

**7th Global Forum on Reinventing Government:
Building Trust in Government
26 – 29 June 2007
Vienna, Austria**

AIDE MEMOIRE

RESTORING TRUST IN GOVERNMENT THROUGH PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATIONS



UNITED NATIONS NATIONS UNIES

**DIVISION FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS**



ASH INSTITUTE
**FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE
AND INNOVATION**

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Workshop organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance, Harvard University in partnership with Formez and the UN Project Office on Governance



BACKGROUND

The 7th Global Forum on Reinventing Government to be held at United Nations Headquarters in Vienna from 26 to 29 June 2007 will focus on the theme “Building Trust in Government”. It will offer plenary sessions and a series of parallel capacity development workshops on different aspects of revitalizing governance and public administration to build trust in Government. Participants will include ministers, senior government officials, parliamentarians, mayors, civil society representatives, academics and the private sector.

This event is part of a UN system wide partnership led by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). While the United Nations will organize the plenary sessions, seven capacity development workshops will be organized by the Institutional Partners Group (IPG) composed of entities and programmes from the UN system as well as external organizations. The workshops will provide an opportunity to think and discuss in-depth how governance institutions, processes and strategies can be revitalized to rebuild trust in government.

The workshops include:

1. Restoring Trust in Government through Public Sector Innovations
2. Governance Challenges in Crisis and Post-Conflict Societies
3. Civic Engagement for Trust in Government
4. Decentralization and Local Governance
5. Improving the Quality of the Electoral and Parliamentary Process
6. Managing Knowledge in Government
7. Global Convention on Anti-Corruption and State Capacity for Implementation

The Workshop on “Restoring Trust in Government through Public Sector Innovations” is organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, through its Division for Public Administration and Development Management, and the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Kennedy School of Government, at Harvard University in partnership with FORMEZ and the United Nations Project Office on Governance (UNGC).

CONTEXT

As highlighted by the United Nations Millennium Declaration, democracy, including an efficient and effective public administration, is the best way to ensure that the values of freedom, equal opportunities, solidarity, environmental protection, and shared responsibility are respected. Democracy and good governance are a goal in itself because of the values on which they rest, but at the same time, they are also the most critical means to promote development and poverty eradication. An efficient, effective and democratic government is the best guarantor of social justice and an orderly society. Only democratic governments—because they are participatory, transparent and accountable, respect plural and diverse perspectives, promote gender and social equity, and allow freedom of choice, expression and beliefs—are best suited to advance those goals and ideals. A democratic government that reflects popular will is better equipped to ensure social justice, to create an even playing field that allows its citizens the freedom to realize their full potentials and creativity; and to deliver the services and opportunities that people need. Though many studies have not been able to show that democracy per se will lead to greater economic growth, there is evidence that democracy ensures greater redistribution of resources. One of the consequences of democracy is that it generates political incentives for decision makers to respond positively to the needs and demands of society. The stronger a democracy is the greater and more effective will be the pressure of these incentives on the decision makers, thus the higher the well-being of the whole society.

Having in place a democratic system, however, is not sufficient. Government institutions must be based on clear and widely accepted rules; have committed leaders and qualified people to undertake appropriate reforms in the economic and social spheres; be able to mobilize resources and manage expenditure; and to operate in the most cost-effective way possible by making use of new information technologies. In other words, a democratic government must be effective or it will alienate citizens. The absence of effective government makes citizens cynical and apathetic towards civic activities and institutions, erodes their confidence and trust in both the government and its elected officials, and generally leads to a diminution of the government's legitimacy and its authority. The suspicion of government is reflected in declining voter turnout, the difficulties of attracting competent and idealistic people in public service, and in the general inability of the government to deliver services to the citizens.

With low public trust, government officials and politicians have little legitimacy to implement political programmes, as well as represent and act on behalf of citizens. A low trust in government institutions can also lead to growth of the informal sector, tax evasion, corruption, crime, and eventually social anomy. Moreover, when trust in public institutions is low, informal institutions, such as the mafia or terrorist groups, can come to be regarded as more authoritative than the State in regulating economic and social affairs and providing services (the control of organized crime over specific territories within democratic states is a stark example of this phenomenon) turning the State into an empty shell. In extreme cases, low trust in government can pave the way to dangerous political alternatives, including extremist movements and non-democratic forces. History has shown that democracies are fragile in nature and need continuous support in order to survive as low legitimacy and apathy can open the doors to authoritarian regimes. In other words, a democracy is not a “once and for all” conquest but it relies on the vigilance and participation of all citizens at all times. It is interesting to note that “mistrust” in government officials and the majority is built into all constitutional democracies through mechanisms of checks and balances, including an independent judiciary. Even with the enthusiastic urging of a majority whose representatives have meticulously observed proper processes, government should not trample on fundamental rights nor should the majority. In order to protect fundamental rights, including minority rights, limits are imposed on the actions of politicians (or governmental powers) as well as on the majority itself. Constructive criticism is a key element to a healthy and well-functioning democratic system whereas mistrust can be very dangerous.

