

PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY – IMPLICATIONS OF AG’S REPORT FINDINGS WHAT ROLE ARE CSO’S PLAYING?

1. I want to develop two simple and straightforward propositions here this morning:
 - First, the findings of the AG’s Report are undermining the hopes of integral and sustainable development in Zambia
 - Second, the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSO) in Zambia must be positive, proactive and fearless in turning around the culture of non-accountability.
2. To start with, it is helpful to note the Mission and Goal of the AG office:

Mission Statement

To provide quality audit services to government and other institutions in order to promote accountability, economic, efficient and effective utilization of funds and other resources **for the benefit of society.**

Goal Statement

To ensure efficient management and utilization of financial and other resources in government and other institutions **for sustainable development.**

Those two phrases that I have emphasised are key to our discussions here, since they surely must be central to the purposes of CSOs in Zambia.

3. Surely, the AG and her team struggle to fulfil that noble Mission and Goal, with the well-deserved admiration and appreciation of the general public! Indeed, they do this under the adverse conditions of apparent lack of political will at the highest level, constrained budget conditions, uncooperative civil service at both high and lower rank, antagonism and suspicion among politicians, and lack of understanding by the general public.
4. Why is an AG report important for Zambia? Because we live in one of the richest countries in Africa amidst some of the poorest people in the world. This *paradox of poverty* is simply unacceptable – on the political grounds that it fosters and festers civil discontent and on the moral grounds that it denies human dignity and community and threatens the societal pillars of peace and justice.
5. Even a cursory glance at the 2007 *Auditor General’s Report* reveals the shocking levels of lack of public accountability throughout the GRZ system, from high to low. More in-depth study, such as done in TIZ’s *Show Me the Money*, is frighteningly disturbing, disgustingly outrageous. Account books not available, documents not up-dated, safes not utilised, satisfactory explanations not given. Imprests not returned, advances not repaid, vehicles not delivered, horses not delivered, construction contracts not fulfilled, overpayment on contracts (whether fulfilled or not!), cell phone allocations overspent, internet paid for but not connected, fuel filled up in cars twice a day every day (trips?), salaries paid for employees not employed (dead or dismissed), street children in programmes not fed, expired drugs sitting on shelves for years, etc., etc.....!
6. Over the years, millions, billions, trillions of Kwacha meant for development of the people of Zambia diverted into the pockets of greedy and unconscionable individuals and groups – how long can we allow this to go on completely unchecked or only minimally dealt with?

This is a challenge that CSOs must take much more seriously if our own commitment to development is to be taken seriously!

7. Simply reflect for a moment on the current scandal being revealed through action of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). Money stolen from the Ministry of Health – I've been told it may come from the Global Fund monies granted for dealing with Zambia's AIDS pandemic – put into fancy cars and plush lodges. How many Zambians will die as a consequence? Yes, simply put, *corruption kills!* Lack of public accountability destroys!
8. At this point now, let me summarise six rather obvious impacts of the lack of accountability, since in my view there are the implications of the findings of the AG's Report:
 - *First*, it embarrasses all of us, puts in question the reputation of Mother Zambia, damages the image of a country that we respect and love and want others to respect and love. That's no way to build up a spirit of citizenship so necessary for the hard work and sacrifice required for national development. Zambia ranks very low on the TI indices and that shames all of us!
 - *Second*, it discourages hardworking honest citizens, that is, the majority of the Zambian populace! Pay taxes, and see money squandered and laundered! Seek services, and be told no money for that? Cooperate on local projects, and find out that they failed because an official ate the funds! Such an environment can and does dampen a commitment to work hard for the future of the country.
 - *Third*, it alienates donors. How true and honest, I'd ask, is the remark sometimes heard in public that donors "appreciate" Zambia's record regarding corruption. I hear – and I'm sure many of you also hear – very different remarks, perceptions, judgments! Just recently a major donor told me that the AG reports make it very difficult to campaign back home for more assistance to be given to Zambia. Only if you buy the extremely controversial thesis of DEAD AID and don't want any more foreign aid to come to this country would you be pleased with this consequence.
 - *Fourth*, it unattracts investors. An "enabling environment" for good investment must include honest public service for sustainability, creativity, productivity, and profitability! Face the fact: Zambia will only attract less than honest investors if there is a more than dishonest public service!
 - *Fifth*, it destroys governance. Democracy requires government of, by, and for the people, and certainly not of, by, and for a section of the public service that instead of serving the public is serving itself! Some might even argue that it's better to have a dictatorship that doesn't hide where its true self-interests are than a deceitful government that brags about its democratic spirit while allowing public funds to drift away from public accounts to private interests.
 - *Sixth*, it opens the employees in the public service to ridicule, suspicion, anger. I don't know about you, but I sometimes find myself, if I'm talking with a government official or reading something an official has written, wondering how she or he would stand up to a severe audit from the Auditor General and her team! And that's not fair to the vast majority of civil servants. Morale is broken down and confidence is undermined.
9. In summary fashion, these are some of the serious implications of the AG's Report. So now the second question arises: what can we do about all this? And specifically, what is

the role of CSOs in this country? Obviously, I must urge that we CSOs that would engage in the noble cause of promotion of greater public accountability must ourselves be clean in accounting, unafraid of severe audits of our own books! Doesn't Scripture remind us, "Physician, heal yourself!"?

