

MAKING ALL
VOICES COUNT

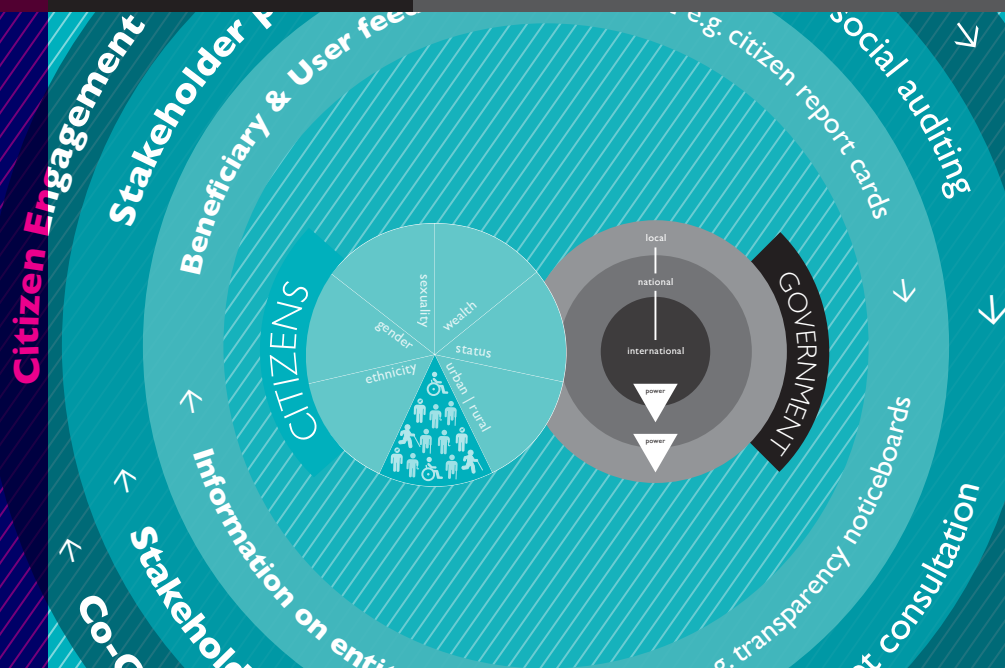
A GRAND CHALLENGE
FOR DEVELOPMENT



MAKING ALL VOICES COUNT

GOVERNMENT RESPONSIVENESS

A think piece for the *Making All Voices Count* programme
Rosie McGee
June 2014



INTRODUCTION

This think piece is based on a review of recent experience conducted between October and December 2013 and a series of e-Dialogues in January 2014. It is an individual reflection on what we found – and did not find – about what government responsiveness consists of, and what can make it happen. As well as a rapid scan of recent published academic literature, our review included an online search and targeted searching among key contacts in practitioner and academic roles. This aimed to identify other relevant material published in ‘grey’ (organisational) literature and various online forms, or lodged in institutional memories and people’s lived experiences. We also looked for gaps and weaknesses in the available research and evidence about government responsiveness, aiming to highlight these for the research community, and to address some of them ourselves in due course as the Making All Voices Count programme.

The work on which this think piece is based is not a systematic or exhaustive review. It reflects a selective, purposive and partial gathering and reading of available recent literature and practice, and a situated analysis of it from our position within the Making All Voices Count programme.

When citizens exercise voice, what is it that makes their voices count, or not count? If citizens’ voices count, governments are being responsive. In the past fifteen years many development and social change programmes have sought to make or strengthen the connections between citizens exerting voice and governments responding to their voices. Some research has been done on what produces greater responsiveness to citizens’ voices, but the meaning of responsiveness has not been adequately defined or explored.

The research questions we initially set out to explore were:

- What makes government actors targeted by tech-enabled transparency and accountability initiatives (‘T4T&A’) change their behaviour and act responsively?
- Have T4T&A initiatives contributed to these changes?
- What do we know about the effects of different kinds of technological innovation? What do we need to know? How can we know it?

In specific cases government actors have become more responsive and accountable through enhanced citizen voice and appropriate technological solutions, and have become Transparency and Accountability (T&A) ‘champions’.

- What makes a champion?
- Which have been the critical ingredients (non-technological determinants as well as technological) of these transformations?
- How are the transformations sustained?
- How transferable they are to other contexts?

- What kinds of citizen engagement lead to what kinds of government responsiveness?
- Are there relationships between different forms of citizen engagement and different responses or degrees of responsiveness from government actors and institutions?

The think piece first sets out the implications of our findings and reflections for the field of transparency and accountability and, within that, the sub-field of T4T&A. The focus then shifts to the implications for Making All Voices Count and similar programmes, and finally, to implications for research and the creation and use of evidence in this field.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD

Current writing, thinking and practice in the field of citizen voice, accountability and government responsiveness are underpinned by a number of premises and assumptions. Many of the premises are already being addressed by current projects and programmes; and many of the assumptions have already been noted as questionable in past work. Some are less recognised; and for some, we think the time has come to explore them in greater critical depth. With the massive adoption of technologies in the transparency and accountability field, some new and invisible assumptions have crept in, which are equally or more questionable.

