A gateway for capacity development

Capacity.ORG

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Accountability

FEATURE

Using accountability relationships to support capacity

Thomas Theisohn makes the case that effective accountability mechanisms induce public sector organisations to remain responsive to the people's needs.

INTERVIEW

Promoting mutual accountability

Heinz Greijn interviews H.E. Chhieng Yanara on Cambodia's Aid Effectiveness Report and the government's aid coordination activities

POLICY

Can civil society have an impact?

Paolo de Renzio and Warren Krafchik review the work of civil society organisations to monitor and influence government budget policies and expenditures

TOOLS & METHODS

Citizen report cards score in India

Samuel Paul and Gopakumar Thampi describe how civil society monitoring in Bangalore has improved the quality and cost-effectiveness of public services

PRACTICE

Supporting communities to speak out

Emmanuel Kallonga, Philip Connelly and Kees de Graaf examine Tanzania's experiment in tracking public expenditures to increase public service accountability

ORGANISATIONS, NETWORKS AND INITIATIVES

This section offers a selection of organisations, networks and initiatives concerned with capacity development. A more extensive list can be found at www.capacity.org.

CIVICUS World Assembly

The theme of this year's meeting which took place on 23-27 May 2007 in Glasgow, Scotland, was Accountability: Delivering Results. Issues addressed included: approaches for donors working with civil society on strengthening governance and accountability; the experiences of CSOs in using tools that aim to promote accountable government; enhancing the voice of the poor for better public policy and practice for poverty eradication.
www.civicusassembly.org

Global Transparency Initiative (GTI)

The GTI is a network of civil society organisations promoting openness of international financial institutions (IFIs), such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Investment Bank and regional development banks. They support civil society's right to information and to participate in the development policies and projects that affect their lives.
www.ifitransparency.org

Open Budget Initiative

On 18 October 2006, civil society organisations from 59 countries unveiled the Open Budget Index. This is the first index to rate countries on how open their budgets are to their citizens. The index provides civil society organisations with the comprehensive and practical information they need to gauge a government's commitment to budget transparency and accountability.
www.openbudgetindex.org

International Budget Project (IBP)

The IBP works with organisations that focus on the impact of government budgets on poor and low-income people in developing countries or new democracies. They aim to make public budget policies and processes more transparent and accountable to the public.
www.internationalbudget.org

Idasa Africa Budget Project (ABP)

The ABP is working to build the capacity of civil society and legislatures to participate effectively in budget processes in African countries. Over the past four years, the ABP has introduced more than 220 organisations across Africa to budget advocacy work.
www.idasa.org.za

HAP 2007: Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management

Working with its partners, disaster survivors and others, Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) International has now completed the HAP 2007 Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management as part of its project to prepare a 'Manual of Humanitarian Accountability'. The certification scheme aims to provide assurance that certified agencies are managing the quality of their humanitarian actions in accordance with the HAP standard.
www.hapinternational.org

Fundar

This Mexican applied research institution is working to strengthen democracy through efforts to increase government accountability and transparency. The initial steps in this field were started within the Civic Alliance – a broad coalition of Mexican NGOs – and the Mexican Academy for Human Rights.
www.fundar.org.mx

Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS)

Established in 1990, MKSS is a grassroots organisation working in rural Rajasthan. It uses modes of struggle and constructive action to change the lives of the rural poor. For instance, it has taken up issues of land ownership records, land distribution and minimum wages. Read more about MKSS in an article by Soumya Kidambi:
www.samarmagazine.org

Citizen Report Cards Learning Toolkit

This kit is a self-learning course on how to use the citizen report card (CRC). The toolkit, produced in partnership with the Public Affairs Centre (PAC), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI), can be accessed at:
www.citizenreportcard.com

Help us identify topics for *Capacity.org*

There is so much yet to be explored in capacity development. The editorial board of *Capacity.org* brainstormed about topics for future issues. Plenty of ideas popped up. The problem: We do not know what to choose. Who is in a better position to help than our readers? Please look at the topics below and let us know:

- which topics would you be most interested to read about?
- which topics could you contribute to?
- any other topics related to capacity development that you think we should address.

Brain drain, brain gain and incentives
Building human resource capacity can be daunting, especially if the trained workforce leaves the country for more lucrative job offers abroad. 'Brain gain' efforts to counter this are about keeping educated people in the country and persuading the ones abroad to return. The key is to find affordable and attractive incentives. One issue of *Capacity.org* could be dedicated to innovative ideas on brain gain and incentive systems.

Envisioning results and setting targets in capacity development
The challenge of envisioning results and setting targets is often underestimated. This is strange considering the vast attention given to monitoring and evaluation, exercises that often only make sense if one is clear about the intended results of capacity development efforts. Target setting needs to take into account ownership, accountability, the ability to learn and efficiency. There is also a tension between setting targets and allowing flexibility and room for incremental learning as part of the capacity development process.

The Paris Declaration and capacity development
For too long development cooperation was characterised by fragmentation; donors each had their own priorities, focused on their own projects, competed for scarce human resources and imposed their own administrative systems. These practices have exhausted and undermined capacities rather than building them. The Paris Declaration is meant to change all this.

Developing the capacity of producer organisations
Against the backdrop of fair trade and eco-labelling there is renewed interest in producer organisations. While in the past efforts to build the capacity of producer organisations focused primarily on building their visibility within markets and supporting their organisational development, current approaches recognise the importance of analysing market chains.

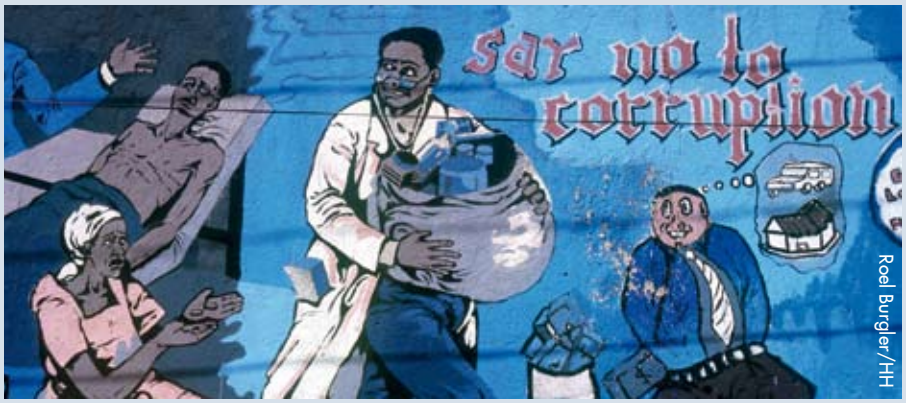
Other topics that could be explored include:

- human resources development
- the Millennium Development Goals and capacity development
- change management and process facilitation
- youth
- implementation capacity
- costing and financing capacity
- advocacy/lobbying
- corruption
- capacity and aid mechanisms (SWAps/PBAs/budget support)
- information/ICT capacity
- policy analysis/debate
- procurement
- private sector experiences of capacity development

We look forward to hearing from you.

Heinz Greijn,
Editor in Chief

Accountability relationships for development success



Roel Burgler/HH

Welcome to issue 31 of *Capacity.org* on accountability. In this issue we focus on the question: what initiatives citizens can take to hold decision makers, service providers and development practitioners accountable to their commitment to reduce poverty? The articles in this issue deal primarily with two specific relationships: that between governments and their citizens; and that between national governments and the international donor community.

Our feature article reviews the definitions and elements of accountability in order to ensure that we all have the same understanding of the term. The author, Thomas Theisohn, policy advisor for the UNDP and co-author of *Ownership, Leadership and Transformation: Can we do better for capacity development?,* introduces the idea which this entire issue will support: that promoting accountability provides a fundamental contribution to capacity development (page 4).

Civil society advocacy

Holding those in power accountable is quite a challenge especially in societies characterised by authoritarian styles of governance. Many civil society organisations around the world have started monitoring and trying to influence government budget policies in order to ensure public spending accountability. Paolo de Renzio and Warren Krafchik (page 7) review case studies in six countries. The study was undertaken by the International Budget Project, a US-based organisation which has expanded its independent budget advocacy work to developing countries around the world.

A specific example of a civil society organisation's success in ensuring government accountability is described by Samuel Paul and Gopakumar Thampi (page 10). In 1994, the Public Affairs Centre, an NGO in Bangalore, southern India, started generating information about the quality of the city's public services through citizen report cards. These reports are similar to the customer feedback reports that are common in the private sector. Confronted with very low ratings, service providers improved their performance. The Bangalore scorecard has become a model for many other users around the world.

