

MAKING CITIZEN-CENTRED ACCOUNTABILITY LAST: TIME, MONEY, PARTNERS, MOTIVATION

Research report



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Citizen monitoring, social audits, mobile-based feedback systems, procurement monitoring: These are just a few examples of so-called **citizen-centred accountability (CCA) mechanisms** which governments and civil society organisations have developed to encourage citizens to feedback on the services they are entitled to and ultimately hold them to account.

As one organisation active in this field, Integrity Action has a particular interest in learning more about how these kinds of CCA systems can be designed so that they have the greatest chance of being sustained. In order to address this question, we carried out a comprehensive literature scan, 25 semi-structured interviews with experts and practitioners from civil society and government and an online snap survey with 70 respondents. This report shares what we discovered through that learning journey.

We first mapped out the range of perspectives on sustainability that we encountered across four levels: project, process, outcome and impact. These are presented in an earlier briefing note.¹ Recognizing that an in-depth discussion of outcome and impact sustainability - as central as they are to the success of any CCA initiative - was beyond the scope of what we could hope to achieve through this modest contribution to the field, we instead focussed on some of the key factors that help determine the potential for sustainability at the project and process level. This means our focus was on the systems or mechanisms that are employed to promote citizen-centred accountability. What emerges is a complex mesh of interdependent considerations, some mutually reinforcing, some competing, which can broadly be bundled under four headings: **time, money, partnerships and motivations**. There are of course others which are equally worthy of exploration, but our focus, for now, rests here.

We find that **time** considerations for CCA mechanisms are driven by a number of endogenous and exogenous factors, most notably:

- **The frequency of the event to be monitored:** whether these be episodic or occasional events (sporadic, sometimes across multiple sites), recurring events (predictable, cyclical), or continuous, ongoing events.
- **Time budgets:** The available time which different CCA stakeholders (citizens, service providers, intermediaries) have at their disposal to engage in the mechanism.
- **External events and commitment cycles:** Whether these be election cycles, local political events, or time-bound planning cycles attached to international processes such as the Open Government Partnership (OGP) or Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- **Attention spans and continuity:** The arc of popularity - from boom to bust - of specific "hot" topics, and the persistence of individuals who champion a specific CCA cause over time.

¹ Integrity Action (2020) Citizen-centred accountability: How can we make it last?, Briefing Note, Integrity Action, London <https://integrityaction.org/media/12393/integrity-action-sustainability-research-briefing-note.pdf>

- **Learning and adaptation cycles:** The typically short-term perspective of research and evaluation cycles coupled with the long time-lags in research uptake which means that tech-relevant insights in particular may be outdated by the time they are finally absorbed (so-called “phantom learning”).

As noted, there is no hierarchy among these. In any given context, they will each hold more or less significance to different stakeholders, and they will interact in different ways. The challenge is to acknowledge this plurality of time horizons and incorporate them as appropriate into the design of CCA mechanisms to maximise chances of sustainability.

We also find that CCA practitioners on the ground are often working with, or contemplating, a very pragmatic blend of **funding arrangements**, including but not limited to:

- **Donor funding**, typically in various combinations and iterations to mitigate the inherent volatility of donor priorities.
- **Government support**, as a potentially more stable funding source to complement external donor support. While government support can help foster a deeper commitment to accountability, the inherent risk of compromise and co-optation is clearly recognised.
- **Community foundation model**, whereby donor funds and other donations are locally pooled to address development issues, with a community-owned administrator acting as an intermediary between government and community members.
- **Monetising CCA services**, for example by charging fees to service providers or users, offering subscription services for governments, developing for-profit spin offs, or commercialising data for market research. Again, these approaches are not risk free, for example by closing off access to existing users, or by straightjacketing an organization into a specific model with limited flexibility.
- **Replicating, adapting or scaling CCA models** to ensure follow-on funding by expanding to new locations/service situations and/or by adding new features.
- **Pro-bono support**, including strategic use of volunteer time (e.g. monitors), (re)deployment of existing tech tools, free and open-source software applications, or pro-bono resources such as free accommodation for monitoring missions.
- **Innovative sources**, such as gamification of monitoring processes, impact investment, community-based saving groups, fundraising from local business, crowd-funding, selling off start-ups.

The choice of, or indeed the combinations of, the most viable funding arrangements is not simply a financial matter but has important implications for the relationships between the different stakeholder groups involved. Funding shapes the accountability and decision-making structures and ultimately the modes of partnership that underpin any CCA mechanism.

Nevertheless, from both our discussions with CCA practitioners and review of the literature, there seems to be - if not a consensus - at least some preference for the idea that more collaborative **partnership**-based approaches to CCA are more conducive to long-term sustainability. Such

approaches can help establish shared expectations and responsibilities between citizens and authorities as long as there are clear lines of autonomy on both sides and a mutual appreciation of divergent ideologies, priorities and agendas. In the right circumstances, when civil society actors can simultaneously act as a critical voice and a champion of progressive government action, they can even engender a certain symbiosis.

The evolution of CCA mechanisms towards some level of co-ownership or institutionalisation can be critical to ensure sustainability and achieve impact at greater scale, especially where there is a supportive legal environment that embeds citizen participation as a long-term policy goal. However, transitioning CCA initiatives from civil society to government or joint ownership is considered by many civil society actors to bring with it a number of risks, including potential loss of momentum, increased vulnerability to changing political priorities, and government co-optation or window-dressing. From the government perspective, risks include perceived favouritism, preferential treatment or the bestowal of (sometimes unwarranted) legitimacy on selected partners.

To address these risks, institutionalisation needs to be accompanied by mechanisms to maintain independence, impartiality and credibility and secure long-term commitment on both sides, such as arm's length administration of government funds or formalised multi-stakeholder accountability structures and decision-making processes. Alternatively, we might consider more creative long-term partnerships, such as with larger, established civil society organisations (CSOs) or official consumer associations that can pool funding sources, as an alternative, or complementary, route to sustainability.

Ultimately, whatever the model, we find that lasting engagement of citizens and service providers in CCA is contingent on a set of underlying **motivations, interests and incentives**. For citizens, these are often deeply personal, such as a sense of duty to the community or a feeling of accomplishment derived from problem solving. But smaller, reward-based incentives are also found to be important motivators, including economic incentives, stipends to cover costs, or the provision of mobile devices. Beyond the material, these micro-incentives may also offer a sense of prestige, status and credibility.

Lasting engagement is also contingent on service provider responsiveness to identified problems. Acting on, and being seen to act on, citizen demands is considered critical to sustaining long-term engagement. Closing the feedback loop can strengthen ownership, accountability and collective efficacy and activate further engagement. But above all, it requires trust. Building trust takes time and requires multiple sustained interactions, especially when engaging marginalized communities with limited political capital. Intermediaries can be critical, yet often under-valued, resource for nurturing trusting relationships and thus a key ingredient for sustainability.

Individual leadership and personal relations were also highlighted as key drivers for sustainable CCA mechanisms. Strong leadership can help foster a culture of accountability within the public service which is critical to creating lasting collaboration between government and civil society. Deliberately nurturing relationships with key champions as they move within and across government agencies or between government and civil society can serve to replenish the well of social capital and goodwill which can be strategically tapped to maintain the drive for CCA over time.

While our research does not offer any clear answers on which combinations of these factors are more critical for ensuring sustainability, it provides a framework for considering their relative importance in a given context, as well as how they might interact or conflict with each other. Ultimately, reconciling these tensions in a way which offers the greatest chance of sustainability may require us to forge ahead with a sense of "hopeful pragmatism": to use experience and skilled intuition to make things work today while nurturing a long-term, perhaps open-ended, ambition to contribute to more profound change. And above all, to embrace the challenge to adapt as circumstances change, and not become intimidated by uncertainty.



INTRODUCTION

Every year, organisations and governments across the world establish new – and sometimes tried and tested – ways of encouraging citizens to feedback on the services they are entitled to and ultimately hold them to account. Citizen monitoring, social audits, mobile-based feedback systems and procurement monitoring are just a few of the ways in which this takes place. We use the term **citizen-centred accountability (CCA)** to refer to the range of approaches and mechanisms that encompass, and go well beyond, what is listed above. Integrity Action is active in this field, having worked with a range of partners since 2013 to establish systems in which communities monitor the projects and services they are entitled to and seek solutions to the problems they find.

This research into the sustainability of CCA was originally triggered by a key challenge faced by Integrity Action: how to keep community monitoring systems going once a funded project ends. There is, of course, a more fundamental question of whether to keep them going at all – and the answer to this will not necessarily be affirmative in all cases. However, feedback from our partners, from citizens and stakeholders participating in our work, and from our peers within the field, tells us that there is a strong appetite for such mechanisms to continue when they bring positive outcomes. Furthermore, failing to continue them could lead to negative outcomes, such as disillusionment among participants and stakeholders if expectations are not properly managed. So, while we don't contend that all CCA mechanisms should be sustained, we do believe the sustainability question is worthy of exploration.

We therefore embarked on this research with a question that would, we hoped, be relevant to the wider field we work in, and not only Integrity Action:

How can systems of citizen-centred accountability be designed, so that they
(a) have the most impact, particularly for people who are excluded; and
(b) have the greatest chance of being sustained?

The inclusion of part (a) within this question was to ensure we did not forget about impact entirely – after all, it would be easier to sustain a CCA mechanism if impact wasn't a concern. However, recognising that there are many ways to achieve impact through CCA and that questions of impact have been explored much more thoroughly within the literature, the focus of the research presented here is much more on part (b).

This research is deliberately broad. We have not narrowed down our enquiry by specific sectors, such as health or education; nor have we done so by geographical regions, though it's important to note that the majority of contributions have come from the so-called "global south", as was our intention. We felt that, given the lack of research on sustainability in social accountability, keeping the focus

broad would allow us to (1) “map out” the landscape and highlight the issues that are most consistently faced, to provide others with a framework for addressing this challenge, and (2) bring together ideas from a range of sectors and geographies to provide inspiration and promote cross-fertilisation. Thus, this research aims to provide stimulation rather than concrete recommendations.

Research methodology and process to date

This research was carried out throughout 2020, based on three main strands of inquiry:

- A comprehensive literature scan of over 200 shortlisted empirical studies from academic, policy and evaluation sources in the fields of governance, development, and sectoral studies;
- 25 semi-structured interviews with relevant experts and practitioners from civil society and government from around the world;
- An online snap survey with 70 respondents on funding and ownership models for CCA mechanisms.²

As the knowledge and insights began to take shape, we realised that the sustainability of “systems” or “mechanisms” of CCA is not the only concern here. Such systems sit within a wider “ecosystem” of accountability and change processes that are no less relevant to the question of sustainability. Therefore, in October 2020 we published a briefing note that offered a typology of different perspectives on sustainability in the context of CCA.³ This looked at sustainability at four distinct levels: project, process, outcome and impact.

