

COLLABORATIVE SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN FRAGILE SETTINGS: LESSONS FROM GUINEA, NIGER, AND TAJIKISTAN

Prepared by **Maria Poli, Saad Meknassi, Jeff Thindwa, Saki Kumagai, Maria Cavatore, and Ann-Sofie Jespersen**¹

The United Nations and World Bank jointly urge a shift away from managing crises toward prevention through inclusive and collective interventions (United Nations and World Bank 2018). Collaborative social accountability—a process where citizens and civil society actors engage with state actors in joint, iterative problem solving to improve service delivery, sector governance, and accountability—can make an important contribution to this goal. Citizen engagement,² and within that social accountability, can potentially help to strengthen the social contract and build state legitimacy. A consensus is emerging among scholars that state legitimacy is enhanced not by service delivery alone but by the opportunities the process provides for citizens to interact positively with the state (Grandvoinnet and Chasara 2019). Inclusive citizen engagement involving women, youth, and other traditionally excluded groups in decision-making is fundamental to sustaining peace. Formal and informal civil society organizations (CSOs) can play critical roles by representing citizen interests and preferences, enabling citizens to hold government to account, facilitating collaboration of citizens and state actors,³ and involving coalitions of stakeholders.

Supported by the State and Peacebuilding Fund (SPF), the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) piloted collaborative social accountability approaches that bring together citizens, CSOs, and the state actors in Guinea, Niger, and Tajikistan from September 2018 to December 2019 (see box 1). This note aims to capture the activities and lessons learned as a resource for World Bank operations teams.

DESIGN OF THE PILOTS

Drawing on the GPSA's experience in capacity building, adaptive and learning-by-doing approaches, and collaborative problem solving through multistakeholder coalitions, the pilots sought to learn how collaborative social accountability (see box 2) can help simultaneously address service delivery improvements while contributing to the mitigation of conflict and fragility risks as well as capacity building for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Pilot activities also assessed the potential of collaborative social accountability as an independent third-party monitoring mechanism for World Bank operations in countries affected by fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV).

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² The World Bank Group defines *citizen engagement* as "the two-way interaction between citizens and governments or the private sector within the scope of World Bank Group interventions ... that gives citizens a stake in decision-making with the objective of improving the intermediate and final development outcomes of the intervention" (World Bank Group 2014, 8).

³ The World Bank Group provided guidance on multi-stakeholder engagement (World Bank 2009) and included it as a special theme under "Governance and Institutions" in the 19th Replenishment of IDA (World Bank 2020).

Box 1. World Bank's Support to Civil Society Organizations on Social Accountability

Established in 2012 by the World Bank's Board of Directors, the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) promotes constructive engagement between governments and civil society by providing strategic support to civil society organizations in social accountability initiatives to meet specific development challenges and improving governance and service delivery. To date, 53 countries have opted in, and the GPSA has supported 42 grants in 27 countries. The GPSA has more than 300 global partners from civil society, foundations, governments, research institutions, academia, and the private sector that collaborate in advancing social accountability knowledge and learning. (www.gpsaknowledge.org).

Source: GPSA (2019).

Box 2. What Is Collaborative Social Accountability?

In its practice, the GPSA understands social accountability as a process that enables the inclusive participation and collective action of citizens and civil society organizations in public policy making and implementation so that state actors and service providers are responsive to citizens' needs and held accountable.

Social accountability is "collaborative" when civil society actors adopt nonconfrontational strategies aimed at collectively solving problems and delivering results. In this process, civil society organizations (CSOs) play important roles by facilitating citizen feedback to identify challenges and solutions, and by engaging with coalitions of diverse stakeholders, including otherwise excluded groups.

In practice, collaborative social accountability consists of iterative processes that invest purposively in creating new or strengthening existing cooperation "spaces." CSOs and public sector institutions with decision-making power and public management authority, at different levels across the institutional and service delivery chain, convene to analyze a

problem, identify citizen participation mechanisms to help solve it, and agree on joint actions to "co-produce" solutions and appropriate responses.