Other initiatives, such as the Institute of Public Finance (IPF) in Croatia, focus on budget tracking in order to advocate for government financial accountability (page 12). In some countries, governments support budget advocacy organisations; they recognise the potential of such advocacy work in changing the way public institutions are run. In Tanzania, for example, the central government has endorsed an NGO's initiative to build capacity in public expenditure tracking and in monitoring government service delivery (page 13).

Finally, Craig A. Schwabe describes how the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in Africa is seeking to pool knowledge and experiences in order to boost the effectiveness of civil society advocacy projects across the continent (page 14).

Mutual accountability

The other focus of this issue of *Capacity.org* is the concept of mutual accountability between countries receiving aid and the international donor community. For a specific example of how this mutual accountability can work, we talked to His Excellency Chhieng Yanara, Secretary General of the Cambodian Rehabilitation and Development Board (CRDB) to find out how the Cambodian government has tackled the process of promoting mutual accountability.

Guest columnist Alnoor Ebrahim highlights the fact that capacity training in developing countries cannot be successful if donors do not accept the fact that they are also accountable to the recipients of aid.

The authors of all these articles share the view that accountability is necessary for capacity development, and that effective rights and responsibility structures are what strengthen societies from within.

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CONTENTS

Help us identify topics for *Capacity.org* 2

EDITORIAL 3
Accountable relationships for development success
Heinz Greijn

FEATURE 4
Using accountability relationships to support capacity
Thomas Theisohn

POLICY 7
Can civil society have an impact?
Paolo de Renzio and Warren Krafchik

INTERVIEW 8
Promoting mutual accountability
Heinz Greijn interviews His Excellency Chhieng Yanara

TOOLS & METHODS 10
Citizen report cards score in India
Samuel Paul and Gopakumar Thampi

PRACTICE 12
Enhancing public control of national finances
Katarina Ott

PRACTICE 13
Supporting communities to speak out
Emmanuel Kallonga, Philip Connelly and Kees de Graaf

PRACTICE 14
The strength of partnerships
Craig A. Schwabe

RESOURCES 15

GUEST COLUMN 16
Rethinking capacity building
Alnoor Ebrahim

Future issues

The next issue of *Capacity.org* will focus on capacity development in extremely difficult environments, including conflict and post-conflict situations and areas struck by natural disasters.

Cover photo

Hollandse Hoogte/Magnum Photos

Strategies for strengthening societies

Using accountability relationships to support capacity

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This article argues that improving accountability relationships is an effective strategy for developing capacity. Effective accountability mechanisms induce public sector organisations to remain relevant and responsive to the needs and demands of the groups they serve.

Why is accountability critical for capacity development?

When people think about capacity development, they usually have in mind training or some kind of activity aimed at organisational strengthening. The assumption is that better trained personnel and more technologically advanced operating systems will automatically result in better service delivery. Experience suggests otherwise.

While investments in staff, procedures and systems in the public sector (the 'supply side') are important, organisations tend to perform better when they are held to account by their owners, shareholders or clients (the 'demand side'). It is the pressure exerted by these groups that creates the incentive to perform. This is most obvious in the private sector where companies have to be responsive to the needs of their customers in order to survive. Conversely, in the absence of competition, the quality of public service delivery often remains well below expectations despite heavy investments in staff development and equipment provision.

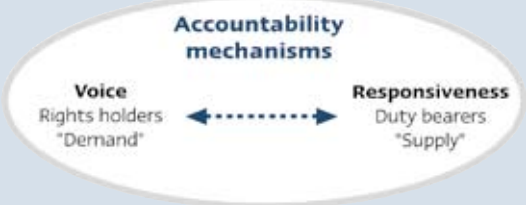
The notion of 'rights holders' and 'duty bearers' can be useful in illustrating the relationship between, for instance, service providers (supply) and users of services (demand), and the importance of accountability mechanisms in linking the two together. **Duty bearers**, such as government departments, provide public services. **Rights holders** are the legitimate beneficiaries of the actions of the duty bearers. As such, citizens are rights holders with regard to the public services provided by their government. **Accountability mechanisms** bind both sides with defined rules, rights and responsibilities. They help rights holders to **voice** their needs and demands and establish a responsibility of duty bearers to be responsive. **Responsiveness** refers to the way in which duty bearers perceive the needs of, and respond to the demands of particular groups such as the poor sectors of society or the recipients of a particular service. The diagram below depicts this basic relationship. Further working definitions of accountability are provided in the box on page 5.

Accountability mechanisms help to monitor, steer, and adjust behaviour in all kinds of social systems: families, groups of people, organisations, and societies at large. In democratic societies governments are held to account at the very minimum because they have been elected and can be replaced through the ballot box. As this simply is not enough, a host of mechanisms are deployed to keep a check on public administration from local to national levels. In the private sector, chief executives are accountable to the company shareholders. International organisations are held accountable through their governing boards. Local associations and NGOs have their boards or general assemblies to ensure that they serve the objectives they are mandated for.

Focusing on accountability can therefore be a strategic entry point or driver for promoting capacity development and performance. There are at least five reasons why such a focus should be part and parcel of any capacity development strategy:

- **Incentives** - Accountability mechanisms allow demand side pressures to be exercised on those in power, and can have a bearing on the motivation of people and organisations to learn, to perform and to make use of their existing capacities.
- **Legitimacy** - Accountability builds legitimacy in decision making, implementation and monitoring processes, and can thus boost the ability of individuals and groups to act on behalf of the groups they serve.
- **Empowerment** - Accountability mechanisms can be used to empower people to claim their rights from the 'bottom-up', to forge a stronger democratic culture of participation and engagement, and to serve as the ultimate safeguard against the abuse of power.
- **Politics** –Accountability loops provide checks and balances in a society's decision-making processes which increase transparency and limit the influence of vested interests on public policy.
- **Concrete action** - Accountability mechanisms can be defined, communicated, implemented and measured in tangible ways.

It can be seen from the above that having effective mechanisms of accountability is an important part of any well-functioning system. Akin to living organisms and eco-systems that function with feedback loops, social systems also have their regulatory functions. Accountability mechanisms are part of these and enable social systems to learn, self-regulate, remain relevant to their constituencies, and to achieve their respective purposes. The ability of a country to manage its own affairs then depends not only on 'duty bearers' that in principle could deliver relevant services. It also depends on the mechanisms in place that enable 'rights holders' to make sure services remain relevant to their needs and are actually delivered.



Cartographics, Heemskerk

Accountability entry points as a capacity development strategy

The following discussion considers eight practical ways of using accountability entry points as a capacity development strategy.

Necessarily the discussion will touch on ways to strengthen accountability and voice. But the primary focus of this discussion is not on providing capacity development to strengthen accountability. The focus is on using specific accountability approaches to induce dynamics that are conducive to the development of a system's capacity.

In the following, much reference will be made to public service accountability. The article however tries to encourage the reader to think creatively and to consider opportunities in any context: national, sub-national, local, public sector, private sector, NGO, and others.

1. Reliable and legitimate 'ground rules'

Accountability in its most basic form is exercised when people agree to engage with one another with a certain binding moral force. Such agreement can either be made on the basis of informal rules or through a formal contract. If rules are not explicit enough there can be misunderstandings about respective roles and responsibilities that weaken the collective effort. Most have seen caricatures of people in one boat rowing in opposite directions and giving competing orders. Making the ground rules explicit can clarify the common purpose, focus energies, attribute authority and legitimise questioning if things are not going according to the rules. Such ground rules may take the form of editorial statutes for a journal, regulations for team work, a business plan, a national constitution or a negotiated agreement such as the Paris Declaration.

2. Transparency, access to information and awareness

Transparency is a pillar of trust and legitimacy in social systems. People (rights holders) are only able to claim their rights if they are aware these rights exist, if processes are sufficiently transparent to understand them, and if they have access to salient information. Access to information moreover holds the key to increasing people's participation in democratic and policy making processes. A law on access to information may be critical in the enabling environment and lead, for instance, to public disclosure of state budgetary allocations to local schools allowing parents to question where the money actually goes.

3. Facts, broadened evidence and increased objectivity

Even where there are no agreed rules, initiatives to establish evidence are potentially powerful means to focus attention and energies. Performance assessments, functional reviews, public expenditure reviews, gender budget analyses, programme evaluations and peer reviews are all means for establishing a degree of certainty around information that is of public interest. The degree of independence of the reviewing authority, as well as the degree to which the perceptions of client groups are reflected, will increase the legitimacy of any assessment or evaluation. National reports on progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as

Kumi Naidoo of Civicus is a leader who promotes accountability for development.

