

938Live Radio Broadcast 11/05/07: Transparency Trends PKG

More countries may have recognized the benefits of greater transparency when it comes to decision-making.

But globalization experts at NUS' two-day conference on transparency and governance warn of another trend that may supersede this transparency revolution -

That is, the need to cut back on disclosure because of national security concerns.

Wu Shang Yuan finds out what this means for citizens waiting to speak up.

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Countries are rethinking what they would have previously considered as state secrets.

More are looking to their people for feedback on key decisions, says Director of the National University of Singapore's Centre on Asia and Globalization, Ann Florini.

And this move has worked wonders for countries like China, Pakistan and the Philippines.

The Chinese are experimenting with public budgeting, where they spread information about the budget to their population and get communities to participate in decision making. The Pakistanis are doing the same. So we start to learn that you get more satisfaction among the citizens because they can affect the outcomes and you make better decisions also, because you draw on local knowledge, information that central decision makers can't have.

A key question then, says Professor Florini, is how much to disclose.

She cited the US as an example.

The US and other governments have used the language of national security to cut back on disclosure and retrench on transparency. The US is still an open government but trends there point in a different direction from the rest of the world.

Professor Florini says it's uncertain which trend will win out in the end.

All government bureaucracies, she says, would have a tendency to withhold information because knowledge is power.

This is true whether or not national security concerns come into play.

As such, citizens who see the need for greater transparency should not be disheartened in the face of greater security threats like terrorism.

For those who believe in using transparency in governance matters, it's important for those people to be very active, in pushing for greater disclosure and demonstrate how useful it'll be for their societies and governments.

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