Sources: Poli and Guergovich (2020); Guergovich, Poli, and Fokkelman (2020).

Four GPSA opted-in countries—Guinea, Nepal, Niger, and Tajikistan—were identified for the pilots from the IDA18 Risk Mitigation Regime (RMR) portfolio, meaning they were not engaged in active conflicts but were categorized as non-FCV countries facing FCV risks. The GPSA developed a two-tier model for rolling out the pilots while tailoring the activities to the country contexts: stakeholder mapping and context diagnosis as well as capacity development for conflict prevention.

STAKEHOLDER MAPPING AND CONTEXT DIAGNOSIS

The GPSA developed a cross-cutting country scoping tool to enhance understanding of the key stakeholders and assess capacities and capacity gaps for collaborative social accountability. The methodology itself is designed to be collaborative in nature—by engaging both civil society and public sector stakeholders leading or part of relevant multistakeholder initiatives (see box 3).

This first phase combined rapid desk reviews with interviews and meetings with key stakeholders. The analysis allowed the GPSA to identify CSO partners and to structure country action plans for collaborative social accountability. CSOs were selected based on key criteria: (i) transparent and accountable internal governance; (ii) capacity to be a neutral agent; (iii) good reputation and credibility with government and civil society; (iv) ability to mediate government engagements with CSOs and citizens; (iv) knowledge and experience of social accountability practice and peacebuilding; and (v) knowledge and experience of social movements.

Box 3. Approach for Stakeholder Mapping and Context Diagnosis

The Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) developed a multicountry framework as a scoping tool for stakeholder mapping and context diagnosis. This allowed it to structure country action plans systematically as it identified entry points for collaborative social accountability within existing multistakeholder spaces while paying close attention to the specific needs and contexts of the pilot countries.

The assessment looked at (i) active key stakeholders in civil society, government, donors, private sector, and others, if any, and their involvement in conflict prevention and service delivery monitoring activities, including both formal and informal spaces of engagement; (ii) capacities for collaborative social accountability based on the GPSA's categorization, which includes willingness to engage with other stakeholders, negotiation and conflict resolution skills, and technical and organizational competences; and (iii) lessons from ongoing monitoring activities and funding sources.

The diagnostic identified entry points within existing multistakeholder spaces in priority sectors and themes as well as links with the World Bank's operations and pipelines. These informed the definition of country action plans which prioritized tailored capacity-building measures and learning-by-doing activities, rolled out in partnership with civil society organizations and governments.

Source: Poli and Guergovich (2020).

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION

The GPSA partnered with in-country CSOs to roll out locally led, hands-on capacity development processes and trainings as well as multistakeholder dialogues for formal and informal civil society groups, community and religious leaders, government officials, and other stakeholders on collaborative social accountability. Government counterparts supporting conflict prevention and service delivery monitoring initiatives, some supported through World Bank operations, were also engaged.

RESULTS

The pilots in three countries demonstrated that collaborative social accountability processes can help to link service delivery monitoring with conflict prevention and mitigation mechanisms. By linking actors that don't usually work together in a collaborative space and helping them "bridge" seemingly disconnected activities with a focus on common, overlapping goals, these processes can offer concrete channels for strengthening the "humanitarian-development-peace nexus."

Activities supported helped to map out overlaps and synergies across service delivery monitoring and conflict prevention and mitigation mechanisms, connected the actors leading their implementation, and fostered dynamic partnerships between them. In so far as the collaborative social accountability approach shifts the focus from predetermined citizen engagement or feedback gathering "tools" to context-tailored, problem-solving processes, local actors were able to reflect on their experiences and to adapt the approach to concrete capacity and implementation challenges.

