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Social accountability and water integrity: Learning from experiences with participatory and transparent budgeting in Ethiopia and Nepal

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Experiences with social accountability measures in water management schemes in Nepal and Ethiopia offer useful lessons for practitioners. Participation and transparency in budgeting measures open up new spaces for deliberation, raise awareness of rights, and encourage calling service providers to account. Donors should recognise and appreciate this development of deliberative capacities and trust building as a worthwhile goal in itself. It is also an important precondition for strengthening the links between transparency, accountability, participation, and anti-corruption.

Main points

- Consolidate the links between transparency, accountability, participation and anti-corruption (TAPA) to improve water integrity. One cannot take a direct and effective relationship between TAPA for granted. It is necessary to continuously examine and consolidate the links between these principles in order to make them effective.
- Appreciate deliberative capital and trust building as major outcomes. Even if they are not easy to measure, building deliberative capital (the capacity to become an outspoken critic) and trust building are important outcomes of social accountability programmes. They are preconditions for devolving power from funding agencies and governments to communities so that the communities can become critics, watchdogs, and equal partners.
- Promoting a social accountability culture creates and requires new roles, relationships, and responsibilities between all stakeholders – this takes time! Local interpretations of accountability do not always match textbook approaches, but they can often be functional in their own way. Thus, a learning approach to local people's expectations of justice and accountability is important to define which tools are the most appropriate.

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Researching social accountability mechanisms in the water sector

Weak governance systems, poor incentives, mismanagement, and corruption undermine efficient service delivery in the water sector. The UNDP Water Governance Facility states that up to half of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) projects fail to remain successful for a prolonged period of time, leading to an overall loss of investment between US\$ 1.2 and US\$ 1.5 billion over the last 20 years.¹

One response to these challenges has been the proliferation of social accountability (SAcc) mechanisms in the water sector. Such programmes engage citizens by providing appropriate tools and capacities to hold service providers and other water-related institutions accountable in order to make water services more efficient and their distribution more just. By building an architecture that allows for more transparency, accountability, and participation in water provision, these mechanisms also entail the promise of building an ‘integrity wall’ to reduce corruption risks.²

The existing literature on SAcc in the water sector provides little insight regarding the success of such interventions. Only a few studies explicitly address SAcc mechanisms in the water sector and even fewer focus on the impact of SAcc mechanisms on improving integrity.³ Generally, those studies highlight that SAcc interventions are successful in raising awareness and citizens’ demand for better services and accountability. However, state responsiveness remains slow, and it is not clear whether such interventions have a direct impact on service improvement. Such observations align with Fox’s argument that SAcc mechanisms often address the symptoms of accountability failures rather than focusing on their causes and institutional change.⁴

The literature illustrates that the relationship between transparency, citizen action, and accountability on the one hand and effective government response on the other is not straightforward. As Guillan, et al.⁵ point out, transparency and information do not necessarily lead to participation and action, and action does not necessarily lead to

1. The UNDP Water Governance Facility/ UNICEF 2015: 6.

2. WIGO 2016.

3. Eg Hepworth 2016; Butterworth and Potter 2014; UNDP 2011: 27; WaterAid 2010: 18; WEDC 2007.

4. Fox 2016.

5. Guillan, et al. 2016.

response.⁶ Thus, scholars have called for more ‘nuanced approaches’⁷ to understand what makes social accountability mechanisms successful and to gauge their long-term and unanticipated effects.⁸

One prominent and thoroughly studied example of a successful SAcc mechanism is participatory and transparent budgeting (PTB).⁹ Fox shows that participatory budgeting initiatives in Brazil, Mexico, and India have had positive effects on reducing infant mortality, increasing basic service coverage, and improving targeting.¹⁰ While these examples refer to health, education, and employment programmes, there is less information on PTB mechanisms in the water sector. The present study aims to fill this gap. It focuses on PTB as a SAcc mechanism in Nepal and Ethiopia to analyse its effects on improving water integrity and service delivery. The PTB interventions analysed addressed the planning and monitoring processes of the construction of a water scheme in a small rural or peri-urban community. While the focus is on local level initiatives, these projects were integrated into larger national programmes.