Already well recognised, for instance, is the fact that voice is not the same as influence. While citizens might initially find it empowering to voice concerns and priorities, their sense of empowerment will be short-lived if their voices secure no influence among decision-makers. Similarly, we already know that the voices of citizens who are marginalised through biases of gender, geography, age, education or class, are less likely to be expressed and, if expressed, are more likely to go unheard; and that special measures are needed to make sure those citizens' voices meet with responsiveness. These two issues combined highlight why a minimalist, laissez-faire approach to amplifying citizens' voices is not enough, why it cannot be assumed people simply 'choose' to give voice or 'choose' to

remain silent, and why, when thinking about voice, it is necessary to think also about listening and responsiveness, and to actively pursue non-discrimination and equity not only in voice but also in responsiveness.

Most usages of the terms 'government responsiveness' or 'response' seem to correspond roughly to the definition offered in DFID's *White Paper Making Governance Work for the Poor (2006)*. It defines responsiveness as the degree to which government listens to what people want and acts on it, and to which public policies and institutions respond to the needs of citizens and uphold their rights.

But even if most usages seem to fit this definition, we came across diverse assumptions and statements about what 'government responsiveness' actually means and looks like in practice. It seems to have a broad span, from the relatively 'shallow' (responsiveness understood as well-functioning feedback loops between service providers and users), to the very deep (responsiveness understood as the progressive construction of empowered, deliberative democracy by citizens and governments). As is often the case, the different standpoints are associated with different academic disciplines. Much 'feedback loop' thinking is rooted in economics, and many 'deepening democracy' positions in political science and political sociology.



Feedback loop thinking emphasises transparency and, more recently, 'openness' and open government. It is efficiently- and outcome-oriented, aiming at a 'closed feedback loop', or government action in response to feedback citizens provide. Those belonging to the 'deepening democracy' school, in contrast, emphasise the processes by which transparency or openness can lead to more accountable and empowering outcomes for people, as distinct from economically different outcomes for states, corporations or people. While the former view assumes a certain 'rational' response to information, by both citizens and governments, the latter view uses a power lens to question the assumed link between information and action.

What do we know about how transparency or openness generate greater accountability in governments? As well as the 'information leads to action' assumption, a further assumption is implicit in much of the experience we reviewed. This is the myth of an uncomplicated, automatic, causal forward link from transparent information

to government accountability, still alive and kicking although critiqued by Jonathan Fox in 2007 (Fox 2007a). Fox pointed out the flaw in assuming that transparency consisting of 'naming and shaming' will have any influence at all on those shameless enough to misappropriate public resources or abuse public office. Besides, cases abound of 'opaque transparency' (his term) by states and corporations. So do transparency measures and openness gestures which are not connected to any enforceable, 'hard' accountability. They illustrate just how uncertain the relationship between transparency and accountability actually is, let alone the relationship between 'openness', transparency and accountability. But convenient assumptions die hard.

The 'transparency action cycle' developed from research by Fung and colleagues (Fung et al 2004; Fung & Kosack 2014) highlights that government transparency or disclosure in itself is not necessarily responsiveness. Responsiveness happens when governments respond to changes that people make in their own behaviour as a result of newly disclosed information.



Five key points about government responsiveness for those designing Tech-for-Transparency-and-Accountability initiatives:

- Understandings of what 'government responsiveness' consists of vary from the very shallow, to much deeper and transformative processes of change.
- It cannot be taken for granted that transparency will lead to accountability; and even less, that openness will lead to accountability.
- For transparency to lead to accountability involves significant and sustained government responsiveness
- It is not only preferences and incentives, but also power relations, that shape which citizens' voices meet with government responsiveness
- Citizen voice and government responsiveness programmes can aim to engage government actors either as direct participants, or indirectly by working with theories of change that clearly, strategically and realistically set out how they can be reached and influenced.

A further and related problem that Fox pointed out in assumptions of a neat linear relationship 'T&A' and others have highlighted since, is the omission of 'P' – citizen participation – from the more basic and minimalist understandings of what government responsiveness means and how it happens. To get to responsive, accountable governance requires citizens taking up newly transparent information and using it to inform their participation in the governance sphere. Without this, the result is 'dry transparency' or 'opaque transparency', and no strengthening of accountability.

Such diverse diagnoses of 'the problem' of government responsiveness lead to widely diverging implications and solutions. There is a key historic difference between positions on how to resolve the problem of unresponsive government. While some have favoured working to reform governments and institutions (often referred to as the 'supply- side') others have opted to strengthen citizens' organisations and citizen voice to demand needs and rights more effectively from governments (referred to as the 'demand-side'). It is now increasingly recognised that work on neither 'side' alone will make

for responsive, accountable governance; coordinated work on both sides is needed, but also fresh approaches that cut across or 'blur' the boundaries between them (Citizenship DRC 2010).

