is likely to take some time and a lot of effort.

In other countries, the waning confidence in organized government may be traced not to civil conflict but to what has been described as the “crisis of representative democracy”, by which is meant the widening gap between citizen expectations and the actual performance of those acting on their behalf. As societies become increasingly complex and the interests to harmonize become more numerous and mutually exclusive, government policy makers find it extremely difficult to keep the promises they might have made to their electors. So it is that in between elections, the people’s representatives are confronted with challenges never before foreseen, and feel themselves obliged to make choices that run counter to the compact they entered into with their supporters. This is akin to the moral hazard that features prominently in the literature on economic neo-institutionalism.

Yet, the wider the gap between pledges and actual delivery, the more distrustful of government the public becomes. This might explain the growing clamour for “home rule”, decentralization, and “direct” democracy, as well as for the creation of mechanisms likely to empower the citizen to participate in processes such as budgeting, decision-making, project monitoring, and expenditure tracking. The questions that are yet to be answered are whether the public is adequately equipped for the challenges of direct democracy, and how to integrate disparate “self-help” efforts in formal governmental arrangements. For instance, community participation in law enforcement may not be a bad idea where government resources are too fully stretched to respond to pressing security concerns. However, unless community/neighbourhood policing arrangements are consciously

planned and properly integrated into the formal law enforcement apparatus, there is a risk that enthusiasm for “instant justice” will trigger unintended consequences – among them, disregard of standard police and judicial procedures, mob lynching and extra judicial killing, and egregious violations of accused persons’ rights.

In any case, imperfect as representative democracy may be, it is to-date the only credible alternative to autocracy and/or oligarchy. That is why any attempt to interfere with its operation is likely to exacerbate the crisis of confidence facing this system of government. Interference with democratic institutions takes various forms. It ranges from constituency gerrymandering, through the manipulation of voter registration system, intimidation of candidates and voters, stuffing of ballot boxes, falsification of election results, exertion of undue influence on electoral administration as well as law enforcement agencies, and employment of an assortment of election engineering tricks.

Where representative democracy manages to overcome the risks inherent in principal-agent transactions, it may still face the hazards in a different form – that is in regulating the conduct of public officials and their external clients. The risk of decline in public confidence will increase as reports of ethical violations on the part of state officials enter the public domain. In other words, the tendency to distrust government will increase where malfeasance and impunity receive full press coverage, and reports of corrective actions are few and far in between. Such a situation is likely to trigger public resentment against government, fuel the demand for the “privatization” of state agencies, and/or encourage the proliferation of uncoordinated “vigilante” groups. The chances also cannot be ruled out that corruption will promote cynicism in society at large and reinforce the belief, however unfounded, that the only way to transact government business was to demand and/or offer gratifications. The risk of distrust increases exponentially as public decisions become opaque and access to information is restricted.

The first danger signal to watch out for therefore is the growing perception that government and its officials are corrupt, and so, untrustworthy. Corruption thus constitutes as much a threat to public confidence as civil conflict. Just as devastating conflict forces the citizen to search for alternative coping mechanisms, corruption encourages him to switch his/her allegiance (from formal organized government) to parallel, mostly under-ground, institutions. Fortunately, measures to combat corruption are receiving increasing attention in Africa. Besides the enactment of national anti-corruption laws and the establishment of watch-dog agencies, African Governments came together in February 2001 to adopt what is now known as the Charter for the Public Service in Africa. The Regional Forum provides yet another opportunity to revisit the Charter and deliberate on the steps to adopt to achieve the Charter’s underlying objectives.

The Forum will also need to examine another possible cause of public distrust in government – i.e., the enactment of policies that are skewed in favour of or against a geographical area, adherents of a particular religious sect or political party, members of a socio-economic class or gender group. Where the structure of access is such as to exclude a significant demographic group, the ill-will that comes with the exclusion will sooner or later translate into distrust. A system founded on patron-client relations is likely to

command the allegiance of the favoured sections, but resented by those not connected to the power source and/or the influence peddling network. An economic liberalization policy may promote “investor confidence”, but end up alienating large sections of the population (particularly, unemployed school leavers and university graduates, low-skilled workers living under constant fear of retrenchment, urban and rural poor, etc.).

