



International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy
and Electoral Assistance

Democratic Accountability and Service Delivery: A Desk Review

JANUARY 2013

THIS PAGE WAS INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK



DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND SERVICE DELIVERY: A DESK REVIEW

*ANDRÉS MEJÍA ACOSTA WITH
ANURADHA JOSHI AND GRAEME RAMSHAW**

*INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
JANUARY 2013*

* We acknowledge valuable input and comments from Agustina Giraudi, Louise Heggaard, Anna Lekvall, Enrique Peruzzoti, Kristen Sample and Jorge Valladares. All omissions and errors remain ours.

© International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2013

International IDEA publications are independent of specific national or political interests. Views expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of International IDEA, its Board or its Council members.

This publication is available under a Creative Commons Licence (CCl)—Creative Commons Attribute-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Licence. You are free to copy, distribute and transmit the publication as well as to remix and adapt it provided it is only for non-commercial purposes, that you appropriately attribute the publication, and that you distribute it under an identical license. For more information on this CCl, see: <<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>>

International IDEA
Publications Office
Strömsborg
SE – 103 34 Stockholm
Sweden
Phone + 46 8 698 37 00
Fax + 46 8 20 24 22
E-mail: info@idea.int
Website: <http://www.idea.int>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper seeks to identify and document how different modalities of democratic accountability are linked to improved service delivery in developing democracies. The work extends an agenda proposed by International IDEA's Democracy and Development programme to better understand the workings of accountability mechanisms. This paper addresses a double democratic challenge: to strengthen formal and legal mechanisms that allow citizens to articulate and voice their policy concerns, and to encourage elected and non-elected representatives to effectively respond to the provision of public services.

The first part of the paper explores the concept of democratic accountability, and discusses the different approaches identified in the existing literature, including social and political accountability approaches. It also discusses the roles of different agents and multiple political arenas. The paper outlines four ideal dimensions

to evaluating the effectiveness of accountability relations: standards, answerability, responsiveness and enforceability. In each of these dimensions, we are interested in identifying the main agents of accountability, their incentives to be accountable, the existence of formal and informal provisions to enable accountability and the presence of sanctions to enforce accountability.

The second, empirical, part of the report offers a detailed review of 16 case studies in which citizens or politicians have held government officials accountable for the delivery of public services. These cases are analysed according to the proposed four dimensions of democratic accountability. Based on these evaluations, the paper highlights key accountability dimensions that contribute to improved delivery of government services. The paper also puts forward some policy recommendations to advance democracy support.

ACRONYMS

CBU	Childrens Budget Unit
CBMES	community based monitoring and evaluation systems
CCAGG	Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (Philippines)
CDD	The Ghana Center for Democratic Development
COA	Commission on Audit (Philippines)
CSO	civil society organization
DHP	Philippine Peso
IDASA	Institute for Democracy in Africa
International IDEA	The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IBP	International Budget Project
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	non-governmental organization
PDS	public distribution system
PR	proportional representation
PRI	Institutional Revolutionary Party (Mexico)
RTI	Right to Information
SA	social accountability
UDN	Uganda Debt Network
ZAR	South African Rands

CONTENTS

1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION	4
2. DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND SERVICE DELIVERY	5
a. The scope of democratic accountability: premises and challenges	5
b. The agents of democratic accountability	6
c. Arenas and institutions of effective accountability	6
d. Effective sanctions for enforcing accountability	9
3. ANALYSING EFFECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY	10
a. Social and political accountability mechanisms	10
b. Bridging the accountability gap	11
c. Proposed dimensions to evaluate effective accountability	12
4. ASSESSING THE EVIDENCE: ACCOUNTABILITY CASE STUDIES	14
a. Standards	14
b. Answerability	15
c. Responsiveness	16
d. Enforceability	17
5. ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY ON SERVICE DELIVERY	19
a. What is a service delivery outcome?	19
b. Comparing experiences of democratic accountability	20
c. Other constraints on service delivery	21
6. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS	22
a. The missing aspects of democratic accountability: a brief summary	22
b. Making accountability work for service delivery: policy implications	24
7. REFERENCES	26
ENDNOTES	29
ANNEX: Making accountability work: a desk review of cases	30
FIGURE 1: A mapping of accountability relationships in a presidential system	7
TABLE 1: Assessing the dimensions of accountability	20

1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

International IDEA's Democracy and Development programme has set out to explore, explain and document the linkages between democratic accountability and service delivery. The work builds on the conviction that democratic practices offer the most effective way to promote development outcomes in an inclusive, equitable and effective way. Accountable democracies provide a two-way channel to connect citizens' preferences with elected officials. On the one hand, democratic mechanisms must offer citizens the legal means and guarantees to articulate and voice their policy concerns in a way that effectively reaches elected representatives. On the other hand, democratic mechanisms should enable citizens to hold government officials accountable for their actions, thus contributing to the provision of public services that respond to citizens' preferences in a responsible and transparent manner. Thus, the notion of democratic accountability refers to both the ability of citizens' to articulate their policy demands and the responsibility of government officials to respond to those preferences.

This report explains how different modalities of democratic accountability can improve service delivery.

In Chapter 2, the paper develops the concept of democratic accountability and discusses social and political accountability approaches found in the specialized literature. This section also explores how accountability relations change depending on the number of agents involved and the nature of the democratic arena. Chapter 3 outlines four dimensions to evaluating the effectiveness of accountability relations: standards, answerability, responsiveness and enforceability. In each of these dimensions, a detailed description is provided of the main agents of accountability, their incentives to be accountable, the existence of formal and informal provisions to enable accountability and the presence of sanctions to enforce accountability. Chapter 4 looks at 16 cases in which citizens held government officials to account (sometimes with the help of elected politicians) for the delivery of public services. The cases are analysed according to the proposed four dimensions. Chapter 5 explores the potential contribution of these accountability mechanisms and dynamics to improving the delivery of services. Chapter 6 provides the conclusions and offers some policy recommendations.

2. DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND SERVICE DELIVERY

A key premise—and promise—of the democratic contract is that citizens can hold government officials accountable for the provision of public goods and services. The fundamental assumption is that more effective accountability mechanisms will encourage improved service provision, in the form of faster, higher quality or better implemented responses to the demands of citizens. In principle, a democratic regime can provide citizens with the necessary mechanisms to hold governments accountable. Citizens in democratic regimes can reward or sanction the performance of government officials through elections, referendums, impeachment procedures, and street protests and demonstrations.

The concept of accountability remains one of the most contested in the social sciences. While addressing this theoretical debate is beyond the scope of this review, it is nevertheless relevant to explore in this section some key areas of frequent debate: the scope of accountability, the agents of accountability and the presence of mechanisms to sanction the lack of accountability.

The following discussion should also provide the basis for an operational notion of accountability, which explores who exactly the agents of accountability are, their incentives, the broader political context in which accountability takes place, and what happens if government officials do not respond to citizens' demands.¹

A. THE SCOPE OF DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY: PREMISES AND CHALLENGES

The basic notion of accountability entails a relationship between at least two types of actor, one of which (*a principal*) delegates to another (*an agent*) the responsibility to act on his behalf. This act of delegation usually entails some kind of correspondence by which

it is implied that the agent is *accountable* for his actions to the principal (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991).

In a democratic environment, government officials are *account givers* and most of their actions are open to public scrutiny. It would not be realistic, however, to expect all officials to respond to every citizen for every one of their actions (Pitkin 1967). If a voter writes a letter to her representative demanding an explanation for her vote on an issue, an individual contributor requests a specific policy action in compensation for his campaign donations, or a newspaper reveals government wrongdoing, these are all events that demand a response on the part of a government official. In these cases, the account giver is expected to offer a response, but the official *is not legally required* to do so. These would be examples where there is direct *answerability*, but these could not be construed as cases of *accountability* proper unless the citizen exerts some kind of sanction such as deciding *not* to vote for this parliamentary representative at the next election, the parliamentarian being forced to return contributions in the case of a demonstrable campaign scandal or a High Court determining legal responsibilities over the misuse of government funds. To be clear, the stricter notion of *political* accountability used here refers to “relationships that *formally* give some actor the authority of oversight and/or sanction relative to public officials” (Mainwaring 2003: 7). This minimalist definition drawn from political science is bound to be controversial because it leaves out many social interactions that are and can be commonly construed as “relationships of accountability”. Yet, it helps to raise the bar of the accountability concept in a useful way.² There are many examples of accountability being exercised in a democratic context, such as street protests, the work of civil society organizations (CSOs) and the proactive efforts of media outlets to call governments to account. These efforts can certainly trigger greater responsiveness from account givers but it would be misleading to expect that each one of these actions entails a legal obligation to respond, and not all

of those actions trigger a corresponding reaction from the state if action fails to happen.

Alternative approaches have proposed additional elements that must be considered in accountability relations: (a) the *standards* to which the principals hold agents to account; (b) the agents' provision of *information* on their actions to their principals; (c) a *justification* that stands up to public scrutiny; and (d) the existence of *sanctions* that principals can impose if they are not satisfied with the actions or justification provided (Schedler 1999).³ To expand and illustrate the argument made so far, the next section introduces a more precise discussion of the relevant agents, arenas and mechanisms of democratic accountability.

B. THE AGENTS OF DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY

The number and characteristics of democratic agents have concrete implications for the nature of accountability relationships. It matters whether there are one or multiple account givers, or account holders, whether these are elected or appointed and whether they have short- or long-term ambitions. In its simplest form, the most *direct* or conventional form of accountability involves the relationship between two single agents (e.g. a voter and an elected official), in which the former delegates authority to the latter and holds her accountable for her actions. It is in the best interests of the latter to be responsive and accountable for her actions if she wants to remain in office (Mayhew 1974).

In contemporary representative democracies, however, there are many variations to this basic model.

- The basic relationship becomes more difficult when a single agent has to respond to the expectations, needs and demands of **competing principals**. For example, an elected legislator may be responsive to the citizens who put her in office, but her political career choices may depend on the goodwill of her party leader, or will depend on her ability to appease the leader of the government who controls access to important state resources (Carey 2009). Unlike the direct and visible relationship with their citizens, the muddled nature of facing competing principals allows agents ample room for strategic action or shirking (Carey 2009, Mainwaring 2003: 9). The notion of accountability appears to suffer when agents are unable to reconcile conflicting mandates.
- The presence of **non-elected agents**, such as bureaucrats and civil servants, may also undermine accountability

relations when they are directly responsive to the elected official who appointed them—and can in theory remove them. In principle, all bureaucrats are accountable to the public they serve but, in practice, it is only to be expected that non-elected service providers will become less responsive to the interests of the public if for example their professional future depends on the good will of direct supervisors.

- Sometimes, state agents can acquire **considerable autonomy** to ignore citizens' **demands and/or bypass** mechanisms of control and oversight. This can be the case for agents who have gained considerable job security through the civil service, form part of a government majority, or develop specialist knowledge that gives them unique advantages over the principals (Carey 2009, Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991, McCubbins and Schwartz 1984).

From an accountability perspective, these important variations in the number and nature of agents may undermine the scope or effectiveness of existing formal accountability mechanisms, and, consequently, may have a negative impact on the ability—or willingness—of agents to deliver effective services to citizens.

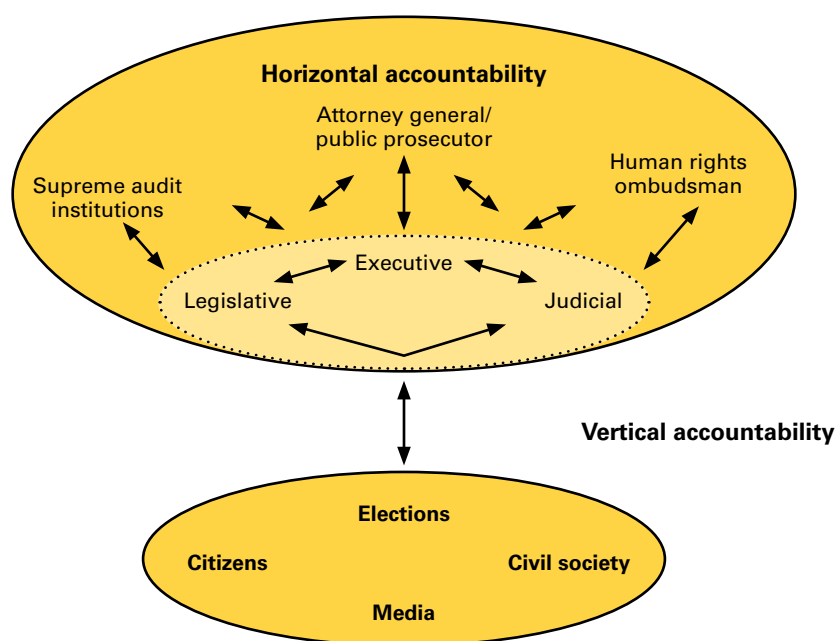
C. ARENAS AND INSTITUTIONS OF EFFECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

In addition to differences in the nature of democratic actors, a myriad of institutional arrangements and democratic arenas can have a direct impact on the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms. One analytical distinction to consider is the difference between **vertical and horizontal accountability**. Vertical accountability mechanisms refer to the relationships between citizens conceived as principals (voters, organized society and the media), and state agents who have an effective expectation to answer for their actions (legislatures, elected representatives, the executive branch and local government). Horizontal accountability refers to relationships in which diverse government offices hold each other to account to ensure that no one encroaches on the rights and privileges of the other, and that no agency stands above the rule of law (O'Donnell 1998). Horizontal accountability relationships include but are not limited to instances of formal checks and balances between government branches. They also encompass the workings of control and oversight institutions such as an Ombudsman, the Attorney General and the Comptroller and Auditor General. Figure 1 is a simplified map of vertical and horizontal accountability relationships in the case of presidential systems.

From a citizen's perspective, this accountability landscape opens a wide range of possible arenas or entry points for holding a government to account. Some of these mechanisms (vertical) imply a direct relationship between citizens and elected officials, but citizens can also demand that their elected representative holds the government to account (horizontal). For the purposes

of this discussion, the focus is on several institutional arenas that can facilitate democratic accountability, such as political parties, elections to legislative bodies, and oversight and control mechanisms. We also discuss the conditions or institutional variations that make these arenas more or less responsive to citizens' demands for accountability.

Figure 1 : A mapping of accountability relationships in a presidential system



Source: Payne, Mark, Daniel Zovatto, Fernando Carrillo Flores, Andrés Allamand Zavala, *Democracies in Development. Politics and Reform in Latin America* (Washington D.C.; Inter-American Development Bank and International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2002).

Political parties

Political parties—and elected representatives—play a dual role in the accountability landscape, since they can be both democratic instruments to hold governments to account (account holders) and also agents of accountability that respond to the demands of their voters through the electoral cycle (account givers).

There is some academic agreement that more policy-oriented political parties are instrumentally more effective at demanding and providing accountability than parties structured along personalistic or clientelistic lines. While the latter are able to provide a particularistic

and short term form of public goods to citizens, the former are in principle better positioned to offer long term and broader representation to more diverse segments of society (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). There is less scholarly consensus on the impact of the number of political parties on accountability relationships. While the presence of one or fewer partisan options makes agents more identifiable, it limits or constrains the range of demands represented. Conversely, a larger number of parties may be more representative and would potentially offer a greater ability to respond to diverse needs, but will also dilute lines of responsibility and “identifiability” (Morgenstern 2004).

Electoral systems

The nature and design of electoral systems have a significant impact on enhancing or undermining the prospects for democratic accountability in a given context. For example, systems that promote some kind of proportional representation (PR) of different interests may enable greater participation by citizens in the decision-making process, and thus facilitate the proliferation of people who demand accountability. At the same time, however, such systems will undermine the identifiability of the agents that are to be held to account if, for example, the responsibility for actions taken or not taken is distributed among the multiple representatives who were elected in the same district (Morgenstern 2004). Conversely, plurality, or first past the post systems that favour the representation of visible majorities would facilitate the identification of those responsible for policy choices but would inevitably undermine the democratic representation of a wider set of interests. Following the conventional wisdom on the effects of electoral rules, proportional representation systems tend to be associated with a proliferation of political parties, whereas plurality systems might have the effect of reducing the number of available parties (Duverger 1954).

Recent research has illustrated that the choice of different candidate nomination rules has a significant impact on who legislative agents are likely to be accountable to, not just between voters and elected politicians, but also among elected politicians themselves. Electoral rules that favour the election of legislators through closed list formulas are likely to give party leaders greater power to influence the career choices of the rank and file, whereas rules that allow for personalized voting schemes are likely to empower legislators beyond the control of their parties to become, in principle, more responsive to the needs and demands of their electorate (Shugart and Carey 1995, Siavelis and Morgenstern 2009).