Working with 'champions' or reformist bureaucrats and elected representatives is noted in the literature on governance as an effective way to spark reform and modernization in otherwise unresponsive bureaucracies and political systems. It is a strategy pursued in some T&A programmes and projects we have come across. Yet beyond generalities about champions of reform being important actors to identify and work with, there is little written up about how such strategies work in practice to bring about, specifically, T&A. Where the accountability problems relate to systemic corruption or systemic underperformance, there are clearly quite specific disincentives for government actors to break ranks and lead accountability reforms likely to be unpopular with their colleagues. This suggests that a harder look at whether and how championing actually functions in the T&A field is needed. This includes asking what makes a champion, what determines whether championing happens, how sustainable it is, and whether championing as a strategy is 'scaleable' and transferable across different contexts.

Much of the analysis of state institutions and 'supply-side' constraints on good governance centres on what economists call the 'principal-agent problem'. This holds that states are not accountable towards citizens because citizens do not have access to the necessary information to hold their states to account. It points towards better and more transparent information as the solution. Published outputs from the Overseas Development Institute's Africa Power and Politics Programme include some helpful explanations of the principal-agent theoretical approach and its limitations. Both they and a team of World Bank researchers (see Devarajan, Khemani and Walton 2011) find principal-agent theory too narrow to explain the accountability problem or lead to solutions. They recognise that citizens' lack of information is often compounded or dwarfed by the problem of lack of coordination or organisation between citizens, often referred to as the 'collective action' problem. Their work starts to lead

away from the community or social arena where so much 'social accountability' programming has gone on lately, and points firmly back towards politics as the arena where accountability problems need to be redressed.

To sum up, what is known about how government responsiveness is improved or attained? Researchers and practitioners working towards this end are working at quite varied depths and intensities. The less 'deep' are not to be dismissed as irrelevant. But they do need to be carefully embedded in deeper, broader, more transformative change processes if they are to achieve more than better information flow between citizens and governments or better customer service to service users, as ends in themselves.

It is clear too that increased transparency or disclosure alone does not constitute or bring government accountability or responsiveness, without the activation of a long chain of mechanisms and actors in between. It is also clear that approaches combining the promotion of citizen voice with efforts to change behaviours in government or the state are more promising than either approach in isolation.

Perhaps most importantly, approaches to securing government responsiveness which stay within the realm of the social and avoid issues of power and politics are doomed to fail. 'If voice is about capacity for self-representation and self-expression,' writes Jonathan Fox, 'then power is about who listens' (Fox 2007b). It cannot be assumed that government actors will respond 'rationally' (whatever that means – 'rationality' is not the same for everyone) to better information from citizens about needs, preferences and demands. A fresh perspective is opening up on citizen voice and accountability which is broader than either the principal-agent problem or the collective action problem (see for example Devarajan, Khemani & Walton 2011; Booth 2012; Booth & Cammack 2013; Fung & Kosack 2014). It is one which sees beyond government information provision or government responses to citizens' expressed needs or complaints, and which understands 'social accountability' and the promotion of citizen voice to be firmly political in nature and outcomes. The term 'citizen-led accountability' is perhaps more appropriate.



2

IMPLICATIONS FOR MAKING ALL VOICES COUNT AND SIMILAR PROGRAMMES

The challenge of moving on from airing citizens' voices, to securing a hearing for *all* citizens' voices, to making them actually *count*, is at the very heart of the Making All Voices Count programme – and is the core aspiration embodied in its theory of change. A similar aspiration drives many other aid-supported governance programmes, advocacy efforts and accountability struggles. It drives social actors from the most tame to the most unruly, and reformers within governments, often seen from outside as lonely 'champions' of lost or difficult causes. So what has this review of experience told us about how to go about this more effectively

If there is a wide range of implicit and hidden assumptions about what 'government responsiveness' actually means and looks like in practice, then from there, there is also a wide range of ideas on what exactly programmes like Making All Voices Count are, or should be, aiming for.

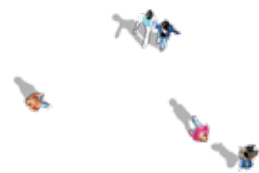
If the programme's efforts to promote citizen voice through grants, brokering of relationships and capacity building are to succeed in terms of securing government responsiveness, they need to engage government actors. They can do so either directly – by attracting government actors to participate in these activities themselves – or indirectly – by crafting the theories of change of these activities so that they maximise the chances of contributing to government responsiveness.

