Helpdesk Research Report

Interventions to increase levels of trust in society

Becky Carter

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Question

Identify interventions that have attempted to increase levels of trust in society. Look at what the interventions have tried to do and if they were effective. The focus is on 'trust' from the perspective of accountable relationships with government (e.g. over taxes) and general economic relationships. The aim is to look at the social side of state accountability and anti-corruption.

Contents

1. Overview

This report has searched for interventions that attempt to increase levels of trust in society, looking in particular at economic accountability relationships with government. The overall findings from this search are:

- It is possible to discern that **interventions concerned with transforming state-society relations necessarily involve or require raising trust levels** within society and/or between state-society. However, only a **few** of these **interventions present trust-building as a central or explicit objective**.

- In contrast, descriptions of trust deficits in fragile states abound in governance and institutional reform programme documents.

- It appears some development agencies treat 'trust' as a **cross-cutting** dimension that enters into discussions around related themes such as social cohesion, inclusion, accountability, and resilience (expert comment).

- Some interventions do track levels of trust (within society, between state-society), sometimes as a (proxy) indicator of building social cohesion or social capital, but **measuring** trust levels and trust-building is challenging, and techniques are still nascent.

- Illustrative cases of **interventions** that have involved building and/or measuring trust levels in society have been found in **four areas**:

    1) Social accountability

    2) Community-driven development

    3) Tax-related interventions

    4) Transformative social protection.[1]

Other key points raised by this rapid review are:

- Trust is a **complex, multidimensional cultural concept**. Two key categories are political (state-society) and interpersonal (intra-society) trust.

- There is general consensus that **effective, peaceful states are underpinned by a strong state-society relationship**, with trust an essential component of this social contract.

- Rising interest in trust as a **key driver of the social contract** between state and society is linked to:

    - a growing body of economic studies finding links between trust and economic prosperity and assorted development outcomes;

    - the popularity of key concepts such as reciprocity, participatory governance and social capital;

    - the evolving good governance agenda, which brings accountability between state and society to the fore; and

    - conceptualisation of development, and particularly governance, issues as collective action problems, which highlights the necessity of first building a working level of consensus and trust before undertaking other reform actions.

- Lessons learned from **social accountability** approaches include:

    - the importance of a context-sensitive, flexible approach;

    - the benefits that can accrue from building a relationship using small steps and a continual process over time;

    - the potential efficacy of transparency, dialogue and participatory budgeting for increasing trust, including around revenue collection;

    - the risk of changing local trust relations, with unintended consequences.

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[1] Other types of interventions that involve increasing trust in society but are outside the scope of this report include: 1) peace and reconciliation processes; and 2) local institution-building (such as decentralised local government planning and finance, electoral rules, justice delivery and other legal reform).

- **Community-driven development** projects can also facilitate collective action through building trust, but this does not happen automatically and must be managed. Measuring outcomes on collective action is challenging and evaluations report mixed results. The results of some interventions have been disappointing in relation to broader transformational outcomes.

- Interventions focused on improving state-society relations around **taxation** incorporate social accountability methods to improve tax education, awareness, compliance, and, more ambitiously, engaging communities in tax collection efforts.

- **Transformative social protection** interventions – such as cash transfers – that incorporate building transformational human and social capital as part of their theory of change are also seen as having potential in increasing state legitimacy and improving state-citizen relations.

The report first briefly outlines the concepts and theory associated with trust and trust-building, and then goes on to provide examples of the interventions.

2. Concepts and theory

Definitions

Trust is a **complex, multidimensional, cultural concept**. Academics highlight that social science disciplines have struggled to develop tools and discourses for affective dimensions of human experience (Gormley-Hennan and Macginty, 2009). This is complicated by the fact that trust can operate on the private, public, institutional and political levels, with a lack of immediate clarity on how these levels connect with one another. Moreover, trust is understood and interpreted in different ways in different societies (Gormley-Hennan and Macginty, 2009).

