

Ladies and Gentlemen,

“As 2012 approaches, reform calls are still being heard loud and clear [across the region]. They are voiced by citizens demonstrating in the streets and acknowledged by policy-makers and opinion leaders in decision-making circles. Whether the emerging situation will eventually bring about the needed reforms or not, will, by and large, depend on how different societal powers interact to influence the processes of forming governments and holding them accountable.”

This statement, taken from the introduction of the agenda for this conference, immediately hones in on the important role of social accountability mechanism. To channel the peoples desires for reform, and holding decisions-makers accountable for seeing these reforms through.

It’s about engaging social movements to demand accountability through mechanisms other than the traditional channels of formal political accountability, such as elections and legislatures. Social accountability relies on civic engagement, with ordinary citizens participating directly or indirectly in holding decisions-makers and service providers to account.

My presentation will focus on a paper commissioned by the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre on “Social Accountability in Situations of Conflict and Fragility”. It draws on the lessons learned through Tiri’s Network for Integrity in Reconstruction’s work with civil society organizations and community groups in Afghanistan, DRC, Liberia, Nepal, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste.

I won’t spend a great deal of time on the different types of social accountability mechanisms, as I believe this will be covered more ably by the other panelists. Instead I’ll focus on lessons learned from supporting social accountability in situations of conflict and fragility, some of the challenges faced and recommendations for effective engagement.

As we all know, conflict affected and fragile states pose particular challenges. They’re generally noted for their limited ability to govern a population and territory, and build mutually constructive and reinforcing relations with society. Trust and legitimacy is often lacking as social cohesion has broken down, and citizens’ expectations are high in the aftermath of rapid transitions.

Failure to fulfil state functions and build accountability in the immediate years after transition or conflict creates high risks for

corruption and renewed violence. Yet in these periods of high hopes and expectations, there is often little emphasis placed on increasing public access to information and strengthening local accountability mechanisms.

Instead focus is often on conventional approaches to strengthening accountability through formal political channels. But experience has shown that these more traditional approaches often fail in fragile states.

In these contexts a critical weakness often tends to be a lack of accountability to citizens and limited public participation. This is why attention is increasingly being placed on supporting social accountability interventions in situations of conflict and fragility.

Very briefly, tools available for strengthening social accountability through transparency, accountability and citizen engagement include, amongst others:

1. Participatory budgeting;
2. Budget monitoring and analysis (e.g. public expenditure tracking systems);

3. Social audits

4. Citizen report cards, community scorecards and citizen charters, and

5. Community development plans.

Studies of social accountability initiatives point to a number of success factors:

- Initiatives that use advocacy and communication strategies achieve greater social accountability gains than those that don't. This entails the capacity to gather robust and systematic data and to reflect the needs of communities; and
- Building civil society's technical expertise in financial management and budget analysis, and approaches to working with the state to overcome mistrust and political resistance are critical factors in the success of e.g. independent budget analysis, monitoring and advocacy.

These success factors are important to keep in mind when considering the particular challenges to social accountability

initiatives in situations of conflict and fragility. These challenges include the following:

1. Elite capture, violence and coercion may be a significant challenge. Participating organisations may be co-opted or viewed as agents of external forces. These risks are exacerbated where there are limited means for citizen protection and voice, high factionalism and weak security.
2. The impact of social accountability initiatives is weakened where it is difficult to mobilise citizens. This can result from a lack of coherent leadership or voice within civil society and limited access to information and means of communication.
3. Facilitators of social accountability, such as community-based organisations, often experience difficulties in securing funding and finding the right staff to manage their operations, mobilise and train citizens, engage authorities and stimulate collective action.
4. Capacities of both state and non-state actors are often limited in fragile and conflict-affected states. This includes the capacity of service providers to manage information

leading to difficulties when trying to accurately assess effectiveness of government services.

So how are these challenges to be overcome? The U4 paper proposes a number of recommendations for donors seeking to support social accountability initiatives in situations of conflict and fragility. Nevertheless these recommendations are generally applicable, and hold relevance in this region.

- 1. A first step should be to map stakeholder capacities and accountability mechanisms in order to strategically support them in order to strengthen social accountability.**

Knowing who are and how to support social accountability facilitators will depend on the context. Non-governmental organisations or community-based groups who served the public good before and throughout war or transition may be well placed to build and train networks of change agents. It is also important to identify and mobilize the ‘losers’, that is to say those who stand to lose from corruption – e.g. parents monitoring the use of education funds. But knowing the context to fully to understand politico-economic incentives (or disincentives).

2. Partnerships should be strengthened across sectors, and demographic and geographic divides.

As mentioned earlier, social accountability thrives where government has both the interest and capability to deliver services as well as channels to interact with communities and their representatives. When these conditions are not present, it is necessary to bridge the capital and periphery, the urban and rural divide, to enable intermediaries, including parliamentarians, civil society organisations and sub-national officials, to convey and act on citizens' concerns. Donors also need to lead by example, making themselves subject to robust social accountability mechanisms.

3. Support collaborative governance and build capacity for the strengthening of the social contract.

Where civil society is weak or fragmented and government is unable to produce, manage and disseminate information, on-going support to strengthen skills and systems to collaborate, monitor and use information is often needed. This can range from support to statistics offices and information management systems to civic education, joint state-society skill building, monitoring and policy-making.

In the end, the main argument for strengthening social accountability mechanisms is that they contribute to citizens' building trust in the governance system, and ultimately, in the government at local and national level. Alliances for social accountability that cut across socio-economic lines, the public-private divide and local and international partners can strengthen social accountability and deliver development gains, even in the most challenging of settings.

Thank you!