



**International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IDEA**

**Democratic Accountability and Service Delivery
-A Desk Review-**

Andrés Mejía Acosta
a.mejia@ids.ac.uk

**With
Anuradha Joshi and Graeme Ramshaw¹**

**Institute of Development Studies
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Executive Summary

This report seeks to identify, define and document how different modalities of democratic accountability are linked –if at all- to improved service delivery in developing democracies. The work extends an agenda proposed by the International IDEA’s Democracy and Development program with a view towards understanding the workings of accountability mechanisms. The guiding premise is that democratic regimes offer citizens the legal means and guarantees to articulate and voice their policy concerns in a way that reaches elected and non elected representatives to demand the effective provision of public services.

Thus, the first part explores the concept of democratic accountability, and discusses different approaches identified by the existing literature, including social and political accountability approaches. More specifically, it seeks to describe the number of different accountability agents, the nature of existing arenas and the presence of sanctions to render effective accountability. The paper outlines some four ideal dimensions to evaluate the effectiveness of accountability relations: standards, answerability, responsiveness, and enforceability. In each of these dimensions, we are interested in looking at who are the main agents of accountability, what their incentives are to be accountable, the existence of formal and informal provisions to enable accountability, and the presence of sanctions to enforce accountability.

The empirical part offers a detailed review of sixteen cases where citizens or politicians held government officials to account for the delivery of public services. These cases are analyzed, according to the proposed four dimensions of democratic accountability. Based on these evaluations, the paper discusses the need to combine social and political factors to strengthen democratic accountability and improve the delivery of government services.

Acronyms

CCAGG	Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (Philippines)
CDD	Centre for Democracy and Development (Ghana)
CSO	civil society organisation
IDASA	Institute for Democracy in South Africa
IDEA	Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IBP	International Budget Programme
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PA	political accountability
PB	participatory budgeting
PDS	Public Distribution System
PR	proportional representation
PRS	poverty reduction strategies
RTI	Right to Information
RWI	Revenue Watch Institute
SA	social accountability
UDN	Uganda Debt Network

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Desk Review of Democratic Accountability and Service Delivery

1. Background and Introduction

The International IDEA's Democracy and Development program has set out to explore, explain and document the linkages between democratic accountability and service delivery. The underlying proposition is that democratic practices have the potential to promote development outcomes in an inclusive, equitable and effective way. Functioning democratic systems should provide a two-way channel to connect citizens and elected officials. On the one hand, democratic mechanisms should offer citizens the legal means and guarantees to articulate and voice their policy concerns in a way that effectively reaches elected representatives. On the other hand, democratic mechanisms should enable citizens to hold government officials accountable for their actions, thus contributing to the provision of public services that respond to citizens' preferences in a responsible and transparent manner. Thus, a basic notion of accountability refers to both the responsiveness of elected officials to citizens' demands, and the responsibility that government officials have to act upon those preferences.

This report seeks to identify, define and explain how different modalities of democratic accountability are linked –if at all- to improved service delivery. To do this, the paper first focuses on explaining patterns of accountability only to develop further connections with service delivery patterns in the latter part of the paper. Thus, the first part explores the concept of democratic accountability, and discusses different approaches identified by the existing literature, including social and political accountability approaches. More specifically, it seeks to describe the number of different accountability agents, the nature of existing arenas and the presence of sanctions to render effective accountability. In the next section, the paper outlines four ideal dimensions to evaluate the effectiveness of accountability relations: standards, answerability, responsiveness, and enforceability. In each of these dimensions, we are interested in making a detailed description of who are the main agents of accountability, what their incentives are to be accountable, the existence of formal and informal provisions to enable accountability, and the presence of sanctions to enforce accountability. Although the desk review was built on evidence from nearly three dozen cases, this section looks in detail at sixteen cases where citizens or politicians held government officials to account for the delivery of public services. These cases are analyzed, according to the proposed four dimensions that are developed in section four. The fifth part explores the potential contribution of these accountability mechanisms and dynamics to improve the delivery of services. The sixth part concludes.

2. Democratic Accountability for Service Delivery

A key premise –and promise- of the democratic wager is that citizens can hold government officials accountable for the provision of public goods and services. The fundamental assumption is that more effective accountability mechanisms will encourage improved service provision, in the form of a faster, better quality or well implemented responses to citizens' demands. In principle, a democratic regime can offer citizens with the necessary mechanisms to hold governments to account and reward or sanction performance through a wide range of

mechanisms such as elections, referenda, impeachments, and street protest and mobilizations, to mention a few. It is however necessary to define what is democratic accountability, who exactly are the agents of accountability, what are their incentives, what is the broader political context in which accountability takes place, and what happens if government officials do not respond to citizens' demands.²

The concept of accountability remains a highly contested issue in the social sciences. While this review does not attempt to address a theoretical debate, this section outlines some relevant dimensions that capture key sources of disagreement around the concept of accountability. These dimensions refer to the scope of accountability, the agents of accountability, and the presence of mechanisms to sanction the lack of accountability.

a. The scope of democratic accountability: premises and challenges

The basic notion of accountability entails a relationship between at least two types of actors, one of which (*a principal*) delegates to another (*an agent*) the possibility to act on his behalf. This act of delegation usually entails some type of correspondence by which it is implied that the agent is *accountable* for his actions to the principal (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991).

In a democratic environment, government officials are account givers and most of their actions are open to public scrutiny. Yet, it would not be realistic to expect that all officials respond to every citizen for every one of their actions (Pitkin 1967). If a voter writes a letter to her representative demanding an explanation for her vote on an issue, an individual contributor requests a specific policy action in compensation for his campaign donations, or a newspaper reveals government wrongdoing, these are all events that demand a response on the part of government officials. In these cases, the account giver is expected to offer a response, but the official *is not legally required* to do so. These would be examples where there is a direct *answerability*, but could not be construed as cases of *accountability* proper unless the citizen decides not to vote for his MP in the next election, the MP has to return contributions in the case of a demonstrated campaign scandal, or a High Court determines penal responsibilities over the misuse of government funds. To be clear, a stricter notion of *political* accountability used here refers to “relationships that *formally* give some actor the authority of oversight and/or sanction relative to public officials (Mainwaring 2003: 7). This minimalist definition drawn from political science is bound to be controversial because it leaves out many social interactions that are and can be commonly construed as relationships of “accountability”. Yet, it is deemed necessary to raise the bar if the concept of accountability is going to be useful.³ There is a plethora of examples where accountability is exercised in a democratic context, such as street protests, the workings of civil society organizations, and the proactive efforts of media outlets to bring governments to account. These efforts can certainly trigger greater responsiveness from account givers, but it would be misleading to expect that each one of these actions entail a legal obligation to respond and a corresponding sanction if action fails to happen.

² In this essay, we exclusively focus on mechanisms of democratic accountability to refer to the provision of public goods, as opposed to relationships of private or individual accountability devised to ensure the provision of private goods.

³ More broadly, the concept of “political accountability” can be conceived as a notion of accountability applied to the exercise of public—as opposed to private—authority.

Alternative approaches have proposed additional elements that need consideration in accountability relations: a) the *standards* to which principal's hold agents to account, b) the agents' provision of *information* on their actions to their principals, c) the *justification* that stands up to public reason, and d) the existence of *sanctions* that principals can impose if they are not satisfied with the actions or justification provided (Schedler 1999).⁴ To expand and illustrate the argument made so far, the next section introduces a more precise discussion of the relevant agents, arenas and mechanisms of democratic accountability.

b. The agents of democratic accountability

The number and characteristics of democratic agents has concrete implications on the nature of accountability relationships. According to this principle, it matters whether there are one or multiple account givers, or account holders, whether these are elected or appointed, whether they have short or long term ambitions to mention a few characteristics. In its simplest form, the most *direct* or conventional form of accountability involves the relationship between two agents (for example a voter and an elected official), in which the former delegates authority to and holds him accountable for its actions and it is in the best interest of the latter to be responsive and accountable to her actions if she wants to remain in office (Mayhew 1974).

In contemporary representative democracies however, there are many variations to this basic model.

- The basic relationship becomes more difficult when a single agent has to respond to the expectations, needs, and demands of *competing principals*. For example, an elected legislator may be responsive to the citizens that put him in office, but her political career choices may depend on the goodwill of her party leader, or will depend on her ability to appease the leader of the government who controls access to important state resources (Carey 2009). Unlike the direct and visible relationship with its citizens, the muddled nature of facing competing principals, allows agents ample room for strategic action or shirking (Carey 2009, Mainwaring 2003: 9).
- In the case of *non elected agents*, such as bureaucrats and *civil servants*, they are in principle accountable to the public they serve, but this relationship can be mediated by an elected official who appointed them –and can in theory remove them- in the first place. In such scenario, it is expected that non elected service providers will become more responsive to the guidelines of their supervisors rather than the needs of the public at large.
- Sometimes state agents can *acquire considerable autonomy* to ignore citizens' demands and/or bypass or mechanisms of control and oversight. This can be the case of the agents that gained considerable job security through the civil service, they form part of a government majority, or if agents develop specialized knowledge that give them a unique advantage over principals (Carey 2009, Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991, McCubbins and Schwartz 1984).

⁴ Schedler (1999) refers to dimensions b) and c) as components of answerability.

From an accountability perspective, these important variations in the number and nature of agents may undermine the scope or effectiveness of existing formal accountability mechanisms, and consequently, may have a negative impact on the ability –or willingness- of agents to deliver effective services to citizens.

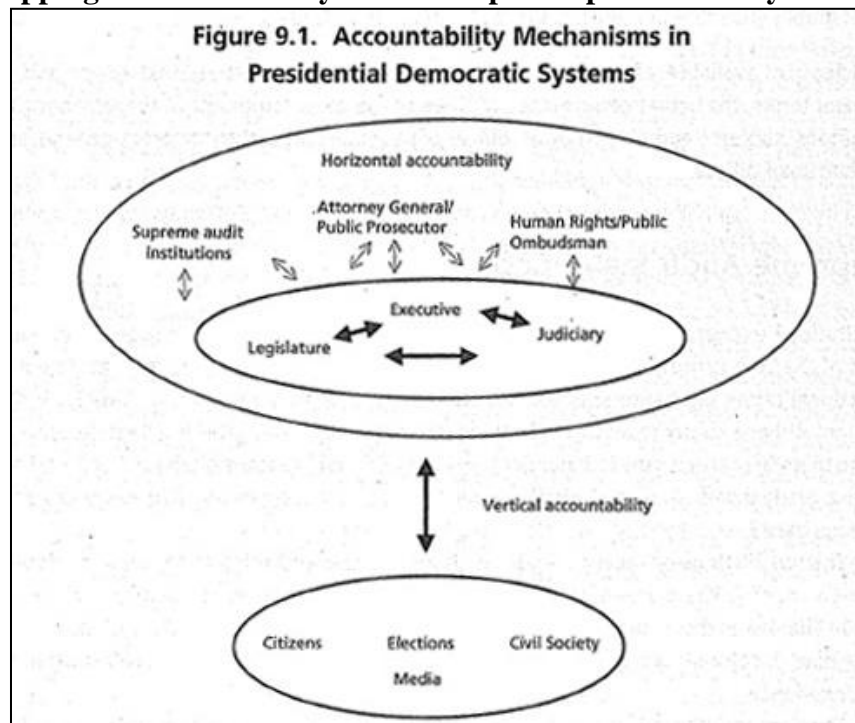
c. Arenas and institutions of effective accountability

In addition to differences in the nature of democratic actors, there is a myriad of institutional arrangements and democratic arenas that have a direct impact on the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms. One analytical distinction to consider is the difference between **“vertical” and “horizontal” accountability**. Vertical accountability mechanisms refer to the relationships between citizens conceived as principals (voters, organized society, media), and state agents who have an effective mandate to respond for their actions (legislatures, elected representatives, the executive branch, local government). Horizontal accountability refers to relationships where diverse government offices hold each other to account to ensure that no one encroaches on the rights and privileges of one another and that no agency stands above the rule of law (O’Donnell 1998).⁵ Horizontal accountability relationships include but are not limited to instances of formal checks and balances between government branches. Rather, it also encompasses the workings of control and oversight institutions including Ombudsman, Attorney General and General Comptroller. Figure 1 illustrates for the case of presidential systems, a mapping of vertical and horizontal accountability relationships.

From a citizens’ perspective, this accountability landscape opens a wide range of possible arenas or entry points to hold their governments to account. Some of these mechanisms (vertical) imply a direct relationship between citizens and elected officials, but citizens can also demand their elected representatives to hold governments to account as well (horizontal). For the purpose of discussion, we focus here on several institutional arenas that can facilitate democratic accountability such as political parties, elections legislative bodies, and oversight and control mechanisms. We also discuss the conditions or institutional variations that make these arenas more or less responsive to citizens’ demands for accountability.

⁵ Develop debate about whether vertical accountability relationships are the only relationships that matter (Crisp et al 2003) and HA situations are simply redundant forms of vertical accountability [Mainwaring and Welna 2003].

Figure 1. A mapping of accountability relationships in a presidential system



Source: taken from Payne et al 2002

Political parties

Political parties –and elected representatives- play a dual role in the accountability landscape, since they can be both democratic instruments to hold governments to account (account holders), but they are also agents of accountability that respond to the demands of their voters through the electoral cycle (account givers).

There is some academic agreement that more programmatic political parties are instrumentally more effective in demanding and providing accountability than parties structured along personalistic or clientelistic loyalties. While the latter are able to provide some particularistic and short term form of public goods to citizens, the former are in principle better positioned to offer long term and broader representation to more diverse segments of society (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). There is less scholarly consensus on the impact of the number of parties on accountability relationships: while the presence of one or fewer partisan options makes agents more identifiable, it limits or constraints the range of demands represented; conversely, a larger number of parties may be more representative and would potentially offer greater ability to respond to diverse needs, but it will also dilute the lines of responsibility and identifiability (Morgenstern 2004).

Electoral systems

The nature and design of electoral systems has a significant impact on enhancing or undermining the prospects for democratic accountability in a given polity. For example, systems that promote some kind of proportional representation (PR) of different interests may enable greater participation of citizens in the decision making process (and thus facilitate the proliferation of people who demand accountability). But such systems will at the same time undermine the

identifiability of agents that are held to account if for example, the responsibility for actions taken or forgotten is distributed among the multiple representatives that were elected in the same district (Morgenstern 2004). Conversely, plurality or first past the post systems that favour the representation of visible majorities would facilitate the identification of those responsible for policy choices but would inevitably undermine the democratic representation of a wider set of interests. Following the conventional wisdom on the effects of electoral rules, the first type of PR systems tends to be associated with a proliferation of political parties, whereas plurality systems tend to have a reducing effect on the number of available parties (Duverger 1954).

Recent research has illustrated that the choice of different candidate nomination rules has a significant impact on who are legislative agents likely to be accountable to, not just between voters and elected politicians, but among elected politicians themselves. Electoral rules that favour the election of MPs or legislators through closed list formulas are likely to give party leaders greater power to influence the career choices of the rank and file, whereas rules that allow for personalized voting schemes are likely to empower legislators away from the control of their parties, and become in principle, more responsive to the needs and demands of their electorate (Shugart and Carey 1995, Siavelis and Morgenstern 2009).

*Parliaments and legislatures*⁶

A country's legislature has a considerable potential to be an effective body that provides and demands accountability. In addition to the electoral and partisan configurations discussed above, there are other rules and institutions that facilitate democratic accountability. A first dimension to consider is whether the government has been directly elected by the people as in a presidential system or elected by members of parliament. In the latter case, the government's survival literally depends on gathering sufficient partisan support through a vote of confidence, whereas presidents have a more independent relationship vis-à-vis the legislature. In addition to this division of power, there is an important division of purpose that is determined by the amount of political support that the government has in the parliament. It is argued for example, that a divided government exists if the partisan majority is different from the party in government (Haggard and McCubbins 2001). These configurations are relevant to understand the conditions under which the parliament –and parliamentarians- can effectively hold governments to account. This is more likely to happen in the context of a divided government with a moderate or two-party competition. Members of parliament would not be willing to hold governments to account in the case of single party majorities, especially when their own political survival depends on promoting –not opposing- the governments' agenda. Conversely, in a highly fragmented context, parties and MPs are least likely to hold governments to account because they face higher obstacles for assembling effective oversight majorities.

The parliaments' ability to hold governments to account would also depend on the political effectiveness of legislative committees and committee hearing procedures. This is directly referred to the technical capacity of parliaments to archive, analyze and process information, on the transparency and institutionalization of legislative procedures, and the extent to which legislative committees are staffed with experienced or amateur politicians. Legislative

⁶ There are important differences between the roles of the legislative branch in a Parliamentary and Presidential systems, but this section will keep this contrast to a minimum to focus the discussion on accountability institutions.

committees also offer a valuable entry point to facilitate the participation of civil society in the decision making and oversight process.