Some working notions of accountability

Accountability (narrow sense) A widely used definition of accountability is 'the means by which individuals and organisations report to a recognised authority (or authorities) and are held responsible for their actions' (Edwards and Hulme 1996, quoted from Mulgan 2000). This definition includes several underpinning notions:

- it is external: 'account to some external authority';
- it involves social interaction and exchange: 'being answerable to someone and accepting of sanctions'; and
- it implies rights of authority: 'to call someone to account, demand answers and impose sanctions'.

Accountability (widely used) denotes a relationship between a rights holder or a legitimate claim (for instance a public good) and the agents or agencies responsible for fulfilling or respecting that right by taking specific action, or desisting from particular actions (duty bearers). In rights-based language, accountability relates to the responsiveness of the 'duty bearers' and the voice of 'rights holders' to articulate their needs and claim their rights.

Voice refers to the strength of the impetus decision makers or duty bearers receive from rights holders.

Responsiveness refers to the way in which a development agent – public or private – perceives the needs and responds to the demands of particular groups, such as the poor.

Vertical accountability denotes the direct relationship between citizens and their representatives holding public office primarily through the electoral process but also through more direct forms of participation and civic engagement.

Horizontal accountability refers to mechanisms through which different state institutions hold each other to account on behalf of the people. Horizontal accountability primarily implies the executive being answerable to the legislature, the courts, and special agencies of restraint, e.g. human rights commissions; ombudsmen/public protectors; auditors-general; independent electoral commissions; independent central banks; independent revenue authorities; and anti-corruption agencies.

Upward accountability is the answerability of lower ranks to a higher-level authority, for instance a local administration which is accountable to a line ministry.

Downward accountability is the answerability of higher ranks to a lower-level authority, for instance a line ministry which is accountable for support to extension services.

Social accountability denotes the answerability of organisations to the people. It pertains primarily to public administration but can equally mean the accountability of development partners to ultimate beneficiaries in developing countries.

Mutual accountability denotes a reciprocal accountability relationship based on the notion of a contract. It has become an important concept in particular in the aid relationship. The Paris Declaration stipulates that 'Donors and partners are accountable for development results: A major priority for partner countries and donors is to enhance mutual accountability and transparency in the use of development resources. This also helps strengthen public support for national policies and development assistance'.

Outward accountability describes the accountability of domestic development agents to external donors and development partners, sometimes in tension with, or at the expense of, their domestic accountabilities.

Domestic accountability denotes the range of domestic accountability relationships (see vertical, horizontal, downward, upward and social).

well as local Human Development Reports, for instance, can be a way of democratising information on actions and progress in critical social areas.

4. Regular monitoring and control

In modern democracies, a host of mechanisms institutionalise monitoring and control. For example, certain entities, such as the Auditor General or an independent electoral commission are entrusted with a constitutional mandate to hold other state agencies to account – thus indirectly acting on behalf of the people. Such mechanisms and entities can monitor accountability relations over time. In similar ways individual organisations evaluate their operations, and projects are usually monitored at regular intervals to make adjustments and improve on weaknesses.

5. Improved access to recourse and arbitration

Access to justice, in particular for poor people, is not a given in many societies. Even where these rights exist and where institutions are in place, they may be biased toward the interests of elite groups. NGOs have successfully used court action to assert their rights, and of courts consciously promoting the interests of the weakest and most vulnerable. The institution of the Ombudsman has been established in many countries as a more or less independent body that investigates grievances of citizens and seeks to broker solutions or an equitable settlement. A range of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms that provide arbitration outside the formal courts of justice are other examples.

6. Accountability loops closer to the people

When users of services have a real opportunity to influence public policy and services, they are more likely to articulate their demands. Decentralisation does not necessarily ensure that the services provided by local authorities are effective, appropriate and accountable. However, strengthening the lines of communication between citizens and local government structures is often effective in improving direct accountability and the performance of local service providers.

7. Opening channels and arenas for participation

This approach focuses on the institutional channels and arenas through which citizens can shape decision-making processes. Participatory mechanisms take various forms, including public consultation mechanisms and public hearings, village assemblies, consultations on project options, or internet forums. Participatory planning, budgeting and evaluations are mechanisms that have been successfully used to increase the 'voice' of citizens. Social audits are also being increasingly used to ensure accountability. However, consultation fatigue has become a common phenomenon and care needs to be taken to ensure that those consulted perceive their invitation to participate as being of real benefit to them.

8. Voice and the ability to articulate

The approaches listed so far emphasise structural changes and the opening of opportunities by changing elements in the accountability relationship. This eighth approach directly aims at strengthening the ability of rights holders, and in particular poor people and their advocates, to speak out, to organise, to know their rights and to claim them. Civil society organisations tend to work closely with local stakeholders and are more intimately aware of the constraints people face in voicing their needs and in participating in policy processes. Access to quality education, campaigns to raise awareness, support for local leadership development or other approaches to strengthen self-esteem and confidence can be part of strengthening the articulation of demand.

Thinking out of the box

The above has been an attempt to show different entry points to strengthening the capacity of a social system to function effectively by bolstering its accountability structures. An investment in accountability can maintain the 'health' of a system, reinforce ownership and legitimacy, and is a seed for the development of sustainable capacities at all levels of society. The following questions summarise dimensions that practitioners may want to consider as options in the context of the specific challenges they face:

1. Which ground rules of engagement are conducive to capacity development and are possible at a given point in time?
2. Which measures can increase transparency and access to information?
3. How can one establish facts and broaden evidence as an impartial basis for collective action?
4. Should regular monitoring and accountability mechanisms be institutionalised?
5. How can formal and informal access to recourse and arbitration be improved?
6. Which accountability loops could be moved closer to local people?
7. What communication/participation channels could be opened?
8. How can one support the capacity of people and community-based organisations to articulate their needs and claim their rights?

Accountability relationships and capacity development are about roles and responsibilities and most of the above approaches are bound to question power and vested interests. Resistance must therefore be anticipated. On the other hand, accountability, evidence, transparency and voice belong to the instruments of good governance and the argument for promoting them is in principle compelling and difficult to refute. It may take creativity to move towards concrete measures. Yet, applying accountability as a capacity development strategy can change dynamics and lead to profound changes in rules, attitudes, behaviour and a society's ability to manage its own affairs. <

Further reading

- This article is based on a paper prepared for the UNDP conference *Capacity Development Strategies: Let the evidence speak,* 30 November–1 December 2006, Madrid, Spain. www.capacity.undp.org
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Public spending: holding governments accountable

Can civil society have an impact?

Ten years ago a small number of civil society organisations began experimenting with methods to monitor and influence government budget policies and expenditures. Have these initiatives had an impact?

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In a number of developing countries civil society groups have initiated advocacy activities aimed at analysing and influencing public revenues and spending. Such groups include development NGOs, social movements and research organisations. Their activities range from training, technical analysis of budget documents and expenditure and revenue tracking, to building advocacy networks and organising campaigns.

The International Budget Project is an initiative of the Centre on Budget and Policy Priorities, an independent research and advocacy organisation based in the United States. The IBP, together with the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Sussex, recently undertook a study of organisations in Brazil, Croatia, India, Mexico, South Africa and Uganda that have been engaged in such budget advocacy work for at least five years. These case studies provide examples which show that civil society organisations can have a significant impact on *budget accountability*, for instance increasing budget transparency, public awareness of budget issues and public engagement with budget processes. This advocacy work can also affect budget policies through improvements in budget decision-making processes and shifts in budget allocations.

Examples of impact

Several civil society groups found inventive ways to access budget information, such as through opposition parliamentarians (in India) or by using freedom of information laws (in Mexico). They produced citizens' budget guides and analytical reports which were widely disseminated. Their documentation was enthusiastically received by other organisations, legislatures and the media, who then joined the lobby process for budget policy change. Groups in South Africa and Brazil used training modules and online distance education courses to increase awareness of government accountability issues.

In some cases, budget advocacy work had a direct impact on improving pro-poor budget allocations. In South Africa, budget lobby groups managed to push for substantial changes in government policies on child benefits. In Uganda, the groups sought to tackle corruption and inefficiencies in public spending by training community-based monitors to check the quality of local service delivery.

Establishing relationships

There are a number of constraints which limit the impact that civil society groups can have on government budget processes. The openness of the political environment, the nature of the budget process, the stability of national legal and institutional frameworks, and the level of literacy of the population will affect the potential influence of budget analysis groups. Other factors are internal to the civil society organisation itself. For example, the organisation's structure, and the strength of its leadership, communication strategies and technical capacity influence the organisation's effectiveness.

