Integrity Action: Ambition for open citizen feedback

Five-year strategy 2018-2023

Across the world, and particularly in countries of the Global South, citizens fail to receive essential services and entitlements from the institutions on which they rely. Whether it is governments, private providers, or development and humanitarian organisations, vital services and projects don't always meet people's needs to the extent that they must.

In many places, citizens experience poor performance of essential services as a matter of routine. Roads being washed away months after they are built, new buildings like classrooms and clinics that are promised but never materialise, or teachers who fail to turn up for work – all these and more are all too common for people living in poverty in the Global South.

Even when key institutions are responsive to what citizens say, there is a growing body of evidence to show that the citizens speaking up tend to be wealthier, male and better educated. Citizens who are marginalised for one or more reasons typically remain unable to voice their concerns and have those concerns acted upon.

These failures of service delivery, as well as failures of listening and responding, create a widespread lack of trust. Many citizens simply do not believe that the institutions that exist to support them will genuinely respond to a complaint, a concern, or even a basic need. When levels of trust are so low, citizens are reluctant to engage with those institutions in the first place – and this lack of participation makes it all the more difficult to build equitable, thriving societies.

Integrity Action has been addressing these challenges since it was founded in 2003. Our work has focussed on enabling citizens - including the most marginalised - to promote integrity in their communities and wider society, so that public services and development projects are delivered to a high standard. Since 2013 we have combined our approach with a real-time technology tool, DevelopmentCheck, which gives citizens a means of reporting integrity problems and solutions openly.

Today, DevelopmentCheck is a tried and tested tool that has been improved progressively over the last five years. So far citizens have used this tool, together with our approach, to monitor over $1 billion worth of essential projects and services in some highly challenging environments. It all adds up to the world's largest cutting edge citizen monitoring effort generating open feedback for the purpose of sustainable development.

As we move into our new strategy, this experience gives us an excellent platform to build on. We have also recognised some key opportunities and positive developments that make this an exciting time for Integrity Action:

1. We have witnessed a strong appetite among citizens to provide feedback on essential services *and* find solutions - for the citizens we have worked with, giving feedback is a proactive process that helps them take control of their own development.
2. More than ever, the development sector recognises the importance of citizen feedback, and wants to do more. Indeed, key stakeholders in development including citizens in the South and North, as well as donors, *expect* development organisations to improve their accountability to the people they serve.
3. We see that when citizens monitor with our approach, it works. Since 2013, citizens have identified thousands of integrity problems in challenging contexts, like Afghanistan and eastern DR Congo, and they have found solutions to around half of them. These have

translated into real benefits in peoples' lives, such as improved education, increased water supply, and better infrastructure.

Alongside these developments, we recognise there are some tough questions we must ask ourselves as we move ahead, particularly: how do we turn the gains we have seen into systemic change? How do we embed or sustain feedback systems that transfer power to the citizen, especially to the most marginalised citizens? And how do we make open feedback the norm in development? In this strategy, we seek to build on our impact to date and continue to improve our approach, while tackling these questions head on.

Our approach and theory of change

Integrity Action's approach is inspired by the growth of **open feedback**, which transformed the consumer industry. This allowed consumers to post their feedback on products or services openly, so anyone could see it. All this meant their feedback could not be ignored – and it gave them power.

We want to achieve the same in international development, because there remains a major power imbalance between the institutions and organisations that "do" development, and the people and communities who are on the receiving end.

Removing this power imbalance would not only result in development that is better designed, more locally owned, and more worthy of people's trust. It would also eradicate an environment where corruption and abuses of the system can flourish. The development sector's recent focus on safeguarding emphasises how this is a problem that urgently needs solving.

In our approach, volunteer citizen monitors report openly on how vital projects and services are working – or not working – in their community. They then seek to solve any problems they find in a constructive manner. In this way, the incentives created by the open reporting of feedback are combined with the energy and know-how of community members to achieve change.

Our theory of change seeks to link this approach with our goal: *Societies in which all citizens can - and do - successfully demand integrity from the institutions they rely on*. This goal reflects our ambition for scale, long-term change, and "leaving no one behind" (through its focus on *all* citizens).

