Citizen Engagement in Public Service Delivery

The Critical Role of Public Officials

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Foreword

This is the twelfth in our Centre's series of Discussion Papers, which put forward ideas for, and approaches to, improving public service in developing countries, especially with the aim of achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This paper suggests that reform-minded public officials can improve development results by using citizen engagement in a variety of ways: to elicit information and ideas, support public service improvements, defend the public interest from 'capture' and clientelism, strengthen the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of citizens and bolster accountability and governance in the public sector.

Based on analysis of five case studies exploring recent citizen engagement initiatives in different parts of the world this paper posits that there are no blueprints for the design and implementation of such initiatives or standardised and replicable tools. Instead it suggests that successful and sustainable citizen engagement is ideally developed through "a process of confrontation, accommodation, trial and error in which participants discover what works and gain a sense of self-confidence and empowerment".

The key advice for agencies and practitioners promoting citizen engagement is that they should identify pro-reform public officials, elected representatives and citizens, understand their motivations and incentives and think through how broad pro-reform coalitions can be established and supported. It is also important to examine and understand the wider socio-political environment and the power structures in which state-society relations are rooted.

An engaged citizenry working alongside and enabling public officials, in joint stewardship of the public good, can help transform public services and give people the effective, honest and responsive public institutions they deserve. Such such transformed public institutions can certainly help nations achieve their SDG targets, not least by helping to improve the morale and motivation of public officials.

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Introduction

Citizen involvement in public affairs is not new – over centuries and throughout the world citizens have actively participated in the deliberation of local issues, decision making within their communities and the selection of their leaders. In the last couple of decades, we have witnessed a profusion of citizen engagement initiatives, such as community development committees, citizen satisfaction surveys, public consultations, participatory planning, budget consultations and social audits. Using such initiatives, citizens seek solutions to specific problems in the public sector by engaging[1] constructively with public officials[2] and the political leadership.

Advocates of citizen engagement celebrate its intrinsic and instrumental value. They relate its intrinsic value to the concept of human capabilities put forward by Amartya Sen, according to which citizen engagement gives people a voice in the development process and enables them to speak up against injustices and discrimination[3]. By fostering human capabilities and promoting fundamental freedoms, citizen engagement contributes to people's wellbeing and quality of life. From an instrumental perspective, citizen engagement is promoted as a means to achieving a range of development and governance goals, such as reduced corruption, improved public services, increased social capital, etc.

From such an excess of virtues and uses, this paper will concentrate on one particular feature of citizen engagement – the way it can be used to support the effective delivery of key public services such as education, water supply, waste collection, etc. Although this topic is relevant to any country, this paper will focus on low and middle income countries[4], where inadequate public services represent a key development challenge. Citizen engagement will be examined as an instrument for strengthening the delivery process, ultimately contributing to poverty reduction and the attainment of other development outcomes.

Moreover, unlike a lot of the literature on citizen engagement which has traditionally focused on the citizen-state dichotomy (with the state represented primarily by the political leadership or top policymakers), this paper will concentrate on the crucial role of public officials in the engagement process and will explore various strategies of partnership between public officials and citizens in the pursuit of shared goals.

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1   The terms "engagement", "involvement" and "participation" have been used interchangeably in this paper. As this paper does not delve into the differences of impact that various forms of engagement produce, all references to engagement (or involvement or participation) apply to the whole continuum of engagement types. Also, throughout this paper, the term "engagement" refers to all levels of government (national and sub-national).

2   The term "public official" in this paper is used to describe non-elected public sector employees.

3   Amartya Sen, *"Development as Freedom"*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (1999).

4   The definition of low and middle income countries is based on World Bank categories.

Box 1: Characteristics of citizen engagement

Citizen engagement may:

▶ Involve citizens individually or in the form of collective action (including civil society organisations). While both forms of citizen engagement are important, a critical mass of people is often crucial for strengthening social accountability[5].

▶ Be achieved through different mechanisms (i.e. citizen satisfaction surveys, public consultations, participatory planning, budget consultations, community scorecards, social audits, etc.)[6]. Often, there are no clear boundaries as they overlap or may be used in combination. Advances in ICT has further expanded opportunities for public participation and facilitated the emergence of new forms of engagement such as crowdsourcing, online consultations, interactive mapping, etc.

▶ Be organic or induced, although there may be a degree of overlap between the two. Organic engagement emerges endogenously and is usually motivated by pressing social concerns and led by highly-motivated civic leaders. It may take different forms of civic expression, varying from the agreeable to the confrontational, aimed at contesting and reshaping the balance of power. By contrast, induced engagement is typically initiated by the state through policy action and is implemented by the bureaucracy[7].

▶ Be a short-term exercise or a sustained long-term commitment. Sometimes, short-term engagement is driven by donor requirements and may be undertaken as a "box-checking" exercise. To be sustainable, citizen engagement requires commitment from citizens and the state, and can then become integrated into governance processes.

▶ Be constructive, confrontational or even disruptive. Given that it directly affects the balance of power between state and society, citizen engagement can be seen as a process of confrontation and accommodation between the state and citizens. Whether it leads to disruption or conflict depends on a variety of factors related to dynamics of engagement, objectives of stakeholders and the socio-political context.

▶ Be spontaneous, informal or formal and underpinned by clearly-defined rules and norms. Organic initiatives, by their nature, tend to be more spontaneous, although they may become formalised over time.

▶ Take place with or without the mediation of civil society. Civil society may play different roles: it may initiate the engagement process or mediate the interaction between the citizens and the state. While mediation by civil society could help create the critical mass necessary for collective action, yet on the other hand civil society organisations may get captured by vested interests.

▶ Take place at different levels - at the local, regional, sector, national or global level - depending on the objectives of engagement.

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5   Anuradha Joshi (2008), 'Producing social accountability? The impact of service delivery reforms', IDS Bulletin, 38 (6), 10–17.

6   For a list of various forms of citizen engagement see Annex 1 (page 20) of the following publication: How-To Notes: *How, When, and Why to Use Demand-Side Governance Approaches in Projects, Social Development Department, World Bank, 2011.*

7   Ghazala Mansuri & Vijayendra Rao (2013): *Can Participation be induced? Some evidence from Developing Countries,* Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy, 16:2, 284-304.

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Value of citizen engagement for public officials

Frontline public service providers, such as nurses, teachers and social workers, interact with their clients on a daily basis, so for them engaging with citizens is nothing new. What is different, however, about citizen engagement in public service delivery is that engagement may take place anywhere along the delivery continuum - from involvement with up-stream policy making to closer interaction with frontline service providers at the point of delivery - and that citizens can be empowered *vis-à-vis* public officials to monitor performance, influence decision making or even take part in the design and delivery of services.

To understand citizen engagement in the context of service delivery, it is useful to consider the roles of the three main sets of actors involved - citizens, politicians and public officials.

▸ **Citizens** provide the political leadership with the authority to govern and expect in return effective governance and public services. This is referred to as the "social contract".

▸ **Politicians** (those in positions of leadership) derive their legitimacy from citizens' acceptance of their authority. They aggregate the preferences of citizens and deploy state bureaucracy and resources to fulfil the citizens' expectations. For their results, they are largely accountable to the citizens. This is called *"political accountability"*[8].

▸ **Public officials** implement the strategic direction provided by the political leadership and deliver public services to citizens. They are accountable directly to politicians (what is called *"bureaucratic accountability"*) and only indirectly to the citizens. When citizens engage with public officials, they may exact accountability directly from them. This is called *"social accountability"*[9].

The role of each set of actors is equally important because the way they interact and collaborate largely determines the effectiveness and quality of service delivery. However, citizens and politicians often receive disproportionate attention in development research and practice compared to public

officials. The interests and motivations of citizens and politicians are carefully identified and their roles in promoting change in the public sector closely examined, whereas public officials, by contrast, are often treated as the target of the intervention - i.e. the matter that needs fixing - rather than potential agents of change. Sandwiched between citizens and politicians, public service is often seen as a monolithic structure that needs to be reined in by politicians and kept in check by citizens. Few attempts have been made to understand the internal dynamics of public organisations and disaggregate the interests and motivations of public officials whose actions are just as important for service delivery as those of other actors (see Box 1). Questions about the usefulness of citizen engagement from the perspective of public officials are rarely raised. This section will examine the value of citizen engagement for public officials and will answer the following questions:

▸ *Why should public officials care about citizen engagement?*

▸ *What does it mean for them and how can they benefit from it?*

▸ *What may be the impact of engagement at the organisational/system level?*

Box 2: Heterogeneity of the public service and diversity of attitudes to reform

▸ The state bureaucracy is typically a large structure with a lot of diversity in terms of performance, culture, interests and motivations. Horizontally, across organisations and sectors of government, there is a lot of cultural and performance heterogeneity, with ineffective sections co-existing with more effective domains[10]. Some sections of the bureaucracy may be in favour of reform and responsive to change, and others not. Broader reform dynamics in the public sector are largely shaped by the interaction and power struggles between the various sections of the bureaucracy.

