

U4 Helpdesk Answer 2019:09

# Local government accountability mechanisms

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Recent experiences in decentralisation have seen an ever-growing need to incorporate accountability mechanisms into local governance structures to counter corruption and mismanagement. Differences in local contexts make the replication of distinct models difficult; therefore important considerations must be observed to guarantee local governments are effectively held to account. New developments in accountability mechanisms are now being developed to adapt to a variety of local contexts. Digital complaint mechanisms, legal counselling services, media based accountability platforms and participatory budgeting are some ways accountability mechanisms are being transformed to meet the particular needs of the specific contexts. This U4 Helpdesk Answer provides information about these mechanisms and summarises existing standards and best practices.

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**U4 Anti-Corruption Helpdesk**

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# Query

Please provide an overview of research related to local government accountability mechanisms.

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## Caveat

The U4 Helpdesk has produced several query responses related to general accountability mechanisms. This query response will expand on those previous answers by focusing on digital and ICT-based complaint mechanisms, media-based accountability mechanisms, legal counselling, empowerment services and participatory budgeting.

## Overview of local government integrity

### Context and concepts

Local government is an important point of contact between the state and citizens, where public services are generally exchanged and where local norms and by-laws regulate citizens' quotidian habitat: their home, their street, their neighbourhood, their city. Though the jurisdiction and responsibility of municipalities may differ according to context, ensuring good governance in local government is key to maintaining a healthy relationship between citizens and the state.

The 1980s saw many central governments transfer power to lower tiers of government. This move towards decentralisation was generally justified as a way of shortening the distance between citizens, decision-makers and service providers to make

## Main points

- In response to the failure of decentralisation in many countries, civil society organisations, governments and international development organisations promoted accountability mechanisms to allow citizens to hold local governments responsible for their actions.
- The academic literature has produced some evidence that local accountability mechanisms have a positive impact on governance.

governance more responsive and increase local input to policy design to increase policy efficiency (Akudugu 2012). By bringing the state closer to the public, decentralisation was assumed to promote public participation in local democratic structures and greater accountability.

Yet decentralisation did not have uniform effects in terms of governance: while many local governments saw a rebirth of local politics and renewed synergy between local governments and their constituents, other areas saw a rise of corruption in the form of clientelism, state capture and illicit rent-seeking. These areas also saw a decrease in the quality of public services and trust in government and a rise in negative development indicators. Many countries now show a significant gap in the quality of governance between their

national and local governments (Transparency International 2009).

In response to these developments and the failure of decentralisation in many countries, civil society organisations, national governments and international development organisations began promoting accountability mechanisms that would allow citizens to hold local governments responsible for their actions. Local government accountability mechanisms are particular, demarcated approaches to exacting accountability to ensure democratic control of public institutions, to prevent corruption and abuse of power and to improve public confidence in governance arrangements (Ferry et al. 2015).

Accountability “exists when there is a relationship where an individual or body, and the performance of tasks or functions by that individual or body, are subject to another’s oversight, direction or request that they provide information or justification for their actions” (Stapenhurst & O’Brienne 2006). Local government accountability mechanisms are particular, demarcated approaches to exacting accountability to ensure democratic control of public institutions, to prevent corruption and abuse of power, and to improve public confidence in governance arrangements (Ferry et al. 2015). Exacting accountability at the local level generally involves four elements (see Joshi 2013):

- setting standards
- getting information about actions
- making judgements about appropriateness, and sanctioning unsatisfactory performance

Accountability mechanisms are often classified in the literature based on whether citizens are “invited” to participate or whether these are “autonomous” spaces (Haider 2012, Ferry et al. 2015). “Invited spaces”, or top-down spaces, are institutionalised mechanisms run or supported by governments. These include, for example, municipal anti-corruption hotlines or participatory budgeting, actions that require government intervention to be possible. “Autonomous spaces” or bottom-up spaces, are mechanisms created through social activism and collective action. These do not necessitate the participation of state actors

but essentially require the response of state actors to citizen inputs.

The impact of accountability mechanisms is largely context-dependant, and it is thus difficult to systematically assess their effects or implementation on a broad scale (Muriu 2013). The academic literature has produced, however, some evidence that local accountability mechanisms have a positive impact on governance. Various studies have shown that local governments subject to more accountability structures provided better public services than those who were not (Muriu 2013). Participatory accountability mechanisms have also been found to have a positive effect on citizens’ trust in government and on the legitimacy of governments in fragile, post-conflict states. Other studies have also found such mechanisms to increase upwards social mobility, increased awareness of citizen rights and government responsiveness to citizen demands (Pandeya 2015, Cleary et al. 2013, Kim & Lee 2012)

### Challenges to implementing local government integrity

As Binkerhoff and Wetterberg (2016) note, local state structures and processes dominate the terms in which citizen input is solicited and responded to, and influence the capacity and incentives to which local governments have to be responsive. A key challenge when dealing with the integrity of local governments is that they vary widely on a range of characteristics, powers and responsibilities.

First, local governments are found at different levels, depending on the national and regional context. In some cases, there is only one degree of separation between local governments and national governments, while in others local and national governments may be separated from one or more tiers of provincial, state, regional or district governments. Increasing number of tiers may confuse citizens seeking to hold authorities accountable as unclear jurisdictions and responsibilities may lead to authorities diverting their own responsibility to other tiers, avoiding accountability (Beeri & Navot 2013).

Second, local governments differ on the legal powers and functions they have as well as on the

services they are responsible for providing. The degree of autonomy a local government has has a profound effect on how well top-down accountability works: if a higher tier government has delegated functions to lower tiers they may feel less inclined to hold these to account on their performance, and the lower tier governments might feel less inclined to report and justify their actions to higher tiers. Accountability changes profoundly context-to-context on the basis of how decisions are made, what resources are available and how decisions are enforced.