Parliaments and legislatures⁴

A country's legislature has considerable potential to be a body that provides and demands effective accountability. There are rules and institutions, in addition to the electoral and partisan configurations discussed above, that facilitate democratic accountability. A first dimension to consider is whether the leader of the government has been directly elected by the people, as in a presidential system, or elected by members of the legislature. In the latter case, the government's survival depends on gathering sufficient partisan support through a vote of confidence, whereas presidents have a

more independent relationship vis-à-vis the legislature. In addition to this division of power, there is an important division of purpose that is determined by the amount of political support that the government has in parliament. It is argued, for example, that the government is divided if the majority in the legislature is different from the party in government (Haggard and McCubbins 2001). These configurations are relevant to an understanding of the conditions under which parliament and parliamentarians can effectively hold governments to account. This is more likely to happen in the context of a divided government with moderate, or two-party, competition. Members of the legislature would not be willing to hold governments to account in the case of single party majorities, especially if their own political survival depended on promoting rather than opposing the government's agenda. On the other hand, in a highly fragmented context, political parties and parliamentarians are also less likely to be able to hold governments to account because they face bigger obstacles to assembling effective majorities.

A parliament's ability to hold governments to account will also depend on the political effectiveness of legislative committees and committee hearing procedures. This is directly related to the technical capacity of the legislature to archive, analyse and process information, the transparency and level of institutionalization of legislative procedures, and the extent to which legislative committees are staffed with experienced and professional politicians. Legislative committees also offer a valuable entry point to facilitate the participation of civil society in the decision-making and oversight processes.

Control and oversight institutions

Figure 1 illustrates the existence of other institutions of horizontal accountability. As is mentioned above, the purpose of institutions of horizontal accountability is to ensure that no government agency encroaches on the rights of another government body and that no government office stands above the rule of law (O'Donnell 1998). These institutions include the Ombudsman, the Attorney General, the Comptroller and Auditor General and financial audit institutions. The strength and effectiveness of these institutions depend on their origin and level of autonomy vis-à-vis other branches of the state. In a context in which oversight institutions are directly or indirectly dependent on the executive branch (e.g. if they are appointed by the president or directly financed by the president's office), it is likely that they will be less proactive in holding governments to account. Conversely, in countries that have a strong

tradition of the rule of law and an independent judiciary, governments are likely to be more accountable for their actions or to face credible sanctions when they fail to respond accordingly.

Alternative arenas

In addition to these formally constituted and legally recognized arenas, there has been a recent proliferation of political spaces in which citizens can voice their concerns and demand accountability from elected officials, such as CSOs staging street protests, signing petitions, organizing hearings, and so on. Media outlets have also played an important role in monitoring public action and demanding greater accountability from government officials. These arenas have become important platforms for voicing demands, providing “naming and shaming” mechanisms to ensure public awareness and political responsiveness. As is illustrated below in the empirical review, in some cases these alternative mechanisms have also provided legal sanctions to compel politicians to act in a responsive manner.

D. EFFECTIVE SANCTIONS FOR ENFORCING ACCOUNTABILITY

The presence of penalties to sanction the lack, or rewards to encourage the presence, of accountability is perhaps the most decisive and most controversial condition for enabling effective accountability. In a democratic setting, most formal political institutions offer clear and visible mechanisms to ensure that politicians remain accountable for their actions vis-à-vis the public. Using a narrow definition of the term, as is explained above, elections offer the most visible and

institutionalized form of accountability in a democratic setting because they allow citizens to reward by re-electing or vote their elected representatives out of office depending on their performance (Stokes 1999). Political parties and legislative bodies also offer sanctioning devices, including constitutional provisions for recall mandates, holding referendums on policy choices and allowing impeachment procedures to hold governments directly accountable for misdemeanours, corruption or other wrongdoing in office (Pérez-Liñán 2007). More recently, freedom of information legislation in many parts of the world has provided an additional tool that can be used effectively by citizens to demand clear and concrete action on the part of government officials.

The existence of independent and strong government bodies that can make sanctions effective is a critical condition. In this spirit, democratic governments have created a range of “institutions of final appeal”, such as an Attorney General, an Ombudsmen or specialist fraud offices, to review citizens’ concerns and hold government officials to account. It follows that stronger institutional settings are likely to produce more effective sanctions that elicit greater accountability from government officials. Existing laws would not be sufficient to ensure the impeachment of a corrupt politician or have the authority to recall a mandate if these mechanisms of accountability lack credible sanctions. “Social accountability mechanisms” have emerged as an alternative to allow citizens to log complaints, demand information or stage a street protest in situations where formal accountability institutions lack the political autonomy, the necessary funding or the legal jurisdiction to hold governments to account (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz 2003).

3. ANALYSING EFFECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

The scholarly and action-oriented literature has developed a number of notions of accountability that depend on whether relationships take place between societal actors and the state, are intrastate relationships only or feature a sequence of both. For analytical purposes, this paper examines two predominant traditions: one that focuses on the political and institutional nature of state-society relations, and one that focuses on state-society relations from a citizen's perspective.

A. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

Narrowly defined, the concept of political accountability refers to a specific form of relationship in which *elected government officials are directly responsible to voters for their public actions including but not limited to the provision of public goods*. In this sense, the notion of political accountability refers to the vertical linkage between voters and representatives. The democratic contract allows citizens the opportunity to reward or sanction the performance of government officials through regular elections. Elections are legal and institutional mechanisms that allow citizens the opportunity to re-elect their political representatives or vote them out of office (Stokes 1999).⁵

Another characteristic of the electoral democratic process is that it provides the conditions in which the preferences of the most members of the public can be reflected in the decision-making process. In principle, elections make public officials accountable to the policy preferences of all citizens participating in the decision-making process. All things being equal, a competitive electoral process should favour the provision of *public goods*. Yet, in many young democracies—and some established ones—politicians are able to build direct linkages with voters through the provision of particularistic or clientelistic goods, thus departing from the democratic principle.

An alternative approach to understanding political accountability focuses on the social dynamics that can improve accountability relationships between voters and government officials in the provision of goods and services. Unlike political accountability mechanisms, these types of *social accountability* (SA) mechanism are not limited to specific formal procedures (elections) or regular intervals (electoral cycles), but instead facilitate the continuous reflection of citizens' demands through street protests and demonstrations, public naming and shaming, petitions, and so on. The core feature of SA mechanisms is to exert direct political influence on government officials for increased and more effective government action in the short run. Through SA mechanisms, citizens have organized to demand service provision from government officials in charge of specific sectors (health, water and sanitation), sometimes even bypassing elected bodies such as national legislatures or city councils. Rather than imposing formal sanctions on politicians, citizens' mobilizations can impose a heavy reputational cost on government officials should they fail to answer to citizens' demands.

An important point of contrast is that SA mechanisms are not legally binding in a direct way. They may promote a basic level of *answerability* from government officials, but they cannot ensure continued government responsiveness in the long run. In this sense, SA mechanisms lack explicit instruments or "teeth" to provoke government responses or punish departures from expected behaviour. Furthermore, it may be argued that civil society groups or organized individuals tend to mobilize for the effective provision of goods and services that are closest to their own policy preferences or interests. Thus, such groups are not very different from other lobbying groups described by theories of democratic pluralism. On the other hand, these groups—although narrow in their policy demands—offer an appeal to "moral standpoints" and therefore seek to institutionalize durable societal control over policies by exercising voice in deliberative processes that monitor public decisions (Joshi 2008).

B. BRIDGING THE ACCOUNTABILITY GAP

This paper's main contribution is to argue that effective democratic accountability is the combined result of social mobilization demands that take place in the context of well-defined and formal accountability mechanisms. This intersection between social and political accountability mechanisms is key to understanding and enhancing the potential impact of democracy on service provision. The existence of political accountability mechanisms such as elections, and an independent legislature and judiciary as well as other mechanisms for control and oversight give citizens legal and formal opportunities to penalize or reward the performance of their elected representatives. Yet, political accountability mechanisms per se are not sufficient to meet the specific demands and needs of citizens. Nor do they offer the best channels for demanding immediate action from service providers. This is precisely the point at which social accountability mechanisms come into play to complement, enhance and advance the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms. SA mechanisms, such as social audits, usually require considerable effort to organize from outside the political system. In some instances, SA initiatives can rely on existing legal instruments such as a 'freedom of information' act to enhance their impact. Without the intervention of dedicated stakeholders, however, there are no formal means to ensure sustained and transparent government responses in the long run.

We argue that effective approaches to democratic accountability combine the direct and immediate capacity of SA mechanisms to respond to social challenges with the long term sustainability provided by political accountability mechanisms. In an extreme way, the proliferation of presidential crises in many Latin American countries since the 1990s illustrates both the failings of conventional accountability mechanisms and the important role of a combined social and political approach to improved accountability. It has been argued that presidential crises were accelerated in part by citizens on the streets and social organizations frustrated by the inability of government institutions to punish alleged corruption and improve government services. However, social mobilization was a necessary but not sufficient ingredient to produce political instability, as the actual removal of presidents took place through legal and in some cases extra-constitutional means adopted by elected legislative bodies (Pérez-Liñán 2007). If there is a lesson to be drawn from these Latin American experiences, it is that

social action was critical to challenge and overcome institutional rigidities but, ultimately, long term solutions to political conflict emerged from the effective use of existing legal provisions.

The challenge of strengthening accountability mechanisms to improve service delivery can be confronted by addressing two fundamental and complementary questions:

- (a) How can formal and legal accountability mechanisms be made more sensitive and responsive to the multiple demands of citizens?
- (b) How can existing social efforts of protest and mobilization eventually gain "more teeth" or acquire legally binding powers to hold governments to account in the long run?

This integrated approach requires the strengthening of existing rules and sanctions to ensure effective government accountability, but also facilitating the mobilization of social actors who demand greater government responsiveness.

From a *supply* perspective, institutional reforms in young democracies have actively sought to reinforce the legal prerogatives and mechanisms for holding governments to account. These strategies include, for example, the creation or strengthening of government offices for monitoring and oversight, such as Courts of Accounts or anti-corruption bodies. Many constitutions in Latin America, for example, have introduced provisions for the election of government officials at the national and local level. From a *demand* perspective, recent decades have witnessed a proliferation of civil society efforts to hold governments to account through collective action. Such strategies have included the implementation of social audits or the establishment of public works watchdogs. In some cases, these efforts were backed up by legal instruments such as freedom of information acts or participatory budget bylaws.

Effective accountability mechanisms can be undermined if, for example, an excessive focus on the formal or normative aspects of accountability crowds out the space for collective social action, or if social accountability efforts lack political responses to deploy clear sanctions for government inaction. Section C discusses in greater detail the need to define and evaluate the multiple dimensions required to produce effective democratic accountability.

C. PROPOSED DIMENSIONS TO EVALUATE EFFECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

The most effective form of democratic accountability takes place when a series of conditions converge:

- a) there are legal and formal institutions and mechanisms to hold governments to account;
- b) there are clearly defined agents who demand government action;
- c) there are clearly defined agents who are responsible for government action;
- d) there are legally established and effective sanctions for those who are not accountable.

These elements help define four ideal dimensions of accountability: rules or standards, answerability, responsiveness and enforceability.⁶ These dimensions provide a useful starting point for understanding how multiple attributes interact to enhance democratic accountability, and how sometimes, when examining concrete cases, improvements in one dimension may not be accompanied by improvements in other dimensions.

The first dimension refers to the existence of *clearly defined rules of the game* for holding governments to account. Thus, we look at the extent to which there are legal and established *standards* that enable effective accountability relationships. In other words, we want to see that existing rules and procedures establish clear linkages between account givers and account holders, and this is ideally defined around the provision of a specific good. To assess existing accountability standards, it is relevant to examine: (a) the extent to which existing legal provisions and prerogatives enable citizens to hold governments to account; (b) how responsibilities are defined; (c) whether there are legal provisions to ensure the dissemination of timely and transparent government information; (d) whether constitutions guarantee the political and civil freedoms of citizens; and (e) whether there are provisions to penalize government ineffectiveness.

The idea of *answerability* gauges the extent to which accountability relationships are truly reciprocal between clearly defined actors, in a way in which such actors have an understanding of who is *answerable* to whom. Answerable in this sense requires agents not only to provide timely information regarding decisions but also to be able to justify those decisions. This dimension

focuses on the *demand side of accountability*, and pays special attention to whether citizens can effectively access timely and transparent information, whether citizens have access to their Members of Congress or Parliament, whether they participate in legislative hearings, and whether citizens can freely associate and participate in electoral events.

A third dimension focuses on the *responsiveness* of government officials or the *supply side of accountability*. The idea is that government officials must be effectively willing and/or able to respond to citizens' demands given the available technical resources, economic constraints and the political context in which they interact. It is not sufficient to have clearly defined rules, and actors who actively demand government action. It is also necessary to consider existing *incentives* to give an account of actions. Some of the critical factors shaping government officials' willingness to be accountable are linked to whether government officials are elected or appointed, how they are selected or nominated, and how are they elected, how often and whether they face term limits, and so on. From the perspective of political incentives, this paper argues that elected and non-elected government officials are most likely to be effectively accountable when their government actions and responses to the electorate might also advance their electoral or career prospects in the concrete future.

The fourth dimension, *enforceability*, considers the range of effective sanctions that can contribute to improving relations of democratic accountability. This dimension acknowledges that in some cases, effective democratic accountability may not occur even when there are legal provisions, widespread demand and favourable political support to hold governments to account. The notion of sanctions refers to the roles of control or oversight institutions such as the judiciary, constitutional courts, Ombudsman offices, or legislative committees to uphold accountability standards or punish government inaction. In many countries, for example, the Office of the Attorney General has significant powers to investigate cases of alleged corruption by government officials, but they often lack effective teeth or legal prerogatives to act on findings and punish the guilty. In some cases, lack of enforceability is observed when the government directly appoints those in control of oversight institutions, or the government restricts their financial autonomy. These encroachments on institutional autonomy can undermine the workings of proactive actors and undermine the workings of formal institutions of accountability.

The four dimensions of accountability offer a more nuanced discussion of how different mechanisms of social and political accountability interact to promote effective governmental responses to the demands of citizens. In terms of democracy promotion, the four dimensions offer a more balanced approach to identifying which conditions can effectively improve accountability under different circumstances. A state-centred approach to strengthening accountability may encourage the adoption of new legislation and the creation of special offices or information or disclosure protocols without sufficient attention being paid to the demand side of accountability or the political incentives of government officials. At the other extreme, a strong focus on social accountability agents and mechanisms may privilege the allocation of financial resources to civil society and promote capacity development initiatives to strengthen the demand side of new social actors but disregard the inherent weaknesses of control or oversight

institutions that are unwilling or unable to hold governments to account.

Thus, effective democratic accountability understands state-society relations as a “two-way street, where genuine societal demand is met with decisive and autonomous government responses”.⁷ We believe that there are tremendous academic and policy benefits to using the proposed dimensions to analyse empirical cases in which there is implicit or explicit demand to improve democratic accountability. Chapter 4 provides an empirical and systematic review of reported cases and experiences of democratic accountability around the globe, and seeks to identify how the proposed dimensions complement, enhance or replace each another. Building on this review, chapter 5 seeks to establish conceptual and empirical links between effective democratic accountability and the effective (or ineffective) provision of government services.

4. ASSESSING THE EVIDENCE: ACCOUNTABILITY CASE STUDIES

This chapter uses the analytical dimensions proposed above to examine specific country experiences where there is an explicit or implicit relationship of democratic accountability among political and social actors. The research undertaken for this section surveyed over 30 case studies to determine which dimensions were present and how they were relevant to bringing about effective democratic accountability. The research showed up an interesting range of cases and some experiences that were generously labelled as examples of accountability but would barely have met any of the criteria outlined above.⁸ For the purpose of the systematic review in this chapter, we have selected 16 cases based on geographic representation and the policy issues featured as well as the type of social and political actors involved. Not all the cases feature a similar set of players or relationships, but these include national and regional governments, mayors, legislators, party leaders, civil society organizations, media organizations and organized citizens' groups. The cases also offer rich qualitative and quantitative evidence of how accountability and service delivery interact in the developing world. The case studies include examples from Brazil, Ecuador, Ghana, India, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. The sample includes cases extracted from the scholarly literature, and research findings from policy-oriented research from the IDS Centre for the Future State and the Citizens and Participation Group, as well as some interesting practical cases documenting project interventions by the International Budget Project and the Revenue Watch Institute.

