



Social Accountability in Post-Conflict and Fragile States

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PRELIMINARIES

The political map of Africa today presents many cases of countries whose governments lack the capacity to have control or influence over the entirety of their territories. Such countries include the DRC, Chad, Somalia, the Republic of Congo, Sudan, Ivory Coast, Central African Republic, to cite a few. Another category of countries are those where there exists a real and constant threat of political instability for one reason or another. Such countries include, among others, Guinea, Zimbabwe, Togo, Somalia, Nigeria. There is a third category of countries which are in a post-conflict phase or are about to exit a situation of conflict. Such countries include, among others, Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Angola, Mozambique, Ivory Coast... The institutional environment in many of these countries is often so weak that the government lacks the capacity or the willingness to deliver core functions to the majority of its citizens. Such countries are known as fragile states. In general, fragile states are those that have yet to establish a stable political and security environment that would allow governments to extend their influence and to deliver core services over the entirety of their territories. According to the OECD, fragile states

share a common [frailty], in two particular respects: State policies and institutions are weak in these countries, making them vulnerable in their capacity to deliver services to their citizens, to control corruption, or to provide for sufficient voice and accountability. They face risks of conflict and political instability.

Fragile states are not necessarily conflict or post-conflict countries however. To the extent that there is constant threat of a coup, revolution, or armed conflict, in a country, the state remains fragile. To the extent that institutions remain weak and unable to perform basic services, and as long as certain groups or regions of the country feel marginalized, disadvantaged or treated “unfairly” by the political system in place, the country will remain in a fragile state.

Due to the very nature of the problems faced by fragile states: e.g., bad governance, poverty, weak institutions, massive unemployment, absence of civil society, such states may find it extremely difficult to forge a way out. It is likely that good governance and accountability remain elusive or ineffective in fragile states, hence the topic of this session. Before tackling the issue of social accountability properly speaking however, I propose to first discuss the adjustment process that such countries, in particular those in post-conflict situations, must undertake as a precondition for the types of institutional reforms and governance issues we will discuss in this section.

TRANSITION TO PEACE

Post-war or post-conflict countries, must complete a transitional process, during which issues of justice, victims’ reparation, and national reconciliation are addressed. Typically, a post-conflict country has to go through three phases in its recovery and reconstruction process. These are the emergency phase (which follows immediately after the cessation of conflict); the transition phase; and the

development phase. The main priorities during the emergency involve establishing a safe and stable environment; providing emergency humanitarian needs; resettling IDPs and refugees; and, consolidating the DDR process. In the transition phase, the process of reconciliation, justice, and restoration, become key priorities, as well as rebuilding and rehabilitation of productive sectors and the macro economy. During the transition phase, the foundations for the new political, legal, and economic structures and institutions, which will be necessary to maintain the peace are established. A framework for governance must also be put in place.

In the development phase, the achievements of the previous phases are consolidated. In particular, the political institutions, established based on the political consensus that has been achieved in the aftermath of the conflict must be strengthened. The consolidation of the political and governance institutions is best achieved through a broad-based participatory process. Indeed, post-conflict peace and development can be strengthened through the institution of a decentralized governance which fully incorporates all sections of the population into the political process, while devolving to local communities the means and responsibilities of deciding on how best to manage and allocate local resources.

DECENTRALIZED GOVERNANCE AS A TOOL FOR PEACE

Decentralization is believed to reduce the chances of conflict by granting previously marginalized groups political influence. The creation of democratically

elected local councils for example, can help to enhance participatory local governance structure providing hitherto marginalized populations an opportunity to develop trust in the political system in place, and feel safe to engage actively in the decision-making process at the local level (Hartmann, 2002, 2006). The author also argues that decentralization can be used as an instrument of conflict management in that it increases political competition across ethnic boundaries and provides “breathing space in hostilities” to the parties in conflict.

For Braathen and Hellevik (2006), decentralization offers an opportunity for the de-escalation of conflict. The authors explain that in many cases, civil wars originate from local groups fighting to gain access to resources in a given area; therefore, granting political powers to local institutions that have better knowledge of these resources can better help to manage conflict.

Furthermore, decentralization may be used a “cooptation” strategy by the central government. In this case the government may decide that in order to keep peace and unity and reduce chances for conflict, it might need to integrate separatist groups into a political institutionalized structure at the regional and local levels. In Mali for example, the 1992 decentralization reform program integrated the separatist Tuaregs into the political process.

Moreover, given the frailty of a nation-state emerging from conflict, decentralized governance can contribute to rebuilding a nation by strengthening local

governments, which are likely to be more responsive to local communities due to their proximity to them. Furthermore, a decentralized process that promotes a fair and equitable distribution of resources across regions reduces the inter-regional differences in access to resources, thereby decreasing the chances of conflict.

