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Citizen-driven reform of local-level basic services: Community-Based Performance Monitoring

David W. Walker

Amid growing interest in forms of participatory and decentralised governance, increasing efforts are being made to increase the accountability, responsiveness, and relevance of the state through active citizenship. Drawing on the theoretical basis for social accountability, this article explores bottom-up views of active citizenship which highlight the importance of the intrinsic as well as the instrumental value of participatory social accountability, and thus of active citizenship. One approach to social accountability, Community-Based Performance Monitoring (CBPM), is used to demonstrate these instrumental and intrinsic values in practice, in relation to local public-service delivery.

KEY WORDS: Civil Society; Sub-Saharan Africa

Introduction

Concerns about issues of governance, corruption, and lack of accountability in developing countries have come to dominate the development agenda for several reasons. First, as a result of mounting dissatisfaction with the way in which states perform, and a growing awareness of the cost of state failure, there has been increasing interest in how states can function effectively. Responses emphasise improving governance, strengthening democratisation, and increasing capability to deliver inclusive services.

Essential public services are critical for human development. Yet these often fall far short of even basic standards of access, affordability, quality, and relevance to major sections of a country's population. Their breakdown has serious impacts, often creating a vicious circle, damaging the welfare of citizens who depend on them, and thus entrenching poverty. Citizen-state relationships also decay, undermining the efficacy and credibility of processes considered essential to democracy (especially voting). This, in turn, tends to weaken the legitimacy of the state itself (Fukuyama 2007). Lastly, in the process, it reduces the meaning and relevance of the state and of citizenship, particularly for the poorest: there is often a serious disconnection between state and citizens.

Second, existing means for ensuring public accountability often fall far short of resolving problems of governance and accountability. Aware of this, donors have made efforts to increase accountability, strengthening electoral systems and encouraging decentralisation. Related to these has been the push for ‘country ownership’ via Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) processes. In each case, the results have been disappointing. For example, a recent global survey of government accountability found that ‘although elections are seemingly the linchpin of Western governance reform efforts around the world, there is little evidence to suggest they are strongly related to improved government accountability’ (Global Integrity 2007: 3). The quest for development effectiveness is thus jeopardised.

Third, at the same time, civil society has also been advocating increased public accountability. A variety of models for accountability to citizens have been emerging, beyond formal donor-initiated methods. A key challenge now is how the state, civil society, and sometimes the private sector, working together, can deliver better governance and essential services.

Despite the extent of failure and citizen disenchantment, most citizens continue to expect state institutions to provide basic services, efficiently, effectively, and equitably (Narayan *et al.* 2000). They want governments to be accountable to them, and responsive and relevant to their basic needs. Particularly where grand corruption is rampant, they want it stamped out. Mulgan (2003) notes that there is now a worldwide movement in favour of increased accountability, which reflects a growing democratic assertiveness, and an unwillingness to accept previously tolerated standards of secrecy and unaccountability. But what do we mean by accountability, and how is it important, together with voice, as a way for marginalised citizens to pursue change on these fundamental issues?

Towards justice through accountability for ordinary citizens

Only in recent decades has ‘accountability’ become popular as a generic term for scrutinising and controlling authority. The meaning of accountability as *an obligation to be called to account* has broadened to overlap with ‘responsibility’, often focusing on making powerful institutions responsive to less powerful publics. Citizen–government relationships are the primary domain for public accountability. Citizens are collectively authorised to exact accountability according to two broad types of justification (Mulgan 2003).

The principle of ownership

The principle of ownership involves rights of prior authority, based on relevant ownership by citizens, and is thus linked to concepts of democracy. Citizens can be said in an important sense collectively to have ultimate ownership of the state and, in a limited sense, authority over it. In theory at least, this can be exercised in a variety of ways, but in practice many of those methods that matter most to marginalised citizens are easier to implement locally.

States exist to serve and protect their citizens. This stewardship is fairly universally accepted as entailing the provision of basic services. Democratically elected governments accept and owe a duty or obligation to their citizens for the provision of such services. In virtually every country today, governments continue to espouse goals not merely of protecting their citizens, but also of ensuring that all, including the poorest, have access to basic services.

However, within nations, this ownership principle is often poorly understood or promoted through governmental notions of citizenship. For the poor and marginalised it is often largely ignored, and so all too rarely enacted for or by them in their practice of citizenship. Rather, the practice of citizenship tends to become excessively confined to electoral processes, which represent a weak route to accountability. Significant awareness of the ownership

principle, among citizens, civil society, and governments, is needed for accountability to become operative among impoverished citizens.

The principle of affected rights

The principle of affected rights involves the principle that those whose rights have been adversely affected by the actions of someone else have a right to hold that person to account for the way they have been treated. Alongside this, it is necessary to set right what is wrong. In an increasing variety of ways, some basic rights of citizens to health care, education, water, and sanitation have been or are being recognised.¹ What is often lacking are effective means of redress which can provide accountability when, for example, a service provider infringes a citizen's right to health care.

This dual rationale for accountability forms the basis for citizens to call the state to account and to seek redress for wrongs for which the state holds responsibility. However, little power remains with the people, particularly at the local level, compared, say, with bureaucrats. More effective means of realising accountability are needed. Relationships of accountability need to be transformed so that the collective will of communities can be expressed, heard, and heeded, and these twin principles thus become enacted.

