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Voice and Accountability Matters for Better Education and Health Services

Accountability is at the heart of current international development debate and policy. It is essential for building effective states, reducing poverty, promoting human rights, and aid effectiveness. But what are the implications and actions required for making accountability a means for delivering better education and health services?

This Briefing Note synthesises experience with citizen voice and accountability in the education and health sectors and highlights the role of information and communication processes in promoting participation, transparency and accountability. It provides practical insights into the issues and opportunities for interventions that promote voice and accountability to contribute to improved outcomes. It aims to assist advisers and programme managers to navigate the growing body of literature and to better integrate voice and accountability into health and education sector work.

What is citizen voice and accountability?

Participation, voice and accountability are common themes in national Poverty Reduction Strategies, education and health sector strategies, and integral to our dialogue with national partners. They are core to DFID's mission to eliminate poverty and build effective states and encapsulated in commitments to realising rights for poor people¹.

What does accountability mean? Accountability refers to relationships of power both formal and informal. It describes the "rights and responsibilities that exist between people and the institutions that affect their lives, including governments, civil society and market actors"². These relationships may lie within the state itself such as between the executive government and parliament, or between the state and citizens (such as participating in elections), or between government and private providers through regulation systems. Although accountability can take many forms, it has two key characteristics:

- Answerability, the right to receive a response and the obligation to provide one,
- Enforceability, the capacity to enforce action and seek redress when accountability fails.

¹ DFID. 2006. *Eliminating World Poverty. Making Governance Work for the Poor*. London: DFID.
DFID. 1999. *Target Strategy Paper. Realising Rights for Poor People*. London: DFID.

² Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Policy Briefing, Issue 33 November 2006.

Accountability is the third pillar of DFID's approach to improving governance, working alongside and with Capability and Responsiveness³.

What is citizen voice? The limitations of technical, supply-driven strategies for achieving transformational change and building effective institutions have raised the importance of public participation, voice and accountability as levers for good governance⁴. Citizen voice is the various ways citizens and organised groups place pressure on service providers and policy makers to demand or advocate for better services. This takes many forms including: participation in planning and management committees, citizen scorecards, media campaigns, and participatory public expenditure tracking; these are often collectively referred to as forms of social accountability⁵. Choosing to exit services is another form of voice, though for many poor people whose access to alternative service providers is limited this may not be an option.

Voice is by nature empowering and instrumental in claiming accountability; and voicelessness a characteristic of poverty⁶.

Politics and power are at the heart of accountability and voice as they aim to effect power relations and the use of power. Embedded in the political, institutional and social context, voice and accountability relationships have to be understood in context. There are no blueprints to strengthening voice or accountability. Each country has to chart its own course for increasing the accountability of service providers and policy-makers to citizens through a process of negotiation and experimentation.

The World Bank's accountability triangle⁷ has been pivotal in mobilising international debate and attention to voice and accountability. The framework has limitations particularly in its underplay of politics and political process, and skirting over of the layering of power relationships at national, sub-national and local levels. However, it still provides a useful starting point for understanding the incentives and power structures that underpin power relationships between citizens, service providers, and policy-makers in different institutional settings.

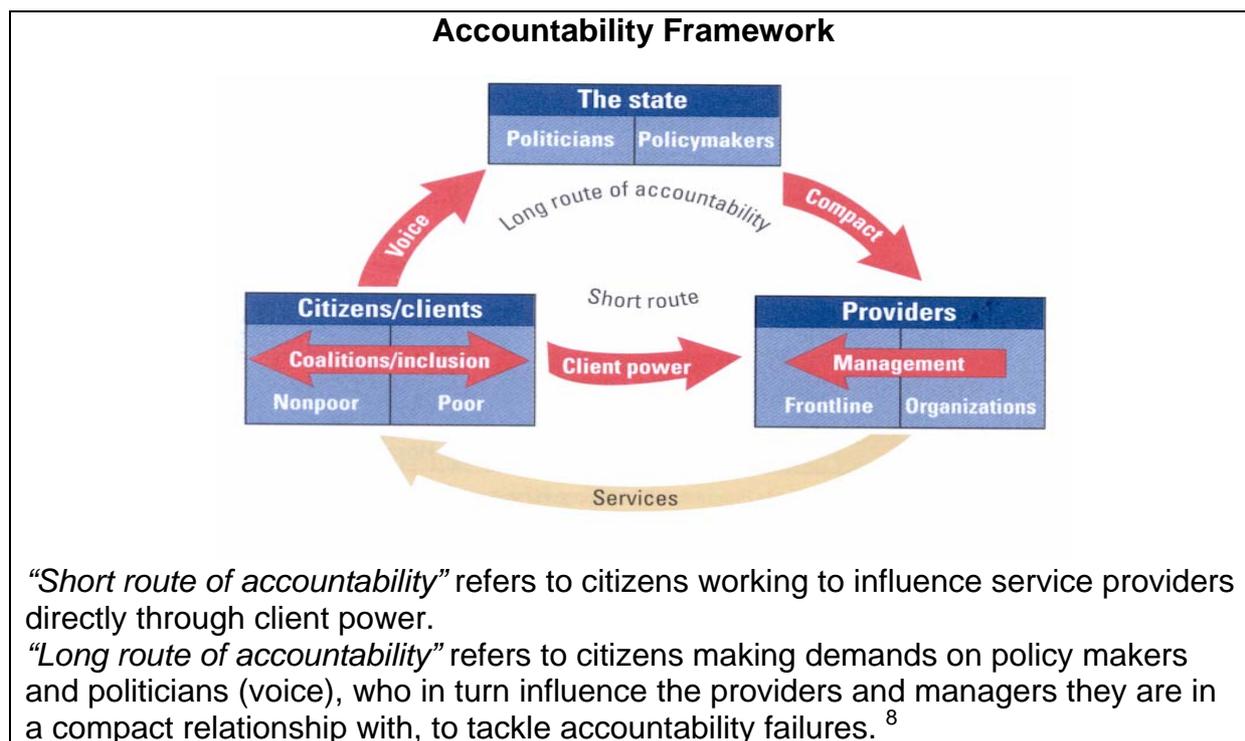
³ See the DFID Accountability Briefing Note for a fuller discussion of the conceptual basis of accountability.

