THE ETHICS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

1. For Public Servants ‘Good Governance’ is now an accepted goal. Some attribute this to interference by outside agencies. But almost everywhere people have changing expectations of government. These result from increased levels of literacy and education over the past one or two generations, and increasing levels of information (with global television coverage) over the past one or two decades.

2. The characteristics of good governance advocated by many include accountability, transparency, participation, non-discrimination or ‘being fair’, devolution (for better response to end users) and poverty alleviation. Competition is also an important part of the governance ethic, aiming to avoid the effects of unrestrained monopoly power.

3. We consider accountability in a later session. However, suppose an individual or organisation becomes more transparent, or more participatory, having neglected these values before. How would their actions differ? Let’s consider a few ‘governance’ values, asking:
   1. How can we motivate staff to a stronger commitment to these values?
   2. In what other ways can we ensure that these values are observed?
   3. Is more of each better, or can we have ‘too much of a good thing’?

[There are brief hints below.]

Transparency  ‘freedom of information’
Information may be available, but we need to inform the public where and how to get the information. How shall we do that? Providing information costs time and money. There is need for consultation with staff and customers about what they want to know. What limits should we set on transparency, and why?

Participation    co-operation, partnership
Note the problems associated with coordination (everybody waiting for everybody else to agree, seizure of power by ‘coordinator’, source of frustration)
   ▪ Involve all stakeholders, who should be informed, consulted, given ‘voice’
   ▪ How achieved? Note that we need both cooperation and competition.

Non-discrimination   fairness
What are the groups of people most likely to be favoured, or disfavoured? (Sometimes the rich and powerful get the best service, though needing it least.)

Competition   as incentive, and to avoid disincentive of monopoly
Dangers of unfair competition, cartels (as shown by ‘mock auction’) Need for clear rules for markets, as for competition in soccer or golf
Need to clarify roles for those who compete, and those who referee and monitor.
A REFLECTION

5 When we have time, we may reflect on changes in the public service and think how these will affect the way we work, and the way our staff will work.

6 In one Asian country in 1999 civil servants in the Civil Service Commission adopted a vision statement for the country’s civil service seeking:

   A World-Class Civil Service,
   transparent and fair in all its transactions,
   responding with integrity to the wishes of the people,
   and giving effective service to the people
   and their elected Government.

7 Everywhere, the demand of citizens for ‘Good Governance’ is bringing new standards for public service. There are demands for quality service, for fair treatment of individuals and groups including the poor, for transparency, accountability and participation, and for strong measures to reduce corruption. These are ethical requirements. Ethics is the new priority agenda for public service. Meeting the demands may require difficult breaks with, for example:

   • cherished but sometimes authoritarian national cultures;
   • work cultures that have developed through years of colonial rule;
   • an emphasis on academic qualifications rather than practical competence.

In part the need is for adaptation to a global economy, but primarily it is an adaptation to better educated and informed citizens.

8 That need is greater in some places than in others, but we may ask what changes will be needed in work practices and attitudes to meet the requirements that as civil servants we – and our staff – should:

   • serve citizens, not rule them, and be fair and friendly in that service;
   • be transparent and inform the people, not secretive
     - telling everything, except what we are instructed to keep in confidence,
     - rather than saying nothing except what we are given authority to tell;
   • seek consultation, participation and partnership, not ‘going it alone’
     - working with citizens, the private sector and other groups in civil society;
   • be accountable for what we do, not act without explanation
     - to management, to clients or ‘customers’, to the public in general;
   • fight corruption, and not allow a conflict of interest
     - or even a reasonable suspicion of such conflict
     - in our work or the work of our departments;
   • give ministers and political leaders honest advice, not flattery
     - telling them the truths they need to know, not what they wish to hear.