Two key categories are **political trust** and **interpersonal trust**. Political (or civic) trust is divided by Morrone et al (2008) into: *macro (or organisational) trust* – an issues-oriented perspective when citizens trust or distrust the government because they are satisfied or dissatisfied with current policies and implementation; and *micro trust* – a person-oriented perspective directed towards specific political leaders. Interpersonal (also called individual) trust is sometimes divided into *thick or strategic trust* between relatives and friends and *thin or moralistic trust* between strangers (Blind, 2006; Morrone et al., 2009).

Why trust matters

Until very recently efforts undertaken by the international community to promote institutional reform have focused on the state, resulting in a top-down approach centred on formal institutions (Haider, 2011). Today there is a **general consensus that effective, peaceful states are underpinned by a strong state-society relationship** – sometimes conceptualised as the 'social contract' – that is predicated on trust (DFID, 2010); fragile and post-conflict states tend to be defined by their lack of trust between states and citizens.

Looking specifically at the role of trust in economic relationships, Pritchard (2010) finds that **trust is essential for cooperative rather than coercive tax relationships** between state and society. He notes that taxpayers' compliance is shaped to a large degree by various forms of trust: whether they trust that *other* taxpayers are paying; how effectively they believe that revenue is being used; whether or not they believe that tax administration is honest and fair (p. 11).

The rising interest in '**trust' as a key driver of the social contract** between state and society, and the various factors promoting it (social capital, associationalism, and the existence of certain key institutions) is underpinned by a growing body of economic studies that finds links between trust and social capital and economic prosperity and development, good government, good schools, the provision of quality health care and even the resolution of ethnic conflicts (Locke, 2001).

The interest in trust is associated with the concepts of:

- **Reciprocity** between the state and society as the most important factor in the process of state-building; for the state to gain legitimacy, consolidate security and political stability, and create the foundations of trust and social reconciliation (DFID, 2010, p. 15).

- **Participatory governance** with its claims of intrinsic value (through strengthening citizenship and more inclusive civic engagement) and instrumental value (through building capacity for self-reliance and collective action) transforming passive residents into effective public citizens who can hold states and markets accountable (Mansuri and Rao, 2013).

- **Social capital** (the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively), which rose to prominence in the 1990s with Putnam's proposition that when social capital is high, citizens express confidence and trust not only in each other but also in public institutions, thereby encouraging them to work to improve the democratic accountability of the state (Rose-Ackerman, 2001). Trust is often associated with social capital and sometimes considered a proxy or key determinant for it (Morrone et al., 2009, p. 5). Rothstein points out that some definitions of social capital are tautological – social capital is simultaneously based on and leads to cooperation, reciprocity, and trust – and promote defining social capital as the 'sum of the number of social contacts multiplied by the quality of trust in these relationships' (Rothstein, 2005, p. 54; p. 66).

Today's focus on trust is very much shaped by the evolving **good governance agenda** (introduced in the 1990s) which has brought to the fore **accountability** as a crucial element of the relationship between state and society: accountability is posited to lead to more government legitimacy and greater trust on citizens' part (World Bank, 2011). More recently the move to conceptualising development and particularly governance issues as **collective action[2] problems** (Booth, 2012; Rao, 2013) highlights the importance for governance and institutional reform to start with building a working level of consensus and trust to change incentives (Johnston, 2010, p. 7; Marquette, 2011). Johnston (2010) warns that without this initial trust-building, embarking directly on usual reform activities risks placing severe stress on weak institutional frameworks and social loyalties.

How to build trust

A **long list of factors is associated with building trust**,[3] some backed up by **evidence from macro historical and economic cross-country studies**. There is also a **growing experimental literature** looking at the effect of sanctioning institutions on cooperation. These studies undertake experiments to show that institutional features, such as the presence of a sanctioning system, leadership, etc. improve cooperation within a group (expert comment). Some of these are laboratory experiments; a corollary field applies

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[2] The provision of public goods through the collaboration of two or more individuals (Rao 2013).

