

Mechanisms to Improve Accountability in the Public Sector

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Abstract

Incidents of a lack of accountability, often associated with an element of corruption, among public officials and institutions when rendering public services, is a worldwide occurrence. In an attempt to address this governance tendency, governments increasingly look towards more sophisticated managerial methods such as improved monitoring and evaluation systems, and performance management systems, to address accountability deficits in governance. Such a managerial method is not necessarily similar to the rational theory as a remnant of the New Public Management (NPM). The prevailing belief in the NPM is that improved effectiveness and efficiencies enhance accountability and eliminate corruption. Accountability, however, is a political concept that relates to a power discourse. Citizens are often unable to influence government decisions affecting their lives and eliminate the abuse of power by the government. A key challenge in practice is, accordingly, to create forms of accountability in terms of which citizens can have control over and sanction such abuse of power. This type of approach necessarily positions accountability in a non-rational neo-institutional theory framework. The article explores existing accountability mechanisms that scholars propose as solutions to address governance challenges and to strengthen weak accountability. These mechanisms are analysed so as to indicate weaknesses and strengths of each. It then deals with other accountability mechanisms that relate to a neo-institutional theory framework and discusses strengths and weaknesses of those mechanisms. The article concludes with proposals of alternative innovative accountability mechanisms with which citizens could hold the public sector to account.

Keywords: *Accountability, corruption, new public management, political power, management, rational theory, non-rational neo-institutional theory, accountability mechanisms.*

1. Introduction

One of the central concerns of contemporary governance is the reduced or complete lack of accountability among public officials and institutions when rendering public services. In the absence of accountability, incidents of corruption often occur. This is evident in governments worldwide and the mentioned concern is thus well justified. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International, the vast majority of the 183 countries and territories assessed in 2011, scored below five on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (very clean). Corruption exacerbates

underdevelopment in developing countries and thwarts the achievement of upliftment goals. It causes and results in, amongst other things, poor quality goods and public services, a lack of efficiencies, excessive costs, and ineffective public programmes (Madonsela 2010). It came as no surprise when service delivery protests in many countries, including South Africa, escalated to the point of mass demonstrations in 2010, and still continue today.

Governments attempt to address this governance tendency by looking towards more sophisticated managerial methods such as improved monitoring and evaluation systems, and performance management systems, to address accountability deficits in governance. A managerial method then applied in practice is not necessarily similar to the rational theory as a remnant of the New Public Management (NPM). Wherever the NPM is followed, the belief is that to reach improved effectiveness and efficiencies in service delivery, this enhances accountability and eliminates corruption. Rational theory, in this regard, refers to making a decision or performing an action that is based on reasoning and which is in line with the pre-existent objectives of the institution concerned, and is directed towards maximizing them. When reasoning is not used to accomplish an objective, the behaviour can be regarded as non-rational (Smith 2003, 315-316).

This, however, does not appear to be the ultimate solution for the afore-mentioned concern. Citizens are still often unable to influence government decisions affecting their lives and eliminate the abuse of power by the government. This, accordingly, creates a key challenge in practice to create forms of accountability in terms of which citizens can have control over and sanction government's abuse of power. This type of approach, namely where citizens make use of accountability mechanisms to be able to influence government decisions affecting their lives and eliminate the abuse of power by the government, necessarily positions accountability in a non-rational neo-institutional theory framework. In this regard, neo-institutional theory offers a means to explore not only the level of commonality in use of other accountability mechanisms, but also the processes by which these have become popular across the governance landscape. Neo-institutionalism is therefore a theory that focuses on developing a sociological view of institutions; the way they interact and the way they affect society (Larrinaga 2007).

