Transforming Governance: What Role for Technologies?

A LEARNING EVENT

FEBRUARY 2016

MANILA, PHILIPPINES

Transforming Governance: What Role for Technologies?

The technological innovations of the last two decades – cell phones, tablets, open data and social media – mean that governments and citizens can interact like never before. Around the world, in different contexts, citizens have fast-increasing access to information and communications technologies (ICTs) that enable them to monitor government performance and express their views on it in real time.

In February 2016, a learning event in Manila, convened by Making All Voices Count, brought together 55 researchers and practitioners from 15 countries. They all work on using new technologies for accountable governance. They shared their diverse experiences, reflected on how they approach transformative governance, and visited Filipino accountable governance initiatives.

This report shares some of what they learned.

WHAT MAKES A LEARNING EVENT?

Introduces Making All Voices Count and its work; the event participants and their work; and the aims and design of the learning event.

IDEAS FOR ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNANCE

Describes three useful ideas for thinking about tech for accountable governance, and uses each one to frame a learning conversation about two examples of work funded by Making All Voices Count.

- *Transformative governance*
- *Vertical integration*
- *Accountability ecosystems*

CONVERSATIONS ON TRANSFORMATIVE GOVERNANCE

Some emergent conversational themes from the event, each illustrated by examples drawn from field visits to accountable governance actors in the Philippines.

- *The importance of context*
- *Tech for transformation*
- *Thick and thin engagement*
- *The dynamics of partnership*
- *Transparency*

WAYS FORWARD

A summary of reflections on future directions in transformative governance work, and for Making All Voices Count.

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What Makes a Learning Event?

This section describes the key ingredients that were needed to make the Manila learning event happen.

What Makes a Learning Event?

The *Transforming Governance* learning event was designed to allow participants to engage with, and learn from, the knowledge and experiences of other researchers and practitioners working on citizen engagement and accountable, responsive governance.

A number of key ingredients are needed to make a learning event like this happen: a convenor, a theme, a network of willing participants with experiences to share, a structured learning methodology, and an experience of contextual learning.

A CONVENOR: THE RESEARCH, EVIDENCE AND LEARNING COMPONENT OF 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. It makes grants to support innovations and technologies that have the potential to transform governance, and it does research about what works in accountable governance, and why.

Making All Voices Count is implemented by a consortium of three organisations – Hivos, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Ushahidi – that have extensive and complementary skills and experience in the fields of citizen engagement and technology for open government.

IDS hosts the Research, Evidence and Learning (REL) component of the programme.[1] This component contributes to improving performance and practice in accountable governance, and building an evidence base in the field of citizen voice, government responsiveness, transparency and accountability, and technology for transparency and accountability.

REL Co-ordinator Rosemary McGee introduces the aims of the learning event

The REL team convened, co-designed and organised the *Transforming Governance* learning event. Their aim was to bring together participants from the Making All Voices Count network – consortium staff, funded partners, and researchers working in the accountable governance field – to share research, evidence and experiential lessons, and to enhance their capacities, question their assumptions and strengthen their networks.

1 McGee, R.; with Edwards, D.; Minkley, G.; Pegus, C-M. and Brock, K. (2015) *Making All Voices Count Research and Evidence Strategy*. Brighton: IDS

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A THEME: TRANSFORMING GOVERNANCE – WHAT ROLE FOR TECHNOLOGIES?

Making All Voices Count focuses attention on innovative and cutting-edge solutions to transform the relationship between citizens and their governments. It encourages locally driven and context-specific change, in the belief that its vision can only be achieved if it is pursued from the bottom up, rather than the top down.

Across the world, many initiatives are working to try and improve governance, and make its systems work better. These include efforts to

- enable citizens to have a voice
- engage as citizens in various aspects and levels of governance processes
- hold governments to account at local or national levels
- make government more responsive to citizens' realities, needs and rights.

Some of these efforts are led by citizens, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academics or faith-based organisations, others by government, and yet others by international aid agencies. They include government decentralisation programmes, the devolution of government responsibilities to local levels, aid projects or grassroots community development projects, policy-focused research, the opening up of government data to public scrutiny to improve transparency, provision of information to citizens about government policies or procedures,

citizen monitoring of government spending, and mobilisation of mass citizen protests to name and shame corrupt or incompetent officials.

Many of these initiatives involve ICTs, either alone or in combination with offline approaches. The purpose of the learning event was for participants to reflect on the role of technology in transforming governance in their own work and the work of others.

A NETWORK OF WILLING PARTICIPANTS WITH KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE TO SHARE

Making All Voices Count started in June 2013 with a group of consortium staff. It is now at the heart of a vibrant partnership of governance innovators, supporting 86 initiatives that work in support of improving the accountability of governance, many of them using ICTs.

The learning event brought together Making All Voice Count staff from different parts of the programme with some of these funded partners and international researchers working in the field of accountable governance.

Funded partners and researchers came from tech companies, labs and hubs; research institutes and policy advocacy organisations; international and national NGOs; grassroots projects and foundations. What they had in common was an interest in changing governance for the better: through enabling citizens to have a voice to hold local or national government to account, to make

USA AND CANADA

Blair Glencorse is working to increase public understanding about the role of legislatures and enhance the capacity of civil society to engage in improving legislative governance in Pakistan

Heather Gilberds is exploring whether interactive radio and mobile platforms enable small-scale farmers in Tanzania to voice their needs to decision-makers

Chris Hale directs a programme working in several countries, with the central goal of improving governance and transforming lives through a meaningful right of access to information

Brendan Halloran works to expand the impact and scale of transparency and accountability interventions, and has supported learning in this field for several years

Matt Leighninger directs a network of practitioners and researchers collaborating to strengthen the field of deliberative democracy

Nina McMurry is researching what happens when poor people learn new civic skills and begin to interact with local officials and politicians in the Philippines

Rachel Neill is researching the role of technology innovation hubs in transforming governance in sub-Saharan Africa

AFRICA (GHANA, KENYA, SOUTH AFRICA, NIGERIA, LIBERIA)

Al King is creating a collaborative reporting and monitoring system to improve policy accountability in Liberia

Florence Ndeti is supporting rural women in Kenya to engage with the duty-bearers under the county governance system

Gavin Weale is working with a platform that connects urban youth to the South African parliament through the use of online media and offline direct interactions

George Osei-Bimpeh is working to promote citizen inclusion in the allocation and expenditure of District Development Funds in Ghana

Indra de Lanerolle does research on how open government data in South Africa can be used for accountability purposes by local and provincial organisations

Jakeline Were is gathering evidence on how technology can be used in citizen complaints systems to contribute to the effective delivery of humanitarian services in Kenya

Jawa Mwachupa Wangoni is creating digital maps of extractive sites as an advocacy tool to trigger evidence-based conversations about the extractives industry in Kenya

Jerry Sam aims to improve information-sharing between citizens and duty-bearers on development plans and budgets in Ghana

Koketso Moeti runs a mobile, multi-lingual platform in South Africa that allows local activists to load their campaigns so that anyone can join them from a cell phone

Leah Kimathi is working to strengthen health services in Kenya by supporting the feedback loop between the county health government structures and the community

Lucas Fondo is implementing a county budget tracking project in Kenya, to ensure that public participation spaces are used effectively for meaningful participation

Munirat Tawiah is improving understanding of incentives and barriers to low-income women's engagement with metropolitan authorities in Ghana

Nomsa Mahlalela is developing and testing an app to improve the responsiveness of justice, health and psycho-social support services to the needs of rape victims in South Africa

Oluseun Onigbinde is using technology and community participation to track public budgets in Nigeria

Pramod Mohanlal is adapting an online consumer ratings and reviews platform in South Africa for use in the public sector, enabling citizens to feed back on their experiences of public services

Rory Liedeman does research on what role – if any – technologies can play in making government more responsive

Ssanyu Rebecca Ntongo is doing research on citizen-generated data in the information ecosystem in Uganda

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government more responsive to citizens' realities, needs and rights.

A STRUCTURED LEARNING PROCESS AND A FACILITATOR

The design of this learning event built on lessons from convening a similar gathering in 2014.[2] The Manila learning event was carefully structured to provide a balanced mix of

- inputs on three key ideas – transformative governance, vertical integration and accountability ecosystems – to provide a framework for examining practice

- opportunities for participants to share their own experiences of using digital technologies to improve the accountability of governance

- opportunities to learn first-hand about accountable governance initiatives in the Philippines

- spaces for conversation, networking and discussion of tips and tactics for better practice.

To achieve this balance, lead facilitator Chris Michael guided the event participants through three sets of activities, which were designed to

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2 Making All Voices Count (2014) *Bridging and Bonding: Improving the Links Between Transparency and Accountability Actors*. Brighton: IDS

INDIA

Nandini Chami is studying how new rules evolve and how values are renegotiated to legitimise new forms of participation in India

Anshuman Karol works with an Indian NGO that embraces participatory democracy as a guiding vision of governance

PHILIPPINES

Joy Aceron works to deepen democracy, directing two university programmes on governance

Al Alegre is working to develop and popularise an 'Open eGovernance Index' to enhance public service and citizen engagement, and address communication rights

David Genixon is piloting context-specific tech-based innovations to support the spread of grassroots participatory budgeting

Jalton Taguibao is supporting community members to monitor the implementation of their local government's development plans

Marlon Cornelio is a political and development worker focused on youth, governance and ICTs

INDONESIA

Ahmad Rofik is working to improve the implementation of Indonesia's village law by developing an online forum to document knowledge and experiences the system

Christian (Kes) Evert is evaluating the potential for fraud in e-procurement

Fajri Siregar is examining the effectiveness and impact of public reporting tools

John Taylor is researching the ideal conditions for participatory budgeting to thrive

Siti Aisah is using a computer game app to support citizen participation in village budgeting

Siti Fatima is mapping the patterns of ICT initiatives in the governance sector

Wawan Suyatmiko runs a platform that handles and follows up complaints about schools and educational infrastructure

Cecilia Luttrell helped evaluate a Making All Voices Count project in Indonesia, and evaluated the learning event for the programme's External Monitoring Unit

"Questions," said lead facilitator Chris Michael, "are the primary currency here."

balance structured sessions steered by the event organisers, with sessions where participants set the agenda.

- A cycle of three **key ideas 'peer assist'** sessions, in which a key idea was first introduced to the whole group, before it was split into five smaller groups, each of which had a facilitator and a note-taker. In each small group, one participant presented their own work and the group provided inputs on the work and reflected on it through the 'lens' of the key idea, using questions from the plenary presentation.

- A day of **field visits**, with participants split into four groups, each of which visited a

site of accountable governance work in the Philippines, and then reflected on what they had learned. The groups were later re-mixed for a session of cross-learning and comparison.

- A cycle of three **open 'peer assist'** groups. Throughout the event, participants had identified conversations they wanted to have about their own work, and invited their peers to discuss them in small groups. Facilitation and recording were self-organised.