The study analyses both cases using the concept of the Integrity Wall, developed by the Water Integrity Network, as a tool to explore how these PTB mechanisms foster water integrity. Water integrity is a term that broadly refers to *decision-making that is fair and inclusive, honest and transparent, accountable and free of corruption*.¹¹ More specifically, an assessment of water integrity involves an evaluation of the role and strength of transparency, accountability, participation, and anti-corruption (TAPA). Thus, the aim of this study is to analyse the two qualitative case studies of social accountability measures from Nepal and Ethiopia with the TAPA framework to understand how these mechanisms improve water integrity. After introducing the rationale, literature, and methodology of this project, the study initially presents the results of the two individual case studies of social accountability initiatives in light of their outcomes and challenges, and subsequently discusses the findings in relation to their impact on water integrity.

6. Guillan, Halloran, Lavin 2016; Fox 2016.

7. McGee and Gaventa 2010.

8. Fox 2016; DFID 2015.

9. USAID 2005.

10. Fox 2014: 22.

11. Water Integrity Network, Delft Declaration 2013.

Background, rationale and methodology

The broader picture: social accountability and the water sector

In development cooperation, the concept of social accountability (SAcc) has gained momentum since the early 2000s in relation to various tools and mechanisms that aim to engage citizens in order to reduce corruption and improve services. The notion of SAcc emerged as a result of dissatisfaction with the dysfunction of formal accountability procedures such as voting and auditing. It was also due to the increasing recognition of the importance of strengthening the interaction between citizens and state in order to improve the effectiveness of service provision.¹²

The 2004 World Development Report highlighted the importance of a ‘short route’ to accountability, namely by reducing information asymmetries between clients and service providers through citizen participation and access to information.¹³ Such ‘client power’ aimed to complement the existing ‘long route’ to accountability of improving services via policy makers and state institutions. However, rights-based approaches have moved the concept beyond an ‘instrumental’ focus on users as clients. To date, the World Bank defines social accountability as the ‘extent and capability of citizens to hold the state accountable and make it responsive to their needs’.¹⁴ This definition addresses both the demand side, that is, mobilising citizens to claim better services, and the supply side, which refers to improving state responsiveness by establishing mechanisms that allow for (formal) inquiry, feedback, and dialogue. Researchers have enriched this framework for understanding accountability by distinguishing between horizontal, vertical, and diagonal forms of accountability. These latter two forms address the political accountability relations between citizens and their elected representatives as well as more hybrid forms of accountability in which citizens get directly involved within state institutions.

Fox¹⁵ points out that while these frameworks are valuable in understanding the various forms of (social) accountability, they are limited in their capacity as analytical tools. To understand whether SAcc actually works, the different approaches need to be disentangled and addressed individually so that we can compare and assess them. Only then can we answer whether ‘informed citizen engagement can improve the public

12. Joshi and Houtzager 2010; World Bank 2012.

13. WDR 2004.

14. World Bank in Aslam et al 2015.

15. Fox 2015.

sector's performance'.¹⁶ For example, Baez-Camargo and Jacobs¹⁷ identify the core elements of SAcc as voice (here, meaning capacity building, participation, transmission of information), enforcement, and answerability. Such an approach helps to highlight the interrelation between users, policy makers, and service providers. Moreover, Grandvoinet et al.¹⁸ distinguish SAcc mechanisms based on the types of actors (individual vs. collective) and strategies (confrontational vs. collaborative) involved. Here, grievance mechanisms or citizen report cards target individuals and aggregate individual data, whereas social audits and community scorecards are based on collective action. Whereas the latter is collaborative and involves working jointly with service providers, social audits are more confrontational as they aim to directly address actors' wrongdoings.¹⁹

Other important elements that are necessary to unpack include the different needs and forms of social accountability required for each phase of service delivery (planning and design, financing, procurement, construction, and operation) and the distinction between tactical (local, one-off) and strategic (more integrated) approaches.²⁰ In order to identify the different forms of social accountability one must determine whether the SAcc mechanism has been introduced by an external actor such as a development agency, or whether it emerged out of the local civil society as a social movement²¹; whether it is based on formal or informal and direct or indirect inquiry (U4 Practice Insight forthcoming); whether it draws on a particular legal context such as participatory budgeting in Brazil,²² and whether the initiatives target state and/or other non-state actors.²³

The table below shows examples of various SAcc mechanisms.