The principle of affected rights is closely linked to the principle of subsidiarity – the idea that the most local agent(s) who are capable of making a choice should decide. This principle underlies some decentralisation initiatives, but it deserves to be more central, given the importance of basic services for the well-being of marginalised citizens. In other words, the principles of affected rights and of subsidiarity support the democratic decentralisation of service delivery.

In theory, the poor as citizens are the 'masters', and government officials such as service providers are the servants. In practice, among impoverished communities entrenched inequality and imbalance of power may lead to a perverse reversal of roles, undermining accountability.

Three ways in which affected, enabled citizens-owners become authorised, and thus empowered, to exact accountability are the following:

1. Calling those responsible to account, for their performance against agreed standards: thus making them answerable. This requires voice, dialogue, and responsiveness.
2. Holding the responsible to account: thus requiring accountable action, which may include sanctions.
3. Obtaining redress, if due, from them. In essence, this is about setting to right what is wrong. This step is essential where significant broken relationships need restoration, or compensation is due. The importance of redress is shown by its prevalence in accountability institutions oriented to the less powerful.

These elements can also be rephrased in the language of rights: citizens are rights holders, and the powerful are duty bearers. In practice, realising each of these elements of accountability is often most difficult for the powerless, and the marginalised. The possibility that wrongs or failures will be remedied or sanctioned often becomes remote. Lack of opportunities or capacities to make demands for remedies or sanctions entrenches the weakness of marginalised citizens – often the very reason for needing accountability in the first place. In practice, these three elements intermingle. For example, obtaining redress usually requires providing answers, which may require enforcing action.

What becomes apparent from this examination of accountability is the extent to which it consists of notions that are central to justice, such as power, equity, rights, and distribution. The powerless are thus authorised to quiz the powerful. Where oppression rules, impunity of

the powerful is likely to be rife: the cycle begins to be broken when the powerful are called and held to account, and redress occurs. Also implicit in our discussion is the importance of equitable treatment for affected citizens to whom it is due, and greater equity in distributing basic services to which affected citizens are entitled.

Social accountability

Social accountability refers to an ‘approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement’. Thus, ordinary citizens participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability. It encompasses the broad range of actions and mechanisms, beyond voting, that citizens, communities, civil-society organisations (CSOs), and independent media can use to hold public officials and servants accountable.

In this sense, it is a relatively recent term.² However, the *notion* of social accountability has been around for millennia (Goetz and Jenkins 2005). With the emergence of the modern nation state and more centralised bureaucracies, social accountability declined. More recently, with a stronger focus on decentralisation, especially with devolution of decision making closer to those affected, the question of how to effect this arose. Decentralisation is particularly challenging where government capacity is lacking. Successful decentralisation requires a functioning, responsive state, empowered local authorities, and ‘voice’ from a strong civil society. With some notable exceptions, all three have been difficult to achieve, particularly in the context of states built on colonial models.

During the 1980s and 1990s, varied models of social accountability emerged, initially in countries with strong pre-existing civil societies such as India and Philippines, and in Latin America. The Right to Information movement in Rajasthan in the 1980s in India helped to create the conditions for the balanced scorecard and social auditing. In Brazil, participatory budgeting processes, which started with neighbourhood consultations to review local government budgets, have led to profound changes in the operation of local government and encouraging human-development outcomes. It has also spread to other countries.

Diverse models and applications for social accountability have evolved. These include various forms of participatory approach to budgeting, processes of participatory planning and policy making, public scrutiny to hold elected representatives and government officials to account, public-expenditure tracking, citizen monitoring and evaluation of public-service delivery, citizen engagement via public commissions and hearings, and citizen advisory boards and oversight committees. These are to a large degree about public accountability. Each recognises or assumes, to varying degrees, the rights that citizens collectively have as owners to exercise authority over those accountable to them.

International NGOs (INGOs) began to become involved in these processes initially through funding some of the local groups and CSOs. As the legitimacy and mainstreaming of these processes grew, INGOs sought to be more directly involved. Some initiatives, such as the various scorecards, involved CARE International and the World Bank. Oxfam International’s One Programme sought to link advocacy on policy directly with programmes. Meanwhile, heightened interest in accountability has put INGOs under increasing scrutiny for their own performance in their enlarged role in service delivery, which in turn has led them to seek mechanisms to demonstrate their own effectiveness and accountability.

According to the World Bank, a good social-accountability mechanism involves the following:

- citizen or CSO monitoring of government actions, which requires and generates publicly held information

- citizen feedback on, and advocacy for, specific government actions, both of which require voice and free media
- negotiation of the issues
- government response and responsiveness.

All facets of citizen engagement in social-accountability processes – whether in obtaining or producing information relevant to them, or in monitoring, feedback or negotiation – are most plausibly grounded in the principles of *citizen ownership* and their *affected rights* as citizens in relevant arenas. Likewise, the onus on government to respond and to be responsive is grounded in these dual principles.

Conceptually, and in practice, social accountability has some limitations. It assumes that some form of citizen engagement, as outlined above, is possible. But sometimes this may be difficult or impossible. By emphasising social rather than political accountability, it can both in theory and in practice be accused of not taking the political seriously enough. Major proponents such as the World Bank have been faulted for de-emphasising the enforceability side of accountability and for depoliticising it (Goetz and Jenkins 2004).