Local governments may have legislative capacity, having the ability to implement by-laws, local regulations or adjust higher tier government programmes to their local context or, conversely, may simply act as a local administrator for higher tiers of government with little to no say on how to implement programmes. Where this is the case, local authorities are held accountable for how something is done, not what is done. Local agents may wish to incorporate accountability mechanisms but may lack the legislative capacity to institutionalise them (Nabatchi & Amsler 2014).

Accountability of local agents also changes according to how local governments get their resources: they may have the power to tax citizens and assume private debt or conversely be delegated funds and have no capacity to take on debt or tax citizens. Local governments may wish to meet citizen expectations on local policies but may lack the resources to do so: generally, local governments differ greatly in the quality of civil servants they can hire due to this lack of resources (Fan, Lin & Triesman 2009). Accountability mechanisms may be misguided by targeting local authorities when higher tiers of government may not be transferring funds to assure good governance.

Also, local government may differ in their relationship with law enforcement or parts of the judicial system, which can alter how local governments respond to crime, corruption and human rights violations (Masters and Graycar 2016). Local governments may have jurisdiction over local law enforcement and lower level magistrates, or may depend on higher tiers of government to enforce laws locally. Thus,

prosecuting local government corruption differs greatly in this relationship.

In short, the powers and functions of local governments can completely change the target of accountability in local governance, and can change the tools available to local government to respond to local citizens' feedback.

Third, local governments may be appointed or chosen by citizens or residents. Local authorities may be electorally accountable to citizens or may be accountable to authorities in a higher tier of government. Depending on whether these authorities are chosen directly or indirectly by local constituents can have an important impact on who the local authorities feel accountable to, as appointed authorities may feel less accountable to their constituents than to the authorities who granted them power (Muriu 2013). This can have an important effect on local accountability mechanisms as these may have less effect on authorities who do not directly depend on citizens for their power.

Finally, local governments differ widely in terms of population and size, economic profiles, geographic and demographic profiles. This means that even within a particular region, local governments may experience differing realities. The elements listed above can have profound effects on accountability mechanisms: instruments that may be accessible to citizens in dense urban environments, for example, may not be ideal for more sparsely populated or widely dispersed villages.

Beyond these general context challenges present in local governments worldwide, a special mention must be made about the particular context of local governments in developing countries.

Decentralisation in these countries generally accompanied efforts in democratisation and was used as a way of bringing rebellious or secessionist areas of the country back into national politics following civil conflict (Shou & Haug 2005). In many cases, local elites captured local governments and used them to thrust themselves into regional or national politics. Contexts of local elite capture provide particular challenges for local integrity mechanisms (Joshi 2014). In their review of three case studies of local social accountability

mechanisms in “fragile contexts” in Bangladesh, Mozambique and Nepal, McGee and Kroessschell (2013) conclude that the main goal of social accountability in these contexts is to create spaces where citizens can participate in local government, and avoid the closing of these spaces while improving social realities.

Given the diversity of local governments and realities, creating a one-size-fits-all model of “best practices” is not possible. Interventions at this level should thus be carefully designed to meet the local realities and constraints. The following section, however, provides a number of guiding principles that are important to keep in mind when designing local accountability mechanisms.

### General principles and best practices for local government accountability mechanisms

Implementing local accountability mechanisms can be a daunting task for those seeking to shorten the gap between local governments and their constituents. As previously stated, local contexts limit the ability to replicate successful mechanisms, and determine what is the right type of mechanism a specific municipality should apply or, conversely, what kind of extra-governmental accountability mechanisms are more appropriate for a particular context.

As replication is not usually an option to facilitate adoption of any accountability mechanism, these should be guided by an accountability framework or guidelines which provides participants and outside observers a blueprint of how a particular set of actions can lead to a determined result by holding a local authority accountable. A framework can establish the scope of topics to be covered by an accountability mechanism so as to avoid diversion or co-optation of these spaces: for example, a mechanism to create a dialogue to fix local schools can chose to moderate comments centred on fixing roads or hospitals. Frameworks can further establish performance standards and metrics, clarify and rationalise goals to make them easier to accomplish and to monitor. It is important, however, that frameworks be responsive to changes when demanded by citizens. Including general goal and mission statements in these frameworks can

keep accountability focused on results rather than meeting performance metrics (Freedman and Schaaf 2013).

Integrity pledges are a common form of accountability frameworks related to fighting corruption in local government. These pledges are commitments that local governments subscribe to when dealing with more integrity in their affairs. Integrity pacts can include commitments to introduce particular participatory mechanisms, to consult citizens or civil society on particular issues or to establish common governance standards across all areas of government.

Accountability mechanisms are at the risk of becoming ends in themselves, as some instruments may be incorporated and sustained by local authorities regardless of their effects to uphold an outward appearance of being more open to citizen feedback (Freedman and Schaaf 2013). Even if intentions are good, this could pose a risk given that accountability mechanisms that require citizen time and investment but do not contribute to improving their condition may not only lead to less participation, but might end up captured by interest groups or local elites (Hough and Verdenicci 2015).

The available literature on accountability mechanisms is largely dominated by case studies of these mechanisms in practice, generally focusing on their success in meeting with citizen expectations and holding citizens accountable. Most of the key principles and best practices identified by the literature focus on four elements present in all accountability mechanisms: information, discussion and debate, citizen action and government response.

### Information

Any accountability mechanism must aim to lessen information asymmetries between governments and citizens. First, local governments must disclose information that is “actionable” to citizens, that is, information that can be used to hold governments to account (Fox 2015). Local governments should strive for and constituents should demand high quality, accurate, timely and clear data disclosures

relating to government activities (Bovens et al. 2008 cited in Schillemans et al. 2013).

The quality and sources of information is thus an important point for discussion between citizens and governments and both sides should work together to identify alternative sources of information or the available ones through, for example, citizen surveys and consultations and outreach to external experts (Schillemans et al. 2013). Involving third party actors that are considered credible and trustworthy to analyse and scrutinise information can also help improve its usefulness and guide governments on how to improve it (Porumbescu 2015).

