

Concluding remarks with emphasis on the discussions on Good Enough Governance

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This conference has come to an end now and it is up to us as rapporteurs to make some final comments. For me it was an extra-ordinary conference in the sense that next to the confusion much discussion was visible on its main topics, that is Governance, Aid and establishing a research agenda. I loved those discussions, because they were open, they were sometimes sharp, but always filled with substantive arguments instead of strategic, power and interest based, arguments.

Such discussions are seen far too seldom in conferences and even in scholarly conferences. If this conference succeeded in one way, it was to make me think and I hope to make you think also.

So that is the good thing, or might I say the good enough thing.

For me as a rapporteur that makes for a difficult position. Because the discussions are not finalized substantive conclusions are not yet possible.

All I can do is summarize and reflect and give the basic questions at stake.

But even that is somewhat redundant, because most sessions were plenary sessions. You all attended and you all know what was said.

So let me just give a short resume regarding the governance issues and summarize the basic questions at stake.

It started with Mrs Grindle's approach an wonderful article.

She told us that the governance agenda is overloaded. Given the scarce resources too much of these resources is going to improve government in such a way that it approximates the ideal governance structure

We should diminish this overload Merilee Grindle said and just strive for good enough governance. There are so many other urgent problems to address like poverty, health and education problems. The problem is that we - the developed countries - have imposed an agenda for developing countries that is impossible to accomplish. It is an agenda which we ourselves did not even follow

Downsizing the agenda or adding to it

What happens is of course similar to trying to downsize governments. You know the saying that if you want to reduce administration with 15% you probably end up with an increase of 15% because of all the project groups steering committees, working groups and planning groups you need in order to make a good policy on downsizing the apparatus. The same happened during this conference also. Instead of reduction of demands on governance, some additional demands entered the discussion. What about security? Should it be added to the agenda or is it a too political issue to touch upon. What about equality? Should it be something that should be included in the agenda?

So the alternative was "good enough governance"

Then the discussion emerged. What is needed for growth? Is good governance with the 140 indicators as mentioned by the World Bank and summarized under such aggregates as Government effectiveness, political stability, regulatory quality, Voice and Accountability,

Control of corruption really necessary? Or on the other extreme “can bad governments” also do a good job and what can we learn from that, as Pat Gray told us?

There are also some dangerous sides to such a concept

To introduce a concept like good enough governance one makes a sliding scale, a continuum, of the quality of governance. Where to put the dividing line? Are we satisfied if a government scores high enough on all dimensions. F.I. beyond a critical point? Or are we to focus on some important dimensions? I do hope it is the second point. Because one can not achieve everything simultaneously. It has in my opinion to be done consecutively. You focus on the most urgent problem and when that is solved you address the next most urgent problem. But then the question arose what are the most important aspects and who should decide?

Some suggestions about the most important aspects came from analysis

Empirical research (Kim Molomney) suggested that we could focus on government effectiveness and stability because these are the two that impact most. And we had discussions about the necessity of such analysis, but because I was part of that discussion I will not make comments upon this as rapporteur.

Ownership of the agenda

Perhaps the whole discussion is just based on the question who should own the agenda. Everybody wants to own it. Developing countries don't want the developed countries to impose their values on them. That is the question of power and interests, that is a political question.

I can understand that this question arises, but I am first of all a scholar, who wants to analyze what gives optimal results in one way or another

Then we discussed good governance

Is it about reforming government? Is it about establishing principles of New Public Management? Or about involving the civil society? Is it about the public side of public administration or the administration side thereof? Is it about nation building? Or is that a contradiction in terms, As our general rapporteur tends to argue, because nations and governments emerge evolutionary? And the discussion became quite fundamental. What is governance anyway?

In my view the answer depends on how you interpret the emergence of the concept in the 1990s.

Was it a new attempt to further reduce the role of government after the Washington consensus of the early 1980s with its emphasis on efficiency and promoting the free market and the need to downsize government?

Or was the concept of governance a first attempt a way to smuggle government back in? According to me it was the second, but I don't want to restart the discussion right now.

Goal or means

Good governance has become a value in itself. What is it? A goal or an instrument? Nowadays I think most donor-countries see good governance as a goal in itself. Hardly caring about economic growth, implicitly, good governance has become a goal in itself. And a goal not primarily there to serve the interests of developing countries but to serve developed countries' interests.

But good governance is a means. It is the intermediate variable so to speak. The lightning bolt that prevents not the lightning to strike but prevents it from causing a fire. Governance should provide the instruments that problems become less dependent on factors one cannot influence. Some problems are caused by factors you could influence. Good governance should address these factors. But there are also other factors, sometimes out of the control of government and governance. In those cases government and governance should try to break the link between those factors and the problems caused by them, that is act like a lightning bolt.

In the end we were both optimistic and pessimistic.

Scholars in Public Administration can help to strive for good 'enough' governance. To respond effectively to new developments and to achieve practices of good enough governance. but we have a long way to go. I would argue that perhaps many countries don't have good governance; perhaps practices change very slowly; but we in Public Administration still lack the information to understand the problems, to explain and to improve. That seems to be one of the undisputed conclusions of this conference.

Thank you for your attention.