Despite its shortcomings, social accountability serves as a useful conceptual framework and increasingly diverse body of practice. By adopting an appreciative stance which builds on its strengths and insights, and makes justice more foundational, alongside a critical one which analyses its weaknesses and compares it with other discourses and bodies of practice, we see scope to enhance practice of, insight into, and theory about active citizenship.

A closer examination of the significance and meanings of accountability and voice that are central to social accountability is needed before applying theory and principles of citizenship from perspectives of marginalised citizens themselves to a selected social-accountability practice.

Accountability requires voice

‘Voice’ refers to the capacity to express views and interests, and also to the exercise of this capacity (Burnell 2007). It has wide applicability, and is central to many contemporary notions of democracy and citizenship.

The exercise of citizen voice is premised on the ownership of citizens and their affected rights. Rights to exercise voice, and associated rights (such as the right to associate) enabling citizens, acting together, to claim those rights, inhere in or arise from their *collective ownership* and their affected rights as citizens: in this instance, ownership of, and rights in relation to a local public-service facility.

Further, citizen voice and the exercise of accountability tend to be mutually connected: the voice of citizens as owners requires actions and responsiveness of an accountable agency, and it also calls for sanction: this is how the agency becomes accountable (Goetz and Jenkins 2004).

Voice does not *necessarily* lead to or increase accountability (Foresti *et al.* 2007). Yet public accountability cannot often be achieved without citizen voice, especially in circumstances where citizens most want and deserve it. ‘Voice and accountability’ interventions need to be tailored to the political context, and to address causes of poor governance.

Bottom–up and top–down perspectives on voice and accountability will usually vary and require negotiation and contesting, in the interests of seeking justice. The intersection between voice and accountability provides an important potential bridge between those with a top–down perspective (e.g. state and institution building) on the one hand, and those with a bottom–up view (e.g. focusing on active citizenship): where these two ‘traditions’ meet provides a crucial locus for forms of participatory governance which take engaged citizenship seriously

(Foresti *et al.* 2007). Without state responsiveness or capability, encouraging citizens to engage is a recipe for frustration and eventual citizen disengagement. Similarly, capable states offering responsiveness require active citizens to *become* responsive and accountable.

Why voice matters so much to the poor

Hirschman's (1970) classic typology of exit, voice, and loyalty provides a useful framework for understanding why voice matters to the poor, in the context of essential public services. He argues that any customer of such services has broadly three options for response to the service: *exit*, *voice*, or *loyalty*. For example in relation to any concerns about a local essential public service, such as a health centre or school, citizens' options are to:

- leave the service in favour of an alternative (i.e. *exit*);
- *voice* their concerns (usually entails seeking change from within); or
- remain loyal (*loyalty*) to the service.

The poor typically lack both 'voice' in regard to basic services and the means to 'exit' to alternatives, such as to privately provided services open to those who can afford and access them. Thus, they may remain 'loyal' users of public services despite major shortcomings, or simply cease to use them. As Narayan concludes (Narayan *et al.* 2000: 100), 'It is not surprising that poor people so often simply do not go for treatment'.

Whether trapped in 'loyalty' or forced into 'exit' from essential services, the poor recognise that the politics surrounding the provision of public services frequently exacerbate inequities (Narayan *et al.* 2000: 82). The very services critical to them are those least likely to provide information about performance relevant to voting and credible political promises about their reform (Keefer and Khemani 2005: 52). This further weakens answerability, enforceability, and redress. Whether through factors they are aware of, or in the systems whose functioning they may not grasp, the poor are often trapped.

Providing 'voice' options for citizens to engage with government and exercise their rights is essential for them to have a meaningful influence over local public-service delivery. Such voice is both intrinsically and instrumentally important for human development.

Arenas for and benefits of citizen voice

Forms of democracy that rely too heavily on elections for accountability have been found wanting as the primary route to accountability and for voice. Briefly, this is because the electoral route to accountability, via political representatives who legislate and make policy, and then rely on the public service and others to execute it, is long and often fragmented (World Bank 2004). Citizen voice is often not adequately represented or is lost *en route*, leading to a breakdown in accountability. While elections are essential to democracy, additional methods of pursuing accountability that entail voice more adequately are required.

Citizens, especially the poor and marginalised, must be able to hold service providers more directly accountable, preferably face to face. To achieve this, citizens require deepened understanding of active citizenship and capacities to practise it. This way, their collective concerns, perspectives, and aspirations can find voice and register with relevant power-holders at various levels. Such voice then must meet with responsiveness and capability from government.

There are also important benefits to be gained by governments from increasing genuine citizen participation and voice. A recent study of political-democracy trust and social capital found that increased government legitimacy resulted when citizens were meaningfully engaged (Andrain

and Smith 2006). There is growing evidence that citizen-engagement initiatives promoting accountability, transparency, and information flow can also have a considerable impact on improving the delivery of key services.

One social-accountability approach being applied to local service delivery which shows how these issues matter in practice is Community-Based Performance Monitoring (CBPM), which World Vision (WV) is piloting.³ CBPM shows promise in deepening understanding and practice of active citizenship, particularly in promoting voice, accountability, dialogue, and transparency.