Table 1. Overview of social accountability tools

Tool	Core features	Further info
User complaint mechanism	Enables individuals and user groups to raise complaints, should be combined with redress mechanism.	Implementing robust consumer voice mechanisms

16. Fox 2015: 348.

17. Baez-Camargo and Jacobs 2011.

18. Grandvoinet et al. 2014.

19. Grandvoinet et al 2014.

20. Fox 2015; see also Adank, van Koppen, and Smits 2012.

21. Gaventa and Barrett 2010; Overy 2013.

22. Cornwall and Shankland 2008.

23. Bohórquez/ Etxaniz 2014.

Tool	Core features	Further info
Establishment and empowerment of water user groups	User groups with a legal role and status can raise demands to the service provider or regulator.	Consumer engagement guideline Water watch groups
Social audit	Participatory examination of the impact or performance of a programme or service provider.	A practical guide to social audit as a participatory tool to strengthen democratic governance, transparency, and accountability
Community score cards	Systematic feedback on a service between mobilised citizens and WSPs or local governments.	The community score card (CSC): a generic guide for implementing CARE's CSC process to improve quality of services
Citizen report cards	Household surveys for user feedback. Can be combined with public debates or advocacy campaigns on findings.	Citizen report card learning toolkit: improving local governance and pro-poor service delivery
Public hearing	Dialogue between government bodies or service providers and citizens.	World Bank Social Accountability Sourcebook
Participatory budgeting	Citizens participate in local budget decisions, either deciding over an earmarked portion of the budget or giving recommendations.	Civil society/user engagement and participation
Budget monitoring	Monitoring budget allocation and execution. Often combined with advocacy.	Our money, our responsibility: a citizens' guide to monitoring government expenditures
Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS)	Quantitative exercises tracing the flow of resources from origin to destination.	Public expenditure tracking survey (PETS)
Community monitoring of procurement and infrastructure development	Civil society following procurement processes and raising red flags, physically checking infrastructure development.	Civil society procurement monitoring tool Getting to the heart of the community: local procurement monitoring in Mongolia

SAcc mechanisms have produced 'mixed results'

The general rationale underlying most SAcc mechanisms is that enhancing transparency will lead to (improved) participation, which in turn will lead to accountability and government response (answerability and enforceability). Yet, while there are many

individual success stories of SAcc mechanisms,²⁴ meta-studies evaluating a large number of projects have drawn attention to the difficulty of measuring results. In general, such studies found that SAcc mechanisms seem to be marked by their diverging outcomes or ‘mixed results’.²⁵

Such reviews suggest that evidence of accountability outcomes are not straightforward and are at best modest, suggesting that much of the evidence is superficial and remains limited in scope.²⁶ Fox suggests that many SAcc mechanisms only address the symptoms of accountability failures rather than focusing on causes and institutional change.²⁷ He laments that researchers often too easily assume a direct relationship between transparency, citizen action, accountability, and government response, while they take for granted (and never articulate well nor analyse) links to anti-corruption and democratisation agendas.²⁸ As Guillan and others point out, information does not necessarily lead to action, and action does not necessarily lead to response.²⁹ Moreover, Fox distinguishes between tactical SAcc approaches that ‘are bounded, localised, and information-led’ and strategic SAcc approaches that ‘bolster enabling environments for collective action, scale up citizen engagement beyond the local arena and attempt to bolster governmental capacity to respond to voice’.³⁰ Thus, Fox calls for ‘vertical integration’ of SAcc interventions, meaning that social accountability action has to be interlinked and coordinated across various local, sub-national, national, and transnational scales. Vertical integration of this sort addresses power imbalances more effectively, as it generally strengthens the coordinated, independent oversight of public sector actors at all levels.³¹

The impact of social accountability on reducing corruption is generally not the main focus of such studies, even though a DFID report states, ‘evidence does indicate overall that social accountability mechanisms can have an impact on levels of corruption,’ depending on the mechanisms used and the context within which they are implemented.³²

24. A few examples are public expenditure tracking surveys to reduce leakages in delivery of service sector budgets in Uganda (Björkman and Svensson 2009), citizen report cards or community scorecards in India (Ravindra 2004), social audits in India (Singh and Vutukuru 2010).

