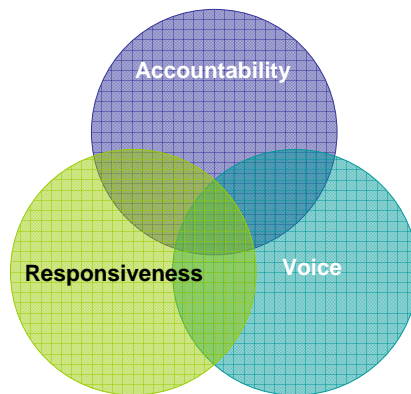


DRAFT Discussion Note – Accountability and Voice Mechanisms for Fostering Human Development



“In too many countries, the laws, institutions and policies governing economic, social and political affairs deny a large part of society the chance to participate on equal terms. The rules of the game are unfair. This is not only morally unacceptable; it stunts economic development and can readily undermine stability and security. The outcomes of governance -, the cumulative effect of policies and institutions on peoples’ lives – will only change if the processes of governance change, and change fundamentally.”

- Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor: Making the Law Work for Everyone, 2008

The Terminology: Defining Public Accountability and Civic Voice

This discussion note presents the conceptual framework of accountability and voice mechanisms within the context of development. The focus is on how enhanced civic “voice” will promote greater accountability of public institutions, which in turn improves institutions’ performance, increases their responsiveness, and ultimately leads to greater development impact.

Accountability is indispensable pillar of democratic governance¹ which underpins the allocation and use of power and resources and hence compels the state, private sector and civil society to focus on producing pro-poor development outcomes. Accountability has always been emphasized as a primary goal of governance and governance reform and as “the central and perhaps the most powerful element of good governance”². The term is often used to denote a **relationship** between a *rights holder* or a legitimate claim and the agents or agencies responsible for fulfilling or respecting that right by acting or desisting from particular actions (*duty bearers*). Duty bearers, such as government departments, regional and local authorities, etc. provide public services. Right holders are the legitimate beneficiaries of the actions of duty bearers.

Accountability has many meanings, however recent definitions of accountability describe it as a multi-faceted concept involving the need for **responsibility** “for government behavior” (conformance to a set of process requirements and rules: how government interacts with citizens- the process) especially related to resource use, and **responsiveness** (what government provides to citizens – the outcomes)³

¹ There are 3 main viewpoints on what is meant today by democratic governance: (i) the minimalist perspective- suggests that the essence of democratic governance is the existence of multi-party competitive elections for government leaders; (ii) the institutional concept with which UNDP works mainly, advocates for liberal or representative democratic governance. This perspective denotes democracy as a regime involving: a) fair and free elections; b) inclusive citizenship; and c) civil liberties and political freedoms; (iii) the maximalist concept defines democracy as a process engaging citizens in direct decision-making over issues affecting their lives.

² Schneider, 1999: 523

³ Manasan, Gonzalez and Gaffud, 1999: 152-153

Accountability and voice mechanisms bind the supply and demand side of public goods and services by defined rules, rights and responsibilities. The relationship which is of most interest in the context of accountability and voice mechanisms is that between the state (at national and local level) and its people⁴ within the context of human development.

Voice denotes an action and refers to the expression of preferences, opinions and views. Mechanisms for expressing voice are key to ensure that different preferences, opinions and views can be expressed, heard and acted upon. Evidences suggest that people are best positioned to hold government accountable if they have a strong potential and capacity to “voice” their demands, concerns and directives to governing officials. The force of civic “voice” is imperative in influencing national and local governments to be accountable, responsive and efficient in their service provision. It is argued that increased participation and voice- public influence- in such areas as planning and budgeting will enhance accountability, deepen the knowledge of demand and thus increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the use of public resources and improve public sector responsiveness to citizen needs⁵.