Control and oversight institutions

Figure 1 also illustrates the existence of other institutions of horizontal accountability. Recall that the purpose of institutions of horizontal accountability is to ensure that no government agency encroaches on the rights of another government body and that no government office stands above the rule of law (O'Donnell 1998). These institutions include the Ombudsman, the Attorney General, the Comptroller General, Financial Auditing institutions, etc. As mentioned earlier, the strength and effectiveness of these institutions would depend on their origin and level of autonomy vis-à-vis other state branches. In a context where oversight institutions are directly or indirectly dependent on the executive branch (for example when they are appointed by the president or directly financed by the presidents' office), it is expected that they would be less proactive in holding governments to account. Conversely, in countries that have a tradition of a strong rule of law and independent judiciary, governments are also likely to be more accountable for their actions or receive credible sanctions when they fail to respond accordingly.

Alternative arenas

In addition to these formally constituted (legally recognized) arenas, there has been a recent proliferation of political spaces where citizens can voice their concerns and demand accountability from elected officials, these include civil society organizations staging street protests, signing petitions, blocking roads, etc. Media outlets have also played an important role to monitor public action and demand greater accountability from government officials. As it will be discussed in the next section, these arenas have become important platforms to voice demands and but have not been always able to offer the legal sanctions to compel politicians to act in a responsive manner, beyond "naming and shaming" mechanisms.

d. Sanctioning mechanisms for effective accountability

The presence of rewards and penalties to sanction the (presence or lack of) accountability is perhaps the most decisive and perhaps most controversial condition to enable effective accountability. In a democratic setting, most of the formal political institutions offer clear and visible sanctioning mechanisms to ensure that politicians remain accountable for their actions vis-à-vis the public. Following a narrow definition of the term as explained above, elections offer the most visible and institutionalized form of accountability in a democratic setting because it allows citizens to reward and re elect or vote their elected representatives *out of office* depending on their performance (Stokes 1999). Political parties and legislative bodies also offer sanctioning devices including constitutional provisions for recalling mandates, holding referenda on policy choices, and allowing impeachment procedures to hold governments directly accountable for misdemeanours, corruption or other wrongdoings in office (Pérez-Liñán 2007). More recently, the adoption of freedom of information acts in many parts of the world provide an additional tool that can be effectively used by citizens to demand clear and concrete action on the part of government officials.

A critical condition for sanctions to work is the need for independent and strong government bodies that can render sanctions effective. In this spirit, democratic governments have created a

range of “last appeal” institutions such as Attorney General, Ombudsmen, Special Fraud Offices, etc, to review citizens’ concerns and hold government officials to account. It follows that stronger institutional settings (arenas) are also likely to produce more effective sanctions that elicit greater accountability from government officials. All the institutional provisions however, would not be sufficient to ensure a fair impeachment of a corrupt politician or would have the authority to recall a mandate if accountability mechanisms lack credible sanctions. The emergence of “social accountability” mechanisms that have emerged as an alternative to allow citizens to log in complaints, demand information or stage a street protest, when formal accountability institutions lack the political autonomy, the necessary funding or the legal jurisdiction to hold governments to account (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz 2003).

3. Analyzing Effective Accountability

The scholarly and action oriented literature has developed a myriad notions of accountability depending on whether relationships take place between societal actors and the state, whether these are intrastate relationships only, or whether they feature a sequence of both. For analytical purposes, we will examine two predominant traditions to understand accountability: one that focuses on the political and institutional nature of state society relations, and the one that focuses on state society relations from a citizens’ perspective. The next sections explore mechanisms of democratic accountability from a social or political dimension.

a. Social and political accountability mechanisms

Narrowly defined, the concept of political accountability (PA) refers to a specific form of relationship where *elected government officials are directly responsible to voters for their public actions including but not limited to the provision of public goods*. The notion of political accountability refers in this context to the *vertical linkages* established between voters and representatives. The democratic wager allows citizens the opportunity to reward or sanction the performance of government officials through regular elections. Thus, elections are legal and institutional mechanisms that grant citizens the right and the duty to re-elect their political representatives or vote them out of office depending on whether they have complied or defected with the electoral mandate (Stokes 1999).⁷

Another characteristic of the electoral democratic process is that offers the conditions by which the preferences of most members of the public can be reflected in the decision making process. In principle, elections make public officials accountable to the policy preferences of all citizens participating in the decision making process. All things equal, the electoral process would tend to influence the provision of *public goods*.

An alternative approach to understanding political accountability focuses on the social dynamics that can improve accountability relationships between voters and government officials for the

⁷ The notion of political accountability in this strict sense does not include the horizontal relationships that take place when different government spheres hold each other accountable. Similar to a childrens’ game of “rock, scissors and paper” where one option beats the next in a continuous cycle, what is essential to horizontal accountability “is not hierarchy but a network of accountability relationships that leaves no agency unaccountable” (Kenney 2003: 65).

provision of goods and services. Unlike the PA mechanisms, this type of *social accountability* mechanisms (SA), are not limited to specific formal procedures (elections) or regular intervals (electoral cycles), but rather facilitate a continuous relationship of citizen demands' through street protests and mobilizations, *public naming and shaming*, signing of petitions, etc. The core feature of SA mechanisms is to exert direct political influence on government officials to extract increased –and effective- government action in the short run. Through SA mechanisms, citizens have organized to demand service provision from government officials in charge of specific sectors (health, water, sanitation), sometimes even bypassing some elected bodies (national legislatures, city councils). Rather than imposing formal sanctions on politicians, citizens' mobilizations can impose a heavy reputational cost on government officials when they fail to answer to citizens' demands.

An important point of contrast between both approaches is that SA mechanisms are not legally binding. They may promote a basic level of *answerability* from government officials, but can not ensure continuous government responsiveness in the long run. In this sense, SA mechanisms lack explicit sanctions or “teeth” to punish inaction or defections from the expected behaviour. Further, it may be argued that civil society groups or organized individuals tend to mobilize for the effective provision of goods and services that are closest to their own policy preferences. Thus, such groups are not very different from other lobbying groups as described by democratic pluralism. Others agree that SA groups may be narrow in their policy demands but appeal to ‘moral standings’ and therefore seek to institutionalize durable societal control over policies by enabling to exercise voice in deliberative processes that monitor public decisions (Joshi 2008).

b. Bridging the accountability gap

This paper argues that the intersection between social and political mechanisms is key to understand and enhance the potential impact of democratic accountability on service provision. The previous discussion highlighted the fact that effective democratic accountability is the combined product of social mobilization in a context of well defined and formal accountability mechanisms.

The existence of political accountability mechanisms such as elections, legislatures, the judiciary and other mechanisms for control and oversight give citizens a legal and formal opportunity to sanction or reward the performance of their elected representatives. Yet, political accountability mechanisms *per se* are not sufficient to receive the specific demands and needs from citizens, nor do they offer the best channels to demand immediate action from service providers. This is precisely the point where social accountability mechanisms come into place to complement, enhance and advance the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms. SA mechanisms such as social audits, usually demand a considerable effort to organize outside the political system and demand service delivery. In some instances, SA initiatives can appeal to the existence of legal instruments such as a Right of Information Act, but without the intervention of dedicated stakeholders, there are no formal means to ensure effective and durable government responses in the long run.

We argue that effective democratic accountability approaches combine the direct and immediate capacity of SA to respond to social challenges, with the long term sustainability provided by formal PA mechanisms. In an extreme way, the proliferation of presidential crises in many Latin American countries after the nineties illustrated both the failings of conventional accountability mechanisms but the important role of a combined social and political approach to improved accountability. It has been argued that these crises were accelerated in part by citizens on the street and social organizations that were frustrated by the inability of government institutions to punish alleged corruption and improve government services. However, extreme social action was not sufficient to solve political crises and the actual removal of presidents took place through legal and in some cases extra constitutional means by elected legislative bodies (see Pérez-Liñán 2007). If there is a lesson to be drawn from these Latin American experiences is that social action was critical to challenge and overcome institutional rigidities, but ultimately long term solutions to political conflict emerged from the effective use of existing legal provisions.

Developing an integrated approach to improve democratic accountability for service delivery can be proposed from two fundamental and complementary perspectives: a) how can formal and legal accountability mechanisms become more sensitive and responsive to the multiple demands of citizens? And b) how can existing social efforts of protest and mobilization eventually develop “more teeth” or legally binding implications to hold governments to account in the long run?

The integrated approach requires strengthening the existence of rules and sanctions to ensure effective government accountability, but also facilitating the mobilization of social actors who demand greater government responsiveness. Effective democratic accountability is a multi dimensional concept. It is not sufficient to have formal-legal mechanisms in place to hold governments to account, but it is also necessary to foster widespread demand for government action.

From a *supply* perspective, institutional reforms in young democracies have actively sought to reinforce the legal prerogatives and mechanisms for holding governments to account. These strategies include for example, the creation or strengthening of government offices for monitoring and oversight such as Courts of Accounts or anti corruption bodies. From a *demand* perspective, recent decades have witnessed the proliferation of civil society efforts to hold governments to account through collective action. Such strategies included the implementing of social audits or the establishment of public works watchdogs. In some cases, these efforts were backed up by legal instruments such as Freedom of Information Acts or Participatory Budget bylaws.

Yet, effective accountability mechanisms can be flawed at both ends, if for example an excessive focus on political accountability mechanisms may crowd out the space for collective social action, or if social accountability efforts lack political mechanisms that can deploy clear sanctions for government inaction.

The next section discusses in greater detail the need for defining and evaluating the multiple dimensions required to produce effective democratic accountability.

c. Proposed dimensions to evaluate effective accountability

We argue that the most effective form of democratic accountability takes place when a series of conditions converge:

- a) there are legal and formal institutions and mechanisms to hold governments to account
- b) there are clearly defined agents who demand government action
- c) there are clearly defined agents who are responsible for government action
- d) there are legally established and effective sanctions for those who are not accountable

We argue that the effective existence of these elements help understand four ideal dimensions of accountability, namely standards, transparency, responsiveness and enforceability.⁸ These dimensions provide a useful starting point to understand how multiple attributes interact to enhance democratic accountability, and how sometimes, improvements along one dimension are not necessarily accompanied with improvements in other dimensions when looking at concrete cases.

The first dimension refers to the existence of *clearly defined rules of the game* for holding governments to account. Thus, we look at the extent to which there are legal and established *standards* that enable effective accountability relationships. In other words, we want to see that existing rules and procedures establish clear linkages between account givers and account holders, and this is ideally defined around the provision of a specific good. To survey the existing accountability standards, it is relevant to ask what are the legal provisions and prerogatives that enable citizens to hold governments to account, what is the extent to which governments are accountable, and what happens if government officials are unresponsive.

The notion of *answerability* gauges the extent to which accountability relationships are truly reciprocal between clearly defined actors, in a way in which such actors have an understanding as to who is *answerable* to whom. Answerable in this sense requires agents not only to provide timely information regarding decisions but also to be able to justify those decisions. This dimension focuses on the *demand side* of accountability, and pays special attention to whether citizens have effective access to timely and transparent information, whether citizens have access to their Members of Congress or Parliament, whether they can participate in parliamentary hearings, and whether citizens can freely participate in electoral events.

A third dimension focuses on the *responsiveness* of government officials or the *supply side* of accountability. The idea is that government officials must be effectively willing and/or able to respond to citizens' demands given the available technical resources, economic constraints and political context in which they interact. It is not sufficient to have clearly defined rules and actors who actively demand government action, but it is also necessary to have the proper incentives to give accounts for their actions. Some of the critical factors shaping government officials' willingness to be accountable have to do with whether government officials are elected or appointed, how are they selected or nominated, how are they elected, how often, whether they

⁸ The last three dimensions are consistent with IDEA's Accountability Assessment Framework. The fourth dimension is reported as "sustainability".

face term limits, etc. These factors are directly related to the question of how improved accountability provides the political incentives and advances the career choices of government officials. From this perspective, effective democratic accountability is likely to follow when the incentives and potential benefits of being responsive to the citizenry are directly aligned with their political futures.

The fourth dimension, *enforceability*, directly addresses the concern about which effective sanctions can contribute to improving relations of democratic accountability. Even if there are legal provisions, widespread demand, and favourable political conditions to hold governments to account, it is relevant to ask whether accountability institutions such as the judiciary or a legislative committee have sufficient “teeth” to enforce accountability or punish government inaction. In many countries for example, the Office of the Attorney General have significant powers to investigate cases of alleged corruption of government officials, but they often lack effective “teeth” or legal prerogatives to act upon findings and sanction the guilty. In some cases, lack of enforceability is observed when the government directly appoint those in control and oversight institutions, or the government conditions their financial autonomy. These encroachments to institutional autonomy have the ability to undermine the workings of highly proactive actors and even erode well defined institutions of accountability.

The four dimensions of accountability offer a more nuanced discussion of how different mechanisms of social and political accountability interact to promote effective government responses to citizens’ demands. It also provides a more balanced approach to identifying which conditions could effectively enhance democratic accountability under different circumstances. As discussed earlier, a state-centered approach to strengthening accountability may rely heavily on the adoption of new legislation, the creation of special offices or information disclosure protocols without sufficient attention to the demand side of accountability or the political incentives of government officials. On the other extreme, a predominant socially oriented approach to accountability may focus financial resources and capacity development to strengthen the demand side of new social actors but disregard the inherent weakness of government institutions that are unwilling or unable to hold governments to account.

Thus, effective democratic accountability understands state-society relations as a ‘two-way street, where genuine societal demand is met with decisive and autonomous government responses.’⁹ We believe that there is tremendous academic and policy benefit to use the proposed dimensions to analyze empirical cases where there is an implicit or explicit claim about improving democratic accountability. The next section offers an empirical and systematic review of reported cases and experiences of democratic accountability around the globe, and tries to identify how the proposed dimensions complement, enhance or replace one another. Building on this review, the following section tries to establish a conceptual and empirical link between effective democratic accountability and the effective (or failed) provision of government services.

⁹ Grant and Keohane note that “information and sanctions are necessary but not sufficient conditions for accountability. They presuppose norms of legitimacy to establish, not only the standards by which the use of power can be judged, but also who is authorised to wield power and who is properly entitled to call the power-wielders to account” (2005: 30).

4. Assessing the evidence: Accountability Case Studies

This section uses the analytical dimensions proposed above to look at specific country experiences where there is an explicit or implicit relationship of democratic accountability among political and social actors. The section surveys approximately three dozen case studies to determine which dimensions are present and how they are relevant to bring effective democratic accountability. The review showed a rather interesting range of cases and experiences that were generously labelled as examples of accountability that would barely meet some or none of the criteria outlined thus far.¹⁰ For the purpose of this systematic review, we have selected sixteen cases based on geographic representation and featured policy issues and type of social and political actors involved. The selected cases include Brazil, Mexico, India, Ghana, Tanzania, South Africa, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines and Uganda. Certainly, not all cases feature a similar set of players or relationships, but the set includes national and regional governments, mayors, legislators, party leaders, CSOs, Media organizations, and organized citizens. The cases also offer rich qualitative and quantitative evidence on how accountability and service delivery interact in the developing world. Finally, the sample includes some cases extracted from the scholarly literature, but also includes research findings from policy oriented research from the IDS' Centre for the Future State, the Citizens and Participation Group, and some interesting practical cases documenting project interventions by the International Budget Project and the Revenue Watch Institute.

Using evidence from these case studies, this section examines which factors contributed to effective democratic accountability. Specifically, cases are assessed according to the proposed four dimensions of accountability: what are the rules of the game (standards), who seeks accountability (answerability), who and why government officials should be responsive (responsibility) and what happens if agents are not accountable (enforceability).

In reviewing these cases, it is important to distinguish the notion of democratic accountability as an end in itself but also as a means to improve service delivery. This review focuses on the former (under what conditions are governments more responsive to citizens' demands), whereas the next section focuses on the latter (how can effective accountability relationships help improve service provision).

The cases illustrate significant variation both between and within countries on the four key dimensions outlined above. Countries that may be very democratic along one dimension (i.e. the formal existence of rules and accountability mechanisms) but may be decidedly authoritarian or clientelistic at another (the use or implementation of effective sanctions). Likewise, certain democracies may feature formal mechanisms for enabling accountable relationships, while other democracies may rely on informal means that are functionally effective but not democratic (i.e. vote buying or vote trading practices). Finally, certain service sectors within countries may be structured in ways that support strong accountability relationships (such as the provision of public services through labour unions) but in other sectors like the management of natural

¹⁰ We have included these cases in the appendix but we have not summarized their main features or calculated their accountability scores in the corresponding sections.

resource rents, accountability relations are deliberately opaque and non-responsive to citizen demands.

a. Standards

Any relationship of accountability is grounded on a set of “rules of the game” that provide the legal foundations to organize, promote and sanction accountability linkages. Although “best” standards can be discussed and disseminated across countries, their effectiveness are context specific, depending on the expectations and incentives of the actors involved, the number of actors in relationships of accountability and the broader political context in which accountability relationships take place. In the absence of clear or effective standards of accountability, agents can choose to bypass accountability relationships altogether or devise alternative –informal– means to hold governments to account through social and street mobilizations for example.