⁴ DFID. 2007. *Governance, Development and Democratic Politics. DFID's work in building more effective states*. London: DFID.

⁵ Social accountability is defined by the World Bank as "an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e. in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organisations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability".

⁶ Narayan et. al. 2000. *Voices of the Poor*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁷ World Bank. 2004. *World Development Report 2004. Making Services Work for Poor People*. Washington D.C.: World Bank.



Why does voice and accountability matter?

Governance impacts on health and education outcomes. At the macro-level multi-country analysis has shown that improved governance has a significant negative impact on infant mortality rates and improved adult literacy rates⁹. Intermediate outcomes, such as public funding, also improve where accountability mechanisms are strong. Democratically elected governments in Africa spend more on primary education than non-democratically elected ones¹⁰. The classic case of increased public funding of schools in Uganda resulting from disclosure of information shows how services can be improved (see box below). Voice for primary education is now so strong in some African and Asian countries that governments are being elected on the back of promises to remove fees from primary schools.

The power of information in Uganda

In 1996 only 13% of public funds budgeted for primary schools in Uganda reached them. Following a major information campaign through the press and radio, and introduction of a requirement for school principals to post funds received on school notice boards, this increased to 80% in 2002.

⁸ The World Bank is currently undertaking more in-depth research and analysis to test application of this conceptual framework to the social sectors.

⁹ [http://wbi018.worldbank.org/Research/workpapers.nsf/08ec75f7ec913f59852567e50050361e/9cf690d8396d8b208525680400677f2c/\\$FILE/wps2196.pdf](http://wbi018.worldbank.org/Research/workpapers.nsf/08ec75f7ec913f59852567e50050361e/9cf690d8396d8b208525680400677f2c/$FILE/wps2196.pdf)

Lazarova, Emiliya A., "Governance in Relation to Infant Mortality Rate: Evidence from Around the World". *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics*, Vol. 77, No. 3, pp. 385-394, September 2006 Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=927833> or DOI: [10.1111/j.1467-8292.2006.00311.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8292.2006.00311.x)

¹⁰ Stasavage D., "Democracy and Education Spending in Africa", in *American Journal of Political Science*, vol.49, 2005, p.343-358

Voice and accountability in the health and education sectors often address common accountability failures, such as poor access and quality, social exclusion, absenteeism and corruption. This may be through horizontal accountability mechanisms such as public audit of hospital expenditures, or by vertical accountability whereby external actors, such as users, seek to hold policy makers and providers accountable. Voice also functions to empower citizens to make informed choices that affect their health and education, and foster responsibility and participation that often spreads into other areas of civic life¹¹. For those who are socially excluded and disempowered (for example youth, disabled people) it may be particularly challenging to have their voice heard. For providers, voicing concerns and connecting with fellow providers to mobilise for change can be motivating and empowering¹².

The growing body of sector experience

Improvements in global political economy and the spread of democracy is increasing the scope for voice and accountability in our sector work; two thirds of African countries have held democratic elections over the past decade. Political and technical commitment to promoting and supporting voice and accountability initiatives in education and health is growing. The challenge of evaluating these initiatives, given the complexity of the change processes and the over-riding importance of context, makes evidence patchy. An inventory of DFID's support to voice, accountability and service delivery¹³ found a wide array of initiatives in all regions but much of the experience is locked in country programmes. Interestingly it found that most of the initiatives in the education sector revolve around parent and community engagement, promoting the importance of education particularly for excluded groups, and strengthening school management and information systems. The initiatives in the health sector are more diverse.

By drawing on experiences from within DFID and the wider literature, this paper aims to provide sector specialists with a brief review of key issues and considerations for better integrating voice and accountability into sector work. It includes references and electronic links to case studies undertaken as part of this review that provide more detailed insight into the processes at work.