The event design assumed that participants were coming with challenges or successes to share that were grounded in their own practice, and with a desire to talk about their real-life contexts. Before travelling to Manila, participants shared

information about their work and their hopes and expectations for the event. The event organising team used this and other background information to assign participants to small groups for the key-ideas sessions and the site visits, maximising the learning opportunities and ensuring a balanced mix of different kinds of actors and a geographical balance.

By contrast, for the open peer-assist sessions, participants pitched their ideas for small-group discussions, and decided which groups they wanted to attend. Some used the opportunity to get ideas on their project, while others pitched broader ideas. So the open peer-assist discussions ranged from exchanges of tips and tactics on specific work and projects, to more in-depth theoretical conversations about using tech for transformative governance work.

The facilitation of the event aimed to support non-judgemental listening and respectful, open questioning. The facilitation approach used flipcharts rather than laptops or PowerPoint presentations, and provided note-takers for the key-ideas sessions and field visits, leaving participants free to choose how many of their own notes to take. Facilitation style included the use of movement, breathing exercises and music to combat jet-lag and keep participants' energy up, and a combination of early starts and two-hour lunch-breaks to allow time for conversation, food, emails and rest.

A CONTEXT TO LEARN FROM: ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES IN THE PHILIPPINES

On the second day of the learning event, participants visited four Filipino initiatives which are approaching accountable governance from different angles. These visits were intended to help participants reflect on what they had discussed in the sessions in the context of work taking place in the Philippines, and to learn from and be inspired by their host organisations. The Filipino workshop participants were divided between the four groups, and they provided essential background guidance to the broader landscape of governance in the Philippines.

Symph is a start-up web development and design company. As well as incubating its own home-grown start-ups, it also works on governance, "to make the world a better place". Its governance initiatives involve developing one tool that makes it easier to access government data from different ministries, and another that allows geotagging through smartphones as a method of auditing government infrastructure.

Naga City local government is considered an example of good practice in local governance, founded on the principles of transparency, participation and responsiveness. It has an i-governance programme (i-Serve) that relies on a combination of digital and analogue delivery mechanisms.

Rappler is a multi-platform online media organisation with a social change vision. Through two of its platforms, Move.PH and RapplerX, it promotes citizen journalism and community engagement. It also delivers content from its own professional journalists, who tap the internet for news sourcing and distribution.

The Open Government Partnership (OGP), founded in 2011, is a multilateral initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. The Philippines was a founding member, and gains on public transparency and accountability have been realised in the first year of implementing its OGP Country Action Plan.

Ideas for Accountable Governance

This section describes three useful ideas for thinking about tech for accountable governance, and uses each of them to think about two examples drawn from presentations of work funded by Making All Voices Count grants.

Transformative Governance*

The *Transforming Governance* learning event aimed to deepen understandings of governance, of the scope and role of information technologies, and of the participants themselves as change agents working towards accountable governance.

Making All Voices Count and its partners are working to make governance systems in different contexts work better, with the aim of ensuring that they are more open, effective, participatory or responsive to the needs of citizens.[1] Acting as governance change agents means operating in a complex, multi-level terrain, which is not neutral; and it means engaging with many actors and interests, at many levels. Often, it means transforming some aspect of the way that governance is normally done. This means identifying power relations between different government actors, and working to change them.[2]

Governance differs dramatically from context to context – even across democratic political systems – and over time. In some contexts, at certain moments, governance is at a very basic level, and it is hard or impossible for government to do more than ensure basic functioning of systems. In other contexts or moments, governments may reach out to citizens, and citizens to government, in order to improve on systems. And in still other contexts or moments, particular combinations of people, knowledge, tools or processes can transform existing systems – actually altering the nature of institutions or relationships so that democratic governance works better for people. Often, these transformative moments don't last long; they open up and then close again quickly.[3]

In each of these situations, change agents carry out different kinds of governance work, and engage with different objectives in mind.[4]

"The terrain of governance is not neutral," said Rosie McGee. "Some of our engagement to transform governance is about how power is distributed."

Transform: "to change completely the appearance or character of something or someone, especially so that that thing or person is improved" (Cambridge online dictionary).

Governance can be thought of as the relationships between the state and its citizens, as well as among citizens themselves; and the processes by which power is exercised in these relationships.

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* This section is made up of four parts. The first part, 'Tranformative governance', is an edited summary of Rosie McGee's presentation on governance. The second part, from 'How can technology shape democracy,' to the end of 'Key variables in democratic innovations featuring technology' is an edited summary of a longer learning event background paper by Matt Leighninger. The final parts, 'Viewing our work through the lens of transformative governance' and 'Collective reflections on transformative governance' are based on the reflections and contributions of event participants.

Each also implies a different kind of relationship between citizens and government. These patterns are summarised in the table below.

For long-term, sustained change in democratic governance, change agents aim for transformative processes, but this is not possible in every context.

HOW CAN TECHNOLOGY HELP RESHAPE DEMOCRACY?

How can we make democracy work in new and better ways, and adjust our democratic formulas so that they are more sustainable, powerful and fulfilling? Some new answers come from the development of online tools and platforms that help people to engage with their governments, with organisations and institutions, and with each other. Often referred to collectively as 'civic technology', these tools can help us map public problems, help citizens generate solutions, gather input for government, coordinate volunteer efforts, and help neighbours remain connected.

Despite the rapid growth of civic tech around the world, in most cases these forums and tools are not fully satisfying expectations. One reason for this is that they are usually disconnected from one another, and from other civic engagement opportunities, so are not reaching their full civic potential. Another is that some are designed mainly to gather small scraps of feedback from citizens on a government service, with no guarantee that government will be willing or able to use the input – so they only *have* limited civic potential.

It may be unfair to expect any new technology to automatically change our systems of governance, when such change involves engaging with existing power relations. Nonetheless, we should

KEY REFERENCES

1. Carothers,T. and Brechenacher, S. (2014) *Accountability, Participation and Inclusion: A New Development Consensus?* Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

2. McGee, R. and Gaventa, J. (2013) *Shifting Power? Assessing the Impact of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives*. IDS Working Paper 383, Brighton: IDS

3. Gaventa, J. (2004) 'Towards Participatory Governance: Assessing the Transformative Possibilities', in S. Hickey and G. Mohan (eds), *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation – Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development*, London: Zed Books

4. Cornwall, A. and Gaventa, J. (2001) *From Users and Choosers to Makers and Shapers: Repositioning Participation in Social Policy*. IDS Working Paper 127, Brighton: IDS

IN GOVERNANCE WORK WHICH IS . . .	CITIZENS ENGAGE TO . . .	CITIZENS RELATE TO THE GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNANCE SYSTEM AS . . .
Functional	. . . make existing governance systems function, usually in the field of service delivery, through giving feedback on how well they are working.	Users (of services)
Instrumental	. . . make existing governance systems work more effectively and efficiently, through getting people's contributions and giving them responsibilities. Usually in service delivery, but also sometimes in objective-setting, planning and budgeting.	Choosers (having a bit more of a say, often choosing from different options)
Transformative	. . . change existing governance systems – the relationships, processes and rules of the game – through active citizen engagement, at all levels and activities of government, within frameworks of rights, responsibilities and accountability.	Makers and shapers (not just taking what's given, or choosing from options, but getting involved in changing the rules)

"Transforming governance is hard." said Matt Leighninger. *"It is difficult to change systems."*

certainly have these tools in mind – along with the many processes for productive public engagement that do not rely on technology – when we think about how to redesign democratic systems.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TRANSFORM GOVERNANCE?

'Transforming governance' can be a helpful term because it urges us to think more broadly about democracy, and about the power of democratic systems to improve our lives. There are at least three ways in which these positive transformations can occur.

- Changing how people think and act in democracies, by giving them the information they need, the chance to connect with other citizens, the opportunity to provide ideas and recommendations to public officials and public employees, the confidence that government is accountable to citizens' needs and desires, and the encouragement to devote some of their own time and energy to improving their communities.

- Changing how governments work, so that public officials and employees can interact effectively with large numbers of people, bridge divides between different groups of citizens, provide information that people can use, gather and use public input, and support citizens to become better public problem-solvers.

- Changing how civil society organisations (CSOs) ('intermediaries') and information mediators ('info-mediaries') work, so that they are better able to facilitate the interaction

between citizens and government, monitor and report on how decisions are being made and problems are being solved, and provide training and support to new leaders.

These changes can add up, in many different combinations, to democracies that are more participatory, energetic, efficient and equitable.

DISRUPTING SYSTEMS OR REMAKING THEM?

In assessing whether and how technologies can aid in transforming governance, we have to look more closely, not only at the technologies themselves but also at the contexts in which they are being introduced. In fact, the variables that have to do with the surrounding system – the extent of government buy-in, for example, or the level of digital literacy in the population – may be the most important ones for determining whether and why a technological democratic innovation has been successful.

It may also be helpful to make a distinction between 'thick' and 'thin' engagement. Thick engagement is intensive, informed and deliberative. It relies on small-group settings, either on- or offline, in which people share their experiences, consider a range of views or policy options, and decide how they want to help solve problems. Thin engagement is faster, easier and potentially viral. It encompasses a range of mainly online activities that allow people to express their opinions, make choices or affiliate themselves with a particular group or cause.

Thick and thin forms of engagement have different strengths and limitations, and they complement each other well – the term 'multi-channel' is often used to describe participation that includes both kinds of opportunities.

Some observers and researchers argue that many recent attempts at tech-enabled democratic innovation haven't paid sufficient attention to

the surrounding systems, and haven't adequately combined thick and thin engagement. A certain scepticism and sense of let-down has been expressed by some observers, but this may have more to do with the way civic technologies were described than their actual impacts on the ground. Many advocates, funders and practitioners of civic technology have romanticised the notion of 'disruptive technologies' that combat the inefficiencies and inequities of the systems that govern us. While it may be possible to disrupt systems, at some point it is also necessary to renovate them, add to them or design new ones.

KEY VARIABLES IN DEMOCRATIC INNOVATIONS FEATURING TECHNOLOGY

Democratic innovations featuring technology are happening in different types of communities in different parts of the world. The social and political context of each innovation is a key factor

in shaping its outcome. There are several other key variables that are important in understanding whether and how such innovations are having a transformative effect on governance:

- the role of government in the innovation
- geographic scope
- existing level of online access and skill in the population
- whether the innovation relies on social media, SMS, websites, or a combination of these – and whether face-to-face meetings are also part of the mix
- whether the innovation uses existing technologies or develops new ones
- whether the agenda of the innovation focuses on an issue or problem that is presented to citizens, or whether it is open to issues or problems that citizens present.

VIEWING OUR WORK THROUGH THE LENS OF TRANSFORMATIVE GOVERNANCE

MAKING ALL VOICES COUNT

This section introduces two examples of accountability work being carried out by learning event participants, which feature democratic innovations that use technology. They do not represent perfect examples of work that used a transformative governance approach; instead, they were examined by learning event participants through the lens of transformative governance. They reflected in particular on the most noteworthy aspects and the extent to which each initiative transformed citizens, government or CSOs.