25. Rocha Menocal and Sharma 2008; McGee and Gaventa 2010; Booth 2011; Fox 2015.

26. McGee and Gaventa 2010; Fox and Acheron 2016.

27. Fox 2016.

28. Fox and Acheron 2016: 2.

29. Guillan, Halloran, Lavin 2016; Fox 2015.

30. Fox 2015: 356.

31. Fox 2016.

32. DFID 2015: 70.

Based on such conclusions, more recent works have turned to developing context assessment frameworks that help to make the ‘right fit’.³³ Generally, authors agree that there is need for more ‘nuanced approaches’³⁴ that draw out the relationship between SAcc mechanisms and better services, including reduced levels of corruption and increased integrity, rather than assuming a direct link. Moreover, further studies should focus on the long-term and unanticipated effects of SAcc mechanisms³⁵ as well as the extent to which broader institutional reforms integrate SAcc mechanisms.³⁶

Enhancing social accountability in the water sector

The water sector is particularly prone to weak governance systems and corruption, given that the number and complex structure of stakeholders involved, the scale of its operations, and the low level of knowledge amongst citizens create manifold opportunities for corrupt behaviour. The UNDP Water Governance Facility, for example, states that up to half of water, sanitation, and hygiene projects (WASH) fail to remain successful for a prolonged period of time, leading to an overall loss of investment between US\$ 1.2 and US\$ 1.5 billion in the last 20 years.³⁷

A number of water sector organisations have deployed social accountability mechanisms to address such losses by strengthening state-citizen relations.³⁸ These tools promise to establish an extra set of checks and balances to compensate for monopolistic market structures or governmental shortcomings. However, with few exceptions, there are no comprehensive studies to provide evidence for the success of such initiatives. The 2007 WEDC synthesis report assessed a large number of accountability initiatives and comes to the result that the mechanism created greater public awareness about corruption and increased citizen satisfaction with service delivery overall. However, the study also finds that relatively few social accountability mechanisms were directly focused on the poor, and the ones that were often required a certain level of education and literacy.³⁹

Underlining these findings, other studies also show increased citizen awareness and increased demands through social accountability mechanisms. However, state

33. Baez-Camargo 2015.

34. McGee and Gaventa 2010.

35. Joshi and Houtzager 2012.

36. Fox 2014; DFID 2015.

37. The UNDP Water Governance Facility/ UNICEF 2015: 6.

38. NGOs such as Water Witness International, HELVETAS, WaterAid, or Oxfam; development organizations, such as the Water and Sanitation Program Africa and UNDP, and CSOs such as the Social Justice Coalition in Cape Town, South Africa.

39. WEDC 2007; see also UNDP 2011: 27.

responsiveness and direct impact in terms of service improvement often remain slow and/or remain understudied. This highlights the need to better integrate SAcc mechanisms into broader water sector reform programmes.⁴⁰

Based on a study of experiences from various water sector organisations, Hepworth concludes that changes driven by water sector social accountability initiatives are linked to increased knowledge, greater capability, new state-citizen interaction, improved advocacy, enhanced dialogue, material improvements, system/policy change, building of trust and legitimacy, outward learning, and uptake.⁴¹ These various and diverse outcomes that this review collects suggest that more studies are needed to show in-depth how and when various mechanisms are linked to particular outcomes.

“SAcc mechanisms require a favourable context and should be designed to help to create this favourable context through institutional reforms.”