Some Making All Voices Count activities may manage to directly attract government personnel as participants. This will require tailor-made outreach and approaches, rather than using the approaches familiar to NGOs and private tech-start-up companies. The need to stop working on just one side or the other of the supply-demand divide means that it would be highly strategic for Making All Voices

Count to support partnerships or joint ventures between government and non-government actors, but the programme needs to understand better which specific incentives would make both parties enter such partnerships, and which obstacles stand in their way.

The indirect route to government engagement suggested above is a realist approach, which starts from the recognition that government actors cannot be forced to take part. It requires a theory of change to underpin the programme's granting, capacity development, relationship brokering and research and evidence strands, and its cross-cutting learning strategy. This can force careful appraisal, analysis and reanalysis of how activities and processes will engage intended participants or appeal to intended audiences.

As outlined above, it is likely that lack of government responsiveness is not due solely to citizens lacking information on which to act, nor to citizens finding it hard to organise themselves. Initiatives by nongovernment actors that seek to attract the attention or engagement of government actors might benefit from careful power analysis during their design. This would shed light on the power differentials which exist between even fairly well-organised citizens and government actors and between government actors at one level or in one sector of government, and those at higher levels or in more fashionable sectors. Understanding these power relations from the perspectives of those locked into them, and bringing to bear power analysis lenses, can expand the less powerful actor's range of strategies and tactics for being seen and heard, having influence and securing responsiveness.



3 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE AGENDA



The implications of all the above for the Research and Evidence agenda of Making All Voices Count are many and diverse. So many specific research questions are raised that, to generate the knowledge needed, the programme will need to commission research selectively or invite research proposals on specified themes, rather than taking a more ‘open call’ approach. The portfolio will need to include research of varying scales and duration, as some of the emergent issues are best pursued through small and bounded case studies, whereas others call for research approaches of a broader, multi-level, networked kind.

Specified themes might include the following:

Contribute to building a Tech-for-T&A evidence base: Our review found no analysis so far of government responsiveness to citizen voices expressed via technologies, as distinct from the older channels such as the media, nontech social accountability projects or social mobilisation. Given the amount of investment in technologies for transparency, this is a serious gap. A solid meta-level review is needed, of the size and scope of the review of impact and effectiveness commissioned in 2010 by the Transparency Accountability Initiative¹, as soon as Sufficient evidence is available means starting to build that evidence systematically at the level of individual initiatives, in a concerted and integrated way. Making All Voices Count needs to do this in respect of the initiatives it supports.

Research the uncertain relationship between openness and responsiveness:

The Open Government Partnership has amassed a new comparative qualitative and quantitative database of evidence arising from the first few years of its existence. While this does not solve the challenges

of researching something as intangible and contextually-specific as accountability or responsiveness, it offers new possibilities for researching the relationships between these desired ends, and ‘openness’ as the means to those ends. Using these data to research the relationship between openness and responsiveness would be an important addition to efforts to shed light on the relationship between transparency and accountability more broadly.

Understand what makes ‘champions’ of accountability: Research and analysis are needed on how ‘champion’ strategies work in the transparency and accountability field, given the general lack of systematic evidence on how championing happens and the specific disincentives and challenges to ‘championing strategies’ posed by accountability-oriented reform processes. This could involve empirical case-study research informed by the political economy literature on the collective action problems experienced by government actors in face of pressures to modernize and reform, and could also be informed by power literature and concepts.

Theorize shifting power relations: The proposition above of using power analysis in designing and appraising Making All Voices Count activities could provide impetus to further exploration of how power can be shifted through transparency and accountability work, and how these shifts in power can best be detected and captured in impact assessment. Power analysis is a different and complementary approach to the ‘political economy analysis’ approach on which much existing work is based (Pettit 2014).

Research ‘social accountability’ as politics: We need to explore the proposition that there are tipping points at which government non-responsiveness and inaction in the face of ‘social accountability’ become unsustainable and improved responsiveness becomes a political survival

¹ http://www.transparency-initiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/synthesis_report_final.pdf

strategy. We need to understand better the nature of those tipping points and work out the ways towards them. Such research would provide the foundations for re-framing social accountability as citizen-led accountability. This is an overdue conceptual clarification in any case, given the wide gaps between the most technical and the most political versions of what it means for citizens' voices to count.

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RECOMMENDED READING

We have summarised useful literature which was identified in the process of our 'Review of Experience'. These summaries pull out key points from the literature which are relevant to the Making All Voices Count mission and do not attempt to be a complete summary of the full article or book.

BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES: CITIZEN ACTION ACROSS STATES AND SOCIETIES

When state-level reforms are combined with citizen engagement in politics, there is the potential to create more responsive, accountable and capable governments. This is particularly true when citizens participate in a variety of spaces, from the local to international levels, and employ a range of techniques for making their voices heard in meaningful ways.

This briefing report from the Citizenship DRC is useful for understanding how citizen action can result in more responsive and accountable governments. The report suggests that it is important to understand the ways in which the state and society interact with one another. Instead of looking at each actor as a distinct entity, it may be more useful to consider the ways in which this line can be crossed, and the outcomes that may ensue from 'blurring' these boundaries.