Voice mechanisms are presented as policy options available to governments or development agencies that are looking to enhance citizen influence over public entities. ***Voice mechanisms facilitate voice expression, which enhances accountability in the governance process.***

Voice mechanisms and tools can be formal or informal⁶: at the informal end of the spectrum, these can include a variety of citizen or civil society-led actions such as public demonstrations, protests, advocacy campaigns, etc. More formally, these can include working with the media, participating in policy-making and budget processes, tracking public expenditures, monitoring public service delivery, and taking part in public commissions and hearings. Voice can be directed at process of decision-making, policy implementation, planning and budgeting, and service delivery..

Accountability and voice are closely related but they are not the same and it does not follow that voice necessarily leads to accountability or vice versa. How and if voice leads or contributes to accountability will differ with the political context.

Relevant literature and reform experience in the developing world suggest a high degree of variations in the “accountability effects” of reforms involving voice mechanisms adoption:

- In many instances voice mechanisms have no impact on accountability at all. For example, when the participatory approach is “mere rhetoric” and participation mechanisms do not induce change in the way government relates to its citizens. Or when there is no effect on fiscal outcomes which are rather determined through negotiations between national and local governments;
- In other instances voice mechanisms facilitate improved accountability of government to narrow segment of society (narrow interest groups, such as influential NGOs, academics, local business, etc.). This means that, on balance, the voice mechanisms have a marked positive effect on accountability, but not to society as a whole;
- Voice mechanisms facilitate improved accountability of government to society as a whole

Voice mechanisms that ensure accountability to the poor and the disadvantaged lead to the following impact:

- Deepened democracy and increased state legitimacy
- Boosted incentives for improved performance and quality service delivery;
- Achievement of the MDGs advanced through strengthened capacity of public institutions at national and local level

While accountability and voice relationships are often complex (though they can be unbundled into specific key relationships) the fundamental question to be discussed is: ***How can civic “voice” (poor people and their advocates, including CSOs, NGOs) ensure the accountability and responsiveness of public officials, and how can one improve the performance of the state to***

⁴ The terms “citizen” and “state” are used as the 2 dimensions of the A&V relationship

⁵ Paul, 1996

⁶ Some examples of voice mechanisms include: citizen report cards, community score cards, social audit, etc.

adequately meet the concerns and needs of the citizens, including the poor and disadvantaged groups? Therefore, strengthening the capacities of governments (at the national and local levels) to become more accountable and citizens⁷ to become more influential and effective in holding institutions to account can be a strategic entry point for promoting democratic governance, inclusive growth and human development.

UNDP prioritizes four capacity development strategies that evidence suggests to be most effective in addressing capacity issues across sectors and themes. These are: institutional reform and incentive mechanisms; leadership development; education, training and learning; and accountability and voice mechanisms.

A Capacity development strategy is comprised of a set of potential actions to address capacity gaps and capitalize on capacity assets. The actions under the strategy Accountability and Voice Mechanisms relate to the systems and organizations that enable rights holders to voice their demands and that ensure that duty bearers respond to them. Such systems can range from simple to very complex. A relatively 'light' mechanism is the posting of public information on notice boards around town and the organization of town hall meetings to discuss the information. More complex accountability systems are the peer reviews that countries engage in, for example under the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). Civil society organizations that play the role of 'watch dog' can be a mechanism for the expression of voice. Municipal performance management systems are powerful mechanisms for improved performance and increased responsiveness. The selection of most relevant and appropriate capacity development actions is determined by the capacity assets and needs emerging from the capacity assessment. The capacity assessment process also creates ownership and empowerment, supports leadership, participation and institutional change, and ensures commitment for further pursuing the recommended capacity actions, which are prioritized and costed. The establishment of a rigorous monitoring and evaluation system enables tracking the capacity development results at the outcome level (organizational outcome is measured by change in attitudes, behavior, process and ultimately performance and leads to increased organizational effectiveness) and at the impact level (development impact is a change in the development situation, such as reduced unemployment, reduced morbidity and mortality, increased literacy, etc.).