Classification of the multitude of initiatives

Voice and accountability initiatives come in many different forms (state-driven, service provider-led, citizen-led, informal) with varying intentions, different levels of scale, extent of participation, and using an array of methods. There are various ways of classifying voice and accountability initiatives. For health and education we have chosen the following classification that includes information on *who* is driving the initiative and for what general *intention*. Some initiatives fall into more than one type especially where they are blended together for greater impact. The tools for seeking accountability are often common across different accountability paths, for example

¹¹ World Bank Institute. 2005. "Social Accountability in the Public Sector: A Conceptual Discussion and Learning Module". Washington D.C.: World Bank

¹² <http://www.nsmf.org/pdf/Artistry-of-the-Invisible--Evaluation-of-Foundation-for-Chan.pdf>

¹³ Thomas, Philippa. 2006. "Database of DFID support to voice and accountability and service delivery initiatives. Summary Report". London: Options.

score cards can be used by civil society groups lobbying politicians for better health care as well as by Government health departments tracking facility performance.

- A. Support to civil society to establish the pre-conditions for voice, for example, social mobilisation and raising awareness of entitlements.
- B. Citizen-led initiatives to influence service delivery through the “short route”, for example, score cards and social audits.
- C. Citizen-led initiatives to influence policy through the first leg of the “long route”, for example, public expenditure tracking surveys.
- D. Joint government-civil society initiatives, for example government sponsored health facility and school management committees.
- E. Government systems of horizontal accountability and government-led initiatives to create an enabling environment, such as parliamentary committees, and citizen charters.
- F. Supply-led (public, private or NGO) initiatives to strengthen the management and accountability of service providers to policy-makers through the second leg of the “long route”, including the creation of user choice through instruments such as demand-side financing.

A. Establishing the pre-conditions for voice

Citizen’s need to be aware of their rights to claim them

Community awareness of education and health entitlements is a first step to seeking better service responsiveness,¹⁴ particularly in contexts of social exclusion¹⁵. Targeted advocacy and communication approaches can play a key role in raising awareness, particularly approaches generated by the communities themselves¹⁶. Use of local media to disseminate messages can be especially empowering for children and youth who are still often subject to the dictum “they should be seen but not heard”. For example, in West Africa Plan has successfully worked with local media organisations to get children and youth voice ‘on the air’ to raise issues that adults have ignored and to inform other children and youth of their rights to public services.

¹⁴ See for example the case study of the “Community Action Cycle in Jigawa, Nigeria” funded by DFID under its PATHS programme.

¹⁵ See for example the case study “Hope Restorers in Kaduna”.

¹⁶ See Making sex work safe produced by the Network of Sex Work Projects and AHRTAG. [Making sex work safe](#) OVERS, Cheryl, LONGO, Paulo, London, Network of Sex Projects, AHRTAG, 1997 [95 p]. <http://www.nswp.org/safety/msws/index.html>

Participatory Rights Assessment (PRAss) in Malawi Education Sector: Changing Relationships - the District Officials join in¹⁷

The PRAss Malawi workshops brought together people from all different levels in the Education system – from the Chief Education Advisor of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, to some of the most marginalised people in the target communities. People from different educational backgrounds, and with very different experiences and authority, worked together in mixed teams to do PRAss in the school communities and build a school improvement plan. Senior officials “mucked in” with the rest of the team – drawing participatory maps in the dust, singing songs and encouraging children to express their own hopes and expectations for better education. Children and adults alike talked with these officials as if they were just “ordinary people”. These experiences have changed the emphasis of the relationships between providers and users of services. Many of the officials stated that they felt really bad that they had never had the opportunity to talk with the people in their constituency in this way before to learn about the problems and issues faced.

B. Citizen-led initiatives to influence service delivery through the “short route”

Direct citizen-provider engagement can lead to more responsive services where legal and institutional frameworks are conducive

Increasing dissatisfaction with the quality of services and a growing sense of entitlement and rights in many countries is fuelling local action for more accountable service provision. Often supported by civil society organisations, “short-route” initiatives have most influence where legal rights and standards of service are well defined and the policies and institutional and funding arrangements that direct services work together to enable citizens to claim their rights.

The right to primary education in India

In India, rights-based NGOs such as CARE, CARPED, and Mahiti are supporting disadvantaged communities (e.g. scheduled tribes, and poor Muslim slum communities) to start up their own non-formal primary schools and claim state funding of them. In the Indian context where the duty of the State to provide primary education is bound in law, and development funds exist for non-formal schools which target hard-to-reach groups, the space has been created for organised communities to make claims on government and for government response.

The example above from India shows that in a context where legal rights to primary education are enshrined, demand-side social mobilisation interventions coupled with supply-side systems that promote locally-controlled schools can increase enrolments of socially excluded children.

In centralised health systems such as Bangladesh there is a tendency for voice to be trapped at the local level with facility providers and managers lacking the authority to

¹⁷ Operationalising the Rights Agenda: DFID’s Participatory Rights Assessment Methodologies (PRAMs) Project, OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Report March 2004. <http://www.swan.ac.uk/cds/research/PRAMS.htm>

respond to demands. In such situations, the structure of the service inhibits responsiveness to “short route” accountability efforts, thereby fuelling the importance of promoting voice through the “long route”: see box below.