Pilot activities also helped to inform the identified key risk areas from the Risk and Resilience Assessment in each country (see box 4). The SPF grant to GPSA was, in this respect, timely and well aligned with the prevention and mitigation of FCV risks.⁴

⁴ For more information, see the Social Accountability for Peace-Building Partnership website at <https://www.thegpsa.org/forum/peace-building-partnership>.

Box 4. Experience in Tajikistan and Niger and Their Contributions to the Risk and Resilience Assessment

Tajikistan. Pilot activities centered around inclusive, youth employment initiatives that addressed the key risks identified in the Risk and Resilience Assessment (RRA)—governance challenges, unemployment, youth bulge and cross-border conflict spillover risks. It created a multistakeholder platform to tackle youth economic exclusion in conflict-prone regions; engaged at-risk youth through local civil society organizations and businesses; used a government-led regional youth council to generate solutions to youth unemployment; and provided evidence-based feedback to the central government.

Niger. Pilot activities helped to build consensus for scaling up two collaborative social accountability mechanisms—participatory budgeting and citizen monitoring of public action—that show potential for contributing to grievance redress and improved local governance and service delivery, which are key conflict prevention determinants as identified in the RRA. Lessons from the pilot also indicate that the collaborative social accountability mechanisms were relevant to crisis prevention and could improve preparedness and response through tools such as early warning systems.

The pilots combined structured multistakeholder learning and action-oriented activities at regional and national levels for: (i) assessing skills and capacity gaps for cooperation across groups working in a new generation of early warning systems that were more comprehensive in defining risks, peace consolidation, and public service delivery monitoring; (ii) analyzing challenges and opportunities from conflict prevention and mitigation and service delivery monitoring mechanisms (e.g., in land, mining, electricity, water, and roads); and (iii) reviewing collaborative social accountability mechanisms and processes and identifying those with the most potential for achieving the two-fold objective of responding to serious service delivery failures and preventing

conflicts. This facilitated improved links between peace consolidation and service delivery actors, paving the way for more adaptive conflict and service delivery monitoring (see box 5).

Box 5. Multistakeholder Engagement in Guinea and Niger

The pilot created multiple opportunities for broad stakeholder dialogues, collaboration, and learning exchange.

Guinea. One of the focus areas was local governance and service delivery—building synergies with the activities of the World Bank’s Guinea Third Village Community Support Project. Based on the pilot’s experience, religious leaders, private sector union representatives, and the Ministries of Decentralization and Citizenship committed to create a platform for advancing state-civil society collaboration. The platform will aim to facilitate regular feedback to activate rapid responses and corrective measures by leveraging the positive results achieved by conflict prevention, peace consolidation, and service delivery monitoring initiatives.

Niger. SOS Civisme, the GPSA implementing partner, collaborated with the High Authority for Peace Consolidation (HACP)—regarded as the most important state institution for peace building—to integrate collaborative social accountability tools (identified through the pilot) into HACP’s risk assessment and needs identification mechanism.

LESSONS LEARNED

The pilots intended to inform an understanding of collaborative social accountability approaches and how they may contribute simultaneously to service delivery and conflict prevention. They offer six insights and lessons that may be useful to teams designing similar programs.

Collaborative social accountability can foster multistakeholder cooperation and joint actions in low-trust and fragile contexts, and the World Bank can

play a key brokering role. This step requires a careful assessment of potential entry points and partners as well as a realistic delineation of what the collaborative social accountability process can offer in highly complex situations. The pilots showed high demand for locally-driven “collaborative spaces,” where public sector institutions can engage with civil society actors in safe environments structured to build trust through concrete cooperative activities and in an incremental manner.

This type of interaction calls for iterative, continuous engagement processes involving governments, donors, private sector, and civil society. The World Bank can play an important role convening diverse groups for collaborative action and facilitating partnerships among the various state and nonstate actors who otherwise operate in silos in environments of distrust and fragmentation. Additionally, the World Bank often has garnered significant trust within the government and can broker CSO and government platforms.