A key indicator of success is the ability of advocacy groups to establish relationships with others from civil society and the media to the executive and legislative arms of government as well as donors. It is through these relationships that coalitions are built, information is passed, influence is exercised, and ultimately impact is achieved.

Lessons

The variety of experiences brought together in the comparative study shows that budget lobby work can be used successfully by a variety of organisations, from policy think tanks to social movements and community-based networks. There are some inherent limitations to successful advocacy work that are linked to the nature of the budgetary process itself and to the level of national budget-related literacy. The greatest internal challenges faced by budget groups are their ability to build and retain trained staff, and to ensure effective leadership.

In terms of impact, the organisations in the case studies were most often successful in increasing transparency and civil society engagement in government budget processes. In some cases, structural changes in budget decision-making procedures and policies were also achieved through a longer-term strategy and commitment. The basis of effective budget work is analysis which is accurate (to ensure credibility), accessible (to guarantee a wide audience), and timely (taking into account the budget cycle).

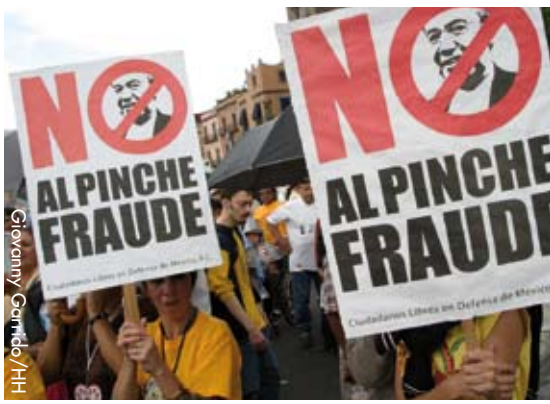
Today, the staff at the International Budget Project is aware that organisations in over 60 countries have initiated projects that aim to ensure that public resources are used effectively for the public good. A continued review of civil society's engagement with budget advocacy will provide an essential contribution to global learning in this new field. <

Links

- Overseas Development Institute, governance and corruption: www.odi.org.uk
- International Budget Project (IBP): www.internationalbudget.org

Further reading

- P. de Renzio and W. Krafchik (2007) *Lessons from the Field: The Impact of Civil Society Budget Analysis and Advocacy in Six Countries,* International Budget Project: www.internationalbudget.org
- P. de Renzio and W. Krafchik (2007) *Budget monitoring and policy influence,* ODI Briefing Paper 16: www.odi.org.uk
- M. Robinson (2006) *Budget Analysis and Policy Advocacy: T he Role of Non-Governmental Public Action,* IDS Working Paper 279: www.ntd.co.uk



Aid coordination in Cambodia

Promoting mutual accountability

His Excellency Chhieng Yanara has been Secretary-General of the Cambodian Rehabilitation and Development Board (CRDB), which manages the public investment affairs of the Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC), since its inception in 1994.
Prior to joining CRDB, H.E. Yanara was Director-General at the Ministry of Planning, where he was responsible for formulating and monitoring the annual and five-year development plans.

H.E. Yanara was awarded a PhD in economic planning from the University of Economics in Hanoi. He is a member of the government's Supreme National Economic Council (SNEC) and serves on the boards of directors of several public bodies.

Over the last five years, the government of Cambodia has strengthened its national aid coordination process. We interviewed H.E. Chhieng Yanara on the first Aid Effectiveness Report which reviewed the process to date.

In the Paris Declaration of 2005, a large number of countries and multilateral development organisations committed themselves to improving aid effectiveness. One of the key principles in this process is the idea of 'mutual accountability' which emphasises the shared responsibilities for national development goals. In this sense, donors are accountable to developing nations, just as these countries are accountable to the donors.

The Cambodian Rehabilitation and Development Board (CRDB) serves as the government's aid coordination focal point. It manages relations between government and its development partners as well as taking responsibility for leading national efforts to implement the Paris Declaration. His Excellency Chhieng Yanara is the Secretary-General of the Board. He led the process of preparing the Aid Effectiveness Report which was presented to the first meeting of the Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum (CDCF) in June 2007. The Aid Effectiveness Report is the first study to make substantial use of empirical evidence and data to improve aid effectiveness using a mutual accountability approach.

Your Excellency Yanara, what are the current challenges to achieving more effective aid coordination in Cambodia?
The Aid Effectiveness Report shows that Cambodia has a highly fragmented aid environment; most of the more than 30 development partners provide roughly equal contributions to our aid budget. In such an environment, many development partners are inclined to participate closely in the decision-making process and to join the policy dialogue. This results in complex decision-making processes and raises the costs of coordination.

A related problem is that many of our development partners disburse their support across a wide range of sectors and projects. In some sectors, including education, health, rural development, water and sanitation, and agriculture the number of partners causes a formidable coordination challenge.

A particularly adverse effect of this fragmentation is the stripping of local capacity. Each development partner seeks to establish its own expertise in each sector in which it has a presence, resulting in 'donor competition' for national resources. For example, government employees focus on the donor's project rather than on the overall national programme, or they leave their jobs for more attractive contracts with donors.

What new structures did the government of Cambodia implement to improve aid coordination as a result of the Paris Declaration of 2005?
We set up the Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum (CDCF) which is managed and chaired solely by the government. It replaces the Consultative Group structure, which was co-chaired by the World Bank. These changes put the Cambodian government in a stronger position to exert ownership and leadership. The CDCF has made it easier to focus on how aid could be made more effective in support of the National Strategic Development Plan. For instance, the Aid Effectiveness Report highlights the sectors in which the burden of managing development assistance may be most likely to distract attentions from achieving the strategic objectives set by the Cambodian government.

Under the umbrella of the CDCF, we have cooperation mechanisms at two levels:
- The technical working groups (TWGs) facilitate dialogue on sector and thematic issues, chiefly on a technical level and with a focus on resource allocation, implementation and monitoring. Each TWG is chaired by a senior government official and is co-facilitated by a development partner representative. For example, the TWG on health is chaired by the Secretary of State of the Ministry of Health, and is co-facilitated by World Health Organization. The Cambodian Ministry of Economy and Finance is involved at the TWG level for budgeting purposes.
- The Government-Development Partner Coordination Committee (GDCC) meets three times a year. It is chaired by the Minister of Economy and Finance and First Vice Chairman of the Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC). The committee addresses higher-level issues often related to cross-sector reforms and governance.

How has this structure enabled your government to address the issue of mutual accountability between the donor community and the Cambodian public sector?
The concept of mutual accountability included in the Paris Declaration is restricted to transparency in resource use and the articulation of the roles and responsibilities of development partners, partner countries and their parliaments. There is, however, a far greater potential for mutual accountability that extends beyond information sharing and assessing progress. Mutual accountability provides an objective basis for more open dialogue, increased

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, endorsed on 2 March 2005, is an international agreement signed by over one hundred ministers, heads of agencies and other senior officials. they committed their countries and organisations to increase efforts to harmonise, align and manage aid and to monitor the results using transparent indicators.

transparency and an enhanced understanding of the interests of both donors and partner countries. This can make a strong contribution to a more authentic ownership that is underpinned by strong leadership and management capacity that pays more than lip service to idea of government control.

Increased mutual accountability is therefore a key component of the challenge to provide 'better' aid, in particular where it can create the conditions that are necessary for more effective capacity development. We believe that, in the absence of an effective mutual accountability mechanism, the prospect of meaningful capacity development is severely diminished.

What measures need to be taken to improve aid effectiveness in Cambodia?

The Aid Effectiveness Report succinctly highlights the nature and scope of the coordination challenge in Cambodia. The report shows that not only is the challenge formidable but that rising to it will be essential if the National Strategic Development Plan outcomes are to be realised. The report also attempts to derive some practical policy-relevant lessons and demonstrates that, by making better use of data and empirical experience, we can provide policy makers with the evidence that is needed to ensure that development assistance provides effective support to our national goals.

First, the report makes clear that development partners should reduce fragmentation in aid delivery: each development partner should concentrate aid on fewer sectors. Second, the Strategic Framework for Development Cooperation Management should be put into practice. This framework, which was approved in early 2006, provides an institutional framework for external resource mobilisation and aid coordination functions and outlines objectives and principles that guide the management of development cooperation.

Third, development partners should be encouraged to strengthen and use the internal systems of government as much as possible. In line with the Paris Declaration, they should refrain from creating dedicated structures for the day-to-day management of aid-financed projects and programmes. Development partners should also engage more in programme-based approaches that are in line with the national development strategy and led by the Cambodian government. On the Cambodian side we need to enhance leadership and management. We need to learn how to say 'no' to development partner approaches that do not follow the priorities of the Cambodian government.