The Community Clinic Management Group (CCMG) of Kafilatoli, Bangladesh, supported by PLAN, emerged in response to the Government’s decision to create community-managed clinics. The CCMG monitored the attendance of staff daily; it also crosschecked the one-time supply of drugs from the upazila (sub-district) with the inventory list. The main problems faced were staff absenteeism and shortage of supplies. Despite the support of the upazila health manager, he lacked the authority and resources to remedy the situation. He did withhold the salary of an absenting health worker for 3 months, which was a significant response, however, the health worker managed to be transferred without further disciplinary action or a replacement¹⁸.

C. Citizen-led initiatives to influence policy through the first leg of the “long route”

Public access to information and its effective use is essential for holding policy-makers to account

The use of credible evidence that can be used to measure performance against local standards is essential for influencing policy-makers, and public dissemination through local media ratchets-up influence further. Civil society organisations play a key role in collecting, analysing and using information to bridge information gaps between state and citizen. Building the capacity, reinforcing the independence and supporting the sustainability of such organisations are all critical to enabling this form of voice.

Citizen monitoring of educational standards in India

Since 2005, the NGO Pratham has been independently surveying educational standards across India to develop an Annual Status of Education Report, this will continue until 2010 when the Government of India expects to achieve universal primary schooling. This report is in demand from the public, particularly middle-class parents with high aspirations for their children’s education, and receives wide-scale publicity and national and local media coverage. Pratham’s initiative to collect information and develop league tables is a means for civil society and parents to monitor educational standards, the performance of the education system, and Government’s legal obligations¹⁹.

The public expenditure cycle is a powerful focal point for civil society to claim accountability and has been used with good effect in DFID funded projects in Brazil and South Africa²⁰.

¹⁸ Thomas, Deborah, Afzal Hossain Sarker, Hosneara Khondker, Zaheda Ahmed and Mobarak Hossain. 2003. “Citizen Participation and Voice in the Health Sector in Bangladesh”. DFID, Options and Partners in Health and Development.

¹⁹ Thomas, Deborah, Parthiban S. and Vichitra Sharma. 2006. “Strengthening Citizen Voice and Accountability for Better Service Delivery: India Case Study”. DFID and Options.

²⁰ Ibid.

Social accountability initiatives include:

- *independent budget analysis and advocacy* to analyse the implications of the budget for different stakeholder groups and demystify the budget process to make it more understandable to the public; for example gender budget initiatives²¹.
- *participatory public expenditure tracking* involves users of services tracking how public funds are spent in a continuous manner with the results publicly disseminated through local media; such as the tracking of poverty reduction expenditures by civil society in Zambia.
- *participatory performance monitoring* through the use of citizen and community scorecards monitors the responsiveness of services and signal results to policy makers and providers; for example the Ghana HIPC Watch.

Such initiatives are also working in anglophone Africa²² to increase transparency in governance and deliver more efficient services. Pursuit of the MDGs and the challenge of delivering free primary education in an environment of weak service delivery capacity, and poor financial management and accountability, have led to several social accountability initiatives²³.

The Malawi Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education (CSCQBE), a network of 67 Civil Society Organisations are active in advocacy for improved education in Malawi, focusing on three particular areas – teacher training, community mobilisation and budget monitoring. Through district education networks CSCQBE works with School Management Committees and Parent Teacher Associations to engage in budget monitoring. CSCQBE have performed this function since the government invited civil society to participate in Priority Poverty Expenditure surveys in line with MPRS policy commitments. New forms of dialogue have opened up between CSCQBE and parliamentary education and budget finance committees, resulting in CSCQBE successful lobbying for an increase in the teaching and learning materials budget allocation from MK372 million in 2005/06 to MK498 million in 2006/07²⁴.

CSOs and social movements are key players

Civil society organisations and social movements have a vital role to play in opening up democratic space. They are often more successful where they have built networks and alliances with reformers inside government²⁵ though there are notable exceptions, such as the Treatment Action Campaign in South Africa which effectively shamed government into action.

²¹ <http://www.internationalbudget.org/resources/library/GenderBudget.pdf>

²² *ibid.*

²³ McNeil, Mary and Takawira Mumvuma, ? "Demanding Good Governance. A Stocktaking of Social Accountability Initiatives by Civil Society in Anglophone Africa", World Bank Institute, Washington D.C.

²⁴ Limbani Nsapato, Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education, Progress Report (August 2006),

²⁵ IDS Policy Briefing Issue 27. March 2006. "Making Space for Citizens".

The **Treatment Action Campaign (TAC)** was established in 1998 to lobby and pressurise the South African government to develop a treatment plan for all people living with HIV. The movement expanded rapidly across all sections of society and the country. It has challenged the global pharmaceutical industry in the media, the courts and the streets; fought against discrimination of people living with HIV and AIDS; challenged unfounded AIDS theories; and taken the government to court for refusing to provide anti-retroviral treatment²⁶. TAC's highly effective mobilisation drew on anti-apartheid campaigning tactics and resulted in government implementation of prevention of mother-to-child transmission programmes in public health facilities. It is a strong example of mobilisation from below, from people living with and affected by HIV and AIDS, creating a 'contested space'²⁷ with government.

