



## **Voices from the Ground**

*Does Strengthening Demand for Better Services Improve Supply*

**International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance  
(International IDEA)**

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

ACE	Asociación Cooperadora Escolar
BIGS	Bandung Institute of Governance Studies
CADEP	Centro de Análisis y Difusión de la Economía Paraguaya
CBPS	Centre for Budget and Policy Studies
CDD	Center for Democratic Development
CIEN	National Centre for Economic Research
CIPPEC	Centro de Implementación de Políticas Públicas para la Equidad y el Crecimiento
CIUP	Centro de Investigación de la Universidad Pacífico
GES	Ghana Education Service
IDIS	Institute for Development and Social Initiatives
IDPMS	Indo-Dutch Project Management Society
IPAR	Institute of Policy Analysis and Research
IMO	Independent Monitoring Organization
PATTIRO	Center for Regional Information and Studies
PETS	Public Expenditure Tracking Survey
SAR	Romanian Academic Society
TAP	Transparency and Accountability Program

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## Introduction

No aspect of governance affects the daily lives of the more than three billion people worldwide who live on less than USD 3 per day than public spending – both the amount spent on the human development sectors and the way in which that money is spent. More so than the public declarations of political actors, the budgets of a government reveal its true priorities towards educating youth, treating the sick and providing basic human rights such as clean drinking water. Common sense would predict that increased spending on these services would translate into improvements in key development indicators, such as literacy, immunization levels, and maternal and child mortality rates – and eventually be followed by improvements in the economic well-being of citizens.

However, government spending in these areas frequently fails to translate into improved outcomes, a finding that has been a major focus of economists and academics as low- and middle-income countries and international donors work to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Focusing on the primary health care sector, Filmer and Pritchett (1999) find evidence to support the hypothesis that demographic variables play a larger role in determining health outcomes than government expenditure on primary healthcare, showing that the share of government expenditure on health care has a statistically insignificant effect on both child and infant mortality in a cross-section of developing countries. Castro-Leal et al. (2000) and Canagarajah and Ye (2001) find similar results using a benefit incidence analysis of public health spending in Africa.

Studies have repeatedly failed to find a significant link between public spending levels and human development indicators and a consistent explanation is emerging – the quantity of money allocated to the social sectors is no more important than the quality of spending. Problems such as the misallocation of funds, leakage of spending throughout the expenditure chain, poor quality service delivery and an inequitable – and often regressive – distribution of public services mean that increases in spending on health and education often do not have the impact that we expect investments in these sectors to have.

The work of global development implementers and researchers alike emphasizes that not only do such problems exist, but they are significantly decreasing the amount of public funding that is reaching beneficiaries in the form of service delivery. By focusing on differences in public health spending across Indian states, Deolalikar, Jamison and Laxminarayan (2006) observe that public spending efficiency is likely to be affected by the administrative capacity of facilities, and that quality of spending must be analysed in addition to quantity in order to determine whether additional spending will have a significant impact on health outcomes. In a pioneering study of the quality of public spending, Reinikka and Svensson (2001) found that 87 per cent of a capitation grant in Uganda was being diverted from schools and intended beneficiaries. Studies such as these highlight that more money allocated to health and education does not necessarily mean more funding is getting to those who need it most or that money reaching the service delivery level is used in an effective way.

In recognizing that increasing the quantity of spending on social sectors can be more than offset by failures in the quality of spending, this paper attempts to identify how this problem can be overcome. Traditionally, the question of how to improve the quality of public spending has been discussed among researchers and practitioners based in institutions in the North. External accountability mechanisms were put in place by the World Bank and other international organizations in an attempt to analyse public expenditure management

problems and recommend broad reforms and policy solutions to developing country policymakers. An in-depth account of many of these external accountability mechanisms is detailed in Griffin et al. (2010).

However, these attempts to reform public expenditure systems from the outside were expensive and had mixed results. While some studies and subsequent discussions with government officials in low- and middle-income countries informed policy and resulted in changes to systems, many failed to take hold or ended prematurely after those advocating change returned to their home countries.

A new accountability mechanism has emerged in recent decades. This form of accountability – referred to as ‘bottom-up’ accountability – involves those who are closest to the services being delivered observing the failures in service delivery and the public expenditure system and holding government officials accountable for these failures. Changes in the global political landscape and the recent trend towards democratization have increased the entry points and influence of the key actors carrying out this mechanism. Political economy theory suggests that bottom-up accountability should play a prominent role in improving the quality of public spending and services, with citizens playing the role of principal to the state’s agents in a classic principal-agent framework. In countries that have functioning democracies, elected policymakers have an incentive to ensure that services are benefiting citizens – if they do not fulfil this duty, citizens can remove them from office.

In practice, citizens face a myriad of obstacles to acting as informed principals and holding their political leaders to account. Problems of limited access to information and failures in collective action can prevent individual citizens from providing a legitimate incentive to political actors to act in the best interests of citizens. However, a new form of bottom-up accountability is emerging – independent monitoring organizations (IMOs). IMOs are a particular type of civil society organization with the mission and the capacity to monitor government policies and services and to demand more transparent and accountable government performance in public expenditure management (Ramshaw 2007).

IMOs overcome the problems of collective action that face individual citizens by acting as a common voice for beneficiaries of government service delivery, and have multiple advantages over external researchers, making such organizations an ideal complement to external accountability mechanisms. IMOs are comprised of individuals who are citizens and thus know the context of their country, state or district. This is an advantage not only in conducting research but also in knowing which recommendations will work in the specific social and political context. As citizens, the representatives of IMOs are also beneficiaries of public spending and service delivering, providing an added incentive of wanting to achieve better services for their own families and neighbours. Furthermore, IMOs are on the ground 24 hours per day, seven days per week. Rather than leaving the country after the completion of a study on the quality of service delivery, the organizations can continue to monitor whether a government is making the necessary or recommended improvements, and can engage in advocacy and pressure if state actors do not respond.

This paper investigates the role of IMOs in improving the quality of service delivery in the health and education sectors by reviewing evidence from the first phase of the Transparency and Accountability Program (formerly the Transparency and Accountability Project, TAP), a programme with the goal of strengthening the ability of civil society organizations to monitor and promote improvements in government spending and service delivery in health and education. TAP’s work takes a ‘learning by doing’ approach to IMO support, combining

financial support for small-scale research and advocacy projects, technical support to help IMOs overcome the key obstacles they face, and opportunities for peer learning between like-minded organizations with different strengths and experiences. Since 2007, the programme has supported 39 research and advocacy projects designed and led by civil society organizations in 21 countries across sub-Saharan Africa, South and East Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe.

Below, the authors present the results of a survey of the 19 completed TAP projects, outlining the IMOs' self-evaluated success in improving the accountability of key development actors as well as the quality of service delivery. Trends are analysed according to the audience reached (national government, regional government, local government, frontline service providers, civil society organizations, citizens and the media), accountability improvement (including increases in media coverage, formal policy change, development and adoption of informal monitoring systems) and improvements in service delivery.

