

TRUST: THE BEDROCK PRINCIPLE OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

By: Dra. Eneida Torres de Durand

A scant four weeks to the general elections, the erosion of our citizens' confidence in their government has reached record heights. Credibility has wavered and given way to frustration and lack of confidence in political institutions and in public administration across the board. It is a dark cloud that looms over us and places at risk the country's potential for moving forward our competitiveness and quality of life and positioning our island as a successful player in the global economy. It is urgent to make a shift towards a new culture of good governance as the foundation for the Island's prosperity.

Good government is made possible only by the confidence of the citizenry. Citizens expect their public servants to look out for the common interest with a sense of Justice equality, and to conduct the daily management of their public resources in a satisfactory manner. Public services that exude quality, and are agile and reliable; and the credibility of public policies and political and government institutions, are meant to inspire confidence in the public and create a level and coherent field that will energize the function of private enterprise and not-for-profit organizations. Together they signal the way to efficient markets and economic development.

Trust is the code word for a fundamental consensus among members of a society as to their collective values, priorities and differences, and their implicit acceptance of the society of which they are a part. It also describes the set of expectations of the members of society as to the type of government they should have, the manner in which government should work and interact with other socio-economic institutions and the citizens, and the expected conduct of their public servants.

Puerto Rico as like many countries around the world is experiencing a persistent erosion of confidence among its citizens. This stems from weak socio-economic structures as well as inefficient institutions and faulty democratic

processes. A sample of these: lack of transparency, diminished accountability, centralization, and the roadblocks to participation for all sectors of society. To the contrary, the nurturing of confidence is the cornerstone for good government as the driver for prosperity.

Governance is the process of interaction between three main sectors – the state, the diverse sectors in society, and the private sector – in the formulation of political, executive, economic and social decisions that set the landscape of a nation's well-being.

The architecture and structure of good government are necessary, but never enough, to improve the quality of governance as a process. This process at its best should be defined by visionary leadership, participation, transparency, accountability, quality of results, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability, among other factors.

Good government worldwide is faced with the mounting hurdle of citizens who are losing their confidence in its ability to look out for their economic stability and to mediate their access to job opportunities and services. Confidence in government has fallen to record lows, public fury alternates with apathy and cynism. When public confidence in government is diminished, citizens become reluctant to participate in the processes of government. This leads to a weakening of societal cohesion and its capacity to effectively pursue common goals such as the all-important development. It follows that confidence is an essential requisite for strengthening the capacity to govern and develop alliances as the basis for social cooperation and the attainment of the common goals and aspirations of a nation.

Our vision for Puerto Rico requires that we move forward with our agenda for prosperity by working in collaborative and complementary ways toward



the collective priorities that we must clearly define. We cannot afford to cancel any of our efforts by competing for a shot at a protagonist role. Likewise, we must end the practice of destructive and superficial rivalry and substitute the present model of partisan political debate and reflection. This model is rife with conflict, dichotomies and polarization, and it must be exchanged for a discourse that embodies a genuine respect for ideas and a search for consensus leading to action and results. If we accept that trust is a basic tenet of good governance, then alliances and the capabilities to govern are key instruments for transforming trust into concrete results. The creation and preservation of fruitful and effective alliances among government, private sector and the diverse representatives of society depend on confidence, mutually accepted goals and a government framework that sets rules and guidelines for each sector.



Partnerships and alliances are the means to attain mutual objectives that transcend the capabilities or mandates of any of its members.

A successful alliance must bring to light and act upon the concerns of all its members, as well as protect the interests of third parties that may be impacted by these concerns. Similarly, in order for an alliance to be productive, it must take advantage of the strengths of each of its sectors, thus giving way to combined capacities that are able to build on the existing knowledge about the needs and priorities of the citizens, improve the quality and reach of services, and reduce its costs.

To nations and organizations around the world, the need to promote and strengthen the confidence of its citizens in government has become the great challenge of the 21st century. In the context of democratic government, decentralization and local

autonomy are crucial to encouraging a more participative governance. It enables citizens to make their demands known in more efficient ways and for them to become active partners in all stages of decision-making, implementation and assessment of policies. This in turn brings government closer to the people and breeds confidence among government, citizens, and the private sector. The figure below summarizes the pillars of good government.

THE PILLARS OF GOOD GOVERNMENT		
1. Trust	6. Visionary Leadership, Quality and Efficiency	9. Tri-sectorial alliances: (government, private sector, and society)
2. Ability to offer services	7. Disclosure	10. Outcomes (collective goals and aspirations)
3. Decentralization	8. Participation and Coherence	
4. Transparency		
5. Accountability		

At the crossroad of the century, Puerto Rico faces the inescapable imperative to reinvent itself in order to meet the challenge of improving its prosperity and raising our quality of life. These are times of profound changes... a time of new models... of new ways of thinking. Everyone is looking to leaders that are capable of thinking outside the box. Now it is nothing less than urgent for us to promote the creation of tri-sectorial alliances among government, the private sector and all other sectors of society. Only then can we begin to move in the direction of a better quality of government, and toward the necessary conditions for improving confidence, ability to govern and creation of alliances as the building blocks for good government. The challenge has been raised; success will come only to the extent that we prove ourselves skillful in combining the passion, determination and commitment of all the members of our society.

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