

JUNE 2017

MAKING ALL
VOICES COUNT

PRACTICE PAPER

A GRAND CHALLENGE
FOR DEVELOPMENT

It matters who produces data: Reflections on two citizen- generated data initiatives



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Citation

Pegus, C-M., and Rono-Bett, K. (2017) *It matters who produces data: Reflections on two citizen-generated data initiatives. Making All Voices Count practice paper*, Brighton: IDS

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Summary

Development Initiatives (DI) and Development Research and Training (DRT) received a Making All Voices Count practitioner research and learning grant of £24,975 to examine the purpose, use and users of citizen-generated data in two case studies.

One case study examined how citizen-generated data on the quality of schools and schooling was channelled to the Ministry of Education in Kenya. The other looked at the work of community resource trackers in five communities in Uganda and their role in providing unsolicited feedback to local government actors and other development partners.

By reflecting on and contextualising the findings of the practitioner research, this Practice Paper looks at the evolution of the open data movement in Kenya and Uganda, and the growth of citizen-generated data initiatives; the advantages and disadvantages of formal feedback structures and the importance of *barazas* as spaces for accountability; the need for demonstrating the value of participating in social accountability mechanisms to citizens; and the challenges of scaling up citizen-generated data initiatives.

Key themes in this paper

- The politics of citizen-generated data, and the inherent and instrumental value of citizen-generated data.
- The rigour, validity, utility and replicability of citizen-generated data initiatives.
- Understanding and communicating the value of participating in citizen-generated data initiatives.
- The perception of community resource trackers as trusted mediators.
- The synergies between online and offline data production and dissemination mechanisms.

Setting the scene for practitioner learning

Making All Voices Count is a citizen engagement and accountable governance programme. Its Research Evidence and Learning component, led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), focuses on building an evidence base on what works in technology for voice, transparency and accountability, how it works, and why (McGee, Edwards, Minkley, Pegus and Brock 2015). The programme's practitioner research and learning grants provide tech for transparency and accountability practitioners with funds and mentoring support. This gives them the space and capabilities to explore questions that will enable them to better implement their governance projects. This real-time applied research contributes to project learning and improved practice.

The grants support practitioners to form their own learning and judgements, and the programme's series of practice papers is part of this process. Practice papers document the process of research and learning from the perspectives of both the practitioner and the programme. They are co-produced and intended to prompt critical reflection

on key learning questions that arise from the process of the research.

This practice paper focuses on practitioner research conducted jointly by Development Initiatives (DI), an international development organisation, and Development Research and Training (DRT), a Ugandan not-for-profit policy research organisation. Through analysing two case studies, the research set out to examine how citizen-generated data led to increased government responsiveness and accountability for resource allocation and service delivery.¹

This paper documents a conversation between DI's Regional Technical Lead Karen Rono-Bett and IDS Research Officer Ciana-Marie Pegus. It describes: DI and DRT's interest in and involvement with citizen-generated data initiatives; the questions they sought to answer through the research; how they went about getting answers; what the research showed and the implications of these findings; and recommendations and the way forward for DI and DRT.

About DI and DRT

Established in 1993, DI focuses on the role of data in driving poverty eradication and sustainable development.² Its mission is to ensure that decisions about the allocation of finance and resources result in an end to poverty, increase the resilience of the world's most vulnerable people, and ensure no one is left behind. It works to make sure these decisions are underpinned by good quality, transparent data and evidence on poverty and resources, and lead to increased accountability and sustainable long-term outcomes.

Established in 1997, DRT is a recognised front-runner in providing high-quality poverty research

and analysis that informs pro-poor policies and programmes.³ It works on four broad programme areas: social policy and human development; governance and transparency; economic policy and livelihoods; and capacity-building and institutional development.

DI and DRT have been working together under a formal partnership arrangement since 2009. The two organisations collaborate in policy research and improving access to, and use of, information on poverty and humanitarian issues, data analysis, institutional and partner capacity-building, and joint programmes targeting extreme and chronic poverty.

