

Ms Katju Holkeri
Governance Forum Marrakesh

Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you warmly for this opportunity to attend the OECD-MENA Governance Forum and to visit the magnificent city of Marrakesh.

Based on today's panel and on the OECD work done in this area of citizen engagement I would like to in conclusion of the panel say a few words on the Why, How, Who, What, When and With Whom of Citizen participation.

On the WHY of citizen participation I think we all here agree on the value of it and we have heard many reasons why we should enhance engagement on our road towards the ideal of good governance – or like it was said here on our path towards good enough governance. But it is important to remember that there are both intrinsic and incremental values in enhancing open and inclusive policy-making. There is strengthening democracy, building trust in government, fighting corruption and on the other hand making better public services, ensuring better policy-making and better informed decision-making, adapting better to change, easier implementation, more innovative and more customer-oriented public service provision. All these are crucial to all our nations' success.

On the HOW of citizen engagement, when listening to today's panel and the different presentations, I would like to take up one principle. When OECD listed for the first time in the beginning of this century the principles to strengthen citizen-government connections, we listed the principles not in the order of importance - except for the first principle. All the countries involved in that work agreed that the most important principle of all, is that of commitment. The other principles will not come true if there is not commitment from the leaders - both political and civil servant leaders. But commitment means not just commitment by words, it means most of all commitment of getting these principles into practice, it means action, it means allocating resources, resources meaning money, human resources and time. We could hear from our speakers today that this has to be enforced by capacity building. Engaging citizens is not something civil servants can just jump into doing. You need to have knowledge of how to do it in the best possible way and you need expertise. In many cases civil servants also need training in order to be best able to use the new methods available, like e-tools. And it means - like Tiago Peixoto mentioned – also commitment in ensuring well-designed processes and commitment in working across levels of government.

On the WHO of strengthening open and inclusive policy-making, it is important to realise that even though we have joint principles there is no a one-size-fits-all solution to the different cases in different areas. We need to be context-specific, also thinking who, which groups, we especially need to engage in each specific case. Different groups need different approaches and it is our job to adjust our approaches accordingly. In the OECD work we defined two especially challenging groups. One group is the willing but unable, where the problem might for instance be socio-economic and where one possible solution in some cases might be for instance to give out multilingual information. The other challenging group is that of the unwilling but able, where the problem might be for instance lack of trust or lack of interest and where one solution might be to offer new kinds of tools for participation.

On the WHAT of citizen participation I would like to take up three things that we need to mainstream participation. We need visible best practices, we need evaluation and we need communication. We learned just about several best practices, like the Tunisian national consultations, the Moroccan region/state contract and the participatory budgeting in Brazil. These kinds of best practices are crucial in ensuring and encouraging civil servants to mainstream citizen engagement. We also need to know more about these best practices, what makes them a success, we also need to learn about failures and we need to learn about the costs and benefits and risks of participation. Therefore it is crucial that we pay attention to the evaluation of citizen participation. And we need communication about our projects in this area, about the best practices. We heard of the vital role the media plays and we need to keep in mind also that if the internal communication inside our public administrations is not working, then there is not so much ground for success in the external communication either. And to take up one principle from the OECD principles, it is crucial that we remember to be clear in our communication. The principle of clarity means that we are clear on what the possibilities of influencing the decision are, but also that the language that is used is clear.

WHEN of the citizen participation means that we need to engage the citizens as early in the process as possible, when there is still a real possibility to be engaged and not just in the end when often the only possibility is to just say yes or no.

And finally the WITH WHOM of citizen participation; His Excellency Minister Mohammed Abbou said this morning that he is deeply convinced on the value of joint work. I could not agree with him more and I feel that especially the area of citizen engagement is definitely an area of joint working and also very much for the OECD and MENA countries an area of joint thinking. But it is that also for the governments and civil society organisations together. A good basis for the future work and joint-thinking in this area is the OECD report recently published that I would like to market here “Focus on Citizens”. I like to market it also because it is also an example where civil society organisations have contributed to the work. The publication is based on 25 OECD member countries and 54 civil society organisations contributions, which makes it a very valuable example.

Thank you once more for the possibility of joining you here today.