According to several studies and statistics trust in government has been diminishing in many parts of the world. In some advanced democracies, including the United States and selected countries of Western Europe, voter turnouts are decreasing. Furthermore, the growing influence of money in the electoral process and the strong role of special interests on public policy decision-making are being viewed in many democratic nations as “deviations” from the spirit of democracy. A similar trend is emerging in developing countries. A recent study by UNDP shows that in Latin America expectations and hopes for a better future, which followed the Third Wave of democratization, have slowly been replaced by apathy and distrust in government. What is more, the inability of governments to deliver adequate services, especially in the social sphere, as well as to promote more employment opportunities and better living conditions for all have resulted in a widespread disappointment among the population for the current form of governance up to the point that, according to the mentioned study, the value of democracy per se is being questioned. Most critical of all some democracies have not been able to address the question of equity and social justice effectively; and in the last quarter of a century poverty and lack of opportunities is still a persisting challenge in many countries around the world.

Notwithstanding the outstanding work that numerous public servants are doing around the world, there can be no denying that in popular perception, especially in some countries, the government is held in low esteem. The theme of rebuilding trust in government is therefore of particular relevance to all those who are concerned with strengthening democratic institutions and enhancing government effectiveness. At an intuitive level, we can single out four main causes for the loss of confidence in the government. First, in certain contexts, government officials are perceived as unethical and deceptive. Studies have shown that people believe that government officials are not trustworthy because they do not keep their electoral promises and do not act in the interests of society. Second, governments are perceived as ineffective in delivering services. This is of particular relevance since the legitimacy of a democratic regime is based in great part on the capacity of the State to deliver services that are relevant and of high quality to all sectors of the population in a society. Third, they are seen as unresponsive since they do not respond to

the needs of citizens, especially those of marginalized groups in society. Fourth, they are wasteful because they are perceived to use resources inefficiently. This is the case of money being spent on building infrastructure which is not useful to the population or which is not completed.

There may be different explanations for the decrease in trust in government. To begin with while demands and challenges have greatly changed over the past decades, government institutions are still shaped in great part according to early XX century models of democratic governance. The changing role of the State as well as new international challenges have resulted in the need for new skills, attitudes and behaviors among public officials at all levels, as well as more innovative practices and strategies. It is not surprising then that the core competencies for the public sector of the 21st century differ in many ways from the past, especially as the demands placed on public servants, in terms of skills, knowledge and capacities, are rapidly evolving and becoming more complex.

In addition, government institutions and practices have sometimes evolved in ways that undermine the true spirit of democracy. This is certainly the case of the influence of money over electoral processes which, contrary to the tenets of democracy, does not ensure all citizens equal opportunities in exercising the right to be elected. What is more, the media may also be responsible for having a tendency to showcase only the negative actions of governments, thus nurturing among the population a sense of mistrust. Above all, citizens are much more demanding of their governments and are asking that government be reformed in order to enhance public participation, to expand political opportunities, and to improve its operations as well as the quality of services provided. Globalization, greater interconnectedness of people living in different corners of the globe through ICT, as well as increased advocacy of global and local NGOs, have also contributed to making citizens more aware of their rights and therefore more demanding of their governments. Citizens are asking to be more actively involved in public affairs and to be engaged in many other ways than just at election day every four or five years. This means greater participation in key spheres of policy-making decisions, including how taxes should be spent and on what, and better and more effective services.

As a response to these challenges, selected governments around the world are attempting to revitalize their public administration, make it more proactive, more efficient, more accountable, more service-oriented and closer to the people. To accomplish this transformation, governments are introducing innovations in their organizational structure, practices, capacities, and how they mobilize, deploy and utilize the human, material, information, technological and financial resources for service delivery to remote, disadvantaged and challenged people.

Experience has shown that introducing innovations in governance has a number of positive results. First, it can help maximize the utilization of resources and capacities to create public value as well as encourage a more open/participatory culture in government, therefore improving good governance in general. Second, by improving the image and services of the public sector it can help governments regain people's trust and restore legitimacy. Third, innovation in governance can boost the pride of civil servants working in the public sector, as well as encourage a culture of continuous improvement. Innovations can have an inspirational capacity which builds a sense of the possible among public officials. Fourth, although innovations are limited governance interventions or micro-level initiatives, they can produce a domino effect in that a successful innovation in one sector can open the door to innovations in other areas. Each innovation can create the opportunity for a series of innovations leading to a favorable environment for positive change. Innovations can lead to building a new block of an institution, and change the relationship between levels of government and within government departments.

