Introduction
Under a democracy such as in the Philippines, the people’s fundamental faith in the integrity of political institutions is what holds the system together even under the most difficult times. The present situation in the Philippines is a test of this principle. Whether or not the test is passed with success is a matter yet to be seen. However, at this stage, what could be gainfully learned from present experience is the knowledge that people’s trust seems to lie on the existence of ethics and accountability mechanisms and infrastructure. As shown and proven with quite a measure of success by many studies, ethics and accountability are keys not only to effective government but also to effective governance. The following discussions deal with some of the infrastructures and initiatives in the Philippines.

Legal Framework
The 1987 Constitution of the Philippines provides the basis of ethical and accountable behavior in the public sector. Section 1 of Article XI states that:

*Public office is a public trust. Public officers and employees must at all times be accountable to the people, serve them with utmost responsibility, integrity, loyalty, and efficiency, act with patriotism and justice, and lead modest lives.*

This provision requires every public official and employee to exhibit and live certain values while in government service. In addition, the State has been mandated by the Constitution to “maintain honesty and integrity in the public service and take positive and effective measures against graft and corruption”.

In 1989, the Philippine legislature passed Republic Act No. 6713, a law embodying the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees. The Code spells out in fine detail the do’s and don’ts for government officials and employees in and out of the workplace. These do’s and don’ts are encapsulated in the eight norms of conduct to be observed by all government officials and employees. These norms or standards are:

- Commitment to public interest
- Professionalism
- Justness and sincerity
- Political neutrality
- Responsiveness to the public
- Nationalism and patriotism
- Commitment to democracy
- Simple living

The Code, likewise, introduced some reforms in the administrative systems like giving heads of agencies the responsibility of ensuring there is a value development program for their employees; continuing studies on work systems and procedures with
the end in view of improving the delivery of public services; and, mandating the designation of a resident Ombudsman in every department, office and agency. Incentives and rewards system has also been put in place.

Another comprehensive law passed to address and curb the commission of malfeasance in government is Republic Act No. 3019 or the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act. In Section 1 of this law, it states that:

*It is the policy of the Philippine Government, in line with the principle that a public office is a public trust, to repress certain acts of public officer and private persons alike which constitute graft and corrupt practices which may lead thereto.*

This law specifies eleven (11) instances of corrupt practices in addition to acts or omissions already penalized by existing laws.

**Political Commitment**

The legal infrastructure that prescribes ethical conduct of public servants is reinforced by political commitment. This political commitment, while difficult to benchmark, has been demonstrated by some policy pronouncements. Quite significant are the ten-point action agenda of the present Administration and the Medium-Term Development Plan (2000-2004) or *Angat Pinoy 2004* which embody the framework for the country’s socioeconomic development.

The agenda and the MTDP place the implementation of a sustained training and orientation program on anti-graft and corrupt practices and laws, and on the Ethical Standards Act of Public Officials and Employees among the Administration’s priorities to reduce graft and corruption and exact high standards of ethics in government. Proceeding from this, departments and agencies of the executive branch have set up and implemented various programs that aim to eliminate bureaucratic red tape. One-stop action centers are now being promoted and institutionalized in the agencies.

**Oversight Institutions**

The legal infrastructure and political commitment are supported and complemented by the existence of oversight institutions. The creation of the oversight institutions that deal with issues of ethics, accountability, graft and corruption are mandated by the Constitution. The common feature of these institutions is they enjoy a substantive degree of fiscal autonomy in the sense that they are not subject to the fiscal controls of the executive. The budget is directly released to these institutions and the heads are authorized to realign savings from their budget. They also have quasi-judicial powers in that they can adjudicate and decide cases and enforce their own decisions, including the imposition of sanctions which may include suspension from office or even dismissal from government service.

In the Philippines, the three constitutionally mandated oversight institutions are the Civil Service Commission, the Office of the Ombudsman and the Commission on Audit.

The Civil Service Commission is the central personnel agency of the government. Under Section 3, Article IX-B of the Constitution, the CSC is mandated to “establish
career service and adopt measures to promote morale, efficiency, integrity, responsiveness, progressiveness, and courtesy in the civil service.” It is also tasked to “institutionalize a management climate conducive to public accountability.” CSC’s effort involves in enforcing ethics and accountability of line agencies basically involves three approaches. One approach is regulatory, the other, corrective, and the last one, developmental. The first approach addresses compliance of agencies with policies and standards on HRD systems set by the CSC. For instance, CSC prescribes qualification standards for each and every position in the Philippine government. Non-compliance with the QS by agencies in the processing of appointments of their staff results in the disapproval by the CSC of such appointments. But, apart from the substantive requirements for practically all kinds of personnel actions such as the publication requirement and the promotion and selection board processes. Non-compliance with the procedural requirements constitutes ground for corrective or even punitive action. The second approach deals with disciplinary actions against official or employee for infractions committed in relation to the performance of his/her official functions. The Administrative Code of 1987 or Executive Order No. 292 outlines the various acts that are subject to administrative disciplinary proceedings. However, administrative discipline is not a function within the exclusive jurisdiction of CSC. Agency heads as well as the Office of the Ombudsman also have the authority to proceed against erring government officials and employees. The third approach is developmental and will be discussed later in the succeeding paragraph.

