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## **SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND ANTI-CORRUPTION: MAKING THE CONNECTION** (Inception Paper)

In the course of doing its work in the country and in the region, the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in the East Asia Pacific (ANSA-EAP) inevitably encountered situations where it had to grapple with and articulate the nuances between two different yet quite related concepts, that of social accountability (SAc) and anti-corruption. Admittedly, many of those working in and with ANSA-EAP came from an anti-corruption background, and the anti-corruption frameworks they brought with them sometimes led to interchanging concepts, or worse, obfuscated the porous divide between the two. On the other hand, there were also instances when discussions tended to make comparative assessments, thus highlighting the insularity of some minds who failed to see – or refused to understand – how one could complement the other. This situation has led to a realization of a need to understand and clearly articulate the hairline distinctions and intertwined dynamics between anti-corruption and social accountability.

This paper therefore is put forward as a think-piece – a starting point, if you will – that should lead to a more systematic discussion of the issues at hand. More than anything else, however, this discussion should lead to a more nuanced application of a range of practical solutions to governance and development problems that plague many societies today.

### **Defining social accountability**

Social accountability (SAc) is defined as a process of constructive engagement between citizens and government checking and monitoring government's conduct and performance as public resources are used to deliver services, improve community welfare, and protect people's rights. SAc is anchored on four fundamental citizen rights: right to information, right to be heard, right to associate, and right to participate in governance. Transparency, accountability, and participation are thus the basic principles from which the demand for good governance flows.<sup>1</sup> In other words, SAc is embedded in good governance, a condition where its absence will most likely result in bad governance.

Iftekhharuzzman and M. Sajjad Hussein, in their paper titled "Integrity Pledge: Participatory Governance through Social Accountability", asserts that social accountability is about

strengthening the demand side of good governance, to build capacities of the citizens to raise voice and demand for accountable, transparent and pro-people governance. It is also essentially a set of tools and processes for building effective bridges of the public officials and public

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<sup>1</sup> According to UNESCAP, "Good governance has eight major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. Accountability ensures corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the future needs of the society". (Available online: [www.unescap.org](http://www.unescap.org))

representatives with citizens. It is a non-conventional process of holding the power-holders accountable and responsive to the people on whose mandate they exercise the power.<sup>2</sup>

### **Focus on corruption and anti-corruption**

Klitgaard uses the formula “monopoly plus discretion minus accountability” ( $C=M+D-A$ ) in defining corruption. It means corruption will most likely happen when someone has monopoly power over a good or service, has the discretion to decide whether one receives it and how much one gets, and is not accountable.<sup>3</sup> The absence of transparency in transactions, the refusal of those in power to account, and the lack of meaningful citizen participation in decision-making contribute to the conditions for corruption to happen. Such conditions show that corruption occurs as a consequence (and manifestation) of bad governance.

Combating corruption, according to Klitgaard,

[B]egins with better systems. Monopolies must be reduced or carefully regulated. Official discretion must be clarified. Transparency must be enhanced. The probability of being caught must increase, and the penalties for corruption (for both givers and takers) must rise.

Klitgaard proposes four components of an anti-corruption strategy. These are: a) punish some major offenders, b) involve the people in diagnosing corrupt systems, c) focus on prevention by repairing corrupt systems, and d) provide reform incentives.

The above resonates with what Iftekharuzzman and M. Sajjad Hussein say. According to them,

The most important element in an effective anti-corruption strategy is the political commitment at all levels, especially at the top. Two major preconditions are a) sending an effective signal that corruption is a punishable offense and b) establishing the rule of law, which can be ensured only by effective functioning of the key institutions of democracy and national integrity system. The other important element is the anti-corruption demand from the people which has been loudly voiced, but must be sustained in the form of a social movement. (Ibid)

### **Making the connection**

What seems obvious from the above definitions and descriptions of social accountability and anti-corruption is that both activities appear to be closely related to and, in some aspects, overlap with each other within the bigger framework of actions supporting good governance. Social accountability, however, has a more basic or generic character to it in the sense that its absence predicates bad governance, defined as lack of transparency, accountability, and participation. Inversely, the concept of good governance carries with it connotations of social accountability, where citizens and citizen groups constructively engage government (which, in essence, is what democracy is all about) for the purpose of

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<sup>2</sup> Iftekharuzzman and M. Sajjad Hussein. (2010, April 11). *Integrity Pledge: Participatory Governance through Social Accountability*. Paper presented at the International Seminar on “Integrity Pledge: Participatory Governance through Social Accountability”, organized by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) in Dhaka.

<sup>3</sup> Klitgaard, Robert. (1997, November). *International Cooperation Against Corruption*. \_\_\_\_\_

monitoring the use of public resources towards improved delivery of services, community welfare, and protection of people's rights. Social accountability is premised on the assumption that constructive engagement between citizens and government through third party monitoring minimizes, if not pre-empts, corruption.

Anti-corruption, on the other hand, is a set of interventions that counter governance gone awry. Corruption happens when government processes are not transparent, when government officials are not held accountable for their decisions and actions, when people do not participate (or are not allowed to participate) in such processes. Corruption is a result – and a manifestation – of bad governance. Anti-corruption assumes there is a “crisis” in governance, a failure in fleshing out the principles of transparency, accountability, and participation as the conditions for good governance. Thus, basic to anti-corruption is a confrontational attitude.

While there exists some delineation between social accountability and anti-corruption, the overlaps also seem evident. The enabling conditions of social accountability – the so-called four pillars: government openness, organized and capable citizens, access to information, and sensitivity to culture and context – are also required in an anti-corruption framework. For instance, Iftekharuzzman and M. Sajjad Hussein assume some form of government openness, maybe through government champions, when they talk of “political commitment at all levels, especially at the top”, as the “most important element in an effective anti-corruption strategy”. Klitgaard mentions the need to “involve the people in diagnosing corrupt systems”, which action cannot be done unless people are organized and has the capability to do so. Transparency as a requirement for any anti-corruption strategy underlines the need for access to information that is readily available, relevant, useful, and understandable. Finally, while anti-corruption requires strict adherence to the rule of law, it must also be sensitive to context and culture, specifically the value systems of certain communities.

### **Social accountability: A wider repertoire of options for good governance**

A social accountability approach provides good governance champions a wider repertoire of options, starting with the more benign (for lack of a better term?) constructive engagement between citizens and government to the more confrontational mode of anti-corruption. In fact, social accountability carries with it some form aggressiveness in the sense that it proceeds from the “demand side” for accountable, transparent and pro-people governance. Social accountability narrows the space for bad governance – and the resulting corruption that it engenders – because citizens have an active role in monitoring the use of public resources and the performance of public officials.

Involving the people as stakeholders – in design, delivery, monitoring and assessment of the quality of services - can effectively reinforce and strengthen the conventional accountability systems. This approach to accountability requires taking the people as stakeholders rather than simple beneficiaries, service recipients or objects of development. Recognizing the people as stakeholders at various levels and institutions of development especially at the delivery level ensures that their participation and their voice and demand are counted.