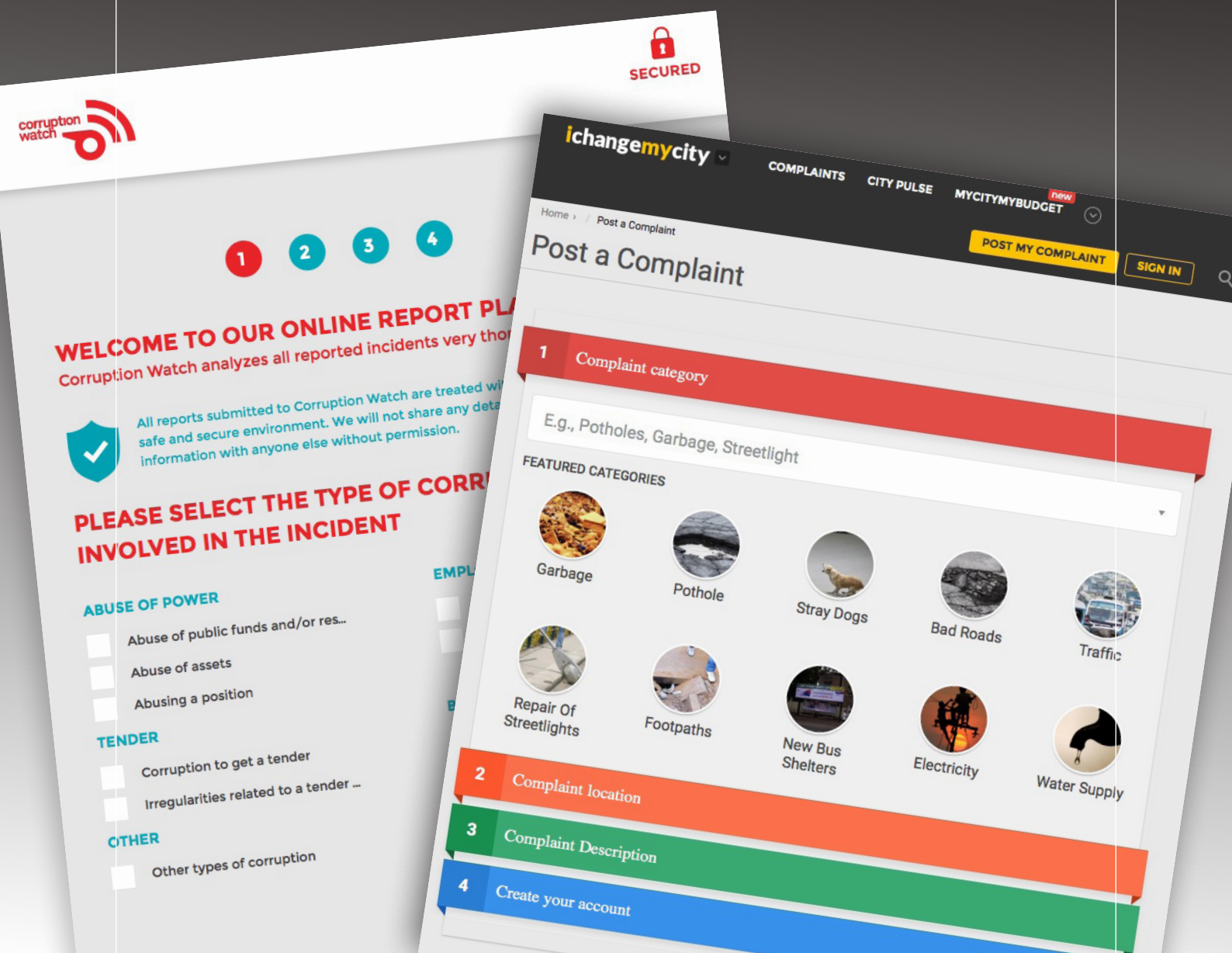


Shifting the spotlight: understanding crowdsourcing intermediaries in transparency and accountability initiatives



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Summary

This report highlights the ideas and practices that underlie the work of crowdsourcing intermediaries: actors who collect and analyse citizen feedback using digital platforms, and use it to support positive change. Most studies of crowdsourcing initiatives in the transparency and accountability field are primarily concerned with representation (whose voice is being heard?) and impact (what kind of change is being supported?). By contrast, this study shifts the spotlight onto crowdsourcing intermediaries themselves, their motives, and their theories of change and action.

The research used an original conceptual framework that combines ideas from the governance and social accountability fields with networked gatekeeping theory. According to this framework, crowdsourcing intermediaries are gatekeepers of citizen voice who can shape and therefore control many different aspects of the flow of information generated by contributors.

The picture that emerges from the research, which combined content analysis of website text with qualitative case studies, reveals a great deal of fluidity and experimentation in the way that crowdsourcing is defined and used as part of the political strategies of crowdsourcing intermediaries. Equally varied were the roles and relationships that crowdsourcing intermediaries engaged in as collectors and analysts of citizen feedback.

A key finding is that in crowdsourcing initiatives, it is difficult to distinguish between the interpretive aspects of intermediation, which comprise the collection and analysis of citizen feedback, and political aspects of intermediation, which involve using the collected information to support positive change. Put more simply, crowdsourced information is inherently political.

The analysis of website content also highlighted privacy concerns, and challenges about how transparent and accountable crowdsourcing intermediaries are to their participants on the basis of the information they make available on their websites. Only 10 out of the 20 websites studied included a privacy policy; six did not explain the sequence of actions that were triggered by submitted reports; and only two made the information they collected available in a format suitable for further analysis. These and other findings suggest that there is much to be done to ensure that those who seek accountability on behalf of others are equally accountable to them.

Key themes in this paper

- The role of crowdsourcing intermediaries as gatekeepers of citizen-generated data
- The accountability of crowdsourcing intermediaries to citizens who contribute data, especially in terms of data policies
- The factors that influence the pathways of individual crowdsourcing intermediaries

Political savviness and good intentions may be undermined by poorly-thought-out data policies and failure to communicate clearly to citizen contributors the implications of their participation.

1. Introduction

This paper presents findings and conclusions from a multi-method study of ‘crowdsourcing intermediaries’.¹ We define crowdsourcing intermediaries in transparency and accountability (T&A) initiatives as actors who aim to contribute to more accountable governance through facilitating citizen feedback on government, using Internet or mobile phone technology to source opinions. They are the people behind crowdsourcing initiatives.

Instead of asking whether T&A initiatives are effective, the research focused on how crowdsourcing intermediaries mediate citizen voice, and why. It addressed two questions:

- What tools, policies and practices do crowdsourcing intermediaries adopt to express citizen voice?
- Who do they mediate between, and why?

The conceptual framework of the research combines ideas from two literature fields: media and communications, and social accountability and governance. By combining insights from these fields, the conceptual framework allows us to examine in tandem:

- the choices and power dynamics that inform the character and direction of information flows that crowdsourcing intermediaries create between citizens and the state;
- the political strategies and actions supported by these information flows.

Crowdsourcing intermediaries form part of a new wave of technology-enabled collaborative transparency initiatives where the information that is required to effect change is generated by citizens themselves (Fung, Graham and Weil 2007).

Whereas the users of earlier, targeted transparency initiatives and ‘right to know’ policies had to rely on disclosers of information and regulators to obtain the information they sought, this wave of collaborative transparency initiatives mobilises citizens to generate flows of information for their own purposes. The ability to circumvent official information channels, or to create entirely novel data sets, combined with the capacity to bring many voices together to increase the prospect of being heard (Fox 2016), renders crowdsourcing a particularly appealing method for supporting accountable governance (Bott and Young 2012; Bott, Gigler and Young 2014; Hellström 2015; Certomà, Corsini and Rizzi 2015).

By shifting the spotlight to the character of intermediation itself, this study surfaces some tensions between the underlying motivation and political strategies of these intermediaries, and the way that they handle and use citizen data. Previous accounts of intermediation have emphasised the gap between information provision and action, arguing that technical proficiency and the establishment of new information flows does not necessarily support collective action and positive change. We argue that, equally, political savviness and good intentions may be undermined by poorly-thought-out data policies and failure to communicate clearly to citizen contributors the implications of their participation.

The findings of this research are of interest to scholars of governance, T&A and the democratic potential of information and communication technologies (ICTs); to practitioners who design, implement and maintain tech for T&A initiatives; and to donors.

¹ The term ‘infomediary’ refers to actors who process, transform and communicate information. An ‘intermediary’ is an actor involved in processes of brokerage – such as the cultivation of political and social relationships – that extend beyond the exchange of information. Fung, Gilman and Shkabatur (2010) make the distinction between interpretive intermediaries who analyse information and deliver its key messages, and political intermediaries who use information to advance a political agenda. In this report, infomediary and intermediary are used interchangeably, reflecting our finding that the collection, processing and communication of information by crowdsourcing actors cannot easily be distinguished from their political aims.