INDONESIA: ACCESS MAPS AND INFORMATION FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

Who   John Taylor, Yayasan Kota Kita (Our City Foundation)

Where Surakarta (Solo), Indonesia (Pop.: 600,000)

What   Solo Kota Kita: Democratisation of a municipal participatory budget cycle using coding and mapping to make neighbourhood information more visible and accessible to citizens.

When   2009–13

Why   Solo city has had a participatory budgeting process for over ten years. The 18-month cycle involves communities voting for their priority

projects and municipal governments approving some of these for implementation. A progressive mayor was concerned that this process always had the same participants, and thought that community data should be accessible not just to the city government, but also to residents. So he asked the Our City Foundation for help with understanding neighbourhood priorities.

How Existing neighbourhood administrative units (*rukun tatanga*) were used as centres for gathering data. Each *rukun tatanga* leader supervised the answering of 13 questions about population density, poverty, land tenure and services. These responses were coded and – using GIS, on a shoestring budget – used to produce maps showing the spatial distribution of inequalities. In 2010, the first survey was carried out on paper, but by the second round in 2012, leaders sent their answers by SMS.

Our City used the survey data to produce a mosaic of maps and infographics which are available online. They were also shared back to neighbourhoods in various offline formats, including poster-sized neighbourhood maps, showing an aerial map with the neighbourhood boundary, then smaller GIS thematic maps showing issues like poverty, water, housing and education – as well as mini-atlases with neighbourhood profiles. One-day workshops were held in neighbourhoods to discuss the stories that the data and maps were telling.

When the participatory budgeting cycle comes around again, these profiles exist as a source of information that is finer-grained than municipal statistics, and that can help neighbourhoods prioritise their needs.

Our City also trained government staff to facilitate the data-gathering process, but found that enthusiasm and uptake was very variable.

Why it worked

- The process reduced the mismatch between existing data on neighbourhoods and their situation on the ground – helping make discussions of resource use more realistic.

- It is not necessary to have 100% information about a community for a decision-making tool – and crowd-sourced data is much better than no data at all.

- The maps and other information proved to be a way of getting people talking about resources in their neighbourhoods and about the participatory budgeting process.

- Turning data into maps allowed residents to put their neighbourhoods into a broader context, and compare their circumstances with those in other neighbourhoods.

Limitations

- How well the maps were used depended on the quality of facilitation in community meetings and in the participatory budgeting process; this was limited by variable uptake within the government.

- The neighbourhood focus meant that actions were also focused at this scale. There was no curiosity amongst neighbourhood citizens to scale up their information up towards the city level, or to try and transform governance systems more broadly.

- The process was resource-intensive and took political commitment to sustain. The mayor who originally initiated the process is no longer in office, and although the new mayor is supportive, the bureaucracy around him has not been behind continuing the two-year updating of the information.

- Not all government actors were prepared to accept the data as 'real information' and a legitimate contribution to governance.

- The participatory budget process is lengthy and tedious, which reduces the possibility that the approach will be applied to other processes, such as procurement.

Reflections on transforming governance

- In a process of dialogue between citizens and government, there's always the question of what's the 'right data' – there is often a mismatch between what data is available, what communities are interested in, and what governments say they need. But this focus on data draws attention away from transforming governance processes more broadly.

- Different people trust and use data differently – governments and community members have different criteria for 'trustworthy' data, and the scale and themes of useful information.

- Turning Solo Kota Kita into a transformative process would mean taking action beyond the initial provision of information, and accompanying citizens throughout the budgeting process.

- The extent to which Solo Kota Kita represented a transformative process for government was limited by its close association with a single elected official. Making it more transformative would have required a stronger focus on building a constituency for the process amongst bureaucrats.

NIGERIA: TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION TO TRACK PUBLIC BUDGETS

Who   Oleseun Onigbinde, BudgIT Nigeria

What   Tracking the national budget to make data accessible, and supporting community monitoring of the delivery of projects highlighted in local budgets.

Why   Transparency and access to budgets are problems in Nigeria. After the speeches are over, budget information is often forgotten. Budget documents are very large and complicated, and the information is inaccessible. Legislation demands that budget information is shared at the national level, but not in an accessible way.

How   At first, BudgIT tracked the national budget to make sure every Nigerian has access to it. Through the use of infographics, graphs, charts, and social and traditional media, the cost of access was reduced and some of the barriers removed.

But they realised that although this was useful, it was not transforming governance. So they began focusing in on projects named in state budgets, which have a completion rate of around 10%. They worked with traditional leaders of communities to monitor 24 projects in six states, managing to ensure that five of these were completed. This involved real-time tracking of project transactions and progress on a website, but also face-to-face work with communities, engaging with the politicians behind the projects, and building an understanding of shared gains.

Why it worked

- Successes relied on a combination of an elevated sense of civic duty, an ease of understanding data, and engagement with different actors (traditional leaders, community members and politicians) and at different levels (local, state and national).

- Community engagement works best when people can clearly see the promise of a direct benefit, such as the implementation of a project in their community.

- In this context, traditional leaders have enough power to challenge elected politicians.

- Showing examples of successful engagement can encourage communities to participate in monitoring.

Limitations

- The focus on project delivery obscures the wider lack of transparency in procurement and contracting.

- Attention spans are short, and budget cycles are long – it is not always easy to stay firmly on the issue of budgets.

- The attention of politicians is related to the election cycle, and their incentives for engagement decrease between elections.

- Rapid turnover of government personnel limits the incentives for sustained engagement.

- Different regulations on public information at the federal and state levels in Nigeria.

Reflections on transformative governance

- Getting buy-in from key stakeholders on all sides is crucial. Although here it's important to target elected politicians, they are not always the people doing the thinking – technocrats are important too for sustainable, transformative engagement.

- Transforming a budget allocation into a project or service means public education about the whole process of budgeting, and the promotion of partnership at every level.

- The technological aspects of transformation do not work at every level – it is important to identify users and non-users of the technology and work with both.

SUMMARY: COLLECTIVE REFLECTIONS ON TRANSFORMING GOVERNANCE

The transformative aspect of governance work is relative – something that is transformative in one context may not be transformative in another. In some places, it would be a surprise if the government showed any interest in citizen participation, but in others, there have been decades of work focused on nurturing accountable governance. So it's critical to understand context, and to ask, "what's on the agenda here? Is it customer service, or is it other things?"

Leading people towards having more of a say in governance is a combination of using structural changes, like decentralisation, and organisational capacity, like leadership training and tactics for organising and participation. Knowing the agenda of potential champions, especially in government, is also important, as is timing. Is it an election

year? Do elected politicians who are due to leave office want to leave a legacy? What is the lead time on public projects? All these factors affect the chances of an initiative being transformative.

The transformative potential of tech-based approaches clearly depends on which media you use and how well it fits into its context. Different media fit in different contexts – in South Africa, for example, WhatsApp is a good way of engaging people in rural areas, while Twitter fits better in the urban context.

Thick and thin participation both have their strengths. But in some contexts – like Indonesia, for example – where there are multiple layers of thin participation, the question arises of whether and how this can be either institutionalised or sustained.

When we engage citizens in initiatives to transform governance, we also need to think of how we can reform the state: we need to frame our work as two-sided. However, the trustworthiness of different parts of government in the eyes of citizens is very context-specific. Where distrust of local authorities is high, for example, civil society actors may need to be creative in seeking alliances within government at different levels.

We should also not underestimate the important of the peer-to-peer dialogues that happen in citizen monitoring initiatives. These dynamics of citizen deliberation are often undervalued but are a key driver of transformation.

Vertical Integration*

Holding power to account requires an understanding of where power lies and how it is exercised. This entails consideration of how and by whom decisions are made. Vertically integrated action is a strategic approach that takes account of power at the different levels of a policy, programme or process.

Jonathan Fox's 2014 paper[1] scans the state of evidence on the impact of social accountability initiatives, and concludes that 'strategic' approaches are the most promising in terms of impact, because they "bolster enabling environments for collective action, scale up citizen engagement beyond the local arena and attempt to bolster governmental capacity to respond to voice." (p. 35)

Meant as a strategy for civil society engagement in scrutinising government performance, Fox argues that vertical integration is an effective way of doing accountability work because it reveals where the problems are, allowing advocacy strategies to be precisely targeted. He also argues that it is effective in addressing corruption and exclusion, because these are produced by vertically integrated power structures – so parallel processes that are also vertically integrated are able to build the kind of long-term countervailing power that could prompt the state to become more open and transparent.

Fox notes that vertical integration is well-suited to contemporary contexts where the design and implementation of public policy is often shared between different levels of decision-making,[2] and that public accountability is often constrained by an exclusive focus on one level of analysis.[3]

WHAT IS VERTICAL INTEGRATION?

● **Systematic, co-ordinated monitoring**. By looking at all levels of government performance simultaneously and systematically, civil society advocacy actors can develop strategies in real time.

"Holding power to account requires an understanding of where power lies and how it is exercised," said Joy Aceron.

Vertical integration is a civil society strategy for scrutinising government performance, involving a "systematic, coordinated monitoring of the performance of all levels of public decision making," taking into account "the different levels of power, from the international to the national, state and municipal." (p. 621)[2]

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* This section, from 'Vertical integration' to 'Using vertical integration as a mapping tool' is an edited summary of a learning event background paper by Joy Aceron. The subsequent sections, 'Viewing our work through the lens of vertical integration' and 'Collective reflections on vertical integration' are based on the reflections and contributions of event participants.

Vertical integration can be applied sectorally or across sectors. It needs the issue that is the subject of civil society action to be clear and rooted in a critical issue recognised by a constituency that allows the alliances to be built across levels involving multiple actions and actors.

- **Connecting the dots to address root causes**. Vertical integration takes scale into account by 'connecting the dots' to address root causes rather than just the symptoms of corruption, inefficiency or abuse. It engages all levels of decision-making by linking bottom-up and top-down initiatives, but also allows for broad geographic coverage and social inclusion. Fox and Aceron[4] argue that the aim of vertical integration is to "combine bottom-up independent policy monitoring with the civic muscle needed . . . for public interest advocacy." They argue that information access and citizen voice are often not enough to deliver accountability, because of entrenched institutional obstacles that favour anti-accountability forces. Mal-governance, Fox[1] argues, does not persist because of "a few bad apples" but because of "vertically integrated power structures." (p. 31) This means that coalition-building and 'connecting the dots' are important elements of civil society efforts to hold government to account. A mechanism for co-ordination and communication is critical to enable integration, to ensure that all actions make up more than the sum of their parts.

- **Inter-connected actions by actors at different levels**. Vertical integration involves a wide variety of actions and actors at different levels. For civil society action centred on advocacy, integration is driven by the need to respond to resistance by vested interests in pushing for a policy or in ensuring its implementation. This makes it critical for civil society advocacy campaigns to use horizontal accountability mechanisms – such as institutional oversight, checks and balances within the state, and the courts and the legislature – and use data from experience on the ground to support and bolster lobbying higher up.

