

Unit 5: Involving Civil Society in Good Governance

Learning Objectives

What can civil society do for good governance?

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand parliament's role in forming and nurturing an active civil society;
- Understand what parliament provides for an environment of an active civil society;
- Know how civil society can help curb corruption.

Solving the corruption problem in a nation involves more than just the good example of political figures and progressive legislation. In order to fully respond to corruption at every level of society, civil society organizations must also play an active role in corruption prevention. This unit looks at methods for empowering and facilitating the creation of active civil society organizations, and the role for parliament in incorporating this essential sector of society into the prevention game.

Box 1

Publicly Accessible Information

- Policy documents
- National archives
- Records
- National registers
- Electoral roles
- Land transfer records
- Housing and land valuations
- Automobile and business registrations
- Meetings records
- Ordinances and laws
- Judicial decisions
- Scientific databases
- Statistical complications
- Cultural surveys

Good governance can only be permanently established if political participation functions at a local level. This, however, is only possible if all citizens participate politically, economically, socially, and culturally. What does parliament and other government bodies need to do to energize and facilitate an active civil society?

Public Information

Fundamental to allowing the growth of civil society is the need to make public information available and accessible.

Without this information, tools and resources, even the most energized public is unable to be truly active in the governance process. Public information is any information that is produced by the public sector but which does not infringe national security, legal right, or confidentiality agreements.

Once information is made accessible, the public will need to have the skills to properly utilize access, and interpret the information in order for it to truly be empowering. For information to empower people it must bring into focus the need to improve their capacity to analyze information and to act on that information by communicating views through a.) public hearings, b.) public meetings, c.) participatory planning committees, d.) focus groups, e.) surveys, f.) citizen advisory groups, etc. Parliament and other government agencies will also need to play their role in assuring that these mechanisms are made relevant and accessible to the community by strengthening community organizations, and sometimes facilitating collective approaches through citizen report cards.

Communities may develop communication networks that allow members of the community to develop a unified voice and make demands for services and information relevant to them, such as health care, education, water and employment. Participation is important because it allows engagement of citizens and organization in public policy debates, delivering public services, and monitoring and contributing to the management of public goods. Participation is critical to making development policy and public service action respond to the needs of the people.

After establishing an environment where citizen voice can be nurtured, citizen feedback on policies should be actively sought. Responsiveness creates an environment where this is possible. Responsiveness by the government occurs when the government:

- **Listens to people's views and concerns;**
- **Acknowledges concerns impartially;**
- **Designs a system in which public information capacity can be implemented, providing the best possible access to and use of information by multilingual or disadvantaged communities at the local level;**

- **Recognizes the role of the media in strengthening government responsiveness to citizen feedback and opening communication to reach more disenfranchised communities.**

Unit 5 Questions

Please answer each of the following questions. If you are taking this course in a group you may then meet to discuss your answers.

1. Through what methods can parliament play a role in improving civil society involvement in the political sphere?
2. What other factors influence citizen involvement with parliament, advocacy and lobbying?