2. Research framework

2.1 Key concepts: governance, social accountability, networks and gatekeeping

Our review of the literature combines concepts from the governance and social accountability fields with networked gatekeeping theory (NGT), a recent offshoot of a well-established line of scholarship in media and communications research.

Social accountability processes seek to support citizens and civil society organisations (CSOs) to demand government accountability – directly or indirectly – through the involvement of government reformers, the media and donors (Grandvoinet, Aslam and Raha 2015); scholars and practitioners have long debated the relationship between information, transparency and accountability. Many contributions show that improved access to information does not necessarily inspire citizens to engage with government (Lieberman, Posner and Tsai 2014). And when citizens do decide to engage, they do not always have the resources to claim their rights or elicit an appropriate government response (Janssen 2012; Gaventa and McGee 2013; Gurstein 2011). Nonetheless, there is some agreement that under certain conditions, access to information on different functions of government, and the establishment of two-way flows of information between citizen and states, can support collective action and positive change.

The questions of who speaks, who gets to participate and whose voice counts (or appears to count) are central in the governance and social accountability literature. Different architectures of participation are shaped by power and offer varying opportunities for expression and agency for different groups (Oswald 2014). This is especially relevant to mediated communication, as representation in digital spaces seems to be influenced by existing divides and inequalities (Ganesh, Deutch and Schulte 2016). There is a growing body of evidence which suggests, for example, that texting – used in short message service (SMS)-based crowdsourcing projects – is predominantly adopted by the more affluent and better-educated segments of populations, especially in countries with low literacy levels (Blumestock and Eagle 2012; Zainudeen and Ratnadiwakara 2011; Poushter 2015).

In the governance and accountability literature, spaces of participation can be closed, invited or created (Cornwall 2005). In closed spaces, citizens are unable to exercise power or to influence proceedings; if they enter invited spaces, controlled by others, their influence may be restricted. Crowdsourcing intermediaries often create invited spaces and can, therefore, wield considerable power, but this has not been interrogated in the context of ICT-supported T&A initiatives. Our research addresses this gap by conceptualising crowdsourcing intermediaries as powerful actors, and examining their approach to mediation. We ask:

- What motivates crowdsourcing intermediaries?
- What are their backgrounds, goals and theories of social change and action?
- Who do they mediate between, and why?
- How do they think of and perform their role as gatekeepers and facilitators?

Another area where scholarship on participatory development and governance offers valuable insights concerns hidden power in the interpretation and presentation of citizen views and feedback. For scholars like Williams (1998), the people that represent us do not simply aggregate our collective interests, but actively shape them.

Studies exploring the success of T&A initiatives yield useful concepts for understanding the different choices that are available to intermediaries when it comes to contextualising and mobilising citizen voice. In this context:

- *Clear* transparency is more likely to yield results than *fuzzy* transparency. Fuzzy transparency “involves the dissemination of information that does not reveal how institutions actually behave in practice, how they make decisions, or the results of their actions” (Fox 2007: 667). Significant investments are usually needed in order to render raw public data into meaningful and actionable information. Clear transparency, on the other hand, “refers both to information-access policies and to programmes that reveal reliable information about institutional performance, specifying officials’ responsibilities as well as where public funds go” (Fox, *Ibid.*).
- *Tactical* approaches – which are localised, information-driven and bounded – are not as

promising as *strategic* approaches, which seek to create opportunities for collective action, scale up citizen engagement and work with the government to strengthen its ability to respond to citizen views and needs (Fox 2014; 2016).

- *Hard* accountability is more effective in holding those in power accountable than *soft* accountability (Fox 2007). Soft accountability involves ‘answerability’ – when the institutions that are the subject of published data and information are called to react or respond. In contrast, hard accountability has clear, built-in sanctions.
- In understanding those who seek to effect change, *downward* accountability is as important as *upward* accountability. Upward accountability involves the use of information to inform actions at the institutional level (Peixoto and Fox 2016) and justify investments to donors. Downward accountability involves being answerable to citizens and wider society, by ensuring that citizens are informed about the processes the platform is meant to influence, its successes and failures, and the measures that are being taken to ensure anonymity.

By definition, social accountability initiatives seek to encourage engagement between citizens and their government, and although they adopt varied forms and approaches, they all involve information flows. The study of information flows and what defines their character, direction and power is the main focus of gatekeeping theory. It was developed to explain the role of newsprint and broadcast media in shaping the news that lies at the centre of our public life. The rise of a new generation of digital gatekeepers, such as Google and Facebook, has inspired scholars to ask who the new digital gatekeepers are, and examine the extent of their influence. NGT, developed by Karine Barzilai-Nahon, is an important contribution to this emerging field.

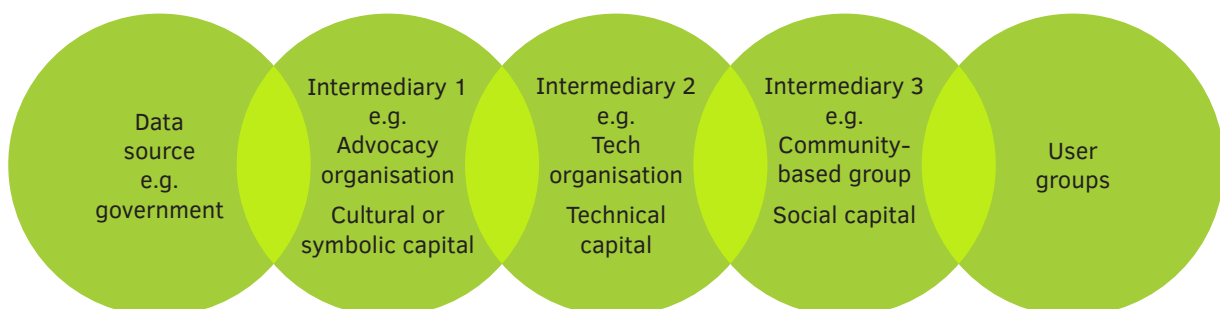
In NGT, gatekeeping is defined as “the process of controlling information as it moves through a gate. Activities include, among others, selection, addition, withholding, display, channelling, shaping, manipulation, repetition, timing, localisation, integration, disregard, and deletion of information” (Barzilai-Nahon 2008: 1496). Gatekeeping is conceptualised as a dynamic, contextual process, where the gated do not accept the actions of the gatekeepers passively, and where gatekeepers are sometimes also gated (Ibid.).

An example from the open data field is useful in understanding what the process of gatekeeping involves in tech-supported T&A and crowdsourcing initiatives. Based on the ‘Open Data in Developing Countries’ study, van Shalkwyk, Cañares, Chattapadhyay and Andrason (2016) introduce the idea of ‘sequenced intermediation’. They propose that tech organisations which promote open data are part of a chain of intermediation that begins with the data source and ends with the user groups (see Figure 1).

At the far left of the diagram lies a data source / data producer – in this scenario, the government. In order for the data to support the actions of user groups, they often have to be transformed. This can involve statistical analysis or perhaps the writing of a report tailored to the needs of a particular stakeholder. These activities are usually undertaken by actors in the middle of the intermediation chain.

Let’s take budget and expenditure data as an example, and assume that a government provides these in an Excel file that can be downloaded from the Internet free of charge. A local advocacy group – a user group in the diagram – wants to identify the funds allocated to improving school infrastructure in its region, how much has been spent, and to what effect. To achieve this, budget data would have to be cross-referenced with expenditure data, and

Figure 1 A model layer of intermediaries connecting a data source with users



Source: van Shalkwyk et al. 2016: 20

The process of intermediation is by no means neutral. Every aspect of intermediation has a direct bearing on what can be known, what additional work may be required to contextualise and use the information, and whose voices will count or appear to count.

the results matched against the current state of the region's schools. This involves different skills and resources: data science skills to combine data from different sources; statistical skills to analyse them; local connections at the grass-roots level to collect information on how the money allocated has been spent; and understanding of the local context to make sense of it all and identify specific opportunities for action. This kind of intermediation, which involves many different stakeholders working towards a common goal, is consistent with Fox's idea of strategic approaches to social accountability.

In initiatives that use crowdsourcing to collect data, citizens are the first link in the chain of intermediation. They are the data source, responding to calls to provide information to address a particular challenge via social media, other Internet platforms or their mobile phones. The organisers of the crowdsourcing effort collate the responses to create the 'bigger picture'. In terms of the gatekeeping model, the 'gated' in this type of initiative are the citizens who choose to respond to a crowdsourcing effort, while the 'gatekeeper' is the crowdsourcing intermediary who decides what information is going to be collected through which channels, and how it is going to be analysed and presented. Every choice that a crowdsourcing intermediary makes has a bearing on whose voice can be expressed, and how.