A CASE EXAMPLE OF VERTICAL INTEGRATION[4]

The Reproductive Health Advocacy Network (RHAN) was formed in 2001 in the Philippines to help push for the passage of what was then called the Reproductive Health Bill. From a small coalition of reproductive health advocates, RHAN eventually grew to more than 300 organisations that included women's groups, health service providers, people's organisations, party-list groups and academic institutions. It later gained massive public support as evidenced by surveys carried out by the Social Weather Stations in 2011 and 2012. RHAN served as the campaign centre and brought the different

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1. Fox, J. (2014) *Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?* Washington DC: World Bank

2. Fox, J. (2001) 'Vertically Integrated Policy Monitoring: A Tool for Civil Society Policy Advocacy', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 30.3: 616–27

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

4. Fox, J. and Aceron, J. (2016) *Doing Accountability Differently: Vertically Integrated Civil Society Policy Monitoring and Advocacy*, Bergen: U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Center

reproductive health groups together, mobilising forces from below and launching various advocacy events. RHAN also actively engaged the state by seeking champions in both the legislative and executive departments. It did so by conducting policy research as inputs for public officials, and by networking with pro-reproductive health legislators in the Senate and the lower houses.

USING VERTICAL INTEGRATION AS A MAPPING TOOL

Fox and Aceron[4] have developed a 'mapping tool' to guide the documentation and analysis of vertical integration processes. Its goal is to allow public interest strategists and policy analysts to visualise patterns of CSO monitoring and advocacy efforts across three dimensions: scale, coverage and intensity of actions.

The mapping tool comprises two matrices. In both cases, they can be completed with different colours to indicate the intensity of CSO engagement, to give an at-a-glance map of engagement:

HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	NONE

Intensity of CSO engagement (darker is higher)

The first matrix, shown below, concerns CSO constituency-building and maps a variety of constituency-building approaches onto different domains of action.

The second matrix deals with civil society's interface with the state, and again maps a variety of activities onto different levels of action.

Matrix 1: CSO constituency-building

CONSTITUENCY-BUILDING APPROACH	LEVEL OF ACTION				
	VERY LOCAL (COMMUNITY, VILLAGE)	DISTRICT/ COUNTY	STATE/ PROVINCE	NATIONAL	INTER-NATIONAL
Grassroots organizing/ awareness-building					
Coalition-building among already-organised, shared constituency					
Cross-sectoral coalition-building					
Mass collective action/protest					
Public education strategy (media)					
Independent CSO monitoring of policy implementation					
Horizontal exchange of experiences/deliberation (across same geographic level)					
Participatory process to develop alternative policy/ implementation proposals					
Strategic use of ICTs					

Matrix 2: Civil society interface

CSO INTERFACE WITH STATE	LEVEL OF ACTION				
	VERY LOCAL (COMMUNITY, VILLAGE)	DISTRICT/ COUNTY	STATE/ PROVINCE	NATIONAL	INTERNATIONAL
Policy advocacy executive authorities (mayor, governor, etc.)					
Policy advocacy legislature (town council, state legislature, parliament)					
Legal recourse (state-based or strategic)					
Participation in 'invited spaces' – shared, but government-controlled					
Participation in 'claimed spaces' – shared, but created in response to CSO initiative					
Engagement with public accountability agencies (ombudsman, audit bureau, human rights commission)					

VIEWING OUR WORK THROUGH THE LENS OF VERTICAL INTEGRATION

MAKING ALL VOICES COUNT

This section introduces two examples of accountability work being carried out by learning event participants. They do not represent perfect examples of work that used a vertical integration approach; instead, they were examined by learning event participants through the lens of vertical integration. Participants learned about what each initative consisted of, and then reflected in particular on how each had interacted with allies at different levels, the quality of those interactions, and what they implied for the transformative aspects of the engagement.

INDONESIA: CHECK MY SCHOOL (CEK SEKOLAH KU)

Who   Wawan Suyatmiko

Where Four cities in Indonesia

What   Participatory monitoring mechanism to improve education service and infrastructure

Why   To improve the condition and governance of schools through participatory monitoring

How   Check My School operates in 73 schools in four Indonesian cities. In each, it invites local CSOs and student volunteers as advocacy partners and 'info-mediaries', and creates two layers of advocacy – one online and one offline.

The online platform allows the submission of complaints via a website, SMS, email and Twitter; the progress of a complaint can be tracked on the website. The offline platform comprises periodic public consultation meetings that bring together parents, children, teachers and local government. People without internet access can submit complaints at these meetings. The meetings are also a space for building capacity in public monitoring.

At the outset, Check My School did advocacy work with the national Ministry of Education. When a new Minister was appointed, he signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Check My School. Although there is a ministerial decree to open budgets, in practice this is seldom achieved. But with the support from the Ministry, government responsiveness at lower levels is very good; officials attend meetings and participate.

The project targeted several liberal-minded head teachers who ensured that the platforms had some traction at the school level. If pupils make a complaint, head teachers have a week in which to respond, and info-mediaries forward their responses to the education department, so that they can assist with solutions.

The project website has received 14,000 visitors, and received more than 500 online complaints, about 60% of which were solved at the local level. School budgeting, planning and management has become more transparent.

Why it worked

● Complaints can be submitted anonymously, protecting the identity of the complainant.

● The diverse mixture of online and offline complaints mechanisms maximised the possible range of participants.

● The 'soft pressure' exerted by the MoU is very effective in ensuring participation amongst bureaucrats at decentralised levels of government.

● Targeting responsive head teachers who engaged with Check My School allowed the initiative to establish itself as making a positive contribution to school reputation.

● Many of the complaints concern infrastructure and services rather than policy; they are relatively easily resolved.

Limitations

● Although there was high responsiveness from the participating schools and localities, there are questions about whether the model would work in less favourable conditions.

● Relying on the buy-in of an elected official is an excellent entry point, but there is always the threat that it will also be an exit point when the official leaves office. Overcoming this limitation means deepening the network of the programme to ensure the future support of other stakeholders at different levels.

Reflections on vertical integration

- Check My School has allies at many levels, which means that it can facilitate both complaint and response.

- It is the dynamic relationship between actors at different levels within government that is key to ensuring the two-way flow of complaint and response.

- The activities that Check My School carries out at each level offer reputational benefits to its allies in government, civil society and schools.

- This kind of vertically integrated initiative is very unusual in the Indonesian context. In this sense, although it mainly deals with relatively non-controversial issues such as school infrastructure, it can be seen as transformational, because it is counter to the prevailing political culture.

- The challenge is in deepening networks at each level of the vertical scale, and in maintaining the dynamic between levels.

GHANA: PARTICIPATORY MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF PRO-POOR POLICIES

Who George Osei-Bimpeh

Where Urban Ghana

What Applying participatory monitoring and evaluation approaches to ensure citizen participation in budgeting for and implementation of Ghana's District Development Facility (DDF). The DDF is a relatively new mechanism of the national government intended to coordinate and harmonise government and donor initiatives by targeting local government financing and capacity-building.

Why Most citizens are unaware of the DDF, yet it is one of the main ways that metropolitan governments receive funds from central government. Even where information does exist, it is written in technical terms that make it hard for ordinary citizens to understand.

How SEND is an NGO with a specialism in research and advocacy for pro-poor policy, and a focus on the inclusion of marginalised people in governance and development. SEND has 15 years of experience applying a participatory monitoring and evaluation framework to successive pro-poor policies and programmes. The latest of these, and its current focus, is the DDF.

The sustained application of the framework on successive policies has led to the establishment of civil society platforms at the district, regional and local levels. In each district, one group acts as a secretariat and organises the network at district level, and also interacts at the regional and national levels.

SEND begins policy monitoring by establishing an MoU with the relevant part of government – an essential step which helps overcome Ghana's lack of a freedom of information law. The engagement of government is framed as a two-way flow of information – both opening government information to scrutiny, and providing government with new information to build up a more accurate picture of what is happening on the ground. SEND then uses a four-stage process of activities:

- Policy sensitisation – taking relevant laws and policies and reframing them to make them accessible to citizens.
- Participatory monitoring – using ICTs to help citizens monitor government spending and interact with the budget process.
- Policy engagement – at district, regional and national levels. At the district level, this engagement is mostly around service delivery, but at the national level it focuses on looking at budget allocations and policy-making.
- Responsiveness – ongoing monitoring of promises and actions being taken to keep them.

SEND also works with the media, building short, easy-to-use fact sheets; and negotiating with local radio stations for free airtime to discuss policies in local languages and at local level. At national level, where airtime is expensive, they creating media events around their reports, generating a buzz for one or two weeks around each event, and pitching the story towards media interests.

Why it works

- SEND pays a lot of attention to coordination between different levels, focusing carefully on what engagement is taking place at each and ensuring that the right people are targeted. They tailor requests at each level to maximise impact.
- Small district groups do a lot of outreach in their communities to ensure that they are representing the people they claim to serve.
- Community radio stations have been essential for getting discussions going at the grassroots.

Limitations

- It is hard keeping citizen groups active – they are volunteers and they get fatigued.
- It is not easy to evaluate impact, or understand what contribution is being made to wider change – including the extent to which this work is 'transformative'.
- As an organisation, SEND needs to consider what will happen when it leaves.

Reflections on vertical integration

- Decentralisation is an important part of vertical integration; it is clear that we need to be careful to understand where power is located in each of these different contexts. This comes out in the way that SEND focuses different activities at the district and national levels.
- The media should not be left out of our understanding of civil society in the vertical integration model. The media is both a means to pass on information, and also a watchdog.
- For one organisation to build strategic engagements with government at different levels, credibility is vital.
- Although there is good vertical integration in this example, there is a sense in which the agenda – which specific policies are the focus of monitoring and evaluation – is top down, driven by SEND, and in turn by its donors. In this sense there may be a danger of citizen groups becoming 'contractors' to this agenda, rather than expressing their own priorities.

SUMMARY: COLLECTIVE REFLECTIONS ON VERTICAL INTEGRATION

Vertical integration may not be useful in all contexts and with all issues; there are opportunity costs to pursuing it that might strain available resources and project guidelines. There may be particular problems with applying it at the international level, when CSOs are trying to hold foreign companies to account for domestic issues. In this case, the vertical integration model may implicitly assume that the state has the power or will to intervene in this kind of situation.

However, where it can be applied, vertical integration may be particularly useful at the outset of a project, to sketch the landscape. As one participant observed, of their own project, "the first step should have involved mapping the stakeholders. Make the right partnerships with people who care." Vertical integration mapping can help understand the context of an initiative, and make strategic choices about the levels at which intervention is needed.

Applying vertical integration successfully means understanding not just the structures and levels of civil society and government, but how different levels interact, the integrity and track records of different organisations and institutions, the capacity and willingness of the agencies to respond, and information asymmetries between levels and actors. It also means ensuring that citizens are involved, and finding willing participants at the grassroots, at the same time as engaging through many different pressure points.