Legal provisions for promoting transparency for example, have enabled in different countries the free flow of information between state and society or between state agencies. The adoption of transparency provisions sought to reduce information asymmetries between state and society. Many governments traditionally guarded against revealing important information to the eyes of the general public, but this trend has been reversed with the participation of rights-based campaigners and growing international pressure to release such delicate information. However, effective transparency is likely to suffer even in the presence of well designed formal mechanisms if political actors lack the incentives to share information or don’t have the resources to justify their actions vis-à-vis their voters.

India is a successful case where the adoption of transparency enabling legislation on a highly democratic context effectively helped improve democratic accountability. The 2005 adoption of a Right to Information Act (RTI) provided grassroots campaigners with the impetus they needed to stimulate collective action around the effective application of a Public -food- Distribution System (PDS). Using government records obtained through the RTI, social organisations were able to examine the intended against the real transfer of food subsidies of the PDS scheme to demonstrate that some shop owners, in collusion with corrupt local officials engaged in fraudulent activities and mismanagement of funds. These grassroots organizations used social/public audit mechanisms to disseminate information –that was previously considered exclusive- in public assemblies. Thus, campaigners built an effective social movement that triggered effective response from government officials to sanction corrupt officials and restore the fairness of distribution chains (Pande, 2008).

There are less positive cases where the adoption of formal standards for accountability was ineffective, either because they did not have explicit political support or demand from citizens, or because it was embedded in an adverse political environment. The attempt to implement participatory budgeting in Buenos Aires illustrates the importance of embedding agreed standards for effective accountability with political support and citizen demands. Faced with protests and mass citizen mobilisation in the wake of the 2001 Argentine financial crisis, the chief of the city government struck a deal with his main political opponent to adopt participatory budgeting as a means of channelling public dissent. Yet, neither civil society itself nor the political elite considered the reforms as a viable option given the circumstances of government

discredit. The system was nevertheless set up to ensure that loyal political supporters were placed in critical positions within the structure of participatory budgets. As a result, implementation varied widely, with some sections of the city choosing open participatory processes and others using a more restrictive process of participation. Not surprisingly, the participatory budgeting scheme in Buenos Aires fizzled out with the change of leadership in the city government and the programme became hostage of political struggles. The case at hand illustrates the failure of a formal scheme to ensure democratic accountability in an adverse political context (Peruzzotti, 2009).

In Mexico, the nature of traditional politics appeared to have worked against the adoption of legislation that enabled citizens' involvement in the planning and budgeting of infrastructure expenditure. Electoral rules reduced the margin for political competition within constituencies, giving extraordinary power to the winning party regardless of the margin of victory. As a result, the incentives for negotiating budgetary spending with the opposition or leading citizens were drastically reduced once elected politicians came to power. In the context of a highly party-centric political system, participatory innovations were blocked by existing political parties. The Mexican experience highlights the difficulties of transforming Mexican political dynamics through participatory schemes alone (Selee, 2009). An important lesson to keep in mind is that political parties could become useful instruments to make governments more open and accessible if these institutions are included in the design of participatory practices through party-affiliated groups rather than trying to bypass existing political schemes to incorporate individual citizens only.

b. Answerability

The notion of *answerability* helps determine who is accountable to whom in a relationship of accountability. An actor is said to be *answerable* to another when he is required to provide information on and justify his actions and decisions to another. Why and to what extent states are accountable depends largely on the institutional environment in which they operate, and the political context itself determines who is accountable to whom. Through existing mechanisms and institutions, states provide the means and the incentives for agents to both inform their principals of their decisions and to justify those actions before the public.

Much of the effectiveness in government answerability has to do with how account seekers articulate their demands vis-à-vis the government. There are multiple channels and mechanisms for organizing collective action to demand effective government accountability. One such example comes from the activism of a women's health NGO in Mexico which played an active role in demanding effective government action on reproductive health policy. Since 1995, social organisations began to collaborate and actively participate with the Mexican government, as well as many state-level governments, to collaborate on the design and implementation of social policies to promote reproductive health. According to this model of interaction, the NGO gained greater policy influence by embedding themselves with policymakers and seeking formal relations with the government to improve services and breadth of coverage (Gomez-Jauregui, 2008).

Another positive example is found in South Africa, where social collective action through civil society organisations proved an effective way of improving government response around the

implementation of the Child Support Grant program. Research conducted by IDASA, a local NGO, showed that increased state revenues had not been sufficiently allocated to fund this essential social programme, thus producing adverse and discriminatory effects on rural and undeveloped communities. Part of the problem had to do with the lack of administrative capacity on the part of local governments to provide effective access to the state's Child Support Grant program. Through concerted social advocacy, civil society organisations lobbied to incorporate many of the key recommendations advocated by IDASA's report into the 2003/4 budget. This example shows how collective action efforts crystallized into effective government answers to citizens' demands (Hofbauer, 2006).

Another useful story where democratically elected governments responded quickly and effectively to citizen demands is the case of the Renda Minima scheme or Minimum Income Guarantee in Sao Paulo. The scheme emerged as a result of political bargaining and an elected Worker's Party city administration first implementing the programme in 2001. Towards the end of a four year electoral cycle however, city administrators were under tremendous pressure to demonstrate impact, particularly in poverty alleviation (Houtzager, 2008). Although the scheme was organized to strengthen direct linkages with its citizens and consolidate its own autonomy, the proximity of elections pushed elected city officials to almost completely exclude civil society organizations from policy bargaining, and directly attend citizens' needs instead. The case helps illustrate a government scheme that was indeed responding to the expressed needs of citizens' but lacked the organizational capacity to build strong citizen-state relations in the long run, thus undermining overall accountability in the process.

The key issue with answerability is to illustrate that the provisions for increased government response may be given, but as we will discuss in the next section, it is not a sufficient condition for improved and stable democratic accountability.

c. Responsiveness

The chain of democratic accountability is designed to produce representatives that serve the dual role of both holding the government to account in lines with the interests of their constituencies and being accountable themselves to the citizens they serve, ensuring that they effectively represent the wishes of their voters. The question of **responsiveness** addresses the question of when and why should government officials care to remain accountable to citizens' demands. To a large extent, political incentives to remain accountable come from range of institutional sources, including the nature of the party system, the electoral rules, the territorial division, and so on. One important consideration for example, is to determine if a member of parliament is in practice *accountable to more than one principal*, the electorate in her district, but its legislative performance is also influenced by the party leadership, the executive branch or a specific interest or lobbying group. The presence of *competing principals* is likely to weaken the accountability linkages of elected officials towards their constituents.¹¹

It has been argued that in places that feature a majoritarian or first past the post electoral system, elected parliamentarians are directly linked and responsible to citizens in their district. This is

¹¹ This is subject of a wider debate on whether individual legislators are deemed to be accountable to citizens (Mayhew 1974) or they can achieve better electoral returns by empowering a party leader instead (Cox and McCubbins 1993).

the case of the Ghanaian parliament, where MPs can make a name for themselves by championing causes or delivering particularistic benefits to their constituencies. In this case, the direct linkage between MP performance and citizens' demands ensures a fundamental level of responsiveness that does not necessarily go through the control of political parties (Mejia Acosta, 2009).

However, a direct linkage does not always yield optimal outcomes for accountability or political representation. The relationship between the elected representative and the political party is also likely to play an important role on the nature of the politician-voter relationship. Comparative evidence from India, another parliamentary system, suggests that legislators are more likely to cater to the needs of constituencies in the context of weak voter affinity for political parties. If voters are likely to demand direct and immediate constituent services from their elected representatives, they are likely to select their candidates based on specific issues or specific candidate attributes. Thus, legislators in these districts will be keen to "pass on the pork", providing clientelistic services that they know may swing the election in their favour. By contrast, legislators acting in constituencies that have been traditionally loyal to party organizations recognise that their individual popularity has little impact on their prospects for re-election. Voters choose candidates based solely on party affiliation, and therefore individual MPs have little or no incentives to provide services outside their party structures (Keefer, 2009).

These insights found in Africa and India are also echoed in two Presidential systems found in Latin America. Work emerging from Ecuador and Paraguay shows that individual legislators often face a representation dilemma, as they are both responsive to the needs of the constituents who elected them, but are also accountable to the leadership of the party that sponsored their names on the ballot, and potentially responsive to the influence of interest and business groups that may have contributed in their campaigns. Clearly, this "competing principals" dilemma affects legislators' willingness to be accountable to the electorate if for example, they have conflicting interests as to who will they predominantly represent. Independent of the presence of party centred or vote centred electoral systems, legislators are more likely to initiate direct clientelistic bills when their electoral prospects depend on the direct nomination of voters as it happens in Paraguay. By contrast, when the electoral prospects of legislators depend on the nomination of party leaders, their legislative activism tends to reflect the needs of the political party and to a lesser extent on their own individual agency (Mejia Acosta et al., 2009).

The empirical evidence suggests that is not sufficient to have clear accountability rules and widespread demand for government responsiveness. The political constraints and incentives of government officials are critical to determine whether accountability relationships are direct or mediated through political parties, and whether the exchanges adopt the form of programmatic or informal-clientelistic transactions. The next section further explores the question of "what happens when governments are unresponsive?"

d. Enforceability

The existence of provisions to reward or sanction actors in an accountability relationship is perhaps the most critical and defining condition to promote effective democratic accountability. As Oakerson states: "To be accountable means to have to answer for one's action or inaction,

and depending on the answer, to be exposed to potential sanctions, both positive and negative” (Oakerson 1989, 114). Following this prescription, much work focuses on the question of sanctions (ie. What happens of actors refuse to be accountable) as a specific criterion to promote effective accountability. While this dimension has been widely explored in the scholarly literature, not many development practitioners regard the **enforcement** of sanctions as a critical element for an evaluation and measurement of accountability relationships.

In developing countries, the emphasis on the creation of formal mechanisms of state-society accountability has often ignored the presence of existing informal mechanisms of accountability. These informal institutions may have more legitimacy in the eyes of citizens but may prove less positive in the promotion of social justice (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004). They also have a hand in producing vast differences between *de jure* accountability structures and observed *de facto* relationships. The merging of these informal and formal institutions into ‘hybrid political orders’ may have a significant impact on accountability relationships and on efforts to build and support effective states (Boege et al, 2008:15). Sanctions that emerge in these settings likewise bear particular characteristics, either formal or informal.

In the context of solid democratic institutions, accountability is built upon a solid rule of law that effectively guides and constrains the actions of both political and social agents. The rule of law reduces the threat of impunity, but it also creates the credible threat of sanctions where service delivery fails to meet minimum standards. Although this area remains problematic in many developing countries, there are some positive examples where effective sanctions function properly.

In India, the 2002 Right to Education bill guaranteed the provision of education by the state. This formal recognition gives citizens a potent formal mechanism for demanding access to a broadly equitable education. Should someone feel he is receiving a substandard education or being deprived of his right to education all together, there is a legal process for him to demand accountability from the state. With the Right to Education as their support, CSOs campaigning in these cases could call upon judicial review to strengthen their case with government officials. While it is difficult to demonstrate that official sanctions were applied when governments failed to deliver on the Right to Education, it is clear that judiciary intervention on the matter carried sufficient influence to compel government into action in most cases (Mehta, 2008).

In Brazil, the Courts of Accounts represent an effective government mechanism to ensure the accountability of other government branches (horizontal accountability). These Courts have significant legal powers to publish reports of corruption or waste, yield important reputational implications, and help inform citizens to shape their voting patterns in future elections. The effectiveness of these courts is enhanced in the context of political competitiveness, in a way that it can be a direct and indirect accountability mechanism between legislators and the executive branch at the local level (Melo, 2009).

Other political landscapes impose structural constraints that undermine the effectiveness of accountability sanctions. Tanzania offers an interesting case where the willingness of government officials to remain accountable is limited by structural constraints beyond their realm of control. Members of Parliament in Dodoma are well informed and knowledgeable of

the critical transparency issues in the extractive industries, but the dominance of one party government makes it unlikely that any MP would oppose government policy or take a chance on proposing legislation outside of the party programme. The incentives are to remain loyal and perform the duties expected of an MP in terms of rubber stamping legislation and fulfilling basic constituent services (Mejia Acosta, 2009). Further interventions by control and oversight institutions to promote effective government accountability have been trumped because these government offices lack then political or financial independency from the executive to pass a critical judgement on the government.

The Uganda case illustrates the use of informal means to ensure government responsiveness. Many district dialogues included revelations of petty corruption in which the perpetrator was made to reimburse the cost or replace any items stolen or illegally procured. In one case, the district health official was initially reluctant to provide any information to the monitoring committee on funds received and disbursement plans. After repeated attempts, the issue was brought in front of a full meeting between district officials, including the Chief Administrative Officer, and civil society representatives. The health official reacted very strongly, questioning the committee's legitimacy to ask such questions and demand information. His behaviour was publicly condemned by most people present, and after a reprimand from the CAO, he started collaborating with the committee (de Renzio et al., 2006).

In the Philippines, the NGO monitoring public infrastructure projects was able to mobilize sufficient public outcry at the corruption and inefficiency within infrastructure projects that sanctions became inevitable. Government audit teams investigated the initial complaints and filed administrative cases against 11 public works engineers. Although politicians tried to step in and intervene on their behalf, other CSOs supported the cause while the cases were being prosecuted. Eventually, the accused were found guilty and suspended from office for a period ranging from four to nine months without pay (World Bank, 2007).

This section illustrated how the presence of effective enforcement mechanisms is critical to encourage government responsiveness or at least deter inaction vis-à-vis citizens' demands. The existence of effective sanctions comes as an additional component to having clearly defined rules, social demands for government action and willingness of government officials to remain accountable. The next section offers a systematic look at how these four dimensions of democratic accountability interact to promote improved service delivery.

5. Assessing the impact of democratic accountability on service delivery

The question of whether effective democratic accountability mechanisms lead to improved service delivery highlights a relevant discussion between scholarly and policy oriented approaches to the concept of accountability. While most scholarly works have conventionally focused on the factors and constraints leading to improved democratic accountability, development experts are keen to see whether democratic accountability has a positive impact on service delivery. Far from attempting to address the question of whether accountability is a dependent or independent variable, this section proposes a systematic way to evaluate if

accountability mechanisms are associated with better provision of services. Although the evidence and conclusions are preliminary, this systematic review of cases suggests that a) effective accountability tends to be positively associated with service delivery, and b) most experiences tend to focus solely on the formal rules and social demand for accountability but less attention is devoted to the alignment of political incentives and the effective application of sanctions. In the next section, we discuss some challenges of looking at service delivery outcomes, we then compare experiences of democratic accountability and we finally highlight some constraints to service delivery.

a. What is a service delivery outcome?

The cases reviewed in this section illustrate important variations depending on the “service” or “outcome” that is being produced. Some outcomes involve producing a more transparent management of public finances or public works, improving citizens’ ability to influence the decision making process, ensuring an effective distribution of a food subsidy, promoting good governance of the extractives sector, or ensuring the provision of particularistic legislation. Most of the cases reviewed feature the implicit or explicit provision of a concrete good or ad hoc service that is considered important for a particular community (such as Food Subsidies programs or Child Support schemes). Yet, further definition would be needed to specify the type of services provided, if the service aims for universal coverage, value for money, or improved service quality. It is also important to consider that democratic accountability mechanisms should aim to provide long term sustainability in the provision of goods and services that are not solely dependent on the political abilities of social entrepreneurs.

For example, the adoption of poverty reduction strategies is often cited as a concrete policy outcome that can be reached with the contribution of effective democratic accountability mechanisms. The logic is that government officials should be concerned with the adoption of policies that benefit the majority of voters, especially the poor and marginalised. But the linkages that connect the demands of a poor constituent and a career oriented politician are elusive to determine. Research emerging from a Peru case study suggests that elected legislators: a) have a wide range of interpretations and definitions about what constitutes effective poverty reduction strategies (PRS), b) have short term political horizons, that are incompatible with the long term programmatic strategies needed for poverty reduction, and c) they have to face institutional factors constraining legislators’ ability to engage in PRS, including the role of internal party dynamics, constitutional restrictions to service delivery, and the absence of technical staff (Mejia Acosta, 2008). The existence of these factors shapes the nature of the service delivery options that government officials are able to deliver in country specific circumstances.

b. Comparing experiences of democratic accountability

This section offers a systematic review of nearly three dozen cases and a more detailed review of sixteen where there is an explicit or implicit link between accountability and some kind of service provision. The underlying premise is to test if the combination of multiple accountability dimensions is conducive to improved patterns of service delivery. In other words, it does not suffice that there are clear standards and widespread demand for the provision of accountability, but agents need to have the appropriate incentives to be accountable and there needs to be clearly

defined sanctions for government inaction. For each country case, we have scored the presence of these four attributes from 0 (complete absence of the attribute) to 3 (criterion is fully met).