2.2 Key questions

What tools, policies and practices do crowdsourcing intermediaries adopt to express citizen voice?

In the gatekeeping model, the power that intermediaries have is both productive and restrictive. It is productive in that it creates new flows of information about public services between citizens and states, and vice versa. However, it is also restrictive in the sense that it imposes conditions on what information can be collected and how it is presented. Irrespective of whether

intermediation is viewed as a predominantly productive or a predominantly restrictive process, it is by no means a neutral one. Every aspect of intermediation has a direct bearing on what can be known, what additional work may be required to contextualise and use the information, and whose voices will count or appear to count.

This research highlights two flows of information: the collection of citizen feedback, and the contextualisation of this information for pursuing accountability.

Intermediaries who collect *citizen feedback* might choose to make provisions for citizens to overcome barriers of literacy and language – for example, by including a voice-based service and multi-language materials (Pegus 2016). They might obtain feedback by posing highly structured questions, or support more flexible forms of expression. They might choose to make the data that they collect available to others, or not. They may provide relevant data accompanied by detailed information about what the data mean and what processes they are meant to inform (clear transparency); or they may require others to do the necessary work so that that information can be used for advocacy.

The flexibility or strength of intermediaries' control over information places their gatekeeping on a spectrum from 'hard' to 'soft'. Hard gatekeeping involves strong control over the generation, presentation and use of information, perhaps only making high-level results available. Soft gatekeeping involves making the results available for others to re-use and analyse. The power of the initial gatekeeper or any other intermediary is open to contestation. Civil society, the media and donors may demand that an infomediary share information they have collected, or change their approach to data collection.

The second information flow concerns *putting information in context*, and the choices intermediaries make about how they do this. Projects may collect and disseminate information without linking it to

existing legislation and how targeted institutions work (fuzzy transparency) or they may link it with specific officials' responsibilities, public spending and institutional performance (clear transparency) (Fox 2007). The information-based actions of intermediaries, and their results, are important cues about the kind of accountability that is being pursued, and the credibility of the intermediaries.

The choices that underlie information control work in concert with the choices that intermediaries make on how to handle citizen information responsibly and ethically (Antin, Byrne, Geber, van Geffen, Hoffmann, Jayaram, Khan, Lee, Rahman, Simeoni, Weinberg and Wilson 2015; The Engine Room 2016; Oxfam 2015). This concerns how transparent and accountable intermediaries themselves are to citizens – especially those who contribute feedback – about how the information collected is being moderated and used, how their privacy is being protected, and any individual or collective actions that the process of providing feedback are likely to trigger. With some exceptions, such as the reporting of human rights violations, the more citizens know about who asks for their feedback and what they are doing with it, the more transparent and accountable intermediaries are.

The same applies to upward accountability. The extent to which crowdsourcing intermediaries – and in particular, crowdsourcing infomediaries – can demonstrate that the information that they collect, re-use and re-analyse has a public value, the more credible they are in the eyes of their broader public.

Who do infomediaries mediate between, and why?

Various factors influence an intermediary's decision to mediate in T&A initiatives, and whether and how to use technology. These include their:

- implicit theories about what it takes to influence government behaviour and how different approaches to intermediation influence this;
- personal background, character and technical ability;
- links to government and civil society, and perceptions of how policy and decision-making work;
- capacity to establish and communicate their trustworthiness.

These factors in turn shape decisions about what information to process, collect, analyse and disseminate.

Intermediaries, therefore, do not operate in a vacuum: their actions and choices are often

shaped by other intermediaries, as well as by the wider environment in which they operate. So intermediaries are not solely gatekeepers, but also 'gated' by numerous other actors; they are, in essence, only one among many links in a chain. Further, the flow of data / information / expertise from one stakeholder to the next is not seamless, but depends on numerous choices and constraints. Some intermediaries may understand their role as merely technical – for example, using crowdsourcing tools to collect and aggregate information – while others have a more political understanding.

2.3 Methodology

We adopted a mixed-methods approach to examine the 'what', 'who' and 'why' of the intermediation process.

- The study of 'what tools, policies and practices crowdsourcing intermediaries adopt' draws from a content analysis of the text of 20 websites (see Table 1), representing a sample of crowdsourcing initiatives aimed at improving citizen representation or supporting social monitoring.
- The questions of 'who mediates between whom, and why?' were studied through a sub-sample of four interview-based case studies (see Table 1), two focusing on social monitoring and two on voice.

Asking '*what is intermediation?*' means looking at sharing, information control and accountability strategies – the mechanics of citizen voice. In examining the selected websites, we cast a wide net, examining crowdsourcing intermediaries from the point of view of a website visitor and potential contributor wanting to understand more about what becoming part of the crowd actually involves, and what kind of accountability they might be entitled to from the crowdsourcing initiative. We were guided by the questions shown in Annex 1.

The initiatives whose websites we studied use digital platforms and mobile phones, often combined with other channels of communication, to support citizen representation (voice) and social monitoring, including citizen feedback on public services. Thus the examination focuses on crowdsourcing initiatives which are open, in theory, to every citizen with a mobile phone and / or access to the Internet. Purposive sampling was used to select initiatives identified from: recent publications that discuss ICT-supported citizen engagement; grantees of Making All Voices Count; the Technology for Transparency Network; the Participedia websites; and general web searches.

Table 1 Sample of crowdsourcing intermediary initiatives

Initiative and country	Description	Website content analysis	Validation of content analysis	Case study
Amandla.mobi, South Africa www.amandla.mobi	Community advocacy organisation – members use cell phones to undertake targeted campaigns on issues they have identified			
CGNet Swara, India www.cgnetswara.org	Online platform to share and discuss issues related to Central Gondwana region			
Check My School, Philippines www.checkmyschool.org ²	Participatory monitoring initiative for education sector			
Citizen Feedback Monitoring Programme, Pakistan www.punjabmodel.gov.pk	Government initiative to gather and analyse feedback from citizens using public services			
Corruption Watch, South Africa www.corruptionwatch.org.za	Platform for reporting corruption			
Daraja Maji Matone, Tanzania www.daraja.org	NGO empowering local communities and institutions to work more effectively together, partly through reporting on service delivery			
Fix My Street, Georgia www.chemikucha.ge	Platform for reporting civic issues			
I Change My City, India www.ichangemycity.com	Platform to post complaints about civic issues, vote to prioritise them, and follow up results			
I Paid a Bribe, India www.ipaidabribe.com	Platform for reporting both bribes and honest officials			
Maji Voice, Kenya www.majivoice.com	Service enabling water users to contact water companies to report complaints			
Not in My Country, Nigeria www.notinmycountry.org.ng ³	Platform to report corruption among higher education teaching staff			
Praja, India www.praja.in	Networking platform for active citizens, capturing voices and logging complaints			
Report Xenophobia, South Africa www.xenowatch.org/	Open source system for crowdsourcing xenophobia-related incidents using different reporting methods			
Sauti Mtaani Kenya www.sautimtaani.co.ke	Platform to promote direct engagement between youth and elected officials			
Sauti Za Wananchi, Tanzania www.twaweza.org/go/sauti-za-wananchi-english	Platform for gathering data from citizens via mobile phone surveys			
Stop Stock Outs Project, South Africa http://stockouts.org	Crowdsources reports of medication stock outs and pursues resolution			
Stopthebribes, Nigeria www.stopthebribes.net	Platform for public feedback on conduct of Nigeria Police Force personnel			
Tracka, Nigeria www.tracka.ng	Feedback on government projects in communities and state budgets			
U-Report Uganda www.ureport.ug	Social monitoring tool for community participation, polling members about key issues and gathering reports			
Vouli Watch, Greece www.vouliwatch.gr	Parliamentary monitoring organisation which shares citizen experiences and ideas with Members of Parliament (MPs)			

² Since the time of the research, this website and processes for reporting and engaging on-the-ground volunteers has been overhauled.

³ Since the time of data collection, the website domain name has been adopted by another project seeking to combat public service corruption in Nigeria more generally.

With one exception, the sample comprises English-language websites in developing countries, where English is also used for reporting and published materials. However, a number of the initiatives use local languages in outreach communications or data collection from constituents.

Data collection involved making a record for each initiative's webpages by saving them as PDFs. The resulting 270 PDFs were then analysed in two steps.

- Thematic analysis, in which chunks of text were coded according to the empirical research questions (Guest, MacQueen and Emily 2011); this surfaced new themes, grounded in the data.
- Content analysis is an approach for systematically structuring and analysing written material (Neuendorf 2002) which has been widely applied in the study of web content (Herring 2010) including web-based, e-government services (West 2007). In this research, areas highlighted by the thematic analysis were coded more narrowly, translating them into distinct variables with specific values.