Accountability frameworks can help to develop standards for the type of information meant to be supplied by governments and how citizens are meant to be involved.

It is also important that citizens and organisations participating in accountability mechanisms receive adequate education regarding local government activities and processes to establish a baseline of understanding between the two sides. For transparency to empower citizens, information must be intelligible and useful to them (Porumbescu 2015). Educating citizens about the roles and functions of government and of local government programmes, for example, may clarify what the government can and cannot do in their particular context and may establish a framework to work more efficiently (Morse 2012, Schillemans et al. 2013).

Furthermore, education can extend to more specific fields, such as a budgetary and fiscal policy, health policy and environmental policy, so that citizens can understand topics related to particular policies. Education will further prevent local elite capture of these mechanisms as education about government processes facilitates access to citizens lacking previous understanding or economic resources. Harilal (2013) argues that most “failures” in accountability mechanisms are due to a lack of commitment to and investment in training and education, both of participants and facilitators.

## Discussion and debate

Establishing guidelines and rules for spaces for discussion with local authorities can have a positive

effect on accountability as it encourages dialogue to be collaborative rather than conflictive. When speaking about these instances for debate Schillemans Van Twist and Vanhomerig (2013) believe that “learning” should be the focus, so that citizens can be made aware of the local government’s constraints and public authorities understand key issues and can focus their efforts on remedying them in the future.

For discussion fora to be useful, it is important to:

- embrace errors as learning opportunities
- consider evaluations as central to the local government’s work
- keep the debate as reflective as possible and focus on improvements

It is worth keeping in mind that both citizens and the local authorities need to have these exchanges in an open and non-threatening environment. If either side is perceived as too aggressive, the debates might not lead anywhere: citizens will likely not speak up and authorities will negate criticism rather than use it as a learning opportunity (Schillemans et al. 2013)

## Citizen action

Effective accountability mechanisms go beyond a simple airing of citizens’ grievances and exposing governments’ justifications: they aim to also incorporate further citizen actions to hold governments accountable. Accountability mechanisms should “actively enable collective action, influence service provider incentives and/or share power over resource allocation” (Fox 2015).

Local governments can incorporate citizen action into knowledge production, through research groups and citizen committees, policy tracking surveys or public opinion surveys to better understand policy issues and either corroborate or challenge official information. Local governments may also integrate citizens into official government functions, either through decision making or dissemination of information.

Numerous case studies of implementation of local accountability mechanisms note that civil society organisations’ participation and promotion of these accountability mechanisms was essential for their

success and sustainability (Pandeya 2015). Civil society groups help to engage citizens and governments in productive ways and generally play an important role in establishing trust and rapport between these two groups in local-level politics (Grimes 2013).

### Government response

It is essential that local governments legitimise accountability mechanisms by actively participating in them, incorporating citizen inputs, and providing feedback and explanations regarding official policy or undertaking reforms. Local governments do not necessarily have to recognise or participate in accountability mechanisms, as long as pressure from citizens, local media or actors outside of the local arena (like higher tiers of government, media and national civil society groups) force local authorities to acknowledge and act on citizen feedback (Fox 2015). Successful accountability mechanisms fuse local, bottom-up pressure with pressure from higher tiers of government to maintain pressure on local authorities to act (Serra 2011).

When institutionalised, local governments should aim to create a direct link between the process and a relevant authority that will be able to act on citizen inputs. This is most crucial when dealing with local government corruption as corruption complaints that are delivered to authorities, which either lack the authority, capacity or will to act, could put denouncers at risk of retaliation or could delegitimise these mechanisms in the future, meaning that corruption complaints will not be pursued (Hough and Verdenicci 2015).

Furthermore, local governments must assure consistent levels of administrative support for and political will towards accountability mechanisms for these to be successful on a sustainable basis and not devolve into conventional processes that do not lead to change (Avis 2015).

In cases where government must respond to claims of wrongdoing or mismanagement, it is crucial to address the conditions which led to infractions. While demanding resignation of local officials may be called for to hold them accountable, it is important that citizens and governments develop a

plan of action to avoid repetition of a situation so that replacements do not commit the same acts (Rose 2005 cited in Schillemans et al. 2013).

### General frameworks and tools to hold government accountable

In recent years, scholars and practitioners have built on positive and negative experiences of government accountability mechanisms to develop general models and guidelines to formulate and implement these types of mechanisms at the local level.

#### [Transparency International. 2015. Local Governance Integrity: Principles and Standards](#)

This is a general guide for local government integrity, for use by local authorities, citizens and civil society. It is relevant to local accountability mechanisms as it provides a detailed standards and principles for complaint mechanisms.

#### [Transparency International. 2014. Local Integrity System Assessment Toolkit.](#)

The Local Integrity System (LIS) Assessment Toolkit is a useful resource for local governments, citizens and civil society to analyse the existence and effectiveness of processes that counter corruption through means to promote transparency, accountability and integrity at the local level. The toolkit provides a guide to developing recommendations on problem areas and create follow-up action plans to implement these recommendations.

#### [CleanGovBiz Initiative. 2013. Civil Society Empowerment.](#)

This questionnaire is a useful resource for local governments who want to incorporate more civil society participation in decision making. The questionnaire includes an implementation guide to help governments understand how to improve their policies towards and with civil society.

#### [GIZ. 2015. Manual on Social Accountability for Civil Society Organizations and Municipalities in Palestine](#)

This comprehensive guide to social accountability mechanisms aimed at local governments in Palestine and Gaza, reviews many of the principles and standards reviewed in the previous section and

provides detailed descriptions of various accountability tools. The guide also provides examples of various accountability mechanisms with model inputs such as model surveys.

## Types of local government accountability mechanisms

Local government accountability mechanisms are not subject to a single, one-size-fits-all model. Academic research on local government accountability mechanisms has proliferated in the last two decades and provides a cornucopia of case studies from developed and developing countries. This section will focus specifically on accountability mechanisms not covered in previous Transparency International Helpdesk answers.