▸ Similarly, there is a lot of heterogeneity vertically, with various levels in the organisational chain performing differently and having different interests and attitudes to reform. This can be within an organisation (i.e. managers vs. frontline workers) or between the levels of government (i.e. national vs. sub-national).

▸ It is also important to think of public officials as individuals whose actions are shaped by the incentives they face, as well as intrinsic motivations. They may act on an individual basis, using their discretion and based on personal preferences, or an organisational basis, driven by the culture, standards and procedures of their organisation.

The main point here is that the state bureaucracy is not a homogeneous structure. It consists of various actors with differing interests, motivations and predispositions to change. Therefore, citizen engagement as an instrument of reform will be met with varying degrees of receptivity and opposition in the public service. It will be embraced by those who are in favour of reform and will be opposed by those whose vested interests appear threatened.

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8   This description applies largely to democracies and some authoritarian regimes. Exceptions are the highly repressive totalitarian regimes where the actions of the political leadership are highly disconnected from the preferences of the citizens.

9   See Annex I for the definition of social accountability and a description of how accountability works in the public sector.

10 Levy, Brian and Walton, Michael. *Institutions, Incentives and Service Provision: Bringing Politics Back In* (February 1, 2013). Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID) Working Paper No 18.

As a process, citizen engagement is not a magic wand that can automatically resolve any delivery issue. But, if deployed effectively, it can help public officials improve the quality and accessibility of services. The rest of this section will focus on four key reform challenges public officials face in middle and low-income countries, i.e. improving the effectiveness of service delivery, serving the public interest, enhancing legitimacy and strengthening accountability.

Improving the effectiveness of service delivery – The delivery of public services is typically a highly complex undertaking, which involves a large number of transactions between service providers and recipients. To deal with such complexity, standardized and impersonal systems of public administration have been adopted by developing countries based on Western bureaucratic models[11]. Implementing such models elsewhere can be highly problematic because they restrict the discretion of service delivery staff, which is essential for the delivery of transaction-intensive services such as education. These models also downplay the idiosyncrasies of context and underestimate indigenous knowledge and tradition, which are crucial for effective uptake of supplied services. Some researchers[12] advocate more organic models of bureaucracy, which are more cognisant of local idiosyncrasies and evolve incrementally around the needs of citizens based on social innovation and bureaucratic entrepreneurship[13]. From this perspective, citizen engagement can help public officials deal with such complexity in a number of ways.

▸ Citizens may have a better idea than public officials about the kinds of services they need, so they can help service providers better understand their requirements and identify solutions. They may become directly involved in the design and delivery of services, a process referred to as *problem-solving collaboration*[14]. Furthermore, public officials may use citizen engagement to elicit specific indigenous knowledge to help them tailor public services to the specific needs of the community.

▸ Citizen engagement can also be a powerful source of ideas and inspiration for social innovation and bureaucratic entrepreneurship.

▸ Citizens may be better positioned to assess the relevance and effectiveness of services, so they can contribute to the evaluation of programmes and services.

▸ Faced with funding constraints, public officials can mobilise additional funds from citizen contributions.

▸ Citizen engagement can provide a platform for inclusive deliberation, consensus and collective wisdom, which has been found to lead to better decision making.[15]

Serving the public interest – When the political leadership pursues special interests through clientelist policies, favouring one group against the interests of the majority, government priorities do not reflect the needs of the citizenry at large and public funds are diverted to non-priority programmes (e.g., military upgrades). Consequently, key public organisations and programmes are starved of necessary funds and manpower to respond to citizen demands. This has serious implications for the equitable treatment of citizens and allocation of resources according to need[16], two guiding principles of an effective public administration. Public officials may rely on citizen engagement initiatives to act as bulwarks against special interests and clientelist policies. The participatory budget initiatives which became popular in Brazil and have now spread throughout the world are good illustrations of citizen engagement being used in this way. By participating in the allocation of state resources, citizens may contribute to restraining the politicians' clientelist policies and build support for programmes which deliver priority services.

Enhancing legitimacy – State representatives (both politicians and public officials) have an inherent interest in strengthening trust in the public sector and ultimately their legitimacy in the eyes of society. Depending on the context, citizen engagement can strengthen state legitimacy in two ways:

i) Where legitimacy is built on democratic processes that enable participation for all and promote decision-making that reflects shared values and preferences, citizen involvement in the governance process may add to state legitimacy[17]. This happens in countries with open, democratic systems where citizen engagement boosts state legitimacy through democratic governance.

ii) Where legitimacy is built on performance and the ability of the state to effectively provide security, welfare and justice for the public, citizen engagement supplements the democratic deficit by increasing trust between society and the state through its effects on corruption, state responsiveness, service delivery, etc. Viet Nam's Doi Moi model is a typical example of state legitimacy derived mainly from state performance and responsiveness to citizens' needs when other sources of legitimacy are limited[18].

Strengthening accountability – Lack of accountability in the public sector is perhaps the single most important factor for failures in service delivery (see Annex I for a short description of how accountability works in the public sector)[19]. Accountability may fail anywhere in the long chain of command that starts with the political leadership and ends at the point of delivery. For instance, accountability may fail when politicians interfere on the basis of patronage with appointments and decision making in the public service, undermining its two key pillars – meritocracy and the culture of effectiveness, both of which have a direct impact on the quality of service delivery[20]. As another example,

11 Lant Pritchett, Michael Woolcock and Matt Andrews (2010) *Capability Traps? The Mechanisms of Persistent Implementation Failure*. Center for Global Development Working Paper 234. Washington, D.C.

12 Ibid.

13 The term "bureaucratic entrepreneurship" refers to the entrepreneurship spirit of public officials within the bureaucracy.

14 Archon Fung, *"Recipes for Public Spheres: Eight Institutional Design Choices and Their Consequences"* in Journal of Political Philosophy, Vol. 11, No. 3. (September 2003): 338-67.

15 Helene E. Landemore (2012) *"Why the Many Are Smarter than the Few and Why It Matters,"* Journal of Public Deliberation: Vol. 8: Iss. 1, Article 7.

16 Peter C. Humphreys, (1998) *Improving Public Service Delivery,* Committee for Public Management Research Discussion Paper 7, Institute of Public Administration.

17 Archon Fung. 2007. *Democratic Theory and Political Science: A Pragmatic Method of Constructive Engagement*. American Political Science Review 101(3):443-58.

18 Le Hong Hiep, *Performance-Based Legitimacy: The Case of the Communist Party of Vietnam and Doi Moi.* Contemporary Southeast Asia, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2012), pp. 145-72.

19 World Bank, *"World Development Report: Making Services Work for Poor People",* 2003.

20 James E. Rauch and Peter B. Evans (2000), *"Bureaucratic Structure and Bureaucratic Performance in Less Developed Countries,"* Journal of Public Economics 75: 49-71.

accountability may also fail at the point of delivery[21], when, given the transaction-intensive and discretionary nature of public services[22], it becomes difficult to monitor the performance of service providers, especially in remote and poor areas where the services are most needed. In both cases, citizen engagement may play a positive role in service delivery. In the first instance, committed public officials may enlist the support of citizen initiatives to defend meritocracy and the culture of effectiveness from political interference. In the second example, public officials may rely on citizen monitoring to reduce corruption and strengthen service delivery at the grassroots in their sectors or departments. An illustration of the monitoring role citizens can play at point of delivery are social audits which have gained traction in several countries.

Discussed thus far are the main ways in which citizen engagement can help public officials effect change in service delivery and strengthen quality and transparency. Yet, the actual outcomes will depend on the types of engagement chosen and will largely be shaped by the context. The rest of this paper will focus on analysing these factors – i.e. the forms, strategies and contexts of engagement – from five country case studies.