A weakness of this part of the study concerns its reliance on web-based materials. Many initiatives of this kind have a diffused web presence; many use social media to mobilise participation and publish their results and successes. Further, websites may not accurately reflect every aspect of an intermediary's activities – an intermediary, for example, may have a detailed privacy or data-sharing policy but may

have chosen not to publish it online. In order to address this, we sought to engage project founders and staff directly in a validation process, by sending them reports with the results of our analysis for comments and corrections. Nine out of twenty provided feedback, as shown in Table 1.

The second limitation of the study concerns the focus on initiatives that have websites in English. This meant that the study could not, for example, take into account Latin American intermediaries which are embedded in a context with a long tradition in participatory research. Despite its weaknesses, we believe that this part of the research yields some important lessons about gatekeeping and social accountability practices in mediating citizen voice.

The questions of '*who do intermediaries see themselves intermediating between, and why?*' were addressed through four case studies. Each case study aimed to include a semi-structured individual interview with a founder and another member of staff, an interview with a key informant, and a review of articles, reports and other materials about each initiative; due to time limits this was not possible in every case, and at the end seven interviews were conducted (see Annex 2). Case notes that wove together these different sources were sent to interviewees for validation and comments. All written materials from the case studies were analysed thematically using the original coding as well as codes from the website content analysis.

3. Crowdsourcing intermediaries in transparency and accountability initiatives

Our analysis of 20 websites showed three broad approaches to the tools, policies and practices of crowdsourcing in the selected initiatives. These approaches are based on the kind of information these crowdsourcing intermediaries use and what they use it for – that is, the political strategies behind their intermediation.⁴

- **Crowdsourcing for addressing specific issues and supporting structural change** (I Change My City, Fix My Street, Maji Voice, Stop Stock Outs Project, Sauti ya Mtaa, CGNet Swara

(later stages), Check My School, Citizen Feedback Monitoring Programme, Corruption Watch (early stages), Daraja Maji Matone)

Initiatives taking this approach seek primarily to connect citizens and either government authorities or elected representatives for resolving specific issues or answering particular queries / concerns. The process of reporting is often highly structured, with participants needing to provide specific information in a specific format, allowing data to be quickly manipulated and analysed.

⁴ This information is not always available or clear. For example, in the case of Stopthebribes it is unclear what actions, if any, are taken on the basis of the reported incidents. Further, some projects, like CGNet Swara, changed their approach radically over time.

Some of these initiatives also pursue institutional change; they are premised on the assumption that existing channels of resolution and communication are inadequate. In this context, crowdsourcing provides a valid alternative for informing departmental agendas, and for communication with elected representatives.

- **Crowdsourcing for improved representation** (Tracka, U-Report Uganda, Sauti Za Wananchi, Sauti ya Mtaa, I Paid a Bribe, CGNet Swara (early stages), Report Xenophobia, Not in My Country)

Initiatives taking this approach use crowdsourcing as a platform for expression and as a way of opening up a window on the views and experiences of a broad audience, including traditional media.

Initiatives in this group maintain a high degree of control over how an issue is framed and reported. U-Report Uganda, for example, elicits citizen feedback mainly through weekly SMS-based polls, while Sauti Za Wananchi surveys citizens by using a mobile phone structured questionnaire platform, and I Paid a Bribe requires citizens to report their experiences by filling in an online form.

Intermediaries adopting this model assume that the information that they collect will inspire action through its publication and dissemination over the web, but also through traditional media.

- **Flexible reporting for collective action** (Praja, amandla.mobi, Vouli Watch)

Initiatives taking this approach tend to adopt a more flexible approach to participation than those in the other two categories. Praja invites citizens to write posts, rather than contribute information in a highly structured way, while amandla.mobi invites citizens to sign petitions, which are then used for mobilisation and collective action.

Our case study analysis, focusing on a sub-set of the larger sample, looked deeper, examining some of these approaches and the motivations of people who use them. The case studies show that intermediation and using technology are profoundly personal and influenced by class and background, as well as the political and technological landscape. Emergent themes from the case study analysis are discussed in Section 5.

4. What tools, policies and practices do crowdsourcing intermediaries adopt to express citizen voice?

This section presents the results of the content analysis of the 20 selected crowdsourcing intermediary websites. The results are organised according to two key themes from the conceptual framework.

The first theme is the gatekeeping choices that intermediaries make with regard to the presentation and analysis of citizen feedback. We approach this issue by considering what opportunities, if any, intermediaries create for others to conduct their own analysis and arrive at their own conclusions as to what the collected information means.

The second theme concerns the enactment of social accountability and how clearly websites communicate some of the rules that underlie the process of data collection, sharing and action. For example, do they clearly explain any steps taken to ensure the anonymity of

contributors? Do they articulate clearly the rules for moderation and publication? Do they explain what actions, if any, citizen contributions will trigger? Within the limitations of the methodology, these questions help us understand how transparent and therefore accountable intermediaries are as facilitators and gatekeepers of citizen voice.

4.1 Sharing and information control: information presentation and availability

The nature of gatekeeping across the websites studied was mixed. The majority exercised soft gatekeeping when it came to publishing individual reports; they were harder or more controlling in terms of sharing information that would enable other users to conduct analysis that could amplify the voices

of contributors. Less than half demonstrated clear transparency when it came to contextualising and interpreting the collected information and providing background explanations of the rules, regulations and institutions relevant to the accountability being sought. What issues influence intermediaries' choices about information control, and how do these alter as they learn from experience?

As shown in Table 2, 16 out of 20 initiatives are publishing 'raw' individual contributions, albeit not in a format that facilitates analysis. For example, in the case of I Paid a Bribe, citizens are called to report bribes that they have paid to public servants to complete a transaction, instances where they refused to pay a bribe, and cases where they completed a transaction without being asked for a bribe. In the case of Fix My Street, citizens of Tbilisi are encouraged to report problems around transportation and road maintenance that affect their lives. In both of these cases, it would be possible to extract the information from the websites, and organise it in a way that supported further analysis.

Three websites (I Change My City, I Paid a Bribe, and Stop Stock Outs Project) offer limited analytical capabilities that enable website visitors to statistically and visually explore the collected data within the parameters specified by the initiative. By contrast, five others (U-Report Uganda, Citizen Feedback Monitoring Programme, Maji Voice, Daraja Maji Matone and Corruption Watch South Africa) have opted for a tighter control over how citizen contributions are presented over the Internet. In particular, U-Report Uganda generally presents only highly aggregated results for each poll alongside a few examples of individual SMS responses. The Citizen Feedback Monitoring Programme makes some aggregate data available through two publications (bulletins) and a video on its impact. Maji Voice offers no insights on the adoption of the service by the wider public.

As indicated in Table 2, only two of the 20 initiatives – Sauti Za Wananchi and Stop Stock Outs Project – offered users the possibility of downloading the data in file formats that can be easily imported to popular statistical packages, such as Stata or Excel.

Table 2 Data availability and presentation in sample websites

Initiative	Are raw citizen contributions available on website?	In-built analytical capabilities on the website?	Can users do their own analysis?	Written outputs on basis of citizen contributions?
amandla.mobi				
CGNet Swara				**
Check My School				
Citizen Feedback Monitoring Programme				*
Corruption Watch				**
Daraja Maji Matone				
Fix My Street				
I Change My City				
I Paid a Bribe				**
Maji Voice				
Not in My Country				
Praja				**
Report Xenophobia				
Sauti ya Mtaa				
Sauti Za Wananchi				**
Stop Stock Outs Project				**
Stopthebribes				
Tracka				**
U-Report Uganda				
Vouli Watch, Greece				
Totals	Yes: 14 No: 6	Yes: 3 No: 17	Yes: 2 No: 18	Yes: 9 *Limited **Extensive No: 11

Lack of ‘openness’ in allowing others to draw their own conclusions from the collected information appears to be more of an issue for initiatives which seek to influence public debate, or whose mission is to render a certain service more transparent to its citizens.

Lastly, only seven initiatives have published outputs that provide a coherent synthesis and analysis of the collected information against the background of the issues they seek to address. The Citizen Feedback Monitoring Programme does so in a limited way through two reports and a short video. Praja has created wiki-based thematic guides on the basis of its members’ contributions. Corruption Watch South Africa has consistently published annual reports drawing from citizen reports and other activities, and also makes available a range of other tools for advocacy and mobilisation.

Making citizen feedback available in an open format or even publishing individual contributions online may not make sense for every initiative. For example, as is further discussed in Section 5, CGNet Swara’s theory of change does not depend on aggregation. In other cases, such as Corruption Watch South Africa, publishing individual contributions may put contributors at risk. Lack of ‘openness’ in allowing others to draw their own conclusions from the collected information appears to be more of an issue for initiatives which seek to influence public debate or whose mission is to render a certain service more transparent to its citizens.