To evaluate the presence of accountability standards for example, we look at attributes such as how the democratic political system works in electoral terms, whether there are explicit provisions that ensure accountability between government officials and citizens, if there is appropriate disclosure of information available to citizens, whether these provisions are enshrined on the constitutional text, and whether these have been legitimized by citizens. To evaluate answerability, we look at how clearly defined are the government official's responsibilities to provide a service, if there is effective demand for the disclosure of government information, if there are organized groups or civil society organizations demanding this information, whether citizens can participate in parliamentary hearings, or access legislative committees, and so on. The responsiveness dimension is evaluated in terms of whether government officials are appointed or elected, whether elected members are selected by party leadership or directly by members of the public, if elected under what electoral formula, how often are their elections, and whether they face term limits. Finally the fourth dimension of enforceability looks at whether there are formal political or administrative sanctions for government inaction, whether control and oversight agencies have the political and financial autonomy to enforce government responsiveness or sanction inaction, and whether the judiciary has effective prerogatives to investigate and punish those found guilty.

[insert Table 4.1 here]

Table 4.1 (see appendix) evaluates and compares the scores obtained by different cases along the four dimensions of democratic accountability. The scores are added for each case in the right hand column and according to each dimension in the bottom row.¹²

The first observable finding is that effective democratic accountability appears to be related to improved service delivery. Indeed, the relatively high scores of 8 to 10 out of 12 possible points, are consistent with the case narratives about improved food distribution systems and right to education in India, as well as participatory budgeting and minimum income in Brazil. In all these cases there are usually well defined standards and rules to guarantee democratic accountability, active engagement of social organizations to demand those rights, and a favourable line up of political incentives and effective sanctions to ensure government responsiveness. At the lower end of the scale, there are cases ranked 4 and lower where there is an absence of accountability provisions, and limited opportunities to demand or incentives to provide effective government accountability. And there is very little scope or strength for enforcement mechanisms to apply effective sanctions. In contrast to accountability experiences such as India or Brazil, these cases feature poor accountability practices in countries ruled by traditional political machineries like Mexico, or Argentina or poorly democratic like Brazil

¹² It would be a fair claim to criticize that the proposed accountability scores are comparing very dissimilar things along different dimensions, and that they are not necessarily additive (for example that a one point increment on standards is not the equivalent of a one point increase in the improvement of sanctions). However, the purpose of this table is to establish *relative* comparisons in multiple cases to verify whether there are some relevant comparisons to make when a similar initiative is applied in two countries or whether two different projects can yield similar results when applied on the same country.

during the military dictatorship. This is not a trivial finding as it highlights the fact that the country's democratic context matters for effective accountability relationships to take place. Put it differently, the table alerts of the need to make a more careful investment for strengthening accountability relationships in countries that lack a strong democratic tradition in the first place.

The second relevant finding of the comparative table, confirms the intuition that most country experiences with democratic accountability tend to focus on the adoption and existence of clear rules of the game and promote widespread social mobilization to hold governments to account. Much less attention is paid to the incentives and resources that government officials actually have respond to those challenges (the responsiveness aspect) and the question of existing credible sanctions to punish government inaction. In other words, the emphasis is placed on the social dimension of accountability relationships but not sufficient attention on the political incentives to be accountable. When comparing the scores, the first two dimensions (standards 30 and responsiveness 28) nearly double the scoring along the last two dimensions (responsiveness 19 and sanctions 15). Furthermore, almost all of the cases with low service delivery scores have no provisions for effective sanctions. This point helps to make the case for bringing back the need to incorporate the political dimension of accountability around service delivery to complement a debate that has traditionally focused on social accountability dynamics.

c. Other constraints to service delivery

Beyond the existence of four relevant dimensions of democratic accountability, it is necessary to highlight and briefly discuss the importance of *structural constraints* that are likely to undermine the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms in the long run. Some of these constraints include broader *institutional* characteristics (such as considerable military traditions weighing over new democracies), the *proliferation* of sector-specific policy actors (including labour unions, business lobbies or external donors) that set boundaries on potential reforms and can limit the capacity of governments to respond, and *sector-specific* rigidities (such as technical challenges for the provision of specific services such as water or drainage). The magnitude of these factors and their relevance over service delivery provision need to be explored in greater detail by the specialized literature.

The recurrent use of informal or traditional practices such as clientelism is also likely to undermine or bias the impact of democratic accountability on service provision. As previously discussed, the provision of discrete and visible goods that can be provided in the short run is likely to be a concrete form through which elected politicians effectively deliver to their constituents *while* maximizing their political fortunes. Conversely, the provision of long term or more diffuse "outcomes" such as health care reforms will present greater challenges and disincentives to provide responsible government services.

Finally, it is necessary to recognize that not all dimensions vary in the same direction and that there are important tradeoffs to be made between them when it comes to providing government services. In some cases, an exclusive focus on "rigid" accountability mechanisms such as the adoption of rules, standards and sanctions, may crowd out the adoption of "soft" mechanisms that focus on answerability and responsiveness. Thus, it is necessary to recognize the

complementarity of approaches and the country specific attributes in order to predict and anticipate the impact of democratic accountability on service delivery outcomes.

6. Summary and implications

This desk review confirms the notion that effective social and political accountability mechanisms are critical factors to improve service delivery and government responsiveness in new democracies. The association between accountability and service provision is complex, sequential and context specific, but the basic premise of the review holds true: government officials that are subject to demands from organized voters and have the legal provisions, political motivations and credible sanctions, are more likely to respond to citizens' demands than those who do not. This section summarizes the main elements of the desk review and discusses the relevance of the findings to inform and shape ongoing efforts of IDEA's Democracy and Development Programme to promote and strengthen democratic accountability for service delivery across the globe.

1. The review makes an important analytical difference to separate the study of democratic accountability as an end in itself and the study of accountability as means to achieving a policy outcome. This distinction is necessary to avoid conflating means with ends at the moment of evaluating effective mechanisms of representation and service provision.

Sections 2 and 3 of this paper were dedicated to exploring the first question, looking at how accountability mechanisms work, what are the predominant approaches to accountability, and what factors are believed to be influential to improve or determine effective democratic accountability. This review argues that mechanisms of social and political accountability are mutually dependent and makes the case for developing a combined approach to exploring democratic accountability that considers the social demand for government action with the formal existence of rules and sanctions to respond to those demands.

- A concrete implication for ongoing work is to take into account and insist on the relevance of fostering both social and political mechanisms to strengthen accountability. All the social activism and mobilization would not leave a long term impact unless there are clearly defined rules, sanctions and political entrepreneurs to convert them into effective government action. Conversely, all the institutional accountability frameworks would be deemed insufficient in the absence of a vibrant demand and continuous pressure from civil society. *Both sides of the coin matter.*
2. This paper disaggregates the notion of democratic accountability into **four analytical dimensions** or components of accountability. Basically, the paper distinguishes the existence of formal rules and their effective sanctioning; it contrasts the social demand for government action from the political motivation to respond. Thus, the four dimensions refer to the existence of standards, the emergence of societal demands for accountability, the government's willingness and ability to be responsive to citizens' demands, and the existence of effective sanctioning mechanisms. The dimensions and

their attributes are fully discussed on section 4, and evaluated in the light of nearly three dozen case studies of accountability interactions around the globe. The analysis of four dimensions highlights the point that the mere existence of rules and procedures is not sufficient to produce effective accountability unless there is a social force or active demand for it; similarly, it helps illustrate that government officials may have significant restrictions to providing government responses depending on the democratic fabric of the country, the institutional configuration of incentives and the credibility of sanctions.

- A concrete implication from this point is to recognize the multiplicity of conditions leading to effective accountability. Therefore future projects should strive to look at the legal, social, institutional and political conditions that enable effective accountability relationships in each country. This recommendation then advocates for *distinctive project interventions* depending on the areas that need more work or investment in each context.
3. The paper explores the impact of democratic accountability on service provision in section 5. It brings back the political dimension of accountability relationships, to advocate for a better understanding of the *political motivations* for the provision of government services and the use of *effective formal sanctions* in case of government inaction. The paper argues that the willingness of government officials to remain accountable to the public does not go through infrequent electoral events only, but there are complex institutional and legal factors that determine and constrain the actions of politicians, even beyond their own policy preferences.

The focus on effective formal sanctions as a defining feature to promote democratic accountability and ensure service delivery is a point that is often dismissed by development experts. Without sanctions, this paper argues, other political dynamics may be described as issues of “answerability”, where it would be ideal that policymakers respond for their actions but nothing would actually happen if they don’t.

- A direct policy implication is the need to understand and promote a clearer alignment between citizens’ demands, political motivations and legal or formal sanctions. The empirical evidence reported in this review shows that the cases that showed poor government performance were also likely to lack credible incentives and effective sanctions for politicians.
4. The paper suggests a positive association between effective accountability and the adequate provision of government services. However, it is necessary to underline that the conclusions and preliminary findings discussed so far, do not take into account the wider range of structural, sector and country specific factors leading to a successful (or failed) provision of government services. The association between accountability and performance does not entail causality, nor do we know all the factors that intervene to produce more responsive governments.

The adoption of the same formal mechanisms in one setting is unlikely to produce the same results in another; each setting will need its own adaptation or variation to establish

its own standards, relationships, and sanctions for effective accountability. For example, social demands on one service sector (drainage) are likely to receive less government response compared to other sectors, regardless of the country. Conversely, accountability dynamics are likely to flourish in countries that have strong democratic traditions regardless of the sector or project activity.

- The direct policy implication is to be mindful of country specific contexts when exploring the question of effective accountability for improved service delivery. A dedicated section discussing sector specific and structural constraints to service delivery is likely to bring the most out of country specific projects.

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Appendix. Making accountability work: a desk review of cases.

Case 1: India - Public Distribution System (PDS), from IDS Bulletin

Overview

The PDS in India illustrates how the appropriate mix of political and societal action can elicit positive outcomes in terms of improved accountability within service delivery sectors. This is not to say that it fundamentally improved service delivery *per se*, but the food distribution system was a crucial entry point for public collective action to successfully provoke political consequences.

Principal Actors

This case revolves around three principal sets of actors: local officials, ‘fair price’ shop owners, and citizen groups. Local officials and shop owners were colluding in Delhi to restrict access to subsidised food, reaping the profits of selling those goods at market prices instead. Citizen groups mobilised using data gleaned from Right to Information requests to demand accountability for this service failure. Municipal and national leaders became involved with the Food Commissioner ultimately stepping in to impose sanctions on several of the worst offenders among shop owners and officials.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability

India is the world’s biggest democracy. Every five years, its citizens are able, through elections, to hold their officials accountable for the actions taken in office. Owing to its federal nature and its implementation of many decentralisation reforms, this democratic process runs deep into the Indian localities. However, in spite of this institutionalised democracy, there is still reason to question whether traditional political accountability functions well in India.

Among the many concerns include complicity between higher and lower levels of government hindering accountability mechanisms; the lack of an effective sanctioning authority outside infrequent elections; and the co-option of elections, while free and fair, by parties and candidates lacking issue-based platforms. As such, democratic politics in India remain quite removed from the concerns of the general population, weakening the potential of political accountability as a potent force in service delivery reform.

Analysis of the PDS bears this out. The PDS is India’s national food security programme, designed to subsidise the cost of food grains and other essential items for poor families. Yet, in spite of its being under government control, elected representatives played no part in administering the programme or distributing the supplies. Rather, it was left to local officials and ‘fair price shops’ to regulate the implementation of the programme. The result was an inefficient, corrupt, and poorly run service that failed to meet the needs of the targeted population.

Mechanisms for Social Accountability

In 2005, the passage of the Right to Information Act (RTI) provided grassroots campaigners with the impetus they needed to stimulate collective action. Using government records obtained through the RTI, social organisations were able to demonstrate that fraud on the part of the shop

owners, enabled by complicit local officials, was undermining the PDS. Using social/public audit mechanisms in which information previously considered secret was read aloud in public assemblies, these campaigners built a social movement.

Connections

In this case, neither political nor societal activities acting in isolation could generate accountability in service delivery. Rather what was needed was a strategic intersection of the two, facilitated by the timely RTI act.

Two factors worked in the favour of the campaigners. First, the food delivery programme was sufficiently important to people's interest that, on this specific issue, citizens from across a broad spectrum were willing to mobilise collectively against corrupt interests. Secondly, the Right to Information Act provided the necessary impetus for these campaigners to expose the malfeasance of the shop owners and local officials. Without this legislation, proof of poor service delivery would have been difficult to come by. Information is power for social accountability, if it used to good effect.

Sanctions

Collective action on the part of citizens yielded both informal and formal accountability outcomes. Through this process of public naming and shaming, some shop owners entered into discussions with the campaigners to work out differences and improve services, but campaigners also met violent resistance from embedded interests within the PDS. Ultimately, the movement gained with ear of the Food Commissioner who initiated a formal review of the PDS across Delhi, resulting in several shop owner and local official suspensions.

Implications/results for service provision

Social accountability in this case cannot be shown to have tangibly improved service delivery significantly. It did however break down corrupt networks that had formed around the service delivery mechanisms, making it more likely for services to improve in the future.

Case 2: Mexico - PROGRESA/Oportunidades, from IDS Bulletin

Overview

The PROGRESA case in Mexico provides evidence that even the best designed systems of political accountability can ultimately be flawed, particularly in the context of urban-rural, centre-periphery divides. Centralised control has its limitations, and elements of societal collective action can be useful in extending accountability into areas and levels of decentralisation where the state has difficulty penetrating.

Principal Actors

The principal actors in the design and delivery of the Oportunidades programme are the Mexican central government, local elites/powerbrokers acting as intermediaries between state and citizen, and local citizen organisations.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability

In reaction to decades of corrupt, single party rule by the PRI, many sectors in Mexico have been designed to operate under strict central control, in an effort to limit opportunities for corruption and clientelism at the local level. Accountability in service delivery programmes, like PROGRESA, follows this structure, and, as a result, the only political representatives that have a hand in the administration of the programme are those elected centrally. The planning and execution of the programme, by design, attempt to bypass officials at other levels of government.

This institutionalised mistrust of local officials both simplified and complicated the route of political accountability for ensuring effective service delivery. While the locus of power was clear, the distance, literally and figuratively, of the central government from many of the programme's beneficiaries meant that political accountability mechanisms were essentially limited to national elections. National-level politicians have broader constituencies, giving preference to higher level issues over local concerns. Moreover, with municipal and regional officials sidelined, unhappy citizens had fewer options available to them for demanding better services.

Mechanisms for Social Accountability

PROGRESA/Oportunidades is a conditional cash transfer programme in which the heads of poor households (usually women) are provided with funds to improve the family's access to education, healthcare, and nutrition. Recipients were targeted based on a mathematical scoring system, again in an attempt to eliminate opportunities for corruption. However, for many years there was no formal system for beneficiaries to articulate demands to the central authority. Not until 2003 was a Citizens Complaint System established to enable citizens to communicate via telephone or letter with the National Coordination office.

This system of direct centre-citizen interaction soon broke down, however, when it became apparent that a large proportion of the intended beneficiaries could not access this complaint system due to a lack of infrastructure in remote rural areas. Central officials responded by removing some of the restrictions that had been imposed at the programme's inception. New intermediaries in the form of local officials and volunteers were introduced to help facilitate accountability through the system.

Unfortunately, these new actors were either ineffective or prone to clientelism. Given the nature of the Oportunidades programme, there were ample opportunities for these intermediaries to extract rents from their positions of authority. They were essentially gatekeepers, providing the approval for the distribution of relatively large sums of money. Holding power over poor families, they could demand concessions, bribes, and work-in-kind in exchange for their allowing the transfers to continue. Otherwise, the poor household would go without.

With the formal accountability mechanisms faltering, other forms of accountability must step in to ensure improvements in service delivery. In the Mexican case, however, collective action proved difficult. Many local social organisations viewed the programme as targeting women primarily and therefore felt it was outside their purview as traditionally male-dominated groups. Moreover, many of the central officials in charge of the Oportunidades programme were themselves drawn from Mexican civil society. Given their presence in government, other elements of civil society didn't feel it necessary or possible to organise collective action against them.

Connections

In this case, the rigid design of the programme compromised one form of accountability for another. In seeking to restrict opportunities for corruption the Mexican government also hindered linkages for feedback and citizen demand that are necessary for successful service delivery. Accountability structures must allow for both individual action and collective action to generate sufficient impetus for change. In this case, the presence of civil society actors within government seemed to undermine the potential for social accountability. Whether the embedded actors were co-opted is unclear, but their presence certainly undercut attempts to mobilise against the weaknesses of the programme.

Sanctions

Essentially, sanctions were non-existent. The policymakers responsible for the Oportunidades programme were too removed from the beneficiaries for there to be a functional accountability relationship. Moreover, the structures created to facilitate this relationship only served to further undermine the possibility of sanctions, with local elites claiming positions as gatekeepers within the programme. The target population possesses little in the way of tools to impose sanctions on the government in this arrangement.

Implications/results for service provision

While the Oportunidades programme has helped many families with its conditional cash transfers, the structural arrangement of the programme allows for localised clientelism and corruption. As a result, some families and regions are being deprived of the rights due to them under the scheme by local powerbrokers. Without the means to hold either the system or the implementers truly accountable, it is unlikely that service delivery will improve.

Case 3: Brazil - Health Sector Reform, from IDS Bulletin

Overview

The case of Brazilian Health Sector Reform in the 1980s and 1990s demonstrates that societal accountability need not come from a confrontationalist approach to political institutions. Rather, collective actors from society can work effectively within the system to generate change and improvements in service delivery. All that is necessary is sufficient political space within the social sector for them to operate without hindrance from the state.