What lessons did you learn from the process of researching the Aid Effectiveness Report?

One important element in our new coordination structure is the fact that we now review the effectiveness of development partners using quantitative analysis. For instance, the Aid Effectiveness Report shows that while development partners commit funds in accordance with our National Strategic Development Plan, actual aggregate disbursements of funds are less aligned to national priorities. Transportation, for example, receives significantly less funding than is indicated in the public investment programme, while both health and governance receive significantly more than indicated. This may lead to absorption constraints and other pressures on government systems.

In terms of data collection for this process we found three major issues. First, very few development partners appear to have information systems in place that permit ready access to information on the projects that they finance. To promote more effective aid management in the context of the National Strategic Development Plan, it would be useful to work in partnership to identify the requirements of such a system to ensure the cooperation of donor capitals or regional offices, whose support is often required in reporting on routine project activities.

A second conclusion is that much more work on awareness-raising and changing mindsets needs to be done by both government and development partners if the Paris Declaration and the whole aid effectiveness agenda are to be applied. A lack of awareness in many development partner offices goes some way to explaining a paradox: many development partners are vocally committed to the aid coordination process at a senior level, but the reality of the practices employed in their programmes and projects is perhaps somewhat different.

The final conclusion relates to the management of data and information systems across government. In the context of ongoing reforms and associated sector/thematic work, it will be important to simplify and harmonise the collection and sharing of data. Multiple data collection exercises are not only inefficient but they can also lead to conflicting sets of data being used for programming or reporting purposes.

How do you plan to monitor the process?

Cambodia's aid partners will soon be able to access updated information with indicators of aid effectiveness on the website of the Cambodian Rehabilitation and Development Board. The website will contain sector profiles consisting of key data on external support to give insight into the nature of the aid coordination challenge within each sector. Each profile shows:

- The Paris Declaration indicators for projects in that sector. For instance, the indicators show that while the infrastructure sector has made significant progress in coordinating technical cooperation, only a small share of total resources pass through government systems.
- The ten biggest projects per sector which account for a significant share of total aid disbursed to that sector (75% in the infrastructure and education sectors and 60% in agriculture). This suggests that if these projects become the initial focus for aid coordination efforts, possibly in the context of a programme-based approach, then efficiency gains may be quickly translated into increased impact and effectiveness; and
- The total number of projects in sectors and sub-sectors. The results suggest that at sub-sector level, the transaction cost of managing aid is not sustainable, and that the efforts to coordinate donor assistance crowd out core government activities, including policy formulation, programme implementation and monitoring. In the health sector, for example, 17 projects were delivering USD1.97 million in assistance to the policy and planning function.

Are you confident that donors will follow up on the recommendations in the report?

At our June 2007 CDCF meeting, development partners welcomed what they described as a 'high-quality report' that provides analysis and conclusions indicating 'a number of directions for us all to focus on now'. It was agreed that implementation of existing policy frameworks is perhaps our key challenge, and the joint statement delivered to the CDCF by development partners gives cause for optimism. We therefore look forward to working closely with them to implement the report's recommendations. <

Interview by Heinz Greijn

Links

Cambodian Rehabilitation and Development Board: http://cdc.khmer.biz and www.cdc-crdb.gov.kh

Further reading

- *The Cambodia Aid Effectiveness Report 2007,* Cambodian Rehabilitation and Development Board, Council for the Development of Cambodia. www.cdc-crdb.gov.kh
- H.E. Chhieng Yanara and P. Courtnadge (2006) *Mutual Accountability: An Imperative for Capacity Development?* Paper presented to the UNDP/government of Spain meeting on 'Capacity Development: Let the evidence speak', Madrid, November 2006.
- Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness

Monitoring public service delivery

Citizen report cards score in India

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After more than a decade of monitoring by civil society organisations, the city of Bangalore in Southern India has achieved real progress in improving the quality and cost-effectiveness of its public services.

User feedback is a cost-effective way for a government to find out whether its services are reaching the people, especially the poor. Users of a public service can tell the government a lot about the quality and value of a service. Strangely enough, this is not a method that is known to, or used by, most developing country governments. The continuing neglect of the quality of services is in part a consequence of this fact.

In sharp contrast, there is an active practice of seeking customer feedback in the business world, or at least among those who produce and sell goods in the competitive market place. The 'take it or leave it' attitude one comes across—especially at the lower levels of the public service delivery bureaucracy—is no doubt due to the fact that government is the sole supplier of most essential services. But the disinterest among the higher levels of political and bureaucratic leadership in seeking public feedback on the quality and responsiveness of service providers reinforces this tendency.

What is a citizen report card?

When a government is indifferent, the initiative for change must come from civil society. Citizens who elect and pay for governments cannot and should not remain quiet when essential services are in disarray and public accountability is lacking. It was against this background that the citizen report card (CRC) on public services in Bangalore, Southern India, was launched in 1994. The CRC represents an assessment of the city's public services from the perspective of its citizens. The latter are the users of these services and can provide useful feedback on the quality, efficiency, and adequacy of the services and the problems they face in their interactions with service providers. When there are different service providers, it is possible to compare their ratings across services. The resultant pattern of ratings (based on user satisfaction) is then converted into a 'report card' on the city's services.

A citizen report card on public services is not just one more opinion poll. Report cards reflect the actual experiences of people with a wide range of public services. The survey on which a report card is based covers only those individuals who have had experiences in the use of specific services, and interactions with the relevant public agencies. Users possess fairly accurate information, for example, on whether a public agency actually solved their problems or whether they had to pay bribes to officials. Of course, errors of recall cannot be ruled out, but the large numbers of responses that sample surveys generate lend credibility to the findings.

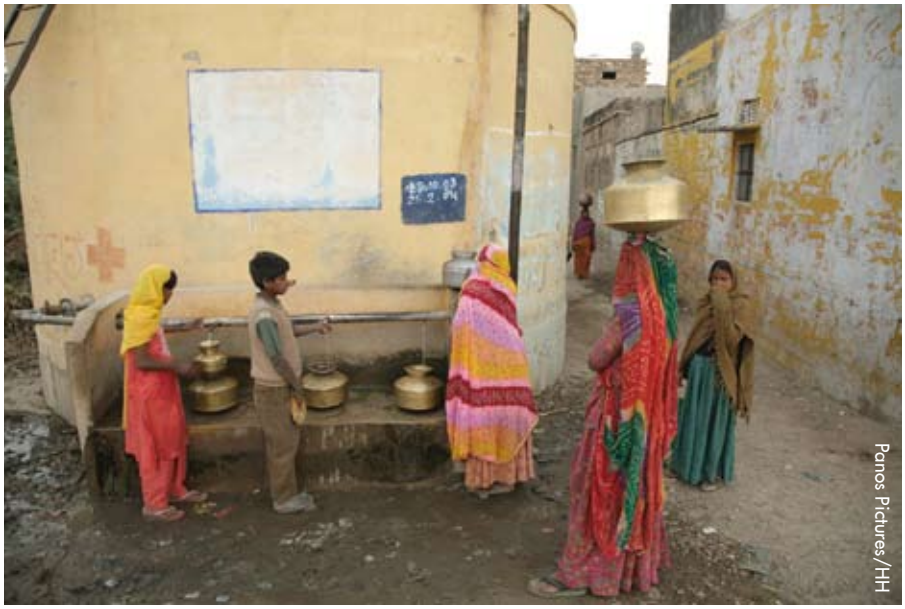
Stratified random sample surveys using well-structured questionnaires are the basis on which report cards are prepared. It is generally assumed that people from similar backgrounds in terms of education, culture, and so forth, are likely to use comparable standards in their assessments. But these standards may be higher for higher income groups than for the poor whose expectations of public services tend to be much lower. Dividing households into relatively homogeneous categories is one way to minimise the biases that differing standards can cause.

The Bangalore experiment

The Public Affairs Centre (PAC) in Bangalore has done pioneering work on CRCs over the past decade. The first report card on public agencies in 1994 covered municipal services, water supply, electricity, telecommunications and transport. Since then, PAC has brought out report cards on several other cities and rural areas, and also on social services such as health care. But since it has tracked services for a longer period in Bangalore, we shall refer only to this experiment.

The findings of this first CRC on Bangalore were most striking. Almost all the public service providers received low ratings from the people. Agencies were rated and compared in terms of public satisfaction, corruption and responsiveness. The media publicity that these findings received, and the public discussions that followed, brought the issue of public services out in the open. Civil society groups began to organise themselves to voice their demands for better performance. Some of the public agencies responded to these demands and took steps to improve their services. The

Villagers can now provide feedback on the quality of public services.



inter-agency comparisons and the associated public glare seem to have contributed to this outcome. When the second report card on Bangalore came out in 1999, these improvements were reflected in the somewhat better ratings that the agencies received. Still, several agencies remained indifferent and corruption levels continued to be high.

