GOOD GOVERNANCE:
AFRICA'S RESPONSIBILITY

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Mr. Chairman, the theme for the Workshop - Democratic Budget Policy amply echoes the call in recent times by civil society organizations, governments and development partners for increased participation, transparency, and accountability in the budget process. Budgets indicate commitments to national development priorities, and it is important that they reflect the voices of the citizenry. This can be achieved i the budget process is transparent and all inclusive, involving as many stakeholders as possible. These principles of transparency and participation are the foundations of good governance.

I subscribe to the definitions of governance and good governance put forward by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). UNECA explains governance as the manner in which responsibility is discharged. Such responsibility may be acquired through election, appointment or delegation in the public domain or in the area of commerce - corporate governance.

Good governance refers to a condition whereby a responsibility acquired through election, appointment or delegation is discharged in an effective, transparent, and accountable manner. Good governance entails the existence of efficient and accountable institutions - executive, judicial, administrative, economic, corporate - and entrenched rules that promote development, protects human rights, respects the rule of law, and ensures that people are free to participate in, and be heard on decisions that affect their lives.

Historical perspective

Chairperson, during the 1960's most African leaders regarded the international community as a threat to their newborn and weak states. As a result, rather than promote good governance by awarding sovereign rights to those regimes that administered a given territory, African diplomatic principles, epitomized by the Organization of African Unity

(OAU), accepted whatever regime occupied the presidential palace, regardless of how (or even whether) the regime governed. During this period the idea of noninterference in the internal affairs of sovereign states was reinforced not only by the OAU, but also by the international community.

The QAU was established to, among other things, accelerate the decolonization process of the continent, and promote development and cooperation among African states (OAU Charter and Rules of Procedure, 1992). Thus, the OAU was not primarily a good governance promotion institution.

Over time the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of a state came under scrutiny. A number of crises (exchange rate, oil price shocks, capture of profits from exports, etc.) forced African countries to accept structural adjustment and direct outside interference in economic policy in exchange for desperately needed international assistance. International financial institutions took control of a significant proportion of the continent's economy and forced a programme of devaluation, privatization, market pricing, and macroeconomic stabilization. Furthermore, structural adjustment challenged the political as well as the economic sovereignty of African states by limiting the resources available to leaders who would provide patronage. In due course the international community added political accountability to the economic constraints imposed by structural adjustment. Domestic sovereignty lost moral legitimacy as regimes such as Jean-Bedel Bokassa (Central African Republic), ldi Amin (Uganda) and Fernando Macias Nguema (Republic of Equatorial Guinea) demonstrated the depths of state brutality.

These political and economic failings caused some people to conclude that African's are incapable of ruling themselves.

Africa's Quest for Good Governance

Africa's quest for good governance has traversed several frontiers. The international community only brought up good governance as a condition for giving aid in its dealings with Africa. Such aid-related discourse of good

governance, a matter between aid givers and aid seekers, often discussed in an arrogant and patronizing manner, discredited the subject in the eyes of most Africans.

Chairperson, almost all African countries have initiated some type of political reform that contains at least some elements of multiparty or electoral competition. Elections are not the same as democracy, of course, and no one claims that elections are a panacea. But the movement of institutions of governance toward achieving greater public participation and taking on more accountability represents what may be the early signs of a locally rooted and thus sustainable form of sovereignty, and thus the emergence of an African responsibility.

Civic groups and opposition politicians seized the opportunity created by the weakening regimes and a more supportive international atmosphere to push for political change. Sovereignty was transformed further in the 1990s by nonstate institutions that took an ever larger part in the affairs of the continent. The transformation of sovereignty has also been impelled by the humanitarian tragedies created by internal conflicts.

Africa in the 21st Century

Mr. Chairman, Africa's failure to assert itself on the world stage is embroiled in two failures - bad leadership and bad governance.