Using evidence from these case studies, this chapter examines which factors contributed to effective democratic accountability. Specifically, cases are assessed according to the proposed four dimensions of accountability: what the rules of the game are (standards), who seeks accountability (answerability), why should government officials be responsive (responsiveness) and what happens if agents are not

accountable (enforceability). In reviewing these cases, this review focuses on examples of democratic accountability as an end in itself: the conditions under which governments are more responsive to citizens' demands. Chapter 5 focuses on democratic accountability as a means to service delivery: how effective accountability relationships can help improve service provision.

The cases illustrate significant variation both between and within countries on the four key dimensions outlined above. Countries may be very democratic along one dimension (i.e. the formal existence of rules and accountability mechanisms) but decidedly authoritarian or clientelistic in another, such as the use or implementation of effective sanctions. Similarly, certain democracies may feature formal mechanisms for enabling accountable relationships, while other democracies may rely on informal means that are functionally effective but not democratic (i.e. vote buying or vote trading practices). Finally, certain service sectors within countries may be structured in ways that support strong accountability relationships, such as the provision of public services through trade unions, but in other sectors, such as the management of natural resource rents, accountability relations may be deliberately non-transparent and unresponsive to citizens' demands.

A. STANDARDS

Any relationship of *accountability* is grounded on a set of "rules of the game" that provide the legal foundations to organize, promote and sanction accountability linkages. Although "best practices" can be discussed and disseminated across countries, the effectiveness of standards is context-specific, depending on the expectations and incentives of the actors involved, the number of actors in relationships of accountability and the broader political context in which accountability relationships take place. In the absence of clear or

effective standards of accountability, agents can choose to bypass accountability relationships altogether or devise alternative, informal means to hold governments to account, for example, through social mobilization and street demonstrations.

Legal provisions to promote transparency, for example, have in different countries enabled the free flow of information between state and society or between state agencies. The adoption of transparency provisions has sought to reduce information asymmetries between state and society. Many governments have traditionally guarded against revealing delicate information to the general public, but this trend has been reversed through the activities of human rights-based campaigners and growing international pressure to release such information. However, effective transparency is likely to suffer even in the presence of well-designed formal mechanisms if political actors lack incentives to share information or do not have the resources to justify their actions vis-à-vis their voters.

India is a case where the successful adoption of transparency enabling legislation in a highly democratic context effectively helped to improve democratic accountability. The adoption in 2005 of a Right to Information Act (RTIA) provided grassroots campaigners with the impetus they needed to stimulate collective action around the effective application of a Public (food) Distribution System (PDS). Using government records obtained through the RTIA, social organizations were able to examine the actual transfers of food against the provision of food subsidies under the PDS scheme to demonstrate that some shop owners, in collusion with corrupt local officials, engaged in fraudulent activities and the mismanagement of funds. These grassroots organizations used social/public audit mechanisms to disseminate information that had previously been considered exclusive to public assemblies. Thus, campaigners built an effective social movement that triggered effective responses from government officials to punish corrupt officials and restore the fairness of distribution chains (Pande 2008).

There are less positive cases in which the adoption of formal standards of accountability was ineffective, either because they lacked explicit political support or demand from citizens, or because their adoption was embedded in an adverse political environment. The attempt to implement participatory budgeting in Buenos Aires illustrates the importance of embedding agreed standards for effective accountability in political support and citizens' demands. Faced with protests and mass citizen mobilization in the wake of the 2001

financial crisis in Argentina, the chief of the city government struck a deal with his main political opponent to adopt participatory budgeting as a means of channelling public dissent. Neither civil society nor the political elite considered the reforms a viable option however, given the circumstances of the discredited national government. The system was set up, but loyal political supporters were placed in critical positions within the participatory budgeting structures. As a result, implementation varied widely, with some sections of the city choosing open participatory processes and others using a more restricted process of participation. Not surprisingly, the scheme fizzled out with the change of leadership in the city government and the programme became hostage to political struggles. This case illustrates the failure of a formal scheme to ensure democratic accountability in an adverse political context (Peruzzotti 2009).

In Mexico, the nature of traditional politics appears to have worked against the adoption of legislation to enable citizens' involvement in the planning of and budgeting for infrastructure expenditure. Electoral rules reduced the margin for political competition within constituencies, giving extraordinary power to the winning party regardless of the margin of victory. As a result, the incentives for negotiating budgetary spending with the opposition or leading citizens were drastically reduced once elected politicians came to power. In the context of a highly party-centric political system, participatory innovations were blocked by existing political parties. The Mexican experience highlights the difficulties of transforming Mexican political dynamics through participatory schemes alone (Selee 2009). Political parties could become useful instruments for making governments more open and accessible if these institutions were included in the design of participatory practices through party-affiliated groups, rather than trying to bypass existing political institutions and incorporate individual citizens alone.

B. ANSWERABILITY

The notion of answerability helps determine who is accountable to whom in a relationship of accountability. An actor is said to be answerable to another when she is required to provide information on and justify her actions and decisions to another. How states are accountable depends largely on the institutional environment in which they operate, and the political context itself determines who is accountable to whom. Through existing mechanisms and institutions, states provide the means and the incentives for agents to both

inform their principals of their decisions and justify those actions before the public.

Much of the effectiveness of government answerability is linked to how account seekers articulate their demands vis-à-vis the government. There are multiple channels and mechanisms for organizing collective action to demand effective government accountability. One example comes from the activism of a women's health organization in Mexico, which played an active role in demanding effective government action on sexual and reproductive health policy. In 1995, social organizations began to collaborate, and to actively participate with the Mexican government as well as many state-level governments, on the design and implementation of social policies to promote sexual and reproductive health. According to this model of interaction, the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) gained greater policy influence by embedding themselves with policy-makers and seeking formal relations with the government to improve services and the breadth of coverage (Gomez-Jauregui 2008).

Another positive example is found in South Africa, where social collective action through CSOs proved an effective way of improving government responses to the implementation of the Child Support Grant programme. Research conducted by IDASA, a local NGO, showed that sufficient state revenues had not been allocated to fund this essential social programme, thereby producing adverse and discriminatory effects on rural and less developed communities. Part of the problem was the lack of administrative capacity on the part of local governments to provide effective access to the state's Child Support Grant programme. Through concerted social advocacy, CSOs lobbied to incorporate many of the key recommendations made in IDASA's report into the 2003/4 budget. This example shows how collective action efforts crystallized into effective government answers to citizens' demands (Hofbauer 2006).

A useful example of democratically elected governments responding quickly and effectively to citizens' demands is the case of the Renda Mínima scheme or Minimum Income Guarantee in Sao Paulo. The scheme emerged as a result of political bargaining, and the Worker's Party administration elected in the city implemented the programme in 2001. Towards the end of the four-year electoral cycle, however, the city administrators were put under tremendous pressure to demonstrate impact, particularly on poverty alleviation (Houtzager 2008). The scheme was organized to strengthen direct linkages with citizens and consolidate its own autonomy, but the proximity of elections pushed

elected city officials to almost completely exclude CSOs from policy bargaining, and to directly attend to citizens' needs instead. The case is an illustration of a government scheme that was responding to the expressed needs of citizens but lacked the organizational capacity to maintain a strong linkage between the state and CSOs, thus undermining the perception of effective accountability throughout the process.

The key issue with answerability is to illustrate that the conditions exist for increased government responsiveness. Section C, however, demonstrates that answerability is not a sufficient condition for improved and stable democratic accountability.

C. RESPONSIVENESS

The chain of democratic accountability is designed to produce representatives who serve the dual role of holding the government to account in line with the interests of their constituencies and being accountable themselves to the citizens they serve—ensuring that they effectively represent the wishes of their voters. The question of *responsiveness* addresses the issues of when and why government officials seek to remain accountable to citizens' demands. To a large extent, the political incentives to remain accountable come from a range of institutional sources, including the nature of the party system, the electoral rules, territorial divisions, and so on. One important consideration, for example, is to determine whether a parliamentarian is in practice *accountable to more than one principal*. The presence of *competing principals*, such as the electorate in a district, but also the party leadership, the executive branch or a specific interest or lobby group, is likely to weaken the accountability linkages between elected officials and their constituents.⁹

It has been argued that in places that have majoritarian or first past the post electoral systems, elected parliamentarians are directly linked and responsible to the citizens in their district. This is the case for the Ghanaian parliament, where Members of Parliament can make a name for themselves by championing causes or delivering particularistic benefits to their constituencies. In this case, the direct linkage between a parliamentarian's performance and citizens' demands ensures a fundamental level of responsiveness that does not necessarily go through the control of political parties (Mejia Acosta 2009).

However, a direct linkage does not always yield optimal outcomes for accountability or political representation. The relationship between the elected representative and

the political party is also likely to play an important role in the nature of the politician-voter relationship. Comparative evidence from India, another parliamentary system, suggests that legislators are more likely to cater to the needs of constituents in the context of weak voter affinity for political parties. If voters are likely to demand direct and immediate constituency services from their elected representatives, they are likely to select their candidates based on specific issues or the specific attributes of candidates. Thus, legislators in these districts will be keen to provide clientelistic or particularistic benefits that they know may swing the election in their favour. By contrast, legislators acting in constituencies that have been traditionally loyal to party organizations recognize that their individual popularity has little impact on their prospects for re-election. Voters choose candidates based solely on party affiliation, and therefore individual parliamentarians have little or no incentive to provide services outside their party structures (Keefer 2009).

These insights from Africa and India are echoed in two presidential systems in Latin America. Work emerging from Ecuador and Paraguay shows that individual legislators often face a representation dilemma, as they need to be both responsive to the needs of the constituents who elected them and accountable to the leadership of the party that sponsored their names on the ballot, and potentially also responsive to the influence of interest and business groups that may have contributed in their campaigns. Clearly, this “competing principals” dilemma affects the willingness of legislators to be accountable to the electorate if they represent conflicting expectations from their constituents. Independent of the presence of party-centred or voter-centred electoral systems, legislators are more likely to initiate directly clientelistic bills when their electoral prospects depend on the direct nomination of voters, as happens in Paraguay. By contrast, when the electoral prospects of legislators depend on their nomination by party leaders, their legislative activism tends to reflect the needs of the political party and to a lesser extent their own individual agency (Mejia Acosta et al. 2009).

The empirical evidence suggests that it is not sufficient to have clear rules on accountability and widespread demand for government responsiveness. The political constraints on and incentives of government officials are critical to determining whether accountability relationships are direct or mediated through political parties, and whether the exchanges adopt the form of programmatic or informal clientelistic transactions. The section below explores what happens when governments are unresponsive.

D. ENFORCEABILITY

The existence of provisions to reward or penalize actors in an accountability relationship is perhaps the most critical and defining condition for promoting effective democratic accountability. As Oakerson states: “To be accountable means to have to answer for one’s action or inaction, and depending on the answer, to be exposed to potential sanctions, both positive and negative” (Oakerson 1989: 114). Following on from this prescription, much work focuses on the question of sanctions (i.e. what happens if actors refuse to be accountable) as a specific criterion for promoting effective accountability. While this dimension has been widely explored in the scholarly literature, few development practitioners regard the *enforcement* of sanctions as a critical element in the evaluation and measurement of accountability relationships.

In developing countries, the emphasis on the creation of formal mechanisms of state-society accountability has often ignored the presence of existing informal mechanisms of accountability. These informal institutions may have more legitimacy in the eyes of citizens but may prove less helpful in the promotion of social justice (Helmke and Levitsky 2004). They also have a hand in producing vast differences between *de jure* accountability structures and observed *de facto* relationships. The merging of these informal and formal institutions into “hybrid political orders” may have a significant impact on accountability relationships and on efforts to build and support effective states (Boege et al 2008:15). Similarly, sanctions that emerge in these settings have particular characteristics, either formal or informal.

In the context of solid democratic institutions, accountability is built on the rule of law, which effectively guides and constrains the actions of both political and social agents. The rule of law reduces the threat of impunity, but it also creates a credible threat of sanctions where service delivery fails to meet minimum standards. Although this area remains problematic in many developing countries, there have been some positive examples of where effective sanctions function properly.

In India, the 2002 Right to Education Act guarantees the provision of education by the state. This formal recognition gives citizens a potent formal mechanism for demanding access to a broadly equitable education. Should someone feel she is receiving a substandard education or being deprived of her right to education altogether, there is a legal process for demanding

accountability from the state. With the Right to Education Act as their support, CSOs campaigning in these cases can call for a judicial review to strengthen their case with government officials. While it is difficult to demonstrate that official sanctions have been applied where governments have failed to deliver on the right to education, it is clear that the threat of judicial intervention in the matter carries sufficient influence to compel governments to act in most cases (Mehta 2008).

In Brazil, the Courts of Accounts are an effective governmental mechanism to ensure the accountability of other government branches (horizontal accountability). These courts have significant legal powers to publish reports on corruption or waste, can have important reputational implications and help inform citizens to shape their voting patterns in future elections. The effectiveness of these courts is enhanced in a context of political competitiveness, in a way that can make them a direct and indirect accountability mechanism between legislators and the executive branch at the local level (Melo 2009).

Other political landscapes impose structural constraints that undermine the effectiveness of accountability measures. Tanzania offers an interesting case where the willingness of government officials to remain accountable is limited by structural constraints beyond their control. Members of Parliament in Dodoma are well-informed and knowledgeable about critical transparency issues in the extractive industries, but the dominance of one-party government makes it unlikely that any parliamentarian would oppose government policy or take a chance on proposing legislation outside of the party programme. There are incentives to remain loyal and perform the duties expected in terms of rubber stamping legislation and fulfilling basic constituency services (Mejia Acosta 2009). Interventions by control and oversight institutions to promote effective government accountability have been thwarted because these government offices lack the necessary political or financial independence from the executive to pass critical judgement on the government.

The case of Uganda illustrates the use of informal means to ensure government responsiveness. Many district dialogues lead to revelations of petty corruption in which the perpetrator is made to reimburse the cost of or replace any items stolen or illegally procured. In one case, a district health official was initially reluctant to provide any information to the monitoring committee on funds received and his disbursement plans. After repeated attempts, the issue was brought to a full meeting between district officials, including the Chief Administrative Officer, and civil society representatives. The health official reacted strongly, questioning the committee's legitimacy to ask such questions and demand information. His behaviour was publicly condemned by most people present, and after a reprimand from the Chief Administrative Officer he began to collaborate with the committee (de Renzio et al. 2006).

In the Philippines, an NGO monitoring public infrastructure projects was able to mobilize such a public outcry about corruption and inefficiency in infrastructure projects that sanctions became inevitable. Government audit teams investigated the initial complaints and filed administrative cases against 11 public works engineers. Although politicians tried to intervene on their behalf, other CSOs supported the cause while the cases were being prosecuted. Eventually, the accused were found guilty and suspended from office without pay for periods ranging from four to nine months (World Bank 2007).

This section illustrates how the presence of effective enforcement mechanisms is critical to encouraging government responsiveness or at least deterring inaction vis-à-vis citizens' demands. The existence of effective sanctions is additional to clearly defined rules, social demands for government action and a willingness by government officials to remain accountable. Chapter 5 provides a systematic examination of how the four dimensions of democratic accountability interact to promote improved service delivery.

5. ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY ON SERVICE DELIVERY

The question of whether effective democratic accountability contributes to improved service delivery reflects an unfinished debate between scholarly and policy-oriented approaches to the concept of accountability. Most of the theoretical work on accountability has focused on analysing the enabling factors and challenges for improved democratic accountability. For development practitioners, however, the most prominent question is whether democratic accountability has a positive impact on service delivery.

Far from establishing direct relations of causality (or resolving whether accountability is a dependent or independent variable), this chapter offers a systematic method for evaluating whether accountability mechanisms *are associated with* the improved provision of services. The proposed method will require more systematic comparisons and better data collection. Nonetheless, although the evidence and conclusions are preliminary, the systematic review of cases suggests that effective accountability is indeed associated with improved service delivery, and that much of the attention reflects a focus on the formal rules and social demand for accountability but less attention is paid to the alignment of political incentives and the effective application of sanctions. This chapter discusses some of the challenges involved in examining service delivery outcomes, compares experiences of democratic accountability and highlights some of the constraints on service delivery.