The Office of the Ombudsman acts as a prosecutor against those charged with the violation of RA 3019, RA 6713 and the law against ill-gotten wealth, among others. It is mandated to investigate and prosecute the criminal liability of public officials and employees involved in graft and corruption.

The Commission on Audit is the fiscal watchdog of the government. COA is responsible for ensuring legal and proper disbursement of public funds and preventing irregular, unnecessary, or extravagant expenditures or usage of public funds. It also has quasi-judicial powers.

All these oversight institutions enforce accountability ethic in government.

Active Citizenry

Market principle is at work in government operations. This simply means that the services provided by the government are dictated, to a large extent, by the need of the people. Some mechanisms by which the extent, type and adequacy of services are gauged are feedback surveys and the practice of benchmarking.

The CSC has relied on *Mamamayan Muna, Hindi Mamaya Na!* Program (translated as Citizens First, Not Later) as source of client feedback. The program is a government-wide campaign of the CSC that not only provides measure of client satisfaction but also addresses the need for behavioral reforms in the bureaucracy, particularly in the manner by which civil servants deal with the public. Since the formal launching in 1994, the program has gained wide acceptance by the public. By reviewing the number and subject matter of complaints received under the
program, the CSC has been able to determine the centers of excellence in government. On the other hand, the performance of agencies that received the highest complaints are continuously being monitored.

**Promoting Ethics and Accountability in the Public Sector**

There have been numerous initiatives in promoting ethics and accountability in the public sector. As shown in the earlier discussions, all the above mechanisms focus on exacting as well as developing ethics and accountability consciousness in government officials and employees. The other approach that will be given emphasis in the discussion are the various developmental initiatives, which are within the area of knowledge and competence of the CSC.

As earlier mentioned, RA 6713 has put in place an incentive and awards program in government. Every year, officials and employees who have demonstrated exemplary service and conduct in observance of the eight norms of conduct are chosen and are conferred awards by the Office of the President and the CSC. The Presidential Lingkod Bayan (meaning: “Serving the Nation”) Award is conferred by the President to an individual for consistent and dedicated performance which made significant impact to the public and the country as a whole. The CSC Pag-asa (meaning: “Hope”) Award is granted to a group of individuals or a team who demonstrated outstanding teamwork and cooperation which resulted in better delivery of public service, improved the lives of clients or beneficiaries, or instituted efficiency and economy in government operations.

In preparing public servants for ethical dilemma, all new entrants in government service undergo the Alay sa Bayan (meaning: “For the Country”) Induction Program. This aims to focus and enhance the energies and commitment of new employees as they assume their new roles as government employees. What follows this is a three-day training program Values Orientation Workshop. The VOW is designed to inculcate appropriate norms and conduct becoming of government employees.

For career executives, a program called Gabay ng Paglilingkod (translated as “Guide to Service”) is a capability building program that provides a forum for discussion on values and principles of public ethics and accountability among government managers.

One of CSC’s present initiatives is the training on public sector ethics and accountability, which is being developed under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme - PARAGON Regional Governance Reform Program. The training course forms part of a six-module training package on governance, which UNDP hopes to pilot across the Asia Pacific Region. The framework that is being pursued for this training course basically focuses on the individual. Because what is being dealt with are moral and ethical issues, the resolve to behave in accordance with the standards of conduct and to live a life of integrity depends greatly on the individual. Of course, as previously elucidated in the paper, the standards for individual behavior should be reinforced by existing mechanisms in the organization. At the community level, there should be ethical infrastructures that will further reinforce and sustain ethical and accountable behavior. The framework therefore
suggests mechanisms or ethics infrastructures, which are not only at the personal level but also at the levels of the organization and the community. The mechanisms and infrastructures common to all levels are commitment, workable code of conduct, effective legal framework, professional socialization mechanisms, efficient accountability mechanisms, ethics coordinating body, supportive public sector conditions and active civil society.

A future goal is for the CSC to be the Center for Leadership and Ethical Management in the government. This has been placed in the drawing board and it is expected that concrete proposals will be ready next year.

A Final Word

The issues of ethics and accountability pose a continuing challenge to the Philippine government. The mechanisms and infrastructure that have been put in place, as outlined in this paper, may not yet be the best or ideal in the sense that ethical and accountable behavior in the public sector is still much to be desired in the Philippines. But, there is so much hope to hold and believe that there will be many opportunities to lead and change for the best.