Recognizing these failures, African leaders have accepted the challenge and are steadily pushing forward to turn the tides around. Spurred on by the Africa Union (AU) and the New Partnership tor Africa's Development (NEPAD), Africa in the 21s1 century is not like the Africa we read of in the past decade.

The AU 15 seeking to address the challenges facing Africa through the broad framework of NEPAD. As a partnership programme established between Africa and the G8 countries, NEPAD emphasizes three dimensions of governance; namely, economic and corporate governance; political governance; and peace and security. NEPAD is seen as a moral contract between African countries and the G8 under which the former strive to

improve governance and promote democracy by undertaking political reforms and market-friendly economic policies, while the lafter undertakes to assist African countries committed to good governance, the promotion of human rights, poverty eradication, and economic growth. However, the G8 aid to African countries under the partnership, is again contingent on the latter meeting stated conditions, reminiscent of the conditionalities under the Structural Adjustment Programmes. The partnership of "equal partners" with mutual respect and accountability envisaged under the New Partnership is therefore neither guaranteed nor automatic.

Notwithstanding the criticism leveled against NEPAD, I firmly believe Africans can make it work tor our common good. This belief is premised on the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) by which African governments are assessed in terms of their progress towards good governance.

Chairperson, the criticism against NEPAD as regards lack of consultations with the populace before its adoption, is laid to rest with the APRM where broad based consultations are being held with the citizenry thereby deepening public acceptance and promoting its legitimacy.

Progress has been made in increasing accountability in the public sector. Mechanisms employed to ensure this include presentation of annual and semi-annual progress reports by public sector actors. Public Accounts Committees of Parliament are being capacitated to effectively perform their oversight responsibilities. A test case is the recent public sitting of the Public Accounts Committee of the Parliament of Ghana. This historic case reoriented the minds of the populace to the fact that corruption is not the exclusive preserve of politicians and top management, but has eroded info all levels of public life.

Chairperson, as we praise the efforts by the Public Accounts Committees, Parliaments across Africa have not been sufficiently effective at representing the citizenry and holding the government to account. Only a few parliamentarians have a deep understanding of budget issues.

Another important accountability system is budget defense, where Parliamentary Sub Committees come down to the Ministries, Departments

and Agencies (MDAs) level for budget hearings as well as peer review of the various MDAs. Other mechanisms for accountability are the General Audit Service, Budget Presentations, and the APRM.

It must be indicated that African government's attempt to improve public financial management systems are undermined by the actions of development partners. While there 15 increase use of national procurement systems by development partners, a major concern lie, with project financing. Here, most development partners do not use the national budget executing system but rather, project funds are controlled between the project management unit and the donor supporting the specific project.

Chairperson, progress has been made in sector level dialogue and linking It to national development priorities. There are a growing number of reports indicating that slowly but steadily, African governments are opening up political and economic space for the citizenry to effectively participate in national dialogues. The major challenge has been the capacity of civil society to constructively engage governments. Both still carry the suspicions of the past decade in their dialogues.

In this new dispensation, civil society has been granted greater space to engage in public discourse and demand accountability from public officials. It is in view of this genuinely critical arena that African leaders are challenged to clearly articulate the nature of their democratic principles and commit themselves explicitly to pursuing them even in the midst of ambiguous situations.

Conclusion

Chairperson, through the NEPAD framework document, African leaders have recognized the importance of good governance for achieving sustainable development in Africa, and they have set out principles pertaining to the strengthening of democracy and good political governance, as well as economic and corporate governance. They have reinforced this importance with their commitment to the African Peer Review Mechanism.

Today, there are more democratic regimes on the continent than was the case a decade ago. An increasing number of African leaders are subjecting themselves to the principles of accountability, transparency and popular participation. African leaders are tackling the issue of poverty, diseases and corruption within the limits of their domestic budgets.

Conditionalities stressed by development partners especially on governance matters cause recipient countries to account to them at the expense of accounting to their citizens.

There are a number of challenges to be overcome but the progress made over the post decade are comforting and worth supporting and encouraging.