The article makes reference to the existence of different conceptualisations of accountability in an attempt to define accountability. Subsequently, a brief overview is given of the NPM as an exponent of rational theory. Following this, the most prominent accountability mechanisms in use are identified and discussed with indications of weaknesses and strengths of each. Although not totally discarding the usefulness of mechanisms based on rational theory to improve public efficiencies, it is argued though for mechanisms that will address the root cause of corruption, as being power abuses. The article then deals with other accountability mechanisms that relate to a neo-institutional theory framework and discusses strengths and weaknesses of those mechanisms. The mechanisms proposed are grounded in non-

rationalist theory and have the ability to civilianise power so as to improve public accountability and curb corruption. The success of these mechanisms has already been proven in the uprisings in Yemen, Egypt, Libya and Syria. The article concludes with proposals of alternative innovative accountability mechanisms with which citizens could hold the public sector to account.

2. Accountability Adversely Affected

In an attempt to improve the accountability of government and its executive institutions, governments are looking towards mechanisms to secure the accountability of government and public officials. The mechanisms proposed for improved accountability, initiate primarily from rational theory. Rational theory underpins the NPM which purports to define a more suitable paradigm for managing government and public institutions in a contemporary environment. This paradigm is one of a market-based public administration. The thinking is that should public officials be more efficient and effective when rendering public services, the accountability for their actions will also improve.

Ayeni (1998), however, remarks that the perceptions that the widespread adoption of rational economic and public choice thinking would reverse the damage and make public accountability more readily manageable "were probably misplaced and may have in fact compounded the problem of some societies". This is because rationalist theory and managerialism do not recognize the political dimension of governance. "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely", writes the historian and moralist, Lord Acton in his letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton in 1887. Political power is a political discourse underpinned by non-rational theory. Those in power usually enjoy the advantage of superior or expert knowledge, legal authority, huge organizational size and professional cohesion which render them even more powerful than they ought to be. If politically powerful regimes are not kept answerable for their actions by effective accountability mechanisms, they will not act in the legitimate interest of society. Accountability, can be argued, is therefore the fundamental prerequisite for preventing the abuse of political power by government and directing such power towards promoting the rights of citizens.

Political power, being a political discourse, requires us to ensure that citizens' political rights take centre stage and are not relegated by the wave of consumerism and managerialism. Contrary to the effectiveness discourse of rational theory, the political discourse departs from a non-rational theoretical framework. Within this framework, political power is recognized as a political construct to be civilianised or deconstructed by citizens (Steyn 2011).

3. Defining Accountability

For the purposes of this article, the concept of accountability is taken as wide as possible as authors tend to conceptualise accountability differently. It could be identified from the perspective of its sources, or as a directional model, or even in terms of a process. Accountability can also be defined in terms of internal or external accountability, depending on whether control is exercised through institutions based outside of or those located within the target institution. For the purposes of this article, accountability is then defined in terms of "public accountability".

Ayeni (1998) defines public accountability as being "about how those who exercise powers in the name of the public fulfil their duties and obligations, and the process by which they are made to answer and account for their actions. It is about the responsibility of officials and agencies, ways to minimize the abuse of power and authority, and strategies to ensure that those in authority comply with acceptable standards, and can be sanctioned whenever necessary". Accountability is understood as the obligation to render an account for a responsibility that has been conferred (Van Niekerk, Van der Walldt & Jonker 2002, 3).

The report of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA Study, 2002) endorses the following general definition of accountability: "*Accountability*," is universally and generally defined as holding responsible elected or appointed individuals and organisations charged with a public mandate to account for specific actions, activities or decisions to the public, from which they derive their authority. Accountability focuses on the ability to account for the allocation, use and control of public expenditure and resources in accordance with legally accepted standards, regarding budgeting, accounting and auditing". Public accountability therefore refers to the constraints placed on the behaviour of public officials by organisations and constituencies which have the power to apply sanctions to them.

Holding government and public officials accountable is about making sure that those entrusted by society with the power and responsibility to manage societal resources and regulate people's lives, remain accountable for their actions to the people within agreed paradigms, says Advocate Thuli Madonsela, the Public Protector of the Republic of South Africa (2010). Accountability is also about ensuring that those who earlier surrendered power remain empowered to ask questions, to get recourse for unauthorised actions and are able to withdraw stewardship when things go wrong. According to the Public Protector, accountability has certain elements: firstly, giving an account, secondly, justification, and thirdly, redress and/or sanctions when parameters have been transgressed.