Conventional wisdom and alternative thinking about strategies of citizen engagement

Public sector reformers, community leaders, development practitioners and others interested in leveraging citizen engagement to improve public services want to know what forms and strategies of engagement are more effective in supporting reform. When getting involved with or supporting participatory initiatives, they need to understand which actors are more likely to participate, for what reasons and when they choose to engage, and how the engagement process takes place and produces desirable outcomes. Although our knowledge of what works and what doesn't remains limited, there are valuable lessons to be drawn from a number of initiatives around the world that have resulted in success or failure[23]. The rest of this section will examine key engagement strategies[24] by drawing distinctions between traditional models, that are largely promoted by donor agencies[25], and alternative approaches which are based on a more dynamic and disaggregated understanding of engagement[26]. All along, the focus will remain on the role of public officials in the process.

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21 Teacher absenteeism, leakages of public funds, bribing of doctors and nepotism in recruitment are all examples of inadequate behaviour resulting from accountability failures.

22 Lant Pritchett and Michael Woolcock. (2002). *Solutions When the Solution is the Problem: Arraying the Disarray in Development*. Center for Global Development Working Paper 10, Washing. DC; Center for Global Development.

23 For a definition of success and failure and many examples of citizen engagement initiatives see John Gaventa and Gregory Barrett. (2010) *So What Difference Does it Make? Mapping the Outcomes of Citizen Engagement,* IDS Working Paper 348, Brighton: IDS.

24 It should be noted that the strategies discussed in this section are by no means all that exists or matters in the realm of citizen engagement. The strategies presented in this section are selected based on the fact that they provide an alternative to what can be considered traditional approaches to citizen engagement.

25 By donor agencies this paper refers to multilateral and bilateral development organisations like the UNDP, World Bank, Swedish SIDA, etc.

26 These alternative approaches mark a departure from the widely used World Bank "long-route accountability framework" described in Annex I.

Figure 1: The Spectrum of Public Participation

Source: International Association for Public Participation (www.iap2.org/).

Technical approach vs. power relations

Development agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have traditionally conceived citizen engagement as a "technical tool" for stimulating citizen demand for better services. Their focus has been on strengthening citizens' motivations and capacity to engage, with much less attention paid to the willingness and capacity of state actors, especially public officials, for engagement. Most participatory projects have been implemented on the basis of standardized "best-practice" models, copied from successful cases and almost invariably consisting of the following stages: 1) identify a specific problem to be addressed (i.e. health, education, infrastructure, etc.); 2) create an interface for public officials to share information with the citizens (i.e. community committees, user associations, town hall meetings, budget deliberations, etc.); 3) incentivise and build the capacity of citizens to use the information and voice their concerns (e.g. financial incentives and training); and, 4) establish formal rules to keep the space for participation open. The basic assumption behind this approach is that if some space for participation is created, training is provided and information is shared, better public services will follow[27].

Reform[28], however, rarely emerges as a technical solution to a governance problem. Effective support for participatory initiatives requires a more nuanced and political understanding of citizen engagement.

▶ First, experience suggests that technical approaches to citizen engagement uniformly applied to any environment, regardless of context, rarely work because they ignore and depoliticise the political processes that underpin power relations within and between state and society[29]. Power and interests are tightly intertwined in a process that shapes public choices that are made - interests determine policy preferences, power determines whose interests prevail and

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27 Bjorn-Soren Gigler and Savita Bailur. (2014). *Closing the Feedback Loop Can Technology Bridge the Accountability Gap?* Washington, The World Bank, 2014.

28 Reform in this context can be broadly defined as a process of change aimed at improving service delivery for all citizens.

29 Shantayanan Devarajan, Stuti Khemani, and Michael Walton. 2011. *Civil Society, Public Action and Accountability in Africa*. HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP11-036, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

political interactions convert policy preferences into policy decisions. When seen as a corollary of power relations, reform is fundamentally political and as such it requires not only technical inputs but also political mobilisation and support to be sustained. It is unrealistic to assume that carving out space for citizen engagement will automatically change the outcome of power relations in favour of reform and effective service delivery.

▸ Second, by focusing primarily on the citizen, traditional approaches underestimate the important role state actors play. First, it is not only citizens who initiate engagement initiatives - they may be stimulated and led (or supressed) by politicians and public officials when it is in their interests to have citizens make demands on the government. But even when they are initiated by citizens, the state's response is just as important because the state is the other half of the equation and what it does shapes the outcome of the interaction. Therefore, it is essential to take into account not only the interests of citizens, but also the (vested) interests of public officials and politicians.

"Citizens vs. State" vs. "pro-reform vs. status-quo coalitions"

The orthodox view of citizen engagement has other limitations. First, it downplays the importance of collective action, by placing disproportionately more emphasis on the role of the individual. This is reflected in the importance donor-funded projects give to the capacity needs of individuals (i.e. training on processing and analyzing information, formulating priorities, etc.), as opposed to the needs of the collective for organisational and political skills and capacities to forge coalitions and alliances across boundaries. Second, the prevailing orthodoxy views the state and society as two monolithic structures clearly divided by a boundary, with citizens on one side demanding quality services and state actors on the other one supplying them[30]. The focus of this approach is not so much on what goes on within the state or society, but on the interaction that takes place along the boundary. Seen through the lens of power relations, however, the reality is a lot more complex and nuanced than this model suggests.

▸ First, given the unequal positions of power between the state and the individual citizen, collective action assumes greater importance than individual action[31]. It aggregates citizen power, amplifies citizen voice and strengthens the ability of citizens to challenge the status quo and demands for change and reform. Although most initiatives involve groups of people rather than individuals, they are rarely guided explicitly and thoroughly by the logic of collective power. Take, for example, the thousands of social audits promoted by development agencies around the world. For many of them, engagement ends with the completion of an individual interview. The assumption is that once information is extracted and made available, it will have the power to change state performance. Rarely do these initiatives go beyond individual interviews and seek to mobilise informed citizens and turn them into active agents of change. A lot of potential is thus left untapped.

▸ Second, instead of seeing the state and society as homogeneous entities, it makes more sense to think of them as heterogeneous networks of power-wielding actors, complete with their internal hierarchies, conflicts and power dynamics and competing with each other on the basis of interests. Some of these networks may be in favour of reform and others opposed to it or even complicit in "bad" governance. From this perspective, supporters and opponents of reforms may be found on either side of the state-society divide. Reform may originate and be driven from below (by citizens), above (by politicians), within (by public officials) and outside (by international organisations and donors)[32].

Therefore, instead of talking about "citizens versus the state", it makes more sense to frame the discussion in terms of "reformers versus supporters of the status-quo"[33] and think how to create and sustain pro-reform alliances that compete with status-quo coalitions and how to avoid the capture of social movements by anti-reform groups[34]. What ultimately matters is which coalition gets to set the agenda and make the decisions based on the power they have, which depends on how organized each group is and what kinds of networks and alliances they have established[35].

Figure 2: Ladder of Participation
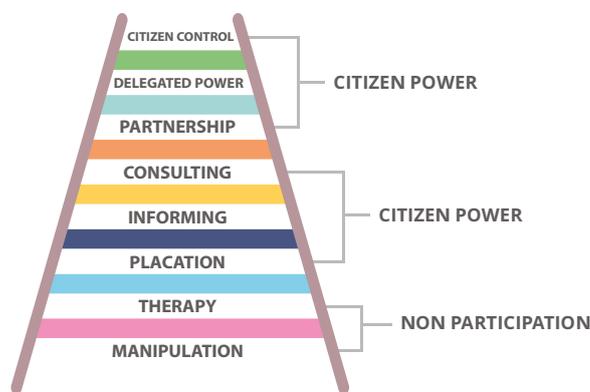
Source: Arnstein, Sherry R. "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," Journal of the American Institute of Planners, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969, pp. 216-224.

This approach broadens our understanding of collective action to include pro-reform actors from within the state and enables us to re-evaluate the role of state actors not merely as suppliers of quality services, but also as demanders and promoters of it.

30 David Booth, *Development as a collective action problem: addressing the real challenges of African governance.* Africa Power and Politics Programme (APPP), London, UK (2012).

31 Anuradha Joshi (2008), *'Producing social accountability? The impact of service delivery reforms,'* IDS Bulletin, 38 (6), 10–17.

32 Jonathan Fox, *Accountability Politics: Power and Voice in Rural Mexico,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

33 Merilee Grindle. 2001. *"Despite the Odds: The Political Economy of Social Sector Reform in Latin America."* Kennedy School of Government Faculty Research Working Paper RWP01-021, Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge, MA.

34 Giles Mohan, *Beyond participation: strategies for deeper empowerment.* In: Cooke, Bill and Kothari, Uma eds. *Participation: The New Tyranny?* London: Zed Books, pp. 153–167, 2006.