### Digital complaint mechanisms

The use of internet and communication technology (ICT) in governance is a growing trend around the world as internet and mobile phone access rates continue to grow. Many local governments have embraced ICTs to offer spaces to constituents where they can offer feedback and report corruption.

The potential of ICTs and digital spaces to provide for more accountability is based on capacity of ICTs to more effectively connect people and process information in a way that it is useful for citizen action (Wittemyer et al. 2014). For example, digital complaint mechanisms can potentially be employed to reach communities in sparsely populated areas, and to provide anonymity and security to those wishing to report corruption. Even in areas with relatively good access to government services, digital platforms can allow local authorities direct access to corruption complaints and so respond faster (Davies & Fumega 2014). Furthermore, ICT's can play a role in amplifying citizens' voices in corruption complaints, increasing awareness and civic education through mass communication, empowering citizens to engage, and monitoring and evaluating service delivery (Wakabi & Grönlund 2015)

### General principles and best practices

Local-level digital and ICT-based complaint mechanisms should adhere to general standards and principles of traditional complaint mechanisms (see Wickberg 2013). Practitioners should adapt these mechanisms to local economic and political realities, and consider the capacities of local government to receive and respond to corruption. For a more comprehensive overview on how to develop and run complaints mechanisms, please see the Helpdesk answer on the topic (Chêne 2013).

As a general principle, when implementing these types of accountability mechanisms, it is important to understand the degree of penetration of the different technologies being considered, e.g. access to phone, internet and digital devices, etc. Lack of access or limited digital literacy can compromise the effectiveness, impact and sustainability of ICT-based mechanisms (Davies & Fumega 2014). It is also important to determine the scope of the digital complaint mechanisms, i.e. whether they will be used simply for reporting complaints, or whether other functions, such as follow up on the complaints, are meant to be embedded into the system, in which case additional resources may be required.

As with any other reporting mechanism, it is crucial that digital complaint platforms remain free of charge, easily accessible and designed to reduce accessibility barriers for persons with special needs (Transparency International 2016, Wickberg 2013). Digital complaint mechanisms must also ensure the security and privacy of those wishing to report corruption and will likely be most effective when linked directly to government institutions or service providers responsible for undertaking action (Peixoto and Fox 2016).

In the particular case of corruption complaints, it is important that relevant anti-corruption authorities are involved or at least be regularly informed of complaints to ensure appropriate action (Hough and Verdenicci 2015). For corruption complaint platforms to be effective, reports must be acted upon. In all cases, the potential risks of reporting corruption should be taken into account and measures be taken to ensure that those who come forward do not suffer retaliation.



Digital citizen reporting mechanisms may also strengthen anti-corruption initiatives by providing additional resources for citizens who report corruption. These platforms can, for example, allow citizens to follow up on their complaints and see the progress made (Davies & Fumega 2014). This, in turn, could help promote accountability among anti-corruption authorities who can be evaluated based on the progress they make in their investigations.

These digital platforms may also serve to produce aggregate data about corruption reports and anti-corruption efforts: they can provide governments and concerned citizens with aggregated information and help identify trends and problem areas within government and service delivery. Moreover, similar complaints by different users targeted at a specific area or service may alert authorities to possible mismanagement or corruption. Furthermore, Peixoto and Fox (2016) find that effective ICT-based citizen feedback platforms make user feedback public, with the most engaging among these providing specialised formats which curate the information in ways that drive citizens to take action outside of the digital space.

## Examples

### Draw a Red Line, Transparency International Macedonia

In 2012, TI Macedonia launched Draw a Red Line, a digital corruption complaint platform based in the cities of Skopje, Shtip and Tetovo. Through a campaign in these cities, citizens were urged to report corruption in local and national government through an internet-based platform which geo-referenced reports and presented aggregated data on a map relating to corruption complaints. The platform was also linked to TI Macedonia's legal counselling service, allowing citizens to reach out to this service directly if they had been victim to corruption (Wickberg 2013).

The platform saw a spike in usage after its launch, and provided information about local property tax fraud. TI Macedonia's ALAC worked on the basis of these reports and uncovered a five-year corrupt operation in Skopje Centre 2. Following an official investigation and sentencing, citizens were

contacted through the platform to offer assistance to access redress (Ushahidi 2013).

### Fix My Street platforms

Fix my street platforms are web-based accountability mechanisms that allow citizens to report problems with municipal street infrastructure and geo-reference their reports. These reports are aggregated, and interactive maps are developed based on the data to show where most people reported problems. The platform was originally developed by UK CSO mySociety in 2007 as an open-source platform which could be adopted at the municipal level (<https://fixmystreet.org/>). The platform was adopted in several countries including Canada, Georgia, Germany, South Korea, Greece, the Netherlands and France (IACC 2012). Similar platforms have also been implemented in municipalities in Hungary and Slovakia (Polyák 2018).

One of the most successful case studies of these platforms is Fix My Street Georgia run by TI Georgia (TI Georgia 2019). This platform started by monitoring the quality of infrastructure in Tbilisi and later expanded to cover three other cities. Fix My Street Georgia not only incorporates geo-referencing tags and public maps that aggregate the data but also permits users to upload photos of problem areas, particularly useful for informing governments and other users about the urgency of the problem. The website also allows users to publish "after" photos of fixed streets, motivating governments to act to fix streets as users will see problems and solutions. Fix My Street Georgia, though not officially linked to local governments, nevertheless created important collective action within municipalities to address more serious programmes, which in turn created new spaces for accountability independent of the platform (Peixoto & Fox 2016).

Another successful platform stemming from mySociety's software was the Por Mi Barrio platform was launched Montevideo, Uruguay. It is mobile and web-based, and enables citizens to report problems like vandalism and breakdowns of public infrastructure. The reported problems and the government actions (for example, if they have been repaired or not) are geo-referenced on a

public map. Municipal data analysed by Peixoto and Fox (2016) shows that upwards of 50% of citizen complaints were acted upon annually, a relatively high degree of responsiveness for an accountability mechanism.