In short, "public accountability rests both on giving an account of and on being held to account" (Stewart 1998, 132). Public officials, who are employed in complex government departments, have to be accountable to their immediate supervisors, the political leadership and the public at large (Campbell 2000, 185). It follows that they

should also be held to account by their immediate supervisors, the political leadership and the public at large.

4. New Public Management Approach

The NPM approach was the dominant paradigm in public administration theory and practice for about 20 years since the 1980's. It could be described as a loose body of concepts, approaches and theories which purported to define a more suitable paradigm for managing government and public sector institutions (Ayeni 1998). The NPM has been described differently by different governments and authors. Some describe it as a market-based public administration and others as an entrepreneurial government or simply, during that period of time, a new doctrine of managerialism. A number of key components are generally associated with the NPM stream of thinking: (a) setting managers free to manage ethics; (b) setting explicit standards and measures of performance; (c) greater emphasis on output controls; (d.) breaking up public sector entities and systems into corporatized units around products; (e) greater competition through term contracts and public tendering procedures; (f) adoption of private sector management styles, and (g) greater discipline and parsimony in resource use.

Underlying these components is the rational theory. The trail of thought is that should government's efficiencies be improved through an increased use of more sophisticated management tools, increased accountability will follow (Ayeni 1998). However, as already stated, accountability refers to the constraint of political power which is a political discourse, and for which rational theory does not provide any basis.

Levy (2011) demonstrates, through his discussion of the global economic crisis of 2008, that the adoption of norms of service delivery in the private sector by the public sector did not lead to increased accountability – but rather to the contrary. Says Levy (2011, 235): "When highly paid private sector executives have presided so spectacularly over the demise of huge organisations in banking, insurance and car making, public sector managers might want to think again before making comparisons".

A market-based public administration underpinned by neo-liberal market strategies promoted by multi-lateral institutions might have opened up markets, but it could also have contributed to a further widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. It could furthermore, have led to decreased accountability, corruption and other social and political problems associated with widespread poverty. In an attempt to address these governance challenges, different accountability mechanisms are now discussed in order to identify those that can possibly strengthen weak accountability.

5. Mechanisms to Secure Accountability

The channels or mechanisms, by which accountability is secured for officials, can consist of informal mechanisms such as mass demonstrations, or formal mechanisms such as legal instruments which are the creation of the state and founded on its sovereign authority. Mechanisms to secure accountability serve to embed and secure whatever it is that people are accountable for: "They are instruments for calling people to account, for judging the adequacy of the accounts rendered, and for bringing sanctions to bear for failures to produce an adequate account" (Goodin 2003, 365).

There are different channels or mechanisms being advocated for securing the accountability of public institutions and public officials (public accountability) and indicating their weaknesses and strengths. A discussion now follows of the accountability mechanisms that are being used more frequently to call public officials and governments to account for their actions when performing public activities.

5.1 Constitutionalism and the judiciary

Democracy, as reflected in section 195 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, (hereinafter called the Constitution, 1996) (<http://www.GOV.za/constitution>), demands that government activities should be transparent, responsible and accountable, and performed by honest officials. An occurrence such as corruption is an example of poor service delivery and the opposite of what democracy demands. Governance in South Africa has to comply with these constitutional demands. The Constitution, 1996, therefore obliges government to perform public actions in an effective and efficient way in terms of particular constitutional prescriptions and the Bill of Rights (Van Heerden 2009, 3).

