

Corruption – A social disease

Part 97

Public accountability is the pivot for good governance

Since 1885, parliaments' legislative function in terms of oversight and accountability had been articulated, e.g. by Wilson), whom emphasised the importance of constant oversight over both the legislature and administration.

Public accountability is the pivot around which good governance rotates. It places liability and obligation on elected and appointed public office bearers to provide satisfactory explanation to the public about how they exercise power and authority which are entrusted to them by the voters.

Article 25 of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia guarantees the right to hold those accountable that seeks to infringe on the right to answerability. In order to operationalise accountability to the level "of whom", "for what", and "to whom", accountability should include an element of oversight over a public office bearer's actions in the form of a third party. If such oversight is not present, then public accountability remains dysfunctional and almost non-existent.

WHERE THE BUCK STOPS

Accountability in its most basic application is answerability for activities.

Fox and Meyer indicated that accountability can be viewed from different perspectives. Firstly, accountability is viewed as the responsibility of government and its agents towards the public to achieve objectives and to account for them in public. Secondly, accountability is seen as "the commitment required from a public official to accept public



JOHAN COETZEE

responsibility for his actions or inaction". Thirdly, accountability is the obligation of an employee to keep his or her supervisor informed of the execution of his or her responsibility.

From the view of Fox and Meyer, it is clear that accountability should comply with allocated responsibility.

Accountability cannot be delegated, it is full and final answerability, or in laymen's terms, "the buck stops with me", that includes to be answerable about all positive and negative actions and not just sugar coated reports or one sided reports, "past the buck" or "blame the messenger" that is so often experienced when the public seeks answers from public servants.

Even if a public service is contracted out, e.g. under a Public Private Partnership (PPP) agreement and/or a Black Empowerment agreement and such service fails to deliver, the government remains accountable for such service failure.

References

- Fox, W. & Meyer, L.H. 1996. *Public Administration Dictionary*. Juta & Co Ltd.
Wilson, W. 1887. *The Study of Administration*. *Political Science Quarterly*. 2 (2), 481-506.

jcoetzee@nust.na