The third CRC on Bangalore, in 2003, showed a surprising turnaround in the city's services. It noted a remarkable rise in the citizen ratings of almost all the agencies. Not only did public satisfaction improve across the board, but the incidence of problems and corruption seem to have declined perceptibly in the routine transactions between the public and the agencies. It is clear that more decisive steps had been taken by the agencies to improve services between 1999 and 2003.

Lessons

What accounts for this distinct turnaround in Bangalore's public services? And what lessons can we learn from this experiment? Needless to say, without deliberate interventions by the government and the service providers, no improvement would have taken place in the services. But the key question is what made them act? A whole complex of factors seems to have been at work. The new Chief Minister who took over in 1999 was very concerned about the public dissatisfaction with the city's services. He set in motion new mechanisms such as the Bangalore Agenda Task Force, a forum for public-private partnerships that helped energise the agencies and assist in the upgrading of the services. The civil society groups and the media supported and monitored these efforts. It is significant that the initial trigger for these actions came largely from the civil society citizen report cards initiative.

What are the preconditions for such civil society initiatives to work? It is obvious that these initiatives are more likely to succeed in a democratic and open society. Without adequate space for participation, CRCs are unlikely to make an impact. A tradition of civil society activism would also help. People should be willing to organise themselves to engage in advocacy and seek reforms supported by credible information. Political and bureaucratic leaders must have the will and resources to respond to such information and the call for improved governance by the people.

The credibility of those who craft CRCs is equally important. The initiators of the exercise should be seen as non-partisan and independent. They need to maintain high professional standards. The conduct of the survey and the interpretation of the findings should be done with utmost professional integrity. A report card does not end with the survey and its publication. Much of the advocacy work that follows will draw upon the report card findings. The CRC thus is a starting point, to be followed by further action through organised advocacy efforts, including civic engagements and dialogues with the relevant public agencies.

Conclusion

When a government on its own improves its services and accountability, initiatives such as CRCs may not be necessary. But even under these ideal conditions, a report card can be an effective means for civil society groups to monitor the performance of government and its service providers. Public agencies can, on their own, initiate report cards on their performance as indeed some in Bangalore have done. However, when a government is indifferent to these concerns, the report card approach can be an aid to civil society groups that wish to induce the government to perform better. <

Links

- The text of this article is based on the version published in the March 2004 issue of *Development Outreach*. http://www1.worldbank.org
- The boxed text is based on the article by G.K. Thampi (2004) *Citizen Report Cards: A Brief Introduction.* http://paf.mahiti.info/pdfs

Further reading

- G.K. Thampi (2005) *Can Public Feedback Enhance Public Accountability? Experiences with Citizen Report Cards,* Paper presented at the First International Forum on Citizen-Driven Evaluation of Public Services, Beijing.

The key stages of a citizen report card study

1. Assess the applicability of citizen report cards. Conditions which affect the outcomes of CRCs include the receptiveness of the political context, the extent of decentralisation, the extent to which citizens can voice opinions freely, local competency to carry out surveys and advocacy. Public Affairs Foundation (PAF), a sister concern of PAC, provides advisory services to various clients. It has developed a structured assessment exercise to explore the applicability of the tool to the local context.

2. Determine the scope and plan the procedures. The next step is to identify key sectors/services to be included in the survey, map service provision structures and identify local partners who will participate in the survey.

3. Design the questionnaire. Focus group discussions involving both service providers and users are necessary to provide input for the design of the questionnaire. Providers of services may indicate not only what they have been mandated to provide, but also areas where feedback from clients can improve their services. Users may give their initial impressions of the service, so that areas that need attention can be determined.

4. Sampling. To collect feedback from the entire population would require too much time and resources. Sampling, when carried out accurately, gathers feedback from a sample group that is representative of the larger population. The appropriate type of sampling design must be determined. A knowledge of statistics and prior experience in developing a sampling plan is necessary, although it may also be useful to consult an expert on sampling techniques if the population in question is complex.

5. Execute the survey. First, select and train a cadre of survey personnel. Second, after a certain proportion of interviews are complete, perform random spot monitoring of question sessions to ensure that the recording of household information is accurate. Third, upon completion of each interview, go over the information collected to identify any inconsistencies.

6. Analyse the data. Typically, respondents give information on aspects of government services on a numeric scale (e.g. –5 to +5 or 1 to 7). These ratings are then aggregated and averaged, and percentage measures are produced. A typical finding may look like this: Boys tend to drop out of school more than girls. Of those children who drop out of elementary school, 60% do so in grades 4 and 5.

7. Disseminate the results. There are three important points to consider with regard to the dissemination of CRC findings:

- The findings should be constructively critical and should not aim to embarrass or laud a service provider's performance.
- The media is the biggest ally for dissemination. Prepare press kits with small printable stories, media-friendly press releases, and translations of the main report into local languages.
- Following the publication of the CRC survey findings, service providers and users should meet in a town-hall type setting. This not only allows for a constructive dialogue, but also puts pressure on service providers to improve their performance for the next round. If more than one agency is being evaluated, these settings can foster a sense of healthy competition among them.

8. Advocacy and service improvements. The findings of the pilot citizen report card survey can then be used in an advocacy programme which seeks to increase public pressure, build coalitions and partnerships and influence key players.

Budget watching in Croatia

Enhancing public control of national finances

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The Institute of Public Finance believes that budgets are too important to be left to elected representatives. As taxpayers, citizens should also have a say in the distribution and management of public funds.

The Institute of Public Finance (IPF), an academic institution based in Zagreb, publishes regular newsletters which it distributes free of charge to members of parliament (MPs), parliamentary committees, ministries, agencies, media and NGOs. The newsletters are published to coincide with the passing or revision of budgets, or at key moments like the introduction of new tax rates, or in the lead up to elections or a change in government. The primary objective is to provide a professional and independent analysis of budget issues in order to facilitate informed discussions.

Attracting attention

The first newsletter (January 1999) explained why budget debates are so important and outlined the kinds of questions that MPs and members of the public should ask. It analysed in detail government revenue and expenditures, highlighting the fact that public spending was continually on the rise and that the tax burden was borne by the general public (consumption taxes accounted for over 70% of total income). IPF called on the government to provide clear information about the size and state of the economy and precise statistics about the external and internal debt, among many other pressing issues.

Right from the outset the newsletters were received enthusiastically by the public. Media coverage of the first newsletter was unprecedented. In the period 1999–2007, the Institute published 27 newsletters, and there was a widespread expectation that IPF would provide a response to emerging financial issues even when the organisation was not able to do so.

Success

IPF has established itself as a non-partisan and trustworthy stakeholder, and an important player in national economic debates. As a domestic source of independent comments and recommendations, IPF is convinced that it has contributed to changes in the Croatian budget process. Gross domestic product estimates have become more relevant and internationally recognised, classifications and consolidations of the budget have improved, as have data on the public debt and on government spending.

Nevertheless, a budget watcher's life is not easy. Thanks to the legacy of non-democratic regimes, and paternalistic and highly centralised states in the region, most citizens are not fully aware of their rights, opportunities and obligations. Moreover, it is often difficult to gain access to financial data and budget watchers sometimes face open hostility.

Steps and Methodologies

In conclusion, the IPF has drawn up a number of useful tips for practitioners who want to engage in budget watching:

- Insist on clear provisions in relevant laws that guarantee permanent access by citizens to financial information as well as on the obligations of local governments to: (i) disseminate budget information; (ii) organise regular open sessions and special public hearings before adopting key decisions; (iii) publish income and expense statements and balance sheets; (iv) have a proactive approach to transparency, with information being made available in reports and on websites; (v) allocate sufficient human resources to processing information requests; and (vi) deal courteously with the public.
- Be engaged in all stages of the budget process. Communicate, ask questions, and give concrete suggestions to local governments, and expand your working knowledge and ability to understand and compare local budgets.
- At the budget preparation stage, learn how (local) governments work and local services are provided. During the budget execution stage, monitor implementation and ask about results. At the financial reporting stage, make comments, insist on clarity, and compare the results with other local units so as to better understand the situation in your community as well as the country as a whole.
- Propose the establishment of a monitoring committee with representatives of relevant ministries, budget users, and citizens (NGOs, local government associations, the media, etc.) and define a working plan.
- Try to produce a reader-friendly citizens' budget guide to enable ordinary people, politicians and the media to have a better grasp of the basics of the budget and the budget process.
- Finally, to make public finances in your community more public, join the worldwide community of budget watchers who are working together with the International Budget Project, which could enable you to share your experiences and learn from others. <

Croatian MPs – a target group for the IPF newsletter.