A. WHAT IS A SERVICE DELIVERY OUTCOME?

The cases reviewed in this report illustrate important variations depending on the “service” or “outcome” that is being produced. Some of the outcomes produce more transparent management of public finances or public works, improve the ability of citizens to influence

decision-making processes, ensure the effective distribution of food subsidies, promote better governance in the extractive industries or ensure the provision of particularistic legislation. Most of the cases reviewed feature the implicit or explicit provision of a concrete good or ad hoc service that is considered important for a particular community. Further work would need, however, to define the type of services provided, and whether the intervention aims for universal coverage, value for money or improved service quality. It is also important to consider that democratic accountability mechanisms should aim for the sustainable provision of goods and services that are not solely dependent on the political abilities of social entrepreneurs.

For example, the adoption of a poverty reduction strategy is often cited as a concrete policy outcome that can be achieved with the contribution of effective democratic accountability mechanisms. The logic is that government officials should be concerned with the adoption of policies that benefit the majority of voters, especially the poor and the marginalized. The linkages between the demands of a constituent living in poverty and a career-oriented politician, however, are difficult to determine. Research emerging from a Peru case study suggests that elected legislators: (a) have a wide range of interpretations and definitions of what constitutes an effective poverty reduction strategy; (b) have short term political horizons that are incompatible with the long term programmatic strategies needed for poverty reduction; and (c) have to face institutional factors that constrain the ability of legislators to engage in poverty reduction strategies, such as the role of internal party dynamics, constitutional restrictions on service delivery and the absence of technical staff (Mejia Acosta, 2008). The existence of these factors shapes the nature of the service delivery options that government officials are able to deliver in country-specific circumstances.

B. COMPARING EXPERIENCES OF DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Table 1 provides a detailed review of 16 case studies in which there is an explicit or implicit link between accountability and some kind of service provision. The underlying premise is to test whether a combination of multiple accountability dimensions is conducive to improved patterns of service delivery. In other words, it is not sufficient that there are clear standards and widespread demand for the provision of accountability. Agents need to have the appropriate incentives to be accountable and there need to be clearly defined sanctions for government inaction. For each country case, we have scored the presence of these four attributes from 0 (complete absence) to 3 (criterion is fully met).

To evaluate the presence of accountability standards, for example, we looked at attributes such as how the democratic political system works in electoral terms, whether there are explicit provisions to ensure accountability between government officials and citizens, if there is appropriate disclosure of information

available to citizens, whether these provisions are enshrined in the constitution and whether all the above have been legitimized by citizens. To evaluate answerability, we looked at how clearly defined are government officials' responsibilities to provide a service, if there is effective demand for the disclosure of government information, if there are organized groups or CSOs demanding this information, whether citizens can participate in parliamentary hearings or access legislative committees, and so on. The responsiveness dimension was evaluated in terms of whether government officials are appointed or elected, whether elected politicians are selected by the party leadership or directly by members of the public, and under what electoral formula, how often there are elections and whether those elected face term limits. For the fourth dimension, enforceability, we looked at whether there are formal political or administrative sanctions for government inaction, whether control and oversight agencies have the political and financial autonomy to enforce government responsiveness or penalize inaction, and whether the judiciary has effective prerogatives to investigate individuals and punish those found guilty.

Table 1 : Assessing the dimensions of accountability

Case	Sector	Country	Standards	Answerability	Responsiveness	Enforceability	Total
1	Food distribution	India	3	3	1	3	10
10	Participatory budgeting	Brazil	3	2	2	2	9
13	Particularistic Legislation	India	3	2	2	1	8
4	Minimum income	Brazil	3	1	3	1	8
6	Education	India	3	2	1	2	8
15a	Extractive industries	Ghana	2	2	2	1	7
8	Budget monitoring	Uganda	2	1	1	2	6
14b	Particularistic legislation	Paraguay	2	2	1	1	6
9	Public works	Philippines	1	2	0	2	5
16	Pro-poor legislation	Peru	2	2	1	0	5
7	Child support	South Africa	2	1	2	0	5
15b	Extractive industries	Tanzania	2	2	1	0	5
14a	Particularistic legislation	Ecuador	2	2	1	0	5
3	Health reform	Brazil	1	1	2	0	4
2	Social spending	Mexico	0	2	0	1	3
5	Reproductive health	Mexico	0	2	1	0	3
12	Participatory budgeting	Mexico	1	1	0	0	2
11	Participatory budgeting	Argentina	1	0	0	0	1
			33	30	21	16	

Table 1 evaluates and compares the scores obtained by the different case studies across the four dimensions of democratic accountability. The scores are added for each case in the right hand column and according to each dimension in the bottom row.¹⁰

The first observable finding is that effective democratic accountability appears to be related to improved service delivery. Indeed, relatively high scores of 8 to 10 out of a possible 12 are consistent with the case narratives about improved food distribution systems and the right to education in India, as well as participatory budgeting and minimum incomes in Brazil. In all these cases there are well-defined standards and rules to guarantee democratic accountability, active engagement by social organizations to demand those human rights, and a favourable range of political incentives and effective sanctions to ensure government responsiveness. At the lower end of the scale, there are cases ranked 4 or lower in which there is an absence of accountability provisions, and there are limited opportunities to demand, or incentives to provide, effective government accountability. In such cases there is little scope for or strength in enforcement mechanisms to apply effective sanctions. In contrast to the accountability experiences of India or Brazil, these cases feature poor accountability practices in countries ruled by traditional hegemonic parties, such as Mexico and Argentina, or that were scarcely democratic, such as Brazil during the military dictatorship. This is not a trivial finding as it highlights the fact that a country's democratic context matters if effective accountability relationships are to take root. It also raises the need to invest in strengthening accountability initiatives, especially in countries that lack a strong democratic tradition.

The second relevant finding confirms the hypothesis that most country experiences with democratic accountability tend to focus on the adoption and existence of clear rules of the game and to promote widespread social mobilization to hold governments to account. Much less attention is paid to the incentives and resources that government officials actually have to respond to such challenges (the responsiveness aspect) or to the question of the existence of credible sanctions to punish government inaction. In other words, the emphasis is placed on the social dimension of accountability relationships but insufficient attention is paid to the political incentives to be accountable. When comparing the scores, the first two dimensions (standards 33 and answerability 30) score nearly double the last two (responsiveness 21 and sanctions 16). Furthermore, almost all the cases with low service delivery scores have no provision for effective sanctions.

This helps make the case for incorporating the political dimension of accountability around service delivery into a debate that has traditionally focused on social accountability dynamics.

C. OTHER CONSTRAINTS ON SERVICE DELIVERY

Beyond the existence of four relevant dimensions of democratic accountability, it is necessary to highlight and briefly discuss the importance of the *structural constraints* that are likely to undermine the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms in the long run. These constraints include broader *institutional* characteristics such as: a strong military tradition weighing down a new democracy; the *proliferation* of sector-specific policy actors, for example, trade unions, business lobbies or external donors and creditors, that set boundaries on potential reforms and can limit the capacity of governments to respond; and *sector-specific* rigidities, including technical challenges for the provision of specific services such as water or drainage. The magnitude of these factors and their relevance to service delivery or provision need to be explored in greater detail in the specialist literature.

The recurrent use of informal or traditional practices such as clientelism is also likely to undermine or bias the impact of democratic accountability on service provision. As is discussed above, the provision of discrete and visible goods that can be provided in the short run is likely to be a concrete form by which elected politicians effectively deliver to their constituents while maximizing their political fortunes. Conversely, the provision of long term or more diffuse "outcomes" such as health care reforms will present greater challenges and lead to disincentives to provide government services.

Finally, it is necessary to recognize that not all the dimensions vary in the same direction, and that there are important trade-offs to be made between them when it comes to providing government services. In some cases, an exclusive focus on "rigid" accountability mechanisms, such as the adoption of rules, standards and sanctions, may crowd out the adoption of "soft" mechanisms that focus on answerability and responsiveness. Thus, it is necessary to recognize the complementarity of approaches and their country-specific attributes in order to predict and anticipate the impact of democratic accountability on service delivery outcomes.

6. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper argues that effective social and political accountability mechanisms can contribute to government responsiveness and improved service delivery in young democracies. The association between accountability and service provision is complex, context-specific and difficult to measure. Nonetheless, the fundamental premise holds true: government officials who are subject to demands from organized voters equipped with legal provisions, political motivation and credible sanctions are more likely to respond to citizens' demands than those who are not. This section summarizes the main findings of the paper and outlines some policy implications to inform and influence the ongoing efforts of International IDEA's Democracy and Development Programme to promote and strengthen democratic accountability across the globe.

A. THE MISSING ASPECTS OF DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY: A BRIEF SUMMARY

1. The main contribution of this paper is to *bring political dynamics (actors, incentives and arenas) to the front of ongoing accountability debates*. It argues that the number of democratic agents, their incentives and the arenas in which they work have concrete implications for the nature of accountability relationships. It matters whether there are one or multiple account givers (or account holders), whether these are elected or appointed and whether they have short- or long-term ambitions. In a democracy, accountability relationships rarely take place between two single actors: a voter who delegates authority and a government official who responds. In contemporary representative democracies, there are widespread variations to the basic model.
 - a. Agents or representatives often have to respond to the expectations, needs and demands of multiple and competing principals. An elected legislator may be responsive to the citizens who put her in

office, but her political career may depend on the support of her party leader, or the group that funds her campaign. Accountability suffers when agents are unable to reconcile conflicting mandates.

- b. Government officials have different incentives to respond to citizens' demands. Non-elected agents, such as civil servants, are directly responsive to the elected official who appointed them—and can in theory remove them. Accountability suffers if the incentives of government officials are not linked to serving the interests of the public.
- c. Government agents with greater autonomy or specialist knowledge may be tempted to ignore citizens' demands and/or bypass mechanisms of control and oversight. This can often be the case where government officials enjoy considerable job security, form part of a government majority, or develop specialist knowledge that gives them unique advantages over the principals. Accountability is undermined when autonomous agents are beyond the control and oversight of other government agencies.

From an accountability perspective, the recurrent use of informal or traditional practices such as clientelism emerges as a concrete and tangible form of democratic accountability for service provision. Through the provision of discrete and visible goods, elected politicians may be able to effectively deliver constituent services while maximizing their political fortunes. A major challenge is then how to encourage the demand for (and provision of) government services that benefit the majority of citizens in the long run.

2. A second contribution of this paper is to document the existence of *a gap between existing understandings of political and social accountability*. The paper acknowledges that formal political accountability mechanisms (free and fair elections, freedom of

information acts, independent legislative and judicial bodies) are not sufficient to meet the specific demands of citizens. Nor do they offer the best channels for obtaining immediate action from service providers. In addition, social accountability mechanisms (including social audits, street protests and community action) do not always elicit government responsiveness if they lack explicit mechanisms to sanction or reward the performance of government officials.

The challenge of strengthening accountability mechanisms to improve service delivery can be confronted by addressing two fundamental and complementary questions:

- a. How can formal and legal accountability mechanisms be made more sensitive and responsive to the multiple demands of citizens?
- b. How can existing social efforts of protest and mobilization eventually gain “more teeth” or acquire legally binding powers to hold governments to account in the long run?

This integrated approach argues that improved accountability requires strengthened rules and sanctions, but also a facilitated mobilization of social actors who demand greater government responsiveness.

3. A third contribution of this paper is to *disaggregate the notion of democratic accountability* into four analytical dimensions: rules or standards, answerability, responsiveness and enforceability. The four dimensions of accountability offer a more nuanced discussion of how different mechanisms of social and political accountability interact to promote effective governmental responses to the demands of citizens.

- a. The standards dimension looks at the extent to which there are *clearly defined rules of the game for holding governments to account*, that is, the extent to which existing legal provisions and prerogatives enable effective accountability relationships, governments are required to disseminate timely and transparent information and sanctions exist to punish ineffective government.
- b. The dimension of *answerability* focuses on the *demand side of accountability*. It pays special attention to whether citizens can effectively access timely and transparent information, whether citizens have access to their local councillors or

Members of Congress or Parliament, whether they participate in legislative hearings and whether citizens can freely associate and participate in electoral events.

c. The third dimension, *responsiveness*, looks at *the supply side of accountability*. It explores whether government officials have incentives to respond to citizens’ demands, given the available technical resources, economic constraints and the political context in which they interact. From this perspective, the paper argues that government officials are most likely to be effectively accountable when their actions also advance their electoral or career prospects in the concrete future.

d. The fourth dimension, *enforceability*, looks at effective sanctions that can contribute to improving democratic accountability. It focuses on the roles of control or oversight institutions such as the judiciary, constitutional courts and legislative committees in upholding accountability standards or punishing government inaction.

From the perspective of democracy promotion, the four dimensions offer a more balanced approach to identifying which conditions can effectively improve accountability under different circumstances. A state-centred approach to strengthening accountability may encourage the adoption of new legislation and the creation of special offices or information disclosure protocols, without sufficient attention being paid to the demand side of accountability or the political incentives of government officials. At the other extreme, a strong focus on social accountability agents and mechanisms may privilege the allocation of financial resources to civil society and promote capacity development initiatives to strengthen the demand side of new social actors but disregard the inherent weaknesses of control or oversight institutions that are unwilling or unable to hold governments to account.

4. A fourth contribution of the paper is to document *a positive association between effective accountability and the adequate provision of government services*. The linkage between the two is complex, context-specific and difficult to assess. The reported findings, however, suggest that government officials have greater incentives to respond to citizens’ demands when organized voters mobilize, when they appeal to existing legal provisions, and there are credible sanctions for government inaction.

- a. The first observable finding is that cases reporting on improved food distribution systems and the right to education (India), as well as participatory budgeting and minimum incomes (Brazil) also tend to score high in comparative assessments of effective accountability. In all these cases there are well-defined standards and rules to guarantee democratic accountability, active engagement by social organizations to demand those human rights, and a favourable range of political incentives and effective sanctions to ensure government responsiveness. By contrast, service delivery tends to suffer in countries that exhibit a traditional democratic deficit (i.e. due to the presence of authoritarian legacies).
- b. The second finding confirms the notion that effective democratic accountability is in most countries associated with an emphasis on the normative or social dimensions of accountability (the existence of clear rules of the game and widespread social mobilization to hold governments to account). Much less attention is paid to the incentives and resources that government officials actually have to respond to such challenges (the responsiveness aspect) or to the question of existing credible sanctions to punish government inaction. The empirical analysis shows that comparative scores for the first two dimensions (standards and responsiveness) nearly double the scores for the last two dimensions (responsiveness and sanctions). Furthermore, almost all the cases with low service delivery scores have no provision for effective sanctions.

This helps make the case for incorporating the political dimension of accountability around service delivery into a debate that has traditionally focused on social accountability dynamics.

Other, additional, factors that undermine effective service provision will escape this analysis. Each policy realm requires its own interpretation to establish the standards, relationships and sanctions for effective accountability. For example, social demands in a service sector such as drainage are likely to receive less of a governmental response compared to other sectors, regardless of the country. It is necessary to interpret the conclusions and preliminary findings in the context of wider structural, sector- and country-specific factors that lead to the successful or unsuccessful provision of government services.

B. MAKING ACCOUNTABILITY WORK FOR SERVICE DELIVERY: POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This paper seeks to contribute to and advance International IDEA's prolific work on promoting effective democratic accountability for service delivery around the globe. Building on the reported findings, the following policy recommendations aim to inform the work of development practitioners, country experts, civil society organizations and students of accountability. The paper outlines four implications:

1. *Understanding country politics matters.* The paper shows that social activism and mobilization initiatives are likely to be diluted unless they clearly engage with defined rules, sanctions and political incentives to convert social activism into effective government action.
 - a. A specific policy implication is to develop a greater awareness of the political and structural constraints that government officials face when delivering public services. IDEA partners could promote in-country stakeholder assessments that address the issue of "*why government officials should care about providing constituency services for the people who are poor.*" The difference between government officials "being unable to" and "being unwilling to" provide responsive government would have important connotations for International IDEA's effective democracy support objectives.
2. *Promoting selective social interventions.* The paper acknowledges and documents the valuable contributions of citizens and organized civil society organizations demanding government responsiveness and better service delivery. The number of government agents, their temporal ambitions and political arenas in which they compete have a direct impact on citizens' ability to hold governments to account.
 - a. A concrete policy implication is to help civil society organizations, citizens' groups and political parties identify the most relevant entry points to effectively influencing government action. The guiding question here is: "*How can citizens effectively hold governments to account?*" Depending on the nature of the stakeholder analysis, effective interventions may take the form of supporting the growth of social networks in highly repressive environments. This intervention would help increase governments' *responsiveness* to social

demands. A different strategy, suitable for more mature democracies, would be to encourage a policy-oriented dialogue between thematic civil society groups (on gender, energy sustainability, etc.) and corresponding legislative committees. This latter form of intervention has the potential to produce long-term impacts on government accountability.