The Brazilian health sector underwent rapid reform in the 1980s and 1990s, leading to free and universal access to healthcare for all Brazilians. Many analyses of this transformation assign credit for the successful transition to the democratisation that swept Brazil in the mid-80s, culminating in the Constitution of 1988. Yet, viewed from a different perspective, the real catalyst for change may have come from another source.

Principal Actors

Key actors in this case include the military dictatorship and its authoritarian penetration of all levels of government and the *Sanitarista* movement that emerged as a collective action among health workers to push for health policy reform from within the existing health structure.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability

Brazil from 1964 to 1984 was ruled by a military dictatorship. As an authoritarian regime, it countenanced little public opinion and sought legitimacy not through free and fair elections but through effective governance. To justify its own excesses and the limitations it placed on civil and political liberties, the military government decided to expand public services, such as health and education. Government officials were tasked with designing and implement a two pronged system, in which collective clinical services were provided publicly and individualised hospital-based services were provided through a private medical sector.

Accountability was therefore quite opaque. The authoritarian government were not amenable to public collective action on service delivery demands, and the private medical sector had little time for the concerns of poorer segments of the population who felt excluded by the system. By embracing a multiplicity of models, however, the Brazilian state had provided a means for collective action within the health sector institutions.

Mechanisms for Social Accountability

The *Sanitaristas*, a group of doctors, academics, and other health professionals, disagreed with the military regime's choice of health care structure. However, lacking a means of political accountability, they formed a movement designed to press for reforms within medical institutions. Exploiting the existence of many health care models and the opportunities afforded them for collective action within the health profession, the *Sanitaristas* were able to mobilise using academic conferences and associations around certain progressive policies.

These progressive policies began to filter into the health care system in 1970s, with the military regime content to claim credit for popular reforms to the system. Ultimately, the *Sanitaristas* were able to use decentralisation as a means of implementing their policies more broadly. By

1981, these local and regional reforms were undertaken at the national level in the wake of severe financial crisis, and in 1988, the *Sanitaria* movement achieved formal recognition of its progressive policies in the Constitution.

The *Sanitarista* values of universalisation, accessibility, decentralisation, comprehensiveness, and community participation became synonymous with effective service delivery and were embedded in the Brazilian democratisation movement under the motto 'Health and Democracy.' Indeed, while significant progress was made under the military regime, true consolidation of the service delivery improvements was effected under democratic leadership. Whether these reforms would have lasted under continued authoritarianism is unclear, making the arrival of democracy an important contributing factor.

Connections

While not a standard example of grassroots collective action, the Brazilian case illustrates the potential for societal accountability when it is exercised by those with sufficient interest in change and sufficient connection to the system of service provision. Shared values for health care brought together a diverse group of professionals under the *Sanitarista* movement, and their political decision to mobilise and operate within the system paid dividends in tangible reform and lasting change. Where political accountability is non-existent and the potential costs for confronting the state are high, collective action that makes use of state institutions for positive effect may be a potent form of societal accountability.

Sanctions

None. Working within the system, sanctions were not really relevant.

Implications/results for service provision

This example of social accountability fundamentally changed the way Brazil's health care system functioned. In a political environment in which civic action and democracy were absent, this movement managed to influence health policy effectively using their particular skill sets and unique access to officials and implementing agents.

Case 4: Brazil- Minimum Income Guarantee, from IDS Bulletin

Overview

The example of the Renda Mínima, or Minimum Income Guarantee, in Brazil in the early 2000's is illustrative of the difficulties social accountability faces in terms of mobilising collective action in the face of an organised and responsive state bureaucracy. In this case, the formal mechanisms, such as the electoral cycle, produced a very responsive government that exerted a monopoly over the delivery of income guarantee grants, purposefully excluding civil society organisations that had previously been involved in the delivery of basic services to the poor. As a result, a diffuse civil society was unable to mobilise in order to exercise accountability from below.

Principal Actors

The case study is based on evidence from the city of Sao Paulo. The principal actors include the elected city administrators on whose urging the Renda Mínima was created; civil society and neighbourhood organisation representing poor communities who have in the past implemented small-scale service delivery projects on behalf of government; and the urban poor for whose benefit the programme was created.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability

The Renda Mínima emerged directly as a result of formal political accountability mechanisms, with an elected Worker's Party city administration first implementing the programme in 2001. Indeed, one can argue that the importance of the electoral cycle played a key role in determining how the programme was established and administered and contributed greatly to the lack of social accountability observed.

Given a four year electoral cycle, the city administrators were under tremendous pressure to demonstrate impact, particularly in poverty alleviation. As a result, the government chose to bypass civil society organisations and organise implementation solely through formal, state channels. This purposefully contradicted previous government service programmes in which these organisations were tasked with implementing small-scale projects.

Instead, the city government sought to strengthen its direct linkages with its citizens, building its own autonomy, and establishing strong citizen-state relations to stand it in good stead for the next elections. This more direct delivery of services was also designed to combat paternalistic and clientelistic networks that were developing as a result of the previous civil society-focused system. In this way, political accountability, far from failing, was actually working very well, but in so doing, it crowded out civic involvement.

The only formal mechanisms for accountability, outside of elections, are administrative reviews that can be triggered by local organisation or politicians if they feel that the programme is failing in some way. Nevertheless, this remains only an *ad hoc* form of accountability, not systematised in a way as to be accessible to all beneficiaries.

Mechanisms for Social Accountability

The design of the Renda Minima programme in Sao Paulo was specifically formulated to exclude participation from civil society organisations. Faced with such an institutional force, these organisations disengaged from the income guarantee programme, providing little resistance to or oversight of government policies. Indeed, the years previous had served to disconnect the organisations operating within the city. Focused on operating their own small projects within their assigned areas or sectors, Sao Paulo's community organisations had never contemplated acting collectively, and this diffusion of interests served to undermine any efforts at rallying around the Renda Minima.

Evidence suggests there is nothing inherently difficult in organising the urban poor around income guarantee programmes. On the contrary, given their very tangible and personal nature, it has been suggested that collective action is easier around such programmes than around sectors such as health or education, which are more collective goods. What has been lacking thus far is time. Perhaps in a few years, the importance and scale of the Renda Minima programme will provide sufficient impetus for the organisations to overcome their inertia and mobilise to exercise social accountability.

Connections

In this case, political accountability and social accountability appear contradictory. The city government has, in an effort to increase and expand the former, crowded out the latter. As such, very little can be done to exercise accountability over the Renda Minima programme outside of the electoral cycle.

There are, however, signs that some linkage between the two may be possible, but it requires strong political leadership. Given the diffuse nature of civil society in Sao Paulo, a political entrepreneur is needed to organise a social movement capable of acting as a counterweight to the state. The potential energy is there within society to exert social accountability, but at present, it needs a push from political actors.

Sanctions

Given the lack of accountability mechanisms, excepting elections, the only real sanction is the removal of a party's government from power through the electoral process. This has happened in the case of Sao Paulo, but in all instances, the Renda Minima programme's implementation structure remained the same, even if the policies guiding it shifted.

Implications/results for service provision

In this case, the strength of political accountability ensured that the delivery of the income guarantee grants remained an important programme across political parties. However, while the government was responsive to the need for a programme, it was less responsive to the beneficiaries in terms of how the programme should be designed and implemented. Rather, it was led in a top-down fashion that often resulted in families and neighbourhood receiving only a fraction or none of their entitlements. With only an *ad hoc* administrative review to ensure continuous accountability, these problems tend to slip through the cracks. This case illustrates the importance social accountability can play in monitoring and fine-tuning policies and services that may have been initiated through political accountability mechanisms.

Case 5: Mexico – Citizen Participation in Reproductive Health, from IDS Bulletin

Overview

Over the past ten years, Mexico's health system has undergone significant reform, particularly in the area of reproductive health. This case study shows how the institutionalised participation of civil society organisations can help improve and expand health service policy and delivery, when coupled with a responsive government. By finding allies within the formal mechanisms created for social accountability, reproductive health organisations were able to advocate for policy change and improve implementation effectiveness.

Principal Actors

Based on the national health system in Mexico, the study focuses on several principal actors—most notably, the Ministries of Health and Education, several government bodies tasked with health policy, and a number of NGOs whose organising interest was sexual and reproductive health. The interaction of these actors forms the basis for the emergence of social accountability.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability

The impetus for the reforms to Mexico's health system came following the 1994 elections. The new government embraced the growing international consensus that the incorporation of NGOs into policy design and implementation would significantly improve health outcomes, especially in sexual and reproductive health where special sensitivities may arise. Future elections served to strengthen the policy of formally including NGOs into reproductive health discussions, however, it is unlikely that reproductive health in and of itself was significant enough an issue to influence the electoral process.

Within the health system, formal political accountability was relatively absent. Within the reproductive arena, NGOs were contracted to carry out community-level health projects, designed to expand service coverage. It was the NGOs, however, that were then accountable to the government, not the other way around. Informally, female politicians made reproductive and maternal health a principal issue in their campaigns and official work, creating relationships and networks with health advocates at the community level to whom they were accountable, but this was largely informal and rare.

Mechanisms for Social Accountability

From 1995 onwards, the Mexican government, as well as many state-level governments, began formally concluding agreements with social organisations to collaborate on the design and implementation of social policy. Chief among these collaborations was reproductive health policy, in which NGOs and the government would work together to improve services and breadth of coverage.

Collaboration took one of four forms: 1) NGOs providing training or expertise to existing or proposed government programmes 2) Government implementing formal services in sectors or areas where NGOs have historically filled the void 3) joint work through formal agreement or 4) applying political pressure to support change. Numerous consortia and collaborative efforts were created involving both public and NGO actors. While many remained short term, due to the

nature of Mexican politics, some relationships became institutionalised to promote continuity in policy-making across political administrations.

Social accountability in the Mexican reproductive system took the form of bolstering failings in the public provision of services. Whether it be due to a lack of policy prescription or poor implementation on the part of the state, the NGOs stepped in to fill in the gaps, at the same time using their actions to motivate advocacy for greater government service provision. As a result of the strong relationships between public institutions and NGOs, many of the services provided and advocated by the NGOs have since come under government remit, representing a successful use of social accountability for positive policy change.

Connections

Two key connections were critical to the success of social accountability in this case. First, the open inclusion of the NGOs in the policy making and implementing process made the prospect of impact more realistic. Civil society had the ear of important government actors and could advocate forcefully for improvements in services that had historically been neglected. Second, this relationship was further strengthened by the strong support of key decision-makers within government and in the international community. Pressure was brought to bear on the state both internally and externally to listen to NGOs and implement their recommendations as often as possible. In this way, political accountability fed into a successful partnership with social accountability mechanisms.

Sanctions

Electoral sanctions for governments. Reputational and public pressure through social accountability mechanisms. Nothing particularly noteworthy.

Implications/results for service provision

Successful social accountability in this case arose from formally constituted spaces for interaction and collaboration between government and civil society actors on a specific issue of reproductive health. This complementary approach brings many positive characteristics to the table in that the state remains the principal source of services and legitimacy by inviting participation from a position of strength, rather than weakness. Civil society plays a role in holding the state accountable but does so not in a combative manner but rather as a partner or consulting advocate. In this way, the state is not threatened by social accountability mechanisms bypassing formal political accountability mechanisms. Instead, state legitimacy and credibility is strengthened by its incorporation of civil society as working partner.

Case 6: Delhi – Education Schemes, from IDS Bulletin

Overview

This case study, based on evidence from three education schemes in Delhi over the past 5-7 years, argues that a collaborative approach to social accountability yields the best outcomes in terms of service delivery performance and government accountability both in the short term and the long term. Contrary to those civil society activists that contend that social accountability must present a confrontational face to government to ensure autonomy and prevent cooptation, this study suggests that policy embeddedness may be the best way for civil society to effect change in government actions. By being involved in all aspects, CSOs can really shape service delivery design and implementation.

Principal Actors

The principal actors in this case study are the myriad government agencies and ministries responsible for providing education in Delhi and the CSOs that have emerged as collaborators and counterweights to these bureaucratic bodies. Also featuring in supporting roles are the Union government of India and the Supreme Court whose actions determine the political and legal environment in which the interaction between the principal actors takes place.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability

India is a functioning democracy, and its mechanisms for political accountability both help and hinder efforts to improve education outcomes in the city of Delhi. Firstly, education is guaranteed by the state, enshrined in 2002 as the Right to Education bill. This formal recognition gives citizens a potent formal mechanism for demanding access to a broadly equitable education. Should someone feel he is receiving a substandard education or being deprived of his right to education all together, there is a legal process for him to demand accountability from the state.

On the other hand, however, enshrining education as a human right complicates severely the implementation of education policy in the federal structure of India. Given its importance, all levels of government from the central, to the state, to the municipal have a responsibility in formulating and implementing policies. This overlap resulting from a desire to respond to political accountability demands means that civil society has a myriad of actors to deal with when seeking entry points for social accountability.

Mechanisms for Social Accountability

Using education as their motivating interest, several CSOs became involved in exercising social accountability throughout the course of the study. In one instance, an organisation partnered with government to design and implement an inclusive education programme that targeted previously neglected communities such as street children. This involvement ensured that the state was meeting its obligation to provide education to all children, not just those with engaged parents.

CSOs also became engaged in textbook development when parents grew concerned that the curriculum proposed in Delhi schools was overly religious and lacking in secular content. By pursuing a collaborative approach, the CSOs built relationships with government officials and helped ease tensions that had emerged following the decision to revise the school curriculum mid-year.

Finally, CSOs were also involved in advocating the provision of midday meals at schools to promote attendance from poorer communities. Once government had acquiesced the CSOs remained a key player in the implementation and monitoring of the programme, particularly in areas prone to corruption or lacking regular parental involvement.

Connections

A key connection that emerged in these cases was the way social accountability advocates successfully used the judicial system to press their demands against state actors. While this mechanism may not be available in societies where the legal system is less well developed and institutionalised than India, where formal legal channels exist they seem effective in forcing the hand of the state in terms of delivering on promised services. In these cases, the potent combination of a Right to Education law, a robust judicial system, and civil society not afraid to use it resulted in positive outcomes for service delivery performance.

Sanctions

With the Right to Education as their support, CSOs campaigning in these cases could call upon judicial review to strengthen their case with government officials. While it is unclear what the official sanctions were for the government failing to deliver on the Right to Education, it is clear that judicial decisions did carry sufficient to compel government into action in most cases. Moreover, having such a tangible measurement for performance, or lack thereof, would no doubt influence voting patterns in upcoming elections, should officials be shown to be in violation of the Right to Education bill or a judicial recommendation.

Implications/results for service provision

This case may prove to be too India specific to be generalisable. However, it is useful to note the suggestion of policy embeddedness on the part of CSOs as an effective means of influencing service delivery reform. And if a sufficiently developed legal-judicial system exists, CSOs should make use of it to connect formal accountability mechanisms with their more informal efforts at advocacy and performance monitoring.

Case 7: South Africa – Child Support Grant (IBP/IDS)

Overview

South Africa's Child Support Grant is a monetary support program, and at its inception each recipient was granted 100 Rand monthly. It was to be limited to children under seven years of age, and targeted the poorest 30 percent of children. Evidence suggested that a lack of administrative capacity on the part of local governments hindered access to the program, having particularly discriminatory effects in rural and undeveloped communities and that increases in state revenue had not been sufficiently allocated to an essential social programme.

This case illustrates the power of information united with collective action, as two civil society groups with differing skill sets successfully collaborate to force policy change. Here, because of the specific nature of the issue, the normal channels of political accountability proved to be incapable of producing a meaningful response. What was needed was social mobilisation, led by two well-organised NGOs, to spur national debate and compel the state to take action.

Principal Actors

The principal actors here include the Ministry of Social Development in South Africa, local administrators, and two NGOs—Idasa and ACCESS. Dissatisfied with the amount and distribution of resources assigned the Child Support Grant, the two NGOs formed a coalition to demand improvements to the social security programme, bypassing the ineffective local officials whose task it was to implement the programme, and going straight to the Ministry responsible for setting the budget.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability

Since 1994, South Africa has been a democracy, meaning that citizens have the ability to hold their government accountable through the ballot box every five years. In the case of the Child Support Grant, however, the target population do not possess the right to vote and being from poor families lack the means and opportunity of mobilising against the state or having their voices heard through political channels. Moreover, the structure of the Child Support Grant was such that, while local elected officials were charged with implementing the scheme, the overall budget and eligibility guidelines were set at the national level, further stretching the feasibility of strong state-citizen accountability.

Mechanisms for Social Accountability

In 2001, Idasa, a well-regarded NGO, began to analyse the budgets and programme documents of the Child Support Grant as part of its Children's Budget Unit (CBU). Finding that poor capacity at the local level and underfunding at the national level were hindering the effectiveness and scope of the programme, they began advocating for improvements to the scheme. Following long established political advocacy techniques, the CBU tried to promulgate its findings among politicians and media outlets, but in spite of these successful forays, policy change was slow.