The decision of whether or not to facilitate greater access to the crowdsourced information is not simple or static. Research on open data has shown that the costs of publication can be significant, especially if the data are properly anonymised (Cole 2012). Other explanations are also possible; some intermediaries, for example, are still testing and adapting their platforms to fit their contexts. When asked to comment on the results of the website analysis, which showed that the platform does not share its data in an easy-to-use format, the head of content for I Change My City remarked:

We are actively considering the same [i.e. opening up our data], and we would like to reach there. For now, we share such information actively with journalists, policy-makers, law makers, bureaucrats and even with journalism colleges for them to work on reports and stories... However, on the

issue of allowing download of all complaints, our experience is that since crowdsourcing of complaints is something novel in India, the discussion both in the media and in the public domain tends to focus on the outlier reports rather than a substantive discussion of the issues.

Though we do not want to be a gatekeeper for the crowdsourced information, for now we want to give a context of how it was sourced, the basics of crowdsourcing and how users file complaints on our site, so that a substantive discussion takes place on these issues.

The scarce availability of outputs that make sense of collected data is mirrored by the relative lack of contextual information that could help gauge institutional performance or inform citizens of their rights and responsibilities. Examples of institutional and regulatory information included the information on municipal budgets and the mandates of city services provided by I Change My City, and the information on legislation and citizen rights and responsibilities in reporting corruption provided by Corruption Watch South Africa. Providing such information for initiatives with a relatively narrow focus, such as corruption reporting or water delivery, appears more straightforward than it is for initiatives with a more diffuse focus that try to address multiple policy areas at once, like U-Report Uganda and the Citizen Feedback Monitoring Programme. Our analysis indicated an almost even split between initiatives that provided a good deal of background information and those that did not communicate much about the issue that they were seeking to address.

4.2 Social accountability and rules of engagement

Most of the selected websites were accountable in terms of providing users with information about the actors behind the initiatives and their contact details, but they performed poorly in terms of making public the criteria and processes used for deciding which contributions to accept, the measures taken to ensure the protection of contributors’ personal information and

contributions, and the individual and collective actions triggered on the basis of collected information. In this section we discuss the difficulties of assessing the accountability of crowdsourcing initiatives that use multiple platforms, and the challenges such initiatives face in communicating policies to users.

Information about intermediaries

Three websites – amandla.mobi, Not in My Country and Praja – did not provide any information about the people or organisation which founded the initiative. Among these three, Not in My Country – as a corruption reporting platform – stands out as the initiative that handles the most sensitive and potentially controversial information, which explains the decision of its founders to remain cloaked in anonymity. By contrast, amandla.mobi and Praja support online and offline citizen action and mobilisation to a greater degree than other selected crowdsourcing initiatives, which perhaps accounts for the lack of online information about their founders; this was the reason provided by amandla.mobi.

With the remaining 17 initiatives, it is difficult to say what decisions and experiences informed their information-sharing policies, or whether the people behind them are well-known within the communities that they operate. Information that is not available on websites – making the initiatives appear opaque to a global audience – may be well-known among advocacy groups in a city or region, or may be available in other parts of the Internet – for example, on social media platforms which were not investigated in the research.

Amandla.mobi's case study sheds further light on why some projects may omit information about their founders. A member of its team suggested that sharing information about founders might lead to some crowdsourcing websites being perceived as biased towards 'upward accountability' to donors rather than 'downward accountability' to their members or contributors. In amandla.mobi's case the website is only one of many channels of communication with members, and the initiative was experimenting with using technology to enhance its downward accountability to members.

Rules for publication and moderation

Only two websites explained well the criteria applied to judge the validity of a contributor's submitted report. The Stop Stock Outs Project clearly states that some reports will be followed up through direct contact with the reporter, and Corruption Watch South Africa has built in some

aspects of verification in its online reporting form, which asks reporters to provide documentation where possible, the names of people who might have been involved, and their roles.

Vouli Watch and Praja also publish detailed guidelines on how contributors are expected to express themselves on the forums and wikis, and the role of moderators. Processes of verification and / or follow-up of submitted reports are mentioned in the cases of Not in My Country, Report Xenophobia, CGNet Swara, Stop Stock Outs Project and Corruption Watch South Africa. In the first three cases there is reference to a verification or validation process, but no details are given about how the process actually works – no explanation is given, for instance, explaining what additional information contributors may be asked to provide, or the criteria for considering a report valid. In our case study discussions it emerged that Corruption Watch South Africa, I Change My City and CGNet Swara do have such criteria, but that they are rarely communicated clearly to contributors. Further research would be needed to understand whether this is due to a desire to minimise the barriers to participation, an assumption that many of these concepts and processes are self-explanatory, or the lack of a relevant, clear policy.

The clarity around key definitions and concepts exemplified by Corruption Watch South Africa is uncommon. For example, Report Xenophobia does not define its central concept – xenophobia – in the context of the initiative, while verification data for reporting are elusive on its website. In common with Stopthebribes, it also does not provide submission verification criteria.

However, there are some surprising exceptions. Although Not in My Country rates low in terms of explaining how submitted reports are verified, at the time of the research it provided a very detailed and well-articulated definition of corruption. I Change My City also allows citizens to contest whether an issue has been 'resolved' by the relevant government agency by 'reopening' a complaint.

Privacy and security

As shown in Table 3, there is an even split between websites that have chosen to publish or not publish their privacy guidelines. Out of these, seven mention some of the circumstances under which the data would be shared with the relevant authorities. I Change My City and Fix My Street both mention that reports are shared with the city authorities charged with resolving these issues,

The benefits of providing clear guidelines about privacy and the information that crowdsourcing initiatives collect about their users need to be weighed against the kind of information that the initiative is publishing, the reason why it is being collected, and the broader institutional and political landscape.

but they do not provide details about how much information about registered reporters is provided alongside the details of the complaint. As well as providing broad advice about how online users can safeguard their anonymity, Praja also has a separate policy on whistle-blowers – people who wish to provide sensitive information anonymously. Similar advice is also provided by Not in My Country, which is also the only website that details the technical arrangements that underlie privacy, such as how the data are encrypted and stored.

Only two websites, Not in My Country and Corruption Watch South Africa, state clearly that they can be compelled to release their data if they are ordered to do so by a court of law – even though this is the case in most contexts and an important piece of information for those submitting reports. Corruption Watch South Africa was the only initiative that specified who from within the organisation has access to a reporter's personal information; in this case, staff who had signed a confidentiality agreement, an important step for establishing trust in Corruption Watch's relationship with citizens.

I Change My City was the only website that included a clause in its terms of use that 'aggregated data may be sold for commercial purposes'. When the reasons for this were explored, it appeared that the statement had been incorporated from a standard policy, rather than reflecting a definite intention to sell the data.

Among the initiatives that have chosen not to publish their privacy and data-sharing policy are U-Report Uganda, the Citizen Feedback Monitoring Programme and Maji Voice – all three of which have many users and are considered to be success stories in the T&A field. U-Report Uganda mentions that the anonymity of contributors is respected, and

cautions them against scams, but provides no more details on who within parent organisation UNICEF has access to the data, or what steps are taken to protect contributors' anonymity. Maji Voice is even more opaque, although its website does mention that water service providers can obtain access to the submitted queries and complaints.

A significant number of initiatives, 7 out of 20, allow users to sign up using a social media account. Richard Stallman,⁵ an open source software evangelist, suggests that signing up for a website using a Facebook login has implications for privacy, given that Facebook sells a great deal of personal information back to the service that users signed up for, depending on how a user has set up their privacy profiles.

The benefits of providing clear guidelines about privacy and the information that crowdsourcing initiatives collect about their users need to be weighed against the kind of information that the initiative is publishing, the reason why it is being collected, and the broader institutional and political landscape. For example, users who report incidents of corruption, or those who are accused of corruption, might have more to lose if their identity is revealed than those who have reported the existence of a pothole in their street. However, in the age of big data, where information about citizens can be collected and combined from many different sources – including website cookies and social media accounts – careless data handling can render citizens vulnerable to data profiling and targeting (Solove 2004; Gandadharan 2012).

The challenge of establishing and communicating meaningful privacy guidelines is linked to that of obtaining informed consent, and therefore relevant for any type of survey or social science research. Meaningful consent and participation in data collection involving human participants

⁵ See <https://stallman.org/facebook.html> (accessed 9 January 2017)

means different things for different groups (Crow, Wiles, Heath and Charles 2006; Singer 2004). For SMS-based crowdsourcing initiatives in particular, communicating privacy guidelines and what actions citizen feedback will set in motion poses challenges to informed consent. It is not always easy for the

fundors / managers of crowdsourcing intermediaries to ensure that participants fully understand the character and meaning of their participation, when very few of them may have access to the Internet, or when there are few resources for publishing pamphlets and other promotional materials.

