



AIDE MEMOIRE
THE REGIONAL FORUM ON REINVENTING GOVERNMENT IN ASIA
Building Trust in Government:
Innovations to Improve Governance
6-8 September 2006, Seoul, Republic of Korea

PURPOSE & SPONSORSHIP

The Regional Forum on Reinventing Government in Asia is an ongoing effort designed to highlight innovations and best practices of governments so that they may be shared and adapted to enhance the quality and effectiveness of governance region-wide. This investment in strengthening State capacity and transparent governance aims to directly contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It will be organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) in partnership with the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs (MOGAHA) of the Republic of Korea, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Project Office on Governance. The Regional Forum will be held from 6 to 8 September 2006 in Seoul on the topic of “Building Trust in Government: Innovations to Improve Governance.”

BACKGROUND

Improvements in governance and public administration have become increasingly recognized by the international community as central pillars to the successful implementation of a wide range of policy objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Since its origin in 1999, the Global Forum has emerged as one of the most significant global events to deal with government reinvention. Previous host governments have included the United States of America, Brazil, Italy, Morocco, and Mexico. In May 2006, the Government of the Republic of Korea hosted the 6th Global Forum in Seoul. During the 6th Global Forum, the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations invited participants to the 7th Global Forum to be held at the UN Headquarters in Vienna, Austria. Participants endorsed the recommendation of the Government of the Republic of Korea to accept the invitation of the United Nations.

Through Resolution A/RES/57/277, the General Assembly asked the United Nations Secretariat to provide support to the Global Forum on Reinventing Government. In view of the significance of the Global Forum for ministers, senior government officials, civil society organizations, and the private sector, the Secretary-General of the United Nations endorsed continued support, if requested, for the Global Forum in his 2002 report to the General Assembly.

A series of preparatory Regional Forums on Reinventing Government take place in the year prior to the Global Forum to identify region-specific issues, challenges, and responses within the area of governance and public administration. The conclusions that emerge from these meetings influence the trajectory of the Global Forum and are presented in plenary to its participants. In 2006, six Regional Forums will be held, including the Regional Forum on Reinventing Government in Asia on “Building Trust in Government: Innovations to Improve Governance.”

CONTEXT

Building trust in Government presents one of the major challenges for the early part of the century. Tremendous global changes over the past few years have resulted in a better informed, more diverse, and more demanding citizenry. The breadth of challenges facing the State within the new globalized environment means that governments must explore new ways of incorporating the voices of their citizens into the policy process, while earning the trust of many people and groups which did not always participate actively. There are different ways of meeting this challenge, although commonalities are also present. Integrity, accountability, and transparency are core values that can help build trust in government.

Credible and sustainable policy measures also work to enhance trust in government, while lowering the uncertainty of socio-economic actors. Tri-sectoral partnerships between Government, the private sector, and civil society can help to improve the quality and reach of service delivery, while ensuring that citizen priorities are reflected in policy decisions. The quality of leadership represents an additional key variable, as governments and organizations aim to introduce innovations into existing structures, improve public sector performance, and enhance the development of human resources.

OBJECTIVES

Building on the results of the 6th Global Forum on Reinventing Government: Toward Participatory and Transparent Governance held from 24 to 27 May 2005 in Seoul, the Regional Forum in Asia is designed to ensure that the valuable analytical insights and lessons learned are expanded upon, transferred, and adapted to meet the needs of governments within the region. The Regional Forum will focus on the transfer and exchange of public sector innovations and best practices in governance, with a view toward measures that help to improve the trust of citizens in their governments. The practical experience of senior level government officials will be used to devise strategies for implementation. A small core group of resource persons will facilitate the dialogue among the senior government officials from the region.

The objective of the Regional Forum on Reinventing Government in Asia is to assist governments to strengthen their public sector and governance capacities, take greater advantage of the potential of globalization, and achieve development objectives, such as the Millennium Development Goals. This entails, first of all, an assessment of ongoing reform efforts and practices within the various countries in the region, with a view to analyzing best practices and innovative approaches and learning from past efforts in furthering their development agenda. The innovations and good practices to be presented and explored at the Regional Forum will focus different measures that work to build trust in Government, as a means to improve governance and conditions for citizens. The Regional Forum on Reinventing Government in Asia will further provide participants with the opportunity to meet several complementary objectives:

- Establishment of a platform for senior government officials to present their recent experiences in government reinvention;
- Discussion and exchange of different methods of building trust in Government for the purpose of improving governance and public administration;
- Summary review of best practices and innovative approaches for a range of governance activities within the region;
- Examination of central factors that have enabled the successful implementation or adoption of enhanced practices;
- Provision of a venue for senior officials, who are in a position to improve the quality of governance and public administration through Government reinvention efforts, to strategize on methods that enable the implementation and replication of innovations that further these goals; and
- Preparation of a foundation for a “Regional Reinvention Network” that interconnects key partners for improved governance; i.e., governments, the private sector, and civil society.

SUB-THEMES

Within this context, the presentations and discussions at the Regional Forum on Reinventing Government in Asia will refer to one or more of the following four themes:

1. Public Sector Capacity and Innovations

To build trust and achieve development objectives, governments must have the capacity to effectively select and implement public policy with broad based support. Government reinvention thus refers to innovations that strengthen the credibility of policies and institutions, improve coordination between governmental authorities, increase the sustainability of policy measures, enhance the consistency and transparency of public communications, as well as improvements in human resource development, training, and incentive structures.