More than this, making good use of vertical integration for transformative governance means understanding your own piece in the puzzle:

- understanding your value
- understanding power-holders, change agents and the difference between them
- creating virtuous cycles through sustained conversation with stakeholders at different levels
- understanding blockages between levels
- looking for openings and opportunities, big and small, up and down the chain.

Vertical integration mapping can also be a useful learning tool for educating yourself, in order to educate others. This may be particularly helpful in contexts where constitutional change or decentralisation mean that the roles of different branches of government have changed; or in places where their roles are not well-understood.

Applying vertical integration effectively implies a strong role for multi-level coalitions. Many of us face challenges in coalition-building, which include balancing the commitments and goals of different coalition partners, sustaining commitments, and identifying the right point people within coalition partner institutions.

Accountability Ecosystems*

Accountability is a process involving relationships between different actors and mechanisms in both state and society, and is influenced by many contextual factors. Using the lens of an accountability 'ecosystem' focuses our attention on the complexity of accountability processes. An ecosystems perspective suggests that simple assumptions about accountability – such as the ideas that citizen feedback reaching decision-makers ensures more accountability, or that greater transparency equals greater accountability – are often actually much more complex.

"Real transformation happens when we think about the broader system," said Brendan Halloran.

DIRECTIONS OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND POINTS OF ENGAGEMENT

Thinking systematically about accountability relationships helps us plan more strategically for how to promote accountability and responsiveness. For example, if we are interested in more responsiveness in public service provision, we can think of a short accountability route, of citizens to service providers, and a long accountability route, of citizens to government decision-makers, as illustrated below.

Accountability is the obligation of those in power to take responsibility for their actions.

KEY REFERENCE

1. Peixoto, T. and Fox, J. (2016) 'When Does ICT-Enabled Citizen Voice Lead to Government Responsiveness?' *IDS Bulletin* 47.1: 23–40

The short and long routes to accountability
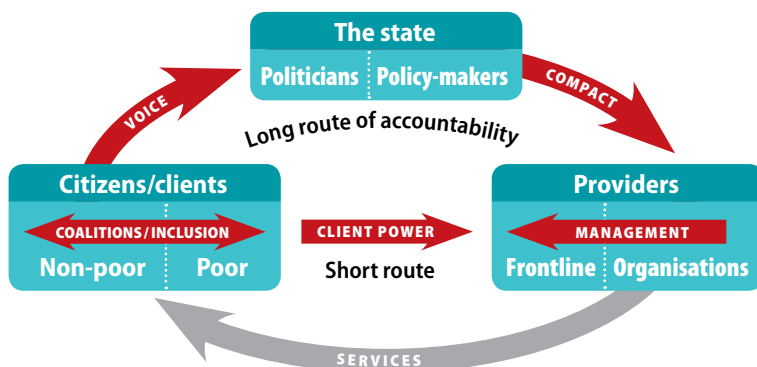
Source: World Bank (2003) World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People. Washington, D.C., World Bank

* This section, from 'Accountability ecosystems' to 'Making the most of ICTs in accountability ecosystems' begins with an edited summary of a learning event background paper by Brendan Halloran. The subsequent sub-sections, 'Viewing our work through the lens of accountability ecosystems' and 'Collective reflections on accountability ecosystems' are based on the reflections and contributions of event participants.

Similarly, understanding accountability as an ecosystem encourages us to think about the different directions of accountability, such as upward and downward accountability relationships involving service providers. Upward accountability is where service providers are held accountable by higher-level elected or appointed government officials, while downward accountability (sometimes called 'social accountability') is where citizens and civil society actors engage with service providers to ensure greater accountability.

Although the upward/downward directions and short/long routes are simplifications, they help us think a bit more systematically about accountability relationships, and how and where to influence them. For example, if a programme only acts through the short accountability route, there is an assumption that service providers have the incentives and capacity to respond to citizens. Similarly, attempts to 'close the feedback loop' assume that if decision-makers receive citizen priorities or complaints, they will act on them.

Often these assumptions prove false in the more complex and challenging realities in which we work. The following section introduces new research that explores this very issue in relation to technology.

ICTs AND ACCOUNTABILITY

A recent study by Peixoto and Fox[1] helps clarify how ICT-based efforts have influenced accountability, or not. The study looked at 23 digital platforms that gathered citizen feedback on government services in an effort to inform decision-makers and prompt a response in the form of service improvements. Thus, most of the initiatives that these researchers examined relied on the idea of 'closing the feedback loop', mentioned above. However, the creators of these ICT platforms assumed that citizens would (and could) make use of them to provide data or

make a complaint. Furthermore, they assumed that decision-makers would use this information to improve services. In many cases, these assumptions did not prove correct.

Let's look at a couple of examples. FixMyStreet is a web-based citizen reporting mechanism. Simply put, citizens upload a picture and location of a hole, blocked sewer, or other problem with a road. An email is sent to a relevant government official, and the problem is mapped on a public website, which shows if the issue has been resolved or not. After four years of operation, only 4% of reported problems had been repaired within a year of reporting.

Another case, Check my School in the Philippines follows a similar pattern. Citizens report issues with their local school, and these are displayed on a public website. The programme was developed in collaboration with the government, and has online and offline components. Yet only about one in ten of the reported issues get resolved.

What is going on here? Why didn't these ICT-based accountability initiatives work as planned? In both of the above examples, it seems that decision-makers either did not have the capacity to respond to the issues raised, or were not influenced to respond even with public display of their inaction, or both. The initiatives were based on flawed assumptions about why there were problems with service provision and what would influence relevant government actors to be more responsive.

The study found that there was no evidence that the platforms influenced the political will of decision-makers to improve services. But it did find that where decision-makers were already willing to respond, ICT-enabled citizen voice often increased their ability to do so by providing specific information. Many of the more successful initiatives were run by government agencies seeking tools to improve their own service delivery.

Thus, where there is existing political will, ICT tools contribute to upward accountability by providing information to government decision-makers to then pressure service providers. However, the ICT platforms generally do not influence the downward/short accountability route or the long accountability route, which evidence and experience tell us rely on approaches that strengthen civic capacity, including collective organisation, building relationships and trust, and acting in flexible and adaptive ways according to shifting contextual opportunities and constraints.

In many ways, this should be intuitive. We know that influencing government decision-makers can be hard, and an ICT short-cut does not exist. Nonetheless, ICTs can play an important role in collective mobilisation, and there are examples of CSOs using technology strategically to enable them to navigate accountability ecosystems, working to address multiple entry points for strengthening accountable and responsive governance.

MAKING THE MOST OF ICTs IN ACCOUNTABILITY ECOSYSTEMS

Thinking about accountability more systematically helps us to envision strategies that take advantage of the diversity of tools, tactics and opportunities

for engagement around transforming governance. It focuses us on systems and processes rather than products or technologies.

A key lesson from this kind of thinking is about the need to connect the dots, rather than working in isolation, focusing on one point of engagement or one kind of accountability process. Influencing the accountability ecosystem means connecting the dots across multiple levels of governance and diverse actors, and using multiple tools and approaches (e.g. advocacy, monitoring, legal empowerment and investigative journalism). Real transformation happens when we think about the broader system.

Technology and data can make key contributions when they are used strategically with a sound understanding of the accountability ecosystem. ICTs can support citizen collective action, data analysis can enable more effective advocacy and monitoring, and collecting citizen data and priorities can be useful for orienting action. However, these approaches seldom work alone, and must be combined to contribute to systematic change.

| VIEWING OUR WORK THROUGH THE LENS OF ACCOUNTABILITY ECOSYSTEMS | MAKING ALL VOICES COUNT |

This section introduces two examples of accountability work being carried out by learning event participants. They do not represent perfect examples of work that used an accountability ecosystems approach; instead, they were examined by learning event participants through the lens of accountability ecosystems. They reflected in particular on whether or not these initiatives were able to 'connect the dots' to strengthen the accountability ecosystem.

KENYA: AN EFFECTIVE PLATFORM FOR CITIZEN COMPLAINTS?

Who   Jakeline Were, Transparency International

Where Turkana, West Pokot and Wajir districts

What   Uwajibikaji Pamoja (Accountability Together), a platform for effective citizen complaints referral and management for the humanitarian and public service delivery sector.

Why   A key challenge in humanitarian operations is the lack of accountability mechanisms for people affected by disasters. Many agencies are involved in reducing drought risks and supporting drought-affected populations in dryland Kenya. Uwajibikaji Pamoja gives citizens several ways of making a complaint about humanitarian agencies, and ensures that complaints are referred from one service provider to another.

How   Uwajibikaji Pamoja enables members of the public to submit complaints or feedback concerning aid and service delivery through three channels: a toll-free SMS line, a web-based portal, or by filling out paper forms. People with no access to a cell phone or internet, or who cannot read or write, can visit the nearest office of a participating organisation to lodge their complaints. The system routes the complaints to the relevant organisation.

Government departments, NGOs and oversight organisations have signed up as partners to the system, and agree to an MoU which outlines their protocols for responding to complaints. Uwajibikaji Pamoja brings these partners together with citizen groups in public forums, to discuss how the system works, the complaints and issues that have been raised, and what is happening in response.

Every time action is taken on a complaint, it is logged into the integrated system and the complainant gets a notification by whichever method they choose.

Around 4,000 complaints have been made, but response levels have been very low.

Why it worked to facilitate complaints

- Providing three channels allowed a variety of people to make complaints.
- County governments have only existed since 2013, and the project correctly identified the need for government capacity-building to try and bring people on board.
- The project looks at the transparency of NGOs as well as government.

Limitations for responsiveness

● Uptake of the SMS route to complaints has been low, especially among women: not everyone is able to navigate this technology.

● Even though the organisations that signed up as partners said they were willing to respond, there has a gap between this willingness and their actual response.

● There was uneven buy-in from government, with those who were enthusiastic not necessarily those who were responsible for responding. Many government actors perceived the process as additional work for them, rather than as assistance in their work.

● The bureaucratic structure of some NGOs meant that complaints were not passed on within the organisation once they had been received at the field office level.

Reflections on the accountability ecosystem

● This initiative was not just about setting up a system and a process, but about the capacity and willingness of the agencies to respond. To be more successful in ensuring responses, it has to engage through a multitude of pressure points.

● 'Joining up the dots' in the accountability ecosystem involves not just mapping organisations, but thinking about their internal power structures and how this influences their capacity to respond.

SOUTH AFRICA: MONITORING VIOLENCE AND CRIME TO IMPROVE POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

Who Rory Liedeman, Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation

Where Cape Town

What The violence and crime monitoring project plans to use e-technology to track violence and map crime accurately in order to improve police accountability.

Why Crime is a serious problem in the Western Cape, where there were 70 murders between September 2015 and January 2016. Local people have struggled to show evidence of why and when theft, rape and murder are happening, and to have these crimes investigated.