3. *Facilitate positive feedback.* Effective democratic accountability is a public good that can have positive implications for government officials. There is much to gain from focusing on the potential electoral benefits of delivering effective government services.
 - a. Government officials, directly elected officials at the local level (mayors and councillors) and new national legislators are quite keen on learning ways in which they can be more effective vis-à-vis their voters. Depending on the country, there are multiple mechanisms that governments can and cannot use to fulfil their representative roles, but there are very few instances of young politicians learning which of these mechanisms are suitable and how they work in a specific context. This is an area for effective development in the future.
 - b. Media outlets could also benefit from understanding how can they help politicians to

effectively respond to the demands and human rights of their voters. This type of training would help media outlets focus on reporting corruption scandals but also reporting positive actions taken forward by politicians.

4. Effective sanctions are important. One of the challenges emerging from this paper is how to align political motivation with legal or formal sanctions. The empirical evidence reported in this review demonstrates that cases of poor government performance are also likely to lack credible incentives for and effective sanctions on politicians.
 - a. Effective work can be done to help governments set up, fund, capacitate and strengthen control and oversight institutions, such as Accounts Tribunals, Ombudsmen or corresponding legislative committees.
 - b. Development cooperation can also promote and convene multi-stakeholder meetings to gather consensus or public commitments around transparency and accountability initiatives. Depending on the specific country context, these public events may create binding commitments from governments and potentially generate public sanctions for politicians who have failed to keep to agreements.

7. REFERENCES

- Boege, V., Brown, A., Clements, K. and Nolan, A., "On Hybrid Political Orders and Emerging States: State Formation in the Context of Fragility", *Berghof Handbook Dialogue* 8 (2008)
- Carey, J.M., *Legislative Voting and Accountability* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009)
- The Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD), "Tracking Leakage of Public Resource in Education" (Accra, Ghana: CDD, 2008)
- De Renzio, P., Azeem, V. and Ramkumar, V., "Budget Monitoring as an Advocacy Tool: Uganda Debt Network", *Lessons from Civil Society Budget Analysis and Advocacy Initiatives* (Washington, D.C.: International Budget Project, 2006)
- Dowbor, M., "Origins of Successful Health Sector Reform Public Health Professionals and Institutional Opportunities in Brazil", in Houtzager P., Joshi, A. and Gurza Lavallo, A. (eds), *State Reform and Social Accountability: Brazil, India and Mexico*, *IDS Bulletin* 38/6 (Brighton, UK: IDS, 2008)
- Duverger, M., *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (New York: Wiley, 1954)
- Foresti, M., Sharma, B. and Evans, A., "Voice for Accountability." ODI Briefing Paper 31 (London: ODI, 2007)
- Global Fund ATM and International HIV/AIDS Alliance, *Civil Society Success on the Ground: Community Systems Strengthening and Dual-track Financing* (Geneva, Switzerland and Brighton, UK, 2008), pp. 25–27
- Goetz, Anne Marie and Jenkins, Rob, *Reinventing Accountability: Making Democracy Work for Human Development* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)
- Gomez-Jauregui, "Participation in Reproductive Health Policies in the Context of Health System Reform in Mexico", in Houtzager, P., Joshi, A. and Gurza Lavallo, A. (eds), *State Reform and Social Accountability: Brazil, India and Mexico*, *IDS Bulletin* 38/6 (January 2008)
- Grant, R. and Keohane, R., "Accountability and Abuses of Power in World Politics", *American Political Science Review* 99 (2005), pp. 29–43
- Haggard, S. and McCubbins, M., *Presidents, Parliaments and Policy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001)
- Helmke, G. and Levitsky, S. (eds), *Informal Institutions and Democracy: Lessons from Latin America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006)
- Hevia de la Jara, F., "Between Individual and Collective Action: Citizen Participation and Public Oversight in Mexico's Oportunidades Programme", in Houtzager, P., Joshi, A. and Gurza Lavallo, A. (eds), *State Reform and Social Accountability: Brazil, India and Mexico*, *IDS Bulletin* 38/6 (January 2008)
- Hofbauer, H., "Sustained Work and Dedicated Capacity: IDASA's Experience in Applied Budget Work in South Africa", *Lessons from Civil Society Budget Analysis and Advocacy Initiatives* (Washington, D.C.: International Budget Project, 2006)
- Houtzager, P., "The Silent Revolution in Anti-poverty Programmes: Minimum Income Guarantees in Brazil", in Houtzager, P., Joshi, A. and Gurza Lavallo, A. (eds) *State Reform and Social Accountability: Brazil, India and Mexico*, *IDS Bulletin* 38/6 (January 2008)
- Hossain, N., "Rude Accountability in the Unreformed State: Informal Pressures on Frontline Bureaucrats in Bangladesh", *IDS Working Paper* 319 (Brighton: IDS, February 2009)

- Joshi, Anuradha, "Producing Social Accountability: The Impact of Service Delivery Reforms", *IDS Bulletin* 38/6 (2008)
- Keefer, P. and Khemani, S., "When do Legislators Pass on Pork? The Role of Political Parties in Determining Legislator Effort", *American Political Science Review* 103 (2009), pp. 99–112
- Kenney, C. D., "Horizontal Accountability: Concepts and Conflicts", in Mainwaring, S. and Welna, C. (eds), *Democratic Accountability in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 55–76
- Kiewiet, D.R. and McCubbins, M., *The Logic of Delegation* (Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 1991)
- Kitschelt, H.P. and Wilkinson, S., *Patrons or Policies? Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007)
- Mainwaring, S. and Welna, C., *Democratic Accountability in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)
- Mayhew, D.R., *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974)
- McCubbins, M. and Schwartz, T., "Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols Versus Fire Alarms", *American Journal of Political Science* 28 (1984), pp.16–79
- Mehta, A., "Good Effort, but Must Try Harder: Civil Society Organisations and Education in Delhi", in Houtzager, P., Joshi, A. and Gurza Lavalle, A. (eds), *State Reform and Social Accountability: Brazil, India and Mexico*, *IDS Bulletin* 38/6 (2008) (Brighton: IDS, January)
- Mejia Acosta, A., *Pilot Programme to Strengthen Parliamentary Oversight of the Extractive Sector in Ghana and Tanzania: Baselines Overview and M&E Report* (London: Revenue Watch Institute, 2009)
- Mejia Acosta, A., "Do Legislatures—and Legislators—Matter for Poverty Reduction?", *Peru Country Report*, (Lima: International IDEA, 2008)
- Mejia, Acosta, A., Pérez-Liñán, A. and Saiegh, S., "The Partisan Foundations of Legislative Particularism in Latin America", Mimeo. Social Science Research Network. Uploaded October 2007, <http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1018099>
- Melo, M.A., "Democratizing Budgetary Decisions and Execution in Brazil: More Participation or Redesign of Formal Institutions?", in Peruzzotti, E. and Selee, A. (eds), *Participatory Innovation and Representative Democracy in Latin America* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009)
- Morgenstern, S., *Patterns of Legislative Politics: Roll Call Voting in the United States and Latin America's Southern Cone* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004)
- Newell, P. and Wheeler, J., "Rights, Resources and the Politics of Accountability: An Introduction", in Newell, P. and Wheeler, J. (eds), *Rights, Resources and the Politics of Accountability* (London: Zed Books, 2005)
- Niskanen, W., "Bureaucrats and Politicians", *Journal of Law and Economics* 18 (December 1975), pp. 617–43
- Oakerson, R., "Governance Structures for Enhancing Accountability and Responsiveness", in Perry, James L. (ed.), *Handbook of Public Administration* (San Francisco: Jossey–Bass, 1989)
- O'Donnell, G., "Horizontal Accountability in New Democracies", *Journal of Democracy* 9/3 (1998), pp. 112–126
- Olson, M., "Dictatorship, Democracy and Development", *American Political Science Review* 87/3 (1993), pp. 567–576
- Pande, S., "The Rights to Information and Societal Accountability: The Case of the Delhi PDS Campaign", in Houtzager, P., Joshi, A. and Gurza Lavalle, A. (eds) *State Reform and Social Accountability: Brazil, India and Mexico*, *IDS Bulletin* 38/6 (January 2008)
- Payne, Mark, Zovatto, Daniel, Carillo Flores, Fernando, Allamand Zavala, Andrés. *Democracies in Development. Politics and Reform in Latin America*. Inter American Development Bank and International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. Washington D.C. 2002
- Pérez-Liñán, A., *Presidential Impeachment and the New Political Instability in Latin America* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

- Peruzzotti, E., “The Politics of Institutional Innovation: The Implementation of Participatory Budgeting in the City of Buenos Aires”, in Peruzzotti, E. and Selee, A. (eds), *Participatory Innovation and Representative Democracy in Latin America* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009)
- Peruzzotti, E. and Selee, A. (eds), *Participatory Innovation and Representative Democracy in Latin America* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009)
- Peruzzotti, E. and Smulovitz, C., “Societal and Horizontal Controls: Two Cases about a Fruitful Relationship”, in Scott Mainwaring and Christopher Welna (eds), *Accountability, Democratic Governance and Political Institutions in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)
- Pitkin, H.F., *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967)
- Schedler, A., “Conceptualizing Accountability”, in Schedler, Andreas, Diamond, Larry and Plattner, Marc F. (eds), *The Self-Restraining State: Power and Accountability in New Democracies* (Boulder, Co.: Lynne Rienner, 1999)
- Selee, A., “An Alternative to Clientelism? Participatory Innovation in Mexico”, in Peruzzotti, E. and Selee, A. (eds), *Participatory Innovation and Representative Democracy in Latin America* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009)
- Shugart, M.S. and Carey, J.M., “Incentives to Cultivate a Personal Vote”, *Electoral Studies* 14/4 (1995), pp. 417–439
- Siavelis, P. and Morgenstern, S. (eds), *Pathways to Power: Political Recruitment and Candidate Selection in Latin America* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008)
- Manin, B., Przeworski, A. and Stokes, S., “Elections and Representation”, in Przeworski, A., Stokes, S. and Manin, B. (eds), *Democracy, Accountability and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- von Kaltenborn-Stachau, H., “The Missing Link: Fostering Positive Citizen-State Relations in Post-conflict Environments” *World Bank Policy Brief* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2008)
- World Bank, “*Empowering the Marginalized: Case Studies of Social Accountability in Asia*” (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2007), pp. 44–47

ENDNOTES

- 1 This essay focuses exclusively on mechanisms of democratic accountability that apply to the provision of public goods, as opposed to relationships of private or individual accountability devised to ensure the provision of private goods.
- 2 More broadly, the concept of political accountability can be conceived as a notion of accountability applied to the exercise of public as opposed to private authority.
- 3 Schedler (1999) refers to dimensions (b) and (c) as components of answerability.
- 4 There are important differences between the role of the legislative branch in parliamentary and presidential systems, but this section keeps this contrast to a minimum to focus the discussion on accountability institutions.
- 5 The notion of political accountability in this strict sense does not include the horizontal relationships that take place when different government spheres hold each other accountable. Like the children's game of "rock, scissors and paper" where one option beats the next in a continuous cycle, what is essential to horizontal accountability "is not hierarchy but a network of accountability relationships that leaves no agency unaccountable" (Kenney 2003: 65).
- 6 The last three dimensions are consistent with IDEA's Democratic Accountability Assessment Framework.
- 7 Grant and Keohane note that "information and sanctions are necessary but not sufficient conditions for accountability. They presuppose norms of legitimacy to establish, not only the standards by which the use of power can be judged, but also who is authorised to wield power and who is properly entitled to call the power-wielders to account" (2005: 30).
- 8 These cases are included in the appendix but we have not summarized their main features or calculated their accountability scores in the corresponding sections.
- 9 This is the subject of a wider debate on whether individual legislators are deemed to be accountable to citizens (Mayhew 1974) or they can achieve better electoral returns by empowering a party leader instead (Cox and McCubbins 1993).
- 10 It would be a fair criticism that the proposed accountability scores are comparing dissimilar things along different dimensions, and that they are not necessarily additive (e.g. that a one point increment on standards is not the equivalent of a one point improvement in sanctions). However, the purpose of this table is to establish relative comparisons in multiple cases to verify whether there are some relevant comparisons to make when a similar initiative is applied in two countries, or whether two different projects can yield similar results when applied to the same country.

ANNEX: MAKING ACCOUNTABILITY WORK: A DESK REVIEW OF CASES

CASE 1: INDIA—THE PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

Pande, S., “The Right to Information and societal Accountability: The Case of the Delhi PDS Campaign”, in Houtzager, P., Joshi, A. and Gurza Lavalle, A. (eds), *State Reform and Social Accountability: Brazil, India and Mexico*, *IDS Bulletin* 38/6 (January 2008)

Overview

The public distribution system (PDS) in India illustrates how an appropriate mix of political and societal action can elicit positive outcomes in terms of improved accountability within service delivery sectors. That is not to say that it fundamentally improved service delivery per se, but the food distribution system was a crucial entry point for public collective action to successfully provoke political consequences.

Principal actors

This case revolves around three principal sets of actors: local officials, ‘fair price’ shop owners and citizen groups. Local officials and shop owners were colluding in Delhi to restrict access to subsidized food, reaping the profits of selling goods at market prices instead. Citizen groups mobilized using data gleaned from Right to Information (RTI) requests to demand accountability for this service failure. Municipal and national leaders became involved and the Food Commissioner ultimately stepped in to impose sanctions on several of the worst offenders among shop owners and officials.

Mechanisms for political accountability

India is the world’s biggest democracy. Every five years, its citizens are able, through elections, to hold their officials accountable for the actions taken in office. Owing to its federal nature and its implementation of many decentralization reforms, this democratic process

runs deep into the Indian localities. However, in spite of this institutionalized democracy, there is still reason to question whether traditional political accountability functions well in India.

Among the many concerns are: complicity between the higher and lower levels of government, which hinders accountability mechanisms; the lack of an effective sanctioning authority outside infrequent elections; and the co-option of, although free and fair, elections by parties and candidates that lack issue-based platforms. As such, democratic politics in India remain quite removed from the concerns of the general population, weakening the potential of political accountability as a potent force in service delivery reform.

Analysis of the PDS bears this out. The PDS is India’s national food security programme, designed to subsidise the cost of food grains and other essential items for poor families. Yet, in spite of its being under government control, elected representatives played no part in administering the programme or distributing the supplies. Rather, it was left to local officials and ‘fair price shops’ to regulate the implementation of the programme. The result was an inefficient, corrupt and poorly run service that failed to meet the needs of the target population.

Mechanisms for social accountability

In 2005, the passage of the Right to Information Act provided grassroots campaigners with the impetus they needed to stimulate collective action. Using government records obtained through the RTI Act, social organizations were able to demonstrate that fraud on the part of shop owners, enabled by complicit local officials, was undermining the PDS. The campaigners used social/public audit mechanisms, in which information previously considered secret was read aloud in public assemblies, to build a social movement.

In this case, neither political nor societal activities acting in isolation could generate accountability in service delivery. Instead, what was needed was a strategic intersection of the two, facilitated by the timely RTI Act.

Two factors worked in favour of the campaigners. First, the food delivery programme was sufficiently important to people's interests that, on this specific issue, citizens from across a broad spectrum were willing to mobilize collectively against corrupt interests. Second, the RTI Act provided the necessary impetus for these campaigners to expose the malfeasance of the shop owners and local officials. Without this legislation, proof of poor service delivery would have been difficult to come by. Information is power for social accountability, if it used to good effect.

Sanctions

Collective action on the part of citizens yielded both informal and formal accountability outcomes. Through this process of public naming and shaming, some shop owners entered into discussions with the campaigners to work out differences and improve services, but campaigners also met violent resistance from embedded interests within the PDS. Ultimately, the movement gained the ear of the Food Commissioner who initiated a formal review of the PDS across Delhi, resulting in several shop owner and local official suspensions.

Implications/results for service provision

Social accountability in this case cannot be shown to have significantly improved service delivery. It did, however, break down corrupt networks that had formed around the service delivery mechanisms, making it more likely that services will improve in the future.