35 M Hajer and W Versteeg, *Performing governance through networks,* European Political Science, 2005.

▶ In certain situations, politicians may become champions of reform. When political equilibria shift, politicians seek to strengthen engagement with citizens outside electoral channels, which creates windows of opportunity for the promotion of difficult reforms demanded by citizen groups[36]. Therefore, it is crucial to think of citizen engagement initiatives in terms of their ability to capitalise on political processes by building alliances and coalitions with politicians who are interested in reform. At the same time, care should be taken not to undermine the authority and legitimacy of elected politicians, which might turn them into opponents of reform.

▶ Public officials too may become active promoters of reform. Though traditionally seen as part of the problem, public officials are at the forefront of everyday efforts for public sector effectiveness and openness. Pro-reform allies may be found in internal bureaucratic struggles for performance and results, so identifying them requires a good understanding of organisational behaviour within the public sector. When the public sector is exposed to citizen engagement, the bureaucratic leadership may play an important part in promoting a broader culture of participation within the public service or even facilitating the engagement process. However, actively promoting citizen engagement to public officials when there is no buy-in or ownership from them, as has often been the case with donor-funded projects, can be a recipe for failure. In all cases, citizen participation should be aligned with the incentive structure of public officials, if a degree of ownership and commitment is to be built within the public service.

This understanding of service delivery reform, typically provided by donor agencies, also has implications for capacity building activities. When supporting participatory initiatives, the question to ask is not what kind of capacity support should be provided to the citizens, but rather what kind of support should be provided to pro-reform state-society coalitions. From the perspective of citizens, the type of capacity that is critical in this context is not merely how to obtain, analyse and use information, but rather how to organize, manage political relations and form alliances and coalitions with other citizen groups, politicians, legislators, bureaucrats, service providers, civil society, and the media, across all levels (local, regional and national). From the perspective of public officials, the type of capacity that is critical is how to build coalitions and alliances horizontally across organisational boundaries and vertically along the bureaucratic chain, as well as with citizens, politicians and the media.

This approach also casts civil society as a powerful broker of collective action and pro-reform coalitions[37]. Success requires that civil society organisations have the capacity to identify pro-reform actors and mobilise them into alliances and coalitions. It is also important that they be perceived as legitimate and credible by both society and the state. Civil society organisations that are not rooted in the local context, serve special interests or are largely dependent on donor funding, not only lack the credibility to mobilise a sustainable coalition, but also might harm engagement by disillusioning interested citizens. Moreover, meaningful participation requires informed participants, which gives the media a particularly important role in the mobilisation process.

The power lens also reveals a number of significant risks in undertaking citizen engagement. For instance, if engagement initiatives are captured by better educated and more politically-connected elites, all they might do is reinforce exiting power structures, increase inequality and promote special interests. In the process of designing and carrying out participatory approaches, it is therefore important to understand not only how the distribution of power enables citizen engagement and shapes its impact, but also how the engagement of citizens in turn affects the configuration of power within the state and in society.

Collective action comes with its own perils. When built on exclusive goals, amplified citizen power may only promote narrow interests. For example, in societies fragmented along ethnic, religious, gender, regional or class lines, collective action may further widen social divisions if participation and mobilisation take place along sectarian lines[38]. Moreover, when increased citizens' collective power is not accommodated by the state, there is risk of confrontation and violence. The borderline between violent and non-violent movements can be very thin and civic leaders and country reformers have to tread it very carefully. It is, therefore, important that citizen engagement initiatives are pursued in a risk-informed manner to achieve sustainable progress.

"Static & short-term" vs. "dynamic & long-term" engagement

Another orthodox view of citizen engagement initiatives, often advocated by donor agencies, is that they follow a linear process – once an initiative is initiated, it is expected to follow a smoothly rising trajectory and produce uniform effects. Moreover, when pursued in the form of projects, initiatives tend to be short-term and highly structured. In some cases, they are even made to fit the planning and budgeting timelines and imperatives of process owner – for example, donor organisations which are often under pressure to disburse budgets and demonstrate results.

When seen from the perspective of power relations, it is hard to see why the effects of citizen engagement should be smooth, unidirectional and uniform[39]. The highly political process of competition between pro-reform and status quo forces is inherently dynamic, with ups and downs, and rapid changes in the power structure taking place after periods of lull. In such highly dynamic processes, it is normal for things to get worse, before they get better. It takes time for changes in the structure of power relations and actors' incentives to become

36 Helene Grandvoinnet, Ghazia Aslam and Shomikho Raha *(2015) Opening the Black Box: The Contextual Drivers of Social Accountability.* World Bank Publications.

37 Jonathan Fox. 2014. *"Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?"* Global Partnership for Social Accountability Working Paper 1, World Bank, Washington, DC, July.

38 Albert O. Hirschman, *"Exit, Voice, and Loyalty": Further Reflections and a Survey of Recent Contributions,* The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly. Health and Society, Vol. 58, No. 3 (Summer, 1980), pp. 430-453.

39 Michael Woolcock (2009). *'Toward a plurality of methods in project evaluation: a contextualised approach to understanding impact trajectories and efficacy'.* Journal of Development Effectiveness, 1(1): 1-14.

(cc) United States government work / *Participants at a US AID workshop in Indonesia promoting citizen engagement.*

sustainable, therefore a longer timeframe is needed for results to materialise. A reason for the failure of many citizen initiatives that are totally dependent on donor support is that they aren't given enough time to fully develop their potential.

It is important to recognise that the engagement process is gradual, iterative, open to self-experimentation and learning through failure and success. Effective initiatives are those that take advantage of cycles of political openings and incrementally strengthen the foundations of reform through iterative cycles of confrontation and accommodation between state and societal actors[40]. The key to success for such initiatives is getting it right after much trial and error. An important distinction can be drawn here between the advantages of organic initiatives which have no time pressures and are highly iterative, and the disadvantages of induced initiatives that often operate under time constraints and a linear logic.

"Parallel structures" vs. "integration with formal governance processes"

Another common weakness of citizen engagement initiatives implemented as part of donor-funded projects is that they are often established in parallel or as appendices to state structures. Combined with the short-term orientation, this may lead to engagement being perceived as an external requisite and may contribute to the erosion of their legitimacy, turning them into a "box-ticking" exercise. Moreover, the creation of parallel informal governance structures that bypass formal institutions may displace mechanisms of political accountability which are considered more democratic, legitimate and effective.

Service delivery reform does not work in a vacuum – it is largely shaped by political and institutional contexts[41]. Therefore, anchoring citizen initiatives in country realities is essential. Citizen engagement is more likely to produce positive impacts when permanently embedded into existing state structures and integrated with other forms of accountability (political, bureaucratic, etc.). Research shows that citizen engagement initiatives are particularly effective when they

complement other forms of accountability[42]. However, for citizen engagement initiatives to become fully incorporated in government practices and processes, they generally need to be sustained over a long period of time.

Another key factor for engagement initiatives to work is the openness of the public sector to good governance reforms[43]. Institutional openness is important for building a culture of responsiveness and accountability among public officials and elected politicians, as well as strengthening the capacity of the citizens to engage. Open access and entry into economic and political organisations, which some researchers[44] identify as the single most crucial factor of success, includes citizen engagement as a key element of development. An enabling environment that encourages voice and participation and has a history of democratic openness and functioning civil society tends to make a difference[45]. Democratic systems have more accountability and checks-and-balances mechanisms that can be activated by citizens and offer more possibilities for combining social accountability with political accountability. Where the basic freedoms of expression or association are absent and governments are unwilling or unable to meaningfully react to citizen input, the process may result in disaffection and participation can actually decrease citizen trust in the government and democratic legitimacy.

In summary, successful citizen engagement is not a recipe that can be reproduced anywhere. Particular forms of engagement interact in specific ways with existing institutions and processes of governance within broader social and political contexts. As an integral part of governance processes, above and beyond individual projects, citizen engagement is highly embedded in the nature of the political and governance context and in existing power relations. Therefore, the same approach implemented in different contexts may yield different outcomes. However, only suggesting that the context matters would amount to nothing more than a tautology. The following section will illustrate some of the points made here, by examining and discussing five case studies from various experiences and regions. The final section will provide a template for analysing the context and identifying ways of supporting citizen engagement initiatives more effectively.

Case Studies

To illustrate some of the points made so far and derive insights on the factors that shape the success or failure of citizen engagement initiatives, this section will introduce five cases[46] from middle and low income countries. These cases were selected on the basis of parameters such as type of

40 Jonathan Fox, *Accountability Politics: Power and Voice in Rural Mexico,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

41 Bjorn-Soren Gigler and Savita Bailur. (2014). *Closing the Feedback Loop Can Technology Bridge the Accountability Gap?* Washington, The World Bank, 2014.

