Decision-making and accountability deficits in Public Governance

UN CEPA Meeting
14-20 April
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The new governance context

Public administration challenges:
• greater complexity, vulnerability and interdependence;
• financial pressures to do more with less;
• increasingly educated and cynical public;
• governments need to partner to deliver results:
  - from ‘big government’ to ‘big society’ and/or ‘big citizenship’.
Our Topic

• My focus on citizen engagement and accountability issues.

• Focus not on corruption but Mustaq Khan has an important message

  - different drivers of corruption require different responses
  - cannot rely just on greater transparency and accountability through citizen engagement but
  - need systemic changes to deal with political corruption and weakness of institutions
Democratic Deficit(s)

- Democratic deficit:
  ‘any situation in which there is believed to be a lack of democratic accountability and control over the decision-making process’ (English Collins Dictionary)

- Focus on two aspects:
  - ‘decision-making deficit’;
  - ‘accountability deficit’.
(a) The Decision-making deficit

• Where there is a lack of attention by policy makers to the involvement of citizens at the beginning of the policy cycle.

• Much attention given today to putting citizens at the centre of policy delivery.

• Deficit in decision-making which involves citizens
  - most evident when dealing with complex and politically sensitive problems that governments alone cannot resolve.
OECD findings

• Providing information to citizens or consulting them is common, but
• active participation is not, yet:
• more participatory policy-making processes appear inevitable especially if governments want citizens to change behaviour.

(OECD 2009)
Broader challenges

Interrelated challenges for successful engagement include:

• Strong and inclusive leadership
• Building and maintaining trusting relationships
• Willingness to share decision-making power
• Appropriate capabilities and cultures
• Citizen access to government information
• Institutionalizing engagement into the policy process
(b) The Accountability deficit

- Where there is lack of attention by governments to accountability issues when they partner with others to meet citizens’ needs.
- Three circumstances:
  - across government agencies
  - across levels of government
  - with third parties (non-government providers)
Accountability questions

• Key: how to adapt hierarchical model to where there are two or more delivery partners?

• Other:
  - how can ‘shared’ accountability work?
  - should auditors audit third parties? (as in Australia)
  - how are third parties to be held accountable to citizens as well as funders?
  - do citizens/communities have any obligations? (Edwards 2011)
Australian Federalism Reform

• A new approach: *Intergovernmental agreement on federal financial relations* 2009
  - advances ‘collaborative federalism’
  - greater service delivery flexibility at state and local level with
  - public accountability for achieving outcomes.

(CRC 2011)
Institutional features assessed

Overall assessment ‘fundamentally sound’ but:

• Need for more cultural change.
• Agenda more transparent and accessible to public.
• Less prescriptive role of central government.
• Better performance reporting – better quality of data and performance indicators.

(CRC 2011; JCPAA 2011)
Conclusions

New government environment requires new structures, processes and relationships to deal with identified ‘deficits’.

• Dilemma given need to do more with less:
  - short term urgent issues crowd out needed longer term governance reform.

• Too much rhetoric leading to mistrust.

• Not enough accountability for outcomes.

So valuable prescriptions in papers before us.
Some References


Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA) (2011), Inquiry into National Funding Arrangements, Report 427, Parliament of Australia, November


• Peruzzotti, Enrique (2011) “Engaging Citizens and their Organisations to Prevent Corruption in the Delivery of Public Services for Achieving the MDGs”, paper prepared for DPADM, UNDESA, UN, November.