The next year, Idasa teamed with an advocacy and networking group dedicated principally to children's causes to ramp up the campaign. The mobilisation worked. Thanks to the involvement of ACCESS, the 2003/4 budget incorporated many of the key recommendations advocated by

Idasa's report. Social collective action through civil society organisations proved the most effective means of inducing a desired response from government.

Connections

Here the political accountability mechanisms were too distant or too ineffective to elicit the kind of change needed. The constituency itself was too weak to demand accountability and needed outside intervention in the form of well-organised NGOs. Recognising the structural reality of the programme, these campaigners bypassed local government, where some of the inherent problems lay, and focused their attention at the national level, seeking to resolve the issues at their source.

Political accountability can be of limited use to disenfranchised or marginalised populations. Social accountability may be their only means of making their voices heard. Sometimes this means working through political accountability mechanisms to expose problems and demand change. Other times, like in this case, mobilisation must bypass immediate political mechanisms and reach up to the bureaucracy to achieve success.

Sanctions

Implications/results for service provision

This case is rare in that it has tangible results. The advocacy of Idasa and ACCESS resulted in a change of policy, with the Ministry agreeing to increase budgets and expand eligibility to 14 years old from 7 years old. On paper, this is a huge success. However, since implementation still lies at the local level, there may still require further action to ensure that these new funds and guidelines are put into practice honestly and effectively.

Case 8: Uganda – UDN Community Monitoring Committees (IBP/IDS)

Overview

Budget monitoring is a relatively new phenomenon for civil society groups in the developing world. Many organisations, however, are coming to the realisation that following the money is the best way to ensure effective service delivery, particularly in cases where lines of formal accountability are convoluted or non-existent. In Uganda, the Uganda Debt Network (UDN) did just this, mobilising citizens and providing them with information and training necessary to hold their representatives to account. As a result, corruption in procurement in the health sector was exposed and, in many cases, resolved to the benefit of the affected communities.

Principal Actors

In Uganda, social services are highly decentralised with most of the responsibility falling on local governments to implement state policy. The national government provides funds on a regular basis, and the decentralised districts do the work. As such, in this case, UDN focused principally on local governments and administrators at health and education sites. Some political advocacy was undertaken at the national level, but the bulk of the work was accomplished locally.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability

Uganda, while ostensibly a democracy, has been a “no-party” democracy for some time. This moniker, a holdover from President Museveni’s rise to power, belies what is essentially a one-party state, dominated by the national executive. While responsibility for service delivery has been decentralised in accordance with international donor dictums, the money and the power reside with the President.

Within the budget process, Uganda does allow for a not insignificant amount of involvement on the part of NGOs and citizens in the form of consultative processes. The meetings, however, are generally mandated by external donors and often have little real power to influence decisions on the budget. Local government is designed to be the citizen’s link with the state, collecting taxes and providing services, but many are captured by local elites or woefully underfunded and understaffed, making the prospect of political accountability unlikely.

Mechanisms for Social Accountability

Beginning initially as a debt relief advocacy organisation, the Uganda Debt Network quickly recognised the value in analysing and monitoring the budget for social service delivery. After some abortive attempts at top-down mobilisation, UDN shifted the monitoring focus from a group of individuals at district level to a more elaborate Community-Based Monitoring and Evaluation System (CBMES), which involved community-based monitors from village communities. The idea of delegating monitoring responsibility to community-based individuals, and promoting local dialogue around problems that could be solved locally, seemed to better fit local circumstances.

Reports from the districts showed that there was flouting of tendering procedures, shoddy construction work and, in some cases, outright corruption. Monitors often reported on cases of poorly constructed medical and education infrastructure, absence of drugs from health units,

arrogance of medical staff and ill-treatment of service users, teacher absenteeism and irregular inspections in schools, and so on. The culmination of this process were the district dialogues, happening on average once a year, during which UDN monitors presented their results to district authorities, including senior civil servants and local politicians, and demanding concrete responses.

Connections

UDN's approach was in many ways non-confrontational vis-à-vis government, allowing it to gain respect from and access to government officials and to avoid potential strong government reactions to its campaigns and accusations. Local-level monitoring is more about checking the quality of implementation of government contracts, rather than effectively monitoring the whole process of budget execution and reporting.

While this attempt to reconcile social accountability with political actors may work in the short term, such an approach seems to limit the kind of activities that UDN undertakes, and as a consequence also limit its overall impact. Given the absence of real political accountability in Uganda, these mechanisms for social accountability are a necessary substitute to allow citizens to voice concerns over the design and delivery of social services in their communities. While some collaboration and coordination between political and social actors is of course to be desired, letting political actors dictate too much the terms of social accountability ultimately may render the process futile.

Sanctions

This case presented a rare example of social accountability actually imposing sanctions upon those implicated in corruption or malfeasance. Many district dialogues included revelations of petty corruption in which the perpetrator was made to reimburse the cost or replace any items stolen or illegally procured.

In one case, the district health official was initially very reluctant to provide any information to the monitoring committee on funds received and disbursement plans. After repeated attempts, the issue was brought in front of a full meeting between district officials, including the Chief Administrative Officer, and civil society representatives. The health official reacted very strongly, questioning the committee's legitimacy to ask such questions and demand information. His behavior was publicly condemned by most people present, and after a reprimand from the CAO, he started collaborating with the committee.

Implications/results for service provision

At the local level, the community monitoring committees were very successful in highlighting petty corruption within the health and education sectors. Particularly in the realm of procurement, they exposed poor quality materials and corrupt procurement practices that had undermined the quality of service infrastructure in a number of communities.

These community committees, however, have limitations. When faced with the prospect of taking on serious administrative corruption, many monitors backed down, fearing that forcing their hand may undercut the successes they had made thus far. More work is needed to build sufficient impetus for change at official levels.

Case 9: Philippines – Citizen Monitoring of Infrastructure Projects (World Bank)

Overview

Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG) was founded in February 1986 with the objective of monitoring public spending and raising political awareness in local communities. The group rallied around the issue of roads in Abra, a neglected and isolated region. The impetus for CCAGG's monitoring work came from a news article that listed 20 completed public infrastructure projects in the region. CCAGG decided to verify the information, and in the process exposed discrepancies and anomalies in the government's reports. CCAGG's report eventually led to the suspension of 11 government engineers.

Principal Actors

This case focuses on the efforts of the CCAGG and their dealings with various government agencies and contractors in the monitoring of public infrastructure projects. Local government officials play a big role owing to their responsibility for the contracting and implementation of these projects. The evolution of the relations between civil society and local government in this case are instructive.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability

The Philippines is a highly corrupt country, with graft and clientelism institutionalised within the system after years of state neglect. At the best of times, political accountability is limited to the elections that take place every 3-6 years, but within the Abra region, these mechanisms were extremely weak. Local officials were isolated from the central government and held significant sway over local politics, including the public budgets. With corruption so endemic, political accountability proved not to be a viable option for pursuing improvements in infrastructure projects.

Mechanisms for Social Accountability

CCAGG conducted its first expenditure monitoring exercise in 1987. The monitoring work unearthed anomalies such as "ghost" projects and incomplete works. The government acted on CCAGG's findings and conducted an investigation. The public works officials accused of corruption were found guilty and suspended from office for four to nine months without pay.

All CCAGG activities are participatory in nature. The infrastructure monitoring initiative is extremely inclusive, as monitoring teams are composed of the beneficiaries of the projects being investigated. The social validation part of the audit provides a venue for community members from poor and marginalized families, many of them women, to participate. CCAGG also ensures sustained community participation by organizing people into village monitoring and evaluation teams. CCAGG provides regular training to these groups, and communication and interaction between them and CCAGG is ongoing to ensure sustained participation.

Connections

In the beginning, the activities of CCAGG spawned negative reactions from government agencies and some members of the private sector. One member was killed at the height of its monitoring activity. CCAGG members received anonymous threatening calls and faced a hostile reception during field visits. Ultimately, however, resistance calmed.

By 2000, CCAGG had been selected as the CSO partner organization for the Enhancing the Public Accountability Program of the Philippine Commission on Audit (COA) through Participatory Audits with CSOs Project, which was supported by the UNDP. The project piloted the involvement of CSOs in an attempt to address the increasing demand for transparency and accountability through greater citizen participation in auditing government services. The success of the project challenged the mind-set of government officials by demonstrating that citizen groups have the technical skills, could be unbiased, and could work in partnership with the government.

Sanctions

CCAGG were able to mobilize sufficient public outcry at the corruption and inefficiency within infrastructure projects that sanctions became inevitable. Government audit teams investigated CCAGG's initial complaints and filed administrative cases against 11 public works engineers. Although politicians tried to step in and intervene on their behalf, other CSOs supported the cause while the cases were being prosecuted. Eventually, the accused were found guilty and suspended from office for a period ranging from four to nine months without pay.

Another example concerns a bridge that was completed in 1996 at a cost of P8.26 million. It was hastily built and in the end was never used because of errors in the engineering design. To add fuel to the controversy, a flash flood destroyed the bridge in 1997, unleashing a public outcry. CCAGG pushed for government agencies to investigate the matter, but CCAGG was not satisfied with the response of the Department of Public Works and Highways. As a result, the COA recommended the prosecution of certain Department of Public Works and Highways personnel.

Implications

A visible impact of CCAGG's work is greater accessibility to remote areas as a result of roads, bridges, and so on. Children are now able to go home every day after school instead of once a week. CCAGG's vigilance has also saved scarce government resources from graft and corruption. Early detection of technical flaws in projects has resulted in collaborative correction of the projects, thereby saving millions of pesos. "Ghost" projects no longer exist in Abra province.

Case 10: Brazil – Participatory Budgeting and Democratic Reform (Melo)

Overview: This case argues that participatory budgeting is, in fact, a flawed means of reforming democratic institutions, as it is predicated on the notion that local legislatures are a problem to be bypassed rather than collaborated with or strengthened. By contrast, it notes that Courts of Accounts, set up to monitor budget expenditure to ensure that it is spent according to the approved budget, can positively impact the democratic accountability system, providing citizens with necessary information to make informed decisions at election time and take informed action in the interim.

Actors: Mayors, local councils, citizens, and Courts of Account.

Social Accountability Mechanisms: Participatory budgeting, it is argued, often arises in situations of divided government at the local level. Local councils, viewed as illegitimate, are perceived as impeding development through a mixture of corruption and obstinacy. Reform-minded mayors implement participatory budgeting as a means of bypassing the legislature by assembling a group of like-minded delegates who represent citizen interests. This often leads to conflict between the councillors and the delegates and can result in simply a transition of power from one set of elites to another, with citizens having actually little say in the process.

Political Accountability Mechanisms: Courts of Accounts, by contrast, have been set up to monitor the implementation of the budget. While originally an ancillary agency of the legislature, they have developed in some cases into quasi-judicial bodies with power to investigate and report on claims of irregularities in public expenditure. While their powers vary according to the political context, in some states where political competitiveness is high, these Courts of Accounts have proven effective sanctioning agents.

Sanctions: Participatory budgeting is a low sanction mechanism for accountability. Citizen delegates are ostensibly involved in the planning of public expenditure and therefore citizens lose some of their prerogative for launching complaints against policies they can be claimed to have help implement. Moreover, in spite of the appearance of greater participation, PB can sometimes result in a less accountable executive, as it manipulates PB to override a reluctant legislature that, for all its fault, remains democratically elected.

Courts of Accounts represent a more typical formal accountability mechanism, often referred to as horizontal accountability. Nevertheless, it has significant power to publish reports of corruption or waste, yielding reputational accountability outcomes, and it can serve to inform citizens to shape their voting patterns in future elections. It is therefore both a direct and indirect accountability mechanism, that given sufficient political competitiveness, can be a useful tool in promoting greater democratic accountability from legislators and the executive branch at the local level.

Case 11: Argentina – Participatory Budgeting in Buenos Aires (Peruzzotti)

Overview: Participatory budgeting in Buenos Aires arose neither from public demand nor from political reform initiative, but rather was implemented in desperation by a government severely lacking legitimacy. It lacked support within civil society and from the political elite. As a result, it fizzled out producing neither greater civic engagement nor improved accountability. The case illustrates that created social accountability mechanisms require a certain amount for citizen support prior to implementation; the mere act of creating participatory spaces does not mean that citizens and the state will make effective use of them.

Actors: Mayor, local councils, citizens.

Accountability Mechanisms: In the wake of the Argentinian financial crisis, the chief of government of Buenos Aires found himself in a difficult position. His political coalition had collapsed around him from the national level to the municipalities. He was faced with protests and mass citizen mobilisation. One of his main political opponents agreed to strike a deal with him if he instituted participatory budgeting as a means of channelling public dissent. Yet, neither civil society itself nor the political elite viewed PB as a viable option given the circumstances. Nevertheless, the system was set up with special attention paid to ensure that loyal supporters were placed at critical positions within the structure. As a result, implementation varied widely, with some sections of the city choosing open participatory processes and others using a more restrictive process of participation. Ultimately, political machinations overtook the programme, with turnover of leadership, PB in Buenos Aires fizzled out.

Sanctions: Participatory budgeting in Buenos Aires, in addition to its shambolic structure and implementation, was also designed without the teeth of its Brazilian counterpart. The process produced merely recommendations for public expenditure priorities, with no money attached and no quantifiable targets or measures against which progress could be assessed. The whole programme was a political manoeuvre that rang hollow from the start and failed to elicit either greater civic involvement or better accountability.

Case 12: Mexico – Participatory Innovation around Budgeting (Selee)

Overview: Co-opted under the one-party system, the term “participation” is not universally lauded in Mexican politics. Too often it means a brief consultation to legitimise a decision already taken by the government. Nevertheless, some participatory democratic innovations are reaching Mexico from other parts of Latin America. The innovations, however, may not be sustainable, as structural and institutional impediments are preventing participatory practices from evolving beyond basic levels. Participatory innovations are empowering citizens, not by bypassing political parties, but by forcing parties to compete for public support.

Actors: Municipal governments, citizens

Accountability Mechanisms: Many instances of participatory budgeting are designed as a reaction to flaws in existing democratic institutions. By bypassing many intermediary institutions, the idea is to directly link citizens with their politicians to both simplify and strengthen accountability. Results, however, have been mixed.

In Mexico, the nature of politics appears to be working against these new forms of accountability. Political parties in Mexico view participatory mechanisms as a means of building support among citizens and organisations. Once they develop their support bases, however, they lose interest in participatory processes. Moreover, electoral rules reduce political competition within constituencies, giving extraordinary power to the winning party regardless of the margin of victory. As a result, the incentives for negotiating policies with opposition or citizen leaders are drastically reduced once a politician is in power.

These findings suggest that in Mexico’s highly party-centric political system, participatory innovations that include, rather than bypass, party-affiliated groups may be more sustainable and effective than those which seek to incorporate individual citizens only. Rather than transforming Mexican politics through participation, it may be more pragmatic to use political parties as a means of making governance more transparent, open, and accessible.

Sanctions: The case of Mexico focuses on a very narrow form of municipal participatory planning where citizens were involved in the planning of infrastructure expenditure. As such, it makes little claim to elucidating sanctions. However, in this case, the evidence suggests that these participatory mechanisms did shift relationships within politics, sometimes reduces the clientelistic policies that pervade the Mexican system. In this way, it created more positive accountability relationships that could form the foundation of tangible sanction enforcing mechanisms in the future.

Case 13: India – Incentives for Legislators (Keefer)

Overview: This review of cases suggests that voter attachment to parties disrupts political incentives to provide constituent service. In constituencies where voters are strongly attached to a political party, for whatever reason, the legislator in that constituency is unlikely to take an active role in providing services. He/she has no incentive to do so because their re-election or not will be based upon party identification not particular services rendered. By contrast, in weak affinity constituencies, personal politics matters, meaning that legislators have a high incentive to improve voters' opinion of their personal activities, like constituent services.

Actors: Legislators, political parties, and citizens

Accountability Mechanisms: Legislators are often considered an essential link in the chain of democratic accountability. Directly elected by voters, they serve a dual role of both holding the executive to account in lines with the interests of their constituencies and being accountable themselves to the citizens they serve, ensuring that they effectively represent the wishes of their voters. Yet, one of the problems of electoral accountability is the lag between elections. Understanding why legislators take certain actions while not actively seeking re-election is a way of analysing the strengths and weaknesses of a particular accountability system.

In this case, the evidence shows that legislators are more likely to “pass on the pork”, i.e. provide constituent services in conditions of weak voter affinity for political parties. Voters who are more likely to select their candidate based on specific issues or specific perceptions of that candidate are a prime target for “pork.” As such, legislators in these districts will be active in providing services that they know may swing the election in their favour. By contrast, legislators in party-dominated constituencies recognise that their individual popularity has little impact on possible re-election. Voters choose candidates based solely on party affiliation, and there is therefore no incentive to provide services.