10. Let me suggest five tasks that CSOs should engage in, while acknowledging that many CSOs already do many of these tasks, directly or indirectly, full-time or part-time.

First, call for stronger "political will" to support the work of the AG's office. "Political will" is a fancy catch phrase but in this instance has some clear consequences. CSOs can make appropriate noises to demand that the President, Vice President and Cabinet officers come out strongly in favour of the work of the AG, with compliments and encouragements. Then the office is not seen as somehow outside of the democratic process, or the evil domain of "opposition" supporters!

Second, publicise the findings of the AG's Report. Aside from sensational headlines in the media, little in-depth analysis or wide-scale reporting is done when the findings of the AG's work are published. The pages of the Report are not available to the general public, not because of secrecy but simply because of cost. Various CSOs should take up specific findings as they relate to their own missions and make sure that the general public is aware of what is happening to public funds by naming names of ministries and ministers, agencies and agents, services and servants!

Third, demand punishment of the abusers, misappropriators, thieves and robbers of public funds. As shocking as are the revelations in the AG's Report, even more shocking should be the seeming absence of wide-spread action taken against the perpetrators. Let me quote a column I wrote in THE POST in February 2008, commenting on the then just released 2006 AG's Report:

Is it fair to ask a rather obvious question? How many employees of the various ministries – from top Ministers to the lower workers – have ever been reprimanded? Or penalised? Or dismissed? Or prosecuted? Or jailed? If some sort of disciplinary action is never taken against those who divert designated funds, don't retire imprests, fail to account for large amounts of money, send money to foreign bank accounts without authorisation, etc., etc., then how can we expect such criminal practices to come to a halt?

We are regularly assured by high Government officials that "steps are being taken." But steps in what direction? And with what consequences? New computer systems for more effective oversight of various accounts may help, but people who really want to embezzle, swindle and steal will usually find a way around even the best of technical systems!

How can Zambia expect Cooperating Partners to come up with aid packages when the 2008 Budget reveals billions of kwacha unspent and the 2006 AG Report shows billions of Kwacha misspent? Will the mines pay added taxes that they can certainly doubt will reach the people? Who will give flood relief money to a Government that regularly misuses funds? How can high Government officials travel overseas to woo support when here at home they don't seem to be able to control an environment of corruption that will waste that support?

The records of the AG's Report and follow-ups are public. The hearings and conclusions of Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) are public. CSO's should demand that appropriate actions should be taken so that lack of public accountability does not go unpunished. (The role of ten leading CSOs in the recent Tribunal action can serve as a good example of appropriate responsibility.)

Fourth, advocate for greater and more timely budget support for the AG's office. This would include not only greater support for the Lusaka office but also for the offices distributed across provinces and districts throughout the country. Thorough investigations done by competent accountants don't come cheaply. But the potential for money saved far outweighs the expenses. CSOs should lobby for more adequate funding for this very important work.

Fifth, call for a strengthening of the structures of accountability and competence in Government. I believe that CSOs can help in that direction especially by engaging in the APRM process that is now getting underway here in Zambia. This process offers an opportunity for wide-spread citizen review of governance directions and actions and this opportunity should be grasped.

Sixth, promote grass roots monitoring of Government actions. I think of the budget monitoring activities undertaken by many CSOs, including the sponsor of this morning's Round Table, CSPR. Another good example is the "Community Notice Board" activity coordinated by TIZ. Local communities are informed about how much money has been actually disbursed to meet needs such as schools or clinics, and local people are trained to follow through with investigations to see how this money is actually spent – or not spent! TIZ is already supporting these programmes in Chongwe and Nyimba and several other districts will soon be involved.

Seventh, promote a culture, an ethic, a morality of decency and honesty in the public service. CSOs should be in the lead in such a campaign, working closely with churches committed to such a culture. And if I may be allowed to say, in this so-called Christian nation of Zambia, we need a little less shouting of Christian *slogans* and a lot more practising of Christian *virtues*!

11. In conclusion, what I have attempted to do is present some of the implications of the findings of the AG's Report as they affect the "benefit of society" and "sustainable development" (to return to the words of the Mission and Goal Statements of the AG's Office. Then I have suggested some roles that CSOs might play in turning around the disaster in Zambia of the lack of public accountability. Hopefully, together we can map some way forward in our discussions here this morning. The citizens of Zambia deserve better!

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