The paper also presents three detailed cases studies of independent monitoring organizations that were able to have a significant impact on the quality of service delivery in connection with their project. The first of these case studies focuses on the work of the National Centre for Economic Research (Centro de Investigaciones Económicas Nacionales, CIEN) in Guatemala, an organization that exposed significant delays in educational resources reaching schools during its expenditure tracking survey of primary schools in Guatemala City. The project team used its findings to successfully lobby the Ministry of Education to change aspects of the school calendar which were directly contributing to delays in resource allocation. The Ministry announced its adoption of CIEN's recommendations in December 2008. The second organization, the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, documented high levels of absenteeism among teachers in the country and discovered disturbing trends in the timing and incidence of absenteeism. Following its study, CDD worked with the Ghana Education Service (GES) to change policies cited as common reasons for absenteeism among teachers. The final case study is from the Centre for Analysis and Dissemination of Paraguayan Economy (Centro de Análisis y Difusión de la Economía Paraguaya, CADEP), an organization that worked to identify problems with education spending in primary schools in Paraguay. While CADEP's primary finding was linked to the difficulty of the task of monitoring government spending in the newly democratized country, the organization was still able to work with the government, service providers and citizens to improve the means through which citizen groups can improve public spending in schools. These very different cases provide valuable insights into how independent monitoring organizations can draw on their own strengths and overcome individual weaknesses to hold governments accountable for social sector spending and service delivery, and to successfully push for concrete changes in the governance of service delivery in their countries.

## **Methodology**

The Results for Development Institute and the Brookings Institution launched TAP, with funding from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, in 2007 with the mission of strengthening the capacity of IMOs to hold their governments accountable for public spending and service delivery in the social sectors. While TAP has many components, the core element of the project is a small grants programme that provides financial and technical support for short-term research and advocacy projects conducted by IMOs on key issues in expenditure and service delivery. The organizations in the first phase of TAP submitted proposals and were selected competitively for research and advocacy grants averaging USD 45,000 each, as well as for technical support to build the capacity for high-quality analytical

work and high-impact advocacy and dissemination activities. The programme piloted one phase of a competitive small grants programme, in three smaller rounds, which supported 19 studies by 16 organizations for about nine months each in short-term and small-scale research and advocacy projects on the efficiency of social sector public spending. The programme worked with grantees to improve their analytical and advocacy work plans, provided workshop training on the methodologies used in the projects, and offered tailored assistance as needed throughout project implementation. Perhaps the greatest support that the programme provided was through peer-learning opportunities, workshops and events at which like-minded organizations could share strategies for successful monitoring techniques and build on each other's strengths.

The IMOs in the first phase of TAP were highly diverse, ranging from grassroots advocacy organizations interested in using data in their advocacy to emerging and established think tanks (see Table 1). The 19 projects analysed spending and service delivery in 13 countries in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America. While traditional civil society organizations conjure images of individuals protesting outside government offices, the organizations in these pages categorize themselves in very different ways, including 'think tank', 'academic research institution', 'research nongovernmental organization' and 'advocacy nongovernmental organization'. Although the differences are vast, the diverse strengths worked to the advantage of all organizations during peer-learning events, when well earned knowledge could be shared with fellow 'demanders' of good governance.

**Table 1.** Independent monitoring organizations supported by TAP

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Year founded</b>	<b>Professional staff</b>	<b>Type of organization</b>
2A Consortium	Albania	1993	5	Think tank
Bandung Institute of Governance Studies	Indonesia	1999	10	Advocacy NGO
Center for Democratic Development	Ghana	1998	13	Research NGO
Centre for Budget and Policy Studies	India	1998	15	Research NGO
Centro de Análisis y Difusión de la Economía Paraguaya	Paraguay	1990	8	Think tank
Centro de Implementación de Políticas Públicas Para el Equidad y el Crecimiento	Argentina	2000	68	Think tank
Centro de Investigación de la Universidad del Pacífico	Peru	1972	35	Part of academic institution
Centro de Investigaciones Económicas Nacionales	Guatemala	1982	9	Think tank
Gdansk Institute for Market Economics	Poland	1990	62	Think tank
Indo-Dutch Project Management Society	India	1988	11	Other
Institute for Development and Social Initiatives	Moldova	1993	10	Think tank
Institute for Urban Economics	Russia	1995	41	Think tank
Institute of Policy Analysis and Research	Kenya	1994	9	Think tank
Integrated Social Development Centre	Ghana	1987	50	Advocacy NGO
Pusat Telaah dan Informasi Regional	Indonesia	1999	12	Advocacy NGO
Romanian Academic Society	Romania	1996	6	Think tank



The first phase of TAP did not have a rigorous evaluation built into the programme. Anecdotes from the grantees of critical small-scale research projects, however, as well as evidence of advocacy translating into policy changes and other results led the authors to seek a means to measure trends of impacts from the first round of TAP grants. This paper is not designed to be a traditional impact evaluation. Instead, it is a retrospective assessment of the projects that the TAP programme supported, both financially and technically, between 2006 and 2008. It is designed to be a starting point, to gain an overall picture and examples of the areas where the organizations have made the biggest contribution to increasing the accountability of democratic actors and improving the quality of service delivery.

This evaluation examines the external impact that these organizations have had and in particular the effect that these projects have had on transparency and accountability. While many of the projects in TAP have had an internal or organizational impact, the sections below do not discuss the way in which the projects strengthened the institutional capacity of the TAP grantees. It is also important to note that the cases of impact highlighted below are unlikely to be the final impacts that these studies will have. All of the projects presented in this paper are still in progress in some respect. In fact, one organization had to make an addition to its rubric during the writing of this paper, as a national policy had been implemented the day before. Finally, the evaluation presented in this paper is based on empirical evidence and a self-evaluation completed by the TAP grantees themselves. We feel that TAP grantees are well placed to track the progress of their projects, but the responses to the rubric are from the grantees themselves and, in many cases, based on reflection on events or impacts that took place 12 to 18 months before the self-evaluation.

### ***The rubric***

The structure of the research and data collection for this paper is based on a rubric developed to guide TAP grantee self-evaluation, and to identify trends in responses (see Annex 1). The rubric is intended to categorize the impacts that grantees' individual projects achieved based on outcome and audience, allowing the authors to identify who the grantees were able to reach with their research and what impact they were able to have. Audiences and outcomes for the rubric were chosen based on the most frequently reported target audiences and the outcomes reported by the grantees at the end of the studies in their advocacy and dissemination reports, as well as the analytical reports submitted to TAP in two waves in late 2007 and late 2008.

Potential audiences were selected with the goal of including a wide range of actors that could be instrumental in implementing, sustaining or drawing attention to improvements in social sector spending, or those who would benefit from improvements in transparency and accountability. Such audiences include national, subnational and local governments, as well as the media, other civil society organizations, front line service providers and communities. Outcomes were actions that had the largest potential to directly or indirectly improve transparency and accountability in service delivery or to improve the quality of service delivery itself. The outcomes were categorized as policy changes, increased media coverage around the issue under investigation, informing policymakers, increasing the number of organizations doing similar work, and setting permanent monitoring systems in place. This rubric was not intended to be exhaustive, and grantees were able to respond 'other' to the type of outcome or audience – a response that was expanded on in follow-up interviews with each grantee. The rubric was sent to two randomly selected grantees, as a pilot, to ensure that

it was representative and had identified the most important audiences and impacts. Based on the feedback received, some changes were made and the rubric was finalized.

The finalized rubric was sent to all previous TAP grantees in early 2010, along with an explanation about what the evaluation was attempting to achieve and instructions on how to complete it. Grantees were asked to mark each box of the rubric where their project had an impact, and to provide an explanation in the space provided below the rubric. They were initially given two weeks to complete the rubric, and were told that once a member of the TAP staff had reviewed their responses a telephone call would probably be requested to discuss their results. Rubrics were received from 15 of the 16 grantees that participated in the first phase of TAP.