How The Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation (SLF), which has experience engaging diverse stakeholders around a range of issues in inclusive urban development, is working with Neighbourhood Watch groups, run by local community leaders, to develop a cell phone survey tool. The reports it produces will be used to engage the South African Police, and to lobby policy-makers to improve police accountability.

The project is in its infancy, and it has taken two years to build enough trust at the grassroots to be able to move forward. It is now at the stage of participatory workshops involving SLF, ward councillors, Neighbourhood Watch groups and the police. The aim is to first to take the 'short route' to accountability by providing information to service providers. The 'long route' to accountability, via policy-makers, is much harder for people living in townships, who only have access to policy-makers when they are looking for votes.

In this project, simplified ICTs will provide the capacity to report crime, but its success will depend on mediating between different actors in the accountability ecosystem.

What are the challenges?

- Participants may face physical consequences from their participation that threaten their safety.
- Relationships between police and citizens are deeply problematic, and citizens remain scared to have honest conversations with the police.
- Finding champions within the police force to bring into the process.
- Equipping the police to deal with citizens' stories and accounts of crime and violence.

Reflections on the accountability ecosystem

- One of the 'dots' in the accountability ecosystem in this case is legislation, which is in place, but the rule of law is not followed. So it will be important to understand who can drive the sanctioning power of legislation.
- More work may be needed on understanding who is prepared to listen to citizens, how they hear, and what language will be needed to establish a dialogue.
- In this process, SLF is positioned as an intermediary between victims of crime, the police and policy-makers. There may be other intermediaries in the accountability ecosystem who could also help – perhaps shops or businesses, who have an interest in safer communities that are better for commerce.
- SLF is trying to be both bottom-up and top-down in this process: finding other allies within the accountability ecosystem and building a coalition will be important.

SUMMARY: COLLECTIVE REFLECTIONS ON ACCOUNTABILITY ECOSYSTEMS

In our efforts to keep things 'neat and tidy', and within short-term, linear project frameworks, we are sometimes in danger of ignoring the wider accountability ecosystem and the long-term changes we're trying to make. But actually, as this approach reminds us, governance work is messy and dynamic. As it grows and changes, we need to learn and adapt, particularly in linking up relevant actors and mechanisms.

Looking through the accountability ecosystem lens can be a useful way of thinking and learning about the context of the right we are trying to protect, or the services we are trying to provide, and reflect on what strategies might make a real difference. It is also a reminder that accountability ecosystems are political, and that accountability is a political process. All too often we think mechanistically, over-selling tools that address symptoms but not root causes, and forget that we need political and power analyses in our daily work.

Mapping the accountability ecosystem is about finding the right audiences and the right stakeholders for our work at both local and higher levels of governance; it also involves thinking about the internal structures of organisations. To join the dots in the accountability ecosystem, it's necessary to listen carefully to find allies – organisations and individuals within them that have synergy with our own work and goals, and complement our capacities. It also means finding the right balance of tactics to engage power-holders – a mixture of formal and informal meetings and conversations, bridging different levels.

Legal systems, laws and courts are one important 'dot' in accountability ecosystems that civic tech initiatives often don't directly address. In Kenya, for example, the law gives a mandate to confront politicians and demand access to information; but on the other hand, politicians are protected by loopholes in the law that hinder persecution or punishment. This highlights the need to be flexible and adaptive, taking advantage of the useful mechanisms that are available, and working around those that are not.

The accountability ecosystem approach can help us think outside the box. All too often we assume that government is responsible for solving all governance problems. A lot of accountable governance work focuses on complaining about government, on the assumption that it can provide solutions. But other actors in the system can be problem-solvers too. Mapping the accountability ecosystem could help us figure out who can address which problem. It could also help unravel the relationship between elected officials and public service providers, and whether they are the same at all levels and in all places.

Conversations on Transformative Governance

This section provides glimpses into some of the important conversational themes from the event, illustrated by examples from the field visits to Filipino accountable governance organisations.

Conversations on Transformative Governance

Throughout the learning event, some conversational themes emerged repeatedly as participants reflected on their own experiences, those of their peers, and their visits to accountable governance actors in the Philippines. This section provides glimpses of some of these conversations, illustrated with examples from the visits to the local government of Naga City, software development company Symph, several different initiatives related to the Open Governance Partnership, and online media house Rappler.

The Manila office of Rappler, a multi-platform online media organisation with a social change vision

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

Governance work does not exist in a vacuum; governance systems are dynamic, fluid and political. The potential of any governance work to be transformative can only be evaluated relative to the system in which it is embedded.[1] In this sense, our reflections on the transformative character of the governance initiatives we briefly visited during the learning event are limited by our lack of grounding in their context.

During the visit to the Open Governance Partnership, one event participant noted that "the importance of historical context was impressed on us over and over again by our group's Filipino members: colonialism, dictatorship, the development of a strong, conscientised civil society, the beginnings of the democratisation process, and local-level participatory planning from 2001 onwards." So, while participants may not have viewed the initiatives they visited as transformative in themselves, they can be seen as part of a broadly transformative governance project, which is all about changing where power lies on the ground in the Philippines – from traditional, feudal, political patrons who run the rural areas and islands, to grassroots citizens.

In Naga City, participants were told about the history of progressive politics and activism in the region which have contributed to the local government's long commitment to transparency, accountability and participation. They heard about the civil society platform through

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which CSOs engage with government, that has been established for decades. Although they heard anecdotes about the representativeness and autonomy of the platform, without a stronger understanding of the context, it was hard to tell to what extent it was influential and internally democratic, or had been captured or influenced by elite interests.

At online news agency Rappler, visitors heard that during the country's last presidential election, the Electoral Commission agreed to release real-time electoral data to Rappler. This meant that Rappler was able to conduct real-time analysis – of more than 11 million rows of data from 36,722 polling stations – that identified apparent discrepancies in the voting process before the results were declared. Participants agreed that the willingness of the Electoral Commission to partner a media organisation in the digital age was forward-thinking and potentially transformative; it was only when they learned more about the context that they were able to link this to the government's public commitment to opening data and the country's membership of the Open Governance Partnership.

Many participants drew the conclusion that it is important to study the political economy of context and question the benefit of ICT use before starting a project; and that iterative evaluation, reflection and adaption according to context are vital to ensure that accountable governance work maximises the chances of transformation.

TECH FOR TRANSFORMATION?

ICTs are used in diverse ways by different actors to try and increase citizen participation and improve accountable governance.[2] The extent to which these tech-based initiatives are transformative varies according to how they are initiated and used, and the intention behind their design. Examples from the field visits illustrate some of the dynamics around tech for transformation.

THE I-SERVE SYSTEM: RESPONSIVE DIGITAL GOVERNANCE IN NAGA CITY

One aspect of Naga City local government's declared drive towards transparency, participation and responsiveness is a range of digital participation mechanisms that allow government data to be posted online, and citizens to comment on government performance via SMS and social media.

Another aspect is a service provision system, Innovative Service and Value Entitlement (I-Serve), designed to record, monitor and evaluate the delivery of basic services of the city government through the use of a computerised system that accounts for and reports all service transactions using the city website. The government intends to roll out the system across the city by issuing digitised ID cards to all registered Naga City residents, so that when they use government services, these can be entered and tracked on the computer system. Ultimately, the government intends to use the cards to ensure effective delivery by recording, verifying and evaluating its services.

Participants who visited Naga noted that government officials told them that about 50% of the population has access to social media and can engage with the government's digital participatory efforts. They suggested that the transformative potential of these efforts would depend partly on the 50% of the population with no access to social media, but also on the way the virtual participatory mechanisms interact with existing face-to-face mechanisms, such as a long-established civil society platform. The face-to-face

mechanisms fulfil deliberative, representative and social capital-building functions that the virtual participation cannot, and these are important aspects of transformative governance. Do the virtual and face-to-face aspects complement or undermine each other?

They also noted that I-Serve is a relatively conventional top-down e-government programme, motivated by efficiency, and pointed out the lack of citizen involvement in its design. They also wondered who was excluded by the system, and whether it set barriers to access to those living outside the city.

Participants who visited the Department of Budget and Management in Manila learned about several initiatives that focus on digitisation of data at the national level in order to meet transparency commitments under the Open Governance Partnership National Action Plan. These include the digitisation of the national budget so that it has a unified accounting code structure, meaning that every bit of income and expenditure is digitally traceable.

They agreed that arguments in favour of giving budget data a digital footprint were persuasive in terms of the scale, efficiency and complexity that digitisation makes possible; but less persuasive in terms of transformative governance. Under-Secretary Richard Moya concurred, commenting that "clearly, transparency in governance isn't of interest to everyone. You need publishing of information, then messaging of that information, then civic participation around that messaging to get the right outcome from it." Participants reflected that despite this, laying down the foundations of digitisation and transparency in the present, in a powerful government department which is influential across all sectors, is an important ingredient for future transformation.

Participants who visited Rappler learned about several examples of investigative journalism

where the news service had made public new information in the political arena – including real-time analysis of election data, and spotlighting the false career claims of a presidential aspirant. They argued that there is a transformative aspect to raising consciousness this way – through providing people with relevant information at a time when it is needed – and that doing this via social media provides space for people to respond to information and participate in their own time and in their own way. However, they also pointed out that this kind of information is only one of the ingredients of transformative government, and that Rappler could perhaps be viewed as one 'dot' in the accountability ecosystem, that could best be put to transformative use through a coalition or a network.

A theme that runs through many of our conversations on tech for transformation is the message that tech on its own cannot succeed in transforming governance. Making technology available isn't the same as getting people to use it, and it is understanding how to get people to use it that is the key to scaling up change that is broadly transformative. It was widely noted that the offline activities that are needed to complement tech initiatives are often not supported, because they are less attractive to funders than the technologies themselves.

THICK AND THIN ENGAGEMENT

The concepts of thick and thin engagement – intensive, informed and deliberative interactions, as opposed to fast, easy, online expressions of opinions and choices – came up often during conversations on transformative governance. Although there was a strong thread of argument that tech for accountable governance initiatives has a tendency to over-emphasise thin engagement and the need to think about how to get to thick engagement in order to achieve transformation, it was also often suggested that it is thin engagement that is the route to the critical mass needed to make change happen.

RAPPLER: BLENDING THICK AND THIN ENGAGEMENT FOR SOCIAL CHANGE?

Rappler was founded by journalists who were tired of reporting the same stories about the same problems. They wanted to deviate from just reporting facts, to reporting on the context of problems and tracking and aggregating readers' responses to create positive social change. Rappler is made up of several online platforms, and user engagement is built into all of them. All Rappler's content is re-purposed for social media, which is its only broadcasting platform, and a key route for user response. Rappler sees its work as being at the overlap of journalism, technology and crowds – producing content that is a mixture of stories, data and crowd-sourced information.