42 John Gaventa and G. Barrett (2010) *So What Difference Does it Make? Mapping the Outcomes of Citizen Engagement,* IDS Working Paper 348, Brighton: IDS.

43 Anuradha Joshi. (2011) *'Review of Impact and Effectiveness of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives: Annex 1 Service Delivery',* prepared for the Transparency and Accountability Initiative Workshop October 2010.

44 Douglas North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry Weingast. (2009) *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009.

45 A. Goetz and R. Jenkins. (2005) *Reinventing Accountability,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

46 These cases are meant to illustrate a range of positive and negative experiences with citizen engagement and do not constitute in any way evaluations.

engagement, level of engagement, context, region, etc.[47], and are drawn from independent assessments[48] or randomized controlled trials[49].

Case Study 1: Solidary Groups and Provision of Public Goods in Rural China[50]

A 2007 study of the impact of China's village solidary groups on the provision of public goods by local governments found that those groups which involved public officials in their membership were able to significantly improve the delivery of public goods.

China has a variety of rural solidary groups which have emerged organically through an evolutionary process and which are firmly embedded in the local context. They can be clans, churches, fraternal organisations, village temples, village-wide lineages, etc. Members of solidary groups have strong obligations to the collective. Gatherings help publicise who is deserving of moral standing in the community. In solidary groups, members are judged according to the group's standards of what constitutes a good person and member. Some solidary groups include local officials as members. By contrast, citizen watchdog organisations, designed to monitor and challenge government, do not embed officials as members.

By examining the effects of different solidary groups, the study found that:

▸ Citizens were more likely to use moral standing to reward local public officials for good public goods provision when the officials were members of solidary groups based on shared moral obligations as well as shared interests. Therefore, public officials in localities with solidary groups which included them in their membership (the study calls these groups "embedded") were more likely to provide better public goods and services.

▸ Public officials acquired moral standing among their constituents and provided better public goods and services in those cases where local administrative boundaries coincided with the boundaries of solidary groups (the study calls these groups "encompassing").

The study concluded that those solidary groups that were encompassing and embedded exerted a significant positive impact on the interaction of public officials with citizens and, ultimately, on the provision of public goods (roads, school buildings, water, etc.).

Case Study 2: Monitoring Public Procurement in the Philippines[51]

Procurement Watch Inc., a citizen initiative in the Philippines, has become an important ally of reform-minded public officials seeking to improve transparency and accountability in the public procurement process. The impact of the initiative has been significant.

Procurement Watch, Inc. (PWI) is a civil society organisation established in 2001 with the goal of combating corruption in public procurement by promoting transparency, impartiality, and accountability through research, training, partnerships and advocacy. PWI was formed by a combination of citizens and former government officials with the objective of advocating for a new procurement law and monitoring enforcement after its enactment. While drafting the new procurement law, reform-minded government officials decided that opening up the process to non-governmental actors would benefit reform. The procurement task force in the government invited PWI to join the task force and help it in redrafting the law and in analysing regulations promulgated after the enactment of the law.

PWI members built a close working relationship with the technical experts in the task force and provided great value through their technical input in the process. PWI also organized a coalition of other civil society organisations - primarily groups working on anti-corruption – and mobilised public opinion in support of procurement reforms. PWI found a key ally in the Catholic church, widely perceived to be the most influential non-governmental organisation in the country. The media (newspapers, radio, and television) too became part of a strategic and well-planned awareness campaign. In January 2003, PWI's efforts paid off when the legislature passed the new procurement law – the Government Procurement Reform Act (GPRA).

Since the passing of GPRA, PWI has been invited by the government to monitor public procurement. PWI diagnoses procurement processes and puts forward recommendations to government agencies on how to make procurement more efficient. PWI is now widely recognized for its significant contribution and expertise on procurement practices. PWI conducts a variety of monitoring and advocacy activities with different groups including the Ombudsman, government agencies involved in large procurements, and civil society organisations and citizens. In particular, PWI has developed very close relationships with the Ombudsman, whose officials now receive from PWI training sessions on procurement. PWI has also established a "Feedback and Complaint-handling Mechanism" to process and respond to reports and other information provided by observers.

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47 These cases were selected to illustrate the main points made in this paper.

48 Independent assessment implies that the researcher commenting on the case was not affiliated with the entity that implemented the initiative that was assessed.

49 Given their dynamic nature and longer-time frames required for results to materialise, participatory initiatives are difficult to evaluate. Randomized control trials have gained popularity in the last decade, but even they have serious limitations when it comes to identifying trajectories and measuring long-term impact. At the time of writing, there is no consensus on what are the best tools for evaluating participatory projects. The five cases included here were assessed using the 'case study' or 'randomized control trial' method. For an overview of the challenges involved in the evaluation of participatory projects see "Michael Woolcock (2009). *'Toward a plurality of methods in project evaluation: a contextualized approach to understanding impact trajectories and efficacy'.* Journal of Development Effectiveness, 1(1): 1-14."

50 Lily L. Tsai, Solidary Groups, Informal Accountability, and Local Public Goods Provision in Rural China, The American Political Science Review, Vol. 101, No. 2 (May, 2007), pp. 355-372.

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51 Maria Kristina Villanueva Pimentel, (2004) Procurement *Watch, Inc.: The role of civil society in public procurement reforms in the Philippines.* Challenges In Public Procurement: An International Perspective (Vol. 3), Boca Raton, FL, USA: PrAcademics Press.

Case Study 3: Public Administration Performance Index in Viet Nam[52]

The governance indicators collected by the Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) based on citizen experiences have created a wealth of information about governance and service delivery at the local level in Viet Nam. This case illustrates the fact that citizen initiatives need time to take hold. PAPI's institutionalisation process is ongoing and the potential for impact is significant.

PAPI is policy-oriented index that provides information on citizens' perceptions of governance, public administration and public service delivery at provincial level. By providing a set of indicators, it creates incentives for provincial governments to improve performance over the long term. PAPI is a collaboration of the UNDP and a local NGO, in partnership with the Viet Nam Fatherland Front [53](VFF). Given that VFF is by law responsible for articulating citizen perspectives to the Vietnamese government and for overseeing the government on behalf of citizens, it was designed to be the main avenue to securing provincial government buy-in and opening doors at the local level.

Initially, nationwide interviews with citizens were conducted by VFF members, and later by the local NGO. This shift was made to ensure no state power would be exercised on interviewees, thus improving the credibility of PAPI data. Dissemination workshops were led by VFF members, researchers from the Ho Chi Minh Academy and officials from the provinces, with UNDP support.

The project initially faced scepticism and resistance, both at local and national levels. PAPI's team spent significant time sensitising authorities at all levels about the importance of listening to citizens' voices, the value of independent tools and the usefulness of the index. Even within the higher echelons of VFF, PAPI experienced varying political commitment. Although the team had relied heavily on middle ranking VFF officials to obtain local governments' permission to conduct the survey, as top officials remained apathetic. The VFF leadership was initially not prepared to take an active role in strongly advocating the project, likely due to concerns about its political sensitivity. The use of the index in the training of government officials in the Ho Chi Minh Academy and the involvement of Academy researchers played an important role in gradually increasing acceptance within provincial governments.

By mid-2015, the PAPI team had carried out four rounds of the full survey in all 63 provinces and was preparing for the fifth iteration. Thirteen provinces had issued directives or other formal responses to their PAPI results, and more than 30 provinces had held individualised provincial diagnostics workshops. However, as noted in the project's 2014 mid-term review, success was mixed in terms of getting its intended audience of provincial and central government ministries to use the data in concrete ways. In provinces that had conducted diagnostic workshops, evaluators found low levels of awareness about PAPI among officials and the people.

PAPI's contribution has been significant because citizen feedback on governance and service delivery has become available for the first time on a national scale in Viet Nam. However, PAPI's institutionalisation is still work in progress, given that it is still being technically and financially supported by UNDP. It remains to be seen who might take it over in future, especially once international assistance is phased out. PAPI's full impact on the quality of governance and public service delivery at the provincial level will only gradually become evident. The potential remains significant, given the scope and depth of the PAPI indicators. The main lesson to draw from PAPI's experience is that such initiatives take time and sustained support to become institutionalised, especially in a relatively closed governance environment such as Viet Nam's one-party system.

Case Study 4: Community Participation to Reduce Corruption in Indonesia[54]

A 2007 study based on a randomized field experiment found that citizen oversight did not lead to a significant reduction of corruption is infrastructure projects in rural areas in Indonesia. The study found that by contrast government audits produced much better results.