Por mi Barrio is particularly innovative because it brings different actors together. The platform was developed and is operated by DATA, a local civil society organisation. DATA, however, stayed in constant communication with the government during the platform's launch to resolve technological issues at a critical period for citizen acceptance. Furthermore, the Montevideo neighbour's ombudsman, a municipal ombudsman, works closely with the municipal executive to identify particular problems related to user rights and to prosecute petty corruption in infrastructure management should it arise (Por Mi Barrio 2019).

#### Seoul Municipal Government, OPEN and OASIS

The Seoul Municipal Government in the Republic of Korea developed a series of participatory accountability mechanisms in the early 2000s to connect better with local citizens. First, the Online Procedures Enhancement for Civil Applications (OPEN) portal was developed to monitor the delivery of public services to citizens (Transparency International/UN-Habitat 2004 cited in Transparency International 2009). Citizens were able to interact directly with municipal governments to complaint and could follow up digitally to assess if action had been taken (Bertot et al. 2012).

Second, the Cheon Man Sang Oasis (Oasis) was a digital platform designed to receive input from the residents of Seoul about SMG's public policies, programmes and management practices (Kim and Lee 2012). These programmes aimed to address governance issues by incorporating digital platforms which, in a city with high internet access and usage, could be easily consulted and followed up (Abu-Shanab et al. 2013). During the initial period of implementation, Seoul's citizens saw a notable improvement in public services, and the national Korea Independent Commission against Corruption (KICAC) noted improved levels of integrity in local public procurement (Kim et al. 2009).

#### Citizen Feedback Model, Lahore, Pakistan

The Citizen Feedback Model is a programme started in Lahore, Pakistan, in 2008, which has since expanded into other districts. The programme is based on providing citizens the opportunity to give feedback after completing official transactions at government offices (Hough & Verdenicci 2015). After finalising the transaction, users submit their mobile number, which is recorded in a central database. Sometime after the transaction, the citizen receives an official SMS asking if they were asked for a bribe and the amount requested. The information is then processed and reported to the central government to gain insight into problem areas within the municipal administration. In the first six years of the programme, more than 110,000 reports on corruption were made through the Citizen Feedback Model, with more than 3,600 actions taken to sanction corrupt officials (Hough & Verdenicci 2015).

#### I Paid a Bribe, Bangalore, India

The I Paid a Bribe website is a crowdsourcing website originally set up in 2008 in Bangalore, India, by the local CSO, Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship. The website allows citizens to share their experiences of petty corruption, where they were asked or coerced into paying bribes. These reports were anonymous but had to include basic information on the type of service where they were solicited for a bribe (for example, local land registries, local law enforcement, service delivery). I Paid a Bribe then aggregated these results and published reports about trends and corruption in the locality (Davies & Fumega 2014).

The platform saw overwhelming success due to the quality of the reports, which permitted further investigations into corruption and raised awareness about citizens' own struggles with corruption, de-vilifying some bribe payers as victims of the system. Reports on corruption in local driver registry offices in Bangalore were so consistent that the city government completely reformed the offices, and now offers drivers' licence registration solely through online platforms to cut down on bribes (Strom 2012 cited in Davies & Fumega 2014).

The success of this programme led to nationwide expansion and the incorporation of new mobile app and SMS platforms to reach new users (Davies & Fumega 2014) and received more than 32,000 reports (Hough & Verdenicci 2015). It saw many imitations around the world including in Greece, Morocco and China. In this last case, and to emphasise the importance of local context to the success of digital corruption complaint platforms, the programme was largely seen as a failure due to the authoritarian nature of the country, which proved to demotivate digital civic organisation and saw low user participation, fearing reprisal for reports (Hough & Verdenicci 2015).

#### [My E-municipality Platform, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria](#)

My E-municipality is run through a public-private partnership between an ICT NGO and the Stara Zagora city hall. It allows citizens to file complaints and provides a platform to send questions and recommendations to city hall (Stara Zagora 2019). Citizen feedback is public and accessed by any citizen in real time, regardless of whether it is a complaint, a question or a recommendation.

Through a memorandum of understanding, signed by the NGO and city hall, the latter is responsible for providing feedback on all complaints, questions and recommendations in 14 days. Since its inception, the platform has also been extended for use by private public service providers, and has partnered with the National Ministry of Economy and Commerce to provide a hotline for more urgent matters (Stara Zagora 2019).

### Legal counselling services and legal empowerment mechanisms

Accountability mechanisms may engage local governments through the legal system to resolve issues or advance access to rights and services. This can be undertaken through legal counselling mechanisms, which aim to provide professional legal assistance to citizens to redress rights violations, or via legal empowerment, which focuses on the direct capacity of citizens to exercise their rights and access the legal system (Goodwin & Maru 2017). These mechanisms can be run by civil society organisations or can be an office sponsored by higher-level tiers of government. This approach

aims to grant access to real justice by confronting power and empowering people with information about their legal rights and available avenues to seek justice for rights violations, with the help of legal intermediaries, especially vis-a-vis the state (Robb-Jackson 2013 cited in Joshi 2017).

Legal counselling is not a new phenomenon, but research on this accountability mechanism is still in its infancy with relatively little scholarly literature analysing trends and best practices (Joshi 2017, Goodwin & Maru 2017). Nevertheless, literature available on these types of interventions shows that legal counselling and empowerment increases the agency of those assisted, increases the general legal literacy in communities where legal services are present and also improves the responsiveness of targeted governments.

### General principles and best practices

Legal counselling services should always be undertaken by professionals or groups with adequate legal knowledge and who are legally permitted to assist others in legal matters and take cases to court (UNODC 2011). These services should take precautions to protect the security and well-being of those who come forward and protect the integrity of the cases to ensure plaintiffs receive adequate legal repair (UNODC 2011).