Therefore, the input to accountability and voice mechanisms from the lenses of capacity development is the systemic and comprehensive approach that is applied. This approach brings together the following three elements:

- a *value base* that places a primacy upon national ownership, policies and priorities, and recognizes and values existing capacity assets;
- a *conceptual framework* that is focused on applying capabilities for human development and shifts from a supply driven and inputs-based TA to a more demand driven and outcome based one; and lastly
- a *methodological approach* that includes capacity assessment of the individual, organizational and systemic level, formulation of capacity development response/actions, and a rigorous capacity assessment tools with indicators.

What are illustrative actions under this strategy?

- Promotion of client voice mechanisms such as citizen report cards and community score cards
- Promotion of public information campaigns
- Promotion of social auditing and public expenditures tracking and budget monitoring
- Promotion of municipal performance management
- Support to public oversight mechanisms, spanning the executive, legislative, judicial and other constitutionally mandated institutions.

In any given society there are a multitude of accountability relations. For example such relationships exist between a state and its citizens; between an organization and its clients; within an organization as part of the institutional arrangements; and between countries and international donors. Thus there are also a wide range of entry points for investing in accountability and voice mechanisms as a capacity development strategy. Therefore it is important to define the scope and potential components

⁷ As individuals or organized and represented by NGOs, CBOs, community groups, etc.

of the CD strategy based on which targeted and context specific CD response actions will be selected for further pursuit.

Why capacities for accountability and voice?

Better functioning state institutions, a more transparent and accountable administration and a more proactive contribution of civil society in monitoring public action and use of resources are all factors which can contribute to long-term development and sustained economic growth. A&V mechanisms help monitor, steer and adjust behaviour in all kinds of social systems, allowing them to learn, self-regulate, remain relevant to their constituencies, and to achieve their respective purposes. In democratic societies, governments are held accountable at the very minimum because they can be elected or replaced by the public vote. As this is simply not enough, a host of mechanisms (e.g. General Auditor, Anti-Corruption Agencies, Ombudsman, Participatory Impact Assessment, Citizens report cards, Community score cards, etc.) are deployed to keep a check on public administration from the local to the national level. However, accountability relations can and often do fail through corruption, manipulation, or lack of capacity to operate them effectively. In weak states public institutions are captured by the powerful and resourceful, and resources are diverted to serve them. In such case, the poor are not represented by public institutions and their needs are not served. Supporting clear accountability relations, responsibilities, rights, rules and their enforcement can constitute powerful regulatory mechanisms for effective and democratic governance. A&V mechanisms can be a powerful driver for improved performance and development effectiveness.

Focusing on developing capacities for A&V is therefore a strategic entry point for promoting democratic governance, inclusive growth and human development. The rationale behind this is fivefold:

- **Incentives** - Accountability and voice mechanisms allow demand side pressures to be exercised on those in power, and can have a bearing on the motivation of people and organizations to learn, to perform and to make use of their existing capacities. Voice mechanisms enable rights holders (citizens) to influence decisions that affect their life, voice their needs and concerns, and hold the duty bearers (public institutions) accountable to their constituencies
- **Legitimacy** - Accountability and voice build legitimacy in decision making, implementation and monitoring processes, and can thus boost the ability of individuals and groups to act on behalf of the groups they serve.
- **Empowerment** – Accountability and voice mechanisms can be used to empower people to claim their rights from the 'bottom-up', to forge a stronger democratic culture of participation, engagement and social inclusion, and to serve as the ultimate safeguard against the abuse of power.
- **Power relations**—Accountability and voice loops provide checks and balances in a society's decision-making processes which increase transparency and limit the influence of vested interests on public policy.
- **Concrete action** – Accountability and voice mechanisms can be defined, communicated, implemented and measured in tangible ways.

A&V mechanisms are at the heart of reforming political systems and deepening democracy. These relationships are also the main concern in structuring public sector administrative systems. Therefore, the capacity development strategy Accountability and Voice mechanisms is closely linked to the other 3 CD strategies, namely institutional reform and incentives, leadership development, and education, training and learning. This illustrates the mutually reinforcing nature of capacity development responses.

Capacity for whom?