Table 3 Privacy in sample websites

Initiative	Are raw citizen contributions available on website?	Do contributors need to register?	Can contributors register via a social media account?	Does website say who collected information will be shared with?	Is there a privacy policy?	Is the privacy policy clearly written?	Does the privacy policy cover sharing information with the authorities?	Does the privacy policy cover sharing information with third parties?
amandla.mobi								
CGNet Swara		Unclear				n/a	n/a	n/a
Check My School						n/a	n/a	n/a
Citizen Feedback Monitoring Programme						n/a	n/a	n/a
Corruption Watch								
Daraja Maji Matone		Unclear				n/a	n/a	n/a
Fix My Street								
I Change My City								
I Paid a Bribe								
Maji Voice						n/a	n/a	n/a
Not in My Country								
Praja								
Report Xenophobia						n/a	n/a	n/a
Sauti ya Mtaa						n/a	n/a	n/a
Sauti Za Wananchi								
Stop Stock Outs Project								
Stopthebribes						n/a	n/a	n/a
Tracka						n/a	n/a	n/a
U-Report Uganda						n/a	n/a	n/a
Vouli Watch, Greece								
Total	Yes: 13 No: 7	Yes: 14 No: 4	Yes: 7 No: 13	Yes: 10 No: 10	Yes: 10 No: 10	Yes: 8 No: 2	Yes: 7 No: 3	Yes: 7 No: 3

On the whole, this lack of clarity on what citizens should expect as a result of their participation can seriously undermine the aims of these initiatives to engage citizens and make their voices count, or their downward accountability.

Explaining the process of change

Making clear assumptions about how change happens in crowdsourcing T&A initiatives is important at a very practical level, because citizens and other stakeholders need to be aware of the actions they need to take to support change. For example, some initiatives contact citizens directly to clarify their report as part of their report verification process; participants need to be aware of this, and to consider and manage any potential risks that may emerge should their involvement become known. They also need to gauge what additional effort they need to make to achieve their goals.

Several of the selected initiatives did not perform well in this regard. Six did not publish comprehensive explanations on the sequence of action(s) that is triggered when participants submit their feedback, either in terms of the report contributed, or how the aggregate data are used. This may not be important for initiatives such as Not in My Country, Report Xenophobia, Sauti ya Mtaa, or Vouli Watch; their theories of change suggest that availability of the platform coupled with the publication of the collected information is enough to trigger change. This theory is based on the assumption that after key stakeholders – such as citizens and MPs in the case of Vouli Watch, and citizens with regional representatives in the case of Sauti ya Mtaa – engage, then other intermediaries, such as journalists, will step up to further disseminate or take actions on the basis of the collected information. This is how the founders of Not in My Country explain their approach:

We enable students at universities to anonymously rate how their lecturers and administrative staff are performing their jobs. We then aggregate and publicise that information. We believe that by publicising this information – for example, by highlighting strong and weak performers – quiet corruption will diminish because: lecturers and administrative staff

will be motivated to perform their jobs better; government, university authorities, students, parents, media, and the population at large will demand that lecturers and administrative staff perform their jobs better; and students will vote with their feet, punishing poor performers by ignoring and abandoning the courses that they teach and the universities that employ them, and rewarding strong performers by choosing to take their courses and to attend the universities where they teach. This is how the founders of Not in My Country explained their approach in the frequently asked questions section of their website at the time of the research.

It is important to note that – despite the expectation that other actors will take up the responsibility of using the data – none of the initiatives in this group make the collected information available in a format that supports further analysis, have published outputs tailored to specific audiences, or have posted guidelines of the conditions for sharing their information. Therefore, although their theory of change assumes that the information they collect and organise will be widely shared, their practices, as communicated online, appear to block the flow of information and limit the involvement of other actors. Someone who is interested in re-analysing their data or finding out more about how they are produced would have to contact the initiative directly and negotiate access on a one-to-one basis.

Other initiatives have theories of change that assume a tighter loop between information and action. Among these, some – like Maji Voice – provide no details about the rules that regulate how this loop is meant to work. Maji Voice does not inform its users of an acceptable time for resolving reported problems, or what they can do if the water company does not address their complaint. Similarly, though advertised as a police initiative, Stopthebribes provides no details about what the police do with the information that is collected.

The analysis indicates that nine initiatives explain what actions the crowdsourced information sets in motion, but only sketchily. In I Change My City, reported issues can be voted down or up by signed-in participants, which allows problems to be prioritised in a manner defined by the platform. However, the initiators do not explain how the selected issues are dealt with by the authorities, whether they accept this prioritisation process or use different criteria.

On the whole, this lack of clarity on what citizens should expect as a result of their participation can seriously undermine the aims of these initiatives to engage citizens and make their voices count, or their downward

accountability. For example, the submission form for I Paid a Bribe includes an option for participants to share their report on bribery with the relevant authorities and the media, but doesn't explain what citizens that agree to this should expect. Furthermore, the success stories published on the website make apparent that the process of resolution invariably involved participants who submitted a formal complaint after being contacted by the authorities. This reflects a finding from the case studies, discussed in the next section, which is that the burden of hard accountability – of pursuing concrete sanctions or reforms – is a sticking point for the majority of the crowdsourcing intermediaries in this study.

5. Who do crowdsourcing intermediaries mediate between and why?

This section presents the results of the four case studies of crowdsourcing intermediaries, which revealed two emergent themes. The first concerns founders' motivations and positionality as enablers and gatekeepers of citizen voice. Here, we note ambiguities in how the case study intermediaries negotiate their position in relation to their background and class. The second considers how crowdsourced information can support positive action, and suggests that intermediaries have varied and dynamic views on the notion of crowdsourcing.

5.1 Turning the spotlight within: what does it mean to be an intermediary?

Although specific motivations may vary, the reasons behind the development of crowdsourcing T&A initiatives are deeply intertwined with their founders' personal histories, interests and the belief that something needed to change. Class dynamics, in particular, help explain the framing of the case study initiatives and their goals.

A good example is provided by amandla.mobi, an initiative that seeks to amplify the voices of black women from poor socio-economic areas by equipping them with cutting-edge tools to organise and take collective action. Its founders, Koketso Moeti and Paul Mason, both experts in social media activism, use the platform to conduct campaigns that the amandla.mobi team considers important, but also allow other local groups and CSOs to use it for their own purposes.

One of the motivations driving amandla.mobi is the team's disillusionment with the social media campaigns of the large international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) they describe as "middle-class" gatekeepers. Its founders regard amandla.mobi as a genuine opportunity to represent the interests and voices of less privileged groups in society who are engaged in everyday struggles to improve their lives and their communities.

The founders' connection with amandla.mobi's main audience, however, is complex. Mason mentioned the challenges of his position as a white middle-class male, and deferred to Moeti who

Opportunity costs in participatory governance are often very high for poor people, regardless of whether engagement is mediated by ICTs or happening offline.

reflected on the tensions and the ambiguities of her own positionality:

I recognise that I personally occupy a space in which I straddle two worlds – one being an oppressed [person] simply by virtue of my blackness and being a woman, but another in which I am also relatively privileged at the same time. So I think it's a constant pursuit of trying to take action within these worlds, but also trying to not be limited by the confines imposed by those worlds. (<http://200ysa.mg.co.za/koketso-moeti/>)

Redressing inequality was also one of the main motivations for founding CGNet Swara, a voice-based portal, freely accessible via phone, which allows anyone in India's Central Gondwana region – home to millions of excluded Adivasi people – to report and listen to stories of local interest. The initiative was founded by Shubhranshu Choudhary, a former international journalist, with support from a team of advisors which included Bill Thies, a Microsoft employee who was finishing a PhD and interested in using technology for social development.

The child of parents who fled Pakistan during the struggle for independence in what was to become Bangladesh, Choudhary grew up and went to school with children from local Adivasi communities in Chhattisgarh, central India. Unlike his schoolmates, who became caught up in the Maoist insurgency, he was able to leave the region and pursue a successful middle-class career in mainstream media.

CGNet Swara resulted from Choudhary's disillusionment with the poor quality of reporting on the insurgency, which led him to question the democratic and inclusive character of mainstream Indian and international media. Having covered many conflicts, Choudhary was able to see first-hand the blind spots that professional journalists suffered from and, in turn, perpetuated. According to Choudhary, because they did not speak the local dialect, the majority of mainstream journalists were often misled by the Hindi-speaking leaders of the insurgency who acted as gatekeepers for the Adivasi people.