As previously mentioned, local governments operate in different contexts, thus legal counselling services should provide various points of contact according to the economic, social and geographical conditions. Use of mobile resource centres, ICT platforms or telephone hotlines might extend access to more vulnerable communities or individuals hesitant or unable to come forward in person (Romero Leon 2015).

In his analysis of Transparency International's advocacy and legal advice centres (ALACs), Romero Leon (2015) developed a list of good practices for legal counselling services related to corruption. Most of these centre around developing active relationships with community groups, media organisations, state anti-corruption agencies and law firms to facilitate the transfer of knowledge between these actors. This can help to

- gain inputs that may contribute to individual cases
- lighten the load of cases by transferring them to the relevant or competent actors
- grant publicity to important cases to increase pressure on governments to act

In their study of North Macedonian legal counselling initiatives, Abdikeeva and Covaci (2017) note that the proficient training of paralegals from community groups can increase the capacity to identify cases apt for litigation and to liaise with plaintiffs in ongoing litigation to prevent retaliation and monitor to see if conditions changed requiring more urgent legal attention.

Legal counselling services can have a greater impact when carried out through collective legal action or class action lawsuits (Goodwin & Maru 2017). Collective actions potentially expand the resources and evidence at the disposal of legal aids and can deter retaliation on individual members of the collective (Romero Leon 2015). Furthermore, these types of legal empowerment mechanisms can further motivate collective social activism to gather relevant information, monitor implementation of rulings and to assist others who were not included in the original lawsuit to seek justice.

## Examples

### Advocacy and legal advice centres (ALACs)

ALACs legal counselling centres, set up by national chapters of Transparency International, provide legal aid services to victims of corruption or government abuse. They also undertake strategic litigation to close loopholes in anti-corruption law and bring corrupt officials to justice (Elers et al. 2010). Although the functions of the ALACs differ from country to country, they generally integrate in-person consultations, digital complaint mechanisms and telephone hotlines to offer citizens legal support in corruption-related cases. Many ALACs in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus have also attempted to provide digital legal libraries with detailed resources and guides to anti-corruption legislation (Elers et al. 2010).

### Access to health services initiative by CSOs in North Macedonia

Access to healthcare for Roma people has historically been lower than other segments of the population in the Republic of North Macedonia due to the government's attitudes towards this minority and other economic and cultural barriers (Abdikeeva & Covaci 2017). The Association for Emancipation, Solidarity and Equality of Women, the Roma Resource Center, Centre for Democratic Development and Initiatives and the Health, Education and Research Organization launched several coordinated programmes to provide legal counselling services to Roma people to improve their access to local health facilities.

The organisations undertook community consultations and identified the main issues and problem areas that Roma people faced when accessing local healthcare. They worked with communities to raise awareness about these issues and to gather more information through community-led participatory methods (Joshi 2017). Cases were then developed with Roma community members and brought up with local health centres. Public gatherings and media campaigns raised awareness about these cases. As a result, health coverage in predominantly Roma localities improved notably (Joshi 2017). More importantly, however, there was a significant rise in Roma community members filing complaints following the initiative (Abdikeeva and Covaci 2017).

### Paralegal service networks in Sierra Leone

In the mid-2000s, the UN began to promote local-level legal aid initiatives in Sierra Leone as part of their peace-building effort after the civil war (Waldorf 2019). Timap for Justice and the Community Justice Advisors are the most notable initiatives due to their success.

Timap for Justice is a legal aid justice initiative to extend legal counselling services to 13 villages in northern and southern Sierra Leone as well as in the capital. It operates through paralegal offices who work with groups of citizens that suffered a violation of their rights. At village level, these offices offer education, mediation, organise services and advocate for changes at the community level. When confronted with cases that merit litigation,

two in-house lawyers and a network of national lawyers work with affected citizens to develop strategic litigation suits (UNODC 2011, Waldorf 2019). Timap for Justice reviewed more than 1,700 cases from 2008 to 2009. Median time to process a case was six weeks and 25% were closed within one week (UNODC 2011) as litigation or threat of litigation carries enormous weight in local governments in Sierra Leone (UNODC 2011).

Similarly, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission launched the Community Justice Advisors (CJA). The CJA is a mobile paralegal service that works in 10 rural communities and focuses less on litigation, raising awareness about rights and increasing local legal literacy around health and education services (Waldorf 2019).

While most cases litigated by Timap for Justice and CJA are not related to corruption, between 6% and 10% of their annual litigations are related to local government abuse or corruption (UNODC 2011, Waldorf 2019).

### Journalism and media focused accountability mechanisms

Journalism is a key component in local politics as it serves as an important source for information that contributes to the relationship between citizens and their governments, assuming the role of watchdogs or infomediaries, that is processors of government raw data into consumable products. The local media landscape, comprised of traditional print and broadcast media and increasingly joined by hyperlocal digital media (Barnett & Townsend 2015), plays a crucial role in verifying government information, exposing government malpractice and reporting on official responses to these media actions, all of which are core components of the media's role in accountability.

Media organisations occupy an important space between governments and citizens, having access to newswires and press releases before the public, as well as having access to politicians, allowing them to interview and examine politicians (Djerf-Pierre et al. 2013). Recent developments in media-centred, local government accountability have generated better information more efficiently, created spaces for dialogue between media and

governments and facilitated information flows to and from citizens (Felle 2016). Infomediaries are citizens and organisations that produce or refine available data and create analyses that further public debate and identify trends (Schrock & Shaffer 2017).

While newswires and press releases are common tools at local governments' disposal, interaction with journalists and media organisations can be undertaken through institutionalised spaces where these actors interact. These spaces, referred to as media-centred accountability mechanisms, can be in person or digital spaces, and generally only include local journalists or media organisations. These mechanisms strengthen the links between local governments and media and create clear channels of communication between them.

