

Current UAE Government Accountability: A Business-Like Orientation

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Abstract

Decision-making in UAE government and their major relevant services are taken on the ground to maximize profit and generate money as possible from residents' pocket, where residents are the main sources of government budget. UAE government is not accountable to the whole population except for their citizens. Researching on current accountability expresses the need for a new model of government governance and therefore accountability; this result withdrawn from analyzing current situation using theoretical secondary data supported by many short case studies. The new model should take into consideration the interests - quality of lives of population and shift from private – business like to resident accountability orientation.

Keywords

Accountability, Government Organizations, UAE, Citizen and Residents

Received: May 5, 2017 / Accepted: May 12, 2017 / Published online: July 27, 2017

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1. Introduction

UAE has ranked 41 on human development index despite the fact of the weakness in many areas- democracy & participation, aspects of freedom and human rights [1]. Recent years, the UAE government has introduced new strategic plans with new goals and terms focusing on happiness; reflecting the desire to be one of the most happiest nations in the World [2], and promote the state caresses of its citizen and populations. Special happiness ministry has created to ensure the implementation over government and related organizations [3] Literature- media promotion, public relations campaign, training sessions and further material have developed to increase the attractiveness of UAE and seven emirates and increase the ranking of the country internationally in terms of social – economic -business-development measurements. Happiness can be criticized; seems as systemic attempts for more citizens' dependency on monarchy government and neglecting people participation in political and democratic process. In addition, readers can

argue that happiness plans do focus on citizens instead of residents (90% of population), which means that UAE national happiness are on the well of majority welfare.

Among this debate, there is a need to introduce and discuss the term accountability; who should be accountable to UAE residents, how UAE government can be accountable to their residents? Accountability is the term in which monarchy governments try to escape from or in better situation tailor-made the definition by shifting it from public policy to business- clients like relationship or narrowed.

Currently, UAE government does not provide free of profit public services to residents. In fact, UAE government has developed and modified hundred of laws and rules to generate revenues from residents [4]. In addition, NGOs or community organizations are prioritizing UAE citizens [5]. In the coming two years, UAE government plan to impose value add tax (V.A.T) on tens – several commodities. It seems that the only reason behind imposing tax is generating more money from population mainly residents [6]. Similarly, voices from UAE national representatives, members in the

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National Committee have suggested imposing taxes over residents' money transfer to their country of origin [7].

The study pays attention to government accountability towards population; with focus on current UAE government accountability and how it should be for all residents. To Draw the maps for this article, the coming sections determine the used methodology with emphasis on current political restriction and providing letriture review on accountability that helps determining the working definition and providing necessary background information on UAE government organizations. Next section presents findings and analyzing it by presenting several short studies, followed by discussion to illustrate current government accountability and shows it more of business-like. Last section suggests a new model and draws the conclusion with a call to adopt the new accountability model.

2. Methodology

This research adopts theoretical - qualitative approach to build case studies using secondary data and previous published articles enhanced by the researcher's analysis. This approach is suitable due to the current situations; political restriction does not encourage residents to participate in polling or survey and present their opinion freely.

3. Accountability & UAE Government Organizations

Public sector accountability usually is drawn from democracy and people participation in the process [8]. UN general assembly reflects understanding of accountability as obligation to public organizations and employees to achieve targets planned objective taking availability of resources into account [9]. Accountability has many definitions; it's an element of governance to provide answers about organizations performance and results. Also, "the process of holding actors responsible for actions." on three dimensions: upward- downward, internal-external, and functional-strategic [10].

In this article, the working definition for accountability is a process of ensuring that stakeholders mainly people are involved and participated in organizations policy process and decision-making, in a way without having negative consequences on the public presently and in future [11]. People do refer to all population including residents, and policy process refers to departments/ governments that provide services to populations. This does not mean in monarchy country voting and elections although it will be very progressed- advanced step.

Federal and local governments have introduced the concept of governance; enhanced institutionalization level and so accountability. However, accountability is understood a discipline, and following orders - top to down accountability [12]. This is an attempt to narrow accountability on administrative perspective; therefore organizations and staff are accountable to the head of state/ the ruler of emirate.

UAE is a Federal union state consists of seven emirates, two important emirates should represent in the union meetings, have kind of veto power over the union decisions; these are Abu Dhabi and Dubai [13]. The country managed by federal system & laws but in each emirate, the ruler who is a member on Superior Union Council enjoys freedom and autonomy at their Emirates in issuing rules -regulation, and organizing work [14].

Changing has been occurred on UAE and governments organizations attitudes towards serving population. This shifts from serving populations (UAE and residents) to only UAE citizens. Also, UAE passports have been withdrawn from part of residents' hands who should be into final stage in receiving citizenship. Withdrawal passports have caused people lost their jobs and lost any possibility to benefit from governmental services. In fact this action has taken to decrease social expenditure in government budget. Financial crises in 2007/8 and later had major impacts over government organizations where it lets rich oil emirate – Abu Dhabi to decrease its expenditure over population and push forward privatization. Dubai before Abu Dhabi as not enjoying oil revenue depends on fees in their budget. Fees that generated from populations and organizations are considered the main source of Dubai Government budget [15].