D. Joint government and civil society initiatives to influence service delivery and management

Accountability and transparency are gaining increasing importance in the policy objectives of governments embarking on deepening democracy. Governments are creating 'invited spaces' around service delivery in which citizens and civil society organisations can engage. Experience drawn together by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) suggests key enabling factors are the presence of active, informed civil society groups; strong commitment from within government; the legitimacy of citizen representation in the new spaces created, and their ability to link up with other spaces within and outside of government in an inclusive and deliberative way²⁸.

Service delivery surveys can promote responsiveness

Service delivery and perception survey, Sierra Leone

In 2006, the independent think-tank Centre for Economic and Social Policy Analysis conducted a pilot Service Delivery and Perception Survey (SDPS) to capture user satisfaction in the health, education and agriculture sectors. The survey was agreed with the Anti-Corruption Commission and the treasury's public expenditure tracking survey (PETS) Task Team, and was supported financially and technically by DFID. Annual repeat surveys are planned to track progress in the performance and quality of public services, and to monitor increases in user voice. Indicators from SDPS will also be used in the budget support benchmarks' matrix. It is too early to say how effective the SDPS is in making policy and service delivery more responsive to citizens' demands but the high level political support and donor attention it receives is spotlighting responsiveness and accountability. A critical next step is to disseminate the survey findings beyond central government, to local councils and the public, using radio in local languages.

Service delivery surveys capture the voices of service users, household members and service providers and have been used in a variety of governance settings,

²⁶ S Robins (Oct 2005) *Rights Passages from 'Near Death' to 'New Life': AIDS activism and treatment testimonies in South Africa*. IDS Working Paper 251.

²⁷ Cornwall, Andrea and Vera Schattan Coelho. 2007. *Spaces for Change? The Politics of Citizen Participation in New Democratic Arenas*. London: Zed Books.

http://www.drc-citizenship.org/docs/publications/drc_general/id21_Focus_Citizenship.pdf

²⁸ IDS Policy Briefing Issue 27. March 2006. "Making Space for Citizens".

including fragile states, to foster accountability and dialogue between civil society and the state. They have the potential to be a powerful demand-side anti-corruption tool, exposing discrepancies between agreed policies and realities on the ground and are an effective complement to public expenditure tracking surveys (PETS). As with other accountability tools, local media can be used to disseminate the findings to increase the public's awareness of their entitlements, and to amplify citizens' demands.

Student and parental participation and local control of schools can improve education outcomes

Increasing student and parental involvement, promoting and strengthening local control and accountability of the school, increasing student, parent and community access to information to monitor school performance, and enabling the participation of civil society are key strategies as defined by the UN Millennium Taskforce for making education institutions work better and achieving improved education outcomes.

School based management models in Central America²⁹ provide a rich source of experience and evaluative evidence of the impact of parental participation and local control on education outcomes. Variations in impact are linked to differences in reform design and political, institutional and social contexts³⁰. Compared to parallel traditional schools, community schools have:

- Empowered communities and contributed to building social capital. In Guatemala, the spill-over of participation has led to more effective civil participation in other areas of civic affairs.
- Increased parental participation in school decision-making related to day-to-day management, rather than the teaching and learning environment. Use of the right to "hire and fire" is constrained by the limited supply of qualified teachers.
- In El Salvador, less teacher absenteeism than traditional schools.
- School teachers that work more days and hours but use the same teaching methods as those in traditional schools.
- Increased enrolment rates especially in the poorest and remotest areas which they target³¹.
- Mixed results in reducing drop-out rates and grade failure compared to traditional schools.
- Similar educational learning outcomes as traditional schools, though their catchment populations tend to have lower community assets.

In India, the Government flagship programme for universalising elementary education, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has spent over \$7 billion between 2001 and 2006 on building new classrooms and schools, hiring additional teachers and providing increased resources to schools. More than 80% of these funds have been disbursed through Village Education Committees (VECs). Although embedded in

²⁹ El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Honduras.

³⁰ Di Gropello, Emmanuela. 2006. "A Comparative Analysis of School-based Management in Central America", World Bank Working Paper No. 72.

³¹ The Nicaraguan autonomous schools are an exception as they do not specifically target rural and remote schools.

national policy the practice and outcomes of VECs varies significantly across the country.³²

Community management of schools in India

India's Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE) Study (1999)³³ found that parental involvement in schools in Himachal Pradesh led to dramatic improvements in education outcomes. Community partnership with teachers and schools led to better maintenance, community construction of extra classrooms, and lower absenteeism. In 4 other PROBE study states (Bihar, MP, Rajasthan and UP) parent-teacher associations existed in less than a fifth of schools and did little more than hold meetings. Token institutions formed through government order, the Village Education Committees in these 4 poorly performing states were given little importance by teachers or communities. Analysts suggest that factors related to HP's success are the state's homogenous population, strong tradition of civil cooperation, and better-informed communities.

The means and institutional design for translating student and parental participation and local control into good practice depends on the political, institutional and social context. The differing degrees of state commitment to decentralisation and empowerment of local government institutions in India impacts on the design of community participation and local accountability relationships³⁴. In some states VECs report to local government, in others they run parallel, anchored to the line department, and arguably more easily controlled by them and less accountable to the public.