[3] For example, a background paper for the 2007 OECD Global Forum on Reinventing Government states that trust in government requires 'rule of law, an independent judiciary, free, fair and regular elections, legitimate parliamentary processes, a healthy civil society, fighting corruption and appearances of corruption, local governance and decentralization, and finally, e-governance' (Blind, 2006, p.). Others emphasise universal free schooling (Uslaner and Rothstein, 2012) and a responsible and fair tax administration (Persson and Rothstein, 2012, p. 19).

approaches such as game theory in evaluations of development programmes to explore the interventions' effects on trust and other dimensions of state-society relations.[4]

Building trust is complicated because:

- The **link between trust and democracy is multi-dimensional**, and an increase in trust along one line, for example in the reliability of the information provided by the media, has no necessary spill over benefits for other dimensions (Rose-Ackerman, 2001).

- The various factors to build trust **might not necessarily be compatible or mutually reinforcing**, as they can contain specific challenges that might contradict each other (Elhawary et al., 2010).

- The relationship between **trust and reform is complex and reciprocal**: building trust between citizens and the state is both a major challenge and an important potential benefit of reforms aimed at shaping the social contract (Johnston, 2010, p. 2; McNeil and Malena, 2010). States that promote transparency and accountability but fail to respond adequately to citizens' demands can intensify grievances, compounding fragility; some quick results are needed to restore confidence in low trust contexts (World Bank, 2011).

3. Interventions to build trust

Social accountability

While there is wide agreement in the literature that social accountability approaches[5] (sometimes also called demand-side governance) have an instrumental value in improving accountability processes and ultimately service delivery outcomes, recently there has been **increased attention paid to the role of social accountability in improving broader socio-political outcomes**, such as state-society and intra-society relations (Aslam, 2012). From this perspective, social accountability can be seen both to rely on, and in turn reinforce state-society trust (McNeil and Malena, 2010, p.15). In particular, social accountability approaches are seen as potentially **powerful tools both to detect and prevent public sector corruption** – by enhancing public transparency and oversight (as in the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative[6] and Publish What You Pay campaign[7]) and by exposing leakages (as through the education expenditure tracking surveys in Malawi) (McNeil and Malena, 2010, p. 14).

Nevertheless recent critiques highlight a tendency to oversell the potential of generic demand-side governance approaches to solve **context-specific** development problems (O'Meally, 2013, p. 2). A recent comprehensive review underlines the importance of social accountability **interventions focusing on**

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[4] For example, the evaluation of a community driven reconstruction project in northern Liberia uses a behavioural public goods game to augment and validate survey-based findings on the impact of participation on social cohesion and cooperation (Fearon et al, 2009).

[5] Taking a broad perspective, social accountability is organized around three key principles: (i) transparency; (ii) accountability; and (iii) participation (World Bank, 2011) and encompasses an array of approaches, strategies and methods that can be initiated by a wide range of actors (citizens, CSOs, communities, government agencies, parliamentarians, media, and others); occur at different levels (from the community level to the national and international levels); use diverse strategies (for example, research, monitoring, civic education, media coverage, advocacy, and coalition building); and employ different forms of formal and informal sanctions (for example, judicial enforcement of freedom of information laws and public exposés in the media) (McNeil and Malena, 2010, p.15).

[6] http://www.neiti.org.ng/

[7] http://www.publishwhatyoupay.org/where/coalitions/nigeria

solutions rather than problems and ensuring that **engagement remains constructive** (even when it includes criticism) (McNeil and Malena 2010, p. 203).

Cambodia Demand for Good Governance project

The World Bank financed **Cambodia Demand for Good Governance (DFGG) project**[8] is a useful example of a social accountability intervention with trust-building at its core. The project has a non-state actor component that aims to increase the extent and ability of citizens, civil society organizations, and other non-state actors to hold the state accountable and make it responsive to their needs. In turn, DFGG also works with state institutions to enhance the capacity of the state to become transparent, accountable, and participatory. Critically, over time the DFGG project has built a relationship that has opened the door to allow (ongoing) negotiations to the Government's social accountability policy and establishment of a joint social accountability steering committee, in which civil society and government sit together for the first time. (expert comment; Learning Notes[9] and other project documentation provided for deliberative purposes.)