UAE governmental organizations can be classified into two sets:-

- a) Organizations generate money, these dealing mostly with residents & foreigners. Examples: RTA, Land Departments, Costumes Department, I.D Authority, General Authority for Residency and Forging Affairs, Courts ...etc.
- b) Organizations spending money, spending on UAE citizens. Examples: Ministry of Social Affairs, Community Development Authority, Youth Authority, Health Authority, Zayed Housing Program, Mohamad Bin Rashed Housing, Khalifa and Mohamad Bin Rashed SBE's ... etc.

Also, health authorities when dealing with residents, they are generating money from them; medical tests, useless health card¹. In fact the whole system has been sited to be money generator from residents. The coming years, UAE

¹ Residents must pay about one thousand dirham for issuing health card that does not benefit them, its not insurance and does not share in the cost, however, its compulsory by the law, without it residence visa will not be issued.

government will impose value add tax (V.A.T) on tens – several commodities, only one reason behind this is generating more money from population [16]. Top Financial Official & Parliament representative from Federal National Council are argue to impose more taxes on foreign transferring [17]. Same logic applies here which is generating revenue from residents.

4. Finding & Analysis

According to UAE Statistical Centre, the country total population is 9.3 million in 2016, about 10% only is UAE citizens [18]. The causes of demographic factors not only because of huge demands from foreigners or expats to come and work in UAE but also due to the government policy and practice in naturalization and giving citizenship to who was born and live in country for decades. Government legislative and policies were designed to have two kinds, one to citizens and another to residents; which causes legal and cultural/ educational discrimination.

Accountability is a problematic issue within government departments; official and top managements concerns are only on discipline; staff discipline. They forget that organizations are not directors and staff accountability should be first to main stakeholders mainly community/ residents/ clients.

Employees are accountable to their supervisors/ directors / individuals who take the decision and run the organizations/ country. *Wali El-Amer* is a concept means the responsible individuals who should lead and others should follow (like a parental/ guardian authority, maybe). Based on this, government staff and managers trying to satisfy their bosses and so on. Suggestions / proposals / proejcts based on this fact, interpretation of governments vision comes from this base – satisfying Bosses beliefs & Interests [19].

The habit of issuing and adjusting new rules/ laws/ and regulations and impose it over UAE population has crossed line and become over weighted. No real services associated with these imposed fees. Each household needs to attest their contract yearly and pay 1% from total rent in addition to few municipality fees linked to this paper contract and further unnamed fee to sewage company² [20].

There is a need to introduce a new model of governance and accountability; accountability should shift from citizens base to residents base. Monopoly for major services should be ended, same to services delivery and pricing. It's difficult to justify having three classifications in prices for the same services

The following cases illustrate how accountability appears

² Ajman Sewage is a private company owned by the Ruler of Ajman

when government deals with UAE residents.

5. Water & Electricity: Discrimination Based on Nationality

In UAE, three main sources of electricity & water for residential and commercial property; these are: (1) government providers (2) Generator for building or private using house/home/commercial, and (3) private companies whom selling electricity to some residential. Government Authorities are the main Water & Electricity providers across UAE; the Federal Electricity & Water Authority (FEWA) on northern emirates, Dubai Electricity & Water Authority, Sharjah Electricity & Water Authority, and Abu Dhabi Water & Electricity Authority [21].

FEWA is a government owned organization was established in 1999 under the Federal Law No. 31 of 1999 to carry out the duties assigned by Ministry of Electricity and Water in achieving several objectives. FEWA has set several values, some are linked to governance such as: transparency, responsibility, working professionally, customer focus, creativity and innovation. Also, the Authority strategic objectives focuses on serving people at distinct levels and managing their needs in electricity & water in a reasonable way & efficiently to ensure sustainable development. FEWA leadership vision is to improve standards of living and achieve sustainable growth by 2021 [22].

Three things attract our attention when dealing with FEWA;

- a) Electricity and water consumption prices are based on nationality (who owns & lives in the property)
- b) Priority is given to UAE nationals in connecting electricity and water for both residential & commercial proprieties
- c) The cost, fee amount for connecting electricity and water services

How come can justify having three pricing figures to water & electricity; citizen, residents live in citizen owned property, and residents live in residents owned property. The legal justification by the government for having three different sets of prices based on nationality or discrimination to whom will be served; UAE citizen or residents can't be accepted. For example, responding to a request to connect water and electricity takes place right away to citizens but it takes three years to their neighbors of noncitizen to connect. However, a positive point that FEWA does not hide this discrimination [23].

6. Municipality: UAE Welfare

The role of municipalities are to care for local communities'

needs- education, water & electricity, roads & streets, sewage, building, shops, cleanness, attractiveness of city, parking, green areas, various social- educational- cultural activities- creations ...etc. All these services exist under direct responsibility of municipalities or coordination with other local departments.