¹ See: Ssanyu, Rono-Bett and Kenei (2017).

² For more information about Development Initiatives, see: <http://devinit.org/about>

³ For more information about Development Research and Training, see: <http://drt-ug.org/our-mission>

What were DI and DRT looking at?

DI, in partnership with DRT, was awarded £24,975 by Making All Voices Count to carry out two case studies on the purpose, use, users, potential and role of citizen-generated data. CIVICUS, a collaborator of DI and propagator of the term ‘citizen-generated data’, defines this as “data that people or their organisations produce to directly

monitor, demand or drive change on issues that affect them” (CIVICUS 2015: 1). One case study was a formal mechanism for channelling citizen-generated data to government in Kenya; the other was an informal mechanism for channelling unsolicited citizen feedback to government in Uganda.

Case studies: the School Report Card and community resource trackers

The Kenya case study looked at the School Report Card, an initiative to increase parent participation in the schooling of their children. Developed and implemented by the country’s National Taxpayers Association and the Ministry of Education, it is a simple scorecard tool for parents to assess the annual performance of their children’s school in ten key areas that relate to education quality.

The Uganda case study focused on the community resource trackers, a group of volunteers that work, supported by DRT, in five post-conflict districts of eastern and northern Uganda (Gulu, Katakwi, Kitgum, Kotido and Pader). They identify and track resources intended for the community, and provide feedback and information on these to service providers and other duty-bearers. Resources include all financial and in-kind resources, such as grants and services, that are allocated to communities through the central and local government, non-governmental organisations and donors.

How DI and DRT answered their research questions

Using a qualitative, inductive case-study approach, DI and DRT:

- conducted a literature review
- used stakeholder mapping to identify participants

for key informant interviews and focus group discussions

- held these interviews and discussions, between May–September 2016 in Kenya and Uganda, with officials and service providers, community members and project staff
- co-convened a workshop in Nairobi in September 2016 to present preliminary findings to organisations that support the generation and use of citizen data
- organised dissemination workshops with key stakeholders in Kampala and Nairobi in February 2017.

What they found

This research revealed that while the two initiatives had significantly different mechanisms of data gathering and analysis, they both:

- illustrated that individuals and communities played important roles as active users, producers and intermediaries of development data
- led to changes in practice, resulting in improvements to the quality and delivery of public services
- enabled and empowered local actors to participate in accountability efforts, although more marginalised groups engaged less.

Source: Ssanyu et al. (2017)

The context: changing ICT landscapes in East Africa

Ciana-Marie:

In your research, you refer to the changing data and information landscape in Kenya and Uganda. A study in Kenya by Salome (2016) noted that while the information and communications technology (ICT) revolution has changed how individuals use ICT socially, and also resulted in tangible and substantial economic benefits, it has not shifted how Kenyans engage with political leaders and government institutions. In terms of ICT in relation to governance, what do you think has changed in recent years in Kenya? What has remained the same, and why? And how does this differ in Uganda?

Karen:

I agree that the ICT revolution in Kenya has changed social interactions and created economic opportunities and growth, but I also think that it has changed how politicians interact with the public. For example, parliamentarians and county assembly members are using platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter to communicate with constituents on development matters. With the upcoming election [due to be held in August 2017], politicians are using open data to make claims about the types of changes that they have brought about.

In Kenya, the open data movement is starting to gain ground, opening up to include a non-technical audience. For instance, the East Africa Open Data Fest, held in Nairobi in August 2016, had a catalytic effect, stimulating new interest in making official government data open. The passage of the 2016 Access to Information Act, while long overdue, was also a major boon,⁴ as it confers on the Commission on Administrative Justice functions and powers for oversight and enforcement. More broadly though, the country needs clarity on the respective roles of the institutions that are driving the open data agenda in the government.