The theory of change then recognises the importance of incentives both for citizens and the institutions that serve them. By openly posting feedback, and constructively solving integrity problems at the local level, citizen monitors can incentivise those who work within institutions to act with
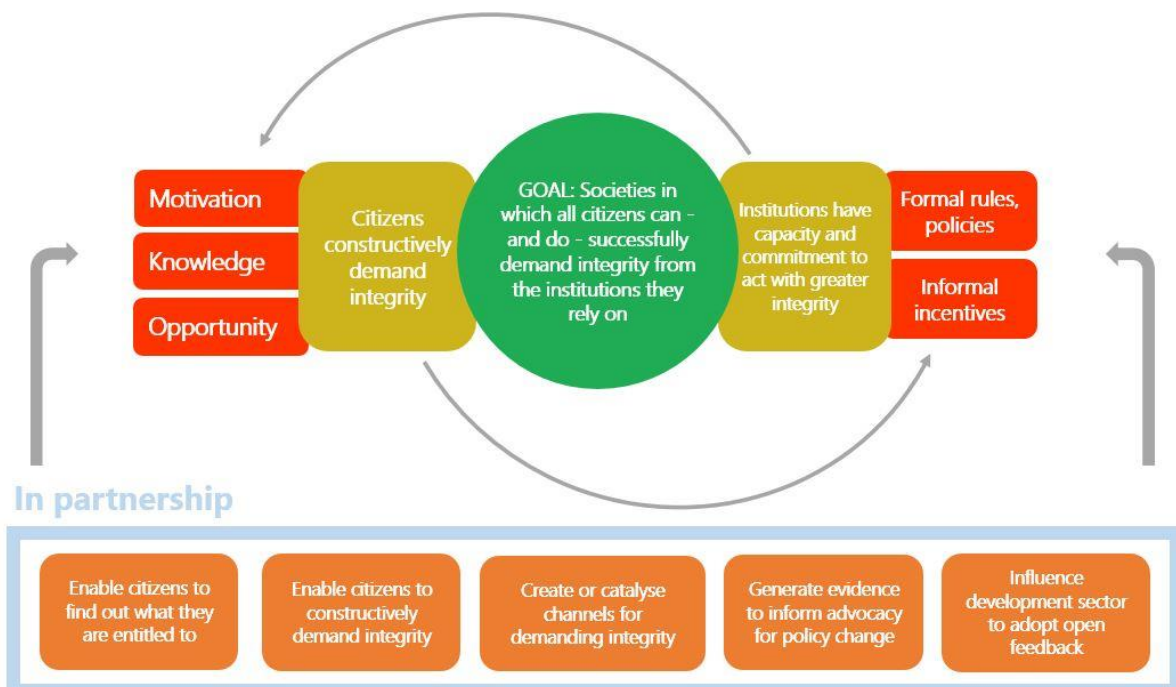
integrity. Meanwhile, when institutions are responsive, this can incentivise citizens to demand integrity because they see something changing as a result of their feedback. We believe this has the *potential* to become a virtuous circle, as shown in the diagram.

In reality this virtuous circle will not work by itself, and the theory of change highlights the other factors that we believe need to be in place. To ensure institutions act with integrity, we propose that a mixture of formal factors (policies, rules) and informal factors (cultural norms and incentives) are needed. Meanwhile, we take a behaviour change approach to understanding what would make citizens demand integrity: they would need the motivation, knowledge and opportunity to do so.

Our theory of change also recognises that we cannot achieve our stated goal alone – our tools, approaches and learning must be used by others if it is to have the greatest effect. Furthermore, we can most effectively generate those through partnerships – such as partnerships that scale up our approach and derive more results and learning than we could manage alone, or partnerships that take the data from our approach and use it to advocate for key policy changes. The importance of partnerships is key to our new strategy.

This theory of change provides a framework for the results we need to achieve, the causal links we need to test, and the things we need to learn.

Our theory of change is also a living document and we don't expect it to remain unchanged over the coming years. However, we do still see it as an important framework for the results we need to achieve, the causal links we need to test, and the things we need to learn. It will be critical to regularly reflect on it as we move through the next five years.

The new strategy: where will we be in 2023?

By 2023 Integrity Action will be at the forefront of demonstrating the transformational value of open citizen feedback to sustainable development.

We will have established our positioning as an international expert on open citizen feedback, and how this can drive improvements in people's lives. We will be perceived as an authority in this space and an innovator that constructively pushes the boundaries. We will have built a robust case for open citizen feedback and the role it can play in development and, specifically, helping to achieve the SDGs. Our internationally-generated learning and evidence will inform development policy and practice, and will reach those involved in development in the South and North.

By 2023 we will have made significant advancements in our understanding of the potential of open citizen feedback. We will have insights or answers to key strategic questions, including: under what conditions are citizens able and motivated to demand integrity? Under what conditions are these demands successful? How can open feedback mechanisms be sustained while remaining trusted by citizens? And what are the best ways to realise the potential of open citizen feedback to influence policy?

Our ambitions over the five-year period are presented as three overarching objectives.