After the completed rubrics were received and compared to the analytical and advocacy report submitted at the end of the grant round, follow-up telephone calls were conducted to get more details about the answers and to clarify anything that seemed inconsistent (see Table 2 for the distribution of results). After the telephone calls, the rubrics were revised by TAP staff based on the outcome. This ensured that the term 'impact' was being applied consistently to each project. From here the rubrics were compiled in order to analyse general trends in audience and type of impact. The most striking trends in the evaluation results are discussed below, but Table 3 gives detailed examples from each of the audience-impact categories that was reported by more than one IMO.

**Table 2.** Distribution of responses

		External Impact on Transparency/Accountability						
		Policy change	Increase in media coverage	Setting permanent monitoring systems in place	Increase in other organizations doing similar work	Increasing availability of tools to measure quality	Informing policymakers	Other
<b>Audience</b>	National government	IDIS CIEN CIPPEC SAR CDD	CDD		CDD		PATTIRO ISODEC IPAR IDIS CIUP CIPPEC SAR BIGS ACER CADEP CDD GIME	CIUP
	Subnational government	IDPMS	CBPS				ISODEC IDPMS CIUP CBPS CIPPEC SAR BIGS GIME	CIUP
	Local government	PATTIRO	CDD				PATTIRO ISODEC CIUP CBPS SAR BIGS GIME	CIUP
	Front line service providers				ISODEC	CDD	ISODEC CADEP	PATTIRO IPAR
	Communities		CDD				CBPS SAR	
	Other IMO's				PATTIRO ISODEC IDPMS BIGS ACER CDD	PATTIRO	ISODEC CBPS BIGS ACER	CIUP
	The media		PATTIRO ISODEC IDIS SAR ACER BIGS CDD GIME				ISODEC IDIS SAR BIGS	
	Other							IPAR

**Table 3.** Selected impact examples

<b>Impact and audience</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Example</b>
Policy change/ national government	CIPPEC (Argentina)	CIPPEC's study on teacher and student absenteeism resulted in the passage of a new national law in February 2010 that imposes harsher penalties on teachers for unexcused absences
Policy change/ national government	CIPPEC (Argentina)	CIPPEC's study on teacher and student absenteeism resulted in the passage of a new national law in February 2010 that imposes harsher penalties on teachers for unexcused absences
Informing policymakers/national government	IPAR (Kenya)	IPAR targeted policymakers at the national level, as they need to accept any framework before it is passed to the local level. The Director of Higher Education was very appreciative of the study, and specifically requested that IPAR do a follow-up national study, as it would have a greater chance of resulting in policy change.
Informing policymakers/ subnational government	CIUP (Peru)	CIUP incorporated its study and methodologies into the curriculum of its new Masters in Public Policy programme, which many members of the national, subnational and local governments are enrolled in.
Informing policymakers/ local government	BIGS (Indonesia)	BIGS presented its study and findings to the Mayor of Bandung. The mayor was very interested and requested that BIGS do a follow-up study that covered more services over a wider geographic region.
Informing policymakers/ front line service providers	CADEP (Paraguay)	CADEP circled back with all of the schools that participated in its study and distributed posters for each classroom, which contained the main conclusions and recommendations.
Informing policymakers/ communities	CBPS (India)	CBPS produced a video that brought the results of its study back to the community, members of the government and other IMOs. This video showed the response of government officials to the spending efficiency problems in health and education and generated much dialogue and debate.
Informing policymakers/ other IMOs	PATTIRO (Indonesia)	PATTIRO's study changed the perception of PETS studies among other IMOs in Indonesia, which were unaware that PETS could be undertaken on a smaller scale. Many organizations have asked PATTIRO to start a training programme for other IMOs.

Informing policymakers/ the media	IDIS (Moldova)	IDIS targeted the mass media as a way of garnering public support and creating awareness around the issue of education decentralization. This put the issue on the national agenda and brought it into focus.
Increase in other organizations doing similar work/ other IMOs	IDPMS (India)	At least three additional IMOs in India used IDPMS' study as a launching platform for examining health systems in India. IDPMS has provided support to an IMO in Bombay, including methodology training and assistance with drug data access.
Increase in media coverage/ the media	SAR (Romania)	By publishing its study and engaging in public debates, SAR increased the volume of media coverage around pre-university education financing and management and changed the focus from curriculum issues to the management and organization of the education system itself – something that had not been done before in Romania.
Other/ front line service provider	PATTIRO (Indonesia)	PATTIRO identified certain 'champions' in the schools in which it worked, to whom it was able to send its research and feed its recommendations. They helped the schools realize the extent of the problems with the efficiency of funding, and spurred the schools to advocate for improved funding.

## Limitations

This study is subject to a number of limitations:

### *Sample size*

The study is based on an analysis of 18 projects conducted by 15 organizations in 13 countries over the course of one and a half years. This is not a large enough sample from which statistically significant conclusions can be drawn regarding the impact that IMOs could have on improving transparency, accountability or quality of service delivery, but it is enough to draw out empirical trends and lessons.

### *Memory*

To gather the data, we asked researchers who led or were greatly involved in leading and designing these projects to revisit their projects and report on any progress, developments and ongoing work since the end of the grant. This was done purely on memory and was based largely on the researcher's judgment and recall, augmented by materials submitted to TAP during project implementation. In some cases the lead researcher was no longer with the organization, so researchers who were involved but less familiar with the study had to respond. Furthermore, most of these organizations are small, without endowments, and

completely dependent on project funding. Most do not have the resources to track the life of their projects for long periods of time after the completion of their funding, and are instead forced to step away from their studies after the termination of the grant in order to pursue new funding opportunities. In many cases, when we followed up with organizations about their studies, they had not made any efforts to track their studies or to do their own impact evaluation. It is possible that some of the responses were not as thorough as they could have been, that some impacts went unreported, or that some responses were based on conjecture. However, we worked to mitigate this potential bias by asking targeted questions during the follow-up interviews regarding evidence for the reported impacts.

### *Confounding variables*

Once reports and recommendations are released to the general public, a number of different actors in addition to the organization leading the project immediately act on them. While having other IMOs, the media and stakeholders take up the cause is often crucial to the success of the larger goal, the involvement of additional agents complicates the process of assigning impact. It is possible that the work of one IMO may prompt other IMOs to conduct similar studies, which can attract media, stakeholder and donor attention, and that all these forces in combination can exert enough pressure to persuade a government to implement or revise policies. In these situations it is difficult to say that the final policy change is the product of the initial study, but it may be true that without that first step, none of the sequential outcomes would have materialized. While we were unable to fully investigate the contributions of additional actors to the successes reported in the rubrics, the three case studies in section 4 present at least three examples of impact that can be directly attributed to the IMOs highlighted.

### *Defining impact*

One final complicating feature of a retrospective evaluation requires attention. Defining and measuring ‘success’ or ‘impact’ are often difficult. Concrete changes, such as policy changes and the implementation of new programmes, can be measured with relative ease. Although it is often nearly impossible to attribute causation, it is possible to observe that a policy that was not there before is now. Other changes, such as changes in policymaker and community attitudes and perceptions, are far more difficult to measure, but these changes can be as significant and important as policy changes. Frequently, communication efforts targeted towards subsets of the public rather than specific policymakers can result in almost imperceptible yet significant changes that can be difficult to measure. Often, these studies provide awareness around an issue, which can directly or indirectly affect other IMOs, front line service providers, and the way the issue is portrayed in the media.