The United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration, in its fifth session, agreed that Governments around the world need to break with “business as usual” and engage in more innovative ways of delivering public services and of organizing the way they function and deploy their resources. They must do more with less; be more accountable and open; and favour greater participation of citizens in public decision-making. The Committee underscored that innovation in governance is one of the most important ingredients for development but cautioned that innovation is not only a theoretical issue but also and essentially a practical one. It stressed the importance of recognizing the problem-solving nature of innovations and highlighted that if developing countries want to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), they need to depart from old practices. The Committee also pointed out that innovation can be seen as opposed to routine or traditional ways of doing business in the public sector and emphasized that it requires freedom of thought and expression to materialize. Innovation is about “what works and what doesn’t work” as well as about learning.

Innovation in governance is an imperative for any country that wishes to prosper and keep abreast of changes and challenges at the national, regional and international levels. Innovation is also critical to the political survival of governmental leadership as well as to rebuilding trust in institutions of government. Furthermore, it is not a “special benefit” of countries with developed administrative systems. As evidenced by the increasing number of applications submitted to the United Nations Public Service Awards, successful practices have been initiated in all corners of the globe and can be successfully replicated by willing public administrations.

OBJECTIVES

The Workshop on “Restoring Public Trust in Government through Public Sector Innovations” aims at exploring why and how government should be revitalized through public sector innovations. It will focus on actual government innovations by drawing on the numerous experiences of innovators around the world who are solving problems confronted by citizens in daily lives, who are making government problem solving, responsive and cost effective.

It is expected that the Workshop will be highly interactive and participatory since all participants should have the opportunity to think analytically about the cases being presented and bring in their own experience of what promotes trust in government. The ultimate goal of this workshop is to build a shared understanding among all governance actors of why it is important to rebuild trust in government, as well as provide concrete tools on how to do it.

The Workshop will provide participants an opportunity to:

- Discuss how innovations in governance can rebuild trust in government;
- Share experiences and practical cases of public sector innovations that have helped rebuild trust in government;
- Promote cooperation among government officials who are interested in replicating selected innovations that have helped rebuild public trust

EXPECTED OUTPUTS

The Meeting is expected to achieve the following goals:

- Enhanced knowledge of public sector innovations that have increased trust in government;
- Strengthened North-South and South-South cooperation in view of replicating innovations that have successfully increased trust in government;

- Greater understanding of the importance and key success factors for restoring trust in government;
- Promote further exchange of experiences through the UNPAN and the Global Network of Government Innovators

A concise statement of key policy messages will be communicated to the Wrap-up Plenary Session. In addition, a short summary of the workshop discussions (7-10 pages) will be prepared by the workshop organizers and incorporated into the overall final report for the 7th Global Forum.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The workshop will take place all day on 28 June and morning of 29 June 2007. It will be articulated into an opening ceremony and six sessions for a total of nine hours over the course of one and a half days. After the workshops, participants will return to plenary for a wrap-up session and the closing ceremony. Coordinators of each workshop will make a presentation on the main findings of each workshop in the plenary session.

In order to allow for a highly participatory and dynamic workshop, one that can produce added value on how innovations can rebuild trust in government, ample time will be devoted to discussion. There will be two speakers per session (not more than 10 minutes per speaker). Brief presentations will then be followed by one hour discussion. Each session will be introduced by a moderator. A rapporteur will be designated to record the discussions and prepare a final report on key findings.

THEMES

During the Opening Session, the workshop coordinators will map out the key challenges and opportunities in restoring trust in government through public sector innovations, and will provide guidance on the structure of the workshop and expected outputs.

A number of key issues will be raised:

- What is trust in government?
- What and why are innovations in governance necessary to rebuild trust?
- How can innovations be adapted to re-build trust in government (methodological tools)
- How can an innovation culture in the public sector be promoted to re-build trust in government, i.e., to become a more service-oriented organization.

The First Session will be devoted to a more in-depth discussion on restoring public trust in government. After a keynote speaker sets the context, participants will be able to share their knowledge and practical experience about rebuilding trust in government.

The remaining sessions will be devoted to knowledge sharing and discussion of "how to promote trust in government" through practical experiences. Innovations that have helped increase trust in government in five main areas will be examined in order to extrapolate useful lessons. These areas include:

- Leadership
- Quality of public services
- Access to public services
- Responsiveness
- Cost-effectiveness

Government officials/innovators and experts will present one or more innovations in public administration. In order to maximize the potential learning about these successful cases, the following issues will be discussed in each session:

- How were these innovations initiated and implemented?
- What strategies were employed?
- What hindered and facilitated the innovation?
- In what ways have these innovations increased trust in government?
- Are these innovations isolated reform efforts or can they create a positive environment for innovations in other areas leading to an increased trust in government?
- Can these innovations be replicated?

TARGETED PARTICIPANTS

Around 1,500 international participants are expected during the first two days and 1,000 in the workshops during the last two days. Each workshop is expected to attract between 50 and 150 participants, including ministers, senior government officials, parliamentarians, mayors, other local government officials, and representatives of the private sector, civil society, academia and international organizations.

WORKSHOP VENUE

The Austria Centre Vienna (ACV)

WORKING LANGUAGES

English

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