Parental and community participation in school management in India has benefits - tighter control of infrastructure works, better quality school meals – but is not a replacement for institutional systems of accountability or good management. Better physical working conditions and infrastructure have a greater impact on teacher and headmaster absenteeism³⁵. This point underlines the message that reaping the benefit of local control requires essential complementary supply side strengthening -- such as teacher capacity building and supportive supervision systems embedded within established human resource sector policy -- and the political will to create new democratic space and the institutional readiness to engage with its representatives.

Local participation in health facility management can be effective

Initiatives to bring citizens into health facility decision-making span many political and institutional contexts and have different intentions ranging from demand creation to

³² In Uttar Pradesh, most parents do not know about the VEC, VEC members are unaware of their roles, public prioritisation of education is low and participation in improving services is negligible. The potential for information and communication campaigns to mobilise and support local participation as a means of increasing outcomes in UP is currently being tested. See Bannerjee, Abhijit et. al. "Can Information Campaigns Spark Local Participation and Improve Outcomes? A Study of Primary Education in Uttar Pradesh, India". World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3967. July 2006.

³³ Probe Team. 1999. *Public Report on Basic Education in India*. Oxford and New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

³⁴ VECs are accountable to Panchayati Raj Institutions in some states and not others.

³⁵ F. Halsey Rogers, 2006. World Bank.

<http://econ.worldbank.org/external/default/main?theSitePK=477916&contentMDK=20661217&pagePK=64168182&piPK=64168060>

infrastructure improvements to management authority. The Bamako Initiative has shown how community control and accountability of service providers, supported by policy and funding, can improve health outcomes³⁶, though not necessarily equitably. In fact, the challenge of protecting the poorest persists when communities take control of resources.

Issues of representation and social inclusion are primary concerns that cut across experiences with this form of voice and accountability. Health committees as a potential source of influence are prone to capture by men and local elites³⁷ unless rules and incentives dictate otherwise; though it is worth remembering that local influentials may provide leadership and influence for pro-poor change. In India, top-down, government-sponsored committees have been prone to capture. This has not been so in Nagaland where strong political support for public sector reform and partnership with the community to revitalise basic services (see box below), has provided the platform and enabling environment for facility committees to be effective drivers of change.

Nagaland Communitisation of Sub-Centres

In 2002, the Nagaland Communitisation of Public Institutions and Services Act created the legal and institutional framework for communitisation of health services. Central to communitisation of sub-centres is: the constitution of local Village Health Committees (VHCs) to manage services; the transfer of Government powers including disbursement of salaries and the power to withhold salaries, to the VHCs; the transfer of Government assets to VHCs; the creation of a community fund managed by the VHC; and transfer of Government responsibility to VHCs for supervision and support to staff. A UNICEF impact evaluation (2004) found improvements in staff attendance, staff attitudes to clients, timely payment of salaries, improved availability and quality of medicines, community contributions to the running of the centres, and increased utilisation³⁸.

Health committees require the same basic ingredients as school committees to function as effective voice and accountability mechanisms. The incentives for participation need to add up. Members need access to information, clear responsibilities and authority, transparent processes of working and representation, clear lines of coordination and linkage with local democratic institutions if present, capacity building and essential resources, and a service and institutional context that is able to respond to community voice.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ See case study of the “Community Action Cycle” supported by DFID’s PATHS programme in Nigeria.

³⁸ <http://www.hsprodindia.nic.in/searnum.asp?PNum=128>

E. Government systems of horizontal accountability and government-led initiatives to create an enabling environment

Parliaments can hold government departments to account

Parliaments potentially play an important role in holding governments to account through legislation, oversight and representation but are often hamstrung by weak institutional and resource capacity³⁹. Where parliamentary oversight of government spending works it can reduce corruption and align government priorities. As in the earlier case from Malawi, linkages between parliamentary committees and CSOs can fill information and capacity gaps and empower parliamentary committees to monitor government action. By arming MPs with first hand knowledge of the ground realities faced by communities, projects in Africa have shown that MPs are better able to fulfil their legislative role, craft laws that reflect national education and health priorities, and question government action⁴⁰.

The effectiveness of independent pro-accountability institutions such as audit commissions, ombuds bodies and Human Rights Commissions to enforce standards is very mixed. Often times they lack real independence to pursue cases that challenge political masters and are created as much to deflect criticism against the government as to enforce accountability. Those institutions that are more open and connected to civil society such as ombuds bodies, have been shown to be more effective than closed institutions like audit agencies⁴¹.

Legislation creates space for citizen's to claim rights

Governments have radically opened up channels for citizen engagement and monitoring of service performance and outcomes through legislation of citizen rights. In Kenya, Malawi and Tanzania the right to free education has empowered civil society coalitions to monitor government performance, and maintain the pressure on the State to deliver. Right to information laws – such as in Tanzania - provide an enabling environment for citizens to demand accountability, and a space that a capable and resourced civil society can exploit⁴². In contrast, gestures without Government ownership or the legal and institutional mechanisms to enforce accountability, such as the Client Charter of Rights for the health sector in Bangladesh, are ineffective⁴³.