An example of a social-accountability approach: CBPM

CBPM is a hybrid community-based monitoring tool which combines elements of three other social-accountability approaches: social audit, community monitoring, and citizen report cards. It seeks to bring about and model constructive dialogue between state and citizens at a local level, where space for voice, mutual understanding, and the development of social contract exists or can be claimed. Central to CBPM is a 'Community Gathering' (CG), a set of facilitated meetings which focus on assessing the quality of services and identifying ways to improve delivery, with active citizen participation. CARE International in Malawi developed the first generation of CBPM, and the World Bank further enhanced it in the Gambia and elsewhere.

World Vision's emerging CBPM practice involves the following features.

Preparing and enabling for citizen engagement

A key initial step is to identify a suitable facility and ascertain that citizen users and service providers wish to trial CBPM there. It is important to prepare citizens both to engage at CG meetings and to sustain subsequent advocacy by them. Citizens become aware of relevant public policies and associated rights and entitlements, particularly in relation to the operation of the facility. Other conditions conducive to the CG are also initiated or fostered.

The Community Gathering

Using a community-auditing process, community members discover any gaps that exist in relation to actual inputs to which the facility is entitled. Drawing on their existing knowledge of the service facility, both citizen users and service providers, in focus groups, then assess, rate, discuss, and agree on action regarding the services by:

- voting and discussing 'standard indicators' of performance (such as overall performance of the facility);
- voting and discussing 'group-generated' indicators – indicators which reflect specific issues of concern to community members;
- generating initial proposals for reform.

The information thus collected is given as immediate feedback to a plenary community meeting for a stakeholder dialogue about the service's performance. Together, participants develop an 'action plan' to reform the service.

Following the CG, community members typically take responsibility for selected reform actions. They are also involved in on-going monitoring and follow-up of decisions taken, e.g. through further community meetings. Processes following the CG are discussed further below.

Sensitivity to gender and social diversity is provided for or can be incorporated in varied ways. Rights training currently being developed includes awareness of the rights of marginalised groups, and seeks more inclusive practice. Focus groups capture the views and voices of specific groups such as women and children, in their roles as local service users. Where possible, CG voting occurs separately, according to gender. Gender-disaggregated data are routinely captured. Specific provisions aim to reduce undue influence by men during voting. The methodology is flexible enough to allow for increased gender sensitivity in specific contexts, but does not routinely foster specific redress by individuals.

Provided that it captures the plurality of community views, including those of the most marginalised, the CG can help to articulate collective voice about the service. Periodic CGs can provide on-going feedback to service providers and pursue waves of reforms. Citizens can thus, over time, work together to improve the quality, level, reach, and targeting of a range of services, and thus address shortcomings in access to them.

World Vision's involvement with CBPM

Late in 2004, World Vision Australia decided, in collaboration with other WV offices, to start piloting CBPM, in the context of a growing emphasis on advocacy within the World Vision Partnership. In particular, CBPM attracted interest because it appears to offer a route to citizen empowerment, starting at the grass-roots level, and potentially also to policy influence – both central elements of WV advocacy.

‘Citizen empowerment’ in WV resonates strongly with notions of active citizenship. Where injustice exists, it involves enabling individuals and groups to understand their rights and responsibilities, understand who has power to bring about change, build their capabilities, and navigate systems and structures to tackle poverty and injustice.

To date, piloting has yielded encouraging results. In Brazil, India, and Uganda, for example, communities employing CBPM have successfully pursued a wide range of reforms. These include obtaining new health clinics, extra health workers and teachers, and improving performance of schools and health centres. Citizens show signs of increased sense of ownership of public facilities, attributable at least partly to CBPM processes. Communities have self-mobilised to effect reforms. Some communities appear to have greater unity, self-help and self-esteem, and an increasing sense of civic responsibility. For example, several communities pooled their energies and resources to build new classrooms or service-provider housing. Local accountability institutions such as school education committees have been revived, and others, such as health councils, created. There have also been ‘ripple’ effects. In Uganda, reform actions such as introducing school lunches, resulting from CBPM activities, have been copied by schools in neighbouring communities.

CBPM is being adapted for quite different contexts, and thus taking different forms. In Brazil, it is being applied to monitor participatory budgeting processes and enhance understanding about budgeting. In Peru, WV is seeking to enhance citizen voice prior to CGs by preparing communities, especially children, through extensive rights education.

Evaluating/assessing CBPM

Various frameworks can be used to assess the CBPM CG and ascertain ways in which it may be adapted or re-shaped. Here I emphasise two contrasting frameworks for active citizenship, social accountability, and inclusive citizenship: good social-accountability practice and inclusive citizenship.

Good social-accountability practice

Comparing CBPM CG practice with elements of good social-accountability practice referred to earlier, we see that it entails the following:

- citizen monitoring of a local public service, which requires and generates publicly held information about it;
- citizen users collectively providing feedback on service performance, and advocating specific reforms, via voice and dialogue;
- negotiation of issues about the service among users, service providers, and other stakeholders;
- more immediate answerability by service providers during the CG, and calls for response and responsiveness from relevant officials to reforms resulting from the CG. This last step, government *response and responsiveness*, cannot be guaranteed by CBPM. Recognising this, our latest CBPM practice involves a broader framework (referred to below) which seeks to enable citizens to pursue answerability. However, sometimes answerability can be notoriously difficult to obtain.