Having explored the question of *what* can be sustained within CCA, we are now reconnecting with our original research question to explore *how*. The reader will not be surprised to hear that we do not provide any hard and fast answers – indeed, any research attempting to provide solid answers in a field that is as context-sensitive as social accountability would rightly be met with suspicion. Rather, this report seeks to bring together and make sense of the insights, experiences, examples and ideas that were shared with us, and that we found in the literature, so as to provide both a worthwhile contribution to the knowledge base in our field and a practical resource for those who are engaged in citizen-centred accountability. We hope it achieves this goal.

Among the 25 interviewees mentioned above, as well as the 70 survey respondents, civil society practitioners are the most dominant group, while experts from government and service providers are represented to a lesser extent. This research was conducted during the first stages of the COVID-19 pandemic and we found government representatives were particularly constrained by intense and unpredictable working calendars. This means the civil society perspective may at times dominate, though we have done our best to ensure findings are relevant to anyone engaged in citizen-centred accountability.

Four key dimensions

In this research report we have organised our findings under four key elements or dimensions of CCA that shape ambitions and prospects for sustainability. These are:

² The full survey results can be accessed at: <https://integrityaction.org/media/15105/ia-sustainability-brainstorming-survey-all-responses.pdf>

³ Integrity Action (2020) Citizen-centred accountability: How can we make it last?, Briefing Note <https://integrityaction.org/media/12393/integrity-action-sustainability-research-briefing-note.pdf>

- A. **Timeframes** – we cannot understand the potential for sustainability without understanding the various ways in which *time* influences, constrains, or provides opportunities for effective CCA;
- B. **Funding models** – this section explores how CCA mechanisms can be financially supported in the long-run, as well as how they can be structured to minimise costs;
- C. **Ownership and partnership models** – here we look at how CCA mechanisms might be governed or administered in the long-term. What kinds of partnerships are needed to ensure continued trust, buy-in and efficacy?
- D. **Sustaining motivations** – here the “human factor” takes centre stage. How do we keep key people motivated to use or engage in a CCA mechanism, including citizens, civil society, service providers and government figures?



A. TIMEFRAMES

To grapple with the issue of sustainability, we found that we firstly need to explore the question of time. Sustainability can most simply be viewed as the potential for something to keep going or endure, but this paints a picture of consistency, perhaps even monotony – like the hum of an engine. Our research showed us that CCA is not like this, and any understanding of its potential for sustainability must be built first on an understanding of how different approaches and mechanisms might change, fluctuate and repeat over time. Added to this, external processes like annual budgeting and electoral cycles will introduce further interactions with time.

It is interesting, then, that the vast body of CCA research and assessments that we scanned is rather silent on this issue of time. Similar to the scant attention to sustainability,⁴ empirical research pays short shrift to exploring the time dimension of CCA. There is almost no explicit inquiry into the time perspectives of participating stakeholders and limited publicly communicated mention of anticipated time frameworks, nor how these were realized or adapted along the way. Policy-focussed project evaluations are at least specific about project implementation timeframes, but a lot of academic research does not clearly state the time period that their interviewees' and survey respondents' views and perspectives relate to.

We therefore asked our interviewees that work on CCA projects to talk about the timeframes that apply to their initiatives and found a great diversity of approaches (see box for examples).

- **Check My Service** (Mongolia) works on short 3–4 month cycles of user mobilisation and engagement depending on the service, then repeats.
- **DATA Uruguay** (Uruguay) typically works on three-year cycles: if projects are successful, they are replicated with incremental improvements made on a cyclical basis.
- **Twaweza's Sauti za Wananchi** (Tanzania) refreshes its mobile phone survey panel every 4 years. Experience has shown that differences in panel findings tend to be negligible across cycles.
- **Uwezo** (Tanzania), a citizen-centred initiative to assess childhood learning, works with multiple timeframes – from instant feedback on childhood education provided at household level, to feedback provided within a few days at the community/school level, through to feedback provided over longer timeframes at the district/national level.
- **CheckMySchool** (Philippines) has been running for almost a decade. Rather than applying a fixed cycle, it employs continuous monitoring.
- **Vulekamali** (South Africa), a budget monitoring initiative, is linked to the two-year action plan cycle in the context of the Open Government Partnership. However, the initiative also boasts instances where things have moved faster than had been originally anticipated.

⁴ Integrity Action (2020) Citizen-centred accountability: How can we make it last?, Briefing Note, Integrity Action, London <https://integrityaction.org/media/12393/integrity-action-sustainability-research-briefing-note.pdf>

A1. Timeframes of the accountability “target”

As the examples indicate, the overall sustainability ambition for CCA initiatives is shaped by a number of time “logics”⁵ that are specific to the accountability “target” (i.e. the project, service or policy being held to account), the issues it focusses on, its objective and the broader operational context. As issues and purposes vary greatly, so do the possible timeframes that would best align with the nature of a particular project. A very much simplified categorization could look like the following:

- **Episodic events** (e.g. monitoring of hygiene measures in the COVID-19 pandemic) may start unpredictably and motivate a rapid launch and open-ended time horizon with lots of flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances.
- **Recurring events** (e.g. election monitoring, budget formulations, procurement processes) are time-bound and happen regularly, thus requiring the periodic mobilization of CCA action and ideally relying on a longer-term orientation where future deployments can build on capabilities previously put in place and experiences previously gathered.
- **Occasional initiatives** (e.g. infrastructure developments: dams, schools, roads) are of varying durations, occur in specific forms in specific locations, but share commonalities and often complex attributes across different implementation sites. They call for timeframes that combine the pooling and expanding of specialized knowledge over time with the on-demand, time-bound mobilization of specific localities and communities.
- **Continuous services** (e.g. water, electricity, health, education), for which continuous monitoring mechanisms might be the most appropriate fit.

It is tempting to see these purpose-driven time logics as the overriding determinant of any CCA time horizon. Yet, there are other time logics that influence and shape both design and practical implementation of CCA time horizons.

A2. Stakeholder timeframes

Different stakeholder groups involved in CCAs have their own particular timeframes and time logics that they bring to bear on their involvement, all of which need to be factored in when making design and planning decisions that aim to improve sustainability.

Citizens

Designing for precious time budgets

CCA initiatives stand and fall with the engagement of citizens. Often the main currency of this engagement is time, for both citizens and those providing the service.

“(...) The real investment isn’t money; it is the commitment of people’s time, the investment in key champions, much more than money.”⁶

⁵ With “time logics” we refer in this report primarily to temporal dynamics that are tied to the workings and features of broader systems and institutions, whereas “timeframes” is used to describe issues of time and timing that are linked to and at least partly shaped by specific stakeholder groups.

⁶ Interview with Kay Brown, Financial and Fiscal Commission (FCC), South Africa

Beyond a very small number of governance aficionados, most beneficiaries will regard CCA initiatives as a pragmatic means to an end – e.g. parents are primarily interested in their children getting a good education, rather than spending time in council meetings. Yet, CCA initiatives, particularly when they focus on lower-income communities, women, parents, care-givers etc. seek the engagement of groups of citizens that are particularly time-poor and often locked into rather precarious, hyper-flexible work relationships that leave them with precious little time and low planning certainty for CCA commitments.

Donors (see also section B1)

Long-term needs, short-term supplies

Several large-scale project evaluations and systematic evidence reviews identify a long-term funding horizon as highly relevant for the sustained success of CCA initiatives.⁷ Yet, a lot of financial support from smaller donors is project-specific and budgets rarely extend beyond 2 years. Even the typical 3-5-year timeframes that larger donors such as the World Bank are willing to fund are often not considered sufficiently long.⁸

Governments and service providers

Rotations and regular fluctuations

As building trust and productive relationships with government players is regarded as a fundamental building block for cooperative CCA approaches, established rotation, transfer and promotion cycles or the lack thereof influence the possibilities and timeframes for building such relationships. The persistent presence – or loss – of a champion or trusted counterparts inside the government or bureaucracies was identified by several interviewees as a crucial factor in determining the success of their CCA initiatives.⁹ Some of these changes may be unforeseeable and unpredictable. But others might be due to employment rules and regular staff movements and can thus be taken into account when planning investments for building rapport on the government side. Election cycles, the ensuing incentives to launch or finalize trophy projects and the possibility of shifting political priorities and new political appointees are also time-bound regularities to reckon with.

Milestones and commitment cycles

At a broader level, the government might also be locked into national and international plans and processes that shape timeframes for action on the ground. This could include regular reporting schemes and milestones for national development plans, plans related to the SDGs, or activities that the government has committed to under two-year action plans in the context of the Open Government Partnership.

⁷ United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (2014) Performance Evaluation of Strengthening Democratic Local Governance (SDLG) Project (Bangladesh) <https://tinyurl.com/8b2nvede>; Heller, K., van Wicklin III, W., & Kumagai, S. (2016) Integrating social accountability approaches into extractive industries projects: A guidance note <https://tinyurl.com/2mhc8u8f>; Social Impact (2019) Ukraine Local Governance Project Whole-of-Project Evaluation https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TW5X.pdf

⁸ Heller, K., van Wicklin III, W., & Kumagai, S. (2016) Integrating social accountability approaches into extractive industries projects: A guidance note <https://tinyurl.com/2mhc8u8f>

⁹ Interview with Doreen Grove, Scottish Government; Interview with Kay Brown, FCC, South Africa; Interview with Zukiswa Kota, Public Service Accountability Monitor (PSAM), South Africa

A3. Learning timeframes

Monitoring, evaluation and accompanying academic research are essential for advancing project-level and sector-level learning, agility and follow-on funding prospects in CCA initiatives. The methods being used for these purposes come with their own time logics that also play into CCA timeframes.

Short-termism by design

The dearth of empirical research on sustainability and CCA is partly attributable to short time horizons imposed by research funding as well as research design constraints. The bulk of research studies on citizen engagement initiatives, for example, only look at a 1-5-year timeframe even when seeking to capture longer-term impacts.¹⁰ Randomized-controlled trials, one of the most popular assessment methodologies at the moment, are typically built around relatively short-term interventions and construed in ways that limit the exploration of longer-term dynamics and sustainability issues.¹¹ But even many qualitative studies pay short shrift to the time dimension in their analysis, often leaving applicable timeframes under-specified in their evidence gathering and evidence presentation.

Phantom learning

The protracted research production and publication cycle makes it very difficult to convert research insights into timely, actionable inputs for future project designs. This is particularly the case for CCA initiatives that use technology. By the time research insights and evaluation findings are published and re-circulated in the policy field, 10-12 years may have passed – half of an eternity in technology time. This means most research-based insights circulating today relate to a time period when none of today's main social networking tools had reached more than 15% adoption in developing countries and some platforms were just launching (such as WhatsApp in 2009 or Instagram in 2010).

A4. Contextual time logics: attention, technology

Two more time logics that bear on the time horizons of CCA are worth noting.