### General principles and best practices

While studies of local media's role in local politics abound, there are relatively few studies of journalists and media directly interacting with local citizens to promote integrity and root out corruption in local government. Recent literature has emphasised the growing need of journalists to properly engage with government data and be producers, not merely informers, of information (Carter 2016). In her study of data-centric journalism, Felle (2016) underlines the need for journalists to interact with government data, process and scrutinise government and private business data to by-pass "spin".

Journalists should immerse themselves in the realities of the communities to which they communicate, as successful accountability driven interventions tend to be undertaken by media which is grounded in local political and cultural contexts (Carter 2016). At the same time, journalism should also educate and engage citizens about topics crucial to the local context. Local media can play an important role in bringing new information and perspectives from the national and international stage to local communities, which may in turn facilitate citizen actions to hold governments accountable. It is crucial that journalists understand local contexts and work with citizens to present concepts in acceptable formats.

## Examples

### [CGNet Swara, Chhattisgarh, India](#)

CGNet Swara is a media platform, with funding from the Knight Foundation, to create ways for citizens of local villages in the Chhattisgarh state to share their experiences. Chhattisgarh has seen intermittent violence from insurgent guerrilla and paramilitary groups, and local villages are hard for media and local governments to access (Agrawal 2013). The CGNet Swara system allows villagers to call special phone-lines where to report their experiences of local government corruption and human rights abuses. Audio recordings are processed into text reports and posted on a digital, state-wide media forum of journalists who can choose to fact-check stories and reach out to those who reported grievances (Wittemyer et al. 2014). Since 2010, more than 46,000 calls were received and more than 1,000 reports processed (Agrawal 2013).

### [Citizen Journalist Show, CNN-News 18, India](#)

National media broadcaster CNN-News 18 (formerly CNN-IBN) launched the Citizen Journalist Show in 2009, a half-hour segment dedicated to local journalists and community activists who wish to expose issues related to local-level governance. In its first years, the show largely focused on community groups fighting for the right to water, and started to feature citizens denouncing particular instances of local corruption. Featured citizen journalists were found through social media groups or through internal producers. Agrawal (2013) notes that many citizens featured on the show went on to integrate citizen movements and CSOs, which the show revisited in later episodes, granting publicity to nascent citizen movements.

### [Media-based budget monitoring, Uganda](#)

In 2002, the ministries of local government and finance collaborated with major national newspapers to promote local government accountability in school funding. Primary schools are the jurisdiction of the lowest tier of government in Uganda, which makes monitoring and auditing by national-level ministries difficult. In 2001, it was estimated that only 20% of the funds destined for primary schools reached its intended goal, with the rest being embezzled or diverted to other areas

(Reinikka & Svensson 2004). To address this, the national authorities worked with media organisations to coordinate a campaign whereby official receipts of cash transfers per school were published in national and local newspapers, so local citizens could see how much money was destined to their corresponding school, further detailing which concepts were funded. The goal was to engage parents and community groups to monitor that these funds were being used appropriately and to contact relevant authorities where they were not. According Reinikka and Svensson (2004), the estimated percentage of funds nationwide that was correctly spent on primary education rose to 80%.

### [Kecamatan local development project media monitoring, Indonesia](#)

This accountability mechanism was launched to monitor the performance of a World Bank sponsored community development programme, the Kecamatan Development Project (KDP) in Indonesia. The Ministry of Home Affairs, the Association of Independent Journalists, and Institute for Social and Economic Research, Education and Information established a framework where provincial journalists would be financially encouraged to publish articles that either provide general KDP information and orientation pieces, feature stories about project participants and investigative reporting, with explicit commitments from national authorities that these articles would not be censored (World Bank 2014). Articles that uncovered evidence mismanagement or corruption were channelled to project authorities and appropriate actions were taken to sanction responsible local implementers. By the end of the first phase of the KDP (1998-2000), the provincial journalists had written or broadcast some 850 stories and visited over 250 villages (World Bank 2014).

## Participatory budgeting

Participatory budgeting is a practice that emerged in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in the late 1980s and was quickly adopted by more than 1,300 local governments all over the world (Cabannes 2013).

Participatory budgeting is a process through which citizens participate directly in the different phases of budget formulation, including the monitoring of the execution of the budget (UNDP 2010 cited in Martini 2014). This practice is meant to directly involve citizens into yearly decision-making processes, allowing them to influence parts or a totality of a local budget. Beyond budget formulation, participatory mechanisms in fiscal matters have also extended to budget execution. Public expenditure tracking surveys (PETS) and social audits are mechanisms employed by civil society organisations and citizens to hold local governments to account and to assure budgeted items are appropriately spent.

Experiences with participatory budgeting have seen an important impact in the provision of public services, the quality of governance in the locality, lower tax evasion rates and increased support for democratic governance among participants (Martini 2014, Cabannes 2013, Wampler et al. 2018, Wampler & Touchton 2017, Touchton et al. 2019).

### **General principles and best practices**

According to Wampler et al. (2018), there are three key elements that must be present for participatory budgeting to be effective and have a positive impact on local accountability: strong government support, availability of resources and organised civil society.

With regards to government support, participatory budgeting processes cannot be undertaken without minimal government support as this mechanism involves allocating public funds with the discretion of local authorities to the discretion of citizens. The level of institutionalisation of participatory budgeting can vary: participatory budgeting can be a fixture of the yearly budgeting process whereby citizens have a legally fixed process to determine the budget or, conversely, can take a less institutionalised route (Ramella 2014): local executives can create spaces for dialogue to determine budget priorities or specific budget items to be presented to local councils or higher tiers of government, and local legislatures can ask citizens about budget proposals to vote then accordingly. Regardless of how it is implemented,

government support for the process should be present throughout the entire process.