Sanctions: For legislators in party-dominated constituencies, democratic accountability does not occur through the ballot box. Rather it runs through their particular political party, which controls who stands in the election. While this is not direct vertical accountability, parties may exercise some kind of discretion in ensuring that their candidates meet minimal criteria of competence and honesty. But then again, they may not. In constituencies with weak party affiliation, personalised democracy thrives. Voters may base their decisions on the delivery or non-delivery of particular services. While this may be good in certain contexts, i.e. delivering development etc., it is unclear whether in these districts, voters are more interested in private goods than public goods. In this case, delivering the pork may only exacerbate corruption and provide no improvement in accountability.

Case 14: Ecuador, Paraguay – Partisan Foundations (Mejia Acosta)

Overview: Reviewing evidence from Ecuador and Paraguay, this study counters the conventional wisdom in comparative politics which sees national electoral rules as shaping legislator incentives. Rather it asserts that organizational control of the nomination process within political parties may be the key determinant of legislative incentives to pursue particularistic policies. Open-list electoral systems may not encourage credit-claiming strategies when party leaders filter access to the lists, and closed-list systems may encourage particularism when party leaders face competitive primaries to determine the composition of party ballots.

Actors: Legislators and political parties

Accountability Mechanisms: Why would legislators choose to pursue legislation that is both distributive in nature and narrow in scope? This evidence suggests that incentives to pursue particularistic legislation originate not only in national electoral laws, but also in the specific procedures used by political parties to nominate candidates. Even though electoral laws may discourage intra-party competition, individual party organizations may still structure the nomination process in different ways. Competitive primaries may encourage leaders of different party factions to pursue particularistic benefits for their strongholds, while candidate selection controlled by few national party leaders may reduce those incentives. This information has implications for democratic accountability in that certain political conditions and, particularly, political party rules will be more or less conducive to facilitating accountability between voters and legislators. Regardless of citizen demand, if party structures do not provide incentives for legislators to react with legislation or constituent services, it is unlikely that they will be forthcoming.

Sanctions: This case focuses on intra-party regulations and national electoral laws to determine where the incentive for particularistic legislation is more likely to arise. As such, it includes only a small element of sanctioning, namely sanctions that may exist within parties or through electoral law. As always, the potential sanction of failing to be re-elected exists, but in this case, we're looking at the reasons why a politician may appear or not appear on the ballot at all.

Case 15: Ghana, Tanzania – RWI MP Evaluation (Mejia Acosta)

Overview: While one of the underlying principles of democratic accountability is that parliaments play a central role to improve the governance and transparency, evidence from the extractive industries sector in Ghana and Tanzania reveals that in reality their role is often constrained by executive power, political conditions, and party considerations. Legislators often face a dilemma in determining who they will hold to account and to whom they will ultimately be accountable.

Actors: Legislators, political parties, media, and CSOs

Accountability Mechanisms: In principle, legislators are involved in accountability through the representation of diverse political interests during the policy formulation process; members of parliament can also amend pieces of legislation to regulate extraction contracts or change the allocation of revenues, and they can oversee the transparent execution and implementation of government policies. In practice, the role of parliaments can be constrained when executives centralize policymaking prerogatives to initiate, contract and amend relevant legislation; politically, parliaments can also have a limited influence in policymaking if the government controls a dominant party majority and the opposition lacks the necessary votes to perform an effective oversight role.

Individual MPs can face a representation dilemma, as they are in principle responsive to the needs of the constituents who elected them, but are also accountable to the leadership of the party that sponsored them, and potentially responsive to the influence of interest and business groups that may have contributed in their campaigns. Clearly, this “competing principals” dilemma may affect the MP’s willingness to effectively advocate for improved governance if for example, MPs have conflicting interests as to who will they predominantly represent. A more competitive political setting, with multi-party politics, offers greater opportunities for different parties to impose checks and balances on government initiatives, especially if legislative activism of individual MPs may in fact contribute to furthering the political careers of individual MPs.

Sanctions: Sanctions in these cases can vary. In Tanzania, while the MPs are well informed and capable of playing an accountability role, the dominance of one political party makes it unlikely that any MP would oppose government policy or take a chance on proposing legislation outside of the party programme. The incentives are to remain loyal and perform the duties expected of an MP in terms of rubber stamping legislation and fulfilling basic constituent services. Sanctions in this case are almost non-existent. In Ghana, by contrast, the plurality of the system enables MPs, though marginally less informed than their Tanzanian colleagues, to play a larger role in accountability. Here Ghanaian MPs can make a name for themselves by championing causes or delivering particularistic development to their constituency. As such, MPs in this system are more likely to push for sanctions when government fails in its promises or performs poorly.

Case 16: Peru – Pro-poor Legislators (Mejia Acosta)

Overview: In Peru, the legislative branch has traditionally played a marginal role in the design, approval and implementation of policies to reduce poverty and socio economic inequalities. The weak policymaking ability of Congress is partly explained by a persistent pattern of executive predominance, widespread decentralization and erosion of political parties. The recent resource boom has served only to further concentrate decision making power away from Congress. This study finds that even when legislators are motivated by poverty reduction goals, they lack the access to resources to fund long term investment projects in their districts. Even if legislators enjoy constitutional prerogatives to do casework, they lack the professional expertise and job security to engage in long term technical planning. Pulled by divergent interests, pro-poor policies, and incentives, pro-poor activity on the part of legislators in Peru is not as easy as it initially sounds.

Actors: Legislators and political parties

Accountability Mechanisms: Legislators are the people's representatives in government, and as such, are expected to deliver for their constituents, especially when those constituents lack other means of expressing opinions such as the poor or marginalised. Stating as much, however, is easier than putting this into practice. Findings from research in Peru suggest that: a) legislators have a wide range of interpretations and definitions about what constitutes effective poverty reduction strategies, b) for the most part legislators acknowledge that long term programmatic strategies for poverty reduction are not always compatible with the short term and concrete demands from their electorate (and a smaller number of legislators provided examples on how to reconcile both goals), c) there are multiple factors constraining legislators' ability to engage in PRS, including the role of internal party dynamics, constitutional restrictions to service delivery, and the absence of technical staff, and d) efforts led by international cooperation agencies have contributed to improving legislators' ability to design PRS, disseminate initiatives, and capacitate beneficiaries, but interviewees believe there is room for greater involvement to strengthen the technical capacity of legislative committees.

As such, the direct link between legislator and poor constituent is nowhere near as clear as supposed. Rather, MPs face significant institutional and structural obstacles to introducing pro-poor legislation and fulfilling their accountability mandate. Democratic accountability therefore must make allowances for country-specific contexts that may inhibit formal mechanisms from operating effectively and delve deeper into the incentives and informal rules that govern legislative politics and policy formulation.

Sanctions: No real discussion of sanction per se. Again, the message is that structures, incentives, etc from within political parties and within the political system can be more influential on MP behaviour than the formal vertical accountability relationship with voters. This undermines the power of election sanctions to some extent, but raises the possibility for improved sanctioning through horizontal mechanisms.

Case 17: Senegal – HIV/AIDS Resources (HIV/AIDS Alliance)

Overview

Concerned with the manner in which HIV/AIDS funding and projects were being managed, civil society groups in Senegal collaborated together to produce highlighting perceived deficiencies and making recommendations for improvements. Backed by international donor support, these groups were able to force changes on the government to improve transparency and to create more spaces for civil society to engage on HIV/AIDS policy.

Principal Actors

This case follows three principal actors: the government of Senegal, specifically the National AIDS Council, a local NGO network called Observatoire, and external donors, the Global Fund and the World Bank.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability

The specific nature of the issue and the actors involved makes political accountability mechanisms difficult to identify. Clearly, the National AIDS Council is a government agency and therefore citizens in Senegal do have the ability to influence its policies through elections, but many of the complaints targeted by Observatoire related to the functioning of the agency, not the policies it implemented. Political mechanisms would be hard pressed to touch upon such technical issues.

Mechanisms for Social Accountability

Observatoire was formed as a network of 5 NGOs engaged in HIV/AIDS advocacy work in Senegal. The impetus behind the organisation was the recognition that the government was not managing its aid resources effectively for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. As a result, suspicions arose that the disease was more widespread than government figures suggested. Unable to mount a sufficiently influential campaign separately, the 5 NGOs collaborated to produce a report on HIV/AIDS in Senegal.

The results of this report were wide promulgated, focusing significantly on donor relations and the lack of civil society engagement on HIV/AIDS policy. This strategy brought the Global Fund on board, and with their support, pressure was laid on the Senegalese government to adopt many of the recommendations put forward in the report. Observatoire and other civil society groups are now more engaged in the monitoring of projects and funds to ensure transparency and effective delivery of services.

Connections

Observatoire was founded with an ethos of collaboration with government, not competition. It maintained this stance even in light of its findings on the decline in HIV/AIDS performance in Senegal. Couching its argument in terms of securing more funds for government programmes, Observatoire successfully positioned itself as a friend to government, sidestepping many of the issues that social accountability movements face in other settings.

Given Senegal's dependence on international aid, the appeal to external donors for support is instructive. Recognising that the government would be held accountable by the Global Fund,

Observatoire was able to leverage this relationship to claim some residual accountability for civil society from the state. With the absence of political accountability to counterbalance social demands, this case illustrates how looking externally may be a viable option in some countries.

Sanctions

Failure to comply on the part of the government may have resulted in the suspension of Global Fund grants and curtailment of HIV/AIDS funding more generally.

Implications

Independent evaluations have confirmed that the implementation of the Observatoire recommendations has improved service delivery. Access to HIV testing and treatment has increased and projects are reaching a larger base of the population, including marginalised and rural groups that had previously been neglected.

By working within the system, Observatoire did not duplicate state service provision or complicate accountability relationships by undermining the principal role of the state in negotiating with international donors. Rather it helped to improve existing services and as a result likely increased the legitimacy of the state with its citizens by enabling it to provide quality HIV/AIDS services to a larger percentage of the affected population.

Case 18: Bangladesh – ‘Rude Accountability’ (IDS)

Overview

For the citizens of Bangladesh, formal accountability mechanisms have long been viewed as ineffective and exclusionary. Yet, while numerous NGOs spring around anti-poverty campaigns, there has been very little collective mobilisation around service delivery failures in the country. This lack of organisation has not deterred individual citizens from expressing their frustration and making the case for individualised accountability based on sheer noise and insulting behaviour – what has been labelled ‘rude accountability.’ While not organised, it still represents a basic form of social accountability.

Principal Actors

Given the lack of organisation, this form of accountability takes place at the most local level, between individuals and the implementers of government services. Eschewing the well-organised campaigns of budget monitoring and social audits, this form of accountability is personal, individual, and informal.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability

Political accountability at the local level in Bangladesh is classic example of informality overcoming formal rules and regulations. Local elected officials have responsibility over the selection of beneficiaries for social service provision while at the same time also acting as the official ombudsmen for complaints against the delivery of social services. This dual role undermines the formal accountability mechanisms, and instead promotes an informal arrangement in which citizens lobby their elected officials to receive entitlements in exchange for bribes or other incentives.

In this structure, citizens are made to request services rather than receiving them by right. Efforts to expand access to services into rural and previously under-serviced areas have pushed new resources down to local settings. This has provided already embedded elites new sources for corruption. Indeed, governance reforms have persistently failed in the face of political reluctance and lack of a constituency to challenge the vested interests within the social services sectors by strengthening their formal accountability to policymakers or citizens.

Mechanisms for Social Accountability

At public service delivery point, the signal failure to tackle accountability is visible in the extremely weak rules and practices for citizens to claim services, feedback and complain, or gain redress or recourse. For poor women, in particular, formal accountability mechanisms are exclusionary to the point of irrelevance. As a result, these excluded actors take their concerns directly to the service providers themselves, causing scenes and demanding better services. While this is, in and of itself, a very informal and potentially ineffective way of securing accountability, for many citizens in Bangladesh, it is certainly no worse and often times is more effective than pursuing grievances through formal or political channels.

Connections

Rude accountability matters because it highlights how relationships of accountability in service delivery are in effect embedded in social relations and political pressures that are unofficial, informal, and personalised.

When accountability systems fail, it may be worth looking to which informal pressures are in fact operating, and to learning from how poor citizens actually attempt to claim their entitlements. The practical agenda here must be to bridge the rude and the official mechanisms of accountability, so that the power and accessibility of the informal can be married to the sanctions and rules and neutrality of the official.

Moreover, social mobilisation requires a catalyst; collective action begins with individual grievance. Rude accountability may represent the emergence of social unrest that could potentially manifest itself later in a form of organised social accountability, given the appropriate circumstances.

Sanctions

Rude accountability has no formal teeth. It is an informal mechanism for dealing with informal lapses in accountability. Service providers suffer the risk of embarrassment, declines in public reputation, and personal discomfort at the hands of practitioners of rude accountability, but little else.

Implications

It is impossible to measure the impact of rude accountability on service delivery, but qualitative data suggests that, as the old adage says, 'the squeaky wheel gets the grease.' Vocal critics often found themselves receiving better services, and service providers in areas with high levels of rude accountability were found to be somewhat more effective in performing their duties and more circumspect in their dealings.

Case 19: Kenya – Mobilisation in Tenements (IDS)

Overview

The case of citizen outrage in the tenements of Mombasa, Kenya illustrates both the strengths and weaknesses of bottom-up accountability mechanisms. On the one hand, navigating through the existing formal and informal channels, these groups were able to secure fairer rents and better living conditions for their constituents, proving that issue-based mobilisation is not only possible but effective in certain developing country settings. However, citizen-led groups have a constantly shifting power base and very little clout in institutionalising the gains they have made, particularly without allies in formal mechanisms of accountability.

Principal Actors

This case illustrates the tensions between local and national actors within Kenya, taking in actors from all levels of the state and society. Principally, the dispute arose between local residents and their municipal council, but during the course of the dispute, the National Housing Corporation, the District Commissioner, and the local media all became involved.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability

While a formal democracy, Kenya's electoral system is based largely on ethnic-motivated voting, rather than ideological factors. As a result, politicians tend to appeal to particular groups instead of seeking to build a constituency around national or local issues. Moreover, while decentralisation reforms have been implemented, the bureaucracy remains highly centrally controlled. Many local decisions need approval at the ministerial level, and the various levels of administration are top-down, authoritarian, and often unresponsive. At the same time, Members of Parliament and national politicians seem remote from the problems of the citizens, and patronage politics persists undeterred by recent anti-corruption efforts.

Within this hybrid system of governance, levels of authority and responsibility between the municipal government (councillors and council bureaucrats) and the provincial administration (District officers and District Commissioners) are not clearly defined, straining relationships between these actors. One of the few mechanisms available to the tenants in this case was the ability to leverage these tensions and navigate the ambiguity of authority to secure improvements in service delivery. Specifically, the residents relied on the District Commissioner to rein in the excesses of their elected representatives, the Councillors.

Mechanisms for Social Accountability

Faced with corrupt local councils and inaccessible district and national politicians, residents from three housing estates in Mombasa organised themselves under an umbrella advocacy organisation, The Shelter Committee, representing community-based groups in the coastal province. This collective action enabled the residents to present a unified front and to organise effective forms of protest and accountability. Chief among their weapons was the local media.

Using well-planned media campaigns the Shelter Committee, forced the council to shelve plans for a steep hike in rent, thwarted the council's secret plans in 1997 to relocate tenants to make room for a private housing development, and exposed corruption in land allocation policies, compiling a list of all the plots of land that had been illegally allocated and names of the people that received them. The tenants also mobilised to engage a lawyer to secure a temporary

injunction preventing the National Housing Corporation from collecting rent, following a dispute between the central authority and the local council over unpaid debts. More informally, tenants often took action to prevent improper evictions and, in one instance, demolished a wall that was illegally blocking access to public services.

Connections

The achievements of the resident organisation were mainly the result of successfully exploiting the connections between social and political accountability mechanisms that existed in the Mombasa housing system. The citizens used informal means, such as media campaigns and physical action, to highlight problems and prevent immediate injustices, while relying on more formal means to consolidate their gains. Of note is the fact that citizens were forced to fall back upon non-elected government officials, District Commissioners and judges, to enforce accountability upon their elected officials. Here, vertical, political accountability had completely failed, and instead it was a connection between horizontal and social accountability that succeeded in achieving any service delivery gains.

Sanctions

In this context, sanctions are difficult to ascertain. Residents succeeded in thwarting various efforts at corruption and profiteering by the municipal council in the housing sector. Some naming and shaming could take place within the media campaigns, but beyond imposing the opportunity cost of lost corrupt gains, citizen organisations such as the Shelter Committee have little means for imposing tangible sanctions.

Implications/results for service provision

The provision of suitable housing, while a very observable service, is nevertheless often underplayed in local and national politics. The difficulty in generating greater accountability lies in both identifying the appropriate responsible authority and in motivating citizen action in the face of a low likelihood of immediate improvements. Without clear lines of accountability and demonstrable success, social movements for improved housing could easily fizzle out once the original leaders have gone.

Case 20: Bangladesh – Garment Industry (IDS)

Overview

In the previously unregulated garment industry in Bangladesh, it was not uncommon for workers to work long hours in poor conditions for low pay. In conjunction with international pressure, however, a small but vocal workers' movement has been able to campaign for improved regulation and, in some cases, improved working conditions. The case illustrates how citizens can link with broader global movements to overcome obstacles to accountability at home.