The issue attention cycle – changing the frame but staying the course

Sustaining citizen engagement requires refreshing motivational resources that are prone to decline over time. The arc of popularity of specific policy topics – in the eyes of donors, the broader policy community and the wider public – runs from excitement about novelty to peak popularity and back down to saturation and fatigue. An onset of fatigue in continuous or periodic monitoring projects has even been identified for crisis-related situations such as the monitoring of hygiene conditions in informal settlements during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa.¹² Initial excitement over a newfound empowerment, purpose or novel technology wears off, while a realization sets in that

¹⁰ International Initiative for Impact Evaluation Inc. (3IE) (2019) Does promoting citizen engagement in the governance of public services lead to improved service delivery and quality of life? (also subsumes “Does incorporating participation and accountability improve development outcomes? Meta-analysis and framework synthesis”) <https://tinyurl.com/ffwhzt7>

¹¹ Grandvoinet, H., Aslam, G., & Raha, S. (2015) Opening the black box: The contextual drivers of social accountability. *In New frontiers of social policy* <http://bit.ly/100NvRq>

¹² Presentation on Asivikelane in Learning Series on Budget Monitoring. Afesis-Corplan

gains are hard to achieve and even harder to sustain. CCA projects should keep this trajectory in mind and be ready to adjust their projects accordingly.

“In our time, we were not talking of transparency and accountability but of people’s participation. Then the concepts of transparency and accountability became the ‘in’ things. There was a demand to look for some of these models. That’s when the international organizations found us... There was no sustainability on the part of the national government to empower the people. Luckily, we were into other advocacy and equipped with technical know-how, so we were able to branch out into different concerns and to package proposals that kept us afloat...” (CSO representative, community monitoring project, Philippines).¹³

Section D1 on citizen motivations presents some of the practical measures that our interviewees and survey respondents shared with us to push back on the demotivation dynamic.

Dealing with the tech trajectory: rapid on the ground, more persistent at the top

Rapid IT development, business models that favour built-in obsolescence and the unrivalled rate of diffusion/leapfrogging into new generations of social media platforms make it extremely difficult to establish a technology infrastructure for CCA projects that remains accessible to less-advanced users, fully harnesses the potential of the present and remains adaptable to inevitable changes in the future. Throughout our interviews we find a very pragmatic attitude to technology. It is treated as one important tool for but not the central driver of CCA projects, mirroring the abating hype curve for civic tech (for more on technology, see dedicated page below).

At the same time, it should be noted that funding opportunities in this area appear to be more persistent at least for groups that are set up to work with large, institutionalised donors. World Bank commitments on Information and communications technology (ICT) projects in public administration reforms have steadily grown from less than USD 20 million in 2000 to commitments well beyond USD 100 million in 2020, while the share of active open government projects in this portfolio has more than tripled from 2.6% (2007-2014 period) to 9% (2015-2019).¹⁴ So taking advantage of new technology-related funding opportunities is still a significant and growing possibility.¹⁵

¹³ Innovations for Successful Societies, Princeton University (ISS)(2013) Power at the Grass Roots: Monitoring Public Works in Abra, The Philippines, 1986-1990 <https://tinyurl.com/sx8f9dr5>

¹⁴ World Bank Group (2020) GovTech Launch Report and Short-Term Action Plan <https://tinyurl.com/bpdk9kmm>

¹⁵ World Bank Group (2020) GovTech Launch Report and Short-Term Action Plan <https://tinyurl.com/bpdk9kmm>

A5. From multi-tasking to multi-timing – from lockstep to rhythm

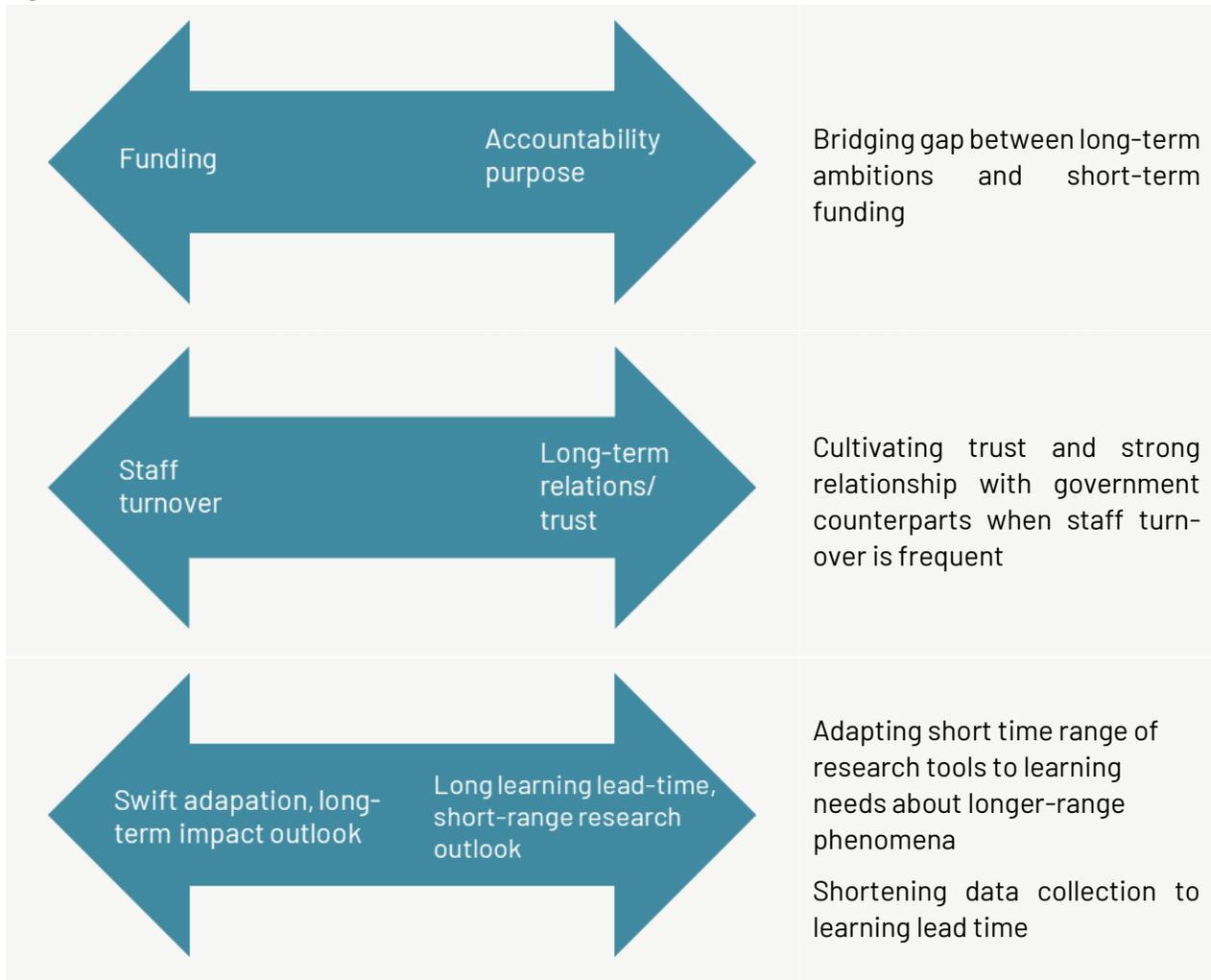
As we have seen, the time pressures, cycles and horizons that coincide for a given CCA mechanism may be many and diverse. Figure 1 summarizes the main ones presented here.

Figure 1: Competing CCA time logics



If timeframes are explicitly considered at all, it is the target-specific ones outlined in section A1 that are typically assumed to have the most influence on the CCA mechanism in question. However, in practice a number of other time logics play into this and might eventually shape both the ambition and practical manifestation of CCA time horizons. Taking these into account requires addressing and managing three rather common structural mismatches which emerge across many different CCA initiatives.

Figure 2: Tensions in CCA time horizons



In practice, of course, there is no make-your-choice, coherent, consensually agreed upon timeframe or sustainability aspiration for a specific type, level or impact of CCA, no dynamics that can be aligned to move in lockstep. In fact, quite the opposite appears more plausible. The different stakeholders that contribute to or are touched by a specific CCA mechanism – citizens, funders, bureaucracies, front-end workers – all bring their distinctive timeframes and time logics to the table. And these stakeholder-specific timeframes interact with broader macro-level time logics.

As a result, it could be argued that one of the main challenges for achieving any notion of sustainability for CCA is to acknowledge this plurality of timeframes and deal with it. The task at hand is thereby not to engineer and agree a common stakeholder timeframe or shared notion of sustainability that underpins the effort. Instead, it is about skilfully navigating and creatively juggling this plurality of time logics and expectations, syncing them up in the most productive ways possible, while seeking to mitigate the negative fall-out when clashes are inevitable.

A nice framing for this challenge is provided by the treatment of time in Greek mythology and its two different conceptions of time:

- **Chronos** as the evenly paced, measurable, plannable linear flow of time.

- **Kairos** in contrast is neither linear nor predictable, nor mechanically pre-determined or computable. It is about the right timing and the right time that can only be selected with skill, intuition and a sound understanding of the time logics that are relevant.

So, *Kairos* more than *Chronos* underpins the art of doing, timing and syncing up CCA initiatives with all the applicable time logics for maximum benefit.



B. FUNDING

Mirroring the dearth of empirical research on time horizons for CCA, there is only very limited in-depth engagement with the financial dimension of CCA in most of the research and policy literature.

A long-term funding horizon is recognized as highly relevant for the sustained success of CCA and the lack thereof is a frequent shortcoming identified in evaluation reports.¹⁶ Yet, a more comprehensive systematic examination of the funding and financial management of CCAs is largely absent.

The following three sections consolidate findings from our interviews, survey and a review of the literature with regard to funding sources, financial management and ideas for new funding models on the horizon.