Strategic objectives 2018-23

1. ACHIEVE

Achieve results for citizens that maximise quality, durability and inclusivity

We will:

- Lead on developing evidence driven, innovative pathways for sustained and inclusive community monitoring
- Enable even the most marginalised citizens to act as monitors and benefit from monitoring
- Incentivise institutions to fix at least 50% of problems identified by citizens

Our first objective challenges us to achieve more, in multiple ways. We must ensure our core approach, citizen monitoring, enables citizens to successfully demand integrity and catalyse real improvements to their lives and the lives of those in their community. To track progress one of our key

measures is the percentage of identified problems that are solved (fix rate), and we aim to solve at least half of these, even in challenging environments like DR Congo and Afghanistan. We must also ensure that our approach is inclusive and that the benefits of community monitoring accrue to citizens who would typically be excluded.

Innovation is key to our approach, and others in the sector already see us as innovative. However, we will be rigorous about innovation, applying our value of *rational creativity* to ensure that whatever we develop is based on evidence. We will maintain a "learning loop" in which findings from our own programmes and beyond feed into future pilots and partnerships.

Our approach to maximising impact will be informed by our partnerships with organisations in the South. One of our values is *collaboration*, and it reflects our view that partnerships are essential to Integrity Action - we never work alone. We have already benefited hugely from working with, and exchanging learning with, local or national civil society organisations in a range of countries. Their insights are crucial as we seek to embed and sustain accountability mechanisms in different environments.

Indeed, sustainability is a key focus of this strategy. We believe our current approach, and the use of DevelopmentCheck, is one way to create a feedback system that transfers power to the citizen - but it is not the only way. In order to create such a feedback system, and sustain it in a specific context, we must be led by organisations, groups or individuals who understand that context intimately. Integrity Action's role is then to contribute its learning, its tools, and its approach in the hope that they are of use to organisations seeking to achieve similar goals.

2. AMPLIFY

Collaborate to amplify results and fuel further innovation

We will:

- Build partnerships to scale up approaches, stress-test them and evidence results
- Take learning and insights from collaborations and feed into future R&D
- Be agile with tech developments to ensure the efficiency, accessibility and local adoption of tools

In the coming five years we expect the programmes on which Integrity Action *leads* to be in the prototype or pilot space. This positions Integrity Action as a "research and development" organisation in the international development sector, combining our reputation for innovation with a strict focus on evidence. All this presents an opportunity to work with larger organisations that have overlapping aims with Integrity Action, and that can scale up our approach to a degree that is well beyond our own capacity. We see this amplification as critical not only to achieve better results for more citizens, but also to generate even more learning and evidence from our work.

We believe this could contribute to a cycle: our innovations and achievements at the pilot level provide the "raw material" for scale-up, while the learning and evidence derived from larger-scale programmes can inform future development of our approach.

Another key collaboration is with the tech sector. To maintain our positioning, we must stay abreast of the latest developments in mobile technology, assistive design, and other relevant areas. We do this to ensure that our tech tools remain effective, accessible, easy-to-use, and functional in a range of challenging environments.

3. CONVINCE

Build a robust case for open citizen feedback to inspire its mainstreaming

- Lead on evidencing the economic, environmental and social case for open citizen feedback
- Build coalitions to call for the mainstreaming of open citizen feedback
- Convince influencers and institutions to demand open citizen feedback

We believe in the potential of open feedback to transfer power to the citizen, and we expect our "amplifying" partnerships to increase the extent to which it is used in development. However, we wish to go further by inspiring other actors to use them, promote them, or even require them.

This will only be possible if we have compelling evidence for the benefits of open citizen feedback. This is a key focus of the coming five years, and we will use the increasing scale of our partnerships to gather stronger evidence on its potential to challenge entrenched power dynamics, build trust, incentivise acting with integrity, and result in tangible improvements in the living standards of people living in poverty. We will also capitalise on the large quantities of data that will be collected through our tools and share evidence of what works and what doesn't.

Alongside this we will build relationships with various constituencies in the South and North that can help make the case for open citizen feedback: other organisations, researchers, donors and influencers. With donors, we see the potential for them to require open feedback mechanisms in the work they fund – but this could only happen if they are convinced of the value of transferring power to citizens in this way.

How we will do it

These five-year objectives challenge us as an organisation to reach a new standard of efficiency, effectiveness and stability with a strong leadership that is accountable for the results we are achieving. We will focus on the following areas:

A strong team

As a small organisation that facilitates major impact through a range of partnerships, and provides valuable learning to the sector, it is critical that we maintain a lean, knowledgeable and happy team that inspires confidence and trust in our partners and peers.

We will:

- o Maintain an inclusive culture in which all ideas are valid and anything can be questioned
- o Build a roster of external experts to ensure our knowledge and ideas are derived from a diverse range of people who think in different ways
- o Grow our impact; this will be achieved by strengthening partnerships likeminded donors to build unrestricted funds to underpin the delivery of our 5 year plan
- o Continue to stress test and refine our business model in order to achieve continuous improvements in productivity and value for money.