Choudhary initially aimed to broadcast community news. As the law prohibited the use of community

radio, CGNet Swara first tried to use Yahoo Groups as a platform, but the challenges of registration led them to look towards mobile phones and interactive voice recognition instead. The early expectation was that the local stories contributed by citizens would be picked up by mainstream media, but CGNet Swara only really took off when contributors and staff started using the channel for pursuing grievance settlements directly, which was somewhat different from the original intent.

I Change My City Bangalore's (ICMYC) audience differs substantively from both amandla.mobi and CGNet Swara. Launched in Bangalore during 2012 by a middle-class Indian diaspora couple, Swati and Ramesh Ramanathan, the initiative sought to take advantage of the spread of IT to scale up the citizen participation work of Janaagraha, an existing citizen platform founded by the Ramanathans in the early 2000s. ICMYC is therefore part of a broader, more ambitious approach to improving urban planning and governance in India, which Janaagraha has pursued in partnership with state and private sector actors since the beginning of the millennium.

Swati Ramanathan indicated that most of those contributing to ICMYC tend to be middle-class professionals between the ages of 20 and 40. Although the platform is beginning to see more use by older age groups – a result perhaps of mobile technology expanding – poor people were never anticipated to be key users. Ramanathan commented that opportunity costs in participatory governance are often very high for poor people, regardless of whether engagement is mediated by ICTs or happening offline. As a result, she sees the middle class as having a responsibility in taking the lead to institute governance change. She argued that if the middle class succeeds in changing governance cultures and institutionalising participatory platforms, poor people will be able to take them up when they are ready and able to participate.

In contrast, David Lewis, the Executive Director of Corruption Watch South Africa (CWSA), was optimistic that despite a reliance on web-based technology, CWSA would be able to engage poor and marginalised people in its anti-corruption

work. Established by a group of ex-trade union officials who wanted to provide an independent and anonymous means to engage citizens in the fight against corruption, CWSA hoped that the use of mobile technology and relationships with other CSOs would enable the voices of poor and marginalised citizens to be included.

Each of the four case study crowdsourcing intermediaries mediated more than citizen voices. In all four cases, staff of the initiatives were involved in influencing which issues were pushed forward for further action and advocacy. For example, some amandla.mobi members, furious about allegations that President Zuma had used public money to improve a private residence, were keen to campaign for his resignation. Although arguably such a campaign could have been presented as an objective and non-partisan action against corruption by public officials, amandla.mobi staff felt that it would be interpreted otherwise, and risk their identity as a non-partisan organisation. Moeti, as Executive Director, makes the ultimate decision about which issues get taken forward for campaigning.

Another occasionally fraught aspect of intermediation concerns establishing a crowdsourcing intermediary's position and legitimacy in relation to other organisations or partners engaged in the initiative. The successes achieved by the case study initiatives were in all cases attributed partly to the individuals involved, but establishing their precise roles was challenging. For example, one of CGNet Swara's stories was picked up by an INGO, and it has also been able to leverage relationships with other journalists. According to Bill Thies, however, forging relationships with larger advocacy organisations acting as intermediaries is not CGNet Swara's strength, and journalists have been very dismissive of its activist approach and challenged the validity of its stories (Chadha and Steiner 2015). Similarly, one informant commented that the double mediating function of amandla.mobi – between citizens and government, and between affiliated CSOs and citizens – has created some confusion as to whether its role is to build a movement, or to provide services for a movement. Currently it appears to be doing both, which requires careful navigation to ensure it is not seen to co-opt members from partner organisations.

When comparing themselves against similar initiatives, interviewees from all four case study organisations argued that their approach

differed significantly from the ways of working of established, mainstream non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Amandla.mobi and CGNet Swara adopted a 'combative' approach, perceiving their efforts as challenging the status quo – the mainstream media, in the case of CGNet Swara, and the digital engagement strategies and campaigns of traditional NGOs, in the case of amandla.mobi.

Issues of representation in the context of tech-supported T&A initiatives usually focus on whose voices are being heard. Less attention is being paid to how founders and staff relate to their audience: who they see themselves as representing and why, and how they negotiate some of the tensions and ambiguities that emerge from the process of representation, particularly as they relate to class. This part of the study offers some insights into this aspect of gatekeeping. In doing so it also reveals other important aspects of gatekeeping, including how founders define their agenda, moderate issues raised, manage partnerships and position themselves in relation to other, similar initiatives.

5.2 Beyond crude aggregation: strategies for influencing

Although the theories of change of the four case study crowdsourcing intermediaries differ, they all consider information exchange and the collection and aggregation of citizen feedback to be embedded in collective action and their efforts to change prevalent norms. The forms of collective action that they undertake, the partnerships that they forge to accomplish their goals, and the role of crowdsourcing all differ significantly from initiative to initiative.

The main difference between CGNet Swara and the other three initiatives is that the platform does not aggregate citizen reports as the basis for advocacy, instead publishing on long-standing issues that affect large numbers of people. According to Choudhary, the platform seeks to enable a community-level democracy and advocacy approach. In this model, local people can take collective action in identifying issues to be aired on the network as requiring change; listeners who have been affected by similar issues to those broadcast also play a role in supporting action for resolution.

Even though the precise triggers of government response are not well understood, personal relationships and community-level, everyday

A common feature of the four crowdsourcing intermediary case studies is that they were all in constant flux, testing and fine-tuning elements of their technology or their approach in response to actions of their constituents or others in the intermediation chain.

lobbying action were critical for resolving grievances in the CGNet Swara case. Actions taken include phone calls, emails and in-person visits to officials by local collaborators. People involved in these actions work with CGNet Swara but also have long-standing relationships with other activists and local administrators. Activists may pick up stories and publish them on Facebook or other social media. When it comes to face-to-face action, local CGNet Swara staff will often turn up in person and say that a long-standing issue is getting lots of attention and something must be done. This approach highlights the blurring of boundaries between state and citizens in accountability initiatives (Benequista and Gaventa 2011), and the active role state employees can play as champions of citizens' issues. One clerk interviewed in a study of CGNet Swara by Marathe, O'Neil, Pain and Thies (2016) remarked, "I don't just call. I make sure he [the senior official] actually sees the petitions, which I either hand to him, or place on his table." Government officers interviewed in the same study reported that CGNet helped them do their job.

A common feature of the four crowdsourcing intermediary case studies is that they were all in constant flux, testing and fine-tuning elements of their technology or their approach in response to actions of their constituents or others in the intermediation chain. For example, CGNet Swara, which started out trying to bridge the gap between citizens and mainstream media, later evolved into a channel for recording and resolving grievances. And CWSA started to use citizen engagement and voice not only for reporting corruption, but also for citizen education on anti-corruption actors, such as the Public Protector.

Understanding of the nature and character of crowdsourcing and its place in the broader strategy of the organisation varied among the case study initiatives, and also changed over time. Thies considered crowdsourcing in CGNet Swara not

in terms of collecting data, but rather in terms of sharing out tasks like moderation among volunteers. Similarly, amandla.mobi looked at crowdsourcing in terms of raising funds or sharing resources for advocacy among its members. CWSA, on the other hand, took a more traditional view. In its initial stages, the initiative placed significant emphasis on crowdsourcing and it was assumed that aggregated results would directly support policy and advocacy. However, they soon realised that although aggregating the number of incidences of different corrupt practices reported provided useful data about citizen reporting behaviour, such data did not always provide an obvious basis for action. In other words, aggregation was helpful but not sufficient for advocacy. So while whistle-blowing has remained an effective engagement strategy and grown in importance as a means to identify possible subjects for campaigns, CWSA now places less emphasis on using aggregated results as the basis for its campaigns.

The character of ICMYC has not changed as much as that of CGNet Swara and CWSA. This may be due to the fact that the platform was conceived as a means for scaling up Janaagraha's existing work, and was therefore built on almost ten years of offline learning and a two-year long process of development, prototyping and experimentation with a similar platform, I Paid a Bribe. At a quick glance, the ICMYC platform sets out quite a simple version of Janaagraha's theory of change, which aims to connect citizens and local administration to resolve issues, such as potholes. In common with other similar platforms, contributors are invited to register and post a complaint on a civic issue. However, a more careful look at the overall design of the site and moderation approach reveals elements of Janaagraha's more sophisticated theory of change, which hopes to inspire long-term group formation, engagement and collective action online and offline. For example, for an issue to

be prioritised, reporters have to secure other members' votes. But resolving complaints is not the main purpose of the site. According to Swati Ramanathan, such action is seen as an entry point to deeper citizen engagement. In addition to interacting with civic authorities and elected representatives, registered members are also encouraged to use the platform to locate other people in their communities, and form groups around common interests and challenges.

