

Ash Institute Director Gowher Rizvi's Global Forum Remarks

Decentralizing Governance: Emerging Concepts and Practices

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Innovations in Governance in the Twenty First Century Series

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President Cardoso and Friends:

It is truly a privilege to be here at the Seventh Global Forum for Reinventing Government in Vienna and to launch the publication of the first book in the new Ash Institute series: *Innovations in Governance in the Twenty First Century*. I am particularly grateful to President Cardoso for his insightful and erudite comments; and of course for his kind words on the book itself.

Before I get to the book itself, let me make a few more compelling remarks. First, we at the Ash Institute are especially grateful to the UNDESA and especially to our long time friends, Guido Bertucci, Shabbir Cheema and Adriana Alberti, for inviting the Ash Institute for the third time to partner in the Global Forum for Reinventing Government. We have worked together in Mexico (2003), in Seoul (2005) and now in Vienna (2007). We look forward to continuing our work in strengthening democracy around the world.

And if you will permit me, Mr. President, I would like to say a couple of words about the Ash Institute. The Institute was set up through the generosity of Lila and Roy Ash and the Ford Foundation to strengthen democratic governments, institutions and processes; and to make governments effective and innovative around the world. It is indeed a large mandate and some times it feels if we are trying to bite more than we can chew. But fortunately we have been able to forge partnerships with a number of institutions, both in the South and in the North, and together we have already accomplished much. I am also particularly delighted to see that the faculties and representatives from a number of our partner institutions are with us here at the Global Forum. I want to particularly recognize Jorrit de Jong (the Netherlands), Raaga Makharia (Egypt), Nabil al Yusef, Tarik Yousef and Yassar Jarar (UAE), Juan Carlos Murrilo Flores and Enrique Cabrera (Mexico), Georgia Kafantari (Greece) and Amy Capman (KSG). I also want to thank two members of the Ash Institute's International Advisory Committee, Professor Ledvina Carrinas (the Philippines) and Rehman Sobhan (Bangladesh), for being with us and for their contributions to the deliberations at the Forum.

The Innovations in American Government Program at the Ash Institute was set up in 1987 in response to widespread concerns about the dangers to democracy arising from citizen apathy and consequent loss of trust in the government. The Institute has sought to restore citizen confidence and trust in government through the Innovations in Government Awards program that recognizes, celebrates and replicates the best innovations in the government. Over the twenty years since the program was launched a large number of outstanding government innovations have been recognized and the

Institute has awarded in excess of twenty million dollars to disseminate and replicate these innovative ideas. The program has also been replicated in a large number of countries, including sister programs in Brazil, Chile, China, Kenya, Mexico, Peru, the Philippines and South Africa. The United Nations Public Service awards, that many of you witnessed yesterday, are a fine example of how international development agencies and governments are using awards programs to spur innovations in government.

Perhaps it will be a slight exaggeration to claim as yet that attempts to make governments effective through innovation is fast becoming a worldwide movement towards effective good governance. But, there is no denying of its transformative impact on the way in which the public purposes are realized and governance delivered. The Kennedy School of Government and the Ash Institute can modestly claim to be at the cutting edge of this effort.

Governance today is no longer what it used to be twenty years ago, although the public purpose of the government has remained the same. The combined resources and expertise of the government, civil society and market are harnessed in co-producing the governance of the society. Although it is perhaps commonplace, but it bears repeating, that cumulatively government innovations have helped to bring in a paradigm shift and fundamentally altered the way in which societal governance is delivered. The innovations have demonstrated that the governance of the society is no longer the sole prerogative of the government – the public purposes are today advanced through the combined effort of all the three sectors in society; the market principle of competition has been adopted and the governments are now outsourcing many of their tasks to avail the comparative advantages of the other providers; market incentives are being used to advance public policy instead of setting up bureaucratic agencies to change public habits; departments and agencies have cut across their bureaucratic jurisdictions in order to provide seamless service to the citizens; they have become flexible and cost effective by introducing cost budgeting and emphasizing outcomes and not merely outputs; they are delivering quality services through the introduction of the International Standards Organization (ISO) benchmarks and have unleashed a plethora of innovations like the citizens charter, public sector report cards and participatory budgeting. Governments are vigorously delegating, devolving, decentralizing and de-concentrating their power and their control of the purse in recognition of the principle that problems are best solved by those who deal with them; and through the extensive application of information technology not only the cost of transaction has been cut, but also government is being delivered at the door steps of the citizens.

Government Innovation has caught the imagination of government and citizens alike around the world. Unlike earlier attempts, such as the structural adjustment reforms (SAR) with their emphasis on managerial solutions which were viewed with suspicion and perceived as mechanisms to weaken the government and expand the power of the market, government innovations have several advantages. Innovations are not exported from ‘donor’ countries but rather ‘home grown’ in response to local problems; they are ideologically unencumbered and not necessarily tied to market-based solutions nor are they hostile to the market; and because innovations address real problems facing citizens,

their solution usually confers a perceptible and immediate relief to the citizens. It is not surprising that government innovations are fast becoming a global movement.

The Innovations in Government program has offered some important learning and insights for public policy. One of the most important lessons, as was pointed to earlier, is that those who are dealing with the problems are also usually best placed to provide the solution. One size does not fit all; and distant policy makers have neither the appreciation nor the knowledge of local complexities to attempt long distance problem solving. Shabbir Cheema, whose knowledge of decentralization is second to none has, in the midst of his responsibilities as an international public servant, combined with Dennis Rondinelli to bring together some of the best North-South scholars to take stock of the experience of governance decentralization. The result is a fascinating and scholarly book and a major contribution to our understanding of the subject. Both the scholarly and policy communities will be grateful to Shabbir and Dennis for their efforts.

The book being released by President Cardoso is the first in the new series being published by the Ash Institute in collaboration with the Brookings Institute. We are delighted and honored that President Cardoso has graciously released the book today. However, our happiness is sobered by the recent passing away of Dennis. Sadly, he did not live to see the product of his labor; and in his death the world has lost a dedicated scholar, and we at the Ash Institute, a kind and caring friend. We deeply mourn his loss and remember his wife and children in our thoughts and prayers today.

And finally, President Cardoso and friends, I am deeply beholden to you for being here with us to celebrate the launch of our new series.