The *Kecamatan* (sub-district) Development Program (KDP) is a national government programme supported by The World Bank which has funded poverty reduction projects in about 15,000 Indonesian villages every year since 1998. A typical village received on average about US$8,800, which villagers have used to surface existing dirt roads with sand, rocks, and gravel.

As part of the study, a randomized field experiment was conducted on KDP to test the effects of two instruments for reducing corruption:

▸ *Community participation:* Invitations to accountability meetings were extended to non-elite villagers and were distributed either by neighbourhood heads or through schools. In half of these villages, community members also received anonymous comment forms, which were collected and summarised at the accountability meetings.

▸ *Audits:* The probability of central government audits was increased from 4% to 100%. They were performed by the same government agency that usually monitored KDP (an agency often perceived as corrupt).

The study found that community participation did not reduce corruption. The invitations to community meetings helped reduce missing labour expenses, as community members often worked on the roads and had an incentive to make sure they received their wages, but they did not have any effect on the much more important problem of missing funds allocated for the purchase of materials. Also, the community participation process was captured by local elites. Even access and information was not sufficient for grassroots actors to rein in corruption if those who benefited could control the process. Inviting more people to meetings had almost no effect on corruption, and the comment forms only had an effect when they were distributed via schools, bypassing local officials. By contrast, the study found that government audits had a significant impact on reducing missing expenditure. So overall, auditing had a better result that citizen oversight in reducing corruption.

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52 This case study is based on information from UNDP Viet Nam, including a 2004 review of the PAPI project, and the assessment by Rachel Jackson, *Measuring citizen experience: conducting a social audit in Vietnam,* 2009-2013. Innovations for successful societies, Princeton University, December, 20014. See www.papi.vn for more information on PAPI.

53 VFF is an umbrella political mass organisation with close links to the Communist Party of Viet Nam and a nationwide network of chapters down to the village level.

54 Olken, Benjamin A. 2007. *"Monitoring Corruption: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Indonesia."* Journal of Political Economy 115(2): 200-249.

Case Study 5: Social Mobilisation in Rural Kyrgyzstan[55]

A 2009 assessment of community development initiatives in rural Kyrgyzstan found that they failed to contribute to good governance, improved service delivery and poverty reduction primarily as a result of elite capture and exclusion of vulnerable groups.

Soviet-era inequalities in rural Kyrgyzstan have widened in the last two decades as a result of the economic restructuring initiated in the early 1990's. Powerful individuals who control resources and assets have emerged in local communities and are seen as a barrier to the redistribution of assets or structural reforms. Local authorities have vested interests in the existing power structures and have no incentive to alter the balance of power and the political and institutional status quo. Service providers are often involved in corruption or rent-seeking behaviour and public goods are allocated on the basis of clientelism and material compensation.

Decentralisation had created space for a number of governmental and non-governmental actors to participate in local governance. The government decided to capitalise on it in order to address problems of governance and service delivery at the local level. Starting in 2003, the Kyrgyz President and Government made social mobilisation and community development a national priority. The government's social mobilisation strategy consisted of two elements: First, it encouraged local forms of formal and informal self-governments (i.e. village head, district committees, courts of elders, mosques and independent community leaders) to perform public sector functions that had been formally decentralised. The government was confined to providing limited policy guidance and oversight to ensure that the poor and marginalised were benefitting. Second, the government supported decentralised and participatory community development initiatives aimed at promoting self-help and encouraging citizens to participate and contribute directly in the delivery and financing of community development activities and problem solving. The most prevalent interventions at the local level were donor-funded, Community-Driven Development projects.

The assessment found that the community development initiatives did not achieve strong pro-poor results and suffered from insufficient institutionalisation. Social exclusion was reported as one of the main shortcomings of the initiatives. Individuals with low levels of education and low incomes were excluded from community-based organisations. Low levels of awareness among citizens and public officials about the initiatives played a role too. Elite capture was also a factor, as those in positions of power primarily benefitted. Collective action was weakened by community fragmentation, given that in-country migration had created social divisions and atomisation in host communities. Little was done to expel the prevailing attitude that the main barriers to poverty reduction were conditioned by the mental and behavioural attributes of individuals, such as "passivity" and "dependency attitudes." Also, the capacity of citizens to engage and organise was not sufficiently supported. The structures created by the initiative were not effectively integrated into formal governance structures, which led to the creation of parallel governance structures and competing power dynamics. The fact that these initiatives were primarily supported by international organisations may have also played a role.

55 Babken Babajanian, *Decentralised Governance and Poverty Reduction in Kyrgyzstan,* Economic and Research Council, May 2009.

UNDP Bangladesh / Mohammad Asad / *Community meetings, women's forums and participatory planning sessions now lie at the heart of local governance in Bangladesh.*

Analysis of the case studies

These case studies offer a number of insights about the value and use of citizen engagement for achieving governance and service delivery goals. Examining them from a "public officials" perspective, the following five key factors of engagement emerge:

1 *Role of public officials and citizens*
2 *Value of citizen engagement*
3 *Collective action across state-society boundaries*
4 *Effective ownership of the initiative*
5 *Institutionalisation*

Each case study is in turn analysed with these factors in mind. Also see Annex II for a list of key factors that played a role in each case.

1) Procurement Watch, Inc. in the Philippines

Public officials played a crucial role in the PWI. The initiative itself was primarily driven by retired public officials who created a citizen's initiative dedicated to promoting integrity in public procurement. At the same time, a set of incumbent public officials, who wanted to see integrity and transparency in public procurement, realised that their interests were aligned with the interests of the citizens and understood the potential role citizen engagement could play in the reform process. By successfully opening up the space for participation, they were able to create a strong coalition of reform-minded actors on both sides of the state-society divide, which took firm ownership of the initiative – a key factor in its success.

Though not every public official in the Philippines was interested in public procurement reform, but those that were interested in strengthening accountability, gained the upper hand owing to the enhanced legitimacy derived from the alliance with citizens. Another for PWI's effectiveness was that it mobilised other forms of accountability within state structures by sharing reports with various government agencies and the Ombudsman, thus triggering various accountability mechanisms which would otherwise not have been activated. Besides accountability, another benefit public officials derived from citizen engagement was that of expertise and knowledge elicited from PWI members. Their contribution in drafting the legislation was considered

invaluable. The PWI case is also a good example of an initiative that became influential upon being embedded in formal governance processes, when the government decided that PWI could participate in the task force charged with drafting the the new procurement law and the subsequent monitoring of public procurement processes.

2) Solidary groups in China

China's solidary groups are a classical example of grassroots citizen initiatives which emerge endogenously in response to concrete local problems. They grow organically through trial and error, by constantly challenging existing power structures, but at the same time accommodating the state. They have grown resilient over time and have emerged as important institutional mechanisms of interaction between citizens and public officials in an environment where political space is constrained. While citizens are clearly the initiators and owners of these initiatives, public officials play an important role by becoming embedded in these groups. The "embeddedness" of public officials in the initiative was found to have been the key factor of success because it generated trust, cooperation and accountability by enabling and enforcing moral motivations and by lowering costs for service recipients of monitoring service providers' compliance with the public interest. Public officials' participation in group activities and interaction with other group members (embeddedness) helped create shared identities and norms between citizens and officials, which made officials feel part of the community. The internalisation of identities and norms made it important for officials that their contribution be morally rewarded, which eventually shaped their behaviour. Solidary groups, in effect, turned public officials into trusted and reliable allies of pro-accountability forces at the grassroots. The result of this process was a coalition of like-minded people across the state-society divide working together for better public services and improved service delivery.

3) PAPI in Viet Nam

In contrast to PWI and China's solidary groups, PAPI arose externally as a donor project, conceived and driven by UNDP. The role of citizens and public officials has thus far been more limited than in the previous two cases (and largely due to the restrictive and authoritarian environment in Viet Nam). Citizens have been mainly had passive involvement as respondents to questionnaires, the findings of which were expected to create pressure on the government for better service delivery. Certain sections of the public service, especially at provincial level, were involved more actively in the discussion and distribution of information. Introducing training for government officials on the use of governance scores, as part of the curriculum at the Ho Chi Minh Academy, was an effective tactic as it raised awareness among public officials. However, no group has emerged to take ownership of the initiative and drive it on its own.