One element of the project illustrates the **importance of a context sensitive, flexible approach**. In one province, beneficiary monitoring of district administrations' one window service office benefited from a hybrid approach of the NGO (first) supporting the district administration and (then) holding the district administration to account via citizen monitoring. While some best practices might suggest separating the roles, this sequencing worked in the context of Cambodia where levels of mistrust are high, and NGOs needed to first build trust with the district administration before they could successfully carry out third party monitoring. This approach has delivered results (with improved performance of public officials and some sanctions put in place) and is now being rolled out across the project. (Plummer and Dolk, 2013)

The Cambodia DFGG project also provides insights into **how to measure trust building**. The project results framework has two qualitative indicators of particular relevance for trust building: 'Increased trust and constructive engagement between non-state actors and government agencies' and 'Positive evaluation of the contribution of partnerships to the project development objective'. While quantitative targets were originally suggested, these were removed to promote critical assessment of the nature of the engagement. The project mid-term evaluation found that trust and mutual respect between CSOs and state institutions has grown during implementation (as measured through observed and reported increases in the number of interactions, collaborative activities, and mutual support between the two actors). The practice of joint planning and implementation of various social accountability tools has improved the relationship to a great extent, resulting in more effective feedback and corrective planning. (Plummer, 2013)

Tanzania

A number of social accountability approaches highlight **transparency and dialogue** as important means to increase trust levels or other indicators of social cohesion, civic engagement and government legitimacy. In a recent comprehensive review of lessons learned from social accountability initiatives, McNeil and Malena (2012) highlight the case of Ilala, Tanzania where survey evidence had shown that the rate of contribution to public services was affected by factors such as citizens trusting others (to pay their share) and the trustworthiness of the government (to use revenues to provide the expected services and to establish fair procedures for revenue collection) (Fjeldstad, 2004). The local government authorities won

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[8] The World Bank's first self-standing project devoted completely to demand-side approaches to better governance.
[9] http://www.dfgg-nsac.org/en/resources/dfgg-learning-notes

increased citizen trust and support (evidenced by an increase of 53 percent of own-source, largely tax-based revenue in three years) by openly sharing information (for example, about revenues and expenditures) and by introducing clear and defined mechanisms for dialogue and negotiation (McNeil and Malena, 2012, p. 203). Important contributing factors included a conducive national political and administrative context; a favourable local social and economic context; extensive support from an exceptionally wide range of institutions; and a flexible, innovative, and persistent process that achieved greater success through trial and error (Kihongo and Lubuva, 2012 in McNeil and Malena, 2012).

Customary systems

There are lessons to be learned from interventions that have aimed to **work with local leaders**, some of which point to the **risk of (inadvertently) changing the bases of trust between societal groups** and affecting social cohesion. Two cases are:

- The multi-donor supported Institutional Reform and Capacity Building Programme in Sierra Leone identified opportunities to strengthen links between traditional chiefs and formal local governance structures, and organised training and opportunities to participate in policy preparation (DFID, 2010, p. 45). However struggles for supremacy between traditional chiefs and local council authorities surfaced very early, and concerted efforts to diffuse these ongoing tensions continue: DFID (2010) found that **issues of revenue sharing can seriously affect the relationship between chiefdom councils and local councils**.

- Marc et al. (2013, p. 5) report that: 'In Yemen, problems of the loss of accountability were observed, resulting from the co-optation of customary leaders into the formal state system. In this case, tribal sheikhs were brought into the formal system and awarded stipends, access to land, and other privileges in exchange for their loyalty to the central government. The sheikhs were effectively converted into representatives of the state in their communities, whereas previously their power had derived exclusively from the support of their constituents. This dynamic had the effect of **isolating the sheikhs from their communities and reinforced divides between the state and social groups**'.