In reference to the Making All Voices Count work on the theme of 'count', the report highlights six key factors to consider when designing a strategy for citizen engagement:

- *Institutional and political context* – The success of citizen engagement depends on the capacity of the state to respond. In Bangladesh, despite a high density of NGOs, the fragility of the government means that it is often difficult for citizens

to influence positive change. On the other hand, in Angola, despite a violent and oppressive state, the establishment of citizen-led associations has led to increased dialogue between citizens and policymakers.

- *The strength of internal champions* – Within government, there are often individuals that are willing to act as 'champions' for citizen-driven efforts. In Chile for example, a small group of enthusiastic government officials worked closely with an NGO to develop a framework to decrease child poverty.
- *The location of power and decision-making* – Holding governments to account depends on citizens' capacity to transcend authority at different levels – from the local to national to global. Success is also more likely when citizen engagement takes different forms and occurs at all stages of the policy-development processes.
- *The history and style of engagement* – While sharing best practices across contexts is important, the success of citizen engagement largely depends on the appropriateness of the action within the specific cultural context. While the construction of citizen associations has been important for increased accountability in Angola, self-organised social movements have seen greater success in Brazil.
- *Prior citizen capabilities* – Citizens need to have knowledge of their rights, as well as the capacity to run meetings, create petitions and understand government

Gaventa, J. and Benequista, N. (2011) *Blurring the Boundaries: Citizen Action across States and Societies. A Summary of Findings from a Decade of Collaborative Research on Citizen Engagement*, Brighton: IDS, The Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability

proceedings. It would be shortsighted to assume that substantial change could occur without at least some of these core capacities in place.

- *The nature of the issue* – While some issues may go hand-in-hand with existing government priorities, others may be more contentious. Thus, the tactics that citizens should use to draw attention to their concerns will likely differ, depending on the issue at hand.

When successful, citizen engagement can lead to the empowerment of communities and individuals, increased government accountability, and more inclusive and cohesive societies. However, when it fails, it can lead to the disempowerment of groups, a more clientelistic state and increased division within society.

Going forward, the report recommends that government officials reach out to other potential champions and go beyond merely 'inviting' citizens to participate. Donors should recognize that citizen engagement and consequent government response requires time and does not necessarily fit neatly into the two-to-three year project cycle. Researchers should work to build collaborative, international partnerships to facilitate the sharing of knowledge for best practices around citizen engagement.

DEVELOPMENT AS A COLLECTIVE ACTION PROBLEM: ADDRESSING THE REAL CHALLENGES OF AFRICAN GOVERNANCE

A 'collective action problem' is an economic principle that pertains to the way that public goods are distributed. Public goods are 'non-excludable' in nature, meaning that no one should be excluded from receiving their benefits. The problem occurs when the majority of people receiving these goods are entirely uninvolved in their production. This creates a culture of 'free riding' that weakens the motivation to contribute to the greater good. In developing countries, where resources are limited, the collective action problem may cause a great deal of frustration on the part of both citizens and the state.

This problem is particularly relevant for many African countries. According to the five-year findings of the Africa Power and Politics Programme (APPP), the collective action problem is one of the largest challenges faced by African governments today. In relation to the Making All Voices Count programme on the theme of 'count' the APPP's report sheds light on the challenges to achieving responsive governance in an African context, particularly under circumstances where clientelism is a norm.

In countries where social fragmentation exists along economic, regional, ethnic and religious lines, cooperation for the greater good is difficult. Clientelism, in this case, is a far cheaper and more reliable option for power-hungry politicians with limited resources. Under these circumstances, the collective action problem often plays out in such a way that the distribution of resources mainly benefits those individuals most likely to vote for a particular public official.

While citizen action has recently been touted as an effective tool for improving government accountability, this idea is challenged within an African context. Since the collective action problem stems from the issue of social fragmentation amongst citizen and state actors, a move to improve the distribution of public goods would likely need to come both from citizen pressure, below and state action, above.

Nonetheless, the importance of local champions within government should not be overlooked in this discussion. In Brazil, the transition from clientelism to democracy was due, in part, to the work of several leaders who chose to publicly disassociate themselves with the prevailing

Booth, D. (2012) *Development as a collective action problem: Addressing the real challenges of African governance*, Synthesis Report of the Africa Power and Politics Programme, London: Overseas Development Institute

clientelistic party system. The same is true with the Mayor of Bogota, Colombia, who made substantial improvements to local living standards by encouraging a 'bandwagon effect' around good governance practices.