## **Evaluation results**

Overall, the impacts of the IMOs in the TAP pilot phase can be split into two broad categories: successfully proposing or implementing concrete changes that improved service delivery; and developing knowledge and interest in transparency and accountability. While the former represents a direct impact that IMOs can have on the ways in which services are delivered and monitored, we argue that the latter, although indirect, can be as important in ensuring the sustainability of the work of organizations and, ideally, in leading directly to future concrete changes.

### *Provision of information*

Although it may not initially be seen as a direct external impact, information being provided in a specific and targeted way can have a ripple effect on state actors, independent citizens and other target audiences that can directly lead to a larger concrete impact months or years after the short-term project has ended. Under the broad category of providing information and spreading interest, informing policymakers was the most frequently reported impact by these IMOs. Of the studies discussed in this paper, 13 IMOs reported 27 instances of informing policymakers at the national, subnational and local levels.

One trend in the responses is that IMOs were almost evenly split over which levels of government they informed (national, subnational, and local). Furthermore, all but three of the IMOs informed policymakers at multiple levels. This indicates that the IMOs in this sample effectively reach and work with multiple levels of government rather than targeting a single level where they might have champions or greater access. While one might expect organizations to specialize by dedicating time and energy to pursuing one specific department or group in government, this finding highlights a versatility in the advocacy strategies of IMOs that is surprising, and may work to their advantage. One possible explanation for this strategy is that the research that the 15 organizations in the sample conducted required gaining access to data from more than one level of government, in many cases making it necessary for organizations to interact with national, subnational and local officials. In addition, many IMOs were seeking to push through reforms that needed to go through multiple levels of policymakers before they were implemented. This puts IMOs in a unique position, with the potential to connect different levels of government and facilitate knowledge sharing between them.

While general information sharing with policymakers is not necessarily an impact that could lead to longer term changes in policy and governance, many of the sampled IMOs reported specific strategies that they utilized to ensure that ‘informing policymakers’ did not translate into just another unread policy brief on the desk of a government official. Multiple IMOs surveyed could point to specific instances in which governments expressed willingness to consider new or revised policies but did not have sufficient information to make informed decisions or sufficient time to carefully research these issues. In more extreme cases, governments were simply not aware of the severity of the situation on the ground, as in the case of the Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (Centro de Implementación de Políticas Públicas para la Equidad y el Crecimiento, CIPPEC) in Argentina (discussed below).

Also under the broad impact category of providing information and spreading interest is the outcome ‘increase in other organizations doing similar work’. Sparking the interest of and providing valuable resources for like-minded organizations has the potential to exponentially increase the spread of an organization’s work. Moreover, political actors are more likely to respond to a larger critical mass of research and advocacy on a particular issue, an additional benefit of catalysing similar work by other organizations. This impact was frequently reported by IMOs in rubric responses, with five organizations reporting that their work had spurred others to work in their focus area. Evidence for this includes requests from other organizations to utilize the respondents’ results in their own advocacy and requests to learn from the IMO about specific issues in order to further their own work.

In Indonesia, multiple organizations approached the Center for Regional Information and Studies (Pusat Telaah dan Informasi Regional, PATTIRO) after reading its report and

learning how it implemented its Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS). PATTIRO discovered that many IMOs in Indonesia, although interested in expenditure tracking, had not become involved because of the belief that PETS would be too difficult to implement and very time-consuming. However, the study by PATTIRO and subsequent advocacy and dissemination of findings proved that smaller, local organizations with more limited resources could undertake a small-scale tracking exercise, that is, a modified PETS, which still produced information that could be used to inform policy. This impact qualifies as information and spurring interest on the part of other IMOs, but PATTIRO is currently planning to develop a training model for educating IMOs about budget tracking at the request of multiple organizations – a further impact that would represent a concrete change towards improving service delivery in Indonesia. The Bandung Institute of Governance Studies (BIGS), also in Indonesia, noticed an increase in similar organizations monitoring budgets after its study was released. In fact BIGS' findings on monitoring tools are being used by a large nongovernmental organization in Jakarta, which inserted BIGS' tools and methodologies into its work and invited BIGS to Jakarta to present its findings.

In Peru, the Centro de Investigación de la Universidad Pacífico (CIUP), a research division of a leading university in Peru, took a different approach. Instead of working directly with individual organizations, CIUP integrated its findings and tools in results-based budgeting into a new Masters in Public Policy programme, in which members of both IMOs and the government are currently enrolled. This allows CIUP to easily reach and actively engage with a wide audience that is in a position to use its findings without having to target each organization individually.

It is interesting to note that, even though in most cases the sampled IMOs did not proactively seek to inform other IMOs, one-third of respondents reported that their work spurred an increase in similar work being conducted by other organizations. Rather than TAP-supported IMOs soliciting other organizations that might have an interest in social sector spending or service delivery, civil society organizations heard about the TAP grantees in the media and approached them. While this finding highlights the value of the work of the respondents and the ability of the IMOs to passively gain the attention of other organizations, the results also raise the question of how much greater the reach of the IMOs could be with a small amount of effort put into forming coalitions or simply sharing data with others. This is an important gap, which some of the respondent IMOs are filling, but the full potential of such collaborations has yet to be met.

### ***Concrete changes***

Of the two categories of impact discussed above, implementing concrete changes is the category that seems most likely to produce sustainable or lasting change. As such, it is encouraging that six of the 16 organizations reported being a catalyst for an adopted policy change at the national, subnational or local level. The changes achieved by the respondents include implementing a decentralization plan for education, changing the start of the school year to ensure students received school supplies, instituting a more rigorous system for discouraging teacher absenteeism and instigating a push to hire and train pharmacists.

While it is rare that a government will publicly announce that its decision to revise or implement a policy is directly attributable to the work of an IMO, this did happen in one case – CIEN in Guatemala. The case of CIEN, including the impact of the organization and the process of collaborating with political actors, is discussed in detail below. Of the other cases examined in this section, the government did not publicly announce that their policy



changes were due to the work of these organizations, and it is certainly possible that other actors and factors could have also made a contribution. However, the cases discussed below and included in this category have shown sufficient evidence of their contribution to lead the authors to believe that without the work of these organizations the policy changes would not have been implemented.

As one example, CIPPEC, a think tank in Argentina, examined the efficiency of classroom teaching time in Argentinean primary schools. It found that 11 per cent of classroom time was being lost due to teacher absenteeism. This far exceeded the data in the official, centralized information that the national government had on file, and shocked the Minister of Education, who responded '(t)his can't be like this, we have to change this immediately' (CIPPEC 2008: 4). In March 2010, during the Federal Council of Education, where all provinces meet to decide national education policies for the year, a decision was taken to deduct pay from their salaries for the days that teachers are absent. Simply getting this information to the correct people who could make changes is an obstacle that many IMOs face, but CIPPEC's reputation and credibility with the Ministry of Education helped to pave the road for sharing and successfully advocating its policy recommendations to the right people.

Of the organizations that were able to play an instrumental role in the implementation of policy changes, a few key trends can be identified. Almost all these organizations were successful because they were able to identify a strategy for connecting with government officials – those who could take their work and actually implement the changes being recommended. The strategies used by IMOs to connect with key government officials varied and largely reflected their own institutional credibility and strengths. In several cases, the respondents were able to find a government champion – a policymaker, ministry official or subnational government official who was interested in the topic being investigated, willing to provide the data needed to conduct the study, and willing to provide a forum in which IMOs could present their results on completion of the study. It is important to note that these organizations did not find someone who said outright that they would implement whatever ideas they were presented with, but instead simply found policymakers who were receptive.