Municipalities care and prioritize their services to UAE national; new roads, paving & of maintenance of current roads, arranging parks for the benefits of UAE citizens. Main roads in Ajman for examples need paving since many years, complete neighborhoods are left without paved roads because there is no UAE citizen living at these areas. It's worth to say that neighborhoods paved streets do not come from Ajman Municipality Budget, rather from residents' personal money. Expats pay such amount as they own / live in these properties building [24].³

In addition, although 90% of population is residents paying different kind of fees - huge amount, not responsible fees, they receive no services in return. Government has issued several rules to force residents attesting their lease contract and documents to live and work. In the past government rules requested to present an electricity & water bills showing it along with rent contract to prove availability of accommodation or station of work [25]. Attesting lease contract for example requires paying one year sewage in advance and more addition fees. Recently, Electricity and Water Authorities demands attesting business and housing rent contract as a condition to provide household with services to show attested signed contract from municipalities, same to Residency - Foreign Affairs & Dept.

7. Transportation: Neglecting Residents

It's wide known that public transportation system is not effective in UAE; it ranges from nothing to weak on scale of nothing to excellent. How is this? In Dubai where buses are operating more within the city and across cities- i.e. intra-cities, transportations does not cover all areas and time consuming when using it. The substitute is taxis that are too expensive relatively to lower level income and people who do not have cars. In other emirates, there is limited and or no public transposition, with one bus line or nothing at all with no buses or shared mini-buses and shared cars, only private taxi.

UAE citizens have cars, in one home, it possible to find one car or more for each family member, so from the government

³ UAE nationals are living in houses- known as villas (private houses with huge lands) in separate areas, so building & towers are left to expats to live in, this allow municipality & other government department to focus on UAE areas and provide them with needed services

perspective UAE citizens does not need public transports. For residents, the government deals with it from profit making perspective, and willing to launch public transposition in one case, covering business expenditure and generating profit [26].

All Transportation Authorities generate income and support local budgets unlike what is going in the World, where transportation budget comes from different sources – federal and local public sector funds.

8. Profitability – Business Like Accountability

The current accountability of UAE government organizations towards residents is strange; it's a tailor made accountability, not public accountability neither business accountability. It's more business - like with clear discrimination towards residents. It's the first time in the world, service prices are determined based on people nationality i.e. electricity and water, they have three prices. To make it clear, it's not government social services or subsidiary to UAE citizens; it's three prices, the lowest one if for UAE nationals.

In addition, residents pay fees more than paying taxes in their original countries; its compulsory fees toward papers and stamps imposed by the government and have- add no value over their quality of life. UAE government called it fees to escape from returning such revenue to residents on form of services, meaning escaping and ignoring about 90% from 9.3 million populations [27].

In the world, major services such as: water, electricity, oil, and services managed by local government and municipalities are provided to all residents in same prices with no discrimination based on nationality. Only higher education services are dealing with it differently; according to citizenship/ resident / member in a regional unions such as the USA and European Union (EU) [28].

9. The New Model

The article shows that UAE government organizations are accountable to UAE nationals /citizens but does not care much for the mass population. It's not only because of the monarchy system in which one person / few people take decision or blood-family related system but also due to current strategic thinking and beliefs that's the 90% of population – residents should maximize the welfare of 10%-citizens.

The New model is a call to shift accountability from citizenship to residency bases; this means changing the perspective of population - from temporary workers to residents. Its

unbelievable people who have born here, spend 50 years of their life in UAE and they still considered temporary workers- expats. This perspective will eliminate many from of discrimination in the law, policies, and in practice, adjust relationship between public organizations including services providers organizations towards populations.

UAE residents do not demand much; they need to enjoy their fees (which is more than taxes) payment. They pay huge amount of fees and expect these money coming back to their neighborhoods - streets, health, parks and other forms of services. In addition, they want to stop the discrimination in services such as water & electricity, stop exhausting their pockets – asking for different type of fees – stamps and forms of papers that are with no value added to their life.

10. Conclusion / Recommendations

Government organization; accountability should shift from citizens base to residents base. Monopoly for major services should be stopped including discrimination in offering and delivering services based on nationality. How come a company can justify having three prices for the same services. Federal and local government organizations do not show flexibility when it comes to fees. In fact, there is extreme *exaggeration* in fees and enforced fines. While the attitude toward UAE citizens is giving and offering them every thing, includes paying their debts to businesses and banks (news in local newspapers). Accountability for majority of UAE population does not exist, government organizations deal with residents as a source of income to satisfy and make UAE national happiness. The only way that government organizations think of residents is indirectly when they threat UAE citizens' existence and their lives such as providing vaccine for illness to the whole populations. In short, government sector related organizations are accountable to their leaders and leaving 90% of population finding their destiny. Further practical studies are needed and approaching stakeholders to identify the elements of this model flowed by consultancy project to set a new model for accountability that satisfies stakeholders and enables achieving their happiness in a modern global context. This is a call for concerned research centers and government organizations to provide fund for the forward work to produce a new model of accountability and governance.

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