The APPP report suggests that in order to address the collective action problem in African governance, there are a few things that should be considered that are relevant to the work of Making All Voices Count. First, the aid industry must reconsider their use of project templates, financial strategies and theories of change for supporting local associations. There needs to be a critical reflection on whether these aid-industry practices are in fact helping or hindering the progress of emerging civil society organisations. Secondly, there must be more investment into the use of local knowledge, traditions and problem-solving mechanisms that will enable citizens and local governments to work together more cohesively. While it is important to open up spaces for citizens and the state to engage in iterative debates and discussion, APPP implies that aid-industry intervention in these processes may do more harm than good.

THE UNCERTAIN RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

While most would agree that both transparency and accountability are key to good governance, there is less agreement about what these processes should look like in practice. Nonetheless, both terms should be considered in relation to each other – who is to be transparent to whom, and who is to be accountable to whom?

Fox (2007) argues that transparency is necessary, but far from sufficient, to produce accountable governance. Previous research has assumed that by that bringing negative information to light, the liable actors will feel compelled to fess up and change their actions in light of public outcry. Fox, however, questions this assumption by asking, “how can you shame the shameless?” For the purposes of the Making All Voices Count project, Fox’s work on the relationship between transparency and accountability is important for drawing out the right questions to ask about these concepts – what happens when government officials can simply brush aside the demands of citizens? And under what conditions can transparency lead to accountability?

In terms of transparency, Fox suggests that it is important to distinguish between ‘pro-active dissemination’ and ‘demand-driven access.’ While the former refers to institutions that volunteer to

release information that is important to the public, in the latter, the public must put pressure on institutions to release the data. Going further, transparency can be either “opaque” or “clear.” In opaque transparency, the information provided may not reveal how institutions actually behave in practice, or may not divulge the full picture. Clear transparency, on the other hand, refers to the release of reliable information about institutional performance and behaviour, as well as public spending.

There are a variety of core actors that do useful work in terms of bringing transparency issues into the public spotlight. These often include public oversight institutions, civil society organisations and mass media. However, these bodies do not generally have the capacity to act on their findings, in order to demand fair sanctions or policy changes. Thus, the power of transparency can only be defined by how these institutions can leverage the voices and capacities of other actors to demand accountability.

Ultimately, Fox makes three major claims about the relationships between transparency and accountability:

- *Opaque transparency* will almost never result in any real sort of accountability
- *Clear transparency* can be understood as a form of soft accountability – both

Fox, J. (2007a) ‘The Uncertain Relationship between Transparency and Accountability’, *Development in Practice* 17:4, 663 – 671

of which may result in institutional ‘answerability,’ but not sanctions, remediation, policy changes, etc.

- *Hard accountability* may not necessarily arise from institutional ‘answerability’

In essence, in order to achieve ‘hard accountability,’ there is the need to go beyond the discussion of transparency, to deal with both the nature of the governing regime as well as civil society’s capacity to encourage the institutions of public accountability to do their job.

THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN EMPOWERING POOR AND EXCLUDED GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

'Empowerment' has become a bit of a development buzzword, taking on different meanings in different contexts. Ultimately though, empowerment is about the reimagining of power relations, whereby those who have been marginalized feel compelled to make their voices heard. But what role should the state play in empowering its excluded citizens?

Green (2013) assesses the many ways that states can work to create an enabling environment for the empowerment of marginalized groups. While the state itself cannot do the empowering, it may be possible for governments to provide the tools and policies necessary for citizens to empower themselves. In the context of Making All Voices Count, this article demonstrates the importance of having support from the top and bottom, in order to bring about positive change for excluded groups of citizens.

Green understands empowerment based on the ways in which power is accumulated and distributed. He uses the 'three powers' model, which breaks up the role of the state into three constructs of empowerment – power within, power with and power to:

Power Within

'Power within' refers to empowerment

at the individual level. It is an important aspect of collective action. For governments to facilitate empowerment at this level, they should seek to reshape the social norms that perpetuate exclusion. This might include activities such as the civil registration of excluded groups, equitable access to assets and opportunities, and the prevention of violence against women and other groups.

Power With

'Power with' occurs when poor people are able to come together to express their collective needs and demand rights. Governments should facilitate these processes, but should not seek to co-opt or obstruct. Examples of facilitating 'power with' might include capacity building for organisations that support excluded groups and providing an enabling environment for the organisation of marginalized actors.

Power To

'Power to' occurs when excluded groups are able to successfully influence those in power. Governments should seek to open up and maintain channels for inclusive dialogue in order to facilitate empowerment at this level. Such initiatives might include affirmative action for the political representation of disadvantaged groups, as well as initiatives that promote transparency and accountability. All in all, Green suggests that states should take an

Green, D. (2013) 'The role of the State in Empowering Poor and Excluded Groups and Individuals', Paper prepared for the Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York

empowerment approach that includes the following core elements:

- An enabling environment for excluded groups to empower themselves
- A process whereby different actors (including elected officials, indigenous leaders, civil society organisations, etc.) are able to get together to discuss solutions to collective action problems
- Different options for empowerment and discards the least successful options
- Processes of change respond to opportunities and risks – including economic and political shocks.

