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Subject: Role of responsible and accountable public governance in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the post-2015 development agenda: Stakeholders' accountability in public governance for development

The United Nations and member governments are committed to eradicate global poverty by 2015. The specific targets include:

- Reducing by half the number of people living in absolute poverty;
- Ensuring access to primary education;
- Promoting gender equality and empowering women;
- Reducing child mortality;
- Improving Maternal health;
- Preventing/Reducing HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
- Developing a global partnership for development.

However, many of these objectives will not be achieved by 2015, mainly because of the lack of alignment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with country-specific strategy and the poor coordination of the program at the national level.

Millennium Development Goals and Governance

Governance is defined by the World Bank as the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. It includes the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them.

Because MDGs implicate multiple institutions at national level, the nature and quality of interactions between them determine the program success. For example, stakeholders involved in

“Reducing child Mortality” may include Health, Education and Social Departments since mother’s age and financial situation can be predictors of the child wellbeing.

Given the entanglement of MDGs:

- Who should be responsible for the failure of the program?
- Are the program objectives aligned with country priorities?
- Is there any indicator of the level of achievement of a goal?
- How to assess the implementation of the MDGs program and its governance at the national level?

Link between Governance and accountability

Governance ensures that the needs of the general public are served according to the mission and mandates of the institution under review.

Besides, the International Federation of Accountants (2001) defines accountability as ‘the process whereby public sector entities and the individuals within them, are responsible for their decisions and actions, including stewardship of public funds and all aspect of performance, and submit themselves to appropriate external scrutiny’.

We believe that the governance of an entity is based on (i) its organizational structure, (ii) its missions and (iii) the individuals within it. Accordingly, the quality of governance practices will emanate from the strength of its institutional framework, stakeholders inclusion in the decision-making process and the availability of resources to be managed.

In assessing the governance of an institution, the following criteria are of importance:

- Its mission;
- Its operational organization;
- The resources available to achieve its goals (people, capital and infrastructure);
- The services to be delivered (stakeholders, outcomes and performance metrics).

Conflicting Stakeholders interests in the MDGs

Several studies (including E/C.16/2013/3) have set up viable primitives useful to comply with stakeholder's accountability. A stakeholder plays a role or has an interest in the outcome of a program. As such, stakeholders may be classified in two categories:

- Internal: the supervising authority (e.g. regulatory board), the management, staff members and other governmental agencies;
- External: citizens, suppliers and other external parties such as industry and not-for-profit members.

In designing public policies, managers must be aware that stakeholders may have competing interests. Therefore, an analysis of various stakeholders should be essential to understand their interests and incentives to prevent the undermining of the program in scope.

MDGs stakeholders may include the departments of the executive branch, private entities (hospitals, schools), NGOs and the general public.

A prerequisite for accountability: Transparency

With regard to the delineation of accountability, the expectations (beneficiaries of the program, impact, outcomes...) ought to be spelled out and publicized. There is no accountability in opacity since (i) program owners may be unknown; (ii) responsibilities blurred; (iii) expected outcomes indistinct and performance metrics unclear.

MDGs were primarily set for 2015. However, for many countries, information related to intermediary milestones is not publicly available. This deficiency by design may help governments to dilute expectations that might lead to public unrest.

When conditions of transparency are met, using ICTs will help determining the responsibility of stakeholders involved in a specific program, since the governance load derives directly from the program objectives. In addition, ICTs allow the collection of stakeholder's feedback in real-time (e.g., AIDS medicine shortages collected from patients).

Governance load

We define Governance load as a quantitative value embedded in rules/regulations/laws reflecting:

- The weight of administrative structures with regards to the global strategy: for example in a country at war, the Defense Department may eclipse Social Departments in preeminence;
- The level of responsibility of the individuals within the organization: a management position will be “heavier” than a staff position;
- The value of the assigned task: the value of the main task is an aggregation of the values of its sub-tasks.

The Governance Load of an individual in an organization can be viewed as the value corresponding to his/her closeness to the governing authority (i.e. the person in charge). This proximity depends on his/her rank and the number of intermediary individuals.

All tasks undertaken within an organization should derive from its mission. Therefore the value of a task is determined by its decomposition and distribution in sub-tasks.

Why is it important to determine governance loads for MDGs?

The determination of governance loads ensures the strategic alignment of missions, structures, and actors. An imbalance will give rise to anomalies and challenges in achieving the expected result.

Furthermore, the determination of governance loads facilitates the accountability and the evaluation of interested parties since each individual within the organization is allotted a portion of the mission.

In conclusion, accountability and responsibility for the achievement of MDGs requires a strategic alignment of the MDGs with the country objectives. A successful implementation of MDGs requires an extensive use of ICTs to capture stakeholders, allocate responsibilities, collect data points, monitor performance indicators and receive public feedback for remediation, if needed. Such an implementation will improve data quality and enable the production of reliable statistics necessary for the implementation of sound policies.

The design of accountability for development is tributary to governance practices at the local level since local official incentives are often tied to his/her desire to be promoted. As such, a dysfunctional government will entice deviant behaviors with little to no repercussion. These behaviors negatively impact the MDGs.