

ECOSOC 2012 HIGH LEVEL PANEL

“ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES”

Monday, 9 July 2012, 9:30 a.m. – 13:00 p.m., 15:00 p.m.- 15:30 p.m.

ECOSOC Chamber, United Nations, New York

CONCEPT NOTE

Background

Promoting integrity, ethics, professionalism and accountability and combating corruption in public sector institutions to achieve more effective, efficient, responsive and equitable government are instrumental for the broader goal of enhancing performance in service delivery and development in general. Inadequate transparency, accountability, and probity among public officials in the use of public resources undermine the credibility of State institutions.

Corruption occurs in all countries regardless of the level of social and economic development, albeit in different forms. However, evidence confirms that corruption hurts the poor disproportionately and hinders efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), poverty eradication and human development by reducing access to services and diverting resources away from investments in infrastructure, institutions and social services. Corruption undercuts government credibility and undermines the rule of law. This is why the outcome document of the 2010 MDG Summit recognizes that integrity, accountability and transparency are crucial for managing resources. It also calls for recovering assets and combating abuse, corruption and organized crime.

The African Union, in its Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, cites the negative effects on the political, economic, social and cultural stability of its Member States and the devastating effects on economic and social development of its people. The Inter-American Convention against Corruption points to the fact that it undermines the legitimacy of public institutions and strikes at society, moral order and justice, as well as the comprehensive development of peoples. The European Union in its Civil Law against Corruption underlines the threat to the rule of law, democracy and human rights, fairness and social justice while endangering the proper and fair functioning of market economies. Despite the variations across regions, the three conventions cited recognize the harm to individuals and to societies.

It is against this backdrop that ECOSOC, the UN central forum for discussing international economic and social issues, devotes attention to promoting accountability, combating corruption and identifying ways to build a values-based approach to prevention that creates an enabling environment for sustainable development.

Objectives and Outcomes

The objectives of the High-Level Panel are the following: (i) to highlight the costs imposed by the lack of accountability and transparency and corruption on sustainable development; and (ii) to exchange views on innovative approaches and partnerships in combating corruption. It is anticipated that the event could promote a renewed commitment at the

highest political level for the ratification of or accession to the UN Convention Against Corruption by countries that have not yet done so and that it could encourage full participation in the Review Mechanism of the Convention in order to promote full implementation of its provisions.

Issues and Challenges

Corruption distorts resource allocation and government performance. Its causes vary from one country to the next but among the contributing factors are policies, programs and activities that are poorly conceived and managed, failing institutions, poverty, income disparities, inadequate civil servants' remuneration, and a lack of accountability and transparency. Corruption has a negative effect on economic development by reducing the effectiveness of private investment and development assistance, and in countries that are already poor, deepens poverty. Corruption that originates from organized crime and drug trafficking has an even more pernicious impact on countries emerging from conflict – in that it further undermines the attempts to rebuild institutions, increases the level of crime and violence and halts peacebuilding advances.

There is broad consensus that all parts of society must share the responsibility for containing corruption. This requires a strategic partnership to be forged between government, private sector and civil society at local, national, regional, and international levels to ensure that there is common agreement and acceptance that it should be rooted out. Business advocacy and buy-in as well as citizenship involvement through reporting instances of corruption can help to leverage collective action to promote clean government, foster market integrity, and strengthen relevant judicial, regulatory, and law enforcement systems. Taking advantage of innovative approaches such as social and other forms of media are also important tools that can be used by public-private partnerships.

It is also important to adopt a longer-term approach to prevention. In this context, building “integrity” and professionalism, especially in public sector institutions, would seem to be a positive, pro-active preventive approach. This approach links integrity to other key variables for sustainable development; namely strengthening the institutional capacity of public-sector and civil society organisations so that systemic integrity and better public-sector performance become possible and reorienting government in order to improve performance or results. These results include improved delivery of public services, established rule of law and creation of an enabling environment for the private sector.

The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) is the only global instrument to address the scourge of corruption. With 159 States Parties (including the European Union), a following that was reached in record time, it has great potential for universal adherence in the not too distant future. Calls encouraging countries that have not yet ratified or acceded to the Convention to do so have been made by all major fora, including the General Assembly, the G8 and the G20. The Convention's recently established Peer Review Mechanism, while still in its early stages, has already engaged more countries than any pre-existing regional or sectoral mechanisms. With already 131 countries involved in the Review Mechanism since its inauguration in June 2010 either as countries under review or as reviewing countries, it is a global and inclusive process without marginalization or rankings.

Ratification while essential is however only the first step, fully implementing the Convention presents significant challenges for the international community as well as individual States

parties, particularly in the innovative areas of the Convention. For this reason, countries have to rely on policy guidance and technical assistance for their effective implementation. What has started to emerge from the results of the first year of the mechanism for the review of implementation of UNCAC is that in particular many developing countries identify technical assistance needs to ensure full and effective implementation of the Convention.

Focus

The first interactive dialogue, “Creating inclusive and cohesive societies: a multidisciplinary approach to combating corruption for development” will focus on short-term and longer-term policies, strategies and programmes that promote integrity, professionalism and accountability and prevent corruption. The second interactive dialogue, “Shared roles and responsibilities: developing innovative partnerships for comprehensive action against corruption” will focus on how all national, regional and international stakeholders involved in the fight against corruption could together promote innovative public-private partnerships aimed at fostering integrity and accountability while promoting sustainable development.