Resourcing our strategy

This five-year strategy demands that the growth of our impact significantly outstrips the growth of our revenue. In business terms, we aim to become much more productive. Our **amplify** objective explains, in broad terms, how we wish to achieve this. So how will this manifest in our approach to fundraising and resourcing the organisation?

1. We will focus our own fundraising efforts on funds that are either unrestricted or strategically important to the organisation. Unrestricted funding safeguards our capacity for innovation, gives us greater flexibility to experiment and adapt to changes and challenges, and helps us keep our technology and methodology at the cutting edge. Strategically important funding, while being restricted, would directly support Integrity Action's innovation function (for example, through pilot projects, or research and learning), and could also support our ambition to influence the development sector.

   A key potential source of unrestricted funding is Integrity Enterprise. In the first year of the new strategy we will test the viability of a commercial offer that capitalises on Integrity Action's skills, knowledge and experience – and which contributes to the charity's overall goal. We project that Integrity Enterprise will contribute 10% of the charity's income by 2023.

2. We will work with partners to develop bids that are more compelling and ambitious than any single partner could manage alone. While Integrity Action's approach can add value to a fundraising bid and project design, larger international organisations have greater fundraising capacity and can apply for much larger opportunities than Integrity Action could manage. Again, this is core to our **amplify** objective: working with larger organisations not only to deliver programmes, but also to conceive, design and fundraise for them. This will help us keep a lean team that focusses on our own strategic objectives.

3. We will develop smarter technology that improves our productivity and efficiency. DevelopmentCheck will be restructured to embed advanced functionalities for monitors (enabling larger scale and faster data collection) and to readily allow data mining, so that conclusions can be drawn easily from the data collected by monitors. We will also build in a feature that allows us to design bespoke sets of monitoring questions, in collaboration with communities. Previously this would have required new, bespoke software to be developed with a significant cost attached.

   This will help us reduce the workload in reporting to donors and grant leads, will open up avenues for future programmes and partnerships in different sectors, and will allow us to more easily create communications content that can contribute to our **convince** objective.

Our own accountability

As an organisation promoting accountability and integrity, it is essential that Integrity Action upholds these attributes in its own work. Therefore, over the coming years, we will ensure we remain accountable to the following stakeholders:

- **The citizens we serve** - we will enhance our technology to ensure better, faster feedback loops with citizen monitors using our platform, and provide other channels for their feedback
- **Our partners** - we will seek to alleviate the power imbalance that is often found in partnerships with Southern organisations, by working with partners to create mechanisms that allow them to hold Integrity Action to account on our commitments, as well as the reverse; we will also take the same approach to partnerships with local or national CSOs and INGOs
- **Donors and, ultimately, taxpayers** - our technology platform will allow real-time project status and progress to be available online to anyone. We will also produce more detailed reports for donors and other interested parties at the click of a button.

All of the feedback we receive - from the above stakeholders, and from other interested parties in the development sector and beyond - will feed into future learning and the continuous improvement of our approach.

Tracking progress

We anticipate that our reach and impact will grow significantly over the five-year period. We also expect the organisation's revenue to grow, though this is not as important to us. Thus, we are aiming to (at least) quadruple our impact without having to grow our income by the same proportion. The steady growth of our income will project strong organisational management and strategic robustness. It will also allow us to only choose projects that have the best alignment with our strategy.

By 2023 we envisage that we will be working in 15 developing countries and enabling over 10,000 citizens to monitor a cumulative total of over £3bn worth of projects and services that are vital to their communities. To incentivise better service and infrastructure delivery to citizens, we will continue to measure the performance of service providers by using the fix rate, as well as other bespoke measures that complement it.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of citizens monitoring	2,200	4,000	7,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
Number of countries	7	11	11	15	15	15
Annual turnover (£ million)	1.5	2.0	2.5	2.5	2.7	2.8

Integrity Action: Vision, Mission and Values

Our vision is for a just and equitable world, where citizens are empowered and integrity is central to vibrant societies.

Our mission is to help build societies in which all citizens can - and do - successfully demand integrity from the institutions they rely on.

Our values ("what we believe in"):

- Integrity
- Equality
- Rational creativity
- Purposeful curiosity
- Collaboration

Operating principles ("how we conduct ourselves"):

- **We are bold**, and not afraid to question the status quo - or ourselves
- **We act responsibly** and listen to and act on the views of the people we work with
- **We are open** about our successes and failures, and open in our engagement with partners and people
- **We are constructive**, and believe problems can best be solved when everyone's needs are recognised
- **We care about impact, and about people** - we strive to ensure our work is enjoyable, inclusive and fulfilling for all concerned