Inclusive citizenship

Citizenship and social accountability can be, and often are, constructed by citizens themselves. Inclusive citizenship is such a framework

Inclusive citizenship: from 'below'. What do impoverished citizens especially look for in citizenship? Kabeer (2005: 3–8) concludes, from a multi-country study, that citizenship as seen through the eyes of the poor relates to four core values or principles:

1. Fairness – when it is fair to be treated the same, and when it is fair to be treated differently.
2. Recognition of the intrinsic worth of all human beings, but also of their differences.
3. Self-determination – people's ability to exercise some degree of control over their lives.
4. Solidarity – the capacity to identify with others and act together in claims for justice and recognition.

Together, these principles seem to express the longings of citizens living in poverty to experience a more just world. Whereas the principles of ownership and affected rights authorise the engagement of citizens in relation to the state, these core values arguably highlight something perhaps more intrinsic to citizenship: a citizenship conceived of in terms of justice *as a human and community value*, rather than one limited to democratic theory. Still, there seems to be a natural affinity and complementarity between the two, since expression of the core values also has instrumental value in realising ownership and pursuing affected rights.

CBPM's contribution to and embodiment of active citizenship

How does emerging CBPM practice contribute to realising or increasing understanding of active citizenship which includes these core values? To answer this question rigorously would require exhaustive research. The observations below point to some possible answers, based on what we have been observing and hearing from the piloting of CBPM in increasingly varied types of localities and countries.

We can appreciate strengths in CBPM, while also critiquing it. In so doing, we highlight ways in which, through developing it, we are learning about and can foster new expressions of more *active citizenship*.

First, an important inherent strength of the CG is its focus on a local service facility which is readily identifiable and can provide public space for meaningful participation. The institutionalised provision of such space for citizens is uncommon – despite the importance of local service institutions to and for human development.

The CG, in allowing users to express voice on felt concerns about services, may engender fairness. Together, they seek information on facility inputs due from authorities (e.g. textbooks for a primary school or drugs for a health centre). Through auditing, they ascertain how far these inputs are in place. Knowledge gained informs relevant action to address major gaps. The state-provided standard inputs due to a service arguably approximate to an initial (sometimes minimum) baseline for an equitable distribution of that state's resources needed to operate that service. While achieving these standards is usually not an end-point for fair service provision, it can be a significant step towards it. What the CG process lacks, but could incorporate, is an assessment of how equitable the 'standard inputs' for a given facility are, for instance in relation to aspirational national or international goals.

By assessing how capably the facility is performing in relation to *actual* inputs, it also provides some process fairness to service providers, who commonly work under major constraints. The facility provides an immediate and natural locus for local 'citizen ownership'. Citizen 'users and choosers' become citizen 'makers and shapers' through processes which pursue fairness by calling and holding to account both government and service providers (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001).

Second, CBPM provides several avenues for citizens to become aware of, claim, and realise key rights. The CG not uncommonly represents a significant claiming of an important public space – that of an essential public facility – by citizens. In it, citizens appear to claim recognition of affected rights. This is expressed through their exercise of collective voice: in discussing, voting, and agreeing on action plans for facility reform, including demands on governments to fulfil their obligations. Above, we also saw that, through greater transparency about its inputs and functioning, they also claim the right to know about the service. Exercise of these rights rest on local citizens' collective 'ownership' of the facility.

The CG helps to bring key rights closer, although by itself it does not guarantee or necessarily sustain an adequate claiming of those rights. Many citizens lack a clear awareness of basic rights. Widening and deepening awareness of these prior to the CG is important in emerging CBPM practice. While citizenship entitles poor people to receive basic services, they often lack ways to access necessary enabling rights, such as rights to association and civic participation. Further, groups such as people living with HIV and AIDS or with disabilities may be unaware of specific services to which they are entitled. Raising awareness of these prior to the CG is important in emerging CBPM practice. CBPM practice will need further provisions to include other groups suffering social exclusion, and to better incorporate peace-building principles. The realisation of various rights usually depends also on an appropriate level of government capability and responsiveness. Citizens often gain confidence through the CG to claim rights and exact accountabilities in other arenas, beyond service reforms. The spotlight of accountability is sometimes even turned on World Vision.

Third, the CG has significant value for diagnosis, discussion, and deliberation. Community awareness of the gap between facility inputs to which they are entitled and what actually is present can inform discussions on how services have performed, how citizen users have been treated, and whether access to services is reasonable. This is important, to ensure that calls for reform are appropriately directed. The CG is centrally concerned with citizens monitoring a specific local public service. The CG allows a fairly open-ended choice of what community and service providers each monitor about a given facility. Together, they canvass and choose their own indicators of quality service delivery, and measure the performance of their facility

or its staff against that. Citizens may focus, for example, on service-provider performance, or on enhancing specific features of the facility. Ordinary citizens with simple tools can make a meaningful measure of service performance and use this to negotiate local reforms with service providers on a more level 'playing field' than previously existed. More generally, because, according to accountability principles, throughout the CG communities generate, own, and use information about the facility, this can become publicly owned 'content' which can further fairness.