In terms of impact, the PAPI case confirms that availability of information alone is not enough to get the government to respond to citizen feedback. As seen in the two earlier case studies, social accountability requires coalitions of empowered pro-accountability actors, which is harder to achieve in a relatively restrictive environment like Viet Nam's. However, PAPI has till date deftly navigated political waters by trying to build

Accessible public transport on Rheintalbus through co-design in Switzerland.

support from certain sections within the state. For example, the involvement of VFF members allowed the initiative to gain ground with provincial governments. It has also activated other forms of accountability by being successfully adopted by the Government Inspectorate and other institutions.

PAPI remains 'work in progress' and its key challenge ahead is the transfer of full ownership of the initiative to a local entity. This is a process that requires time and continued external support, especially in a governance system where the space for participation is restricted. It also remains to be seen how the initiative might integrate with local governance processes.

4) Public works in Indonesia

Public officials did not play a direct role in this case, but were the target of the intervention which was the prevention of corruption. The initiative was a classic example of the traditional approach to citizen engagement, focussing on the role of citizens in promoting transparency and information. The initiative's failure suggests that information alone is not sufficient for ensuring accountability as it does not alter the incentives for corrupt officials. It also demonstrates that community monitoring can be effective in exposing corruption, but only when it is designed to overcome the potential of elite capture. The case showed that the anonymous comment forms were effective only when they were distributed by school children, rather than neighbourhood leaders. Neighbourhood leaders shared the forms with people whom they knew would support the existing status quo. Additional oversight of the use of funds by village authorities was meant to reduce corruption, but to get around that village elites started distributing jobs and contracts to family members.

The main lesson from this is that stronger mechanisms of cooperation between reform-minded public officials, politicians and citizens is necessary to strengthen accountability. This case also illustrates an inherent weakness of randomized controlled trials – they are useful for rigorously measuring short-term effects, but they do not tell us much about the prospects of institutionalisation or long-term effects based on power dynamics.

5) Community-based Development in Kyrgyzstan

The key reasons for the failure of community development initiatives in Kyrgyzstan were weak ownership and involvement of citizens and public officials, lack of collective action and elite capture. The initiatives were conceptualised at the highest levels of government, controlled by local leaders and funded by donors – and they failed to create the right conditions for participation by public officials and citizens (especially, from vulnerable groups). The process was tightly controlled by community leaders with vested interests in maintaining the status quo and no interest in changing the balance of power. Consequently, the initiatives were dominated by better educated and well-connected elite groups, which had no interest in promoting redistributive policies or improving social inclusion. These are the types of obstacles that all externally-driven initiatives tend to face.

The design of these initiatives did not give public officials a stake in the process or the right incentives to participate. At the same time, the poor and marginalised were not able to take advantage of community development opportunities and become "active citizens". Low levels of awareness, education and income were key factors that kept citizens from engaging with the initiative and no real effort went into making it more accessible. Poor and disadvantaged citizens were also seen to be held back by the perception that poverty is an individual characteristic related to personal behaviour such as "passivity" and "dependency". The engagement initiatives did not tackle these barriers by, for example, increasing awareness and capacity for collective action. As a result of community fragmentation, weak involvement of public officials and citizens, and competing power dynamics between local leaders and community members, real change was almost non-existent.

The key conclusion[56] from this discussion is that, given public officials are key agents in service delivery, it is hard to conceive of any serious changes in governance and public services without their involvement. Citizen engagement initiatives can play a crucial positive role, but they need to be grounded in local realities and power dynamics, and need to be connected to reform efforts within state organisations. For sustainable results, any meaningful changes in governance and service delivery need to eventually become fully integrated within existing government structures and processes.

Analysing the context and identifying strategies for supporting citizen engagement

As highlighted earlier, the design of citizen engagement strategies needs to made in the context of power relations, incentives, opportunities and constraints within both state and society. While engagement can be a highly idiosyncratic process, it is possible to design strategies of engagement based on first-order principles that have emerged from research on citizen engagement. The following table lists a sequence of questions that provide guidance for the design and implementation of citizen engagement initiatives.

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56 Also see Annex II which summarises some of main factors for each case by categorizing them.

Conclusions

The literature on citizen engagement in middle and low-income countries devotes much attention to what citizens want and how they can go about obtaining it from the state. This is indeed crucial and the idea of placing the citizen at the centre of governance has great transformational potential for the way the public sector works. However, for engagement to be meaningful and productive the state has to recognise the value of engagement and be willing to take advantage of it.

Public officials play a primary role in the delivery of public services and it is inconceivable that significant service delivery improvements can be achieved without their full participation. Therefore, saying that citizen engagement can be a transformational instrument in service delivery is only partly true. Citizen engagement as an instrument of reform is only as good as the use that public officials and citizens make of it. Reform-minded public officials can take advantage of citizen engagement in several ways: e.g. elicit information, ideas and other contributions directly from citizens; support public sector innovation and entrepreneurship; defend the public interest from clientelism; strengthen the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of citizens; and, bolster public sector accountability and governance. However, citizen engagement comes with its risks – societal fragmentation and widening inequalities may result when initiatives are captured by special interests and elites. Therefore, public sector reformers, civil society activists and development practitioners seeking to promote citizen engagement as an instrument of service delivery reform should exercise due care.

There is no blueprint for the design and implementation of participatory initiatives, nor are there any standardized or easily replicable tools for citizen engagement. Successful citizen engagement takes place through long-term sustained processes of confrontation, accommodation, trial and error in which participants discover what works, find self-confidence and gain a sense of empowerment. Those interested in promoting citizen engagement should identify pro-reform public officials, elected representatives and citizens, understand their motivations and incentives and consider forming broad, pro-reform coalitions.

With poverty reduction gaining ground and information and communications technologies spreading rapidly in developing countries, citizens are becoming more educated and aiming for higher values and aspirations. Rising expectations of empowered citizens will stretch governments' capacities to deliver services their constituents need, forcing governments to change the way they deliver services, often doing more with less. The public sector will have to deliver higher value services to more people, more effectively, while empowered citizens demand more and meaningful participation in governance.

For the state-society relationship this implies that policy making will need to be brought closer to the citizen, allowing more direct engagement in policy development, implementation, evaluation and service delivery. Governments in high-income

Strategic Approach to Citizen Engagement

Questions to ask at each step	Issues to consider
Step 1: What is the problem to be addressed? What are the desired outcomes? What is the context? ▶ What is the problem and why is it a problem? What level of government does it relate to? ▶ What are the desired outcomes and how could success be defined? ▶ How is the problem perceived by the various sections of society and state? How does it affect the balance of power between state and society actors? Is there a risk of a backlash or retribution against the initiative? Where is it likely to originate from? ▶ Are there broader ongoing governance reforms and how does the problem sit in that context? Can there be mutual synergies? ▶ Is the political and institutional system open to citizen engagement and reform? ▶ What forms of engagement are most appropriate for the specific problem? ▶ In whose interest is it to change the status quo? Who might oppose the change?	▶ Framing the problem clearly is important. Likewise, stating clearly what demands are being put forward by the initiative is crucial. Are they related to improved services, more transparency, justifications or sanctions for wrongful behaviour from state officials? ▶ Clearly defining the possible and desired outcomes and success will inform the strategic approach to engagement. ▶ It is important to understand how the initiative affects the balance of power in the society and state and how in turn it is shaped by those powers. ▶ Assessing the contextual factors is essential. It is important to understand power structure and the incentives that state and society actors face and whether there is any likelihood that the state would resort to repressive measures. ▶ Social accountability may complement other governance reforms. For success, synergies should be achieved with other reform initiatives. Also, the institutional openness matters, hence it should be examined carefully.
Step 2: What kind of state action is possible? ▶ What are the possible entry points? Who can initiate the engagement? ▶ Are certain politicians willing to pursue the same objectives? What roles can they play? How can they be mobilised? ▶ Are there sections of the bureaucracy or individual public officials willing to support the initiative? What roles can they play? If so, do they have the capacity to respond? How can they be mobilised? What is the power structure within the state? ▶ Are the checks and balances institutions willing to partner with citizens and civil society organisations? ▶ Can state actors be included in a reform coalition? How can they be mobilised? What role will they play? ▶ What coalitions might emerge in response to the initiative? How can their impact be neutralised? ▶ Are there risks of repressive response by the state? How can the risks of state reprisal be mitigated?	▶ State action is just as important as citizen action. Sometimes, state structures may initiate and formalise citizen engagement and social accountability initiatives. ▶ When the initiative comes from outside the government, identifying a good entry point is key to success. An entry point could be located in a relevant section of the state which is interested in the reform and willing and capable to engage. ▶ Assessing the willingness and capacity of state actors is crucial for a good engagement strategy. ▶ Politicians can play a key role because they are more susceptible to popular demands and they are in a better position to pressure the bureaucracy and service providers. Similarly, the involvement of public officials strengthens the initiative. ▶ Linking social accountability with political and bureaucratic accountability by creating coalitions with politicians and public officials who have an interest in accountability and reform may improve results. ▶ Also, risks of reprisal should be carefully assessed.
Step 3: What kind of citizen action can stimulate change and promote the desired outcome? ▶ Is individual action sufficient for the particular initiative? Or is collective action necessary? ▶ Can citizen action and/or mobilisation build on existing organisations or social movements? ▶ What constrains mobilisation? Is limited information and awareness a constraint? ▶ Is direct engagement possible or an interlocutor between the citizens and the state is necessary? Who can be a credible and legitimate interlocutor?	▶ Sometimes, individual action is pursued, but most often collective action is necessary. Collective action has a lower risk of limited impact or state repercussion. ▶ Civic mobilisation can be more effective when building on existing organisations or social movements. ▶ Information alone is not sufficient to spur citizen action. Mobilisation is often needed to build collective action. ▶ Often intermediaries are needed to facilitate mobilisation, especially among vulnerable and marginalised groups with limited capacities for self-organisation.
Step 4: How to strengthen and sustain citizen engagement? ▶ Is the initiative sustainable? How do we measure sustainability? What key factors affect it?	▶ Assessing the sustainability of an initiative is essential before deciding to further support or expand it. ▶ Having a good idea about the trajectory it is expected allows for effective monitoring and evaluation.