Community-driven development

Aslam (2012) explains that community driven development (CDD)[10] projects by design provide the **opportunity for community members to engage in collective projects**, thereby engendering trust, sense of community and facilitating collective action. Some CDD approaches incorporate trust as one of the variables around which they measure outcomes.

Challenges

CDD programmes do face challenges around 1) achieving and 2) measuring transformational outcomes on state-society relations:

- Marc et al (2013) report that some evidence indicates that, in the long term, CDD can facilitate collective action by mediating among various social groups and local institutions (such as traditional chiefs, customary justice institutions, and local secret societies), but it **does not happen automatically and must be managed**. They posit that for CDD to bring improved interactions and help local communities strengthen their own institutions, while connecting

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[10] Sometimes termed community empowerment development, and in post-conflict contexts known as community-driven reconstruction.

effectively with state and civil society, CDD operations need to overcome common problems such as rifts with local governments, ignorance of customary institutions and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, and a failure to go beyond a narrow focus on basic service delivery to address the population's real needs.

- Labonne and Chase (2008, p. 5) point out that **testing the claim that CDD approaches enhance community collective action is challenging**, not least because of the lack of agreement on conceptualising social capital. Fearon et al. (2009, p. 3) point out that in light of the rapid scale-up of CDD programmes, there is surprisingly little evidence of their impact

Programmes

Mansuri and Rao (2013) provide some examples of studies of CDD projects that focus on trust-building. The studies randomly assigned eligible communities to programme and comparison status and combined survey methods with 'structured community activities'. The examples include:

- **A community-driven reconstruction (CDR) project in northern Liberia** – which took place in September 2006 and February 2008 in 42 villages – aimed to build democratic, community-level institutions for making and implementing decisions about public goods, thereby strengthening the ability of communities to solve collective action problems. A randomised field experiment (Fearon et al., 2009) reported a measurable positive impact on the level of community cohesion, with strong evidence that the project altered patterns of social cooperation and reinforced support for democratic practices, even after the programme's conclusion. Survey results indicate a reduction in social tension and an increase in trust in local leadership. However, Mansuri and Rao (2013) highlight that returning internally displaced persons who benefited from this project as well as other programmes directed at resettling them were contributing to some of the results. Moreover, the evidence does not support any increase in broader collective action or in democratic values or practices in programme villages (Mansuri and Rao, 2013).

- The **CDR National Support Programme in Afghanistan**, initiated in 2003 by the Afghanistan Government supported by a multi-donor trust fund, aims to improve the access of rural villagers to critical services and strengthen structures for village governance through the creation of Community Development Councils (CDCs) and the disbursement of grants to support the implementation of projects selected, designed and managed by the CDC in consultation with the village community. An ongoing evaluation of this programme finds preliminary positive evidence of significant shits in political attitudes, including trust in government and local leaders. A caveat is that self-reports of political attitudes such as trust in government or greater community cooperation can be difficult to interpret in the absence of corroborating evidence on outcomes. There is little evidence that village elites in programme villages were less likely to exercise influence in village development councils or that there was any change in the types of households that benefited from government programmes. (Mansuri and Rao, 2013 citing Beath et al., 2010)

- The **GoBifo (Move Forward) project in Sierra Leone**, funded primarily by the World Bank, provided block grants for local public goods, skills training, and microentrepreneurship, training in democratic decision-making, and encouraged the participation of socially marginalized groups in local decision-making bodies. While one account reports that 'GoBifo has strengthened social capital in communities, including trust, and social, gender and generational inclusion in the implementation of its projects, communication, and use of community-based structures' (Baltissen and Manyeh, p. 68). However an independent evaluation finds no evidence that the

programme had an impact on any measure of social cohesion or collective action used (local fundraising capacity, decision-making processes, and so forth). (Mansuri and Rao, 2013 citing Casey, Glennerster, and Miguel, 2011)

Another CDD project with elements of trust-building between local governments and communities is the **DRC DFID-financed *Tuungane* project**. The project organized the election of village committees in all of these villages, as well as providing training in leadership, good governance, and social inclusion. The elected committees then worked with populations to select development projects and oversee the implementation of these projects. A recent evaluation (Humphreys et al., 2012), using randomised control groups, found some weak positive evidence for improvements in a survey based measure of trust (particularly trust in ex combatants, which is generally low), but no effects of other measures of within or between village cohesion. Humphreys et al find overall that the results on the impacts of the programme on the economic well-being and the socio-political attitudes and behaviours of the populations are surprisingly negative. They conclude that the simplest explanation for the weak effects on governance outcomes is that existing structures are resilient.