3. Objectives of the Forum

The overriding purpose of the Regional Forum is to facilitate exchange of knowledge and sharing of information on measures adopted to reinforce citizen trust in government, and, particularly in post-conflict societies, to re-establish state authority while at the same time enlisting public support for organized government. In pursuit of the overarching objective, the Regional Forum will endeavour to:

- (a) examine contemporary practices (good or otherwise) in government-citizen relations, with particular emphasis on the measures adopted by governments to enable citizens to participate in free and fair elections, to reflect citizen concerns in policies and legislations, to allow the citizen to hold public officials accountable for their actions and/or omissions;
- (b) review the impact and effectiveness of strategies instituted to curb ethical violations, combat corruption, promote integrity in public life, and redeem the image of public officials;
- (c) undertake a critical review of the mechanisms that have been established to improve the service delivery capacities of public agencies and transform them into “customer”-caring entities;
- (d) evaluate the achievements of contemporary decentralization reform programmes and the impact that these programmes have on citizen participation in governance and on trust in public authority;
- (e) examine good practices in re-establishing state authority, building confidence, and promoting trust in post-conflict societies;
- (f) exchange ideas on strategies adopted within and across countries to harness advances in information and communication technologies (ICT) and apply innovative public administration practices to strengthen citizen trust in government.

4. Thematic Focus of the Forum

Discussions at the Regional Forum will focus on the following topics:

- (i) Improving the Conduct of Public Officials: Implementing the Charter for Public Service in Africa;
- (ii) Placing the Citizen at the Centre of Service Delivery Improvement Initiatives: Focus on Quality and Access;
- (iii) Enhancing the Capacity for Citizen/Civic Participation in Local Governance;

- (iv) Rebuilding Public Administration and Reconnecting the Citizen with the Government in Post-Conflict Societies;
- (v) Promoting public administration innovation through e-Government; and
- (vi) Consolidating state legitimacy through electoral arrangements and civic engagement.

5. Methodology

Discussions at the Regional Forum are expected to take place at plenary sessions and in working groups. The first one and a half days will be devoted to panel discussions as well as individual presentations. Emphasis will be on peer learning and experience sharing rather than on theoretical speculations.

Each panel will comprise at least a senior policy maker (preferably a cabinet minister), a high ranking career official at the level of permanent secretary, managing director, or equivalent, an expert in the subject to be discussed, and a moderator (representing an inter-governmental or non-governmental organization, or from the corporate sector). Panel discussions will begin with a brief overview (by the moderator) of the outcomes of regional conferences and meetings on the issue of interest to the session. This will be followed by the panelists' interventions on key challenges and the Next Steps, and a recapitulation of the dominant issues (again by the moderator). The ensuing general discussions will focus on the conclusions and recommendations.

Besides the panel discussions, renowned experts will be commissioned to present material on selected topics. The brief presentations will be followed by the participants' comments and questions. The conclusions emerging from the general debate will be summarized by the session moderator/chair.

In the afternoon of the second day, the Regional Forum will split into Working Groups. The break-out sessions will tackle specific issues, and report back to the plenary in the morning of the third day. The afternoon of the third day will be set aside for Forum evaluation and the closing formalities.

6. Inputs

The inputs required to ensure effective organization of the Forum are:

- Resource persons who will prepare and present papers (if required), or participate at plenary sessions as moderators and panelists;
- Air travel and Daily Subsistence Allowance (DSA) for participants and resource persons;
- Protocol and transport from the Airport to the Hotel and venue of the Forum and back to the airport (for both resource persons and participants);
- Venue for the forum including conference room for plenary sessions as well as rooms for group discussions;

- Secretariat and Logistics support (including photocopying and scanning facilities, stationery, conference bags, badges, computers, power point projectors, and screens);
- Coffee and tea breaks;
- Simultaneous interpretation and translation (English / French).

7. Outputs/Outcomes

The outputs expected from the Regional Forum include:

- (a) Report of the Regional Forum (with the conclusions and recommendations to be transmitted to the Global Forum holding in Vienna, Austria, in June 2007);
- (b) A regional programme of action on measures to strengthen citizen trust in government; and
- (c) Recommendations on the review of the African Public Service Charter.

8. Target group

The participants at the Forum will include cabinet ministers, legislators, civic leaders, and representatives of inter-governmental, non-governmental, and international organizations.

9. Venue and dates

The Regional Forum will be held at the United Nations International Conference Centre, Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 11 to 13 December 2006.

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