B1. Funding models

"We should not be purists and apply for funding from organizations whose societal vision is identical to ours." (Civil society representative, community monitoring, Philippines)¹⁷

Pooling, blending, stitching it together

Where funding models are mentioned in the research literature these references almost exclusively revolve around conventional formats of public and donor funding. Yet, our interviews and survey show that CCA practitioners are working with, and/or are considering, a broad array of funding arrangements. What stands out is the pragmatism with which individual funding modes are being blended, as time horizons for individual funding sources rarely align with the longer-term ambitions for investing in capabilities, nurturing relationships and working towards longer-term change that CCA initiatives embrace. The result is a range of creative funding patchworks. There is donor funding with some co-financing from local government (e.g. CARE Egypt)¹⁸ and donor funding transitioning in some districts to funding by local governments (Civic Action Teams or CivActs Nepal).¹⁹ There are initiatives that mix membership fees, local fundraising events, municipal funding and funding from

¹⁶ USAID (2014) Performance Evaluation of Strengthening Democratic Local Governance (SDLG) Project (Bangladesh) <https://tinyurl.com/8b2nvede>; Heller, K., van Wicklin III, W., & Kumagai, S. (2016) Integrating social accountability approaches into extractive industries projects: A guidance note <https://tinyurl.com/2mhc8u8f>; Social Impact (2019) Ukraine Local Governance Project Whole-of-Project Evaluation https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TW5X.pdf

¹⁷ ISS (2013) Power at the Grass Roots: Monitoring Public Works in Abra, The Philippines, 1986-1990 <https://tinyurl.com/sx8f9dr5>

¹⁸ Interview with Amr Lashin, CARE Egypt

¹⁹ Interview with Blair Glencorse, Jean Scrimgeour, Accountability Lab

traditional leaders (Counterpart Niger)²⁰ and others that draw on a mix of international donors and local philanthropic funding for specific parts of their initiatives (CMS Philippines).²¹

Funders: very important, somewhat moody, too short

3 out of 4 respondents in our practitioner and expert survey considered donor funding as a very or somewhat promising funding strategy for sustainable CCA initiatives, making this the second-most frequently mentioned option.

CCA projects that have been researched over longer timeframes are documented to have relied on varying combinations and iterations of donor funding, rather than relying on a single, stable funding source. This is likely because donor support is viewed as more subject to changing priorities (the flavour of the month) than other forms of funding. As one interviewee indicated, ten years ago, social accountability was attractive to donors but now gets only limited attention, a challenge particularly for countries like the Philippines which is now considered a middle-income country.²² This highlights the importance of adaptability and resourcefulness in fund-raising for CSOs, even when they do have a successful initiative to pitch.

Government support: more patient, more buy-in, yet at risk of co-optation

The views of survey respondents about the potential of government support for achieving longer-term sustainability of CCA initiatives vary greatly: about half of respondents saw this as very or somewhat promising, while another half regarded this option as not so promising, the highest level of scepticism that was expressed for any of the funding options presented.²³

Financial support from the government is recognised as a possible (more patient, more stable) funding complement to external donor support. Financial benefits aside, another positive aspect of government funding is the sense of buy-in that it can foster. Financial commitments by government are associated with giving government a clear stake in the success of CCA, which can in turn enhance the willingness to provide more financial support. Local government co-funding was identified as an important factor in creating a sense of ownership at local level in a large-scale citizen participation initiative in Indonesia.²⁴

The risk of compromising one's independence and opening the door to co-optation however, is clearly recognized as one of the main downsides of a heavy reliance on government funding.²⁵ Clear arrangements must be in place to protect against these risks, for example in the form of an independent administration of government funds²⁶ or by avoiding any direct provision of services to government on a consultancy basis that might undermine the independent monitoring function that

²⁰ Interview with Ousmane Kabèlè Camara, Counterpart, Niger

²¹ Interview with Don Parafina, CMS, Philippines

²² Interview with Don Parafina, CMS, Philippines

²³ The replies might reflect the large share of civil society representatives and the relatively small share of government officials among the survey takers.

²⁴ ISS (2014). Expanding and Diversifying Indonesia's Program for Community Empowerment, 2007-2012 <https://tinyurl.com/e6jfa23z>

²⁵ Interview with Anne Sevilla, Undersecretary for Finance, Department of Education, Philippines; Interview with Tess Salud, Government of Philippines; Interview with Walter Flores, Center for the Study of Equity and Governance in Health Systems, Guatemala.

²⁶ Interview with Don Parafina, CMS, Philippines; Interview with Amr Lashin, CARE Egypt

the CCA mechanism is designed to ensure.²⁷ In Guatemala an interesting model is being tested to balance these issues: public funding for training efforts to give marginalised communities a stronger role in health policies is disbursed via the Ombudsman’s Office and underpinned by a related letter of agreement so that all terms are clear and direct influence by the health authorities is controlled.²⁸ More generally, funding through a government body that operates at arm’s length from the ruling coalition, such as a supreme audit institution, is likely to offer a lower risk of being captured.

Section C3 on transitioning CCA ownership from civil society to government offers some further insights into the risks and opportunities associated with this.

Community foundation model – big promise, nascent practice

An astounding 78% of survey respondents considered the community foundation model as a promising pathway towards financial sustainability of CCA initiatives, making this the most popular funding model among participants, although (or perhaps precisely because) the practical experience with such models and their impacts is still nascent.

The idea behind the community foundation model is to establish an organizational mechanism to pool donor resources and donations dedicated to the social improvement of a given place in collaboration with local civil society organisations. From a sustainability perspective, in theory the foundation creates an endowment, or long-term donor basket fund to address development issues and involve people in a particular place, rather than focusing on a cross-cutting theme. Community foundations would seem to have potential as conduits for social accountability as they often find themselves as interlocutors between government and civil society. They can also serve as useful platforms to run grassroots funding strategies (i.e. via women’s or youth groups), link to local philanthropies and reach out to diasporas and an international audience of grassroots donors (e.g. via connectors such as Global Giving).²⁹ However, turning community foundations into widespread practice is considered to require significant donor investment.³⁰

Monetizing it or some of it? – a worthwhile but difficult dance

“There is a chance to build a hybrid solution that provides services of the public for ‘free’ and also develop a model for corporate clients.”³¹

Survey respondents approached the idea of charging fees – be it to service providers or users – with cautious optimism; around half of respondents found at least some promise in this monetisation strategy as a potential pathway to financial sustainability. In South Africa, for example, a parliamentary feedback system based on the FixMyStreet platform cross-subsidizes its free service by selling information feeds to commercial and parliamentary subscribers.³² In Uruguay Por Mi Barrio has considered introducing a subscription service for governments based on a menu of options.³³

²⁷ Interview with Amr Lashin, CARE Egypt; Interview with Daniel Carranza, Por Mi Barrio, Uruguay

²⁸ Interview with Walter Flores, Center for the Study of Equity and Governance in Health Systems, Guatemala

²⁹ Multiple survey respondents

³⁰ Interview with Matt Reeves, Aga Khan Foundation, Kenya

³¹ Survey respondent

³² Rebecca Rumbul, MySociety, referring for South Africa to the People’s Assembly project run by the Parliamentary Monitoring Group <https://pmg.org.za/page/what-is-pmg>

³³ Aguerre, C. and Bonina, C. (2019) Por Mi Barrio. Lecciones, Hallazgos y Futuro (Por Mi Barrio. Lessons, Findings and Future) <https://tinyurl.com/2uc7d86v>

BudgIT in Nigeria covers 5% of its costs for various transparency and monitoring projects through a for-profit spin off and intends to raise this share to 20%.³⁴

A paid service offering could also be considered by CCAs when co-operating with regional or international organisations and helping them strengthen compliance and corruption controls in their development projects.³⁵ Or as one survey respondent put it:

“It’s wholly feasible that donors, research firms and others should have to pay for community feedback information - it’s cheaper than them sending their own teams.... here is definitely potential for a fully commercial or hybrid arrangement.”³⁶

Cross-subsidizing the operations of CCAs by selling additional services was considered as the third most promising funding mechanism (regarded as very or somewhat promising by 64% of respondents).

Yet, monetising CCA initiatives, or parts thereof, is not without its drawbacks. Some of the data generated by the citizen panel run by Twaweza in Tanzania, for example, could be valuable for commercial market research and thus subsidize the social accountability parts. However, there are concerns that this may jeopardize the currently very high retention rates for respondents.³⁷ The idea of commercialising the business intelligence module of the DoZorro procurement platform for citizen-feedback in Ukraine to raise additional funds has not yet been operationalised because of concerns that doing so would close off access to existing users who are able to freely use the data thanks to its open Application Programming Interface or API.³⁸ Following the Software as a Service Model, MySociety converts experience gained in FixMyStreet implementations into consulting services that help local governments deploy such initiatives more effectively and on a larger scale. While this approach helps to cover staff costs, a clear downside is that it locks the organization into a specific implementation mode with limited wiggle room for innovation.³⁹

B2. Strategies for financial management and cost savings

A number of strategies are used to control costs, make available resources go further or enhance the prospects of securing follow-up funding.

Replication and adaptation to secure follow-up funding

Several initiatives that had developed a successful format or platform managed to secure repeat follow-on funding by replicating or adapting their model in different cities or countries (e.g. Por Mi Barrio, FixMyStreet) and by adding new features and functionalities that would help raise fresh money and keep the overall project going.⁴⁰ Replication may involve repurposing the overall approach rather than the specific mechanism. For example, Transparency International Ukraine (TI Ukraine) has adapted its DoZorro model for an European Union funding application for its

³⁴ Interview with Oluseun Onigbinde, BudgIT, Nigeria

³⁵ Survey respondent

³⁶ Survey respondent

³⁷ Interview with Ben Taylor, Twaweza, Tanzania

³⁸ Interview with Anastasiya Kozlovseva and Khrystyna Zelinska, TI Ukraine, Ukraine

³⁹ Rebecca Rumbul, MySociety, referring for South Africa to the People’s Assembly project run by the Parliamentary Monitoring Group <https://pmg.org.za/page/what-is-pmg>

⁴⁰ Interview with Daniel Carranza, Por Mi Barrio, Uruguay

Transparent Cities project, which aims to build a community of monitors for local level transparency.⁴¹

Scaling to save cost where installed capacities can be shared or costs split

In Pakistan, for example, a district level feedback system developed by the central government could be deployed at small marginal costs across a large number of service situations. As one of the project managers noted:

“We got immense value for money from the [system]... Looking at the impact and scale, the costs were peanuts.”

The scaling up of the project made it possible to account for costs and benefits of the overall project in consolidated fashion and avoid the risk that individual value for money calculations at local level would turn out to be negative and thus lead to drop offs in buy-in by local governments that provided some of the funding.⁴²

In other cases, avoiding the temptation to scale up can itself be a route to sustainability, where the focus is on efficiency improvements rather than rapid growth. Keeping an initiative nimble and avoiding a “growth trap” where rapid scaling up is associated with substantive and rising fixed overhead costs can be a way of keeping funding requirements in check.⁴³

Drawing on pro-bono support

Pro-bono contributions can be important sources of support and lend themselves to local and grassroots fundraising strategies. They can take very different forms, but primarily involve in-kind contributions of time, technology and other supporting resources.