Constitutionalism in the concept of democracy is essential when controlling authority (Bekker, 2009). The constitution of countries such as South Africa demands transparency and accountability for public actions. However, not all countries have a constitution that demands accountability. Even if a country does not have such a constitution, attitudes of the media and the public towards public officials should not remain static, advises Judge Edwin Cameron (1990). The constitutional dispensations of countries should endeavour to change the relationship between the media, the public and the judiciary, as members of the public are bearers of rights and the judiciary is the guardian of such rights (Rickard, 2011).

A common characteristic of constitutional systems is the division of a state's authority between legislative, executive and judicial institutions. The 1996 Constitution provides for such a division of authority in sections 43, 85 and 165, respectively. The current three divisions of authority aim at functional separation from each other and have been put in place to prevent state authority from being exercised arbitrarily by any one of the three divisions (Van Heerden 2009, 6).

Although the judiciary is one of the three divisions of state authority, it is, as the courts have said, "the state acting through its judicial organs" (Lekhari 1956). It is, however, an unelected instrument of state power. This anomaly has caused much debate. Cameron identifies several reasons why judges in a modern state should be accountable to the public: firstly, they are part of the governing structure of a country; secondly, they wield enormous power over their fellows, and thirdly, they are often regarded as 'public oracles'. Cameron also states that "Power, public prominence and influence without accountability amount to despotism". He quotes Lord Devlin who said: "It is a great temptation to cast the judiciary as elite which will bypass the traffic-laden ways of the democratic process. But it would only apparently be a bypass. In truth it would be a road that would never rejoin the highway but would lead inevitably ... to the totalitarian state" (Cameron 1990, 253). It follows, therefore, that if judges in a modern state want to avoid the suggestion that they wield autocratic power, they must be subject to public scrutiny of their functions, continues Cameron; some way must be found to reconcile performance of their judicial duties with constitutional theory. The work of judges should be done under public gaze, every decision needs to be justified with reasons, and hardly any decision should be made without the concurrence of at least one other judge.

According to Page and Wright (1999) there is an increase internationally in the trend of politicisation, which means that there is an increasing political influence over the senior public service despite clear and unambiguous constitutions which provide for the definite separation of the different arms of government, the executive head of state and the cabinet. In such cases, politicians seek to shape to a greater extent the relationship between politicians and the public service in favour of politicians. An uncertainty about a political-administrative interface poses a danger to accountability, especially where the political leadership plays an increasingly dominant role in the relationship. Should there be an overwhelming majority of the ruling party being represented in parliament, this will simply strengthen the notion of abuses of power by politicians instead of curtailing the powers of the presidency, as is supposed to be the role of parliament.

5.2 Improved control measures for parliament

Bekker (2009) suggests improved control measures for members of parliament in discharging their parliamentary duties and exposing financial irregularities. The same suggestion could be made for legislatures at provincial and local government level. Bekker also suggests that clear instructions and control instruments will enable members of parliament and public representatives in local government and civil society in their oversight duties and in holding departmental officials to account. This suggestion means that the current descriptions of parliamentary duties should be revised and made more comprehensive. The descriptions should include control measures over such duties, as well as clear statements as to the sanctions that could

follow when duties are performed without the necessary responsibility and accountability.

5.3 Legal frameworks

Brand (2006) is of the opinion that certain South African legislation such as the Public Finance Management Act, 1999 (Act 1 of 1999), has contributed significantly to better and more regular reporting, improved financial management and more detailed and informative reports on the spending of public funds within the national and provincial spheres of government. This Act, therefore, contributes to that which is required as an accountable use of public funds.

The law is vital for the promotion of public accountability, and Hayek (1960) states that the rule of law could produce economic inequality. He observes that so as to produce the same result for different people "it is necessary to treat them differently. To give different people the same objective opportunities, is not to give them the same subjective chance ... all that can be claimed for it (the Rule of Law) is that this inequality is not designed to affect particular people in a particular way".

