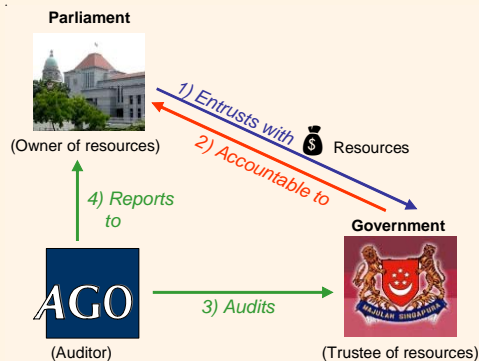


Public Accountability - The Principle -

"The Cabinet is accountable to Parliament, it is accountable to all Singaporeans."

Prime Minister, Mr Lee Hsien Loong
Parliament debate on Civil Service salary revisions, 11 Apr 2007

When a person is entrusted to hold, use or dispose off resources not belonging to him, he must be held fully answerable to the owner of the resources for what he does with them. This is the principle of accountability. To help in the accountability process, the owner of the resources will often appoint auditors to check and report on how the resources are accounted for and used. In line with this principle, the Government is accountable for the billions of dollars of public funds it has been entrusted with by Parliament which represents the people of Singapore.



The Government, as trustee, has to show the people that it has accounted for the funds and resources properly, and has used them in accordance with the wishes of Parliament and without excess, extravagance or wastage. The Auditor-General in Singapore audits the Government ministries and statutory boards, and reports to Parliament through the President.

Public Accountability - The Key Institutions -

PARLIAMENT

Parliament which is elected by the people plays the key role in getting the Government to account.

Parliament ensures this accountability through laws which require the Government to seek Parliament's approval for taxes and expenditures (i.e. Budget). During Parliamentary sittings, especially during budget debates, Members of Parliament may call the Government to account by raising issues and questions relating to public policies, programmes and financial management.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

At the end of the financial year, the scrutiny of the audited Government Financial Statements (GFS) is delegated by Parliament to a Parliamentary Committee called the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). Its duties are to:

- examine the GFS and financial statements of other public bodies laid before Parliament;
- review the annual Report of the Auditor-General;
- conduct inquiries into selected issues; and
- report to Parliament its findings, conclusions and recommendations.

"The PAC stands ever prepared to question and probe Ministries and Statutory Boards on internal controls, processes and outcomes because of our firm conviction that the government, as steward, owes a responsibility to ensure that public funds are put to good use at all times."

PAC Chairman, Mr Cedric Foo, 11th Parliament



To help Parliament call the Government to account, the Auditor-General's Office (AGO) audits ministries and statutory boards to provide assurance that there is proper accounting and use of public funds and resources, and relevant laws are complied with.

At the end of the audits, AGO will report audit observations to the management of the organisations audited. Selected observations are published in the annual Report of the Auditor-General which is submitted to Parliament through the President. The Report is deliberated on by the PAC and made available to the public.

To ensure that the AG can carry out his audits without fear or favour, there are provisions in the Constitution which protect his independence. His duties and responsibilities (including the scope and coverage of his audits) are also spelt out in the Constitution and the Audit Act.

"I am very happy to see that the AGO scrutinises MINDEF and all the other Ministries so carefully because it shows that the checks and balances that we have in our Government system are fully in place."

Defence Minister, Mr Teo Chee Hean,
Committee of Supply Debate on Defence Budget, 5 Mar 2007

Public Accountability - The Full Cycle -

The Government is called to account to Parliament before, during and after each financial year.

Before the Financial Year

- The Government presents its proposed budget to Parliament for approval. Parliament uses these Budget sessions to question the Government on its proposals and get it to account for its work.



During the Financial Year

- Parliament uses Parliamentary sittings during the year to call the Government to account when it seeks parliamentary approval to increase the Budget.
- AGO audits the accounts of the Government.



After the Financial Year

- AGO completes its audits and submits its audit opinion to Parliament through the President.
- The Government presents to Parliament through the President its audited financial statements covering the preceding financial year.
- AGO submits its annual Report of the Auditor-General (containing selected audit observations) to Parliament through the President.
- Parliament refers the documents to the PAC for closer examination.
- The PAC submits its report to Parliament on its deliberations and recommendations.

"I believe that all successful political systems share at least four broad attributes. First, there must be accountability and transparency ..."

Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong
Speech on "Governance and Growth in Emerging Asia" on 11 Nov 2008



Public Accountability



Auditor-General's Office
Singapore

Auditing for the Nation