In Uganda, the dynamics are different. There are fewer actors working on open data than in Kenya, and this enables them to work closely together. I think fewer actors means that there is more clarity on lines of responsibility, and awareness of which institution is doing what. Fewer actors also means that there's a more tightly bound network of actors, and opportunities to forge closer connections and for these organisations to work together to bring about change. It also helps that the Uganda Bureau of Statistics plays a central role in coordinating these actors.⁵

The politics of citizen-generated data

Ciana-Marie:

In this research, DI studied citizen-generated data, which is a fairly new term. From my perspective, citizen-generated data speaks to the activities and outputs of social accountability mechanisms and other forms of evidence-based advocacy. Why did you focus on citizen-generated data?

Karen:

As an organisation, DI looks at how citizen-generated data can complement gaps in official data and how to support citizen-generated data that is 'findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable', or FAIR. We don't think citizen-generated data is there to replace official data;

⁴ Access to Information Act, 2016 (No. 31 of 2016), Laws of the Republic of Kenya.

⁵ The Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2014) has developed a Plan for National Statistical Development, which is inclusive of non-state actors.

DI sees the production of data by citizens and communities as a process of gathering, analysing and using data, and sharing data stories that are not told through official statistics.

we see the production of data by citizens and communities as a process of gathering, analysing and using data, and sharing data stories that are not told through official statistics. This can contribute to building the skills and awareness of these communities on development matters, as well as the localisation of the global sustainable development agenda.

Ciana-Marie:

In the two case studies, citizen-generated data was being produced explicitly for a social accountability purpose i.e. to hold government to account. How does the process of collecting citizen-generated data, and the actors involved in its production, shape its use? How can this affect the dynamics of the relationships between government officials and citizens? What do you see as the 'politics' of the use and collection of citizen-generated data?

Karen:

Regarding the politics of data, who produces the data matters. This extends to who is associated with the data collection process and what kind of

authority they are perceived to have. In Kenya and Uganda, people are accustomed to government officials collecting data from them and generally they do not question the motives or purposes of enumerators acting on behalf of the government. But with efforts to generate data that are led by non-state actors, citizens are more likely to ask why these particular individuals and institutions are collecting information, on whose behalf are they collecting it, and to what end.

In a community-data initiative in Lanet area of Nakuru County in Kenya,⁶ we worked very closely with the local chief to collect data. For many participants, knowing that the chief endorsed the data collection process added credence. Because people trusted him, people trusted that the data was being collected for the public good. It has been my experience in Kenya that when data collection is linked to duty-bearers, when it is associated with leaders and authority figures, people are more willing to engage both as data-gatherers and as providers. This also pertains to Uganda, where community resource trackers were working in small communities and presenting the data in forums that brought local leaders and community members together.

Community resource trackers as trusted brokers

Ciana-Marie:

In the Uganda case study, DRT supported community resource trackers over a five-year period in five communities. As I understand it, prior to this project, there was little engagement by citizens with existing mechanisms for demanding government information and providing feedback to government on its services. The project focused on

creating a cadre of community resource trackers to perform a variety of tasks as intermediaries, including monitoring the delivery of public services and inputting citizen feedback into local government planning processes and cycles. And, as intermediaries, community resource trackers made choices about what was worth recording, and they fielded, filtered and processed information from citizens. They also chose when, where, what and to

⁶ See: <http://devinit.org/post/community-generated-data>

whom to present their findings. Also, the ways in which they communicated those findings shifted, depending on who they were targeting and the position and power of those individuals.⁷ How were the community resource trackers seen by citizens, by government officials, by donors? How did they evolve over time, as individuals and as a group?

Karen:

On a personal level, community resource trackers were able to build up their skills, confidence and knowledge through their involvement in this project. They used citizen-generated data to draw attention to lapses in service delivery, and this work led to tangible changes in practice.⁸ Through their roles as community resource trackers, they came to be seen by their fellow citizens as people who cared about the community, and about the proper and fair use of its resources. And through the changes that came about through their work, they were also seen as people who can champion change in their community.