Fourth, by emphasising immediate response and joint decision making, and joint preparation of specific, agreed, time-bound reform action plans, the CG can engender citizen-initiated reform and give it purpose and direction. Agreeing on service reforms through dialogue between key stakeholders can enhance the legitimacy of reforms, while providing a forum within which stakeholder views and proposals for reform can be heard. Outcomes considered fair by citizen users may be diverse in their scope and timeframes. They may be more immediate, or anticipated by citizens, e.g. the answerability and level of responsiveness of service providers or government officials. Or they can be unexpected or cumulative with other change processes. Conversely, outcomes seen to be unfair may discourage citizen engagement.

Fifth, an ownership seems to be emerging which unites communities, provides direction, and generates energies for and a focus on reform, with an emphasis on collective self-help or solidarity. In taking responsibility via the CG for reform of a public service, and in investing their time and effort in it, communities take important steps towards controlling it. Knowledge, discovered or generated in solidarity, helps in this process. The sense of self-help or solidarity seems to provide a springboard for new forms and expressions of active citizenship, entailing both rights and responsibilities. This may include agreeing to joint community action to enhance services, using whatever funding, energies, and other in-kind resources they can muster. Scrutiny of government performance and power in turn raises healthy questions about WV's use of power, accountability to the community, and role in service delivery, and who should monitor projects. Active citizenship thus extends to non-state actors. In placing citizens at the centre of a newly created political space, it appears that, acting in solidarity, they make collectively important discoveries about a facility and its performance. Most CGs culminate in a community meal and cultural celebration, often song and dance. This appears to reward their active engagement and confirm a sense of joint achievement, discovery, and ownership. In the process, participants often affirm their cultural identity, perhaps indicating the steps they have taken towards being recognised. Yet these expressions of solidarity may be fragile, even fleeting, and need to be nurtured.

Sixth, there appears to be potential, with appropriate sampling techniques, for parts of the data generated at local level to be aggregated and used as evidence to *influence policy*. In many countries there is a dearth of evidence expressing grassroots voice about and monitoring of local public-service delivery. CBPM therefore may help to allow more genuinely pro-poor and responsive policy-formation processes and thus, over longer time frames, it may help policy implementation across many local communities to better respond to and incorporate collectively expressed priorities and aspirations. The development of local, citizen-owned information systems is a huge challenge ahead.

In each of the six contributions, we note that there is both *intrinsic* democratic value and *instrumental* value, e.g. to reform services. CBPM seems to provide spaces for communities to enact a form of active citizenship in which voice, accountability, transparency, and dialogue are enhanced, with scope for them to be further enhanced. It has given WV itself the opportunity to engage and learn from citizens alongside whom we work.

Yet we have also recognised that focusing too heavily on the CG has major limitations. The process is completed after a few days, and may even soon be forgotten. We are turning more

attention to factors which enable longer-term citizen voice and accountability: civic awareness, capability, and responsibility. These are intrinsic to exercising citizenship, as well as necessary for democratic and development outcomes.

What seems to be emerging is a broader model for practising civic-driven advocacy, not just CBPM. Heightening awareness, particularly among children, about rights and responsibilities is critical for realising active forms of citizenship. Practical understanding of how governments, their budgets, and local public services operate, and exploring options for social and political change, are needed to equip them for peaceful, purposeful, and persistent advocacy.

Large challenges remain: such as how to build more inclusive forms of practice and to address exclusion; how to ensure that a representative range of voices are heard and heeded; how to pursue accountability for government service inputs critical to major rights (such as rights to health care and education); and how to increase capability and responsiveness of service providers and governments (Tender 1997).

CBPM is still in varied phases of development and contextualisation and is yet to be fully evaluated. As the approach continues to broaden beyond the CG process, and to expand with more pilots in a growing range of country and local contexts, we continually incorporate and consolidate learning. More challenging governance contexts will require patience, flexibility, and broader collaboration.

Some key shifts in WV's thinking, language, and practice

Piloting CBPM has already taken us on a remarkable learning journey. Here are a few relatively early reflections from that journey.

Shifting paradigms?

CBPM provides a new set of lenses for WV's grassroots development and advocacy. It is showing potential to create new local arenas for impoverished communities to articulate their collective voice for reform, beginning with local service institutions. In CBPM we recognised that we need to intentionally shift our thinking.

In contrast to the project or programme as the organisationally defined arena for participation, in which the poor are understood as being 'beneficiaries', the creation of new public spaces for participation entails different sets of actors, new dynamics of engagement, and new types of participation by marginalised citizens. A key shift is from beneficiary-driven towards citizen-driven forms of participation, in which citizens influence government policy and decision making in local arenas affecting their lives (Gaventa and Valderrama 1999: 6).

Such shifts emphasise the importance of enhancing citizens' collective and individual political capabilities. This in turn raises searching questions about many of WV's current modes and models of operating. It opens up possibilities for broader approaches to change. It also prompts other questions, for which we have very incomplete answers: What are the essential capabilities that citizens need in order to engage with the powerful? How do they exercise these, and to what extent are they contextual? How adequately do we understand power, including our own?