The most important take-away points for the Making All Voices Count programme is the fact that empowerment tends to involve a 'magic triangle' of change – including an active civil society, committed political leaders and adequate enforcement mechanisms. Without these three core factors in place, it is unlikely that excluded groups will see positive and sustainable change.

MAPPING VIRTUOUS CIRCLES OF STATE-SOCIETY INTERACTION

While the empowerment of civil society groups is an important part of holding institutions accountable, it is not sufficient to bring about lasting change. Instead, the process of pro-poor reform within institutions must involve a fundamental shift in power relations. Societal actors from below must leverage their comparatively low levels of power, and pro-poor officials should seek to use their political clout to create an environment that encourages the participation of marginalised actors.

Fox (2005) explores the ways in which institutions can become more accountable through the creations of 'virtuous circles' of interaction between state and society actors. By this, Fox implies that it is only through the construction of mutually beneficial alliances between key officials and pro-poor civil society actors that empowering institutional change can occur. To explore these interactions, Fox examines a variety of case studies from rural Mexico between 1982 and 2000. Each of these cases documents the process of creating spaces for indigenous peoples' organisations to share decision-making power within the public sector. For the Making All Voices Count programme, Fox's work is important to understanding the ways that empowering institutional reform might occur when state and society

actors work together in mutually beneficial ways.

In order to create and sustain these 'virtuous circles' of interaction, Fox raises three important points:

- Reformers within institutions need to foster an environment that will reduce the risks and costs associated with the collective action of poor people.
- Poor people's organisations need to scale up, both horizontally and vertically, in order to gain the bargaining power necessary within anti-poor institutions.
- While both of these processes are occurring, there should simultaneously be the creation of coalitions between key state and society actors.

The problem is that opponents of empowerment and accountability are embedded throughout the chain of authority within institutions. Thus, there is a need for political champions to identify key bottlenecks onto which societal actors can focus their pressure.

Fox refers to this entire process as the 'sandwich strategy.' In this model, institutional reformists can assist by channelling resources downwards to pro-poor social movements. At the same time, civil society groups must exert upward pressure on institutions to demand accountability. Simultaneously,

Fox, J. (2005) 'Empowerment and institutional change: Mapping 'Virtuous Circles' of state-society interaction' in Alsop, R. (Ed), *Power, Rights and Poverty: Concepts and Connections*, Washington DC: World Bank

pro-poor advocates from both the top and bottom must put pressure on mid-level elites, who are resistant to reform. While an ideal outcome of this strategy could be an increase in government accountability, the more likely outcome is an increased capacity for the poor to demand and articulate their interests.

In summary, Fox raises several key points for making this strategy successful and realistic:

- Pro-empowerment institutional reforms must be reinforced by alliances between state and society actors, *grounded in shared interest*.
- Transparency, accountability and participation reforms are mutually reinforcing and must all be present to create a *pro-empowerment policy environment*.
- To be successful, power sharing must incorporate *mechanisms through which arising conflict can effectively be resolved*.
- Pro-poor policymakers need to invest their political power into providing civil-society actors *tangible incentives to engage, as well as some protection from backlash*.

ACCOUNTABILITY POLITICS

'Accountability politics' is a way of referring to the arena of conflict over whether and how those in power are held publicly responsible for their decisions. The process of creating accountable governance involves challenging the state and has the potential to be transformative. Despite the fact that greater accountability is generally associated with stronger governance, its relationship with democracy is more complicated. Electoral democracy, for instance, may not always produce an accountable government.

In Fox's (2007) work on accountability politics in Mexico, he explores the factors necessary for constructing a culture of increased accountability within governance, or what he calls the social foundations of accountability. Specifically, he looks at rural communities in Mexico, where mistrust of the state is traditionally very high and citizen participation in governance is low. His findings show that in some regions, communities were able to overcome a variety of challenges in order to achieve increased accountability in local governance, despite the confines of an authoritarian regime. Fox's work is key to understanding some of the obstacles that citizens must overcome in order to build the social foundations for accountable governance within an authoritarian regime.

By the late twentieth century, the lived experiences of many Mexican citizens had led to a deep suspicion towards the country's government. This mistrust, in combination with the confines of an authoritarian state, meant that achieving government accountability would be a difficult task. These difficulties were even greater in rural communities where factors such as geographic isolation, a lack of access to mass media, limited access to travel and a risk of punishment from powerful elites all weakened citizens' capacities to demand state accountability.

However, in the 1980's and 90's, a series of antipoverty programmes, driven by local, community based organisations, allowed marginalised groups to engage in autonomous collective action. This was something new for many rural communities. In some areas, these initiatives were able to scale up from the community to regional level, with the result that they amassed a stronger voice in the political arena.