Because community resource trackers were considered to be trusted mediators, citizens would go to them and provide them with information on how well, or poorly, resources were being spent, and on the quality and types of service they were

receiving or not receiving. This informal channelling of information to mediators made it difficult for service deliverers and policy-makers to attribute comments and complaints to individuals, and the community resource trackers were able to act as a buffer between the individual and their comments or complaints.

In this project, community resource trackers established partnerships with lower tiers of government and were able to build up very close, personal relationships with these local leaders, who controlled the use of local resources. The local leaders were willing to divulge information about resource allocation and, because of devolution in Uganda,⁹ there was an expectation and requirement for citizens to participate in local planning processes.

In contrast, in-country donors function as on-the-ground implementers, with more of a narrow focus on service delivery and less space for conversations on how and where services should be prioritised. It's very hard to track in-country donor spending from the community trackers' perspective, as the tools for tracking donor spend – like Development Tracker¹⁰ and the International Aid Transparency Initiative – do not provide sub-national data to help close this gap.

The advantages and disadvantages of formal feedback structures

Ciana-Marie:

Community resource trackers collected information from citizens through both formal methods (e.g. attending parish development committee meetings) and informal methods (e.g. conversations with community members). They also used a mix of tech-enabled and non-tech-enabled mechanisms to collect data, which was then shared through online and offline mechanisms. Can you comment on the complementarity between offline meetings and engagements, and tech-enabled data production and sharing mechanisms? Where did tech help

and add value? When were offline, face-to-face engagements most useful?

Karen:

Community development trackers collect information using simple methods that match their skills. Often, they record information on paper forms, and use bicycles to travel from village to village. These data sheets are collated, cleaned, coded and analysed on Excel. With the assistance of DRT, community resource trackers then shape and communicate the key messages from the

⁷ For more on intermediation, see: Berdou and Shutt (2016).

⁸ See Miti (2016) for examples.

⁹ For more on devolution in Uganda, see: Kasozi-Mulindwa (2013).

¹⁰ See: <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk>

When you are operating at a larger scale, technology can play an important role in sharing information rapidly and tracking the behaviour of numerous actors.

data they have gathered: they produce posters, participate in radio programmes, and approach local leaders as individuals or at public forums.

At the village level, through participation in this process, officials and community resource trackers get to know each other well. This allows them [community resource trackers] to be candid and to convene productive face-to-face meetings. At a larger scale, though, these types of meetings would be too formal, and if there are too many attendees they may raise too many issues that need to be addressed and resolved. In those instances, you may need formal, online mechanisms to track the efficacy of budget expenditure and to follow up on what different dispersed but interconnected agencies and departments are doing to ensure that resources are being allocated and spent properly. When you are operating at a larger scale, technology can play an important role in sharing information rapidly and tracking the behaviour of numerous actors.

Ciana-Marie:

In your research report,¹¹ you indicate that in Uganda, decision-makers were keen to act on issues raised in *barazas*, community advocacy forums that were established with the aims of: “(1) strengthen[ing] governance and downward accountability within the public sector; and (2) ensur[ing] adequate space for ordinary citizens to participate in planning and monitoring of government services in their local communities” (Kabunga, Mogue, Bizimungu, Erman and van Campenhout 2016: 1). Why do you think that was the case? What are the factors at play that make these appropriate fora for citizen demands to be taken seriously? What is it about these spaces that compel decision-makers to respond?

Karen:

Barazas are public fora to which members of the public are invited to participate in monitoring the delivery and use of public resources and services. What's more, though, is that when a *baraza* is convened in a particular village, county council, or district, for example, various leaders from that area are invited. *Barazas* are very much conceived of, and designed as, a performance management mechanism.¹² So when an issue is flagged by a member of the public at a *baraza*, in front of the person to whom the representative reports, that creates a powerful incentive for the representative to respond and address these concerns before the next *baraza*.