Principal Actors

This case involves the garment workers of Bangladesh and the factory owners that employ them. Featuring within the accountability mechanisms are the Bangladeshi government and the international community, represented by both international firms and international campaigners.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability

Given that this case takes place within the private sector, little role was played by political mechanisms. However, the rampant corruption that pervades Bangladeshi politics is noted in the formalised relationship enjoyed by the business owners with government which prevented greater oversight into the working conditions in their factories.

Mechanisms for Social Accountability

Bangladeshi workers benefited from a global movement in support of workers' rights in developing countries, resulting in the adoption of codes of conduct by numerous international companies. In practice, however, factory owners often seemed able to circumvent these regulations, leaving workers hardly better off than they were before. The informality of the garment sector enabled owners to continue to exploit workers out of sight of government and international watch dogs.

Nevertheless, a small but vocal subset of workers began unionising and demanding better adherence to the codes of conduct established by the international firms. There are more visible signs of resistance such as resignations, shop floor protests, walk-outs and street protests over the minimum wage. Ultimately, this has resulted in new legislation, creating a new labour code, that while formulated has yet to be passed.

Connections

The worker movements succeeded in linking up with more formalised accountability mechanisms in the form of the codes of conduct and after some advocacy, the new labour code. Workers have been forced to unionise to gain any attention from political leaders, but some have taken on their cause, making an important connection for the workers to succeed in institutionalising the gains they have made.

Sanctions

None from the workers. Internationally, the firms faced boycotts and naming and shaming, but it's unlikely that this significantly impacted the domestic situation.

Implications/results for service provision

Provides an interesting example of social accountability linking up with international movements to drive changes in policy. This has implications for rights-based approaches to improving service delivery which situate service delivery in the language of human rights.

Case 21: South Africa – AIDS Advocacy (IDS)

Overview

The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) has done much to change the political landscape on HIV/AIDS issues in the past decade. Where political will failed, TAC mobilised public support for opening a dialogue on AIDS in South Africa. Using classic social accountability techniques, as well as some innovative advocacy work, they were able to both raise their own profile and compel policy changes from government and corporate actors.

Principal Actors

The principal actor in this case is TAC and its advocacy strategies that brought it into contact with government, civil servants, and international corporations.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability

While a democracy, the politics of HIV and AIDS in South Africa was driven by a vocal minority within government who distrusted the scientific establishment and favoured using 'indigenous knowledge' and 'African solutions' to confront the problem. These views filtered into the public discourse legitimising many of the popularly held AIDS 'myths' and contributing to the stigma and shame associated with the disease. In South Africa, for much of the past 15 years, politicians have adopted a defensive posture and encouraged widespread denial about AIDS among the general public. Under these conditions, political accountability mechanisms had little hope of succeeding in changing policy outcomes and providing better HIV/AIDS services.

Mechanisms for Social Accountability

TAC began its advocacy campaigns using generally accepted techniques of protest and political influencing. When these failed to move politicians, TAC went local. Citizens at the community level were mobilised through AIDS treatment literacy and awareness campaigns.

Future TAC activism straddled local, national and global spaces, using the courts, internet and media, and networking with South African and international civil society organisations, in its struggle for access to cheaper AIDS drugs. Widely publicised acts of 'civil disobedience' also provided TAC with visibility within a globally connected public sphere. Ultimately, TAC used the courts to compel the Ministry of Health to provide anti-retrovirals at public health facilities.

Connections

Recent years has seen great progress in the recognition and treatment of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. While TAC's work has much to do with this shift, an important connection has been with a new health minister that strongly supports the kinds of policies that TAC has promoted over the past eleven years.

Sanctions

Given the kind of cause being championed, sanctions are not particularly relevant. Naming and shaming politicians for their obstinacy over AIDS can be construed as a kind of sanction, but it has little teeth. Likewise, the international corporations faced no hard sanctions for failing to

provide affordable treatments; that they eventually conceded is more a function of placating public opinion than fearing real sanction.

Implications/results for service provision

TAC employed a variety of strategies and engaged a wide range of stakeholders across race, class, ethnic, gender and education divides, an important consideration in heterogeneous societies like South Africa, to leverage pressure via issue-based politics. TAC deployed highly effective strategies of mobilisation at local, national and global levels that can best be described as ‘grassroots globalisation’ or ‘globalisation from below’ thus bypassing an inhospitable domestic political environment and exerting pressure from other directions.

Case 22: Mexico – Water Disputes (IDS)

Overview

Water connects everyone in Southern Veracruz Mexico. All the actors are also connected by the consequences of the persistent degradation of the basin. Deforestation and erosion are contributing to a decline in water flows and quality. All stand to lose from the current situation, though few spaces exist for cooperation in mutual interest. This case illustrates how power relations can be changed through constructive dialogue among actors, moving from confrontational approaches to cooperative ones.

Principal Actors

Local residents and local and state government officials.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability

Mexico's democratic system is in practice highly centralised, particularly in terms of service delivery policy. Ostensibly, interaction between local institutions and federal and state government concerning water and natural resources are regulated by a legal framework that pays lip-service to participation but leaves no room for a negotiated settlement. The obstacles to accountability here relate to the difficulty of enforcing existing laws and procedures designed to create a better planned system.

At the local level, each cooperative farm, village and municipality has its own assembly, but these spaces are often rife with conflict sown by the uneven privatisation of land, competition for state resources, immigration, religion and party politics. Local institutions lack information about their entitlements within this legal framework and higher authorities lack the political will to integrate indigenous people in the existing participation spaces.

Mechanisms for Social Accountability

The inhabitants of regions where the water supply originates were largely excluded from discussions, and when invited are often forced to endure the hostile and prejudiced attitudes of officials. Facilitated by outside researchers, village leaders began networking amongst each other and undertook a number of community-led environmental studies. This process gradually allowed village leaders to articulate their opinions without having to rely on municipal representatives who had for years served only their own personal interest.

This community-driven approach created an opportunity for change when a natural catastrophe required a rapid response. After torrential rainfall caused hundreds of landslides that damaged the dam, village leaders quickly assembled a recovery plan. Though still reluctant to cooperate with indigenous leaders, state authorities had nowhere else to turn.

Connections

While the impetus here was on local residents mobilising to demand their rights, it is also critical that governments provide the deliberative spaces for participation.

Sanctions

None.

Implications/results for service provision

Too many intermediaries in the delivery of public services can distort provision. While direct state-citizen relations may not be possible, creating too many layers between the principal and agent will necessarily weaken accountability relationships. Service delivery, with an already weak political accountability relationship, will suffer disproportionately.

Case 23: Brazil – Health Councils (IDS)

Overview

Brazil has recently created participatory health councils, now found in nearly all of the country's 5,000-plus municipalities. These councils are empowered by law to inspect public accounts and demand accountability, and some strongly influence how resources for health services are spent. This case illustrates that ability of these participatory councils to make health services pro-poor depends on the extent to which marginalised and vulnerable people are truly represented.

Principal Actors

Local health councils, local representatives, and state governments.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability/ Mechanisms for Social Accountability

This Brazil case is somewhat different in its blending of political and social accountability mechanisms. Rather than existing in tension or complementing each other, the two are actually formally blended in the form of participatory health councils that are empowered by the state. Incorporating social accountability mechanisms into the formal system serves to inform and strengthen political relationships.

The Brazilian “Citizens’ Constitution” of 1988 established health as the right of all, defined its provision as the duty of the state and guaranteed the right to participate in the governance of health. It laid the groundwork for the establishment of institutionalised mechanisms for citizen engagement at municipal, state and national levels.

Each month tens of thousands of Brazilian citizens representing a spectrum of civic associations meet with those who run their health services and provide their health care. Through this process of debate, contestation, refinement and reformulation, good ideas from citizens often survive to find a place in state and national policies. Amid all the debate, one important consensus has emerged around the value of maintaining the national health service itself.

The case reveals that many citizen groups are represented in the councils, though diversity is not guaranteed. Breaking the grip of powerful actors on the councils often depends on a public manager who is willing to champion the cause of participation, on strong civil society groups or other associations who refuse to let their constituencies be left out and on the rules and regulations that govern the election of councillors.

Connections

This case also confirms the significance of relationships that exist between public managers, civil society representatives and political parties. Where there is alignment around an ideological commitment to popular participation, councils can serve as a space for what one health manager termed ‘constructive co-existence’; citizens and their representatives are able to make demands on government for accountability, and government is able to engage citizens and civil society organisations in monitoring the effectiveness of public policies and the functioning of the public health system.

Sanctions

None.

Implications/results for service provision

This case demonstrates the value of popular participation in sustaining political commitment and popular support for the national health service. Getting people involved in shaping health provision improves both the health service and the quality of democracy.

Case 24: India – Power Plant (IDS)

Overview

The case concerns the Simhadri Thermal Power Project, which was commissioned by the Andhra Pradesh State Electricity. The state signed a power purchase agreement with the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) in 1997, and construction started in 1998 after 3,140 acres of land was acquired from 13 villages in the Vizag district. In return for their land, villagers were promised new roads and bus service, training facilities, jobs and cash compensation. With the exception of the cash, none of these promises were kept.

Principal Actors

Residents of the Vizag district, NTPC officials, and state government officials all play a part in the breakdown of accountability over the Thermal Power Project.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability

In negotiations with the NTPC, the regional government told the company it could displace people from their land so long as it paid cash compensation for land acquired but made no provision for the landless who had earned their living on other's lands. Nevertheless, the political mechanism considered the case closed, once compensation had been paid.

Further demands by citizens fell upon deaf ears as the state supported the NTPC's to quash disputes over land rights, service promises, and deteriorating health conditions as a result of the plant's construction. Residents got the sense that the government was sacrificing the few in the interests of the many, as the power plant was very much needed for industrial and economic expansion in the region. This feeling of being left out of the economic miracle fueled the residents' sense of injustice.

Mechanisms for Social Accountability

Local organisations, with international support, conducted surveys and gathered data, recording demands and evidence of rights violations and health impacts. The findings from these surveys were presented at a gram sabha (local assembly) as well as at panchayat raj meetings. The contents of the research and subsequent discussions were then fed into a People's Development Plan, which presented the community's view of how the grievances could be adequately addressed in mutually beneficial ways. The communities then invited officials from the company, plus the state and federal governments, to a public hearing hosted within the community, in the presence of ordinary citizens.

Connections

If the state fails to enforce the responsibilities of corporations under its jurisdiction or is even complicit in the violation of rights, communities face a unique challenge in holding institutions accountable. Vizag's residents compiled a list of the community's grievances and the evidence to back them up, then called the various powerful actors to a public hearing, where they had to respond directly to the findings before more than a thousand people. It may not have been a court of law, but the court of public opinion can at times be the best recourse.

Sanctions

Naming and shaming through media publicity softened the NTPC stance somewhat, but there is concern that too much public pressure could cause the corporation to pull out of negotiations all together.

Implications/results for service provision

As non-state actors become more involved in service delivery, accountability lines become blurred. The state has made promises on behalf of the corporation in this case, but the recipients face a difficult decision as to whom they should hold accountable when the services don't materialise. Social accountability mechanisms can help to clarify some of these accountability relationships through multi-stakeholder forums and campaigns.

Case 25: Nigeria – Oil Theatre (IDS)

Overview

The Niger Delta in Nigeria is home to 31 million people from more than a dozen distinct ethnic groups and is also the site of the country's most important oil fields. In spite of its oil wealth, the region has inadequate infrastructure and high unemployment rates, in part because pollution from the oil industry has diminished forest activities and fishing. Residents of the delta states have to drink, cook with and wash in polluted water, and eat fish contaminated with oil and other toxins. The people of the Niger Delta are frustrated and angry and must find useful outlets for their grievances.

Principal Actors

Residents of the Niger Delta region, almost exclusively.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability

The political situation in the Niger Delta is lamentable. The discovery and subsequent exploitation of huge oil reserves in the area have decimated the fabric of the place. Even the once revered traditional leaders have been corrupted, leaving the communities adrift. The case shows how the lack of accountability in formal governance structures can fracture the trust and solidarity that protects communities from outside manipulation, even corrupting the very institutions that claim to seek solutions

Since 2006, rebel groups led by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, or MEND, have resorted to kidnapping oil workers and sabotaging oil facilities. These groups claim they want to win a greater allocation of the oil wealth for their impoverished people, but some of their members have become armed bandits, using political grievances as a guise for personal enrichment, or have formed gangs committed only to the interests of their village. Feeling excluded from the benefits of the natural resources in their region, the residents felt unable to rely on many of the actors that would ordinarily be trusted with defending their rights.

Mechanisms for Social Accountability

The Theatre for Development Centre sent facilitators into eight communities in the Niger Delta region.

The facilitators in collaboration with local liaisons, selected key participants – teachers, community group leaders and other influential figures – who were trained over three days on how to create a 30-minute theatrical performance. Over the course of the three-day training, the participants explored the issues of accountability through the creation of the performance. Finally, the entire community was invited to watch, followed by a discussion that produced a community plan for action.

Connections

The ability of theatre to dismiss itself as fiction, and to deliver fun to the gathered crowd, makes it a safer way to discuss the accountability failures facing their community. In this way, social accountability can covertly address issues of political accountability without openly threatening existing elites and eliciting further oppression.

Sanctions

None, this is more of a community mechanism for facilitating understanding and mobilisation. While naming and shaming is some element of the theatre, it's unlikely that officials would view the plays as sanctioning devices.

Implications/results for service provision

Corporations greatly impact the context of service delivery, both positively and negatively. Some companies provide services to local residents, while others merely exploit populations bringing only negative externalities like pollution. In either case, understanding how to improve accountability relationships is critical to ensuring that public services meet the needs of the population.

Case 26: UK – Health Activists (IDS)

Overview

In a city in the UK, residents in one neighbourhood discovered that the Health Authority was planning to close their health centre, so they mobilised and undertook research to stop the closure. The health centre stayed open, but six years later the group was frustrated about the lack of support from health service officials. This case study looks at what can happen when people who see themselves as an opposing force to government then try to work with and within official spheres of engagement.

Principal Actors

Residents of a UK city and local and national health officials.

Mechanisms for Political Accountability/Mechanisms for Social Accountability

In the UK, participation has been touted as a way to improve policy making and service delivery. In this context, it is increasingly difficult to make a clear distinction between officially sponsored participation and autonomous action, between participation as an instrument used by institutions and participation as a right of every citizen.

In this case, the resident group decided to bid for a Healthy Living Centre that would play a more proactive role in promoting preventative health. To qualify for the bid, they had to reconstitute themselves as a health forum, with some members becoming trustees and taking on responsibility for financial affairs. In the process, the group had moved from oppositional action to trying to work in partnership with the Local Health Authority and officials. The strong sense of ‘we’ based in an oppositional consciousness became more muted and diffuse. Dialogue got bogged down in bureaucratic details and this constrained creativity and dampened enthusiasm generated by direct involvement in community-led research.

The same citizen groups who are mobilising themselves to be heard in spaces where they were not invited are also taking a seat in sanctioned spaces at the request of officials. This means that boundaries between groups can become blurred, and local governments may end up diluting autonomous action when they try to harness local energy for social change.

Connections

The rules of the game between citizens and government officials needs to be negotiated and adhered to in order to develop mutual trust. This is easier to achieve when people have the opportunity to develop collective awareness. While institutionalising participation can be beneficial, autonomous organisation and ‘free spaces’ not affiliated to state institutions are important places to try out new ways of thinking and action before engaging with officials.

Sanctions

None, this is more of a study in understanding mobilisation and the politics of participation.

Implications/results for service provision

Service delivery straddles the public-private divide in ways that complicate accountability relationships. The state must listen to its citizens to ensure that the appropriate services are

delivered, but by formalising participation to too great a degree, it can actually stifle creativity and diversity of opinion. While social accountability mechanisms must be able to operate with the state and within the rules of the game, it is equally important that they remain distinct enough to provide dissenting viewpoints when necessary.

Table 4.1: Assessing the Dimensions of Accountability

Case	Sector	Country	Standards	Answerability	Responsiveness	Enforceability	Total
1	Food Distribution	India	3	3	1	3	10
10	Participatory Budgeting	Brazil	3	2	2	2	9
4	Minimum Income	Brazil	3	1	3	1	8
6	Education	India	3	2	1	2	8
15a	Extractive Industries	Ghana	2	2	2	1	7
8	Budget Monitoring	Uganda	2	1	1	2	6
14b	Particularistic Legislation	Paraguay	2	2	1	1	6
9	Public Works	Philippines	1	2	0	2	5
16	Pro poor legislation	Peru	2	2	1	0	5
7	Child Support	South Africa	2	1	2	0	5
15b	Extractive Industries	Tanzania	2	2	1	0	5
14a	Particularistic Legislation	Ecuador	2	2	1	0	5
3	Health Reform	Brazil	1	1	2	0	4
2	Social Spending	Mexico	0	2	0	1	3
5	Reproductive Health	Mexico	0	2	1	0	3
12	Participatory Budgeting	Mexico	1	1	0	0	2
11	Participatory Budgeting	Argentina	1	0	0	0	1
			30	28	19	15	