Links

- Institute of Public Finance newsletters: www.ijf.hr/eng
- An example of a citizens' budget guide: www.ijf.hr/eng
- International Budget project: www.internationalbudget.org

Further reading

- K. Ott (ed.) (2006) *Making Public Finance Public: Sub-national Budget Watch in Croatia, Macedonia, and Ukraine*, Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Open Society Institute, Budapest: http://lgi.osi.hu/publications.php

Public expenditure tracking in Tanzania

Supporting communities to speak out

How does a population renowned for its tolerance and acceptance of authority learn to demand accountability from its leaders? Can autocratic leaders redefine themselves as public servants? An interesting social experiment is underway in Tanzania.

The efficient delivery of public services is an important factor in poverty reduction. However, in Tanzania, a history of economic centralisation and a concentration of political power in the hands of a one-party government have helped to entrench a culture of acceptance and powerlessness at the local level.

A public expenditure tracking initiative known as *Fuatilia Pesa* ('Follow the money') provides a practical mechanism to help reverse this situation. The programme aims to support the implementation of the ongoing Local Government Reform Programme, which oversees the devolution of decision-making to regional and district levels.

The *Fuatilia Pesa* programme is developing the capacity of Tanzanian civil society organisations (CSOs) that empower communities to enforce their right to information and to use it to demand greater accountability. Three national organisations are involved in implementing the programme: Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA), Hakikazi Catalyst, and the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP). The programme is coordinated by the Policy Forum, a coalition of CSOs that is working to strengthen NGO involvement in policy processes, including local governance. The programme has developed a training manual on approaches to accessing information, monitoring local government budgets and tracking public expenditures.

In 2006, more than 700 representatives of civil society organisations, district officials, elected councillors and journalists completed the action-oriented training courses organised under the auspices of the *Fuatilia Pesa* programme.

Feedback on exactly how many civil society organisations are using the training they acquired to stimulate communities to track public expenditures and lobby for government accountability at the district level is so far mostly anecdotal. It is estimated that 25–30 leading NGOs are currently implementing the tracking model in approximately 40 districts. The Policy Forum will undertake an evaluation of the first phase before the end of 2007.

Achieving broader change

The *Fuatilia Pesa* programme aims to hold public officials accountable through a collaborative rather than confrontational approach. By engaging all levels of the local government hierarchy in a constructive dialogue, the programme hopes to bring about a gradual change in the prevailing norms on public accountability.

However, the reluctance of local governments to provide access to information remains a key hindrance. As the initiator of the Local Government Reform Programme, the central government has endorsed the role of the *Fuatilia Pesa* initiative in contributing to improved governance. Nevertheless, a lot still needs to be done to demonstrate the positive results that can be achieved locally, and the resulting benefits for everyone involved.

The training workshops for district officials and NGOs stress the importance of accessible, transparent and timely information. In the initial stages this information is likely to remain available in nationally aggregated forms, which reduces its usefulness at the community level. Ultimately, the newly introduced local government information systems will provide detailed district budgets for, and disbursements to, individual communities and development activities.

The next stage of the *Fuatilia Pesa* programme has already begun. It entails the development of a national network to share experiences and information in the area of public expenditure tracking and monitoring of service delivery. The network will soon be coordinated by the Policy Forum. It is still early days, but the first steps have been taken towards the creation of a more open society in which citizens realise that 'Yes, we can ask questions'. <

Links

- Hakikazi Catalyst, Tanzania: www.hakikazi.org
- Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA): www.repoa.or.tz
- Policy Forum: www.policyforum.or.tz
- Trocaire: http://trocaire.org
- Oxfam Ireland: www.oxfamireland.org

Further reading

- K. de Graaf (2005) *Public Expenditure Tracking at District level in Tanzania.* SNV Tanzania. www.snvworld.org

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Empowering the weakest

Mkonoo village, near Arusha, is participating in the 'Poverty Monitoring: Action for Accountability' project implemented by Hakikazi Catalyst, and funded by Trocaire and Oxfam Ireland.

The village assembly decided to monitor the use of funds allocated for primary education. The community selected a monitoring committee, and the members were trained in the use of modified score cards to verify that the funds had been spent efficiently. They found that out of Tsh.9.3 million (€5300) allocated for the construction of three classrooms, Tsh.1.1 million had been misused, and that more than Tsh.1 million out of Tsh.4.7 million (€2683) earmarked for a new teacher's house had been misappropriated. The committee reported these findings to the village assembly, and the ward and council level administrations. After a local investigation, the case was forwarded to the government's anti-corruption bureau, which is now investigating the matter.

African institutions for public accountability

The strength of partnerships

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Africans are not recognised for the work they do to promote social accountability in their countries. A new pan-African platform allows them to share their experiences, learn new techniques and disseminate information, and encourages new initiatives.

Weak democratic processes in many African countries have contributed to low public expectations and a culture of impunity. Civil society has started to hold governments accountable for failing to deliver even the most basic services.

The World Bank and the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) of South Africa wanted to build on existing initiatives, accelerate their growth and encourage new developments in social accountability. To this end, they launched the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in Africa (ANSA-Africa) in August 2006. ANSA–Africa has begun networking with concerned partners across Africa to develop a wide-ranging programme that involves community-based organisations, NGOs, advocacy groups and individuals. The primary medium for sharing relevant information is the web portal ansa-africa.net, which links civil society and community groups across the continent to support and encourage new initiatives.

The methodology

The programme includes capacity building courses, seminars, workshops and discussion groups, as well as advocacy campaigns to inform Africans of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Through its network, ANSA-Africa works in three main ways.

- Providing technical and leveraged financial assistance for the design, implementation and evaluation of quality social accountability initiatives. Through collaboration, the network transmits effective tools and incubates innovative new approaches.
- Promoting capacity development through training programmes to encourage the use and adaptation of techniques for citizens to demand accountable governance. These programmes are delivered regionally to generate the greatest impact. ANSA, through its partners, designs and delivers training programmes across Africa.
- Undertaking research and disseminating the findings. The goal is to apply creativity and rigor to assessing, refining and developing social accountability tools and to use electronic media in innovative ways in order to promote wide access to knowledge.

The primary target audience is the civil society groups that are active with policy monitoring processes. However, ANSA-Africa hopes that eventually the business community, NGOs, ratepayers' associations and other concerned individuals will also be influenced by the network's activities. Examples of recent initiatives include:

- The Municipal Development Partnership for Eastern and Southern Africa (MDP-ESA) has developed a web-based course and a training companion in participatory budgeting Africa with the support of the World Bank and UN Habitat, respectively. The course describes the process necessary for effective monitoring and community advocacy work.
- The City of Johannesburg has incorporated participatory budgeting processes in its legal framework for several years now. A typical campaign takes three months and includes an extensive publicity campaign, needs assessment, and analysis of various project proposals, including their priority within the community and cost. The participatory budgeting process has resulted, for instance, in the provision of free water and electricity for low-income earners. It has also increased public support for paying tariffs, reduced vandalism of council property, and enhanced revenue generation and collection.

Future plans

The documentation of these and many other case studies is a key feature of the ANSA-Africa web portal. The intention is to 'pull' information from as many sources as possible and disseminate it to ANSA partners, government officials, politicians and stakeholder organisations. ANSA-Africa plans to distribute such information in more dynamic formats, such as editorial features, advocacy campaigns, newsletters, policy and budget briefs, radio and television programmes, and seminars and workshops. It is critical that findings and reports are disseminated to government and citizens alike, to emphasise their partnership.

Training programmes will focus on methodological aspects of social accountability, in formats that can be adapted to different languages, cultures and literacy levels. New approaches to social accountability emphasise the importance of working with government agencies in the public expenditure cycle: budget formulation, execution, accounting and reporting, and external audit and oversight. This will be an important focus for capacity building.

Social accountability stakeholders will play an active role in defining ANSA-Africa's scope and activities. The strength of partnerships across the continent – among different organisations, community bodies and government entities, across different languages, cultures, and national and regional barriers – will be the ultimate determinant of ANSA-Africa's success. <

Links

- ANSA-Africa portal: www.ansa-africa.net
- Municipal Development Partnership for Eastern and Southern Africa (MDP-ESA): www.mdpafrica.org.zw
- Online course on participatory budgeting in Africa and training companion: www.asaaf.org.zw/pb-course1
- Global Development Network (GDN) Toolkit: Disseminating research online, tips and practical suggestions for communicating academic research using the internet.