In cases where no government champion was identified, IMOs benefited from selecting a topic that was a priority area of an individual or individuals in government. This helped IMOs to gain access to state officials who might otherwise not have been interested in their work. Many of the organizations also benefited from starting to work with and involve various government officials and policymakers at the beginning of their study. By doing so, the IMOs could learn what specifically the government was interested in, what they would be most receptive to, and how they could strategically frame their study, results and recommendations in a way that would be attractive to their target audiences.

One case in which an IMO did not identify a government champion but was still able to cite concrete changes as a result of its study is especially illuminating. In the case of the Romanian Academic Society (Societatea Academică din România, SAR), policy change was instead brought about by changing the focus of the media. Working with the media is potentially an especially effective tool for newer organizations that have not yet established relationships with ministries or for IMOs working in a country context in which governments are not receptive to the topic at hand or civil society voices in general. Through the publication of results and participation in public debates, the volume of media coverage of SAR's report and education decentralization plan increased drastically, drawing more national attention. As a result, SAR was quoted in many reputable journals, and the Ministry

of Education took notice of its findings. After presenting these research findings to parliament, the ministry took steps to implement SAR's recommended changes. In this case, SAR had no champion inside the ministry, but instead changed the focus of the media so that the government had no choice but to address the issue.

### ***Lack of impact and potential areas for expansion***

In addition to the trends discussed above, there was also a noticeable lack of impact in certain areas and with certain audiences, an issue that is as important and interesting as the areas in which IMOs did have an impact. These areas may represent entry points for IMOs to guide their dialogue and have an impact in the future, and may also speak to the comparative advantages and disadvantages of IMOs as creators of change.

#### *The challenge of putting permanent monitoring systems in place*

Of the impacts listed on the rubric, two had the biggest potential for producing sustainable and lasting impacts: policy change, as discussed above, and setting permanent monitoring systems in place. While the former was prevalent with those participating in the TAP pilot phase, the latter was not reported by any respondent. One possible reason for the dearth of this type of impact is the structure of the programme being evaluated. TAP by its nature is a short-term support programme for research and advocacy that takes place during a narrow window of time – generally 12 months. Designing and instituting permanent monitoring systems is likely to take longer than one year, and it is not surprising that TAP may not be the best avenue to encourage and support this type of impact. The one IMO that can claim such an impact – CADEP (see below) – provides support for this hypothesis. CADEP's development of monitoring mechanisms stemmed from the TAP-supported study; however, the pilot of this model was not implemented until further funding and support was secured from the Ministry of Education in Paraguay, several months after the completion of the TAP project.

#### *IMOs as the voice of citizens*

With respect to audiences reached, very few of the IMOs reported any impact on front line service providers and communities. Instead, the IMOs tended to focus on governments and policymakers. This finding may reflect the nature of the studies being undertaken. Given that the organizations were undertaking short term studies with a limited budget and that they were looking at funding and budget tracking, governments may have been the logical target. Political actors have the ultimate say with regard to policy change as they control funding flows for public sector services, so it may seem more efficient to target them.

However, governments are not the only actors in the accountability and service delivery equation. It is important to get front line service providers and community members involved, at least to make them aware of the situation and get their on-the-ground input and views on issues. These are the beneficiaries and deliverers of the services under investigation, and yet they have only limited access to information on these services. The participating IMOs, however, are able to gain access to valuable information and can be effective vehicles for getting information into the hands of citizens.

The IMOs in this survey largely did not report having a major impact with citizens and community groups, which may reflect the fact that the IMOs did not see citizens and community groups as the primary audience for their advocacy and dissemination. A review

of the work produced by the IMOs (outside of the survey and interviews conducted for this evaluation) shows that most IMOs did interact with citizens or community groups before engaging in their research in an attempt to ensure that the research topic and design reflected topics that were of interest to citizens.

However, it should be noted that IMOs may not always reflect the voices of citizens directly. The purpose of an IMO is to monitor government actions and decisions through research and work to improve the quality of spending and service delivery through research-based advocacy. Research on what is and is not working in governance may not always reflect the perceptions of citizens, and the anecdotal evidence from IMOs in this programme is that they present the findings from research rather than perceptions (unless the perception is part of the research, as is the case for citizen report cards). While this generally works indirectly to improve the quality of services reaching citizens, IMOs may not be the correct or best vehicle to carry the voices of citizens to policymakers.

#### *Other political actors as audiences and partners*

It is important to note that, even within the category of government officials, the IMOs in this sample largely focused on a narrow fraction of the spectrum of state actors as audiences for their research and advocacy campaigns – members of the executive at various levels of government. A vast array of other political actors that could play important roles in influencing accountability and ultimately the quality of spending and service delivery were frequently ignored by the IMOs in this sample. While this evaluation is not extensive enough to explain these trends, it is worth discussing possible reasons for the lack of attention paid to advocacy with alternative political audiences.

One obvious potential ally for IMOs working to hold government officials accountable is the set of state-led government accountability groups, including Supreme Audit Institutions and commissions to review government decisions and actions. In the sample of TAP grantees, such institutions were not mentioned as partners or target dissemination audiences. Many factors could be behind this trend. Many of the IMOs in the sample work primarily at the local or subnational levels, at which national oversight institutions may do little work. Furthermore, for those IMOs that have direct access to policymakers, such as those discussed below, working with an intermediary such as a Supreme Audit Institution may seem a superfluous step in affecting positive change in policymaking or decision-making.

However, IMOs outside of the scope of this study frequently work successfully with such state institutions (for a more detailed account of such cases see Ramkumar and Krafchik, 2007). One example is the case of the Centre for Budget and Policy Studies (CBPS), an IMO working to improve governance in the state of Karnataka in India. While CBPS did not work directly with state accountability institutions in its TAP-supported work, the organization is currently undertaking a project in partnership with the state-led Expenditure Reform Commission to analyse the current spending of the Karnataka government as well as the management of ten major social development programmes. Such partnerships are not uncommon among IMOs. Conducting high-quality and objective research on high-priority issues, such as the work done by IMOs in this sample, can build the credibility of IMOs in the eyes of such state-led oversight institutions and lead to improved collaboration between these like-minded actors.

This may make IMOs hesitant about collaborating directly with specific political parties, a trend evidenced if not confirmed by the results of this evaluation. Historically, civil society

organizations in general and IMOs specifically have been viewed in an adversarial light by policymakers – frequently seen as troublemakers with a clear agenda and no evidence to back up their protests and calls for change. This is evidenced by a quote from Goodall Edward Gondwe, Minister of Finance in Malawi from 2004 to 2009, taken from a seminar at the Brookings Institution held on 18 October 2007:

Let me end by saying that there used to be a time when we thought that these civil society organizations were upstarts, they will go away at some stage. So, tolerate them for some time. They'll go away.

Well, it doesn't seem so. They will not go. And therefore I think it's important that we should reach a point where we should concentrate on how you can make them be even more helpful to the government as well as to society as a whole. They are part now of the process, the budgetary process. You have to accept it. But I think they have some of them will have to be going in for a further education, and stop playing to the galleries. That's not their job.

Although this view is changing, even highly capable and objective IMOs have policymakers and politicians who continue to claim that they are catering to one political party or another – a trend that is not isolated to developing countries, as scholars from non-partisan think tanks in the United States can attest. IMOs may seek to investigate problems that are not connected to a single political party as a means to continue to gain credibility in the eyes of policymakers from a range of different parties. As possible evidence of this belief, none of the IMOs in the sample reported disseminating results to or partnering a single political party. However, this may reflect selection bias on the part of TAP. The programme tends to attract organizations that are rigorously studying efficiency problems in social sector spending and service delivery rather than conducting advocacy alone for a single party.