5.4 Codes of conduct

The King III Report on Governance has been adopted internationally to promote sound governance of primarily private corporations, but also of voluntary organisations and the public sector. This report states: "Boards must apply the test of fairness, accountability, responsibility and transparency to all acts or omissions and be accountable to the company but also responsive and responsible towards the company's identified stakeholders". In the case of the public sector, government stakeholders would refer to all the sectors of society, be that civil society, the public sector or business. The report places beyond doubt that all actions must be performed with the necessary accountability.

Every action undertaken by public officials, regardless of which department they serve in, occurs within a constitutional and legal framework. Naturally, such a legal framework contains guidelines on the procedures within which public activities must be performed by public officials. Laws therefore regulate the behaviour of public officials. Statutory codes tend to be more rigid in their interpretation and revision of rules of behaviour than non-statutory codes. In South Africa codes of conduct for public officials are contained in the Constitution, 1996, the Public Service Act, 1994 (Act 93 of 1994), the Public Service Regulations and the Public Service Staff Code issued in terms of the Public Service Act. Normally, a code of conduct is the codification of the principles and standards that ensure accountability by public officials.

5.5 Change to the culture of public institutions

Some authors suggest that by instilling a culture of professionalism and prudence in public officials in their duty of serving the public will make public officials more accountable (Miller 2005). Such principles include values such as integrity, accountability, transparency and accessibility (Armstrong 2005; Fox, Schwella & Wissink 2000; Senay & Besdziek 1999). Other authors, such as Raga & Taylor (2005) suggest that countries need an organizational culture that not only supports ethical behaviour, but sees that it defines and underpins right and wrong conduct at an individual and institutional sphere. Normative criteria are proposed as being suitable as a base for effective and efficient public service delivery to its populace on the local sphere (Raga & Taylor 2005).

Raga and Taylor (2005) state that in countries such as South Africa, the proliferation of ethical codes of conduct, public accountability and the promulgation of a number of laws to thwart unethical behaviour is likely to fail because it is first necessary to inculcate within the public and public officials particular dispositions, attitudes and virtues to guide human conduct. They contend with Aristotle that humans are not inherently virtuous and that ethics must therefore be taught and practiced. Training in ethics is accordingly seen as an essential initiative for establishing an efficient and effective ethical and accountable public service.

Bekker (2009) states that institutions of higher learning such as universities and training centres, should focus on the improvement of financial management and accountability in government departments. He suggests that research should be directed to this field and, furthermore, that special curricula and financial courses should be designed to further the capabilities of public officials and the training of prospective candidates in a career of Public Finance and Accounting. Although this might help to improve some of the inefficiencies, it does not address the root cause of the abuse of power and will therefore not necessarily address the accountability deficits. The same reasoning applies to proposals for other innovations such as accreditation systems for public service managers that would ensure that appointees have the skills and experience required for the work.

5.6 Media

According to Rickard (2011), the media has obligations to help maintain a constitutional democracy. The media should use its reporting power and freedom in defence of judicial independence and the constitution of a country. Odugbemi and Norris (2007) argue that the news media, provided that it is set up in a way that allows it to act as a watchdog, agenda-setters and gatekeepers, is vital for the reform agenda of democratic governments that are responsive to social needs, inclusive, and accountable to citizens.

The watchdog role of the media requires the news media to provide a check on powerful sectors of society, be those leaders from the private or the public domain. In this role, journalists are expected to guard the public interest and to protect it from incompetence, corruption and misinformation. Brunetti and Weder (2003) conclude that an increase by one standard deviation in a country's level of press freedom generally reduces the level of corruption in that country by 0.4 to 0.9 points, on a six-point scale. The reasons they suggest, are that the press provides a platform for the private sector to voice complaints. In addition, with a free press, journalists have incentives to investigate misconduct by officials. A series of other aggregate-level correlational econometric studies, incorporating the standard controls, generally point to similar conclusions (Stapenhurst 2000). Lederman, Loayza and Soares (2005) analysed the effects of democracy, parliamentary systems, and freedom of the press on corruption, and their results confirm the general assumption that a free press inhibits corruption. Media access, in addition to press freedom, is also found to be important. Bandyopadhyay (2006) reported that the degree of media and ICT penetration is associated with less corruption, with the strongest effect where newspaper circulation was deepest.