PUBLICATIONS

This section offers a selection of publications related to capacity development. A more extensive list can be found at www.capacity.org.

2006 Global Accountability Report: Holding Power to Account

M. Blagescu and R. Lloyd, One World Trust, 2006
This report assesses 30 of the world's most powerful organisations from across the inter-governmental, non-governmental and corporate sectors. It highlights good practice principles in four elements of accountability: transparency, participation, evaluation, and complaint and response. This is the first initiative to measure and compare the accountability of transnational actors.
ISBN 0950443484
www.oneworldtrust.org

Trust in Public Finance: Citizens views on Taxation by Local Authorities in Tanzania

O.-H. Fjeldstad, Project Brief 12, Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2004
Part of the problem of raising local government revenues in Tanzania is public resistance to paying service fees and charges, and widespread tax evasion. This report shows that the rate of payment is affected by factors such as citizens' perceptions of the trustworthiness of the government and service providers.
www.repoa.or.tz/publications

Responding to Change: Learning to Adapt in Development Cooperation

P. Engel, N. Keijzer and C. Ørnemark, ECDPM Policy Management Brief 19, 2007
This paper focuses on key issues relating to learning and adapting in development organisations. It refers to an online discussion on the relation between accountability and learning that took place in the Pelican Initiative, a network of people interested in evidence-based learning and communication for development.
www.ecdpm.org/pmb19

A Taste of Success: Analyzing and Affecting Policy, Fundar, Mexico

International Budget Project, 2000
This case study provides an interesting example of how budget work can affect policy and how a budget organisation can develop in response to a particularly compelling problem that people mobilise around – in this case money in a 'secret fund' that the President could use without any accountability.
www.internationalbudget.org

Promoting Mutual Accountability in Aid Relationships

S. Mulley and P. de Renzio, ODI Briefing Paper 1, 2006
This paper addresses the definition of mutual accountability and its key challenges. It reviews existing mechanisms to promote mutual accountability at country level (in Tanzania, Mozambique, Vietnam and Afghanistan) and at international level. It includes recommendations for donors and recipients.
www.odi.org.uk

Children's Feedback Committees in Zimbabwe: An Experiment in Humanitarian Accountability

C. McIvor and K. Myllenen, Save the Children (UK), Harare, 2005
This publication chronicles the attempt by Save the Children (UK) to set up an accountability project within the agency's food aid intervention in Zimbabwe. A key intention was to set up a mechanism that specifically included children in the process of creating better accountability towards communities.
ISBN 0-7974-2933-6
www.sarpn.org.za

A Guide to Budget Work for NGOs

International Budget Project, Washington, DC, 2001
This guide offers a systematic overview of the activities and approaches a non-governmental organisation might want to undertake in its initial years of budget advocacy work. The guide is available online and in print, and is intended for groups or individuals that are relatively new to the field. It contains useful resources, and examples of best practices.
www.internationalbudget.org

Militants and Citizens: The Politics of Participatory Democracy in Porto Alegre

G. Baiocchi, Stanford University Press, 2005
In Porto Alegre, Brazil, thousands of ordinary citizens participate in local governance, making binding decisions on urban policy on a daily basis. While there has been immense attention paid to the practice of participatory democracy in Porto Alegre, this is the first book to examine the politics, culture, and day-to-day activities of its citizens.
ISBN 0804751234

Democratic Accountability in Latin America

S. Mainwaring and C. Welna (eds), Oxford Scholarship Online, 2003
This book seeks to further understanding on the web of institutions that form the mechanisms of accountability, the interaction between these institutions, and interaction between electoral accountability, intrastate accountability, and societal oversight.
ISBN 0199256373
www.oxfordscholarship.com

A Comparison of the Budget Process in France and Francophone African Countries

B.I. Abdourhamane and I. Crouzel, edited by M. Claassens, Idasa, 2004
The publication, available in English and French, traces the influence and the continued dominance of the French public finance model in francophone African legislative and public finance systems. A summary of the publication can be found at:
www.idasa.org.za

User Committees: A Potentially Damaging Second Wave of Decentralization

J. Manor, *European Journal of Development Research*, 16(1), 2004
User committees have proliferated in less-developed countries. They are intended to give ordinary people the opportunity to influence development programmes and projects. In some cases, they have had a positive impact. However, this article argues that they may be having a damaging effect on decentralisation and participation.

Social Accountability Sourcebook: Strengthening the Demand Side of Governance and Service Delivery World Bank

This online guide provides an analytical framework of social accountability, and an overview of the main concepts and definitions; tools and methods that are most frequently used as part of social accountability approaches such as participatory budgeting, citizen's report cards and social audits; case examples in different regions; sector and thematic applications; and resources.
http://www-esd.worldbank.org/sac

Accountability in Health Services: Transforming Relationships and Contexts

G. Asha, Working Paper Series 13, no.1, Harvard Centre for Population and Development Studies, 2003
This paper argues that accountability mechanisms may not always respond to the needs of marginalised groups in society and that attention needs to be paid to the social and institutional context in which they are placed. To be successful, accountability mechanisms need to emphasise building broad and democratic constituencies to support social change.
www.globalhealth.harvard.edu

The PIU Dilemma: How to Address Project Implementation Units

UNDP Practice Note, 2003
Project implementation units raise fundamental issues related to national ownership and capacity development. This note recommends a range of alternative management methods that incorporate capacity development, such as sector-wide approaches, gap filling, i.e. the integration of external expertise into line-functions, salary enhancement and increased access to information on public expenditures.
www.undp.org

The need for analytical and adaptive capacities

Rethinking capacity building

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Capacity building projects are often seen as a means of providing NGOs with the tools they need to effectively deliver programmes or services, and of ensuring the ability of recipients to demonstrate accountability for the financial aid received. However, insights from over fifty years of experience suggest that conventional types of capacity building have often failed to bring about improvements in organisational effectiveness, performance, and accountability.

This failure has several causes. First, the providers of capacity building often misunderstand the capacity needs of their grantees. Donors need to take responsibility for enhancing their own understandings of the capacity shortfalls and strengths of their grantees. The expectations of short-term results, frequently associated with logical frameworks and results-based management matrices, can often be at odds with actual grantee needs.

Second, capacity building efforts tend to focus on 'technical' capacities in NGOs, such as financial management, strategic planning, and indicator development. These technical skills do not strengthen an organisation's analytical capacity – that is the organisation's ability to step back and critically review its work and the changing environment in which it functions. Nor does traditional capacity building strengthen an NGO's adaptive capacity – its ability to change behaviour as a result of that learning and reflection.

Strengthening an organisation's ability to analyse and adapt requires different types of assistance than has traditionally been offered to NGOs. Capacity building needs to be seen as a means of encouraging learning. Thus, effective capacity building often requires a revisiting of an organisation's aspirations and strategy, as well as its standard operating procedures; simple training programmes can achieve little on their own.

One implication for donors is that they need to look at capacity building projects in the long-term. This requires a shift towards an expectation of results over years rather than quarterly or annual budget cycles. Furthermore, capacity building projects need to combine consulting, coaching, training and peer exchanges which are appropriate to the needs of the organisation. The plans and training processes should be locally designed and managed in order to make them appropriate to the needs of the field staff. For instance, a practical approach may be to develop simpler reporting systems (rather than those with complex sets of indicators) that are congruent with existing resources and which can be built up if resources increase.

Another implication is that donors need to accept some responsibility for failure and ambiguity in capacity building. Non-profit organisations that lack analytical and adaptive capacities cannot be expected to identify their own capacity needs. They thus require the support of donors or capacity builders who can help them think through their priorities, assets, and needs.

For NGOs, the greatest challenges lie in understanding the fact that capacity building is not just a 'quick fix' to satisfy donors. Building analytical and adaptive capacity requires organisational commitment to painful self-scrutiny. One way that this can be achieved is by insisting on working with consultants who are willing to serve as coaches during various stages of strategic thinking and project implementation (rather than simply using consultants who help design new strategic plans or information systems but then disappear during implementation). It requires that NGOs take the time and risk to educate their donors as to their capacity needs so as to build long-term relationships of mutual understanding.

The broader challenge for NGOs and funders alike lies in working towards building analytical and adaptive capacities across the sector as a whole, rather than only in atomised organisations. If the long-term goal is to influence social policy and implementation – on health and human services, on poverty, on environmental management, on fiscal and economic regulation – then it will also be necessary to build capacities for sector-wide communication, analysis and adaptation. <

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