The result of these programmes was a partial shift in the state-society balance of power in some rural regions. Fox suggests that there were two key factors that led to this change:

- The scaling up of rurally located, autonomous mass membership organisations; and

Fox, J. (2007), *Accountability Politics: Power and Voice in Rural Mexico*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

- The establishment of alliances across state-society boundaries, which led to the amplification of power and voice for discussions around accountability.

Thus, the social foundations of accountability politics in rural Mexico were established before the transition away from an authoritarian regime. This demonstrates that even under repressive political circumstances, citizens have the capacity to influence the government responsiveness to some degree.

In summary, Fox offers several methodological recommendations for researchers interested in understanding and measuring the social foundations for increased accountability. Fox points to the importance of having a free and open media in order to discipline public officers who misuse their power – something for which there is increasing scope as digital media and social media take off around the world. He also recommends that researchers take an 'ethnographic approach' towards understanding public institutions. By this, he means that it is important to observe those who are participating in these spaces and to understand how they engage with conflicts amongst each other and from outsiders.

DOES TRANSPARENCY IMPROVE GOVERNANCE?

Transparency seems obviously useful for improving governance. Transparency and accountability initiatives especially have received attention as tools for improving public services. How do these initiatives lead to improvements, though, and what factors shape those pathways?

Archon Fung and Stefan Kosack explore pathways toward public service improvement through transparency. They analyse types of transparency and 'worlds' where initiatives take place, in order to understand the potential for change.

This analysis serves those seeking to encourage citizen voice or enact transparency initiatives in order to improve governance or public services. It provides a framework for understanding how transparency leads to change as well as potential obstacles to change.

Fung and Kosack first outline types of transparency, including those for selfgoverning citizens and those for individual customers. For instance, freedom of information allows self-governing citizens to make better-informed democratic decisions about governance. In the private sector, transparency allows individual customers to make informed purchases. It also allows customers to act as self-governing citizens and support certain types of corporate behaviour.

This paper focuses on transparency for individual customers to hold government accountable for public services and their improvement. This type is often the goal of transparency and accountability initiatives. To achieve improvement requires four steps in an action cycle. First, the information must be relevant and available. Customers also must change their actions because of the information. Their actions must impact on providers, either directly ('short routes') or through the political system ('long routes'). Finally, providers must respond to that impact, either through collaboration or due to confrontation by customers or the political system.

Fung and Kosack use these steps and factors to develop a rubric of four 'worlds' in which transparency and accountability initiatives act. The rubric indicates pathways for and obstacles to successful initiatives.

- **World One** is a situation where competitive services allow customers to choose the best provider, leading to improved services.
- **World Two** is a situation where service providers are willing to collaborate with customers to improve services.
- **World Three** is a situation where service providers are unwilling to change. Here, customers change incentives through confrontation with providers in order to initiate improvement.

Fung, A. and Kosack, S. (2014), 'Does Transparency Improve Governance?' *Annual Review of Political Science* 17:65- 87

- **World Four** is a situation where service providers are unwilling to change, but politicians are willing to reform services. Customers work through 'long routes' to initiate change.
- **World Five** has the most obstacles; it is a situation in which neither service providers nor politicians are willing to create change. Transparency initiatives can mobilise broad-based social action for confrontational pressure through both 'short' and 'long' routes.

Fung and Kosack caution that other contextual factors also matter and the rubric is not predictive. However, it does offer valuable insight to those seeking to encourage citizen voice for improved services.

- It provides a framework for understanding contextual factors that influence action and reaction.
- By pointing out all the actors involved, it begs the question of who is supposed to use the information and why they will care or react.
- It provides a framework for understanding potential obstacles to action and reaction in order to find the path of least resistance. For instance, understanding the kind of 'world' in which the initiative occurs points to action through either 'short' or 'long' routes, or both, and to collaboration, confrontation, or both.

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About Making All Voices Count

Making All Voices Count is a programme working towards a world in which open, effective and participatory governance is the norm and not the exception. This Grand Challenge focuses global attention on creative and cutting-edge solutions to transform the relationship between citizens and their governments. We encourage locally driven and context specific change, as we believe a global vision can only be achieved if it is pursued from the bottom up, rather than the top down.

The field of technology for Open Government is relatively young and the consortium partners, Hivos, Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Ushahidi, are a part of this rapidly developing domain. These institutions have extensive and complementary skills and experience in the field of citizen engagement, government accountability, private sector entrepreneurs, (technical) innovation and research.

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About Research, Evidence and Learning Component

This Review of Experience is developed by the Research, Evidence and Learning component of *Making All Voices Count*. The Research, Evidence and Learning component's purpose is to contribute to improving performance and practice and build an evidence base in the field of citizen voice, government responsiveness, transparency and accountability (T&A) and Technology-for-T&A. The Review of Experience aims to reach out to and enlist stakeholders for *Making All Voices Count* among practitioner and academic circles. It provides an up-to-date review of experience on cutting-edge questions that are considered relevant by these actors, to be taken up and used by them.



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