Throughout these activities, ICMYC takes advantage of Janaagraha's experience and connections. As Swati Ramanathan noted, Janaagraha has enjoyed success because they have a "handshake at the back" and are able to trigger a government response. This allows ICMYC to feed their data into various agency e-government systems and its

staff to provide follow-up services. Issues receiving more than 100 votes are regarded as a priority that state officials must act upon. In instances where complaints require budget or policy decisions, Janaagraha will help groups with further analysis and action.

This part of the empirical investigation highlights the complex strategies that the four crowdsourcing intermediaries adopt to translate information into action. In some cases, this involves engaging the government as a partner (Peixoto and Fox 2016), while in others it involves a network of local activists. This echoes our argument in Section 4 that providing a clear explanation of what additional steps, if any, it takes to effect real change, is an important part of an initiative's accountability.

6. Conclusions

The study placed at the centre of its empirical investigation the role of crowdsourcing intermediaries – i.e. civil society and state actors that take it upon themselves to collect and analyse feedback from citizens in order to inform public debate and strengthen public accountability. It sought to highlight the power dynamics that underlie the process of information mediation in this area by bringing into focus the motives, theories of change and action of these actors and relating them to the decisions they make on how to use crowdsourcing and mobilise citizen voice. In doing so the study shifted the spotlight away from issues of representation and impact, of whose voices are being heard through the new digital platforms and what difference they make, on to the character of intermediaries themselves.

The empirical investigation was guided by an original conceptual framework that viewed the choices and positioning of crowdsourcing intermediaries as influenced by their backgrounds as well as their class, while describing them as being both gatekeepers and gated. At the same time, however, their actions and the possibilities available to them are shaped not just by the state but by other crowdsourcing intermediaries, available technologies, and the citizens they want to engage. According to the framework, the gatekeeping function of intermediaries extends

to what these actors choose to reveal about themselves, and how they communicate the rules and norms that underlie their interactions with contributors and duty-bearers. This includes the basis on which a contribution is accepted and how contributors' privacy is protected.

The framework proved useful in analysing empirical findings from four case studies and the websites relating to several themes on the what, who and why of intermediation.

The first relates to what it means to be an intermediary, and whether interpretive and political aspects of intermediation can be considered separately. The personal motives behind the creation of the case study crowdsourcing initiatives were intertwined with their founders' histories and experiences of what is needed to effect change. Class identity and class representation are important aspects of intermediation. Relationships between intermediaries and crowdsourcing participants – the citizens whose voices they seek to represent – are often fraught with tensions and ambiguities. Some of the interviewees saw themselves as addressing deep inequalities, but they were also aware of their relatively privileged position and the risks that different technology choices posed to making all voices count. Others were aware of

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the fact that their participants came from relatively affluent groups, but considered this a necessary step in the process of challenging entrenched cultures of corruption and ineffectiveness.

Intermediaries struggle with positioning themselves relative to other actors in intermediation chains – partners, similar initiatives and state actors. Although two of the four case studies adopted a relatively combative approach, all four were wary of being perceived as too ‘radical’, which they believed could undermine their relations with the state and their ability to effect change. These concerns underpinned choices about what issues they should be campaigning on and what they should avoid. This raises an important question about whether the interpretive and political aspects of intermediation – which differentiate between intermediaries who analyse the information and formulate and deliver its key messages, and those who use the information to advance an agenda (Fung, Gilman and Shkabatur 2010) – can actually be viewed as separate.

How do intermediaries relate crowdsourcing to citizen voice and incorporate it in their broader strategies? A common feature of the case studies is that the crowdsourcing aspects of the initiatives were continuously evolving in response to emerging uses of platforms and lessons learned about the tools and their legitimacy. Interviewees also viewed crowdsourcing as being about sharing out intermediation tasks, a tool for fundraising, and a means to collect opinions on government services or behaviour. Though aims to increase efficiency and widen the scale of initiatives influenced decisions to use technology for crowdsourcing, it was not seen solely as a means to produce large numbers on aggregate voice for advocacy.

Our research reinforces other findings which suggest that a context-specific combination of ‘online’ and ‘offline’ strategies is needed to incorporate information into nuanced political strategies (Cammaerts 2005; Morrison 2016; Tehranian 1990). Even the most sophisticated technological approaches rely on personal contacts with the media, government, and wider activist networks. Founders and staff did not expect that the availability of information alone would support action. Rather, they used published information as leverage or entry point in influencing, cajoling and demanding, and changed and adjusted their approaches on the basis of emerging lessons. The picture that emerges from the case studies departs from previous accounts where crowdsourcing initiators believed that the availability of information alone could support positive change (Berdou 2011; Brito 2008; Welle, Williams and Pearce 2016). Instead, it suggests that ‘infomediation’ – sometimes framed as a purely technical activity – cannot be separated from the broader and more political strategies of which it forms a part.

Our study shows the variety of approaches that crowdsourcing intermediaries take – a mixture of hard, moderate and soft approaches – and the complexity of factors that influence this. Sharing feedback in an open format or even publishing raw contributions online may not make sense for every initiative, but lack of sharing may be problematic for those that seek to inform public debate or aim at rendering a particular service or sector transparent. Yet facilitating greater access to crowdsourced information is not an easy decision to make. Some of our respondents discussed the costs of the data cleaning, anonymising and documenting needed to open up information, while others reflected on the reputational or political risks intermediaries may be exposed to

from erroneous or controversial interpretations of their information.

Applying our conceptual framework to the data revealed a substantial gap between current discussions on ethical and responsible data and prevailing practice, which has important implications for social accountability actors. Our website analysis indicates that most websites publish a great deal of information about the team behind a particular crowdsourcing effort. However, many perform poorly when it comes to explaining to participants how their privacy is protected, who their personal data is being shared with, and what specific actions are triggered by submitting a report.

This is unsurprising. Establishing and communicating meaningful privacy guidelines is a complex undertaking, particularly in the case of crowdsourcing, where the main channel of communication – such as a text message – may restrict what can be communicated to participants. Nonetheless, the character of these initiatives and the values that they espouse make it all the more important that they strive to address these issues as best they can and in a manner which invites and supports public scrutiny. Perhaps citizens that sign up to a service using SMS should be encouraged to visit a website, or listen to a recorded message

that explains clearly and succinctly how their anonymity is protected. An alternative approach might be to provide spaces for intermediaries to discuss their approaches, showcasing innovative applications of technology for this purpose. Bringing actors together physically or virtually to do this could encourage the co-creation of appropriate standards. Whatever the case, it appears that there is a lot to be done to ensure that those who seek accountability on behalf of others are equally accountable to them.

Based on the conclusions above we have identified a number of further questions for future research:

- Given that the use of technology for crowdsourcing falls within broader political strategies, how can these be best studied and understood?
- How can we begin to increase the responsiveness and accountability of intermediaries to their users and / or constituents?
- How are crowdsourcing platforms, their processes and effects experienced by citizens?
- How do service providers negotiate the requests put forward by crowdsourcing intermediaries?
- How do existing, readily available tools and platforms for supporting citizen participation 'gate' crowdsourcing intermediaries?

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Annex 1. Empirical research questions

Sharing / information control	What information is being requested by the crowdsourcing intermediaries? What channels of participation are being used?
	How is citizen feedback published? More specifically, how is the information collected, presented and analysed? How clear are the rules of publication? Does the service support others to conduct their own analysis?
	What are the conditions for participation? Do citizens need to register? If yes, what sort of personal information do they need to provide?
	How clear is the service's privacy policy? How well does the service explain to users how the personal information is going to be handled and shared? What steps, if any, are taken to ensure anonymity? Is any advice given on what steps users can take to improve their security?
Social accountability / rules of engagement	How much is known about crowdsourcing initiators and can citizens contact them directly?
	Are the actions that will be taken on the basis of the information that they provide explained to participants?
	Is there any mention of actions taken as a result of the project?
	What kind of change is being pursued? Does the project aim to address only individual complaints / issues or is more systemic change being pursued?
	What is the nature of evidence, if any, of the changes that are resulting from the project?
	Is there substantial background information on the broader institutional context that the collected information pertains to?

Annex 2. Interviewees

Name	Position	Date
Shubhranshu Choudhary	CGNet Swara – Founder	28.07.2016
Bill Thies	CGNet Swara – Co-founder, and researcher at Microsoft Research India	09.08.2016
Swati Ramanathan	I Change My City – Founder	29.07.2016
Venkatesh Kannaiah	I Change My City – Head of Content	19.08.2016
Daniel Harbig	Corruption Watch South Africa – Online Strategist	04.08.2016
Indra de Lanerolle	Visiting researcher at the University of Witwatersrand, member of Making All Voices Count research outreach team, and independent consultant	08.08.2016
Paul Mason	amandla.mobi – Operations Coordinator and Co-founder	17.08.2016

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.

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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).

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