It is important to note that decentralization does not always reduce the chances of conflict; indeed, some analysts believe it may even intensify conflict, if not carried out properly. Recall Paul Collier's suggestion that post-conflict countries have 40% chance of reverting back into a conflict situation. Some (e.g., Elazar, 1987) have argued that in the aftermath of conflict a country may still lack a sense of unity, so decentralization might exacerbate the existing divisions, thereby failing to hold the country together. Other findings indicate that post-conflict decentralization may reinforce local identities and cleavages (Brubaker 1996) to such a point that local elites may decide to demand secession altogether, since this will increase their personal power. The case of Bosnia illustrates this point, where Serbs and Muslims have kept to their respective geographical areas inside the country despite the Dayton Peace Accord.

Furthermore, some argue that decentralization may cause local legislatures to use their devolved political powers to adopt laws that may discriminate against local minorities. The case of the Shari'a law in some Northern States of Nigeria that are majority Islamic but with minority Christians is generally pointed to as an illustration of this point. Moreover, in Africa, decentralization process that seeks

to integrate chieftaincies and traditional authorities into a formal political system may prove challenging when the said authorities develop secessionist tendencies, such as the case of the Baganda monarchy in Uganda and traditional chiefs in Ghana.

Overall, the success of a post-conflict decentralization program depends on the following factors: the degree of political participation and accountability; the degree of trust in government by local communities; the pace and prospects of economic recovery and reconstruction; the degree of empowerment of local politicians; the degree of empowerment of local communities; transparency and accountability from bottom up; quality of service delivery at the local level.

This brings us to the issue of social accountability in fragile states.

ESTABLISHING SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN FRAGILE STATES

Given the fragility of the state in a post-conflict situation, the existence of a social accountability framework helps to empower the citizens who may not ready to trust the political system right away, given past experience. Social accountability can therefore contribute to citizens' building trust in the governance system, and ultimately, in the government be it local or national.

One definition of social accountability is that it encompasses the "broad range of actions and mechanisms that citizens can use to hold the state to account as well

as actions on the part of government, civil society, media and other actors that promote or facilitate these efforts.” (World Bank). Often we tend to think of such measures as citizen's report cards, participatory public budgeting, public expenditure tracking surveys and other initiatives as appropriate such mechanisms that can be used to establish and strengthen social accountability.

However, in fragile states, particularly in post-conflict countries, certain pre-conditions must first be established, to allow for citizens to develop trust in their government again, and get used to the whole idea of civic engagement without fear. Hence, prior to the full implementation of social accountability mechanisms, a “quick results” approach can be adopted, through for example, the use of Rapid Rural Initiatives (RRIs), which consist of identifying and implementing programs that respond to the needs for services at the local level through the design (or the use of existing designs when possible) of non-complex and supported mechanisms to respond to those needs. RRI programs use a participative approach in partnership with local authorities, citizens, and the international donors, and they are cheaper than typical large government programs. Reports from Yongmei Zhou's work in Sierra Leone for example, indicate that where the RRI method was used in the aftermath of war, many achievements were made in a several development areas, such as, water, sanitation, feeder roads, bridges, traffic, rice production, etc... Through this approach, citizens at the local are in a position to experience peace dividend, while at the same time developing the capacity for civic engagement. RRI programs may help to begin the process of

building trust among parties in conflict in a fragile state. However, it is not enough to ensure social accountability. Institutional and governance reform must also be initiated and strengthened in parallel with the “quick results” programs. In this, the media and civil society play a crucial role.

In many fragile states, independent media is inexistent, and the notion of an autonomous and vibrant civil society is often not adopted by the rulers. To strengthen the system of governance an independent media must be promoted and actively supported, and an active and autonomous civil society must be allowed to emerge. An autonomous and active civil society is necessary to play an advocacy role on behalf of populations who are often vulnerable and without voice in policy-making. Further, a responsible, professional, but independent, media should also be allowed to emerge and act as a watchdog over government action, contributing therefore to the transparency of government policy.

Note that often the capacity of the central government AND local governments is very weak, and under such circumstances, the notion of social accountability will tend to be put on the backburner. To remedy this, in fragile states, assistance may be necessary in establishing best practices in fiscal and financial management, for example, as well as in project design and implementation.

In the end, a successful social accountability program requires effective participation and ownership by local communities. This is best achieved if local authorities and policy implementers adopt a code of conduct based on a set of

ethics and values that are conducive to building trust between them and the communities.

Local populations must also be empowered to become effective participants. The implementation of a program of information, education, and communication (IEC) to achieve a better participation can help empower local communities. Awareness campaigns designed and implemented continually to inform and educate the populations and civil society with respect to their roles, rights and responsibilities, in the local governance process help to strengthen the IEC process. These awareness campaigns must use all available means of communication, be it modern or traditional, and should involve the different civil society organizations such as NGO's, trade unions, and women and youth organization, as well as development partners.