Ciana-Marie:

There is no institutional arrangement through which citizen-generated data from community resource trackers is formally and routinely entered into government-endorsed monitoring mechanisms. By contrast, your other case study, the School Report Card in Kenya, falls under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and is linked to further funding for public schools. Considering these two cases, what do you think are the potential advantages and disadvantages of feedback mechanisms being linked to a government institution? Does this formal relationship shape how citizen-generated data gets used? How does this enable or constrain different forms of advocacy?

Karen:

One of the benefits of being linked to government is that citizens are more receptive to participating and are likely to take the initiative more seriously. The National Taxpayers Association is working with the Ministry of Education, which has a

¹¹ See: Ssanyu et al. (2017).

¹² For more information, see: <http://opm.go.ug/baraza-program>

Initiatives that collect citizen feedback need to spell out how the data is being used, how it is leading to change or not, and why.

presence across the country. The ministry is responsible for the supervision of schools across Kenya and is therefore in a good position to embed formal structures for parent participation in each county. The hierarchical structure, the networks and the reach of the ministry make it easier to scale up an initiative like the School Report Card. Also, as it's part of a formal, government-endorsed feedback mechanism, the School Report Card has a fairly solid methodology, with a standardised reporting template, which lends itself to replication.

In my experience, a drawback of facilitating a formal feedback process to government is that it is more expensive and you need sufficient resources to enable sustained engagement. Also, I think there's a perception that providing feedback will lead to change, and that information provided to government can and will always be acted upon. This often isn't the case, though, and you have to contend with government bureaucracy and sometimes delays and long waits for decisions. Also, expect interrogation of the validity of the data from different officials in different departments and agencies.

Motivating citizens to participate

Ciana-Marie:

Through a facilitated dialogue convened by the School Report Card committee, parents and teachers discuss and agree on scores according to the areas of focus on the School Report Card. Parents, teachers, the school management committee and board and the School Report Card committee then meet to agree a time frame for resolving the issues that have been flagged. Several of the dimensions measured in the areas of focus for the School Report Card regulate teacher behaviour (e.g. measuring gender bias in the allocation of chores, teacher attention, corporal punishment, grievance mechanisms). A few dimensions also look at parental interest in children's schooling (e.g. student absenteeism, parents' proactively meeting with teachers, parental help with homework). You indicate that the School Report Card mechanism has been adopted less in marginalised areas, however, with the socio-economically disadvantaged less likely to participate in the process. Why do you think that is? And what do you think needs to be done to enable poorer parents to participate in this monitoring and feedback process?

Karen:

This is a tricky question and it relates to opportunity cost, which speaks to what poor parents are foregoing by choosing to spend their time inputting into the School Report Card. There needs to be a real incentive for them to participate in the process and attend related meetings.

It's of the utmost importance to think about what makes it worthwhile for parents from all economic backgrounds to participate, not just poor ones. Parents need to see and understand how participation benefits them and their children, and the National Taxpayers Association and Ministry of Education must ensure the purpose of the School Report Card, and the changes it is intended to achieve, are clearly communicated. Initiatives that collect citizen feedback need to spell out how the data is being used, how it is leading to change or not, and why. Demonstrating to the community the value of participation in the School Report Card process is a critical part of building a sustainable and effective feedback loop, and encouraging participation from all economic groups.

There's a real need to figure out what data already exists and to find the niche that citizen-generated data can fill. There's [also] a need to promote data use and consumption, and to work with infomediaries and other intermediaries who can facilitate this.

The challenges of scaling up the production and uptake of citizen-generated data

Ciana-Marie:

What do you think are the key factors inhibiting the scaling up of the production and use of citizen-generated data? What limits the replicability of these initiatives? What limits the usefulness of the data gathered by: (1) the community resource trackers; and (2) the National Taxpayers Association? How do you think these challenges can be overcome? And who do citizens need to work with to ensure the greater uptake of citizen-generated data?