As per availability of resources, there is a direct relationship between resources available for allocation through participatory budgeting and its impact (Wampler et al. 2018). Instances where minimal portions of the budget are allocated to citizen discretion usually underwhelm expectations of participants, leading to less participation in future instances (Cabannes 2013). Where budget allocations to participatory mechanisms meet expectations, there must likewise be adequate investment to meet certain guidelines of accessibility to ensure equitable participation to avoid local elites or particular sectors from capturing these processes (Bardhan & Mookherjee 2006 cited in Hough & Verdenicci 2015).

Physical accessibility to these spaces is crucial, as are considerations of information and education asymmetries of participants (Cabannes 2013). Efforts should be made to ensure that all participants of these budgetary processes have the same access to information, and efforts should be made to educate citizens about the budgetary process and about certain important items (Carlitz 2013). The International Budget Partnership (IBP), for example, recommends the publishing of “citizen budgets”, versions of the budget that reduce technical jargon and present information in formats that citizens can more easily understand (Forstater 2013).

Educating and organising community interests is a key role that must be played by local CSOs as they have a profound impact in legitimising budgeting processes and increasing access of marginalised groups to these processes (Wampler et al. 2018). Guo and Neshkova (2013) explore instances of citizen inputs in budgeting processes and concluded that care should be taken to include citizens and organisations most knowledgeable about budgetary concepts and processes in the early stages of budgeting to avoid delays and provide for more technical analyses on items like expected revenue. In these cases, lay citizens and less involved citizens must participate actively in later deliberation and voting stages so as to not stifle policy innovation and not limit budget determinations on small technical groups.

For participatory expenditure monitoring, citizens and civil society, with or without the support of local authorities, can monitor how budgets are spent to ensure that public funds reach their intended targets (Joshi 2013). Expenditure monitoring can be done in multiple ways but always requires certain levels of budget transparency; to track expenditures, citizens must know how public funds were allocated.

PETS are popular mechanisms to keep governments accountable. These surveys track the difference between allocated funds and funds actually spent, providing valuable data on financial flows, outputs and accountability arrangements (Transparency International 2014).

Social audits, sometimes called quantitative service delivery surveys (QSDS) are also popular accountability mechanisms related to expenditure tracking, which involve citizens and CSOs following up on expenditures, assessing quality and durability of goods and services to scrutinise budget allocation and procurement (Ramkumar et al. 2012). A social audit may, for example, review water treatment quality in a locality and, if not up to standard, may demand that more of the budget be allocated to water treatment or that procurement guidelines change to ensure better quality treatment.

Social audits can vary in scope, as they largely depend on the activities a local government carries out and the degree of transparency regarding budget and procurement information available.

## Examples

### Participatory budgeting in Brazilian municipalities

As mentioned, Porto Alegre was one of the first cities in Brazil to pioneer participatory approaches in budgeting and public expenditure management, allowing citizens to participate in budget formulation decision making and monitor its implementation. The municipal government worked closely with local CSOs and community groups to develop a framework that would guarantee access to all neighbourhoods of the city, assuring constant engagement and, importantly,

that the participatory portion of the budget be submitted in a timely manner (Haider 2012)

The municipal government invested heavily to provide citizens with training regarding the participatory process and worked with local CSOs to provide education regarding budgetary concepts. In 2013 following initiatives by Porto Alegre's home state of Rio Grande do Sul, participatory budgeting can now be accessed through official online fora, where citizens can follow developments, join virtual commissions and vote on budgetary items (Martini 2014, Peixoto & Fox 2016)

Participatory budgeting had a notable impact on local governance: the city has improved access to public services, specifically to water and sewage services, doubled the enrolment in public schools, and improved infrastructure, among others (Wagle & Shah 2003 cited in Martini 2014). Further, many studies attribute a decrease in clientelist politics and an increase of corruption reports to city authorities on participatory budgeting (Haider 2012).

To date, 351 municipalities in Brazil have participatory budgeting, and a recent study shows that those cities spend more on social projects and are more effective in improving citizens' well-being (Martini 2014).

### Youth budgeting in Rosario, Argentina (Avis 2015)

The Municipality of Rosario, Argentina undertakes an annual participatory budgeting process with local youth in its municipal districts. Young people elect representatives to youth councils and decide on budget allocations for youth services based on their neighbourhood's priorities (Avis 2015).

A notable effect of this programme has been the engagement of youth in other participative municipal programmes, as well as increased participation of young adults in local budget politics in the years following the first experiences (Avis 2015).

### Estonian participatory budget

Participatory budgeting in Estonia is a relatively new phenomenon, adopted by at least 14 different municipalities. Adoption of participatory budgeting was effectively implemented due to a high degree of



digital literacy among citizens and a high level of technical capacity by Estonian municipalities due to decade-long programmes.

Estonian municipalities integrated existing e-governance systems into participatory budgeting, allowing citizens to participate and vote on budgets through digital platforms (Krenjova & Raudla 2018). In almost all cases, participatory budgeting is done exclusively in the digital space.

#### [Local PETS in Tanzania](#)

In 1999 and 2001, CSOs launched two PETS to control public expenditure leakage in healthcare and education in eight local districts. When the results were analysed, important funding-expenditure gaps were found in rural areas, and cash transfers to local administrators were found to be important sources of leakage in all cases (World Bank & Kurey 2003). Both Tanzanian PETS were presented to the national parliament, leading to several policies aimed to provide more transparency to health and education expenditure at the local level, and to demand more stringent receipt requirements when executing these funds.

#### [Social audits on local health services, PAS Centre, Moldova](#)

The Centre for Health Policies and Studies (PAS Centre), with funding from the Global Partnership for Social Accountability, established a system of social audits tied to local health service providers in Moldova. Moldova spends much more on healthcare per capita than its neighbours, but health outcomes are far less positive. The PAS Centre encouraged citizens to perform social audits of health services, providing education about primary care facilities and producing patient exit surveys so that patients could evaluate their stay. The PAS was able to undertake audits in nine different rayons (districts) and now coordinates social audits of 55 hospitals and 75 primary care facilities, which now operate on a performance-based financing system (Global Partnership for Social Accountability 2016).

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