Collaborative social accountability can produce more tangible and sustainable outcomes in peacebuilding and conflict mitigation if integrated into a country’s broader conflict prevention strategy, rather than operate as standalone, isolated interventions. The assessment revealed that important drivers of conflict were associated with the lack of transparency and inclusion in service delivery and access to resources (specifically, water, land, and revenue from extractives). Linking service delivery and the broader efforts for peace consolidation, therefore, was critical in areas where conflict was latent.

The collaborative social accountability process purposively links government and service provider response mechanisms with civil society-led monitoring mechanisms. Citizens’ mobilization has been met with limited state response as seen in Guinea, or at times repression as in Niger, causing frustration, undermining state legitimacy, and creating the risk of instability. Collaborative social accountability processes, in contrast, must meet certain basic conditions before moving to mobilize citizens or create participatory mechanisms. They are needed to outline a collaborative

space around initial (and periodically revisited) agreements for (i) information-sharing; (ii) commitments to provide human resources and other types of resources to the process (including giving political authority to subnational officials); and (iii) executing joint actions, including joint capacity building and coordination of follow-up actions to manage responses to issues encountered. The pilot assessments indicate that oftentimes the lack of motivation from government for inclusive decision-making is a result of a lack of know-how and a fear of being confronted, which can be mitigated when operating in safe “collaborative spaces” with civil society actors.

Inclusion of youth, women, and the private sector in coalitions engaged in collaborative social accountability should be a part of monitoring efforts for service delivery and peacebuilding.

The data collected from the pilots suggest that indifference to youth demands should be considered to risk resurgence of conflicts in communities, and that women were strongly motivated to engage in prevention and conflict resolution situations. Private sector actors, in contrast, were difficult to motivate unless there were clear benefits to them, e.g., in protecting their investments. The lack of consultation frameworks, or the intermittent functioning of those that exist, makes it difficult for private sector actors to learn about the “real problems” in their localities. In some cases, they resort to informal channels with local authorities leaving the local population and organized civil society groups out. Problem-driven, collaborative processes can incentivize private sector actors to get involved.

Working with CSOs in fragile contexts requires conflict sensitivity. When social accountability is used as a mediating tool in fractured societies, the choice of partners to work with—coupled with sound understanding of the local political economy—can determine the adoption or effectiveness of collaborative approaches. CSOs can be politically polarized, while political events such as elections and governance reforms can fuel conflict. This calls for conflict-sensitive approaches in scoping out CSO partners, for

example. The pilots included criteria such as political neutrality, legitimacy (from the public, communities, and constituencies), breadth of networks, and track record. It also calls for fit-for purpose, rather than one-size-fits-all, monitoring and oversight mechanisms.

The pilots validated previous GPSA findings that capacities for collaborative social accountability require both technical and behavioral competences and skills.

Trainings for CSOs alone are insufficient to meet this need. Capacity development must be approached as an iterative process that includes both civil society groups and public sector institutions (and the private sector, when relevant) in joint “learning-by-doing” opportunities. Stakeholders in the pilots underscored that in addition to the need for reinforced support on critical technical competences (e.g., budget and service delivery monitoring), more support was needed in fostering spaces of interaction between state and nonstate actors guided by clear terms of collaboration. This type of “practice” must be geared toward specific problem solving that has a chance to address service delivery failures and even conflicts.

CONCLUSION

While collaborative social accountability may not be the panacea in conflict prevention, the three pilots provide a useful foundation for approaches that harness multistakeholder dialogues and collaboration, linkages of service delivery and peace actors, stakeholder monitoring of public services, and inclusion of youth, women, and other traditionally excluded actors. The GPSA’s collaborative social accountability approach requires flexibility and adaptation to context, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, and a capacity to iterate implementation models. This approach can help to support scaling of these models through World Bank operations, RMRs, and broader World Bank country strategies and programmatic approaches to citizen engagement in fragile settings.

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