## **Case studies**

While the results from the rubric above present interesting trends in the impact and strategies of IMOs, some successful cases from the pilot phase of TAP warrant a more detailed discussion.

### ***Eliminating delays in school supply delivery (CIEN Guatemala)***

As part of its mission to contribute to the development of Guatemala through the study of social and economic problems, CIEN began work in 2008 on a study of education expenditure in Guatemala City. The CIEN project stemmed from growing concern among policymakers and community leaders regarding the quality of education in a country where only half of school-age children complete primary school and 30 per cent of those that finish do not continue to secondary school (Yamada and Castro 2008). While many factors could contribute to such abysmal numbers, CIEN chose to focus on one element potentially affecting student learning and retention – the quality of school supplies for primary school facilities.

The CIEN research team undertook an expenditure tracking study in 30 primary schools in Guatemala City, analysing budget and financial records as well as surveying teachers, head teachers, students, parents and school board members. The study followed the funding and resource utilization of six supply programmes that the Ministry of Education ran for schools (textbooks, school meals, school supplies, teaching kits, scholarships and school milk programmes). In addition to investigating the incidence of the leakage of funds, CIEN researchers sought to identify the prevalence of other systematic failures within these

programmes, including delays in resource delivery to facilities, undersupply of resources, student and teacher satisfaction with regard to resources, student and teacher knowledge of the programmes, and equity of resource allocation between urban and rural facilities.

CIEN's study provided concrete evidence of those elements of the school resource programmes which were functioning well and those which were failing students and teachers. Satisfaction with all programmes among teachers and students was found to be high overall, with 96 per cent of students and 91 per cent of teachers reporting satisfaction with the school meals and milk programmes, respectively. No explicit evidence of leakage was found by CIEN researchers, and resource allocation was found to be equitable across urban and rural schools. However, delays in school resource delivery were found to plague all the programmes investigated. Only 38 per cent of teachers reported receiving textbooks for students within the first month of the school year, and only 15 per cent of students reported receiving milk in the first month of the school year. Furthermore, 12 per cent of teachers had still not received the necessary textbooks by April 2008 – four months into the academic year.

### *Impact*

While identifying the systemic problem of delays in school resource delivery to primary schools, CIEN investigators uncovered a potential underlying cause after speaking with national government officials. For purely historical reasons, the school calendar exactly overlapped the fiscal calendar in Guatemala. This overlap allowed finance officials little time to assess the needs of schools and procure the necessary supplies before the start of the new school year. The team at CIEN presented evidence of delays to Ministry of Education officials with a recommendation that the start of the school year be moved from January to February. In December of 2008, the Minister of Education announced that the Ministry would be adopting CIEN's recommendation and changing the school calendar.

### *IMO relationships and interactions with political actors*

While the findings of CIEN's study presented interesting new insights into the problems of school resource delivery in Guatemala, it is unlikely that the results of the study alone would have elicited the response from the Minister of Education without supporting strategic activities on the part of the CIEN team. Starting at the conception phase, CIEN deliberately developed its study to be informative and illuminating for its target audience, the Ministry of Education. The researchers who led this study identified several effective ways to interact with the Ministry of Education and made research and advocacy decisions based on this audience that allowed them to have the impact that they did (Lavarreda 2010).

Shortly after learning that they had been selected for participation in the TAP grants programme, a new executive leadership came to power in Guatemala including a new Minister of Education. Learning that the new minister had promised to reform education in her first 100 days in office, and that one of the priorities for this plan was to ensure that adequate textbooks arrived at schools in Guatemala, CIEN reframed its research to be able to answer critical questions directly related to this priority. The researchers at CIEN then presented the proposed study to the Minister of Education as a study that could inform her team and the goal of improving education quality early in her tenure, and as a project that was supported externally and would not require additional funding from government.

Presenting the proposed research to the Ministry of Education in this way opened doors to the research in terms of access to the information needed for the study. Expenditure tracking studies require researchers to have access to facilities in order to survey beneficiaries and service providers about the quantity and quality of resources received. Without the support of those in government, civil society organizations frequently have to contend with suspicion on the part of respondents and sometimes outright hostility to answering questions. Having the blessing of ministry officials, and in some cases ministry escorts and introductions at study facilities, made the road to collecting questionnaire responses much less challenging for CIEN field teams.

Having already convinced the Minister of Education of the potential benefits of the study for her work, the CIEN team was able to present the results directly to the ministry shortly after completing the data analysis. While the research team had made it clear from initial meetings with government officials that they would not censor any findings from the media, the team also strategically ensured the minister that they would present the results to her before sharing them more widely, ensuring that she had time to develop a response to anything they uncovered. CIEN also helped pave the way for reform based on their study by presenting concrete and feasible policy recommendations based on the study. While a call for increased spending on education supplies would be an easy one to make, CIEN recognized that such a recommendation was likely to fall on deaf ears. Instead, CIEN chose to recommend tangible changes, such as shifting the school calendar that could result in effective and cost-effective improvements to school resource disbursement and utilization.

#### *The importance of timing*

From the discussion above, it is clear that timing in the political cycle significantly enhanced CIEN's opportunities to conduct a study and evidence-based advocacy that could translate into recommendations adopted by key political figures. While textbook and school resource disbursement might rank high as a priority in the minds of many past and future ministers of education in Guatemala, CIEN was able to begin its research at exactly the moment that a new Minister of Education had made a public statement about improving textbook availability in schools, one that could be used to hold her accountable in future electoral cycles. The same study that created a major splash within the first year in office for a new Minister of Education might not have had the same impact had it been introduced 100 days earlier or later.

While the words of the minister could potentially be used to hold her accountable later in her term of office, the study was also potentially more powerful and less threatening to a new Minister of Education because its findings could not be used to hold her accountable for earlier failures in the education system in Guatemala. CIEN was studying the problems with a system that took place in the early months of 2007 and 2008, many months before the current minister came to power. As a result, the CIEN study was non-threatening to the new minister in that it would not point out mistakes or failures on the part of her administration. Instead, the study would identify problems that others had potentially caused but that the new ministry could 'fix' in a public forum.

#### ***Identifying the causes of teacher absenteeism (CDD Ghana)***

In a country that spends 80 per cent of its education budget on teacher salaries, teacher absenteeism can lead to significant wastage in public spending on education. While it was well known that teachers are frequently absent from class in Ghana, the Ghanaian

organization CDD, a research-oriented civil society organization, decided to quantify the extent of absenteeism in primary schools in the country and to look more closely at the trends, potential causes and solutions for this chronic problem.

In early 2008, the CDD research team began conducting multiple visits to 30 public primary schools to study the incidence of absenteeism among teachers in the schools. The first visit made to each school was used to collect quantitative and qualitative information about teacher characteristics, school characteristics, and the proximity of school to other facilities, such as health centres and banks. At least two subsequent visits were paid to each school by the CDD field team on different days of the week and in both the mornings and afternoons. These visits were unannounced and were used to verify the presence or absence of teachers against a roster provided to them by district education directorates. Finally, the CDD team conducted focus group discussions with stakeholders, including parent-teacher associations and school management committees, to ascertain what were believed to be causes of absenteeism and whether monitoring or sanctions were undertaken as a means of reducing the problem.

