



**Promoting Local Democracy and Good Governance:  
Anti-Corruption Measures and Accountability Structures at Local Level**

**Regional and Global Experience: Some Notes and Resources**

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Democracy, whether at national, provincial or local level, is not a technical exercise in which 'independent' experts can produce a best possible solution to problems. It is a political process in which different interests and views within the community, not all of them public spirited or visionary, are debated and choices made.

All forms of democracy seek **popular control over decision making** and **political equality for citizens in the exercise of that control**. However, democracy takes many different forms – it cannot be supplied ready made. As countries and communities build their democracy, the experiences, successes and failures of others and the lessons they have learnt can be invaluable information and knowledge. In that spirit, I would like to share some of the knowledge that exists about democracy, anti-corruption and accountability, and some of the tools that can be used in practice within the community.

### **What promotes corruption?**

- Discretion  
Whenever there is an element of choice in the decision of an official, the opportunity for corruption arises. Criteria for decisions should be clear and where possible able to be assessed against facts.
- Complexity  
The more stages that exist in a process of interaction between citizen and local government, the more opportunity for corruption exists. Local licences and permits are the most corruption prone part of the local government/business relationship.  
Quezon City, Philippines: simplifying the process for ordinary business permit renewals reduced the number of opportunities for corruption.
- Security of documentation  
Old style forms and paperwork may be more prone to amendment than electronic documentation - e-government can reduce corruption opportunities once implemented.
- Opacity  
When you don't know what's going on, corruption is easier.  
India's recent Freedom of Information Act has

## **Anti-corruption resources**

- Philippine Democracy Assessment – Minimising Corruption
- Anti-corruption radio materials – Brazil
- Online anti-corruption resources – Ecuador
- Urban Bribery Index – Kenya
- Parliament Watch – Bangladesh, Indonesia
- 'Courts without Corruption' Kazakhstan

See

[http://www.transparency.org/tools/e\\_toolkit/corruption\\_fighters\\_toolkit\\_2002](http://www.transparency.org/tools/e_toolkit/corruption_fighters_toolkit_2002)

## **Accountability**

There are many facets to accountability. Some forms of accountability are institutional, usually found within the structures of the public administration. Examples include audit, the formal check and accounting of finances; legal challenge when other (usually higher) structures of government disqualify or challenge local authority actions, with disputes determined by the judiciary; and managerial accountability, when more senior public service officials reward good performance and seek to modify behaviour and/or discipline poor performers among their staff.

### ***Social and political accountability***

The other dimension of accountability does not always exist, and does not always work well when it does exist. It involves citizens and communities seeking social and political accountability. These forms of accountability include:

- Formal political oversight: legislators overseeing and questioning the acts of government
- Elections: the chance for voters to reward success and to boot out those responsible for failure
- Citizen participation other than at elections: CSO campaigns and demonstrations
- Media oversight

## Tools for citizens and communities

- ***Citizen assessment of democracy – State of Local Democracy (SoLD)***

When people ask whether their democracy is functioning well in their community, whether services are delivered effectively in line with community needs and priorities, the answer is not found by an academic research exercise or a ‘tick the boxes’ form which produces a list like a football league table. Communities can use the State of Local Democracy tool developed by IDEA for assessing and promoting public debate on community demography, space and planning; human development; local finance; security; participation mechanisms; communication between formal institutions and citizens; and accountability.

- Assessment can be undertaken by formally organised CSOs and/or by informal networks
- Assessment includes research – but more importantly generates community debate and discussion towards an agenda for change and development
- Assessment looks at the legal and regulatory framework – and at what actually happens on the ground
- Some examples: Gaborone (Botswana), Lusaka (Zambia), Nairobi (Kenya), Mwanza (Tanzania), Jerash (Jordan).

See <<http://www.idea.int/publications/dll/index.cfm>> and <[http://www.idea.int/publications/dll\\_africa/index.cfm](http://www.idea.int/publications/dll_africa/index.cfm)>

- ***Citizen Assessment – Democratic Accountability in Service Delivery***

Government officials who are subject to demands from organised voters and are subject to legal provisions, political motivations and credible sanctions are more likely to respond to citizens’ demands than those who do not. Mechanisms of social and political accountability are mutually dependent: both social demand for government action and formal rules and sanctions to respond to those demands need to exist. Any amount of social activism and mobilisation will not leave a long term impact unless there are clearly defined rules, sanctions and political

actors to convert them into effective government action. Conversely, all the institutional accountability frameworks will be insufficient in the absence of a vibrant demand and continuous pressure from the community and civil society. Both sides of the coin matter.

The research that has identified these conclusions has led IDEA to develop a practical tool to enable communities to assess accountability frameworks which is now being piloted in different places around the world. It seeks to enable communities to do four things:

- Catalyse political and social efforts to strengthen accountability for service delivery
- Raise awareness about service delivery in the wider community
- Build space for dialogue on how to strengthen local accountability and develop an agenda for reform
- Acquire a basis for discussion with external actors – for example national politicians, central government agencies, and even donors.

The tool breaks down the process of service provision into its many steps:

- Identifying a need and making a policy commitment
- Getting sufficient priority for the policy
- Designing implementation of the policy
- Implementation -
  - Is there sufficient budget?
  - Do those responsible have the necessary capacity and competence?
  - What opportunities for corruption exist?
  - What are the criteria for quality of the service and access to the service?

Questions like: What do the law and regulations say? What actually happens? Why are the answers different? are asked for each of the four areas of social and political accountability:

- Responsiveness – the process of citizens, legislators, and the media channelling their views to the authorities which provide a public service
- Answerability – whether and how the implementers justify their actions when requested

- Enforceability – the mechanism for feedback and the consequences of inaction or failure
- Sustainability – will the system of accountability continue to work year after year?

### **Direct democracy instruments**

Many countries around the world have developed direct democracy mechanisms, under which citizens can take initiatives to call for policy change. In some cases citizens can call for a local referendum. This power is widespread in Europe and Latin America, and is used in Asia in the Philippines and Taiwan. It was introduced in Germany in 1995: 538 votes took place in the first ten years, leading to 305 'yes' votes for change. The votes covered a wide range of issues, for example schools, waste management.

Agenda initiatives enable citizens to require the local authority to consider an issue. This power is available in Thailand – 2007 Constitution, Article 286.

See <[http://www.idea.int/publications/direct\\_democracy/index.cfm](http://www.idea.int/publications/direct_democracy/index.cfm)>

### **A final note**

It is a characteristic of participation and of democracy itself that people do not always take good decisions or implement the decisions that they do take. Power has been decentralised and devolved to local authorities in Indonesia over the last ten years in the biggest ever process of this kind. Some local authorities have performed very well, some have muddled through, some have made a mess of it, and some have done nothing. The change in the laws and regulations, the developing culture of democratic Indonesia, and the leadership or lack of it shown by the newly created directly elected mayors have all had an impact. Civil society organisations have formed at local level in some areas, have watched the performance of local authorities, and campaigned and advocated change.

The common factor is that the involvement, the discussion, the debate, the spreading of information and the learning from experience can lead to change and improvement – and to citizens who value, support and

engage with governance of their local communities and the decisions which affect their lives.