In Malawi the Ministry of Education's Policy Investment Framework specifies a role for citizens to engage in school management issues and sets out guidance for civil society participation in strengthening capacity of social capital networks. These principles are captured within the constitution as a right to education and are written in to the National Strategy for Community Participation in Primary School Management⁴⁴.

³⁹ Hudson, Alan and Claire Wren. February 2007. "Parliamentary strengthening in developing countries." London: ODI.

⁴⁰ http://www.icrw.org/docs/2007PWH_assessment.pdf

⁴¹ World Bank Institute. 2005. "Social Accountability in the Public Sector: A Conceptual Discussion and Learning Module." World Bank: Washington D.C.

⁴² www.tanzaniagateway.org/docs/Tanzania_Information_Access_Challenge.pdf

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Malawi Education Sector: Policy Investment Framework, 2001.
<http://www.sdn.org.mw/edu/new/min-education/whole.htm>

Decentralisation per se is not the solution

Decentralisation has achieved mixed results in improving service performance and poverty reduction and is not a panacea to increased public participation and accountability. Rather than pursuing a blueprint institutional arrangement, the emphasis for improved accountability and sector outcomes is on understanding how power relationships and incentives work to support or hinder responsive services.

F. Supply led initiatives to strengthen the accountability of service providers and management to policy makers, the compact

Good management enforces accountability

Ensuring the delivery of responsive services be they through the public, private or not-for-profit sub-sectors is the responsibility of policy makers and oversight bodies that regulate professional standards and service delivery in compact with the managers and supervisors that support front-line providers. Education and health systems institutionalise accountability through a range of management processes and tools, incentives, and information and transparency initiatives; the scope for collusion between managers and providers makes the latter particularly important.

Better hospital procurement in Argentina was achieved when government monitoring of the cost of procurement of medical supplies in individual public hospitals, and the dissemination of this information among the participating hospitals, led to a 12% fall in purchase prices⁴⁵.

Financial management and procurement, technical standards, human resource management, health payment systems, and information disclosure are all key areas for promoting accountability. Demand-side financing approaches by empowering users to overcome access barriers and sharpening the targeting of resources have promise in altering the balance of power between citizens and providers and strengthening service responsiveness⁴⁶.

Cash registers increased transparency in Kenya in Coast Province General Hospital, where a patient satisfaction survey alerted government to fraud. User fees were being pocketed by staff, who were aided by the lack of a systematic user fee reporting and management system. The introduction of electronic cash registers increased user fee revenue by 50% in three months⁴⁷.

Creating space for provider voice as a means of mobilising and motivating frontline staff to comply with standards is common. Bringing together providers and citizens in public consultations and hearings can support policy makers exert pressure on frontline workers and respond to citizen demands.

⁴⁵ Schargrodsky, Ernesto and Rafael Di Tella, 2001, "The role of wages and auditing during a crackdown on corruption in the city of Buenos Aires".

⁴⁶ http://www.whoban.org/dsf_international_review.pdf

⁴⁷ www.transparency.org/publications/gcr/download_gcr/download_gcr_2006

Public hearings on safe motherhood in Orissa, India

State-led public hearings in Orissa are providing citizens, especially women, an effective method to inform state policy makers (Orissa State Women's Commission), and state and district managers of service failings. Experience shows that this communication method has raised community awareness of their health care entitlements, and stimulated policy makers into holding providers accountable for poor practice, including disciplinary action. Reports also suggest that following a public hearing there has been a reduction in bribes sought by local health workers, and in some areas an increase in the institutional delivery rate.

Structured participatory planning processes have shown that even in fragile states, communities and providers can be mobilised for joint action to improve service delivery and its responsiveness.

Peer and Participatory Rapid Health Appraisal for Action (PPRHAA), Jigawa, Nigeria

The Ministry of Health introduced PPRHAA to strengthen the management and service delivery of facilities. Structured around participatory planning and appraisal, PPRHAA brings together providers and community representatives to improve services through increased responsiveness and community support. Results include: hospital infrastructure upgraded through community contributions, demand for services increased due to community mobilisation, and more accessible services as health staff increased their outreach work⁴⁸.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Map the political economy of the sector and understand the context

The quality of governance matters. What works in effective states with a strong civil society and history of public participation may not transfer to fragile states, and the optimal blend of approaches will take different shapes. Finding the entry points through which DFID can integrate voice and accountability into sector work requires sector level governance analyses that draw on country level drivers of change analysis⁴⁹ and governance assessments⁵⁰ to understand the politics and power relationships underpinning short and long route accountability relationships. This calls for mapping out the political, institutional, social and cultural space for change and identifying key actors on the demand and supply side at national, sub-national and local levels. Such analysis of the space, agents and opportunities for reform is critical to prioritising and sequencing sector support to voice and accountability. By identifying communication channels and decision-making authority within the respective institutions, DFID can guard against supporting voice initiatives that get trapped at the local level or donor-driven, top-down approaches without local ownership or the institutional teeth to enforce accountability.

