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Moderator: Caby Verzosa, the World Bank

Caby Verzosa: Why should managers of governance reform programs be concerned about political analysis?

J.P. Singh: Political analysis teaches them and sensitizes them to the heart of governance, which is deliberation. Deliberation is a far easier way of resolving problems than strategizing and persuasion, which are also good strategies to adopt in terms of governance and communication.

Caby: Tell us a little bit about deliberation.

J.P. Singh: Deliberation is about getting the right people well prepared to a table to problem-solve and to think of ways in which often times in the developing countries context weak resources can be put forward toward solutions that people would feel there is a buy-in for, as opposed to railing at authority and a government being stymied by demands or not feeling particularly responsive to those demands.

Caby: So it's different from one-way communication, it's really trying to get groups of people to have two-way communication.

J.P. Singh: Right, I would call one-way communication monologic communication. It has been around and I think it serves a purpose. I don't see dialogic communication as a huge departure from earlier forms of communication in that it is building on a trend, which is democracy. So if we build on that, then we have gone through processes where we needed transparency, we needed accountability, and I think in a way monologic communication, that of railing at authority, finding ways to instrumentally affect certain things within authority, did work. But now we're at a point where we are finding that, to the limited extent, some governments may want to be able to attend to demands, or to great extent in the few cases, may be able to attend to particular demands, how should we do it? We found that at an international level deliberation works because it allows for a buy-in, it allows for problem-solving, and for countries or stakeholders to perhaps learn change their interests.

Caby: How do you go about identifying the people who are going to be invited to the table to have these kinds of discussions?

J.P. Singh: You need rich contextual information and I think that's where the method comes in. It would need to vary, but rich contextual information can come from firsthand knowledge. I'm also a big advocate for finding rich contextual information from narratives that already exist. I think it's in the form of narratives that we really understand the contextuality and dynamism of people's lives. I have my graduate students read everything from novels from the developing world, to watch films from the developing world, to look at images from developing world, and to listen to music from the developing world.

Caby: So it's kind of an emersion in the culture and the context, that's what you mean by this kind of context, setting the arena for this deliberation.

J.P. Singh: Yes, and I think a lot of people who work for international organizations have the luxury that my students don't have to be able to travel there and spend some time there, and talk to people and be able to sit in the same tea shops or cafeterias, etc. where other people sit and see how people are talking. I do think on the other hand that one should not go there without some set of formal training. People should prepare themselves to know what is it to take ethnographic field notes, most of us don't know how to take ethnographic field notes.

Caby: Tell us a little bit about the method.

J.P. Singh: The method, I would start with ethnography in terms of listening to the voices. There are formal sets of techniques that anthropologists and others have prepared in terms of these ethnographies, what does it mean to sit somewhere, what does it mean to collect that information and then you can build from there, and you can take ethnographies and learn them to fairly quantitative analysis later on if you are able to encode for particular types of terms that people are using. You may want to know, do people have the capacity to aspire? Do they use words that sound fatalistic all the time versus sounding futuristic all the time? And you may be able to take these ethnographies around the world and be able to say here is an orientation among the people.