Taxation-related interventions

Taxation is recognised as **critical to state-building**: where taxes are raised and managed responsibly, they can have a significant impact on people's trust in state institutions. There are current arguments for pursuing tax reform in a way that encourages broader governance gains, plus a more speculative possibility that governments and donors may be able to use the revenue-raising process as an entry point for improving governance and accountability more broadly and organically (Pritchard 2010). However, there are **limits to the evidence** available on this topic. Pritchard (2010) notes that while anecdotal evidence suggests that successfully linking taxation to improved public spending and performance can rapidly improve trust in government, there is limited systematic country-level research on this topic, because tax reform has rarely been a central element of state-building programmes.

A related point made by Persson and Rothstein (2012) (based on an interview study conducted in Uganda) is that the **level of direct taxation seems to play a decisive role in shaping the incentives for ordinary citizens to hold corrupt officials accountable**, with low levels of direct taxation leading to a significantly decreased sense of 'ownership' of the state, and consequently a decreased demand for 'good government' on behalf of citizens.

Cases of tax-related **interventions to improve state-society relations** highlight the importance of strengthening explicit linkages (the reciprocity) between tax collection and public expenditure, making budget and expenditure data available to citizens, working with social groups to facilitate reform and compliance and also to improve tax education, awareness, compliance and, more ambitiously, engaging communities in tax collection efforts (Pritchard, 2010). Here are some examples:

- One successful case is **Rwanda**, where, as part of its tax reform strategy, the Rwandan government (with substantial financial and technical support from DFID) has actively sought to strengthen state-society relations, to overcome legacy of civil war and genocide, including through working with social groups. For example, it has worked closely with local private sector associations, which, despite their relative weakness, have served as a conduit for information and discussion. Pritchard (2010) finds that these activities and others have arguably contributed to developing a culture of participation and citizenship as part of a wider process of establishing the norms and practices of democratic governance (citing Land 2004).

- A 2006 survey study by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs on strengthening local taxation in **Benin, Cameroon, Ghana, Mali and Mauritania**, found that when local authorities made efforts

to communicate and explain (e.g. through public meetings between local authorities and people or through local radio broadcasts) actions they had taken to provide services (that were considered useful by the public) using local taxes, attitudes did improve (OECD, 2008).

Transformative social protection

Social protection interventions such as cash transfers that incorporate building **transformational human and social capital** as part of their theory of change are also seen to have potential in increasing state legitimacy, strengthening state institutions, thereby improving state-citizen relations (Browne, 2013). The nature of programme design and programme ownership is critical to shaping this relationship, of crucial importance in fragile contexts (Haider, 2011; HelpAge International, 2011)

One example is the **Kenyan Hunger Safety Net Programme** which has encouraged citizens to monitor programme delivery and demand their rights, for example, if payments are late (Browne, 2013). The programme's dedicated Social Protection Rights component is found to have improved community relations with local government, with evidence of spill-over effects to areas related to broader citizen participation, empowerment and engagement with the local authorities (HelpAge International, 2011).

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Expert contributors

Giovanna d'Adda, Department of Economics, University of Birmingham
Ghazia Aslam, World Bank
Sok Bunthoneun, independent
Catherine Dom, Mokoro
Heather Marquette, IDD, University of Birmingham
Rosemary McGee, IDS
Adolfo Morrone, Italian National Institute of Statistics
Janelle Plummer, World Bank
Bo Rothstein, Quality of Government Institute, University of
Gothenburg Janmejay Singh, World Bank
Katie Wiseman, DFID

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