- **Time:** Fluid arrangements are possible that engage citizens beyond the time they donate as service users, or as participants in deliberative processes, to involve them as volunteers to contribute their expertise to monitoring exercises, developing technologies, conducting survey work etc. CCA initiatives have for example reached out to and secured volunteer inputs from universities and other governance NGOs⁴⁴ or youth groups.⁴⁵
- **Technology:** although the deployment of sophisticated, rapidly evolving technologies can turn into a significant cost factor, the (re)deployment of tools that have already been built and the strategic use of free and open-source software applications such as mobile survey tools (e.g. Open Data Kit, KoBo) can help save money.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Interview with Anastasiya Kozlovseva and Khrystyna Zelinska, TI Ukraine, Ukraine

⁴² ISS (2015) Calling Citizens, Improving the State: Pakistan's Citizen Feedback Monitoring Program, 2008 – 2014 <https://tinyurl.com/27xd5psk>

⁴³ Interview with Daniel Carranza, Por Mi Barrio, Uruguay

⁴⁴ ISS (2015) Calling Citizens, Improving the State: Pakistan's Citizen Feedback Monitoring Program, 2008 – 2014 <https://tinyurl.com/27xd5psk>

⁴⁵ ISS (2013) Power at the Grass Roots: Monitoring Public Works in Abra, The Philippines, 1986-1990 <https://tinyurl.com/sx8f9dr5>; ISS (2013). Promoting Accountability, Monitoring Services: Textbook Procurement and Delivery, The Philippines, 2002 – 2005 <https://tinyurl.com/u8n6zj8m>

⁴⁶ Interview with civil society representative; also: Beschel, R., Cameron, B., Kunicova, J., & Myers, B. (2018) Improving Public Sector Performance through Innovation and Inter-Agency Coordination <https://tinyurl.com/bem8wp6d>

- **Other pro-bono resources:** Resourceful CCA initiatives have found ways to secure free airtime at radio stations for promotional work or free accommodation in church facilities during monitoring missions to remote places in the Philippines.⁴⁷

B3. Outlook and ideas

Some of the interviews and survey responses also yielded multiple interesting ideas of innovative funding opportunities for CCA initiatives on the horizon, including:

- **Gamification:** the use of playful mechanisms to sustain engagement through small competitions, achievement milestones, app-based citizen missions etc.⁴⁸ This is perhaps most applicable to the domain of raising grassroots time inputs.
- **Impact investment and social impact bonds** received several mentions in our survey as an approach worth exploring. The idea is to raise money upfront (investments) in return for generating specified development impacts. Such an approach might be partially applicable for CCA initiatives that commit to hitting specific targets for public service satisfaction, integrity etc.
- **Community-based savings groups:** offering mechanisms to community members for pooling funds and saving together over time in order to cover the operational costs of a local CCA initiative.
- **Local fundraising**, with a focus on engaging with local business and the growing local middle class; the latter is regarded as an increasingly significant group to fundraise from particularly in East Africa.⁴⁹
- **Levying a special fee** on big, successful companies for example in the extractives or telecommunications sector. The revenue can be pooled and support accountability projects.
- **New online crowd-support models** such as Patreon or Substack that provide a simple mechanism to source individual contributions for specific services or projects.
- **Selling out for scaling up:** A particular provocative suggestion in analogy to the start-up world: find a large organization with a solid funding base to fold your CCA into (for more on this see also the partnership section below).

Overall, there seems to be growing enthusiasm for exploring local funding options, such as fundraising from local corporates and local middle-classes, establishing community foundations or community saving schemes. As this overview also shows, the choice of the most viable funding arrangements is not simply a financial matter, but has important implications for the relationships between the different stakeholder groups involved. Funding shapes the accountability and decision-making structures, the sense of ownership and motivational force fields that underpin any CCA initiative. The following sections explore these latter two issues in more detail.

⁴⁷ ISS (2013) Power at the Grass Roots: Monitoring Public Works in Abra, The Philippines, 1986 - 1990 <https://tinyurl.com/sx8f9dr5>

⁴⁸ Interview with Arturo Hernández, Supercívicos Mexico

⁴⁹ Charities Aid Foundation (CAF)(2020) Growing Giving in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania <https://tinyurl.com/4xtem3rh>

A note on technology: Thinking pragmatically and thinking politically



The role of technology for the sustainability of CCA mechanisms is ambivalent. On the one hand it delivers the basic functionalities that make many mechanisms possible in the first place and promises cost savings and efficiency gains on many levels. At the same time, however, it can distract attention from stakeholder needs and turn into a costly resource sink. Noteworthy observations on technology from our interviews, survey and literature review include:

- **A useful tool, often in the back office:** technology is regarded as very useful or essential for some basic functions, e.g. storing information, multi-language access, collecting survey information, crowd-sourced collection and distribution of community information at scale, and fundraising, but is not as central to many CCA projects as the recent buzz around civic tech may have suggested.
- **Easy entry but a steeper climb ahead:** Readily available off-the shelf tools enable a low-threshold experimentation and proof of concept. For example, survey tools, such as the Open Data Kit, KoBo or CAPI can be quickly set up to trial remote monitoring and distributed survey exercises. But when deployments are being scaled up and tailored for specific purposes and contexts they tend to require non-negligible resources for customization and maintenance in line with evolving security and privacy challenges.
- **Distraction and exclusion risks:** A narrow focus on technology can be a distraction especially if it is taken as the starting point for a CCA initiative. The “hackathon” approach, for example, which has given rise to a lot of civic tech interventions, is judged by some practitioners to be in itself unsustainable. Similarly, the deployment of sophisticated technologies that often lack backwards compatibility with, say, legacy phones or operating systems that are still widely used creates significant risks of excluding the very groups that are already disadvantaged and could gain most from a stronger voice in the accountability arena.
- **Political momentum 2.0:** The most significant benefits from the strategic use of new technological opportunities may well be at the political level. The arrival of new technologies can create new champions and more determined impetus for reform that could be cross-purposed to overcome resistance around CCA in some instances and increase the prospects for a more enduring presence. It does not override the requirements to build personal relationships and work towards acceptance and co-ownership of CCA mechanisms, but offers opportunities for new allies, new levers and new energy for reform.

“[The automated citizen feedback system] is the chief minister’s baby... he created it in 1999, a time when few people had appreciation for IT-driven reforms in government. He is a big believer in IT and he made sure that I was included in all important meetings of the government.” (Government official, technology platform, Pakistan)

The development of new technologies and related opportunities for CCA mechanisms continues apace, most recently supercharged by the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic that has accelerated the digitisation of many public service and citizen accountability arrangements. This reinforces the need for continuing experimentation and learning even when taking a very pragmatic view on the potential of technology for sustainable CCA mechanisms. Advances in remote sensing and automated monitoring architectures in the context of the Internet of things could have some interesting applications in augmenting citizen monitoring initiatives and further help their scaling and efficacy. Distributed identity management, which aims to make it easier for individuals to prove who they are in the digital realm, could help protect and expand participatory mechanisms in times of computational propaganda and thus address a major challenge to the sustainability of some open participation mechanisms. Social media tools and platforms continue to rapidly evolve and offer expanding choices for reaching new groups and integrating new functionalities.



C. PARTNERSHIP MODELS

In addition to time horizons and funding models, sustainability of CCA initiatives is also influenced by the particular form of partnership involving citizens, civil society, service providers and/or governments that a given model seeks to establish. As a starting point, a simple distinction is often made in the literature between adversarial and cooperative formats of CCA. Typically, viable prospects for sustainability are associated with cooperative formats where citizens and governments work together. This is perhaps not surprising where sustainability is equated with some level of institutionalization, budgetary certainty and political will to get things done, through the types of accountability initiatives that are typically arranged by government. But it is also a feature of civil society-led initiatives. As revealed through our survey results and conversations with CCA practitioners there was generally a preference for non-confrontational, collaborative and deliberative approaches on the civil society side, although this was often tempered by an acknowledgement of the risks inherent in cooperative approaches, including of government co-optation or window-dressing.

*"I think some sort of co-ownership makes most sense. (...) Too much government ownership can be problematic, but equally some buy-in is critical. I suppose the key is to ensure that buy-in at the local level in particular, where these processes are closest to citizens."*⁵⁰

C1. A hybrid future?

So, what do these forms of cooperation look like in practice and what are the risks involved? We were particularly interested in those "hybrid" models which have a strong partnership focus. Examples offered by those we talked to include:

- **CARE Egypt's Third Party Monitoring model** which involves the establishment of a common platform for exchange between citizens and service providers to support an ongoing series of input tracking cycles, site visits, public hearings and review meetings;⁵¹
- The long-standing **Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group** in Uganda which works alongside the Ministry of Finance to track how disbursed resources are used in the country;⁵² and

⁵⁰ Survey respondent

⁵¹ South-South World: Mainstreaming Social Accountability in the Emergency Labor Intensive Investment <https://tinyurl.com/ymb8h48a>

⁵² Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group <https://www.csbag.org/>

- **Counterpart's Participative Responsive Governance project** in Niger which involves civil society partners and unions in the Ministry of Primary Education's newly decentralized teacher deployment process.⁵³

Multi-stakeholder platforms

Unsurprisingly perhaps, multi-stakeholder initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership, the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative, or the Alliance for Integrity, which establish formalised, joint decision-making processes and responsibilities among stakeholders drawn from government, the private sector and civil society, featured prominently.⁵⁴ The multi-stakeholder model is increasingly being replicated at national level, independent of these international frameworks. For example, State-Led Accountability Mechanisms (SLAMS) in Nigeria, co-chaired by government and civil society representatives, provide independent expertise, ensure the inclusion of a range of voices, and foster linkages with other government structures around reproductive health issues.⁵⁵ Cambodia's Social Accountability Framework (ISAF) brings together the government's National Committee for Sub-national Democratic Development and a group of international NGOs (World Vision International, CARE, FHI 360 and others) to inform citizens about the services they are entitled to receive, foster dialogue with sub-national authorities and implement joint actions to address issues identified.⁵⁶

C2. Clarity and trust

Conversations with those involved in such ventures suggest that for these kinds of partnerships to work, there is a need to maintain clear red lines and a minimum degree of autonomy on both sides.⁵⁷ It requires clear ground rules and a mutual understanding that government and civil society have different priorities, agendas, time horizons and are subject to different political or donor requirements. Ideological differences need to be clear from the outset.⁵⁸

South Africa's experience in establishing the Vulekamali budget transparency initiative is informative in this regard. At the outset, the project suffered from a significant trust deficit: some civil society representatives were suspicious of government motivations, while others were simultaneously involved in litigation proceedings against government, albeit on unrelated issues. This inevitably put a strain on relationships and required all parties to (temporarily) put aside these disputes for the purposes of collaboration. Investment in setting up a steering committee with representatives from both sides and deliberately alternating the lead for specific elements of the project was considered critical in building trust in this case.⁵⁹

⁵³ Counterpart, Niger: Participatory, Responsive Governance – Principal Activity (PRG-PA) project <https://tinyurl.com/2h36xy3h>

⁵⁴ Multiple survey respondents

⁵⁵ Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Programme in Northern Nigeria (MNCH2) (2018) Using collective voices to create state-level accountability <https://tinyurl.com/c395t3hn>

⁵⁶ World Vision International Cambodia (2020) Implementation of the Social Accountability Framework <https://tinyurl.com/3u9x3jxz>

⁵⁷ Interview with Daniel Carranza, Por Mi Barrio, Uruguay

⁵⁸ Interview with Kay Brown, Fiscal and Financial Commission (FFC), South Africa

⁵⁹ Interview with Kay Brown, FFC, South Africa

A marriage of convenience

On the flip side, civil society actors sometimes have the political wiggle room to voice opinions or concerns that local officials may not be able to, especially around certain contentious issues, for fear of backlash. In the right circumstances, where civil society is able to simultaneously support and critique government partner efforts, this can create a symbiotic relationship.⁶⁰

One mobile-driven citizen monitoring initiative in Mexico seeks to achieve this delicate balance between cooperative and adversarial approaches through vocal criticism of local government where problems are identified on the one hand, with acknowledgment and credit given where problems are solved, on the other.⁶¹ This is seen to work because local politicians are very receptive and responsive to praise.⁶²

From this perspective, whatever the approach adopted, sustainable CCA initiatives might be considered those which are able to change perspectives and establish shared expectations, roles and joint responsibilities between citizens and government entities over time.⁶³

C3. Transitioning ownership from civil society to government as a route to sustainability?