5.7 Ombudsman

The institution of the Ombudsman has spread phenomenally over the last several years. Dennis Pearce (1999 114) says: "this astonishing growth of an institution is not and has not been emulated by any other body". The ombudsman, or Public Protector in South Africa, is an office established by the Constitution, 1996, and the Public Protector Act, 1994 (Act 23 of 1994). The Public Protector is one of the Constitution's Chapter nine institutions, named for the constitutional chapter that establishes a number of bodies with the mandate to guard democracy. The office is entrusted to an independent, impartial and highly respected functionary who is accountable to the legislative authority. The ombudsman receives complaints from aggrieved persons against public institutions and public officials or launches an investigation on his/her own initiative, recommends corrective action and issues reports. The ombudsman usually receives complaints about maladministration in public institutions. The jurisdiction is usually wide enough to investigate any action or failure to act on the part of any public institution or public official. It also grants authority to investigate the justice, correctness of findings and motivations, adequacy of reasons, effectiveness and correctness of procedures in any action or failure to act of a public institution or official. This institution serves as a watchdog over the interests of the public and other public institutions to ensure that public services are rendered with the necessary accountability.

5.8 Communication Technologies

Communication technologies such as the Internet and the World-Wide Web have given rise to new organisation forms and ways of organising and communicating with social forums (Glasius and Timms 2006), internet-based mobilisation (Clark and Themudo 2006) and transnational networks (Katz and Anheier 2006) as prominent examples. Globally and locally, citizens converge on the World-Wide Web searching for information on similar interests. Social tools and media on the World-Wide Web, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are used as accountability mechanisms to achieve political results. Reports on government and public officials' activities can be noted. Reports and criticism by interest groups and others about the conduct of government and public officials can be compared with what is expected in one's own country. In this manner a government should take cognizance of comments from the public. In order to show an interest in what the public has to say about the conduct of government and public officials, the South African president has a phone-in service where the public can complain about any matter involving the conduct of public institutions and public officials.

5.9 Protests

John Schwarzmantel (1987, 110) argues that the people themselves must be able to decide what their best interests are and have the ability to remove or have a say in the removal of officials or governments which do not respond to their interests as the people define them. The challenge for a democracy is to work out or decide on mechanisms or strategies for implementing these goals. Esterhuyse (1989) emphasises in this regard that a society which does not, or is not allowed to express moral protest in public, can cause political office-bearers to have a low sense of responsibility and integrity. Consequently, the possibility of corruption and maladministration is increased.

Moral protest aided by technology, as will later be purported, has in the past two years proved a powerful mechanism to not only hold governments accountable, but to also remove corrupt governments. On February 11, 2011, President Hosni Mubarak resigned from the presidency after 29 years in power. This removal was preceded by a popular peaceful uprising that continued for 18 days, spreading across Egypt ultimately forcing Mubarak to cede power to the military. This illustrates that protests can be a mechanism to enforce accountability.

6. Innovative Mechanisms to Improve Accountability

It appears that mechanisms, that relate to a non-rational theory, such as protests and social media, could be regarded as the most effective way to increase public accountability, rather than improved effectiveness and efficiency. The question then

arises as to who would be the accountability actors holding a government to account when using these mechanisms? Keohane has conceptualised accountability in principal-agent terms. Broadly defined, Keohane refers to accountability as a relationship "in which an individual, group or other entity makes demands on an agent to report on his or her activities, and has the ability to impose costs on the agent". He states "it is ... essential, in thinking about accountability in a given situation, to distinguish between agents, individuals or organisations that make decisions, and their principals, who have authorised their actions" (Keohane 2002, 12).