One of Rappler's platforms is Move.PH, a space for citizen journalism, which is intended to "build, nurture and engage communities that want to bring about change – through intelligent conversations and stories that can move people to act." Move.PH also provides workshops in online citizen journalism and training in using ICTs for monitoring events – whether they are floods, or elections – as they happen. "Our community development work," said one Rappler staffer, "is about empowering people to use the internet."

Amongst other things, Move.PH hosts Project Agos, a collaborative platform that combines top-down government action with bottom-up civic engagement to help communities mitigate risks and deal with climate change and natural hazards. Using mobile and web technologies, social media and volunteer participation, it ensures the flow of critical and actionable information to those who need it before, during and after disasters, and connects those who need help with those who can deliver it.

Rappler's head of investigative journalism commented that Rappler's investigative stories are intended to make people angry, so that they want to create social change. "Rappler provides the information, but does not have the capacity to close the loop. We want more people to act, and we do this by changing attitudes."

Participants who visited Rappler noted that this was a different kind of organisation from those that we usually encounter in governance work, not least in the sense that it is a self-funding private sector media house. This means that it is approaching some of the challenges of accountable governance from an unusual angle, using different language and assumptions. They noted that Rappler's power is in understanding its users, and how to get them talking – but that this is not directed towards deep, transformative engagement with government. But they were impressed by the power that lies in the way that Rappler visualises available data, and communicates it through multiple platforms.

Although none of the visitors doubted Rappler's technological expertise, innovation or commitment, they pointed out that its activities were largely short-term engagements – picking an issue, getting a crowd, doing targeted advocacy, then moving on. Although to an extent Rappler is tracking the governance system, this is not the thrust of their activities. Their emphasis is on informing people, not on targeting policy or policy-makers.

Many of the online activities Rappler undertakes can be classified as thin engagement, but some of their activities under the Move.PH platform can be seen as moving towards thick engagement. But

there is an underlying question of whether either these thin or thick activities are really governance work. Some activities may be transforming individual citizens, others may be encouraging government to be less corrupt and more responsive – but in the meantime, government decisions are still being made with little input from citizens. This can be framed as internet-enabled advocacy through multiple layers of thin engagement, rather than transformative governance.

THE DYNAMICS OF PARTNERSHIP

Governance work often involves coalitions of different types of actors, and the dynamics of partnership are a key variable shaping outcomes. The site visit to Symph in Cebu offered insights into the different types of partnership encountered by a software developer engaged in several tech for accountability initiatives.

SYMPH: DEVELOPING SOFTWARE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Symph is a five-year-old software development company that has worked with a range of public and private sector actors to build software for transparency and accountability initiatives. These include working with:

- The government and the World Bank on the Open Data Portal, which contains over 3,000 datasets, as well as some processed data and infographics.

- The World Bank and the National Audit Commission on a geomapped photo library of road inspection information. This involved working with many government agencies with responsibilities for procuring and ensuring the delivery of road-building, and created a repository of photographs taken by inspectors, contractors and civil society actors, allowing mapping and monitoring.

- Rappler – specifically, Move.PH – on an emergency response data system. This platform was developed in the aftermath of the 2013 hurricane which killed 15,000 people. It relies on extracting data from Twitter, and reports submitted by SMS and online, which allows an emergency to be mapped. Move.PH volunteers are embedded within state and non-state disaster-response mechanisms, and act as info-mediaries to ensure that help gets to where it is needed.

Symph founders highlighted the importance of identifying the motivations of the different actors. They contrasted their experience of working with the World Bank, when they had to re-negotiate their contract in order to be able to work on iterating the launch version of the road library software after its release, with the emergency-response work with Move.PH, where the partners owned the project and kept the software developers on a retainer, representing a commitment to the ongoing development of the platform as a service. They noted that a key dynamic of partnership is often educating their partners about how software can be used, and the difference between a product and a service.

They also pointed out that managing the expectations of their clients can also be important: "In our experience, agencies often don't ask about who is going to use the software and often don't know that this is an important question to ask." Some clients, they said, will be aiming for millions of users, when in fact hundreds might constitute success.

Event participants who visited Symph reflected that their perspective was an opportunity to understand what is sometimes called the 'missing middle' that exists between technologists and activists, and technologists and governments. Dynamics here can influence the potential of tech initiatives to effect transformative change in governance.

TRANSPARENCY

A recurring conversation in accountable governance work is the relationship between transparency and accountability.[3] Transparency is one of the key outcomes of the implementation of the National Action Plans (NAPs) of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), and event participants who visited several initiatives related to the NAPs discussed the relationship between transparency and transformation.

OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP NATIONAL ACTION PLANS – TRIGGERING GAINS IN TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY?

In 2012, the Philippines became one of the eight founding member countries of the Open Government Partnership, and significant gains in transparency and accountability have been claimed in the implementation of the country's first (2012–14) and second (2014–16) National Action Plans. Much of this extended and built on the prior work and commitments of the national government.

Advances made include the disclosure of government plans and budgets, using technology to expand the reach of these transparency efforts, and partnering with civil society to introduce and sustain government accountability reform.

'Crossovers' – actors moving over from civil society to government, and vice versa – are a recognised feature of the cast in governance work in the Philippines, and have been key in the strength of the open governance agenda under this government.

One NAP-related initiative is Bottom-Up Budgeting, aimed at making the national government budgeting process more responsive to local needs. It has 14,000 projects, and information on them can be accessed through an online portal. In addition, each project has a page on Facebook, which is used by nine out of ten Filipinos.

The third NAP is now under way, covering 2015–17. Whereas the first NAP was government-centric, the third NAP is being co-created between national and local-level government and civil society actors, as well as the private sector. The Department for Budget Management, which leads implementation of the OGP NAP, has proactively disclosed budget information and government plans, and many of the NAP's data- and digital-related commitments centre on initiatives of this kind.

How are all these impressive increases in transparency actually contributing to a transformation towards more accountable governance? Some participants argued that the transformative potential was limited because the numbers of people involved were not big enough: the Open Data Portal, for example, counts 300 'reporters', public servants who log in at least quarterly to submit their reports; it has a further 200 public users. Others disagreed, saying that numbers should not be the criterion for defining the transformative scope of an initiative.

The Bottom-Up Budgeting initiative does translate directly into material benefits for people in every single community in the Philippines – 2% of the national budget is allocated this way. In this sense, it has changed the way that some funding travels from the national level to the local, and this has a transformative aspect.
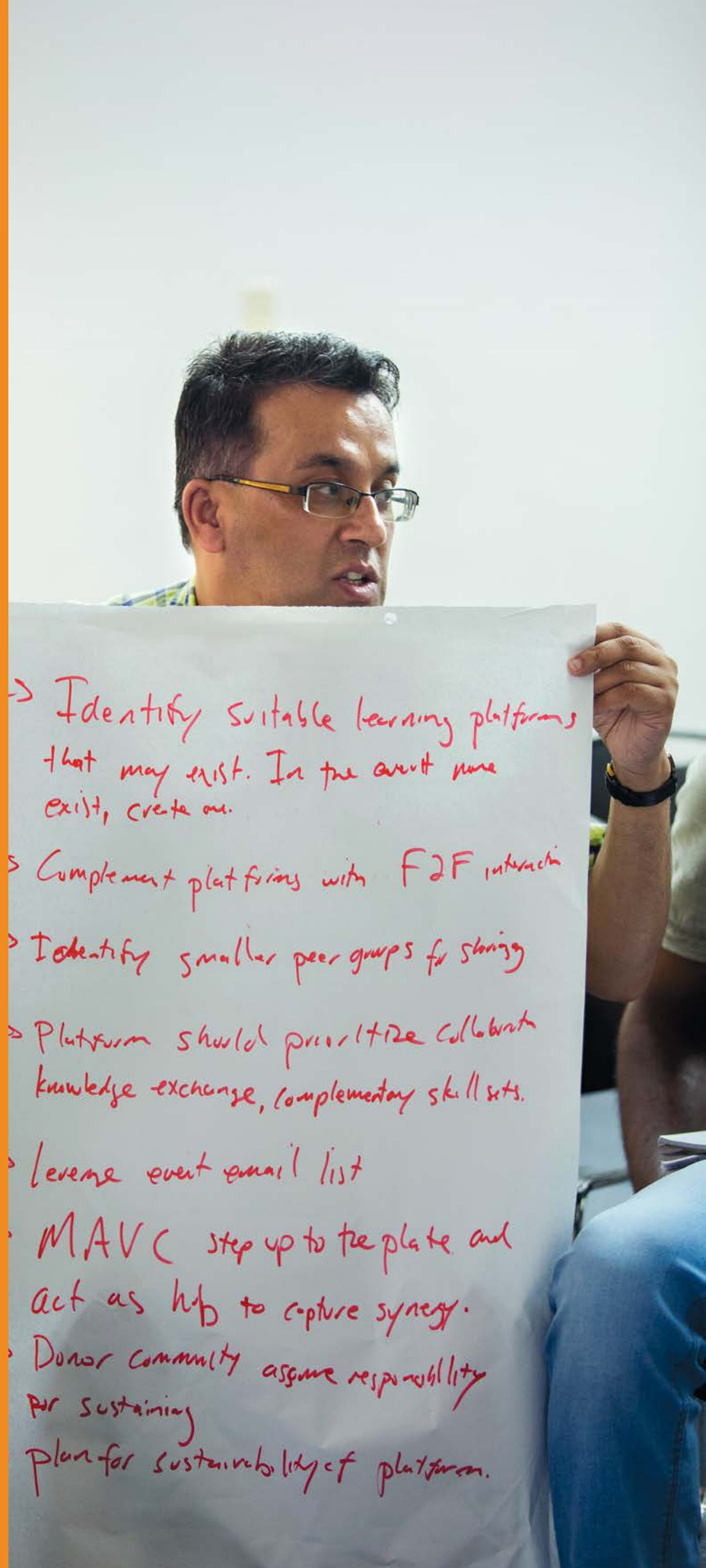
The institutional location of OGP NAP leadership in the Department of Budget Management was felt to maximise the transformative potential of the initiative; reformers were clearly seen to be leading the agenda here, and the Ministry is powerful within government.

The transparency initiatives visited by event participants may not be transformative in themselves, but can be seen as part of a broadly transformative basic approach to governance, which is all about changing where power lies on the ground in the Philippines.

Event participants visit the Contact Center in Manila, which receives public reports of activities that contravene the National Anti-Red-Tape Act.

Ways
Forward

This section summarises the concluding sessions of the learning event, identifying the ways forward for the participants and the Making All Voices Count programme.

Ways Forward

The discussions and conversations at the learning event identified successes and failures, challenges and dilemmas. The concluding sessions focused on identifying the ways forward, both for the participants as researchers and practitioners in accountable governance work, and for the remainder of the Making All Voices Count programme.

MAPPING THE LANDSCAPE

In governance work, it is important to be clear about the purpose of your action. This clarity is important not only for practitioners themselves, but also for the stakeholders they work with, and the donors who may fund their work. For many participants, getting to grips with ideas like vertical integration and accountability ecosystems, which can be used to map governance initiatives and their contexts, were an important learning outcome of the event.