A strong message emerging from discussions with practitioners and experts was that CCA initiatives are rarely static. Ownership and partnership models, and the roles of different actors, can, and often do, evolve over time, as initiatives mature. Often, in the quest for sustainability, changes tend in the direction of transitioning some level of ownership or control towards government.

In certain cases, it may even be legitimate and desirable to have government adoption as an

The sincerest form of flattery

Transition does not always mean handover. Sometimes governments or public sector bodies simply replicate a successful approach off their own back.

This was the case witnessed in Nigeria, for example. Having followed the “town hall” process initially developed by Follow Taxes to enhance fiscal transparency through citizen monitoring, one MDA (Ministry) created their own sectoral town hall meetings in 2020 and began integrating them into their own processes, independently of Follow Taxes. (*Saied Tafida, Follow Taxes*)

In Uruguay, DATA Uruguay, a local start-up, developed “Por Mi Barrio”, an online platform enabling citizens to track and report infrastructure problems in the city. Following several years of successful implementation, the government of Montevideo adopted the approach, essentially making Por Mi Barrio obsolete. This experience is to some extent reflective of DATA Uruguay’s own sustainability model which rests on replication in different cities in Uruguay and beyond. Each new iteration of the model yields improvements to the process which can then be applied across the board to help build on the original concept. Sustainability in this view is about the survival of the process – solving the problem that needs solving – rather than maintaining the initial product per se. (*Daniel Carranza, DATA Uruguay*)

⁶⁰ Interview with Daniel Carranza, Por Mi Barrio, Uruguay; Interview with Anne Sevilla, Undersecretary for Finance, Department of Education, Philippines

⁶¹ Interview with Arturo Hernández, Supercívicos, Mexico

⁶² Interview with Arturo Hernández, Supercívicos, Mexico

⁶³ Interview with Amr Lashin, CARE Egypt

objective of a CCA initiative from the outset.⁶⁴ Government adoption and institutionalisation can be critical to ensure sustainability, especially where the government is the main user and beneficiary of a system. Government can use policy levers to cascade a CCA system down through the levels to achieve impact at greater scale. A supportive legal environment that embeds citizen participation as a policy goal can help strengthen the long-term viability of CCA mechanisms.

ProZorro in Ukraine is a good example of CSO-led design and piloting and, later on, transitioning to government. This was done once the mechanism had been proven to work well and the required procurement legislation was in place. Importantly, while the government has taken over ultimate control of the mechanism, implementation is overseen by multi-stakeholder expert group.⁶⁵ Other examples include; Accountability Lab's Civic Action Teams, a set of pioneering citizen feedback, dialogue and community voice platforms designed to ensure accountability in development processes in Nepal, Liberia and Mali, originally run by local volunteers, but now operating through co-ownership from 20 local governments globally;⁶⁶ the Baraza programme, a community-based local government-citizen interaction and monitoring platform in Uganda, initiated by CSOs but now part of the government service delivery monitoring mechanism under the Office of the Prime Minister;⁶⁷ and adapted Public Expenditure Tracking of public resources in Malawi⁶⁸ which has been transitioned from civil society to district council leadership and has mobilized various state and non-state actors for data collection, validation of findings and collective implementation of suggested solutions.

The perils of partnership

Notwithstanding these successful cases, transitioning CCA initiatives from civil society ownership into government hands was nevertheless viewed with caution by a number of respondents to our survey, with momentum often seen to fizzle out once civil society ceases to lead them. Others noted the danger of co-optation when transitioning into government hands.

The weight of the law

CCAs can benefit from – and, where it exists, should take full advantage of – a supportive legal environment. Ghana's 1992 Constitution (Article 35), for example, requires the state to afford “all possible opportunities to the people to participate in decision-making at every level of national life and in government”. Following the discovery of oil in commercial quantities in 2007, the Petroleum Revenue Management Act (PRMA) 2011 was passed, with provisions for a citizen-led Public Interest and Accountability Committee (PIAC) to monitor compliance of the Act by Government. *(Survey respondent)*

In Uganda, the central level National Local Government Finance Committee is mandated by government to enhance accountability of public finances, acting as co-leads in the Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETs). *(Survey respondent)*

⁶⁴ Interview with Maria Poli, the World Bank's Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA); Interview with Don Parafina, CMS, Philippines

⁶⁵ Interview with Anastasiya Kozlovseva and Khrystyna Zelinska, TI Ukraine, Ukraine

⁶⁶ Civic Action Teams www.civacts.org

⁶⁷ Office of the President of Uganda: Baraza Program <https://opm.go.ug/baraza-program/>

⁶⁸ <https://www.ndi.org/PET-guide-press-release>, referenced by survey respondent

*“In Ukraine, it's very risky to have government funding. If it comes from the local budget - NGOs become dependent on local authorities. Such NGOs might be used for agitation during the campaign period or for the legitimization of some decisions of local government.”*⁶⁹

The “institutionalisation” of CCA initiatives can also make the systems more vulnerable to changing political priorities and raise accountability challenges.

*“If government is paying for a system designed for raising issues, seeking resolutions, and reporting on outcomes, credibility can suffer.”*⁷⁰

Respondents suggested that institutionalisation needs to be accompanied by mechanisms to maintain the necessary independence, impartiality and credibility. In India, for example, where a tradition of institutionalising social audit models has emerged, operations are funded by government but run by independent organisations with independent boards and with clear provisions to avoid interference from government officials.⁷¹ In Andhra Pradesh, the potential for state manipulation of the process is largely overcome by conducting audits through public hearings - which emphasise emotional reactions and testimonials of beneficiaries - rather than led by state officials.⁷² Even where CCA initiatives become deeply embedded within government systems, some form of civil society involvement is almost always needed, in particular to help sustain organised participation and the capacities that enable communities to continue to engage.

*“In reality, institutionalisation of CCAs will only ever be partial, because the only way to activate and sustain active participation at the local level is through civil society.”*⁷³

⁶⁹ Survey respondent

⁷⁰ Interview with Don Parafina, CMS, Philippines

⁷¹ Interview with Don Parafina, CMS, Philippines

⁷² Finnigan, C. (2019) Towards transparency: How institutionalising social audits can increase efficiency of rural welfare programmes in India, London School of Economics (LSE) <https://tinyurl.com/5tvv8vb>

⁷³ Interview with Maria Poli, GPSA

C4. Does it have to be government? What could we learn from the start-up world?

Looking at the sustainability discussion on CCA from a different perspective, one cannot help but notice some interesting parallels with the scaling up problem for new entrepreneurs in the pharma or tech industries. Reasonably successful start-ups in these areas face a continuous choice between going it alone and growing organically or being acquired by an established market player in order to go quickly to scale. Many work from the outset towards the latter as prospects for survival without a strong acquirer are slim.

The choice for many CCA initiatives looks quite similar: set the ultimate aim of your mechanism as being acquired, i.e. absorbed and institutionalized into the workings of government, or face either a life in the margins or gradual attrition and silent exit. But perhaps it is useful to broaden

the view of what could be a viable suitor. Perhaps it does not have to be the government, but a larger, established CSO that draws on a pool of funding sources from donations to membership fees or endowments (e.g. BRAC, Oxfam, World Wildlife Fund etc.) or an official consumer association that is accorded a special institutional role and access in many jurisdictions and again draws on a diversified funding stream that could help sustain some CCA initiative that is neither financially viable nor efficiently scalable on its own. Thinking more creatively about sustainability could inspire such a conversation.

Balancing needs

In South Africa, Vulekamali (a co-created online budget data portal) invested time in finding out what would keep people interested in the platform both at the general level and in terms of people's individual agendas and specific uses. While the core user base has ended up being a narrow group of specialists (CSO budget analysts, academics, and economists), the project has also invested in civic drives across all 9 provinces of the country to identify what kind of budget data would be meaningful to a broader constituency. (*Zukiswa Kota, Vulekamali, South Africa*)



D. SUSTAINING MOTIVATIONS

No matter what the funding and partnership arrangements, sustaining motivations over time and among all involved is one of the main challenges and a prerequisite for making CCA approaches sustainable.

Conversations with those intimately involved in the delivery of CCA mechanisms as well as insights gleaned from the literature suggest that, among other things, lasting engagement is contingent on a set of underlying motivations, interests and incentives which might appeal to citizens on the one hand and duty-bearers on the other.

D1. Citizen motivation

Identifying and addressing local, salient problems

As a point of departure, many of those we talked to suggested that CCA initiatives which address concrete problems of most direct relevance to people's day-to-day concerns – such as social safety nets or land reform processes – are more likely to spark and sustain motivation to participate, as compared to those which elicit feedback in a very general, abstract way. It is also more likely that communities are willing to engage, provide support (and even in some cases contribute funding) to resolve issues they themselves have identified as priorities. This is consistent with evidence from the literature which suggests that government-led CCA initiatives are more responsive to services directly delivered to individuals than to public goods where the benefits accrue to broader collectives of people.⁷⁴

Of course, how and by whom issues are identified has an important bearing on which are prioritised. Achieving the right balance between meeting specific individual needs whilst at the same time appealing to a wider constituency is therefore critical and requires a clear vision for who the initiative is aiming to target and for what purposes.

⁷⁴ 3IE (2019) Does promoting citizen engagement in the governance of public services lead to improved service delivery and quality of life? (also subsumes “Does incorporating participation and accountability improve development outcomes? Meta-analysis and framework synthesis”) <https://tinyurl.com/fffwhzt7>

Doing the right thing

The participation of volunteers and panellists in two CCA initiatives in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda (Uwezo and Sauti za Wananchi) led to some becoming nascent activists, in both cases driven by a sense of duty to the community, rather than the likelihood of success or the expectation of reward. (*Ben Taylor, Twaweza, Tanzania*)

Evidence from a review of Integrity Action's Social Accountability Through Youth (SAY) programme in Tanzania found that a strong motivation for community youth monitors to engage was the prospect of solving a concrete problem within a community, and the accompanying sense of accomplishment. (*Tanzania sustainability research, Integrity Action*)

Nurturing citizen agency

We also found that motivation among citizens to engage in CCA initiatives is often deeply personal, arising from a sense of civic-mindedness, a desire to contribute to something larger or to be part of a community or a wider movement, especially among younger people.