- What kind of trajectory do we expect it to follow? When do we expect the first results? How can we measure them confidently?
- Can powerful pro-accountability coalitions be created? With whom? Who will lead them?
- How can mobilisation be facilitated? Are intermediaries, such as NGOs, necessary?
- Can the initiative be scaled up? Under what conditions? What modifications are required to make it more amenable to scaling up?
- Can the initiative be firmly embedded in existing formal governance processes?
- How can the initiative be connected more effectively to other channels of accountability – i.e. political and horizontal accountability?

- Building pro-accountability coalitions and alliances is essential for the effectiveness of the initiative.
- Localised, short-term and information-led interventions don't work well in the long-run. Embedding citizen engagement initiatives in exiting institutions and governance processes enhances their sustainability. This requires a good understanding of the institutional context and the social contract between the society and the state. Identifying social pressures for change and accountability will be essential.
- Citizen engagement is most effective when bottom-up accountability is combined with top-down and horizontal accountability.
- The role of NGOs is crucial for mobilising collective action across societal and state boundaries.

Step 5: What are the risks and opportunity costs of engagement?

- Which members of the society stand to lose or gain from engagement? How does it affect them?
- Are the wealthy and better educated more likely to participate? Is there a risk that vulnerable and marginalised groups might be sidelines or excluded? How can that risk be mitigated?
- Are there any risks of elite capture and special interests? Are there any risks of fragmentation of communities?
- Are there existing forms of accountability that might be displaced by the new initiative? Has their worth been assessed properly?
- What are the benefits and costs of engagement for both citizens and state officials? Are participants getting value from the process?
- Is there a risk of apathy and inertia from state institutions which might undermine citizen trust and interest in the long-run?

- Quite often, citizen initiatives are captured by elites and special interests which manipulate the process for their benefit. This further exacerbates the balance of power at the disadvantage of the poor and marginalised.
- When marginalised and vulnerable groups are excluded, the space for engagement narrows even further.
- In certain cases, citizen initiatives captured by special interests may result in social fragmentation of communities and even outright conflict.
- Sometimes, new initiatives may displace existing forms of accountability which may be more valuable, legitimate and sustainable. Assessing their worth before starting the new initiative is crucial.
- Citizen engagement entails direct costs or opportunity costs for both citizens and state actors. All participants spend time and resources in the process. For engagement to be meaningful, benefits must exceed costs.
- Also, another risk is state apathy or inertia. When state institutions are not actively and consistently engaged in the long run, citizens will lose interest and trust in the process and will disengage.

countries are currently exploring *co-design*[57] and co-creation of public services to better meet citizen's needs and preferences and leverage non-governmental resources. For middle- and low-income countries, such approaches represent a change from models where the government owns inputs and processes, towards a model where the government and citizens jointly own the outcomes. In other words, the government moves from governing for citizens to governing with citizens.

This also implies a shift in terms of the citizen moving closer to the center of governance and an evolving public sector where citizens, politicians, bureaucrats and service providers become co-creators of public goods.[58] This shift begins to challenge established notions of public sector values, practices, accountability, knowledge and skills. But more importantly, it

also highlights the need for a professional, agile, open, ethical and passionate public service and rebuilding the morale and motivation of public officials where they have been damaged by politicisation or lack of resources.[59]

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57 See also: Design Thinking for Public Service Excellence. UNDP 2015. Available at: http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/capacity-building/global-centre-for-public-service-excellence/DesignThinking.html (accessed on 30 August 2015).

58 See also: Collaborative Capacity in Public Service Delivery: Towards a Framework for Practice. UNDP 2015. Available at: http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/global-policy-centres/publicservice/collaborate.html

59 See also: From New Public Management to New Public Passion - Restoring the intrinsic motivation of public officials. UNDP 2015. http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/capacity-development/English/Singapore%20Centre/NotesPSE1_PublicPassion.pdf (Accessed on 30 August 2015)

Annex I: Accountability in the public sector

The figure below shows a model commonly used to understand accountability in the public sector[60]. It consists of four types of actors: citizens, elected politicians, bureaucrats and oversight institutions. Citizens demand accountability from elected politicians for their policies (referred to as *political accountability*) and elected politicians demand accountability from bureaucrats for the delivery of public services (referred to as *bureaucratic accountability*). The way in which citizens hold service providers indirectly accountable via elected politicians is called the long route to accountability. By contrast, the short route to accountability (referred to as *social accountability*) consists of citizens engaging directly with state officials and eliciting from them accountability – e.g. parents demanding accountability from teachers, farmers from agriculture extension workers, mothers from nurses, etc. Social accountability may work in three ways: (i) citizens may elicit responsiveness from service providers at the point of delivery; (ii) they may influence the managerial level in the public administration which, as the key driver of organisational behaviour, shapes the actions of service providers; or, (iii) they may

mobilise formal oversight and checks-and-balances institutions, such as the judiciary, audit institutions, human rights commissions, etc. (horizontal accountability). This chain of accountability relationships ultimately ensures that the state is guided by the public interest.

Figure 3: Accountability System in Governance
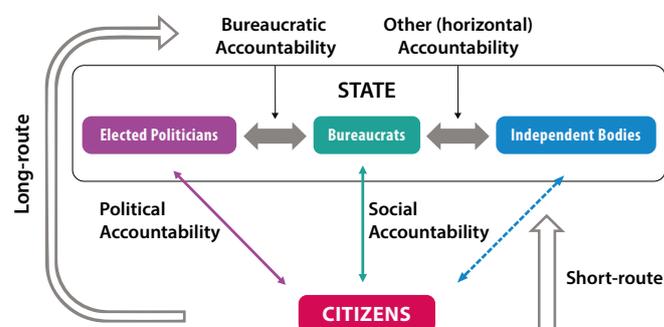
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60 World Bank, "World Development Report: Making Services Work for Poor People", 2003.

Annex II: Key factors of success and failure in citizen engagement[61]

Key Factors	Public Goods in China	PWI in the Philippines	PAPI in Viet Nam	Corruption in Indonesia	Decentralisation in Kyrgyzstan
Information alone is not sufficient			✔	✔	
Bottom-up initiative combined with top-down accountability		✔		✔	✔
Effective collective action and alliances	✔	✔	✔		✔
Involvement of state actors in initiative	✔	✔	✔	✔	
Use of reputational mechanism	✔				
Activation of horizontal accountability		✔	✔		
Integration with governance processes		✔		✔	✔
Inclusion of the poor/vulnerable	✔	✔			✔
Capacity building for participation		✔	✔	✔	✔
Elite capture				✔	✔
Organic grassroots initiative	✔	✔	✔		✔
Role of NGOs as intermediaries		✔	✔		✔
Political nature of initiative carefully examined	✔	✔	✔		

61 The cases where engagement was successful are marked in green, whereas the cases where it failed in red. The institutionalisation of PAPI is still work in progress, therefore in the table it is marked in blue (neutral). This assessment was made based on material available to the author. It is meant to illustrate a range of positive and negative outcomes of citizen engagement and does not constitute in any way an evaluation.

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