Technology allows for a mix of external actors to hold governments accountable to citizens. This mix consists of organized civil society, civil society networks, the media and individual citizens. Organised civil society and organisations such as Amnesty International and Transparency International act as agents of the state demanding greater transparency and accountability from the state and specifically from officials, ministers and members of parliament. Many scholars in the past have attempted to substantiate the potential and right of global civil society to fill democratic deficits towards political ends. Ezzat and Kaldor (2007, 36-37) call on the 'special duty' of civil society actors, in pointing out civility failures and taking corrective action accordingly. Scholte (2007) similarly argues for the potential of the activities of global civil society to act as an antidote to the failings of democracy in politics and in so doing enhancing 'rule by the people' in contemporary politics. Civil society as the so-called "conscience of society" (Bekker 2009, 16) can exert tremendous pressure for improved accountability using the media, the internet and social networks as accountability tools. Internationalisation of relevant national issues (Ayeni 1998) through organisations such as Amnesty International and Transparency International also wield considerable influences because of their acknowledged ability to focus international on relevant national issues.

As a consequence of the NPM, there is a global acknowledgement that organs of civil society need to be empowered to share the responsibility of governance – a shift in emphasis from "government" (the power to govern) to "governance" (the act of governing). Buse and Harmer (2004) state that power in such partnerships or collaborations are being exercised on the basis of coercion, either political or financial, and also on the basis of authority and legitimacy. A citizen-orientated management approach will simply lead to the co-opting of the mandate of the most powerful; in this instance government could render civil society powerless to monitor and to challenge power-holders.

For government to be held to account, civil society must be a source of dissent, challenge, and innovation, a counter-veiling force to government and the corporate sector in an age of globalisation (see, for instance, Batliwala and Brown 2006; Keane 2001; Taylor 2004.). Civil society should "serve as a social, cultural and political watchdog keeping both the market and state in check, and contribute to and reflect the diversity, pluralism, and dynamism of the modern world" (Anheier 2007, 7).

Kaldor, Anheier and Glasius (2003) classify civil society in terms of ideological positions and policy options. In the so-called Activist Manifestation of civil society, they give examples of civil society represented not only by large international non-governmental organisations such as Amnesty International and Civicus, but also by the multiplicity of social forums and dot.causes operating on the Internet. The Internet and cell phone technology has provided citizens of the world the opportunity to form citizen networks from the local to the global scale to claim rights and responsibilities as members of a given polity. Deilbert (2000, 255) refers to the rise of the prominence of citizen networks as "one of the most dramatic changes in world politics" and asserts that "they will continue to grow and expand, intruding into international policy-making processes".

The 2010, 2011 uprisings in the Arab world were demonstrations of the power of citizens mobilised by technology to hold governments to account to such an extent that some governments were toppled through the uprisings. Without technology small pockets of protests might have erupted in the past as mechanisms to call governments to account. Today, however, citizens and civil society have access to the technological tools to hold governments accountable for their actions.

7. Conclusion

A central concern of contemporary governance is the accountability of public officials and institutions. The discussions indicated that in the absence of accountability, incidents of corruption in the public sector abound. This also causes poor quality goods and services, lack of efficiencies, excessive costs, and ineffective public programmes.

Although the so-called New Public Management has been the dominant paradigm in public administration theory and practice for about 20 years since the 1980's, it has apparently not yielded desired results and appears to have rather led to decreased accountability, corruption and other social and political problems associated with widespread poverty.

The discussions then focused on the most common channels or mechanisms that are being used to call public officials and governments to account and for securing public accountability. Powerful regimes need to be kept answerable for their actions by effective accountability mechanisms. Accountability should be the fundamental prerequisite for preventing the abuse of political power and directing power towards the protection of citizens' rights.

Finally, the discussions touched on the question of who would be the accountability actors to hold government to account when mechanisms grounded in non-rational theory such as protests and social media are used to increase public accountability. The conclusion of the discussion in this article is that civil society should serve as a social, cultural and political watchdog to keep public officials and institutions in check.

Citizens and civil society have access to the technological tools to hold governments accountable for their actions.

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