⁴⁸ See case study on "PPRHAA" implemented under the DFID funded PATHS programme in Nigeria.

⁴⁹ <http://www.gsdr.org/go/topic-guides/drivers-of-change>

⁵⁰ www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/how-to-cga.pdf

Ensure specific accountability initiatives are aligned with broader governance developments

The nature and quality of governance impacts on the space for voice and accountability in education and health, and for many of the poor, the availability and quality of their schools and clinics is their measure of governance at work. In the rush to promote participation there is a danger however, that participation through user groups and service site committees carve up accountability and undermine local democratic institutions^{51,52}. Mapping accountability within the sector and how this relates to local governance arrangements is important to maximise results and identify levers of influence beyond the sector. Coherence and synergy with the broader governance agenda can open up opportunities for strengthening sector voice and accountability and reinforce governance objectives.

Promote access to and the effective use of information

Underpinning all voice and accountability approaches is access to information and its effective use. Policy dialogue and sector support provide strategic entry points for supporting governments to both strengthen their information base as well as opening up public access to information; such as through media, public hearings, information displays on fees and timings at schools and clinics. The legal framework is an important enabling factor to promote citizen participation, though alone insufficient⁵³. DFID can play a role in supporting governments enact Access to Information laws, and encouraging civil society and media campaigns for legal change. Apart from an enabling legal environment, raising supply and demand side awareness of information rights, promoting better information flows and mobilising a wide range of communication channels are essential for empowering poor people to participate in governance and claim accountability: this calls for supporting a range of civil society actors, including the media⁵⁴.

Strengthen institutional capacity to respond to demands

Voice and accountability mechanisms work best where technical and institutional capacities exist to respond to demands within an enabling political, legal and social environment. In some contexts, accountability mechanisms have reduced corruption (Uganda) and reduced absenteeism (El Salvador) but in many situations these failures persist despite accountability interventions. To take the example of absenteeism, creating the incentives for providers to attend their duties may require radical revision of the institutional arrangements for delivering services to fundamentally strengthen accountability relationships. Donor support needs to strengthen the capacity of the state to respond to citizens' and providers' demands as well as encouraging voice.

⁵¹ Mosse, David. 2004.

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEMPowerment/Resources/PPFinalText.pdf>

⁵² The World Bank has found that community-driven development projects that have established parallel community management structures have undermined local government ability to engage with local communities and increase their accountability to them.

⁵³ McGee, Rosemary et al. 2003. "Legal Frameworks for Citizen Participation: Synthesis Report", Logolink.

⁵⁴ www.undp.org/governance/docs/A21_PN_English.pdf

Promote voice and accountability that is inclusive and pro-poor

Elite voice can instigate pro-poor change at the national and local level, but elites can also capture public space for personal gain. In policy dialogue and through its financial aid, DFID can monitor that voice mechanisms are inclusive and accountability works for the benefit of the poor and vulnerable. DFID can also consider providing support to civil society groups who help the most marginalised, such as people living with HIV and AIDS and the disabled, gain the confidence to make their voices heard⁵⁵, increase their access to media to communicate and amplify their voices, and provide training so they can control and manage communication, for instance through community radio stations⁵⁶.

Identify an appropriate combination of aid instruments to promote domestic accountability

A mix of aid instruments is required to support both the capacity of citizens to make demands, and the capacity of the state to respond. In the context of general budget support, DFID should consider providing complementary assistance (financial and technical) for citizen-led initiatives. In doing so, care should be taken not to undermine domestic accountability. Small grants can often be more effective than larger funds that can lead to donors' agendas prevailing. DFID could also support wider public spaces for debate about service delivery issues and expand its policy dialogue to engage with 'unlikely suspects' too.

Build the evidence base through on-going documentation of country experience and impact evaluations

The context specific nature of voice and accountability and the importance of blending approaches to fit political, institutional, social and cultural space compound the challenge of formulating lessons for replication or scaling up, and underline the importance of documenting cases in context. The database of DFID experience now developed⁵⁷ is a foundation that sector advisers and programme managers can draw from, and add to through their systematic monitoring of voice and accountability initiatives. More rigorous impact evaluations by DFID, such as that underway by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee⁵⁸, are needed to add to this growing evidence base.

Briefing Paper written for DFID Policy and Research Division and Information and Communications for Development Division by Options Consultancy Services: Deborah Thomas with Katie Chapman, Chris Cosgrove and Christine Kalume.

⁵⁵ Eyben, Rosalind and Sarah Ladbury. 2006. *Implications for Aid Practice: Taking a citizen's perspective*, IDS Citizenship DRC Synthesis Brief, June 2006
<http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/Part/proj/citizenship-drc.html>

⁵⁶ See case study of the "Deccan Development Society's Community Media Centre (community radio and video) Andhra Pradesh, India".

⁵⁷ Effective States team accountability briefing materials -
<http://insight/policydivision/default.asp?teams/ips/onestopshop/ESTOneStopShop.htm>

⁵⁸ O'Neill, T., Foresti, M. and Hudson, A. 2007. *Evaluation of Citizens' Voice and Accountability: Review of the Literature and Donor Approaches*. London: DFID.