To connect the dots of the accountability ecosystem effectively, practitioners and researchers need to get better at pointing out the dots to each other – through, for example, network analysis and network mapping tools. These could help to visualise where the centres of gravity are in our systems, and where there are gaps. A concrete initiative to take this forward could be a network mapping of the countries where Making All Voice Count works, which will show what we mean when we talk about 'connecting the dots'.

One South African participant, Indra de Lanerolle, summarised the importance of mapping for enhancing the transformative potential of governance work, but also warned of the dangers of being blinkered by our own importance: "We have to map the accountability ecosystem. But putting our own intervention in the middle is often a design problem. So let's not put our intervention in the middle. Instead, let's see that we are a stone in the riverbed of a very big system. There are places in the river where a stone might change its path; in others the stone will get washed away. The map should therefore include the existing flow – and look at what is shiftable. How big is our stone, where should it go, and when should we put it in?"

"Putting our own intervention in the middle of the accountability ecosystem map is often a design problem," said Indra de Lanerolle.

Research is needed that contributes to the way governance initiatives are designed and implemented.

BRIDGING RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Research has an important role in governance work, but there is often a feeling that researchers and practitioners do not work closely together. Although external researchers can provide important analytical lenses, there is also a need for embedded researchers who can gather evidence for advocacy, engage in actor mapping, and facilitate learning and reflection.

Some participants noted that research is important at the outset of an initiative, to test assumptions at the initial stages; sometimes, the changes we are trying to make are so complex that we are not clear about our theory of change, and research can help us disentangle this. Embedded research can contribute to the iteration of interventions as they are implemented. But it was also noted that research has an important role in deepening evidence in order to support the scaling up of successful initiatives, particularly by governments.

Some felt that the research community is increasingly driven by donor priorities for expensive ex-post quantitative evaluations of governance work, but that it also has responsibilities to carry out in-depth, qualitative research that makes a positive contribution to the way that governance initiatives are designed and implemented.

Many felt that an important way forward is to enable a research community or platform to contribute to accountable governance work. This could involve mapping the different research organisations that we already work with in different countries, and trying to work together to support more of a role for practitioners in researchers' knowledge production and management. There is also potential for research organisations to become better integrated into existing international circles and communities of practice on accountable governance and, in doing so, enable the research capacity of practitioner organisations to be strengthened.

TACKLING SUSTAINABILITY BY ENABLING EVOLUTION

The question of how to move governance work forward in a sustainable way was discussed from two main angles: how to ensure that gains in transformative governance are sustainable rather than momentary, and how to ensure that our own organisations and initiatives are financially sustainable beyond donor funding.

The first of these challenges was frequently raised, particularly in the context of how to sustain initiatives that were successful thanks to the support of a government champion who would not remain in post forever. Many participants also highlighted the difficulties of sustaining civic engagement through ICTs when social media presents citizens with something new every day, to the extent that there is too much input, and people stop caring. Others also raised the problem of sustaining engagement in situations where it has no impact on government.

Although the solutions to these sustainability challenges are inevitably context-specific, many suggested the importance of balancing thick and thin engagement and on- and offline activities. A strategy for overcoming dependence on elected champions is to deepen and extend the
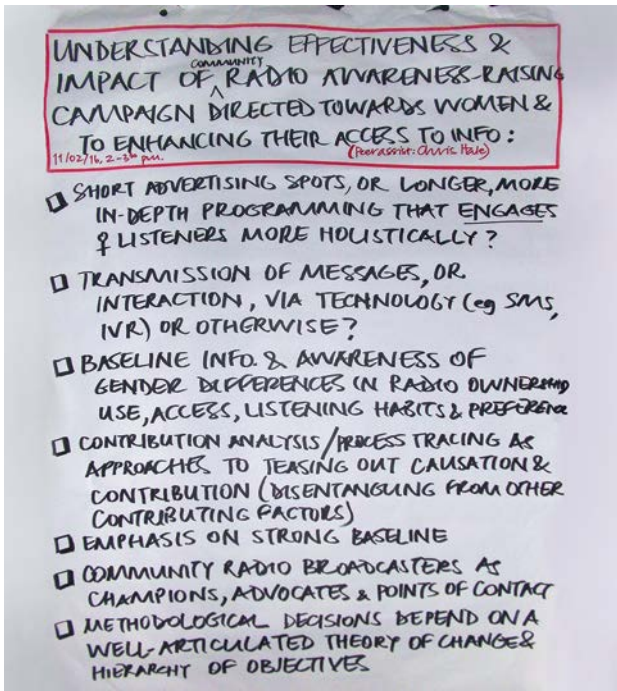
A list of suggestions for understanding the effectiveness and impact of a community radio awareness-raising campaign generated by a peer-assist group offers concrete suggestions for ways forward at the project level.

infrastructure of the initiative so that it gathers more support and its own momentum, and as such survives beyond the term of its original sponsor.

The challenge of sustaining our own organisations rises in part from our failure to learn lessons from things that haven't worked, and having short-term approaches that don't encourage collaboration, coalition-building or integrated approaches. Participants were interested in exploring alternative approaches to these tendencies, and looking at what it would take to develop counter-tendencies.

One suggestion was that, rather than talking about sustainability, we should be thinking in terms of evolution – stepping back from our work and deciding where the broader environment is going, and where and how we and our work are most relevant. This demands that we constantly evolve our practice, which requires trust, honesty, objectivity and adaptive skills. The spaces of

accountable governance work are dynamic, and nobody has answers to everything at any one time.

In response to this suggestion, Making All Voices Count was asked to look at ways to adapt funding models to accommodate iterative change in projects. It was also suggested, in the interests of ensuring sustainability or evolution, that the programme's existing mentoring system be strengthened to ensure that funded partners, as members of a community of practice, have access to others in their own network and beyond, to think about these ideas and mentor others to continue improving what they do.

PEER LEARNING AND COALITION-BUILDING

The learning event was designed to enable the participants to learn from one another, and maintaining the dynamic of peer learning was an important aspect of the ways forward identified for accountable governance work. The three cycles of peer-assist sessions towards the end of the event were rich spaces for participants to discuss challenges in their future work – both very broad, and sharply targeted – and share tips and tactics for overcoming them. The box below shows some of the themes that participants discussed.

Continuing peer conversations in the future was closely linked with the need to build coalitions to take accountable governance work forward. For some participants, this is a question of continuing to engage with other Making All Voices Count funded partners who are implementing similar projects to ensure continued lesson-learning about challenges and success stories alike.

For others, it is a question of enabling coalition-building for vertically integrated units that support accountability ecosystem principles. This route forward was framed has having three steps: self-reflection and collective learning

PEER-ASSIST THEMES

- How can we sell our village-level accountability app to government now that our programme is ending?

- Understanding the effectiveness and impact of community radio awareness-raising campaign directed towards women and enhancing their access to information

- Principles for generating a youth movement for change

- Where is the power in accountability ecosystems, and where do you apply your own power?

- Practitioner-oriented research: How can researchers be more useful to practitioners?

- Six tips on choosing tools and technologies

- Communicating data for citizen engagement

- How can we achieve financial sustainability?

- How can we use vertical integration?

with Making All Voices Count colleagues; story-telling about both the outputs and the processes involved in accountable governance work; and working in a community-led way towards the global level. For many, the best route to achieving this would be for Making All Voices Count to establish and service a platform to facilitate research, learning and action, which would act as a knowledge repository for research and evidence. This platform could be complemented with face-to-face spaces that give opportunities for people to meet and discuss these issues.

At present, peer learning is not strongly supported within the programme, but there are opportunities to dedicate existing Making All Voices Count resources to deeper, more effective and more global focus on it for the remainder of the programme. Enabling and sustaining this doesn't necessarily require flying people around the world, but how best to structure it does require further consideration.

Our track record in the technology for transparency and accountability field is not very good, in terms of failures and poor design. Learning from failure is something we are often afraid to bring up; but if we are brave enough as individual researchers, practitioners and donors to admit failure, seriously analyse it and work out how to do better, then we can make a powerful contribution to the field, and nurture future success. Beyond learning from failure, however, we must also start using the evidence that does exist to inform our practice, with the objective that we fail less.

This is vitally important because, in many of the countries where we work, civil society space is narrowing. This needs to be kept in mind as we move forward. Initiatives that bring together a range of actors from different levels of the accountability ecosystem will be good for the sorts of strategic transformative initiatives we now know work best, and also for holding open and pushing existing spaces for civil society engagement and activism.

A WORD FROM THE MAKING ALL VOICES COUNT DIRECTOR: DR FLETCHER TEMBO

As Matt Leighninger noted in his background paper, "we are frustrated by political systems in which voting is the only legitimate political act, concerned that many republics don't have the strength or appeal to withstand authoritarian figures, and disillusioned by the inability of many countries to address fundamental challenges of health, education, and economic development." The preoccupation of the learning event was therefore with the issue of how Making All Voices Count and similar initiatives can help us to achieve transformative change that is moving towards more sustainable, powerful, fulfilling and democratic systems and actor behaviours.

The strands of thought that emerged from the event strongly suggest thinking in terms of governance changes as happening in an ecosystem of intricate, multi-dimensional and multi-layered actor relationships. In this situation, the best we can hope for are incremental changes where technology plays a critical role that is dependent on the kinds of incentives and problems that are being faced in a given context. Therefore, the starting point for transformative change has to be context-based collective action problems and challenges; the technology must be introduced to fit the context, which means adjusting it to provide answers for those actors that are facing the problems. We cannot

over-romanticise or over-hype technology, or privilege it over the understanding of the prevailing power-laden relationships in any given context.

The way to make a difference therefore is at best a process of muddling through, using learning as a tool for positioning ourselves in the various ecosystems where we work. 'Learning' here implies continuous examination of our assumptions, asking difficult questions and researching or otherwise seeking answers from both ongoing practice, and from intentionally designed professional evidence-based research. This includes learning from mapping processes and interventions at different levels in the ecosystem, and creating vertically integrated and strategic influence at these different levels.

A core feature of this approach is commitment to peer learning, which suggests that learning from other actors about their practice in accountable governance is actively looked for and actively shared. Overall, we can then incrementally get better at understanding what seems to work and not work, and under what circumstances, and improve the effectiveness and impacts of initiatives aimed at transforming governance.

Finally, it is this process of adapting initiatives to contexts, finding the right fit for technology, and commitment to learning that will also lead to the formation of communities of practice, which will in turn influence similar projects beyond Making All Voices Count. In essence, the programme's legacy will be wrapped in the influence it brings to the accountability ecosystem in terms of cultivating a learning culture among actors in this field, as well as generating knowledge that is influential for funding models that best support these initiatives in different contexts. Some of the questions still to be answered in order to put this into practice include how to continue with peer learning through on- and offline platforms, and how to develop repositories of power stories and knowledge products that demonstrate transformative change.

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