Learning from broader experiences of social-accountability approaches

An important recent survey and analysis of case studies in social accountability in Asia (Sirker and Cosic 2007) identified five key enablers for social accountability: responsiveness and voice, the power of information, local ownership, local capacity building, and political buy-in. These variously reflect our emerging practice of CBPM and areas to which learning is being directed.

Sirker and Cosic (2007) highlight the ‘potency of blending state responsiveness with voices of the community’ as opposed to taking adversarial positions, with a view to developing strategic partnerships. Influential evidence from elsewhere emphasises the importance of state responsiveness (Tendler 1997; Grindle 2007) for good government. Locally, we see signs of increased understanding between service providers and citizens emerging from CGs, along with increased partnership and collaboration between service providers, as they share commitment to improve delivery. Beyond the CG, we also see a key challenge of how to magnify the impact of community voice from many CGs, so they can collectively influence policy. One possible avenue involves aggregating performance information from multiple CGs and analysing this to influence policy. However, the success of this hinges on sufficient state responsiveness.

When a local citizenry learns about a facility’s entitlements to inputs, we have observed ‘the emancipatory and empowering potential of information to usher in accountability’ (Sirker and Cosic 2007). But their voice can become muted if government withholds or cannot provide key information. Discouragement may set in. Other means may be needed to pursue the transparency to which citizens are entitled. These vary with context, including political space available to citizens, and the strength of their motivation, capability, and constituencies. Beyond state-provided information, the power of evidence-based, citizen-generated information to influence policy change is also increasingly being highlighted in various studies (Robinson 2006).

A key goal of CBPM is to encourage principles of local ownership, which undergird public accountability. For example, data gathered and generated about a local service and the associated processes are to be community-owned, from inception. Staff facilitate community action and learning ahead of the CG and follow-up community processes.

Fostering local ownership is critical. For social-accountability processes to become self-sustaining, enhancing local capability to assume ownership is important. Equipping local volunteers and organisations to lead CBPM processes is an increasingly important part of CBPM practice.

Ways to institutionalise and scale up social accountability are identified as important issues in the literature (Grindle 2007). As already indicated, the development of strategic constituencies is likely to be important in gaining wider political buy-in and leverage for greater government responsiveness. An important role in exacting accountability is being recognised for traditional local leaders, as well as for local elected representatives (Ananth Pur 2007).

Each of these also presents fresh opportunities for WV as a child-focused organisation, whose vision is ‘life in all its fullness for every child’, and ‘the will to make it so’.

Our journey with CBPM: where to from here?

Over the first 18 months of piloting, it became apparent that our early approach to the CG was strongly instrumental. As our vision and practice for CBPM enlarges beyond the CG, we are seeing CBPM as having both instrumental and intrinsic value. As an intervention to encourage collective reform by citizens, its instrumental outcomes are emphasised. Yet intrinsic value is apparent from democratic participation and voice, citizenship, and public accountability. As citizens claim and enact their citizenship in new ways in familiar contexts, they also potentially realise and constitute it afresh. Yet change, whether of intrinsic or instrumental value, can be fragile, so can nurturing its intrinsic value as well as its instrumental value help to sustain the change process?

WV’s traditional focus on local service delivery could become a limiting factor, because of its tendency to direct community attention towards WV’s actions, funding, and need to see specific outcomes, rather than towards a more open-ended set of processes in which an

important focus is on the community as citizen actors and rights holders, and government as primary duty bearer.

Community Gatherings are not enough by themselves to sustain momentum for active citizenship. Contextualisation, relationship building, awareness raising, and mobilisation need to precede the CG, and processes following it need to sustain the collective community energy and amplify the voice that CGs typically generate. Drawing on our multi-country practice, we are now developing a broader framework of processes that seek to build the *capability* of citizens to engage with government prior to the CG, in ways appropriate to local context.

Active citizenship following the CG

The CG culminates in an action plan for reform. While some reforms will be under community control or influence, typically at least one of the reforms critical to service performance relies on governments or providers being responsive, which may not be forthcoming. What can a community do? In any given context, two broad dimensions may offer opportunities to address such blockages and sustain participatory social accountability:

1. government and institutional functioning;
2. citizens' collective aspirations, energies, resources, and capabilities.

I consider both these factors briefly in turn, in relation to community action to pursue accountability post-CG. Although both will include both enabling and disabling factors, the focus here is on the former.

Government-provided avenues

Various avenues for accountability may be provided, or indeed encouraged, by governments. These may include relatively institutionalised forms of representative governance or mechanisms for voice, accountability, or both, such as School or Health Management Committees. Constitutional, legal, or rights mechanisms may be available to exact accountability in some instances, and selected rights may be justiciable. For example, there may be a constitutional right to participate, or transparency may be pursued by using suitable freedom of information legislation. Overall, we frequently observe that these avenues are inaccessible by or ineffective for ordinary citizens. However, when citizens gain collective voice, they may reform local institutions or be able to gain access to wider avenues.