Karen:

The challenges of scaling up the production of citizen-generated data are manifold. Firstly, many of these initiatives are so context-driven, having been developed and evolved to work in a particular locale. The community resource trackers approach works well in northern Uganda, but you can't guarantee that it will work as well in northern Kenya, for example. You need to be alive to dynamics and context.

Methodologies may need to change as well. If you are implementing a community resource tracker initiative, you first need to identify the community's knowledge and skills, assess which tools are available, and be wise to the dynamics

of the relationships between the duty-bearers and citizens. Depending on these factors, approaches may need to be adapted and shift.

For a bottom-up, citizen-generated data initiative to be successful, you need to have good working relationships between project staff / volunteers and the community, between the community and duty-bearers, and between project staff / volunteers and duty-bearers. Good experiences of collaborative working might lead to new joint initiatives among these groups, or the expansion of existing initiatives. But building up that relationship of trust takes time, and this makes geographic expansion to new areas a challenge.

There's also a huge risk that initiatives that collect citizen-generated data are gathering data that government already has. The issue, then, is what is citizen-generated data actually adding? I think there's a real need to figure out what data already exists and to find the niche that citizen-generated data can fill.

Also, it's critical to ensure that the methodology is robust. If it's easy to 'poke holes' in the methodology, people will quickly lose trust in the data. And once trust in the data is lost, it's not easy to regain.

It's vital to pre-plan how citizen-generated data will be used, to think about potential users and audiences before data collection begins.

It's vital to pre-plan how citizen-generated data will be used, to think about potential users and audiences before data collection begins. The data generated by these case studies is useful for other actors interested in accountability. We found that the Ministry of Education has not maximised its use of the rich data collected through the School Report Card; nor have other stakeholders. There's a need to promote data use and consumption, and to work with infomediaries and other intermediaries who can facilitate this.

Some suggestions are for the National Taxpayers Association to work with the media, local politicians, universities and key personalities to analyse and amplify the stories that the School Report Card data tells. The utility of the data generated by the community resource trackers, however, is limited by the relatively basic methodology. The beauty, though, of this simpler methodology is that it can be more easily communicated and understood by a broader range of interested potential users, including those with low levels of education.

Building on the research: priorities for DI and DRT

- Conduct further research to develop typologies and case studies of citizen-generated data initiatives and the data they produce.
- Push for a broader understanding of the role of citizen-generated data, including its impact on the lives of the citizens who collect the data and its links to official data.
- Work to strengthen methodologies of existing citizen-generated initiatives, and champion findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable data.
- Encourage citizen-generated data initiatives to partner with key infomediaries and intermediaries to facilitate the uptake of data, and thus improve livelihoods.

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A district officer presenting a report in a *Baraza* in Namukora.

About Making All Voices Count

Making All Voices Count is a programme working towards a world in which open, effective and participatory governance is the norm and not the exception. It focuses global attention on creative and cutting-edge solutions to transform the relationship between citizens and their governments. The programme is inspired by and supports the goals of the Open Government Partnership.

Making All Voices Count is supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Omidyar Network, and is implemented by a consortium consisting of Hivos, IDS and Ushahidi.

Research, Evidence and Learning component

The programme's Research, Evidence and Learning component, managed by IDS, contributes to improving performance and practice, and builds an evidence base in the field of citizen voice, government responsiveness, transparency and accountability (T&A) and technology for T&A (Tech4T&A).

About Making All Voices Count practice papers

The Research, Evidence and Learning component has produced a series of practitioner research and learning grants to support a range of actors working on citizen voice, T&A and governance to carry out self-critical enquiry into their own experiences and contexts. The main output of each grant is what the practitioner learns and applies to their own practice. Practitioners can also decide to produce their own written outputs. The purpose of the practice papers, written on completion of each grant, is to capture the essence of that learning process through a reflective dialogue between programme staff and funded partners, to share with a wider audience of peer practitioners and policy-makers.

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