Furthermore, community representatives must be directly involved in local financial decisions, including budgeting, expenditures and resource mobilization decisions. Indeed, by strengthening their planning and management capacity, local administrations can facilitate the institution of a transparent system, for instance by developing tools such as standard procurement guidelines, cashplanning, budgeting templates, which make it easier for local citizens to track budgetary implementation.

I now offer a couple of case studies.

CASE STUDIES

RWANDA

The country of Rwanda has made major strides with respect to peace, reconciliation, and reconstruction in the aftermath of the genocidal atrocities of 1994. After a transition period during which the new authorities dealt mostly with establishing stability in the country, and pursuing a transitional justice process, elections were held in 2000 and again in 2005.

The National Unity and Reconciliation Commission continues to put forth much effort to affect reconciliation the country. Some of the major issues that the country continues to deal with include post-traumatic impact of the genocide on survivors, particularly women and child survivors who were especially targeted during the genocide; the full implication of the Hutu in the political process; continuing threat of the Interahamwe; economic growth and development; and the pursuit of the remaining masterminds of the genocide who are still at large throughout the world. Social accountability was not well developed prior to the events of 1994, and is now slowly taking hold following the 2006 local elections and the extensive implementation of the decentralization program by the government.

UGANDA

Uganda is still in the midst of an internal conflict in its Northern provinces. The conflict has resulted in almost 2 million internally displaced people (IDP). Peace negotiations have been on-again and off-again for several years.

Although there seems to be hope again for a successful resolution of the conflict, the implication of the International Criminal Court (ICC) has made this outcome difficult. With ICC issued indictments hanging over their heads, LRA leader Joseph Kony and his followers are reluctant to come out of the bush to negotiate with the government for fear of being arrested. Decentralization is official government policy, although it is difficult to implement in the Northern region given the current conditions. However, even under these circumstances, the government has made strides in implementing decentralized governance policies throughout the rest of the country. Social accountability mechanisms have implemented in the country. For example the 1996 Ugandan PETS is well-known in our area. The country continues to wrestle with issues of corruption, and accountability at the local level.

SOUTH AFRICA

The apartheid system came to an end in 1990. Since then the black majority has gained political power, although economic powers remain largely in the hands of the white minority. The black and white divide is still very visible. Effective reconciliation is still in large part unattainable because of the continuing mistrust that prevails in each group towards the other.

The government has enacted a Black Economic Empowerment policy (to integrate the majority black into the developmental framework of the country), but many of the victims of the apartheid areas, and the foot soldiers who fought during the apartheid struggle feel abandoned by the government. Although an extensive process of truth and reconciliation was carried out through the instrument of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the post-TRC success remains limited, as many victims do not feel adequately compensated for their losses for example.

Some of the most prominent issues still being dealt with by the country include economic justice for victims of apartheid, which may include reparation, but goes beyond this to include job training, job creation, education, etc...; continuing post-traumatic and psychological impacts of apartheid era atrocities; land redistribution; integration of blacks into the economy; continuing search for truth about many apartheid era atrocities; the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS; crime; white guilt and black apathy. The post-apartheid achievements include the institution of democracy and freedom; Black Economic Empowerment policy; attempts (albeit slow) at integration of blacks and whites in various facets of the society, including the educational system. These issues notwithstanding, the country boasts a strong democratic system, an independent, professional and independent media, and a very active civil society.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The paper attempts to highlight the differences that exist in implementing social accountability mechanisms in fragile and post-conflict states compared to their peers. An emphasis was put on the sequence of adjustment phases, and reform processes that must be undertaken as a precursor for the implementation of social accountability programs. The establishment of a trustful atmosphere between the national government and local or regional governments was stressed, as well as the strengthening of the capacity of national institutions to implement governance reform policies, and building and strengthening of the planning and management capacity of local governments. With these foundations in place, coupled with the empowerment of local citizens and civil society, it is hoped that what often are tentative peace processes achieved in the aftermath of conflict can be consolidated, thereby setting up the conditions for the implementation of the traditional social accountability mechanisms.

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Appendix 1. World Bank 2007 List of Fragile States

- [Afghanistan](#)
- - Angola
- - Burundi
- - Cambodia
- - Central African Republic
- - Chad
- - Democratic Republic of Congo
- - Republic of Congo
- - Comoros
- - Cote d'Ivoire
- - Djibouti
- - Eritrea
- - The Gambia
- - Guinea
- - Guinea-Bissau
- - [Haiti](#)

- - [Lao PDR](#)
- - Liberia
- - Mauritania

- - Myanmar
- - Nigeria
- - Papua New Guinea
- - Sao Tome and Principe
- - [Sierra Leone](#)
- - Solomon Islands
- - Somalia
- - Sudan
- - Timor-Leste
- - Togo Tonga
- - Vanuatu
- - Uzbekistan
- - Zimbabwe
- - the territory of Kosovo