Investments in capacities for effective accountability and voice mechanisms are needed both on the supply side (duty bearers- public authorities and institutions) as well as on the demand side (rights holders- citizens including the poor, minorities, women, marginalized groups). Citizens need the capacity to organize themselves, articulate common positions, express their opinions on the decisions that affect their lives, on the power and resource allocation, and the performance of institutions and quality of public goods and services. Ultimately they need capacity to voice their concerns and

demand change when performance is poor and quality of life is deteriorating. CSOs and NGOs require capacities for engaging with citizens to hold governments accountable and sustaining voice mechanisms. Public institutions need the capacities to establish mechanisms and transform their systems to increase responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness.

Capacity for what?

Capacity needs of state actors: State actors, at both the local and national level are largely responsible for formulating A&V policy and implementing programs. Their skills requirements include not only technical management and financial competencies, but also the capacity to *manage reform process* (e.g. decentralization, including devolution of decision-making responsibilities and technical competencies), to improve *transparency* and the policy dialogue with civil society (including promoting and facilitating greater participation of civil society in decision-making process), to *shape a vision and think strategically*.

Capacity needs of non-state actors: Non-state actors need capacities for creation and exercise of voice and for ensuring that voice leads to greater responsiveness and accountability of both state and citizens. Some of the key capacity needs include: capacity for advocacy and engagement, for acquiring, sharing and applying knowledge, for participation in political processes, for leadership.

Lessons Learnt

A&V relationship and capacity development are about roles and responsibilities and most of the above approaches are bound to question power and vested interests. Resistance must therefore be anticipated. On the other hand, accountability, evidence, transparency and voice belong to the instruments of democratic governance and the argument for promoting them is in principle compelling and difficult to refute. It may take creativity to move towards concrete measures. Yet, promoting accountability through targeted capacity development, framed in a comprehensive way which acknowledges and addresses various challenges across the enabling environment, organisational and individual levels, can change dynamics and lead to profound changes in rules, attitudes, behavior and a society's ability to manage its own affairs.

Through the application of various 'supply' and 'demand side' approaches across the national, sub-national and local public sector, the private sector, CSOs and others, the following elements have crystallized as key features of successful applications of accountability and voice mechanisms in promoting democratic governance and human development.

- *Establishing reliable, legitimate and pro-poor 'ground rules'*
- *Increasing transparency, access to information and awareness*
- *Establishing facts, broaden evidence and increase objectivity*
- *Mandating and maintaining regular monitoring and control*
- *Improving access of poor to recourse and arbitration*
- *Moving accountability loops closer to the people*
- *Strengthening meaningful participation in political process*
- *Strengthening voice and ability to articulate*

UNDP's Relevant Policy Statements and Services Offered:

Policy Statements

- Corruption undermines and erodes capacity and long-term development and must be addressed through legal, institutional and educational means.
- Accountability between the state and communities should be given priority. This will promote mutual engagement on achieving development results.
- Accountability between donors and countries for development finance calls for a transformation of aid relations and aid coordination mechanisms. This will enable greater national leadership, multi-stakeholder engagement and transparency in aid relations.
- The deliberate and sustained engagement of civil society in national policy and budget dialogues is critical to the success of national development and poverty reduction strategies.

Services

1. Support to the design and tracking of mutual accountability mechanisms (e.g., peer review mechanisms), monitoring mechanisms and client voice mechanisms (e.g., client surveys, citizen's audits and social watch mechanisms).
2. Support to the design of systems that provide communities access to the information they need to engage in (mutual) accountability mechanisms.
3. Facilitation of multi-stakeholder engagement in visioning, planning and participatory monitoring, and training in these methodologies (such as 'group' techniques).
4. Providing training and expertise to establish and sustain community mechanisms to track and measure development progress and policy implementation.

Adapted from: Theisohn, T. (2007) 'Using accountability relationships to support capacity', in Capacity.org Issue 31 Accountability, August 2007, p.4-6 and UNDP (2006) 'Mutual Accountability Mechanisms: Accountability, Voice and Responsiveness,' Capacity Development Group, Conference Paper 6, Working Draft November 2006, ODI (2007) "Evaluation of Citizens' Accountability and voice",