

Keynote Address:

Partners Forum of the Global Partnership for Social Accountability

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It is a great privilege for me to join with all of you in the Global Partnership for Social Accountability and at this year's Partners Forum. Through our parallel funding agreement, my colleagues and I at the Open Society Foundations are glad to have been supporters of this Partnership from the start and we are so grateful to you, Mario and Roby, for your leadership. This journey has just begun, and you have already taken us quite far.

In just a short time, you have cultivated a true sense of partnership and community, and we know how hard that is. You have made it clear that, from the World Bank's perspective, social accountability is central to improved governance and development. It is remarkable to see the ever expanding list of countries "opting in" from all regions of the world, as well as the quality and diversity of proposals you are receiving from strong civil society organizations working on governance, justice, women's rights, public health, education, and more.

Over the course of the last few years, my colleagues and I have recognized several of the organizations supported by the Global Partnership for Social Accountability, and we know from direct experience that they are among the best respected in their fields. In Moldova, it's great to see Expert Group working on education and the Center for Health Policies and Studies working on public health, both with GPSA support. Similarly, in the Philippines, Ghana, and Tunisia, we're so pleased to be supporting partners who have responded to your calls. You've been reflective, adaptive, and sensitive to context in your approach—as evidenced most clearly by your vibrant knowledge platform.

You've embraced a necessary pluralism of approach, and it is that pluralism that gives all of us strength and the chance to make a real

difference and see real change. We all agree that improvements in public provision of goods and services are best achieved through citizen engagement in decision making and oversight as well as government response to citizen feedback, but we also know that there is no silver bullet to achieving government accountability, that progress is not linear, and the work itself is risky. We take two steps forward, one step back, and then, if we're lucky, move forward again. That's why the pluralism of approaches represented at this conference (and within the field more broadly) is such a strength.

Citizens everywhere are searching for new ways to hold their leaders accountable where traditional mechanisms have failed, or never been available. Tools like citizens report cards and social audits are giving citizens a taste for democratic practice and political power. The recent social audit of sanitation services by the residents of Khayelitsha in South Africa, or the work that citizen activists together with the government of the Philippines are doing to improve education outcomes through "checkmyschool" are two inspiring examples of how new hybrid forms of citizen oversight and engagement are not waiting around for traditional institutions of governance to "kick in."

This is how transparency makes a difference. The global movement for government transparency has achieved so much--freedom of information laws in more than 100 countries, terabytes of information available on line, and a race to the top through the Open Government Partnership. There's been real change for extractive industries, public budgets, foreign aid, procurement, and more.

And yet only when citizens make meaningful use of this information does transparency lead to social accountability. We can see this in Moldova, where GPSA grantees are helping parents follow-up on budget commitments for education, and in Tunisia where partners are using the right to information to make sure that rural women get the health services they've been promised. And in both Kenya and Pakistan, we have seen community paralegals take up promises of more open government to engage directly with officials to solve everyday problems

of civil documentation, services for people with disabilities, and public transport.

The pluralism is not a miscellany, but a self-reinforcing movement. One example inspires another, and governments that see the advantages in one domain, extend themselves in others. Corporations pressured to participate at first become champions of transparency and accountability when they see the gains in public trust.

As we complete this first phase of the Global Partnership's development, and as the world's governments prepare to endorse a new set of sustainable development goals, this is a good time for some collective reflection. During these two days, we'll celebrate individuals who are already improving governance and advancing development by strengthening social accountability. The GPSA is also just about to launch a third round of calls for proposals. What have we learned, and what more do we need to do?

Let me offer three answers:

First, social accountability needs to be global, not just national, and that means international organizations, including the Bank and donors like Open Society, need to be accountable as well.

Second, social accountability is truly a partnership, requiring work both outside of government and inside, and that means that donors including the Bank and Open Society need to reinforce the efforts of civil society in their direct assistance to governments.

Third, the commitment to transparency and social accountability as fundamental to meaningful economic development, should be a distinguishing feature of the Bank's work in a world with growing numbers of international financial institutions and new threats to open resolution of economic disputes.