The incidence of absenteeism calculated by CDD was not surprising to anyone reading the study report; however, some of the findings related to trends and potential causes of absenteeism presented insights into the problem that could be used by the government and other stakeholders to potentially lessen the problem. Overall, CDD found that 47 per cent of teachers were absent during at least one of the school visits, and the average absenteeism rate for the 192 teachers sampled was 27 per cent. In addition to studying correlations between facility characteristics and absence rates, CDD researchers investigated trends in absence over the week. The study showed that, while absenteeism was inexcusably high throughout the course of the entire week, teachers were more likely to be absent on Thursdays (31 per cent absenteeism) and Fridays (40 per cent absenteeism).

### *Impact*

While the level of teacher absenteeism in Ghanaian primary schools surprised few, the new finding that absenteeism peaked on Fridays led the CDD research team to raise questions about why such a pattern had emerged. In interviews with a sample of teachers, CDD asked about the causes for their own absences as well as the absences of their peers. Although the most frequently cited reason for absenteeism was illness or medical check-ups, another reason cited by many teachers was 'attending distance learning lectures'. The CDD research team discussed this with teachers and found that the Ghana Education Service, a government department, sponsored long-distance learning programmes for teachers for career development. The learning programmes, run in universities across the country, were held over weekends starting on Fridays after the end of the primary and secondary school day. However, attending the training programmes required teachers with posts a significant distance from a university to leave class early on Fridays to arrive at the training programmes on time.

Recognizing that the GES would not want to sponsor teacher advancement programmes that inadvertently led to increased teacher absenteeism, CDD recommended that the GES reorganize the teacher training schedule to no longer conflict with class and teaching time. On launching the report in July 2008, the CDD team initiated a media encounter with government officials, including the Director of Basic Education at GES. The presentation of the results and recommendations to this group of policymakers led the GES Director of Basic Education to consult with CDD about the disruption of teacher training sessions, and

he has since begun working with the universities hosting these sessions to adjust the programmes so they no longer conflict with class time.

### *IMO relationships and interactions with political actors*

Like CIEN, much of CDD's success stemmed from its credibility and collaborative relationship with policymakers at the national level. The CDD developed policy recommendations that would be attractive and feasible for government officials. It is worth noting that CDD presented many recommendations to policymakers based on its study findings, ranging from concrete and inexpensive solutions to sweeping reforms of the sector to reduce teacher absenteeism. While additional CDD recommendations may yet be picked up by the ministry and other government agents, it is telling that the two recommendations that political actors immediately focused on were the two that were the most tangible and potentially the easiest and least costly to implement – reorganizing the distance learning programmes and moving the locations and mechanisms for the payment of teachers' salaries.

Although the Ghanaian team was still able to capitalize on specific factors to influence policy decisions, the case of CDD differs from the CIEN case study in many ways. Unlike CIEN, one disadvantage that CDD faced was that it was concentrating on a problem that was not as high a priority as the minister's first 100-days reform in the case of Guatemala. While many recognized teacher absenteeism as a major problem, there had been no explicit declaration by a government official that absenteeism would be reduced on his or her watch. Instead, CDD faced the challenge of presenting the problem of teacher absenteeism in such a way that key political figures took public notice while also presenting the potential solutions in such a way that policymakers could quickly and willingly adopt them.

The team at CDD points in part to the credibility of the organization as one reason that it was able to overcome the hurdle of gaining access to policymakers, even though the issue of absenteeism was not one at the centre of debate before the organization's study. In an email exchange between TAP and the team at CDD, Edward Ampratwum of CDD stated:

Given CDD-Ghana's profile as a high-level research-oriented civil society organization in Ghana known for its independence, analytical rigor and methodological accuracy of its flagship public opinion survey (Afrobarometer) in 20 African countries, policymakers in Ghana were very receptive of the centre's interest in promoting effective governance in the education sector in Ghana. Indeed, the ease with which the ministry adopted the report and incorporated it into its annual education sector report (2008) shows the level of respect and credibility assigned to the Center's work (Ampratwum 2010).

Another element that CDD used to its advantage was the timing of the report's publication. The study of teacher absenteeism took place in the first half of 2008, allowing CDD to concentrate on disseminating its findings and conducting evidence-based advocacy in the months leading up to the December 2008 Ghanaian presidential and parliamentary elections. CDD used the presidential campaigns and debates as an opportunity to shine a spotlight on the issue of teacher absenteeism and the recommendations that the research team developed. Working closely with the media, the research team pitched the story to journalists and received an enthusiastic response with major articles written about their research findings in six newspapers in Ghana. Furthermore, CDD proactively developed a media guide for journalists about key education policy issues including teacher absenteeism. This ensured that journalists not only printed information about the problem of chronic absenteeism but also questioned political candidates about their views and plans to address teacher absenteeism in Ghana if elected.



### *Transforming the role of parents in school accountability (CADEP Paraguay)*

While many civil society organizations are able to develop concrete solutions to problems in social sector service delivery, other organizations face a myriad of challenges that jeopardize even the completion of a study to identify the problems. The likelihood of obstacles arising is significantly higher when the organization is working in a country without a fostering atmosphere for civil society engagement. As such, the success of CADEP in Paraguay is especially telling and encouraging.

When CADEP began its study in early 2008, Paraguay had been a democracy for less than 20 years. It was only in April 2008 that the country elected an executive that was not part of the former dictator's Colorado party. As a country slowly emerging from a dictatorship, Paraguay consistently ranks below other countries in the region and those profiled in this paper (including Ghana and Guatemala) in governance indicators, including the six Kaufmann-Kraay World Governance Indicators of voice and accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law and control of corruption. As such, a study of the quality of school financial management was both needed and challenging for the CADEP research team.

After facing significant stumbling blocks related to collecting data and gaining access to school budget records, CADEP found that it was unable to quantify the extent of budget leakage and other education system failures. Furthermore, the major finding from CADEP's work was that '[w]ithin the limits of this study, one can conclude that public budget expenditure in primary education is not transparent and cannot currently be controlled by civil society' (Brizuela Speratti 2008: 39).

While this finding was disappointing to the research team, CADEP was able to delve further into the problem of a lack of transparency in education spending and uncover some potential entry points for citizens and citizen groups to improve the quality of education in the longer term. One group that CADEP found to be especially active and interested in the issues of the quality and funding of education was parent associations (Asociación Cooperadora Escolar, ACE). CADEP found that the major role that ACEs were playing in Paraguayan primary schools was the financing of school supplies and facilities. However, the pervasiveness of these groups (every school sampled had an active ACE) and the interest of parents in the financing of education led CADEP to conclude that parents and parent associations specifically could play a significant role in monitoring education spending if given proper support and training on how best to monitor and advocate for change.

#### *Impact*

Unlike CIEN and CDD, the impact of CADEP's study was not observed immediately. The team from CADEP began their evidence-based advocacy in 2008 by consulting with the schools that had been part of the study, rather than going directly to government officials. Working with leaders in the schools and among the parents, CADEP determined that the most effective goal for its advocacy would be to develop participatory models for increasing transparency and accountability in Paraguayan schools. Steps were taken by CADEP to begin the process of building a participatory model, including designing and distributing posters to all sample schools highlighting the recommendations and findings of the CADEP study and meeting with officials from the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) and the Ministry of the Economy to share results.

However, the study began making a major mark when CADEP and two other NGOs in Paraguay were awarded funding from the Government of Paraguay to build a programme to raise awareness and the accountability of government for education budgeting and public expenditure management. The specific activities of the new project included providing training for parent associations to play a more active role in education budgeting and service delivery, and building networks between parent associations so that weaker ACEs could benefit from peer learning from stronger ones. CADEP's work on this project has stemmed from the results of the study in which the key finding was that budgets were too opaque to be monitored by civil society.