CASE 2: MEXICO—PROGRESA-OPORTUNIDADES

Hevia de la Jara, F., “Between Individual and Collective Action: Citizen Participation and Public Oversight in Mexico’s Oportunidades Programme”, in Houtzager, P., Joshi, A. and Gurza Lavalle, A. (eds), *State Reform and Social Accountability: Brazil, India and Mexico*, IDS Bulletin 38/6 (January 2008)

Overview

The Progres-Oportunidades case in Mexico provides evidence that even the best designed systems of political accountability can ultimately be flawed, particularly in the context of urban-rural, and centre-periphery divides. Centralized control has its limitations and elements of societal collective action can be useful in extending accountability into areas and levels of decentralization which the state has difficulty penetrating.

Principal actors

The principal actors in the design and delivery of the Progres-Oportunidades programme are the Mexican central government, local elites/powerbrokers acting as intermediaries between state and citizen, and local citizens’ organizations.

Mechanisms for political accountability

As a reaction to decades of corrupt, single-party rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), many sectors in Mexico have been designed to operate under strict central control, in an effort to limit opportunities for corruption and clientelism at the local level. Accountability in service delivery programmes, such as Progres-Oportunidades, follows this structure and, as a result, the only political representatives that have a hand in the administration of the programme are those who have been elected centrally. The planning and execution of the programme, by design, attempt to bypass officials at other levels of government.

This institutionalized mistrust of local officials both simplified and complicated the route of political accountability for ensuring effective service delivery. While the locus of power was clear, the distance, literally and figuratively, of the central government from many of the programme’s beneficiaries meant that political accountability mechanisms were essentially limited to national elections. National-level politicians have broader constituencies, giving preference to higher level issues over local concerns. Moreover, with municipal and regional officials sidelined, unhappy

citizens had fewer options available to them for demanding better services.

Mechanisms for social accountability

Progres-Oportunidades is a conditional cash transfer programme in which the heads of poor households (usually women) are provided with funds to improve the family’s access to education, health care and nutrition. Recipients are targeted based on a mathematical scoring system, again in an attempt to eliminate opportunities for corruption. However, for many years there was no formal system for beneficiaries to articulate demands to the central authority. Not until 2003 was a Citizens’ Complaint System established to enable citizens to communicate by telephone or letter with the National Coordination office.

This system of direct centre-citizen interaction soon broke down, however, when it became apparent that a large proportion of the intended beneficiaries could not access the complaint system due to a lack of infrastructure in remote rural areas. Central officials responded by removing some of the restrictions that had been imposed at the programme’s inception. New intermediaries in the form of local officials and volunteers were introduced to help facilitate accountability throughout the system.

Unfortunately, these new actors were either ineffective or prone to clientelism. Given the nature of the Progres-Oportunidades programme, there were ample opportunities for these intermediaries to extract rents from their positions of authority. They were essentially gatekeepers, giving approval for the distribution of relatively large sums of money. Holding power over poor families, they could demand concessions, bribes and work-in-kind in exchange for allowing the transfers to continue. Otherwise, the poor household would go without.

If formal accountability mechanisms falter, other forms of accountability must step in to ensure improvements in service delivery. In the Mexican case, however, collective action proved difficult. Many local social organizations viewed the programme as targeting women primarily and therefore felt it was outside their purview as traditionally male-dominated groups. Moreover, many of the central officials in charge of the Progres-Oportunidades programme were themselves drawn from Mexican civil society. Given their presence in government, other elements of civil society did not feel it necessary or possible to organize collective action against them.

In this case, the rigid design of the programme compromised one form of accountability for another. In seeking to restrict opportunities for corruption the Mexican government also hindered the linkages for feedback and citizen demand that are necessary for successful service delivery. Accountability structures must allow for both individual and collective action to generate sufficient impetus for change. In this case, the presence of civil society actors within government seemed to undermine the potential for social accountability. Whether the embedded actors were co-opted is unclear, but their presence certainly undercut attempts to mobilize against the weaknesses of the programme.

Sanctions

Essentially, sanctions were non-existent. The policy-makers responsible for the Progres-Oportunidades programme were too far removed from the beneficiaries

for there to be a functional accountability relationship. Moreover, the structures created to facilitate this relationship only served to further undermine the possibility of sanctions, with local elites claiming positions as gatekeepers within the programme. The target population possesses little in the way of tools to impose sanctions on the government in this arrangement.

Implications/results for service provision

While the Progres-Oportunidades programme has helped many families with its conditional cash transfers, the structural arrangement of the programme allows for localized clientelism and corruption. As a result, some families and regions are being deprived by local powerbrokers of the rights due to them under the scheme. Without the means to hold either the system or the implementers truly accountable, it is unlikely that service delivery will improve.

CASE 3: BRAZIL—HEALTH SECTOR REFORM

Dowbor, M., “Origins of Successful Health Sector Reform: Public Health Professionals and Institutional Opportunities in Brazil”, in Houtzager, P., Joshi, A. and Gurza Lavallo, A. (eds), *State Reform and Social Accountability: Brazil, India and Mexico*, *IDS Bulletin* 38/6 (January 2008)

Overview

The case of Brazilian Health Sector Reform in the 1980s and 1990s demonstrates that societal accountability need not come from a confrontationist approach to political institutions. Rather, collective actors from society can work effectively within the system to generate change and improvements in service delivery. All that is necessary is sufficient political space within the social sector for them to operate without hindrance from the state.

The Brazilian health sector underwent rapid reform in the 1980s and 1990s, leading to free and universal access to health care for all Brazilians. Many analyses of this transformation assign credit for the successful transition to the democratization that swept Brazil in the mid-1980s, culminating in the Constitution of 1988. Yet, viewed from a different perspective, the real catalyst for change may have come from another source.

Principal actors

Key actors in this case include the military dictatorship and its authoritarian penetration of all levels of government, and the *Sanitarista* movement which emerged as a collective action among health workers to push for health policy reform from within the existing health structure.

Mechanisms for political accountability

Brazil was ruled by a military dictatorship from 1964 to 1984. As an authoritarian regime, it countenanced little public opinion and sought legitimacy not through free and fair elections but through effective governance. To justify its own excesses and the limitations it placed on civil and political liberties, the military government decided to expand public services such as health and education. Government officials were tasked with designing and implementing a two-pronged system, in which collective clinical services were provided publicly and individualized hospital-based services were provided through a private medical sector.

Accountability was therefore quite opaque. The authoritarian government was not amenable to public

collective action on service delivery demands and the private medical sector had little time for the concerns of poorer segments of the population who felt excluded by the system. By embracing a multiplicity of models, however, the Brazilian state had provided a means for collective action within the health sector institutions.

Mechanisms for social accountability

The *Sanitaristas*, a group of doctors, academics and other health professionals, disagreed with the military regime’s choice of health care structure. However, lacking a means of political accountability, they formed a movement designed to press for reforms within medical institutions. Exploiting the existence of many health care models and the opportunities they afforded for collective action within the health profession, the *Sanitaristas* were able to mobilize using academic conferences and associations around certain progressive policies.

These progressive policies began to filter into the health care system in the 1970s, with the military regime content to claim credit for popular reforms of the system. Ultimately, the *Sanitaristas* were able to use decentralization as a means of implementing their policies more broadly. By 1981, in the wake of severe financial crisis, these local and regional reforms had been undertaken at the national level; and, in 1988, the *Sanitaria* movement achieved formal recognition of its progressive policies in the Constitution.

The *Sanitarista* values of universalization, accessibility, decentralization, comprehensiveness and community participation became synonymous with effective service delivery and were embedded in the Brazilian democratization movement under the motto “Health and Democracy”. Indeed, while significant progress was made under the military regime, true consolidation of the service delivery improvements was effected under democratic leadership. It is unclear whether these reforms would have lasted under continued authoritarianism, but the arrival of democracy was certainly a contributing factor to facilitating their widespread discussion and subsequent success.

While not a standard example of grassroots collective action, the Brazilian case illustrates the potential for societal accountability when it is exercised by those with sufficient interest in change and sufficient connection to the system of service provision. Shared values for health care brought together a diverse group of professionals under the *Sanitarista* movement and their political decision to mobilize and operate within

the system paid dividends in terms of tangible reform and lasting change. Where political accountability is non-existent and the potential costs of confronting the state are high, collective action that makes use of state institutions to positive effect may be a potent form of societal accountability.

Sanctions

None. Working within the system, sanctions were not really relevant.

Implications/results for service provision

This example of social accountability fundamentally changed the way Brazil's health care system functioned. In a political environment in which civic action and democracy were absent, this movement managed to influence health policy effectively using members' particular skill sets and unique access to officials and implementing agents.

CASE 4: BRAZIL—MINIMUM INCOME GUARANTEE

Houtzager, Peter, “The Silent Revolution in Anti-poverty Programmes: Minimum Income Guarantees in Brazil”, in Houtzager, P., Joshi, A. and Gurza Lavalle, A. (eds), *State Reform and Social Accountability: Brazil, India and Mexico*, *IDS Bulletin* 38/6 (January 2008)

Overview

The example of the Renda Mínima, or Minimum Income Guarantee, in Brazil in the early 2000s is illustrative of the difficulties social accountability face in terms of mobilizing collective action in the light of an organized and unresponsive state bureaucracy. In this case, formal mechanisms, such as the electoral cycle, produced a government response that exerted a monopoly over the delivery of income guarantee grants, purposefully excluding CSOs that had previously been involved in the delivery of basic services to the poor. As a result, a diffuse civil society was unable to mobilize in order to exercise accountability from below.

Principal actors

The case study is based on evidence from the city of Sao Paulo. The principal actors include the elected city administrators, who urged the creation of the Renda Mínima; civil society and neighbourhood organizations representing poor communities, which have in the past implemented small-scale service delivery projects on behalf of government; and the urban poor, for whose benefit the programme was created.

Mechanisms for political accountability

The Renda Mínima emerged directly as a result of formal political accountability mechanisms. The elected Workers’ Party city administration first implemented the programme in 2001. Indeed, it is arguable that the importance of the electoral cycle played a key role in determining how the programme was established and administered, and contributed greatly to the lack of social accountability observed.

The four-year electoral cycle put the city administrators under tremendous pressure to demonstrate impact, particularly in poverty alleviation. As a result, the government chose to bypass civil society organizations and organize implementation solely through formal, state channels. This was in deliberate contrast with previous government service programmes, in which these organizations were tasked with implementing small-scale projects.

Instead, the city government sought to strengthen its direct linkages with its citizens, build its own autonomy and establish strong citizen-state relations to stand it in good stead for the next elections. This more direct delivery of services was also designed to combat paternalistic and clientelistic networks that were developing as a result of the previous civil society-focused system. In this way, political accountability, far from failing, was actually working very well, but in so doing it crowded out civic involvement.

The only formal mechanisms for accountability outside of elections are administrative reviews, which can be triggered by local organization or politicians if they feel that the programme is failing in some way. Nevertheless, this was only an ad hoc form of accountability, not systematized in such a way as to make it accessible to all beneficiaries.

Mechanisms for social accountability

The design of the Renda Mínima programme in Sao Paulo was specifically formulated to exclude participation by civil society organizations. Faced with such an institutional force, these organizations disengaged from the income guarantee programme, providing little resistance to or oversight of government policies. Indeed, their previous pattern of activity had already served to disconnect the organizations operating within the city. Focused on operating their own small projects within their assigned areas or sectors, Sao Paulo’s community organizations had never contemplated acting collectively and this diffusion of interests served to undermine any efforts to rally around the Renda Mínima.

Evidence suggests there is nothing inherently difficult in organizing the urban poor around income guarantee programmes. On the contrary, given their very tangible and personal nature, it has been suggested that collective action is easier to organize around such programmes than around sectors such as health or education, which are more collective goods. What has been lacking thus far is time. Perhaps in a few years the importance and scale of the Renda Mínima programme will provide sufficient impetus for the organizations to overcome their inertia and mobilize to exercise social accountability.

In this case, political accountability and social accountability appear contradictory. The city government, in an effort to increase and expand the former, has crowded out the latter. As such, very little can be done to exercise accountability over the Renda Mínima programme outside of the electoral cycle.

There are, however, signs that some linkage between the two may be possible, but that it requires strong political leadership. Given the diffuse nature of civil society in Sao Paulo, a political entrepreneur is needed to organize a social movement capable of acting as a counterweight to the state. The potential energy is there within society to exert social accountability but, at present, it needs a push from political actors.

Sanctions

Given the lack of accountability mechanisms beyond elections, the only real sanction is the removal of a party's government from power through the electoral process. This has happened in the case of Sao Paulo, but in all instances the Renda Minima programme's implementation structure remained the same, even if the policies guiding it shifted.

Implications/results for service provision

In this case, the strength of political accountability ensured that the delivery of the income guarantee grants remained an important programme across political parties. However, while the government was responsive to the need for a programme, it was less responsive to the beneficiaries in terms of how the programme should be designed and implemented. Rather, it was led in a top-down fashion that often resulted in families and neighbourhoods receiving only a fraction or none of their entitlements. With only an ad hoc administrative review to ensure continual accountability, these problems tend to slip through the cracks. This case illustrates the important role of social accountability in monitoring and fine-tuning policies and services that may have been initiated through political accountability mechanisms.

CASE 5: MEXICO—CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Gomez-Jauregui, “Participation in Reproductive Health Policies in the Context of Health System Reform in Mexico”, in Houtzager, P., Joshi, A. and Gurza Lavalle, A. (eds), *State Reform and Social Accountability: Brazil, India and Mexico*, *IDS Bulletin* 38/6 (January 2008)

Overview

Over the past ten years, Mexico’s health system has undergone significant reform, particularly in the area of reproductive health. This case study shows how the institutionalized participation of civil society organizations can help improve and expand health service policy and delivery, when coupled with a responsive government. By finding allies within the formal mechanisms created for social accountability, reproductive health organizations were able to advocate for policy change and improve the effectiveness of implementation.

Principal actors

Based on the national health system in Mexico, the study focuses on several principal actors, most notably the Ministries of Health and Education, several government bodies tasked with health policy and a number of NGOs interested in sexual and reproductive health. The interaction of these actors forms the basis for the emergence of social accountability.

Mechanisms for political accountability

The impetus for the reforms to Mexico’s health system came following the 1994 elections. The new government embraced the growing international consensus that the incorporation of NGOs into policy design and implementation would significantly improve health outcomes, especially in sexual and reproductive health where special sensitivities may arise. Subsequent elections served to strengthen the policy of formally including NGOs in reproductive health discussions. However, it is unlikely that reproductive health in and of itself was significant enough an issue to influence the electoral process.

Within the health system, formal political accountability was relatively absent. Within the reproductive arena, NGOs were contracted to carry out community-level health projects designed to expand service coverage. It was the NGOs, however, that were accountable to the government, not the other way around. Informally, female politicians made reproductive and maternal

health a principal issue in their campaigns and official work, creating relationships and networks with health advocates at the community level to which they were accountable, but this was largely informal and rare.

Mechanisms for social accountability

From 1995, the Mexican government, as well as many state-level governments, began to formally conclude agreements with social organizations on collaboration on the design and implementation of social policy. Chief among these collaborations was reproductive health policy, in which NGOs and the government would work together to improve services and the breadth of coverage.

Collaboration took one of four forms: (1) NGOs providing training or expertise to existing or proposed government programmes; (2) government implementation of formal services in sectors or areas where NGOs have historically filled the void; (3) joint work through formal agreements; or (4) applying political pressure to support change. Numerous consortia and collaborative efforts were created involving both public sector and NGO actors. While many were short term, due to the nature of Mexican politics, some relationships became institutionalized to promote continuity in policymaking across political administrations.

Social accountability in the Mexican reproductive system took the form of remedying failings in the public provision of services. Whether these were due to a lack of policy prescriptions or poor implementation on the part of the state, the NGOs stepped in to fill the gaps while at the same time using their activities to advocate for better government service provision. As a result of the strong relationships between public institutions and NGOs, many of the services either provided or advocated by the NGOs have since come within the remit of the government, representing a successful use of social accountability for positive policy change.

Two key connections were critical to the success of social accountability in this case. First, the open inclusion of the NGOs in the policymaking and implementation processes made the prospects of having an impact more realistic. Civil society had the ear of important government actors and could advocate forcefully for improvements in services that had historically been neglected. Second, this relationship was further strengthened by the strong support of key decision makers within government and in the international community. Pressure was brought to bear

on the state both internally and externally to listen to NGOs and implement their recommendations as often as possible. In this way, political accountability fed into a successful partnership with social accountability mechanisms.