Indeed, a stronger focus on mobilizing young people is referenced by several evaluations and research projects as a viable avenue for bringing additional momentum and more sustainability to existing CCA initiatives. Pioneering monitoring initiatives in the Philippines were able to successfully scale up by involving students or deploying thousands of boy and girl scouts to monitor textbook deliveries.⁷⁵ Engaging young people in decision-making is also regarded as an important determinant for the success of local government reform projects in Ukraine.⁷⁶ Capacity-building and awareness-raising centred on young people also has the potential to yield more long-term gains as it can potentially raise engagement and efficacy of young people throughout their lives.

Nurturing agency among citizens can also serve the objectives of those delivering public services, as an engaged and active citizenry is more likely to be appreciative of service delivery challenges and better placed to contribute possible solutions. Where citizens lack confidence in their own political efficacy or do not have the skills to convert information into collective action, civic education drives can help prepare the ground for effective CCA, particularly when marginalised populations are involved.

For example, awareness-raising among community members of the role of taxation in public service delivery and of the challenges inherent in tax administration processes were considered critical base investments in citizen budget monitoring initiatives in Niger and Nigeria.⁷⁷ Similarly, in South Africa, information drives to build budget literacy among target users were seen as fundamental for achieving sustainable impact and scale under the Vulekamali initiative.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ ISS (2013) Power at the Grass Roots: Monitoring Public Works in Abra, The Philippines, 1986-1990 <https://tinyurl.com/sx8f9dr5>; ISS (2013). Promoting Accountability, Monitoring Services: Textbook Procurement and Delivery, The Philippines, 2002-2005 <https://tinyurl.com/u8n6zi8m>

⁷⁶ USAID (2019). Ukraine Local Governance Project Whole-of-Project Evaluation, Final Report https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TW5X.pdf

⁷⁷ Interview with Ousmane Kabèlè Camara, Counterpart, Niger; Interview with Saied Tafida, Follow Taxes Nigeria

⁷⁸ Zukiswa Kota, PSAM, South Africa

Building legitimacy and trust

A recurring message from our conversations was that citizen motivation to remain engaged in CCAs is heavily contingent on duty-bearer response to identified problems. Communities are unlikely to continue demanding accountability if they don't see concrete evidence that doing so creates change.⁷⁹

Motivating people to commit to initiatives that might put them into unwanted public limelight and expose them to political and social pressures of all sorts requires cultivating a strong rapport and mutual trust. This takes time, especially when it is about engaging marginalized, socio-economically distant communities with low levels of confidence in their political efficacy and the functioning of political systems. Building trust and commitment therefore requires multiple sustained interactions to demonstrate tangible benefits at a local level.⁸⁰

Trust in the intermediaries connecting citizens with the state is also considered critical for building productive relations between governments and citizens and thus a key ingredient for sustainability. Yet this function is often under-valued and under-funded.⁸¹ Identifying and working with existing organisations, social infrastructures and locally-rooted groups of citizens who are perceived as honest and fair is seen as an important determinant of long-term success.⁸² For example, religious organisations, transport unions, parent-teacher associations, or savings collectives can be activated to host specific CCA initiatives. Working with community leaders that enjoy legitimacy and influence can help amplify grassroots outreach. Intermediaries are seen as particularly important for reaching the more marginalised.⁸³ This often takes time and requires multiple sustained interactions to demonstrate tangible results at the local level.⁸⁴

The devil is in the detail

Case studies of successful CCA initiatives confirm conventional, but also yield some innovative tactics for incentivising engagement. These include using citizen scorecard metrics in bonus systems for government officials,* expediting the authorisation of payments to monitored third-party service provider when they sign-off on monitoring reports,** and encouraging service inspectors to use the feature phones provided for monitoring purposed by loading them with free airtime for calls.***

* ISS (2015). *Listening to the Public: A Citizen Scorecard in the Philippines, 2010-2014*

** ISS (2013). *Promoting Accountability, Monitoring Services: Textbook Procurement and Delivery, The Philippines, 2002-2005*

*** Beschel, R., Cameron, B., Kunicova, J., & Myers, B. (2018). *Improving Public Sector Performance through Innovation and Inter-Agency Coordination*.

⁷⁹ Gonzalez-Piñeros, L., Rade M. (2020) Analysis of interviews and focus groups from Integrity Action's Tanzania sustainability research

⁸⁰ Interview with Arturo Hernández, Supercívicos, Mexico; Interview with Amr Lashin, CARE Egypt

⁸¹ Interview with Sue Cant, World Vision International

⁸² Interview with Maria Poli, GPSA

⁸³ Interview with Zukiswa Kota, PSAM, South Africa

⁸⁴ Interview with Arturo Hernández, Supercívicos, Mexico; Interview with Amr Lashin, CARE Egypt

Closing the feedback loop

Not only acting on, but being seen to act on, citizen demands is considered critical to sustaining long-term engagement.⁸⁵ Closing the feedback loop is found to be imperative for successful and enduring CCAs from mobile phone-based feedback systems in Pakistan to citizen surveys in Vietnam, scorecards in the Philippines, community health committees in Malawi or crowd-monitored street repair in Argentina.⁸⁶ The range of different cases highlights that this needs to happen on both the government and civil society end of the CCA initiative. Independent monitoring of government follow-up further incentivises and strengthens these communication linkages.⁸⁷

Closing the feedback loop can strengthen ownership, increase the chances to translate scrutiny into effective accountability and shore up expectations for government performance that are essential to spark and sustain citizen engagement.⁸⁸ It can enhance a sense of both personal and collective efficacy and thus support a positive reinforcement loop that activates more engagement and impact.⁸⁹ And turning monitoring as well as follow-up data into shared knowledge on all sides helps align expectations on what CCA initiatives can and cannot achieve on all sides as a condition for sustained engagement.⁹⁰

Consistent with these insights is also the message emerging from the literature that the failure to build in such feedback loops is common and an important contributor to initiatives that do not achieve enduring success.⁹¹

Paying heed to micro-incentives

At the practical level, the importance of personal rewards, compensation or other micro-incentives, even seemingly insignificant ones, cannot be overlooked when considering what motivates citizens to engage in CCA initiatives.⁹² These range from small economic incentives to cover expenses, through to compensation for undertaking specific accountability inducing activities. Examples include stipends to cover the costs for trips and meals associated with citizen monitoring committees in Niger,⁹³ nominal fees for monitoring the government-run procurement portal in

⁸⁵ Interview with Doreen Grove, Scottish Government

⁸⁶ Lodenstein, E., Molenaar, J. M., et al. (2019). "We come as friends": approaches to social accountability by health committees in Northern Malawi <https://tinyurl.com/rs8sjyau>; ISS (2015). Listening to the Public: A Citizen Scorecard in the Philippines, 2010-2014 <https://successfulsocieties.princeton.edu/publications/listening-public-citizen-scorecard-philippines-2010-2014> <https://tinyurl.com/k3ubcdev>; Trucco, L. (2016). Broken Cities: The Effect of Government Responsiveness on Citizens' Participation <https://tinyurl.com/m67cakr8>

⁸⁷ Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP) (2018). U-Bridge Phone Monitoring Frontline Workers Brief 51: Does Information Technology Improve Public Service Delivery? Lessons from Uganda

⁸⁸ Holland, A. C. (2018). Diminished Expectations: Redistributive Preferences in Truncated Welfare States. <https://tinyurl.com/8yh63sf3>; Evans, A. (2018). Politicising inequality: The power of ideas <https://tinyurl.com/dru22fyf>

⁸⁹ The observation that a sense of personal efficacy is key to motivate civic and political engagement is a central tenet of a large body of work on participation. For an overview see Oswald, K.; Apgar, M.J.; Thorpe, J. and Gaventa, J. (2018) Participation in Economic Decision-making: A Primer <https://tinyurl.com/2hcp3eyd>

⁹⁰ 3IE (2019) Does promoting citizen engagement in the governance of public services lead to improved service delivery and quality of life? <https://tinyurl.com/ffwhzt7>; Wetterberg, A., Hertz, J. C., & Brinkerhoff, D. W. (2018). Social accountability in frontline service delivery: Citizen engagement and provider response in four Indonesian districts <https://tinyurl.com/ehj46zn>

⁹¹ See for example USAID (2017). Study on Measuring Social Accountability and Citizen Perception (Malawi). Summary Findings and Recommendations.

⁹² Interview with Maria Poli, GPSA

⁹³ As part of Counterpart's citizen monitoring committees, participants are provided with around 50,000 CFA/month (approx. EUR 75) - Interview with Ousmane Kabèlè Camara, Counterpart, Niger

Ukraine,⁹⁴ and the provision of mobile devices, chargers and airtime credit as an incentive to participate in mobile surveys in Kenya.⁹⁵ In Tanzania, citizen monitors were provided with smartphones or tablets to do their monitoring and found that these boosted their status and credibility with both community and government.⁹⁶ In some contexts, financial compensation may even bring with it the prospect of greater access to decision-making. As noted by one community monitor in Tanzania:

“Some people think that we are paid a salary [...] Status in the community is diminished when they know we don’t get paid [...] and there is resistance to talk to us or to (follow) our recommendations.”⁹⁷

D2. Duty-bearer motivation

Minimising risk

At the heart of what is seen to motivate civil servants to engage in CCA processes is the question of who owns and is ultimately liable for the mechanism with which they are expected to engage. Inherently averse to risk, even the most committed and accountable official is likely to exhibit some reticence to external scrutiny. The fear of being caught making a mistake can be an important barrier to being more open to, and even appreciative of, public oversight.⁹⁸

From the duty-bearer perspective, working in partnership with civil society can also carry the risk of perceived favouritism or preferential treatment especially where the representativeness and legitimacy of partner CSOs is in question.⁹⁹ In Ukraine, for example, following the 2014 Euromaidan revolution, some elements of the government feared that the fragile alliance of activists and reform-minded public officials which had formed to demand greater transparency of public procurement would be vulnerable to manipulation and co-optation by vested interests and corrupt forces.¹⁰⁰ While this fear ultimately turned out to be unfounded, it nevertheless gave rise to some initial resistance to engage.

