

All protocol having been observed, let me begin by saying that it is my distinct privilege to welcome you all to this launch of the Civil Society Strengthening component of USAID's Democracy and Governance Programme. In so doing, I also want to extend my gratitude to you all, and to your countrymen in general, for the warmth and openness of the welcome that all of us at Management Systems International have received and so appreciated since we first began doing analytic work for USAID here several years ago. Jamaica's reputation for the graciousness of its hospitality is patently well-deserved, and one of which you may all be justly proud.

As we embark upon the implementation of this programme, it is perhaps worthwhile in these opening remarks for me to attempt to lay out for you some of the assumptions that have and will continue to inform our work here over the next several years.

Representative democracy—as all of us who have been so fortunate as to live under its aegis for all or most our lives surely recognize—neither begins *nor* ends at the ballot box. Indeed, the existence of an informed electorate logically precedes the effective and faithful polling of their choices; just as much as policies and programmes seemingly ratified at the urns may well merit further scrutiny and improvement subsequently.

Electoral results per se, then, only express and ratify the electorate's *current* choice concerning who amongst them will be charged with preserving and pursuing the common weal by exercising the prerogatives of *public* office—be they executive or representative—over a specified term, or mandate. They provide a “snapshot” of the political landscape at one moment in time, in effect.

Democratic *governance* when it is at its best, however, both *transcends* the properly partisan dynamic of electoral campaigning

and *extends* the participation and contributions of concerned citizens well beyond the binary choices with which they are commonly confronted in the voting booth.

Democratic governance, in fact, essentially resides in an ongoing and iterative *conversation* between those who have been duly elected to protect and serve the public interest, on the one hand, and those who take it upon themselves to organize, on a non-partisan basis, in order to more effectively aggregate, articulate and pursue matters of public concern or sectoral interest as these emerge over time — and quite often, obviously, *between* elections.

This conversation or dialogue is, in fact, the primordial mechanism through which the relationship that properly ties any sitting government to its entire citizenry (rather than solely to its party's constituency), is constantly renegotiated and renewed. Indeed, it is the process through which citizens come to learn and appreciate

their own membership in the polity, and hopefully to reaffirm their stake in the state itself.

Needless to add, in this company, I suspect, that the national, local and community media have a singularly important role to play in this connection, by creating and maintaining what may be thought of as the “open, public realm”—that most broadly shared venue where this national conversation can be pursued and engaged by all and sundry.

Expectably, the more robust that public sector/civil society conversation becomes—and the more mature and constructive the interlocutors and their exchanges become, over time—the less it requires overt attention. Yet, where there remain significant impediments or constraints to the kinds of participation, transparency, accountability and oversight that are the lifeblood of the governance relationship; then civil society organizations at all

levels of the society must join together with the public and private sectors in identifying and addressing them.

And this is where one may usefully begin to consider either targeted or more general initiatives to *reform* the governance process per se—so as to favor *increased* participation, *more effective* representation, *greater* transparency and *substantial improvements* in both accountability and oversight.

But I came to welcome you, not to bore you. So let me close by saying only this:

We are a small project, as many of you already know, but we bring to the task hand a much larger perspective. We are—at least currently—a short-lived project, but we have —along with our funding organization, USAID—a longer-term approach and commitment. And finally, we are technicians—nothing more, really—whose happy mandate it is to assist some elements of

Jamaican civil society both to find, and to make more articulate, *their own voices* in the governance dialogue; and at the same time to “give voice” to so many of the broader concerns that need to be addressed by Jamaica’s democratic system.

With your help, of course, we will do our very best to discharge that weighty responsibility.