Sanctions

There were some “electoral sanctions” observed, but it is difficult to attribute direct causality to unresponsive governments. Rather, this case illustrates that reputational risk and public pressure can enhance social accountability mechanisms.

Implications/results for service provision

Successful social accountability in this case arose from formally constituted spaces for interaction and

collaboration between government and civil society actors on the specific issue of reproductive health. This complementary approach brings many positive characteristics to the table in that, by inviting participation from a position of strength rather than weakness, the state remains the principal source of services and legitimacy. Civil society plays a role in holding the state accountable but does so not in a combative manner but rather as a partner or consulting advocate. In this way, the state is not threatened by social accountability mechanisms bypassing formal political accountability mechanisms. Instead, state legitimacy and credibility are strengthened by the incorporation of civil society as a working partner.

CASE 6: DELHI—EDUCATION SCHEMES

Mehta, A., “Good Effort, but Must Try Harder: Civil Society Organisations and Education in Delhi”, in Houtzager, P., Joshi, A. and Gurza Lavallo, A. (eds), *State Reform and Social Accountability: Brazil, India and Mexico*, IDS Bulletin 38/6 (January 2008)

Overview

This case study, based on evidence gathered from three education schemes in Delhi over the past 5–7 years, argues that a collaborative approach to social accountability yields the best outcomes in terms of service delivery, performance and government accountability in both the short and the long term. In contrast to those civil society activists who contend that social accountability must present a confrontational face to government to ensure autonomy and prevent co-opting, this study suggests that policy embeddedness may be the best way for civil society to effect change in government actions. By being involved in all aspects, CSOs can really shape service delivery design and implementation.

Principal actors

The principal actors in this case study are the myriad government agencies and ministries responsible for providing education in Delhi and the CSOs that have emerged as collaborators and counterweights to these bureaucratic bodies. Also featuring in supporting roles are the Union Government of India and the Supreme Court, the actions of which determine the political and legal environment in which the interaction between the principal actors takes place.

Mechanisms for political accountability

India is a functioning democracy and its mechanisms for political accountability both help and hinder efforts to improve education outcomes in the city of Delhi. First, education is guaranteed by the state, enshrined in 2002 in the Right to Education Act. This formal recognition gives citizens a potent formal mechanism for demanding access to a broadly equitable education. Should someone feel he is receiving a substandard education or being deprived of his right to education altogether, there is a legal process for him to demand accountability from the state.

On the other hand, enshrining education as a human right complicates severely the implementation of education policy in the federal structure of India. Given its importance, all levels of government from the

central, to the state, to the municipal have a responsibility for formulating and implementing policies. This overlap, resulting from a desire to respond to political accountability demands, means that civil society has a myriad of actors to deal with when seeking entry points for social accountability.

Mechanisms for social accountability

Using education as their motivating interest, several CSOs became involved in exercising social accountability throughout the course of the study. In one instance, an organization partnered with government to design and implement an inclusive education programme that targeted previously neglected communities such as street children. This involvement ensured that the state was meeting its obligation to provide education to all children, not just those with engaged parents.

CSOs also became engaged in textbook development when parents grew concerned that the curriculum proposed in Delhi schools was overly religious and lacking in secular content. By pursuing a collaborative approach, the CSOs built relationships with government officials and helped ease tensions that had emerged following the decision to revise the school curriculum mid-year.

Finally, CSOs were involved in advocating the provision of midday meals at schools to promote attendance by children from poorer communities. Once government had acquiesced, the CSOs remained key players in the implementation and monitoring of the programme, particularly in areas prone to corruption or lacking regular parental involvement.

A key connection that emerged in these cases was the way social accountability advocates successfully used the judicial system to press their demands with state actors. While this mechanism may not be available in societies where the legal system is less well developed and institutionalized than India, where formal legal channels do exist they seem effective at forcing the hand of the state in terms of delivering on promised services. In these cases, the potent combination of a Right to Education law, a robust judicial system and a civil society not afraid to use it resulted in positive outcomes for service delivery performance.

Sanctions

With the Right to Education as their support, CSOs campaigning in these cases could call on judicial review to strengthen their case with government officials.

While it is unclear what the official sanctions were for a government failing to deliver on the Right to Education, it is clear that judicial decisions carried sufficient weight to compel government to act in most cases. Moreover, having such a tangible measure of performance, or lack thereof, would no doubt influence voting patterns in upcoming elections, should officials be shown to be in violation of the Right to Education Act or a judicial recommendation.

Implications/results for service provision

This case may prove to be too India-specific to be generalizable. However, it is useful to note the suggestion that policy embeddedness on the part of CSOs is as an effective means of influencing service delivery reform. If a sufficiently developed legal-judicial system exists, CSOs should make use of it to connect formal accountability mechanisms with their more informal efforts at advocacy and performance monitoring.

CASE 7: SOUTH AFRICA—CHILD SUPPORT GRANT (IBP/IDS)

Hofbauer, H., “Sustained Work and Dedicated Capacity: IDASA’s Experience in Applied Budget Work in South Africa”, *Lessons from Civil Society Budget Analysis and Advocacy Initiatives* (Washington, D.C.: International Budget Project, 2006)

Overview

South Africa’s Child Support Grant is a monetary support programme. At its inception, each recipient was granted ZAR 100 monthly. It was to be limited to children under seven years of age and targeted at the poorest 30 per cent of children. Evidence suggests that a lack of administrative capacity on the part of local governments hindered access to the programme, with particularly discriminatory effects in rural and undeveloped communities, and that increases in state revenue have not been sufficiently allocated to an essential social programme.

This case illustrates the power of information united with collective action, as two civil society groups with differing skill sets successfully collaborated to force policy change. Here, because of the specific nature of the issue, the normal channels of political accountability proved to be incapable of producing a meaningful response. Social mobilization led by two well-organized NGOs was needed to spur national debate and compel the state to take action.

Principal actors

The principal actors include the Ministry of Social Development in South Africa, local administrators and two NGOs—IDASA and ACESS. Dissatisfied with the amount and distribution of resources assigned to the Child Support Grant, the two NGOs formed a coalition to demand improvements to the social security programme, bypassing the ineffective local officials whose task it was to implement the programme and going straight to the ministry responsible for setting the budget.

Mechanisms for political accountability

South Africa has been a democracy since 1994, meaning that citizens have the ability to hold their government accountable through the ballot box every five years. In the case of the Child Support Grant, however, the target population does not possess the right to vote and, being from poor families, lacks the means and opportunity to mobilize against the state or have its

voices heard through political channels. Moreover, the structure of the Child Support Grant was such that, while local elected officials were charged with implementing the scheme, the overall budget and eligibility guidelines were set at the national level, further stretching the feasibility of strong state-citizen accountability.

Mechanisms for social accountability

In 2001, the Children’s Budget Unit (CBU) of IDASA, a well-regarded NGO, began to analyse the budgets and programme documents of the Child Support Grant. Finding that poor capacity at the local level and underfunding at the national level were hindering the effectiveness and scope of the programme, they began to advocate for improvements to the scheme. Using long established political advocacy techniques, the CBU tried to promulgate its findings among politicians and media outlets, but, in spite of some successful forays, policy change was slow.

The next year, Idasa teamed up with an advocacy and networking group dedicated principally to children’s causes to ramp up the campaign. The mobilization worked. Thanks to the involvement of ACESS, the 2003/4 budget incorporated many of the key recommendations advocated in IDASA’s report. Social collective action through civil society organizations proved the most effective means of inducing the desired response from government.

Sanctions

The political accountability mechanisms were too distant or too ineffective to elicit the kind of change needed. The constituency itself was too weak to demand accountability and needed outside intervention in the form of well-organized NGOs. Recognizing the structural reality of the programme, these campaigners bypassed local government, where some of the inherent problems lay, and focused their attention at the national level, seeking to resolve the issues at their source.

Political accountability can be of limited use to disenfranchised or marginalized populations. Social accountability may be their only means of making their voices heard. Sometimes, this means working through political accountability mechanisms to expose problems and demand change. At other times, as in this case, mobilization must bypass immediate political mechanisms and reach up to the bureaucracy to achieve success.

Implications/results for service provision

This case is rare in that it has had tangible results. The advocacy of IDASA and ACESS resulted in a change of policy, with the ministry agreeing to increase budgets and expand eligibility to all those under 14 years of age.

On paper, this is a huge success. However, since implementation still lies at the local level, further action may still be required to ensure that the new funds are spent and the guidelines put into practice honestly and effectively.

CASE 8: UGANDA—UGANDA DEBT NETWORK COMMUNITY MONITORING COMMITTEES

De Renzio, P., Azeem, V. and Ramkumar, V., “Budget Monitoring as an Advocacy Tool: Uganda Debt Network”, *Lessons from Civil Society Budget Analysis and Advocacy Initiatives* (Washington, D.C.: International Budget Project, 2006)

Overview

Budget monitoring is a relatively new phenomenon for civil society groups in the developing world. Many organizations, however, are coming to the realization that following the money is the best way to ensure effective service delivery, particularly in cases where lines of formal accountability are convoluted or non-existent. In Uganda, the Uganda Debt Network (UDN) did just this, mobilizing citizens and providing them with the information and training necessary to hold their representatives to account. As a result, corruption in procurement in the health sector was exposed and, in many cases, resolved to the benefit of the affected communities.

Principal actors

In Uganda, social services are highly decentralized with most of the responsibility falling on local governments to implement state policy. The national government provides funds on a regular basis, and the decentralized districts do the work. As such, in this case, UDN focused principally on local governments and administrators at health and education sites. Some political advocacy was undertaken at the national level, but the bulk of the work was accomplished locally.

Mechanisms for political accountability

Uganda, while ostensibly a democracy, has been a “no-party” democracy for some time. This label, a holdover from President Museveni’s rise to power, belies what is essentially a one-party state dominated by the national executive. While responsibility for service delivery has been decentralized in accordance with international donor dictums, the money and the power reside with the president.

Within the budget process, Uganda allows for a not insignificant amount of involvement by NGOs and citizens in the form of consultative processes. The meetings, however, are generally mandated by external donors and often have little real power to influence decisions on the budget. Local government is designed to be the citizen’s link with the state, collecting taxes

and providing services, but many local administrations are captured by local elites or woefully underfunded and understaffed, making political accountability unlikely.

Mechanisms for social accountability

Beginning initially as a debt relief advocacy organization, the Uganda Debt Network quickly recognized the value in analysing and monitoring the budget for social services delivery. After some abortive attempts at top-down mobilization, the UDN shifted its monitoring focus from a group of individuals at the district level to a more elaborate community-based monitoring and evaluation system (CBMES), which involved community-based monitors from village communities. The idea of delegating monitoring responsibility to community-based individuals, and promoting local dialogue around problems that could be resolved locally, seemed to better fit local circumstances.

Reports from the districts showed a flouting of tendering procedures, shoddy construction work and, in some cases, outright corruption. Monitors often reported on cases of poorly constructed medical and education infrastructure, the absence of drugs in health units, the arrogance of medical staff and ill-treatment of service users, teacher absenteeism and irregular inspections in schools, and so on. The culmination of this process was district dialogues, happening on average once a year, during which UDN monitors present their results to district authorities, including senior civil servants and local politicians, and demand concrete responses.

The UDN’s approach was in many ways non-confrontational vis-à-vis government, allowing it to gain the respect of and access to government officials and to avoid potentially strong government reactions to its campaigns and accusations. Local-level monitoring is more about checking the quality of implementation of government contracts, rather than effectively monitoring the whole process of budget execution and reporting.

While this attempt to reconcile social accountability with political actors may work in the short term, such an approach seems to limit the kind of activities that UDN undertakes, and as a consequence also limit its overall impact. Given the absence of real political accountability in Uganda, these mechanisms for social accountability are a necessary substitute to allow citizens to voice concerns over the design and delivery of social services in their communities. While some

collaboration and coordination between political and social actors is of course to be desired, letting political actors dictate too much the terms of social accountability may ultimately make the process futile.

Sanctions

This case presents a rare example of social accountability imposing sanctions on those implicated in corruption or malfeasance. Many district dialogues included revelations of petty corruption in which the perpetrator was made to reimburse the cost or replace any items stolen or illegally procured.

In one case, a district health official was initially very reluctant to provide any information to the monitoring committee on funds received and disbursement plans. After repeated attempts, the issue was brought in front of a full meeting with district officials, including the Chief Administrative Officer and civil society representatives. The health official reacted very strongly, questioning the committee's legitimacy to ask such

questions and demand information. His behaviour was publicly condemned by most people present and, after a reprimand from the Chief Administrative Officer, he started collaborating with the committee.

Implications/results for service provision

At the local level, the community monitoring committees are very successful at highlighting petty corruption within the health and education sectors. Particularly in the realm of procurement, they expose poor quality materials and corrupt procurement practices that had undermined the quality of service infrastructure in a number of communities.

These community committees, however, have limitations. When faced with the prospect of taking on serious administrative corruption, many monitors backed down, fearing that forcing their hand may undercut the successes they had achieved thus far. More work is needed to build sufficient impetus for change at official levels.

CASE 9: PHILIPPINES—CITIZEN MONITORING OF INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

von Kaltenborn-Stachau, H., “The Missing Link: Fostering Positive Citizen-State Relations in Post-conflict Environments” *World Bank Policy Brief* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2008)

Overview

Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG) was founded in February 1986 with the objective of monitoring public spending and raising political awareness in local communities. The group rallied around the issue of roads in Abra, a neglected and isolated region. The impetus for CCAGG’s monitoring work came from a news article that listed 20 completed public infrastructure projects in the region. CCAGG decided to verify the information, and in the process exposed discrepancies and anomalies in the government’s reports. CCAGG’s report eventually led to the suspension of 11 government engineers.

Principal actors

This case focuses on the efforts of CCAGG and its dealings with various government agencies and contractors in the monitoring of public infrastructure projects. Local government officials play a big role owing to their responsibility for the contracting and implementation of these projects. The evolution of relations between civil society and local government in this case is instructive.

Mechanisms for political accountability

The Philippines is a highly corrupt country, with significant levels of institutionalized patronage and clientelistic practices after years of state neglect. At the best of times, political accountability is limited to the elections that take place every 3–6 years, but within the Abra region, these mechanisms were extremely weak. Local officials were isolated from the central government and held significant sway over local politics, including the public budgets. With corruption so endemic, political accountability proved to be not a viable option for pursuing improvements in infrastructure projects.

Mechanisms for social accountability

CCAGG conducted its first expenditure monitoring exercise in 1987. The monitoring work unearthed anomalies such as “ghost” projects and incomplete works. The government acted on CCAGG’s findings and conducted an investigation. The public works officials

accused of corruption were found guilty and suspended from office for four to nine months without pay.

All CCAGG activities are participatory in nature. The infrastructure monitoring initiative is extremely inclusive, as monitoring teams are composed of the beneficiaries of the projects being investigated. The social validation part of the audit provides a venue for community members from poor and marginalized families, many of them women, to participate. CCAGG also ensures sustained community participation by organizing people into village monitoring and evaluation teams. CCAGG provides regular training to these groups, and communication and interaction between them and CCAGG is ongoing to ensure sustained participation.

In the beginning, the activities of CCAGG spawned negative reactions from government agencies and some members of the private sector. One member was killed at the height of its monitoring activity. CCAGG members received anonymous threatening telephone calls and faced a hostile reception during field visits. Ultimately, however, resistance calmed.

By 2000, CCAGG had been selected as the CSO partner organization for the Enhancing Public Accountability Programme of the Philippine Commission on Audit (COA), through the Participatory Audits with CSOs Project which was supported by the United Nations Development Programme. The project piloted the involvement of CSOs in an attempt to address the increasing demand for transparency and accountability through greater citizen participation in auditing government services. The success of the project challenged the mind-set of government officials by demonstrating that citizen groups have the technical skills, can be unbiased and can work in partnership with the government.

Sanctions

CCAGG was able to mobilize sufficient public outcry at the corruption and inefficiency within infrastructure projects to make sanctions inevitable. Government audit teams investigated CCAGG’s initial complaints and filed administrative cases against 11 public works engineers. Although politicians tried to step in or intervene on their behalf, other CSOs supported the cause while the cases were being prosecuted. Eventually, the accused were found guilty and suspended from office without pay for periods ranging from four to nine months. Another example concerns a bridge that was completed in 1996 at a cost of PHP 8.26 million. It was hastily built and in the end was never used

because of errors in the engineering design. To add fuel to the controversy, a flash flood destroyed the bridge in 1997, unleashing a public outcry. CCAGG pushed for government agencies to investigate the matter, but CCAGG was not satisfied with the response of the Department of Public Works and Highways. As a result, the COA recommended the prosecution of certain Department of Public Works and Highways personnel.