While not appropriate in all situations, formalising engagement processes with duty bearers has in some cases served to help address these concerns and secure longer-term commitment.¹⁰¹ In Niger, for example, community monitoring committees have gained official recognition, with a formal

⁹⁴ As part of Transparency International Ukraine’s procurement monitoring initiative - Interview with Anastasiya Kozlovseva and Khrystyna Zelinska, TI Ukraine, Ukraine

⁹⁵ As part of Twaweza’s mobile surveys (Sauti za Wananchi) - Interview with Ben Taylor, Twaweza, Tanzania

⁹⁶ Gonzalez-Piñeros, L., Rade M. (2020) Analysis of interviews and focus groups from Integrity Action’s Tanzania sustainability research

⁹⁷ Gonzalez-Piñeros, L., Rade M. (2020) Analysis of interviews and focus groups from Integrity Action’s Tanzania sustainability research

⁹⁸ Interview with Doreen Grove, Scottish Government

⁹⁹ Interview with Kay Brown, FFC South Africa

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Lilia Lakhtionova, Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Agriculture, Ukraine

¹⁰¹ Interview with Arturo Hernández, Supercívicos Mexico; Interview with Don Parafina, CMS, Philippines; Interview with Ousmane Kabèlè Camara, Counterpart, Niger

mandate to work at municipality, regional, and increasingly national levels.¹⁰² In Mexico City, as part of the roll out of a city-wide citizen reporting app, the CSO leading the initiative signed agreements with political parties across the political divide as a demonstration of non-partisanship, thus helping to build confidence in the initiative.¹⁰³

Showcasing success

Building support through peer learning and demonstrating evidence of the benefits of a particular initiative has also served to incentivise government officials to engage – and stay engaged – in CCA initiatives. This is the case, for example, with Ukraine’s civil society-led procurement monitoring platform DoZorro, whose success has made it the go-to tool among some procurement entities to quickly identify problems with, and make changes to, government tenders, as an alternative to often ponderous official channels.¹⁰⁴ In a similar vein, fostering competition between service providers or government entities can create a race to the top, be it among local governments seeking recognition for their commitment to budget transparency in South Africa¹⁰⁵ or local governments vying for the top spot on a service integrity index in Ghana.¹⁰⁶

Supporting champions

Individual leadership and personal relations are frequently described as crucial for overcoming resistance to accountability reforms and building up successful, enduring CCA platforms. This is especially true for initiatives that push boundaries in terms of collaboration between government and civil society. Dedicated local leadership, for example is described as instrumental in creating spaces for citizen participation in Chile, even when legal frameworks are in place that mandate such mechanisms.¹⁰⁷ Sweeping, decentralized anti-corruption reforms in Mauritius or implementing a large-scale citizen feedback platform in Pakistan, hinged on the reform team cultivating personal relationships with downstream agencies.¹⁰⁸

Going with the flow

Engaging in CCA requires an honest appreciation of the political incentives which drive government bodies to engage, including the benefits that these systems bring for the electoral chances of politicians.* It also requires a good deal of patience to roll with the political tide and navigate constantly changing priorities. In Ukraine, for example, a recent move to take the COVID-19-related procurement out of the scope of the government’s open procurement system threatened to undermine civil society monitoring efforts, despite their recognised success.**

* Arturo Hernández, *Supercívicos Mexico*; Undral Gombodorj, *DEMO Mongolia*

** Anastasiya Kozlovseva and Khrystyna Zelinska, *TI Ukraine*

¹⁰² Interview with Ousmane Kabèlè Camara, Counterpart, Niger

¹⁰³ As part of the Supercívicos initiative – Interview with Arturo Hernandez, Supercívicos, Mexico

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Anastasiya Kozlovseva and Khrystyna Zelinska, TI Ukraine, Ukraine

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Kay Brown, FCC South Africa

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Mohammad Awal, Center for Democratic Development Ghana

¹⁰⁷ Bonivento, J. H. (2018). La forma y la esencia: efectos de las leyes de transparencia, acceso a la información y participación ciudadana en la gobernanza democrática local en Chile <https://tinyurl.com/zdrx758s>

¹⁰⁸ ISS (2017). Tackling Corruption from the Bottom Up: Decentralized Graft Prevention in Mauritius, 2009–2016 <https://tinyurl.com/2td4cyn8>

As discussed above, under Section A2 on government and service provider timeframes, as much as personal relations serve as an essential lubricant for successful CCA initiatives they also present a sustainability risk. Initiatives might lose traction or fold when key personnel change on either side. Individuals move on and connections are lost, either through natural turnover, or in some cases as an active policy to avoid entrenchment within the civil service. Either way, it can create challenges for ensuring continuity and building momentum in CCA over the long-term.¹⁰⁹

On the other hand, lateral movement within and across government agencies can have strategic benefits, especially where the right individuals – communicators and connectors – are able to help join the dots as they move through the government system.¹¹⁰ Using these foundational relationship ties

to cultivate broader personal relationships across staff on both sides can therefore be an important mitigation strategy to reduce the fallout from staff changes.¹¹¹

Demonstrating (or at least convincingly signalling) a credible threat

Finally, a credible threat potential of sanctions and outside pressure is considered important to create momentum on the duty-bearer side to engage with citizens. It follows therefore that CCA initiatives which in terms of their funding structure, design and goals do not at least pay lip-service to “being in it for the long game” would not signal the resilience and commitment required to create an effective threat potential. Without signalling sustainability, such efforts may just invite recalcitrant government officials to sit them out and discourage potential allies from risking sticking their neck out and investing in building relationships and supporting transformational reforms. Thus, even if sustainability is not a central concern for a given CCA initiative, “faking sustainability” may increase the probability of success for quick-win strategies.

The “good” revolving door

As well as fluidity within government, movement often also takes place between government and civil society, taking on a revolving door format: Former CSO leaders shift into senior government positions, as is common in the education sector in the Philippines, and thus can deploy their social capital to build productive interfaces for government-civil society collaboration around CCA initiatives.

ISS (2013). Promoting Accountability, Monitoring Services: Textbook Procurement and Delivery, The Philippines, 2002-2005

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Doreen Grove, Scottish Government

¹¹⁰ Interview with Doreen Grove, Scottish Government

¹¹¹ ISS (2013). Promoting Accountability, Monitoring Services: Textbook Procurement and Delivery, The Philippines, 2002-2005 <https://tinyurl.com/u8n6zj8m> (The project built good relations with middle managers that carried the initiative forward after the main government champion had left).



CONCLUSION

With the help of many experts and practitioners from around the world, this research has explored the question of how to design citizen-centred accountability mechanisms so that they last. Our question was deliberately broad and we hoped to both pull out key themes and surface interesting ideas and innovations that the field might find useful. Unsurprisingly, the honest, big picture answer we are left with is: it depends.

Of course, “it depends” is the honest, big picture answer for practically every big picture question. But one of the key things we have tried to do here is to unpack and organise some of the key factors that it depends on, to help anyone engaged in this kind of work to thoroughly consider and address the different challenges they might face if they are seeking to sustain a CCA mechanism. This report has settled on four groups of factors, under the headings of time, funding, partnerships and motivations, though there are undoubtedly others.

While our research does not offer any clear answers on which combinations of these factors are more critical for ensuring sustainability, it provides a framework for considering their relative importance in a given context, as well as how they might interact. Many of these interactions can be seen as tensions that need to be managed. For example, how might we reconcile fixed project or planning cycles with unpredictable external events and opportunities? How can we take successful CCA mechanisms to scale as a means to sustainability without stifling innovation? How might we adapt the short time range of research and evaluation tools to longer-range learning needs for durable CCA systems? How does one cultivate lasting relationships with government counterparts in a context of high staff turnover? How can we invest in long-term trust building and community capacity with short-term, outcome-contingent funding? How can government-sourced funding be administered while maintaining sufficient independence, as well as “bite” to act as a credible threat? And many more besides.

Beyond this, we highlight here two themes that have emerged from this research and which weave their way through many of the findings.

Beyond design choices: relationships, legitimacy, trust

The original question that animated this research asked “how CCA mechanisms should be designed” to increase the likelihood of sustainability. The concept of “design” lends itself most readily to the technical, almost mechanical choices that are made: the tools that are used, the platforms that are established, the means of generating income, or the composition of committees that might govern the system. But there are other issues to consider that are less to do with design and more to do with contextual preconditions that can, with the right approach, be developed or nurtured. These include

the importance of strong relationships established early on between the various stakeholders involved; the critical currency of legitimacy that goes alongside this; and trust, which is something that successful CCA processes depend on, but which they can also generate over time through collaboration, problem solving and tangible improvements to the projects and services being held to account.

While they can be nurtured, these factors of trust, legitimacy and relationships also depend to a large extent on what was there before – on the experiences that people have had, the sense of political efficacy they have gained, and the bonds they have forged for common undertakings. Furthermore, these factors – as cultivated through CCA initiatives – are forward investments, which may open new doors for collective action in the future well beyond any project horizon. In this way, CCA initiatives draw heavily on the accomplishments of the past and make a down payment for more accomplishments in the future.

If a CCA mechanism has a suboptimal design, this could conceivably be remedied via adaptation. However, CCA mechanisms don't stand much chance of longevity without sufficient levels of trust, legitimacy and strong relationships in place to support them.

Hopeful pragmatism

One way to approach CCA initiatives, which might even be the default way, could be described as “hopeful pragmatism”: to steer the ship by line of sight, and use experience and skilled intuition to make things work today while nurturing a long-term, perhaps open-ended, ambition to contribute to more profound change. One of the factors identified as important by multiple interviewees is the ability to adapt to changes in, say, the external context or the political climate. This points towards the need for flexibility in any plans or strategies we might have for sustainability, while not becoming intimidated by uncertainty.

Making things work today is no small achievement. Those aforementioned down payments of relationships, legitimacy and trust could be worth a lot, even if a specific CCA mechanism doesn't pass the sustainability test. As we suggested in our related briefing note,¹¹² we might choose to look at CCA mechanisms as existing in a “brownfield” rather than a “greenfield” context – adding to the pre-existing patchwork of initiatives that have sought to improve accountability and citizen-state relations. Furthermore, making things work today might be one of the best things we can do to ensure they keep working tomorrow, by generating benefits for, and thus buy-in from, the key stakeholders concerned.

This is not to say that sustainability considerations don't matter – indeed, we suggest in this report that giving the impression of sustainability, at the very least, might be an important factor in earning serious engagement from duty bearers. Rather, it is to say that sustainability considerations should not weigh down practitioners in this space. Let's make things work today while always keeping an eye on the prospects for tomorrow – and responding accordingly.

¹¹² Integrity Action (2020) Citizen-centred accountability: How can we make it last?, Briefing Note, Integrity Action, London <https://integrityaction.org/media/12393/integrity-action-sustainability-research-briefing-note.pdf>

Despite the range of factors we have identified as influencing the sustainability of CCA mechanisms, the sustainability challenge need not be seen as a daunting one. Rather, it is an intriguing conundrum which, by its very nature, will always be there – and it is all the more exciting for that. With this report, we hope to have given anyone involved in citizen-centred accountability some useful stimulation towards addressing that very challenge.