Let me start with the first: social accountability needs to be international as well as national. We live today in a world as worried about global inequality as about global poverty. We're making progress on global poverty by concentrating on the places where the need or the opportunity is greatest; but we can't be similarly selective when it comes to inequality. We can only make progress on global inequality if international actors are as accountable as national ones, and that will require an international civil society holding international organizations accountable.

The Global Partnership for Social Accountability can play a crucial role here. As international financial institutions proliferate and the roles of the Asia Infrastructure Development Bank and the other BRIC banks grow, the same organizations that GPSA supports should be developing an all-powers capacity. They should be able to hold their national governments accountable, but also the IFIs and other international actors at work in their countries. And we need to help those GPSA recipients club together in networks, coalitions, and alliances so they can work effectively on the international level.

This gets to the second overarching point I wanted to make today and that is that given the complexity of accountability work, we are learning that **strengthening social accountability requires working from the outside and the inside, often in a coordinated fashion, always sensitive to local context.** GPSA is working through a largely outsider approach—by supporting civil society to constructively engage citizens, government, and oversight bodies to promote greater government accountability.

The World Bank, Open Society, and others supporting GPSA also work on the inside track. The Bank's access and influence gives it the ability to promote the concept of social accountability not only by supporting civil society participation, but by weaving the importance of transparency, accountability, participation and inclusion into its every interaction with client governments, including its lending. If social accountability gets siloed from the rest of the Bank's country work, if Bank staff members negotiating a support package to a government are not asking questions

about how public engagement and oversight will be incorporated into the program, if they see that as someone else's remit, then we will fail. Similarly, if my colleagues at the Open Society Foundations--program officers and policy advocates--are not integrating strategies for economic advancement with our concerns about rights, integrity, and participation when we engage with new governments--whether in Ukraine or Nigeria--our Global Partnership will fail.

I am excited to see the steps that our partners at the Bank have already taken to mainstream social accountability into its lending and advisory engagement with governments. The Bank's commitment to ensure 100% beneficiary feedback in its lending, and its consideration of a new draft safeguard on Information Disclosure and Stakeholder Engagement deserve praise and encouragement. At Open Society, our new programs on Economic Advancement and Fiscal Governance are working with colleagues in our foundations and offices in 41 countries to integrate sound economic and fiscal advocacy with their support for citizens engagement and the advance of rights, justice, and accountability. The point here is that both we and the Bank can actually create more space for civil society in the countries where it works through leveraging our insider influence.

This brings me to the final point I wanted to make, that we must champion the idea that **social accountability is fundamental to meaningful development in a world where IFIs are proliferating and trade deals seem to signal that citizens have no role in economic governance.**

Citizens are at the center of good governance. We've heard this from the Bank's leadership, but this is not yet commonplace in the practice of development. It is already commonsense among most thinking people, but not yet among all our partners. GPSA is about making this commonsense understanding into commonplace practice.

There is no longer a single institution or a single model of development. Development banks themselves are proliferating, and some worry that

this will lead to a race to the bottom, with each lender eliminating conditions to get more business. I see a different possibility: that amid the competition, the Bank will see its commitment to good governance as a competitive advantage, a distinctive strength.

Even more worrying than the proliferation of banks is the danger that new trade regimes are undoing transparency and accountability. Last month in Marrakech, the WTO celebrated its 20th anniversary, but none of the governments outside of Africa were represented at ministerial level, and the private sector did not come at all. Why? Because the new trade partnerships threaten to make public forums like the WTO obsolete. We need to resist the secrecy in the dispute resolution of trade disputes as in all international economic decision making. If we are going to succeed in our work together on social accountability, we need to put citizens at the center of governance in all of its institutional forms, including in trade.

So, let's make commonsense common practice, and make the Bank the preferred lender, and the preferred forum for dispute resolution, among civil society worldwide. What a wonderful transformation this would be: the World Bank the choice of civil society worldwide. And why? Because of its commitment to transparency and accountability, because of its confidence in citizens, and because of its support for civil society. That is the commonsense we need to make common practice.

Thank you very much for your attention and for all you do.