The global trend towards decentralisation can open up spaces and opportunities, especially if accompanied by voice. However, evidence is mixed on the efficacy of decentralisation. On the one hand, overall decentralisation has not delivered on the promise and hopes that it generated (Tambulasi and Kayuni 2007). Evidence suggests that 'decentralised service delivery has not improved poor people's access [to services] and improvements in quality have not resulted from a transfer of power and responsibilities to local authorities'. On the other hand, a recent study concluded that 'many of the problems with decentralised service delivery lie in the design and implementation of reform initiatives and insufficient attention to the feasibility of achieving major improvements without commensurate changes in broader governance structures and underlying socio-economic conditions' (Robinson 2007: 2). To understand what potential decentralisation offers in any context, it is important to appreciate its purpose, and specifically whether and in what ways it devolves power to citizens, and fosters local government responsiveness.

We conclude that decentralisation may offer a route to accountability, but often a slow one. Particularly where government will and capability exists, we see signs that it provides enabling conditions for participatory governance.

Beyond formal government-initiated avenues

Using their collective initiative and imagination, citizens can pursue available and created avenues to build constituencies for change. In finding their collective voice and engaging in dialogue, they can pursue reforms in public-service delivery. We have seen that the imaginative, bold, and peaceful ‘weapons of the weak’ to seek reforms can produce surprising and amusing stories about forms of community action to enforce accountability.

Collaborating in constituencies to advocate for change, whether by linking up with or by creating related grassroots NGOs, campaigns, or movements, is often effective. Co-opting important allies to strengthen these constituencies, such as the middle class, the media, or public servants, can be useful.

Our earlier more instrumental, problem-centred approach to building organisational capacity in CBPM proved inadequate. We have found that a much broader, appreciative, strengths-based framework, emphasising collective citizen agency within the governance context, is essential. Within this, the role of local staff is shifting towards being facilitators of change driven by citizens, rather than implementers of programmes in which beneficiaries participate.

Conclusion

The change process in CBPM shifts the focus from implementing mainly sectoral projects with participating beneficiaries towards facilitating processes in which citizen actors become enabled and authorised to exercise collective rights intrinsic to their status as local citizen owners of local government services. These include rights to associate, to know, to participate – rights needed to discover and exercise voice in the process of dialogue, and to use that voice to claim rights to health care, education, and other essential services. Without sufficient capabilities *and* awareness of rights, citizen action risks being co-opted or losing direction or momentum. In CBPM practice, capabilities built on rights-based awareness of citizens, to monitor basic local services, and as rights-holders to exact accountability for relevant rights, such as the rights to basic health services and education, from the relevant duty bearers, are becoming paramount.

Combining different forms and types of social accountability so as to enhance levels of transparency and accountability owed to citizens and their collective voice and agency seems to offer significant opportunities to deepen democracy and citizenship. Meanwhile, increasing government responsiveness to citizens’ most basic rights also entails addressing structural imbalances of power between government and ordinary citizens. Lastly there seems to be potential to influence the formation of more equitable policies affecting the poor, such as those in health and education.

By progressively imbuing CBPM with more deeply justice-and-rights-based thinking and thus transforming it, and providing a more enabling environment for it, we hope to nurture and generate more inclusive praxis of active citizenship, and thus, as we are beginning to see, realise more equitable distribution of state resources to marginalised citizens. Such praxis will be of both intrinsic and instrumental value if it helps citizens to reconnect with government, realise their ownership of it, and exact accountability from it. This entails citizens collectively understanding and discovering their voice and taking their place as citizen actors. It will require practices to claim inclusion, entitlement, and collective exercise of power, particularly in their civic relationships with state duty bearers, but also with non-state duty bearers such as WV.

WV began with CBPM as a social-accountability tool to be adapted and refined for different contexts, to achieve specific goals connected with ‘community empowerment’. As we began to introduce the CG to communities and staff, stories of empowerment from it encouraged us, but

staff struggled to make sense of CBPM as part of existing development practice. It seems that our rather instrumental approach encouraged a view that our aim was to enhance existing practice. We have concluded that CBPM and, we suspect, other social-accountability tools will not deliver their full potential in the project-based development frameworks that WV commonly uses.

Processes of organisational learning helped us to see that a paradigm shift was needed. This entailed new lenses through which to view seemingly familiar spaces and processes. Such lenses focused our attention on different relationships and issues. CBPM processes appear to place collective initiative in citizens' hands in ways that project participation often does not. But they also pose questions about how collective citizen voice and dialogue can be sustained and amplified.

In this process of discovering new lenses, we saw that WV's mission to seek justice can provide values and commitments important for shaping CBPM practice as empowering. In particular, enabling citizens to engage in governance meaningfully requires that they can address power in key institutional relationships.

We can say that governance is *good* only when the systems of governance are capable and accountable to ordinary citizens, and responsive to them and to their voice. This means that governance needs to be 'democratic in both form and substance – for the people and by the people' (UNDP 2002). The challenge ahead is to realise this. CBPM as an emergent expression of active citizenship is opening up an encouraging pathway ahead.

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Notes

1. These are explicit in human-rights instruments, and strongly implicit in major international declarations and goals.
2. 'Social accountability' is frequently used in the context of corporations to refer to *accountabilities owed by corporations to society* (sometimes relatively narrowly), whereas here the focus is on the broad range of accountabilities involving civic engagement with government.
3. Since the time of writing, CBPM has been renamed Citizen Voice and Action (CV&A). I have retained the programme's original title because this is what was in use during the period referred to in the article.

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