### *IMO relationships and interactions with political actors*

Unlike the previous two case studies, it is not obvious that the success of CADEP in improving monitoring systems for education budgeting was a direct result of interactions with government officials. Rather than hinging their impact on recommending policy changes that political actors would need to implement, CADEP developed recommendations that would require the support of frontline service providers and facilities, the involvement of parent associations, and the skills of organizations such as their own to conduct training. Furthermore, recommendations such as those presented by CADEP do not generally have the same appeal to policymakers as those presented by CIEN and CDD; they require more time and resources than an 'implement and move on' policy, and they have a significant chance of unearthing corruption and problems for which state actors could have to shoulder the blame.

A closer investigation of the work done by CADEP, however, reveals that government support and collaboration played a major role in the success of the organization in setting up monitoring systems. The CADEP team originated the idea of 'government champions', a concept that is now fully integrated into the grants programme of TAP. In April 2008, the former senior director of CADEP was elected to the position of Minister of the Economy in the new government. Rather than struggling to gain an audience with senior government officials, the CADEP team was able to rely on the new minister to listen to the results and recommendations that came from its work. CADEP could also be assured of an ally in government, one who shared the mission of the organization and one who understood the value added of IMOs working on research and research-based advocacy in public expenditure management and budget issues. The value of 'government champions' was introduced by researcher Cynthia Brizuela Speratti during a TAP peer review workshop in June 2008 and echoed by all IMOs attending the workshop – having a path to a state actor at any level of government can make the difference between good recommendations that are never implemented and those that are adopted with vigour.

Government collaboration also played a significant role in the sustainability of CADEP's work, although not in the same way as other cases such as CIEN and CDD. Although CADEP did not present policy recommendations that could be adopted by government, the work and reputation of the organization led the Government of Paraguay to provide funding for the follow-up project led by CADEP, improving the transparency and accountability of education budgeting and increasing civil society's ability to monitor expenditure in this sector. It is important to note that many IMOs struggle with the issue of accepting funding from those that they are trying to monitor. Vyasulu (2008) cites multiple cases of IMOs that refuse to accept government funding, explaining that the advantage of receiving government funding is more than offset by the conflicts of interest that may arise if they take up various

causes. However, other IMOs including CADEP and the Institute for Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR) in Kenya, have benefited from support from government ministries and departments, increasing their sustainability as organizations and allowing them to continue work on key areas such as transparency and accountability. The choice of accepting government funding is one that each IMO must face, weighing the potential costs and benefits. The authors do not advocate one way or the other. We only recognize the value in the case of CADEP and others of improving the domestic sustainability of the IMO.

## **Conclusions**

The 15 organizations highlighted in this paper show the diversity of audiences, outcomes and overall impact that IMOs can achieve while seeking to improve transparency and accountability in service delivery in low- and middle-income countries. However, the trends that present themselves in the retrospective evaluation of the civil society led research and advocacy projects provide significant lessons for implementers, researchers and supporters of organizations working on these issues.

The most relevant lesson to be drawn from the experience of the first phase of TAP grantees is that independent organizations such as these can have a critical impact on the quality of service delivery and the means through which policymakers and others can be held accountable for continued improvements in social sector spending and service delivery. While pursuing improvements in government-run programmes has historically been undertaken by researchers external to the country, the recent shift towards supporting and building the capacity of internal independent actors such as IMOs provides evidence of an effective mechanism for increasing transparency and accountability in health, education and other sectors.

While the potential of IMOs to affect the dialogue around service delivery as well as the quality of service delivery itself is demonstrated in the case studies in this paper, the evaluation also highlights specific strategies that can be used by IMOs to increase the likelihood of impact. One common strategy that emerged from the TAP pilot phase participants is the identification of government champions to facilitate data access and results sharing. The concept of government champions does not work in the same way for each IMO, and collaborating with government officials requires that both parties in the relationship (political actors and civil society) benefit from working together. For the IMO, collaborating with even a single government official can smooth the road for gathering necessary data and can provide a willing ear for findings and recommendations on completion of the study. For the government official, collaborating with an IMO can allow the official to work with a capable organization willing to study a topic of importance to the government and offer recommendations without any obligation on the part of government.

Such collaborations can be mutually beneficial, and IMOs can undertake certain strategies to make these non-adversarial but independent relationships more feasible. Many IMOs benefit from introducing government officials to the study before the project work has begun. Providing policymakers with a voice in the design of the project can pique the interest of government officials while at the same time making officials feel comfortable that the study is not being completed behind their backs. The strategy also allows IMOs to adapt their work to the political context, increasing the likelihood of recommendations being taken up.

Just as adapting to the political context is critical for IMO accountability projects, the timing of project implementation and advocacy can play a major role in translating research into

action. In the featured case studies, the timing of the study meant everything. CIEN was able to be nimble and respond immediately to the promise of a new Minister of Education of reform of the sector in her first 100 days in office. The timing of the political cycle allowed CDD to find a prominent place in the pre-election political debate, which probably contributed to the uptake of its recommendations by government.

Finally, this evaluation of the impact of IMOs raises questions about the potential that IMOs still have to improve accountability and transparency in service delivery. The IMOs highlighted in the evaluation focused in large part on affecting political dialogue and the decisions and actions of a very specific type of political actor – those in an ‘executive’ role in all levels of government. Given the demonstrable influence of citizen organizations, however, it is surprising that more of the IMOs in the sample did not proactively target other independent organizations working in similar spaces. Instead, the frequently cited cases of advocacy with other organizations largely came about at the request of the other organizations. IMOs could also significantly extend their reach and effectiveness by partnering with or advocating to other state actors not represented in the responses of the sampled IMOs, including government oversight institutions such as Supreme Audit Institutions and legislators/parliamentarians. Similarly, while IMOs expend significant time and resources on changing policies related to service delivery efficiency, this study found little evidence of IMOs taking the next step to ensure that systems were put in place to support civil society monitoring of government actions to successfully implement and continue improving these policies. Such actions may not be a comparative advantage of IMOs, but they could present areas on which donors and other organizations can focus to continue building the capacity of IMOs to hold governments accountable for their decisions and actions.

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## Annex 1

### External impact rubric

		External Impact on Transparency/Accountability						
		Policy change	Increase in media coverage	Setting permanent monitoring systems in place	Increase in other organizations doing similar work	Increasing availability of tools to measure quality	Informing policymakers	Other
Audience	National government							
	Subnational government							
	Local government							
	Front line service providers							
	Communities							
	Other IMOs							
	The media							
	Other							

Explanation: The authors developed this rubric to identify and categorize the types of impact that IMOs could have with transparency and accountability-focused research and evidence-based advocacy. Each column indicates a category of impact that could be obtained by an IMO: (1) a policy change based on a recommendation from their work, (2) increased media coverage of a particular problem with transparency and accountability, (3) the installation of permanent monitoring systems which focus on the transparency and accountability problems, (4) **increases** in other organizations that are monitoring the specified problem, (5) increases in the availability of tools to measure quality of the government program being studied, (6) increases in how well-informed policymakers are about a particular topic, and (7) other types of impact (specified by the IMO). The authors were also interested in the audience that was targeted for each type of impact. It should be noted that not all types of impact will apply to every audience. For example, the impact “informing policymakers” is not likely to target communities or the media. However, one could see (and in fact does see in this evaluation) evidence of IMOs informing policymakers at many different levels, including national, subnational, and local. The rubric was sent to former TAP grantees who were asked to indicate impact-audience combination that they believed their project had obtained. IMOs were asked to indicate all boxes that applied to their projects.