Building public sector capacity requires the reorientation and training of public servants to ensure a service orientation and responsiveness to the needs of citizens. Moreover, public administrations often suffer from a lack of a clear mission and institutional structure, as well as weak management systems. If the MDGs are to be achieved by 2015, and the challenge of globalization turned to advantage, the machinery of government will need to become more efficient, transparent and accountable. These and related issues will be explored during the session.

2. Building Trust for Service Delivery and Access

Reforming public administration and ensuring that central agencies operate in an effective and transparent manner are key ingredients for effective service delivery and access. In turn, this facilitates trust in Government and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). With this in view, the Road Map for the MDGs underscores the relationship between public sector management and the goal of poverty reduction.

Tri-sectoral partnerships between the three institutions of governance foster increased participation of citizens in the development process and improved access to services, thereby creating the necessary conditions for enhanced trust between citizens and Government. The State, private sector, and civil society each have different knowledge resources, and skill sets that can be used to complement each other. An effective partnership, which takes advantage of the relative strengths of each member, can result in greater combined capacities that enhance existing information about the needs of customers and clients, ensure that policy measures and objectives reflect citizen priorities, improve the quality and coverage of service provision, lower costs, and strengthen democratic governance.

3. Accountability, Transparency, and E-Government

Trust in Government depends on the integrity of public officials and the policy process itself. Accountable and transparent governance helps to ensure this integrity by allowing citizens to remain informed about policy, providing greater opportunities for participation, increasing the efficient allocation of resources in both the public and private sectors, and minimizing corruption and unethical practices.

E-government can help support these objectives by promoting accountability through greater transparency. By facilitating communication between citizens and Government, e-government increases publicly available information, improves information on Government services and programmes, lowers the uncertainty of socio-economic actors, and enhances decision making. This can help to strengthen community oversight of resource allocation, through media and civil society organizations, reduce corruption, and increase the competitiveness of the procurement process. Lower application processing and wait time can also reduce the cost of complying with government regulations, encouraging the movement of resources into the formal sector. Moreover, by enhancing the speed and efficiency of operations, e-government can also lead to lower costs, improved research capabilities, and better documentation and record keeping. Finally, e-government can also help to improve the coordination between governmental authorities, by increasing knowledge of one another's policies and activities, and supporting the balance of power.

4. Decentralization and Local Governance: Bringing Government Closer to People

Decentralization initiatives have the potential to help build trust in Government, by making the policy process more accessible to the governed. When citizens are empowered to become active and effective partners in policy decisions, implementation, and evaluation, this enhances trust between actors, as well as their joint ability to achieve mutually beneficial objectives, such as development.

Within the framework of democratic governance, decentralization and local autonomy are crucial in fostering more participatory governance and reducing poverty. They allow citizens to “voice” their demands in a more effective way and become active partners in all stages of policy decision, implementation, and evaluation – thereby enhancing trust among actors from Government, civil society, and the private sector, as well as their joint ability to achieve mutually beneficial objectives, such as development. Possible topics to be examined are legal frameworks for decentralized governance; the redistribution of functions and resources between central and local governments; relationships between local governments and NGOs; the enhancement of local autonomy capacity; local autonomy and checks and balances between central and local governments; the role of community based organizations; decentralization and citizen participation; and decentralization and service delivery.

THEMATIC FOCUS & METHOD

Previous forums on government reinvention have been based on the premise that far too little is known or understood about the ways in which innovations, best practices, and reinvention have already worked to the benefit of local populations. The presentations made in Seoul during the 6th Global Forum illuminated numerous positive experiences within the region at both the national and sub-national levels.

The Regional Forum on Reinventing Government in Asia will deal with innovations and good practices in governance; methods of building trust in government through accountability and transparency; institutional mechanisms that promote better upstream and downstream flows of information from the local to the central government levels; participatory approaches to designing and implementing public policies; new frameworks and tools for political, administrative, and financial transparency including institutions to combat domestic corruption.

The substantive focus of the Regional Forum is on the exchange and transfer of these experiences, especially those that have worked to build trust in government. In sum, the experiences of the invited senior officials, the resulting knowledge generated, and the transfer of this knowledge to ensure broader reach would be discussed. Topics for analysis by senior officials and a core group of academic practitioners will include, for example, bureaucratic reorientation, cultural adaptations, structural incentive systems, and transparency. Approximately thirty senior officials from Asia will actively participate, as well as five senior scholars of government and public administration. While reading materials designed to prepare and orient participants will be distributed as background documents, the forum will provide an opportunity for senior government officials to identify strategies and approaches that facilitate the implementation and replication of these innovations. Presentations will introduce country-level innovations that aim to strengthen the quality of governance and trust in Government. Senior government officials will be requested to present one innovation from their country, while addressing the following questions:

1. What are the main characteristics of the reform and how has it worked to build trust in government? To what problems/issues dealing with improvement in governance does it aim to respond?
2. Who were the stakeholders involved in designing, implementing, and assessing the innovation?
3. What are the tangible results of the innovation and which groups did it benefit the most?
4. What challenges were encountered in designing and implementing the innovation and how were they overcome? Or what factors account for its success?
5. Is the innovation an isolated reform effort or has it created a positive environment for reforms in other areas leading to the attainment of national long-term development goals?
6. What makes this innovation adaptable to other countries in the region?

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Based on the discussions and deliberations that emerge from the analysis of key themes, regional cooperation strategies will be developed. The senior officials participating in the Regional Forum will form an ongoing working group that will be responsible for broader dissemination of innovations and experience sharing. Further support for implementation will be made possible through the incorporation of project results into the work plan of the United Nations Project Office on Governance in Seoul. Conclusions and recommendations of the Regional Forum will also be presented to international delegations and participants at the 7th Global Forum on Reinventing Government, which will be hosted by the United Nations in June 2007.

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