Implications

A visible impact of CCAGG's work is greater accessibility to remote areas as a result of roads, bridges, and so on. Children are now able to go home every day after school instead of once a week. CCAGG's vigilance has also saved scarce government resources from graft and corruption. Early detection of technical flaws in projects has resulted in collaborative corrective action, thereby saving millions of pesos. "Ghost" projects no longer exist in Abra province.

CASE 10: BRAZIL—PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING AND DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Melo, M.A., “Democratizing Budgetary Decisions and Execution in Brazil: More Participation or Redesign of Formal Institutions?”, in Peruzzotti, E. and Selee, A. (eds), *Participatory Innovation and Representative Democracy in Latin America* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009)

Overview

This case argues that participatory budgeting is, in fact, a flawed means of reforming democratic institutions, as it is predicated on the notion that local legislatures are a problem to be bypassed rather than collaborated with or strengthened. By contrast, it notes that Courts of Accounts, set up to monitor budget expenditure to ensure that it is spent according to the approved budget, can positively affect the democratic accountability system, providing citizens with the information needed to make informed decisions at election time and take informed action in the interim.

Actors

Mayors, local councils, citizens and Courts of Account.

Social accountability mechanisms

Participatory budgeting, it is argued, often arises in situations of divided government at the local level. Local councils, often viewed as illegitimate, are perceived as impeding development through a mixture of corruption and obstinacy. Reform-minded mayors implement participatory budgeting as a means of bypassing the legislature by assembling a group of like-minded delegates who represent citizens’ interests. This often leads to conflict between the councillors and the delegates and can simply result in a transition of power from one set of elites to another, with citizens having little say in the process.

Political accountability mechanisms

Courts of Accounts, by contrast, have been set up to monitor the implementation of budgets. While originally an ancillary agency of the legislature, they have developed in some cases into quasi-judicial bodies with powers to investigate and report on claims of irregularities in public expenditure. While their powers vary according to the political context, in some states where political competitiveness is high, these Courts of Accounts have proven effective agents for exposing wrongdoing.

Sanctions

Participatory budgeting is a low-level mechanism for accountability. Citizen delegates are ostensibly involved in the planning of public expenditure, and citizens therefore lose some of their prerogative for launching complaints against policies they can be claimed to have helped to implement. Moreover, in spite of the appearance of greater participation, participatory budgeting can sometimes result in a less accountable executive, as it manipulates participatory budgeting to override a reluctant legislature that, for all its faults, remains democratically elected.

Courts of Accounts represent a more typical formal accountability mechanism, often referred to as horizontal accountability. Nevertheless, they have significant power to publish reports on corruption or waste, yielding reputational accountability outcomes, and can serve to inform citizens and shape their voting patterns in future elections. They are therefore both a direct and an indirect accountability mechanism that, given sufficient levels of political competitiveness, can be a useful tool in promoting greater democratic accountability from legislators and the executive branch at the local level.

CASE 11: ARGENTINA—PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN BUENOS AIRES

Peruzzotti, E., “The Politics of Institutional Innovation: The Implementation of Participatory Budgeting in the City of Buenos Aires”, in Peruzzotti, E. and Selee, A. (eds), *Participatory Innovation and Representative Democracy in Latin America* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009)

Overview

Participatory budgeting in Buenos Aires arose from neither public demand nor a political reform initiative, but instead was implemented in desperation by a government that severely lacked legitimacy. Participatory budgeting lacked the support of civil society and the political elite. As a result, it fizzled out producing neither greater civic engagement nor improved accountability. The case illustrates that created social accountability mechanisms require a certain amount of citizen support prior to implementation; the mere act of creating participatory spaces does not mean that citizens and the state will make effective use of them.

Actors

Mayor, local councils and citizens.

Political and Social Accountability mechanisms

In the wake of the Argentinean financial crisis, the head of city government in Buenos Aires found himself in a

difficult position. His political coalition had collapsed around him from the national level to the municipalities. He was faced with protests and mass citizen mobilization. One of his main political opponents agreed to strike a deal with him if he instituted participatory budgeting as a means of channelling public dissent. Yet, neither civil society nor the political elite viewed participatory budgeting as a viable option, given the circumstances. Nonetheless, the system was set up—but special attention was paid to ensuring that loyal supporters were placed in critical positions within the structure. As a result, implementation varied widely, with some sections of the city choosing open participatory processes and others using a more restrictive process of participation. Ultimately, political machinations overtook the programme, and with a turnover of leadership participatory budgeting in Buenos Aires fizzled out.

Sanctions

Participatory budgeting in Buenos Aires, in addition to its shambolic structure and implementation, was designed without the teeth of its Brazilian counterpart. The process merely produced recommendations on public expenditure priorities, with no money attached and no quantifiable targets or measures against which progress could be assessed. The whole programme was a political manoeuvre that rang hollow from the start and failed to elicit either greater civic involvement or better accountability.

CASE 12: MEXICO—PARTICIPATORY INNOVATION AROUND BUDGETING

Selee, A., “An Alternative to Clientelism? Participatory Innovation in Mexico”, in Peruzzotti, E. and Selee, A. (eds), *Participatory Innovation and Representative Democracy in Latin America* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009)

Overview

Co-opted under the one-party system, the term “participation” is not universally lauded in Mexican politics. Too often it means a brief consultation to legitimize a decision already taken by the government. Nevertheless, some participatory democratic innovations are reaching Mexico from other parts of Latin America. These innovations may not be sustainable, however, as structural and institutional impediments are preventing participatory practices from evolving beyond the basic level. Participatory innovations are empowering citizens not by bypassing political parties, but by forcing parties to compete for public support.

Actors

Municipal governments, citizens

Political and Social Accountability mechanisms

Many instances of participatory budgeting are designed as a reaction to flaws in existing democratic institutions. By bypassing many intermediary institutions, the idea is to directly link citizens with their politicians to both simplify and strengthen accountability. Results, however, have been mixed.

In Mexico, the nature of politics appears to be working against these new forms of accountability. Political parties in Mexico view participatory mechanisms as a means of building support among citizens and organizations. Once they develop their support bases, however, they lose interest in participatory processes. Moreover, electoral rules reduce political competition within constituencies, giving extraordinary power to the winning party regardless of the margin of victory. As a result, the incentives for negotiating policies with opposition or citizen leaders are drastically reduced once a politician is in power.

These findings suggest that in Mexico’s highly party-centric political system, participatory innovations that include, rather than bypass, party-affiliated groups may be more sustainable and effective than those which seek to incorporate individual citizens only. Rather than transforming Mexican politics through participation, it may be more pragmatic to use political parties as a means of making governance more transparent, open and accessible.

Sanctions

The case of Mexico focuses on a very narrow form of municipal participatory planning in which citizens were involved in the planning of infrastructure expenditure. As such, it makes no claim to elucidate sanctions. However, the evidence in this case suggests that the participatory mechanisms did shift relationships within politics, sometimes reducing the clientelistic policies that pervade the Mexican system. In this way, it created more positive accountability relationships that could form the foundation for tangible sanctions or enforcement mechanisms in the future.

CASE 13: INDIA—INCENTIVES FOR LEGISLATORS

Keefer, P. and Khemani, S., “When do Legislators Pass on Pork? The Role of Political Parties in Determining Legislator Effort”, *American Political Science Review* 103 (2009), pp. 99–112

Overview

This review of cases suggests that voter attachment to parties disrupts political incentives to provide constituency services. In constituencies where voters are strongly attached to a political party, for whatever reason, the legislator in that constituency is unlikely to take an active role in providing services. Legislators have no incentive to do so because their prospects for re-election are based on party identification rather than the particular services provided. By contrast, in weak affinity constituencies, personal politics matters, meaning that legislators have a big incentive to improve voters’ opinions of their personal activities, such as constituency services.

Actors

Legislators, political parties and citizens

Political and Social Accountability mechanisms

Legislators are often considered an essential link in the chain of democratic accountability. Directly elected by voters, they serve the dual role of both holding the executive to account in line with the interests of their constituencies and being accountable themselves to the citizens they serve, ensuring that they effectively represent the wishes of their voters. Yet, one of the problems of the electoral cycle is the reduced incentives for accountability between elections. Understanding why

legislators take certain actions while not actively seeking re-election is a way of analysing the strengths and weaknesses of a particular accountability system.

In this case, the evidence shows that legislators are more likely to provide constituency services in conditions of weak voter affinity for political parties. Voters who are more likely to select their candidate based on specific issues or specific perceptions of that candidate are a prime target for receiving particularistic benefits (“pork”). Legislators in these districts will be active in providing services that they think may swing the election in their favour. By contrast, legislators in party-dominated constituencies recognize that their individual popularity has little impact on their possible re-election. Voters choose candidates based solely on party affiliation, and there is therefore no incentive to provide particularistic services.

Sanctions

For legislators in party-dominated constituencies, democratic accountability does not occur through the ballot box. Rather, it runs through their particular political party, which controls who stands in the election. While this is not direct vertical accountability, parties may exercise some kind of discretion in ensuring that their candidates meet minimal criteria of competence and honesty. Then again, they may not. In constituencies with weak party affiliation, personalized democracy thrives. Voters may base their decisions on the delivery or non-delivery of particular services. While this may be good in certain contexts, that is, delivering development, and so on, it is unclear whether in these districts voters are more interested in private goods than public goods. If so, delivering selective benefits may only exacerbate corruption and provides no improvement in accountability.

CASE 14: ECUADOR AND PARAGUAY— LEGISLATIVE PARTICULARISM

Mejia, Acosta, A., Pérez-Liñán, A. and Saiegh, S., “The Partisan Foundations of Legislative Particularism in Latin America”, Mimeo. Social Science Research Network. Uploaded October 2007

Overview

Reviewing evidence from Ecuador and Paraguay, this study counters the conventional wisdom in comparative politics that sees national electoral rules as shaping legislators’ incentives. It asserts that organizational control of the nomination process within political parties may be the key determinant of legislative incentives to pursue particularistic policies. Open-list electoral systems may not encourage credit-claiming strategies when party leaders filter access to the lists, and closed-list systems may encourage particularism when party leaders face competitive primaries to determine the composition of party ballots.

Actors

Legislators and political parties

Political and Social Accountability mechanisms

Why would legislators choose to pursue legislation that is both distributive in nature and narrow in scope? The

evidence suggests that incentives to pursue particularistic legislation originate not only in national electoral laws, but also in the specific procedures used by political parties to nominate candidates. Even though electoral laws may discourage intra-party competition, individual party organizations may still structure the nomination process in different ways. Competitive primaries may encourage leaders of different party factions to pursue particularistic benefits for their strongholds, while candidate selection controlled by a few national party leaders may reduce such incentives. This information has implications for democratic accountability in that certain political conditions, in particular political party rules, can be more or less conducive to facilitating accountability between voters and legislators. Regardless of citizen demand, if party structures do not provide incentives for legislators to provide legislation or constituent services, it is unlikely that they will be forthcoming.

Sanctions

This case focuses on intra-party regulations and national electoral laws to determine where the incentive for particularistic legislation is more likely to arise. As such, it includes only a small element of sanctioning, namely sanctions that may exist within parties or through electoral law. As ever, the potential sanction exists of failing to be re-elected, but in this case we are looking at the reasons why a politician may appear or not appear on the ballot at all.

CASE 15: GHANA, TANZANIA—REVENUE WATCH INSTITUTE PARLIAMENTARY STRENGTHENING

Mejia Acosta, A., *Pilot Programme to Strengthen Parliamentary Oversight of the Extractive Sector in Ghana and Tanzania: Baselines Overview and M&E Report* (London: Revenue Watch Institute, 2009)

Overview

One of the underlying principles of democratic accountability is that parliaments play a central role in improving governance and transparency. Evidence from the extractive industries in Ghana and Tanzania, however, reveals that in reality their role is often constrained by executive power, political conditions and party considerations. Legislators often face a dilemma in determining who they will hold to account and to whom they will ultimately be accountable.

Actors

Legislators, political parties, the media and CSOs

Political and Social Accountability mechanisms

In principle, legislators are involved in accountability through the representation of diverse political interests during the policy formulation process. Members of Parliament (MPs) can also amend pieces of legislation to regulate extraction contracts or change the allocation of revenues, and they can oversee the transparent execution and implementation of government policies. In practice, the role of parliaments can be constrained when executives centralize policymaking prerogatives to initiate, contract and amend relevant legislation. Politically, parliaments can have only limited influence on policymaking if the government controls a dominant party majority and the opposition lacks the necessary votes to perform an effective oversight role.

Individual MPs can face a representation dilemma, as they are in principle responsive to the needs of the constituents who elected them but are also accountable to the leadership of the party that sponsored them, and potentially responsive to the influence of interest and business groups that may have contributed to their campaigns. Clearly, this “competing principals” dilemma may affect the willingness of MPs to effectively advocate for improved governance if, for example, MPs have conflicting interests as to who predominantly they will represent. A more competitive political setting with multiparty politics offers greater opportunities for different parties to impose checks and balances on government initiatives, especially if the legislative activism of individual MPs may contribute to furthering the political careers of individual MPs.

Sanctions

Sanctions in these cases can vary. In Tanzania, while MPs are well informed and capable of playing an accountability role, the dominance of one political party makes it unlikely that any MP would oppose government policy or take a chance on proposing legislation outside of the party programme. There are incentives to remain loyal and perform the duties expected of an MP in terms of rubber stamping legislation and fulfilling basic constituency services. Sanctions in this case are almost non-existent. In Ghana, by contrast, the plurality of the system enables MPs, although marginally less well informed than their Tanzanian colleagues, to play a larger role in accountability. Ghanaian MPs can make a name for themselves by championing causes or delivering particularistic development to their constituency. MPs in this system are therefore more likely to push for sanctions when a government fails to keep its promises or performs badly.

CASE 16: PERU—PRO-POOR LEGISLATURES

Mejia Acosta, A., “Do Legislatures—and Legislators—Matter for Poverty Reduction?”, *Peru Country Report*, (Lima: International IDEA, 2008)

Overview

In Peru, the legislative branch has traditionally played only a marginal role in the design, approval and implementation of policies to reduce poverty and socio-economic inequalities. The weak policymaking capacity of Congress is partly explained by a persistent pattern of executive predominance, widespread decentralization and the erosion of political parties. The recent resource boom has served only to further concentrate decision-making power away from Congress. This study finds that even when legislators are motivated by poverty reduction goals, they lack the access to resources to fund long-term investment projects in their districts. Even if legislators enjoy constitutional prerogatives to do casework, they lack the professional expertise and job security to engage in long-term technical planning. Pulled by divergent interests, pro-poor policies and incentives, pro-poor activity by legislators in Peru is not as easy as it initially appears.

Actors

Legislators and political parties

Political and Social Accountability mechanisms

Legislators are the people’s representatives in government and, as such, are expected to deliver for their constituents, especially when those constituents lack other means of expressing opinions, such as the poor or marginalized. Stating as much, however, is easier than putting this into practice. Findings from research in Peru suggest that: (a) legislators have a wide

range of interpretations and definitions of what constitute effective poverty reduction strategies; (b) for the most part, legislators acknowledge that long-term programmatic strategies for poverty reduction are not always compatible with the short term and concrete demands of their electorate, and a small number of legislators provided examples of how to reconcile both goals; (c) there are multiple factors constraining legislators’ ability to engage in poverty reduction strategies, including the role of internal party dynamics, constitutional restrictions on service delivery, and the absence of technical staff; and (d) efforts led by international cooperation agencies have contributed to improving legislators’ ability to design poverty reduction strategies, disseminate initiatives and empower beneficiaries, but interviewees believed that there is room for greater involvement to strengthen the technical capacity of legislative committees.

Thus, the direct link between legislator and poor constituent is nowhere near as clear as supposed. Instead, parliamentarians face significant institutional and structural obstacles to introducing pro-poor legislation and fulfilling their accountability mandate. Democratic accountability must therefore make allowances for country-specific contexts that may inhibit formal mechanisms from operating effectively and delve deeper into the incentives and informal rules that govern legislative politics and policy formulation.

Sanctions

No real discussion of sanctions but the message is that structures, incentives, and so on, from within political parties and within the political system can be more influential over the behaviour of parliamentarians than formal, vertical accountability relationship with voters. This undermines the power of electoral sanctions to some extent, but raises the possibility of improved sanctions through horizontal mechanisms.