

# **THE OSLO PRINCIPLES ON DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE ASSESSMENTS**

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## **OSLO GOVERNANCE FORUM 3-5 OCTOBER 2011**

We, the participants of the Oslo Governance Forum present **the Oslo Principles on Democratic Governance Assessments** for the consideration of practitioners, promoters and supporters of Democratic Governance, including governments, donor agencies, international organizations, civil society, citizen groups and media.

The Oslo Principles is a statement designed to promote and strengthen democratic governance at the **local and national** levels. The Principles are also expected to serve as a reference point and guide institutions and practitioners in the area of governance monitoring, assessment and analysis.

### **Introduction**

Democratic governance means that people's **human rights and fundamental freedoms** are respected, promoted and fulfilled, enabling them to live with dignity. People have a say in decisions that affect their lives and can hold decision-makers to account, based on inclusive and fair rules, institutions and practices that govern political, economic and social interactions. Women are equal partners with men in private and public spheres of life and decision-making, and all people are free from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, class, gender or any other attribute. Democratic governance feeds into economic and social policies that are responsive to people's rights and aspirations, that aim at eradicating poverty and expanding the choices that people have in their lives, and that respect the rights of future generations.

**Principle 1. Promote country-ownership of governance processes and assessment.** Support multi-stakeholder approaches, political settlements and consensus-building in order to broaden ownership of democratic reform. Recognizing that such broad ownership cannot be assumed in advance, but may be considered a positive outcome of a governance assessment process. Acknowledge that citizens and social groups may

have different interests, but that governance evidence can assist overcoming collective action problems.

**Principle 2. Strengthen the ability of people to hold their governments to account.** Indicators and assessment results should serve to strengthen individual and group claims for better governance performance. Recognize that dissemination of assessment results is not sufficient, and that strengthening the ability of citizens and especially the poor, indigenous people, and other marginalized groups to hold their governments to account should be integral to the assessment process from beginning to end. This means deliberately choosing communication and dissemination methods and media that are relevant to marginalized groups as well as strengthening economic and statistical literacy, raising understanding of issues, making information meaningfully accessible and allowing for genuine participation in decision making.

**Principle 3. Apply a rights based approach.** Governance assessments need to generate information and analysis that can help us to understand and address the issues of poverty, deprivation and exclusion, and promote a gender sensitive approach to public policy and governance. The rights and interests of poor, vulnerable people, women and other marginalized groups must be taken into account in the collection and presentation of governance evidence, as well as in its use.

**Principle 4. Strengthen governments' capability to be responsive.** Strengthen the capacity of governments to promote governance indicators as essential tools for benchmarking results and managing performance. Assist national and local actors and institutions to produce independent assessments and ensure that there is regular information-sharing and communication of governance targets and data.

**Principle 5. Strengthen accountability across government.** Acknowledging that checks and balances are essential for deepening democratic governance, indicators and governance evidence should support the work of parliaments and independent institutions of horizontal accountability, including anti-corruption agencies, ombudsman offices, and human rights institutions.

**Principle 6. Promote and protect space for citizens and civil society organisations to participate in democratic governance assessments and to hold their governments to account.** An enabling environment that respects human rights, particularly freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and association is an essential for carrying out democratic governance assessments.

**Principle 7. Commit to transparency and access to information:** Governance assessments need to be transparent and publicly available so that stakeholders and citizens have access to the results, method and process. Recognizing that the innovative use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has the potential to reduce barriers to citizen participation in governance processes, and present novel opportunities for data collection, dissemination and coordination.

**Principle 8. Encourage a culture of evidence-based policy-making:** To foster a culture of evidence-based policymaking requires a critical mass of participants. Enabling different groups to engage in evidence-based debate requires support to their ability to produce, evaluate and use evidence. Attention should therefore be given to strengthening the capacity of academics, communities of practice, networks, think tanks, research institutes, civil society [social movements, NGOs, and CBOs] national statistical offices, in-depth journalism and government administration.

**Principle 9. Embed the assessment in political realities:** Deepen political economy analysis to ensure the contextual relevance of assessments. Governance is a complex process involving multiple institutions at

different levels. Recognize that reforming governance is an ongoing socio-political process rather than a technical fix. Assessments, therefore, need to transcend narrow project objectives, and be undertaken with an acknowledgement that they are both technical and political process.

**Principle 10. Align with national development and political vision:** an assessment should be based on priorities and reform processes as defined by citizens, their organisations and national stakeholders. These may manifest themselves in the form of development plans and sector strategies or more deep rooted processes for strengthening democratic governance, widening political space, and consolidating peace.

**Principle 11. Support democratic governance assessments at the local level.** Local governance assessments should not be a translation or simplification of national level assessments. Assessments at the local level need to include a focus on the capacities of local government institutions to respond to local needs as well as the capacities of citizens to hold local government institutions to account.