In sum, these studies reiterate that firstly, SAcc mechanisms require a favourable context (legal-political and community) and should be designed to help to create this favourable context through institutional reforms. Otherwise they face the risk of (re)creating unequal power relationships or even creating new opportunities for corruption (eg ‘tokenistic or ‘captured’ forms of participation). Secondly, SAcc initiatives in the water sector create citizen awareness and demand. However, the extent to which the respective institutions meet these demands has not been studied systematically. Lastly, in all of the aforementioned studies, it remains unclear just how much of a direct effect SAcc mechanisms have on reducing corruption. This raises the question *how* concrete social accountability mechanisms have been effective in increasing integrity in the water sector and *what* exactly the contextual conditions for its success have been when it has been effective.

Zooming in: Participatory and transparent budgeting as a means to improve social accountability

Engaging citizens in budgeting processes

For the purpose of this multiple case study, this report focuses on one particular mechanism, namely participatory and transparent budgeting (PTB), to analyse its effect on social accountability and improved integrity in the water sector. PTB is a prominent

40. WaterAid 2010: 18; see also Butterworth and Potter 2014; see also Fox 2014.

41. Hepworth 2016: 11.

and well-studied example of successful SAcc mechanisms.⁴² To enhance the democratic process locally, PTBs aim to engage ordinary users in budgeting processes by giving them the opportunity to decide how local resources should be spent and/or to monitor such expenditures.⁴³ By making local budgets transparent and letting users participate in decision-making processes, the aim is to make local government more effective and predictable, enhancing the use of public funds and providing fewer opportunities for corruption, social exclusion, and clientelism. Moreover, increased transparency about public expenditures is also associated with increased trust in the functionality of public institutions.⁴⁴

In some cases PTB projects have improved fiscal collections, reduced tax arrears and have also increased citizens' commitment to infrastructure works.⁴⁵ & ⁴⁶ The extent to which such participatory and transparency budgeting mechanisms disrupt local control of powerful actors over budgeting remains contested, however. Many studies point to the risk of elite capture of PTB when the mechanism does not challenge, but instead reinforces, the culture of local government officials that dominates the budgeting process.⁴⁷ For PTB to thrive, it is necessary that a sufficient budget to fund service delivery projects is in place, that there is a supportive political environment, and that there is a pro-active civil society with mayoral support.⁴⁸

PTB in the water sector

While many PTB examples refer to health, education and employment programmes,⁴⁹ there is less information on PTB mechanisms in the water sector. The Water Integrity Outlook 2016 states, 'institutional fragmentation and complex funding arrangements make the water sector particularly vulnerable to financial inefficiencies, mismanagement and corruption'.⁵⁰ Corruption and misappropriation of funds may appear in the form of inflated budgets, ghost contracts, double-counting, kickbacks and bribes, etc. Addressing such circumstances and following existing developments in the

42. USAID 2005.

43. Marumahoko 2018.

44. Wampler 2012: 21.

45. Cabannes and Lipietz 2017: 76.

46. The origins of the concept trace back to the Municipality of Porto Alegre that, initiated by the Workers Party, introduced participatory budgeting to equalize public spending between rich and poor neighbourhoods and to fight clientelism and corruption (Goldfrank 2012: 99). PTB has since been reproduced in more than 3000 variations across 40 countries, mostly in Latin America (Cabannes and Lipietz 2017: 67). Critics of the wide spread of PTB in development aid argue that in many contexts PTB is disconnected from social movements and therefore not strong enough to ensure administrative reform (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2014: 198)

47. Marumahoko et al 2018: 203; Acheron 2019: 13.

48. Wampler 2012: 21.

49. Fox 2014: 22; Cabannes and Lipietz 2017.

50. WIGO 2016.

health and education sectors, there is increasing recognition that transparent and accountable allocation and management of funds is key to financing and improving water services.⁵¹ For a long time, financing discussions in the water sector focused on revenues from water tariffs to cover recurrent costs and (pooled) donor funding for investments. More recently, initiatives such as Sanitation and Water for All and Public Finance for WASH have increased efforts to attract and absorb more funding from national and local government budgets and to strengthen civil society's role in monitoring these government commitments and expenditures (eg WASHCost or wash watch).

Such public budgeting procedures⁵² enable citizens to participate in local finance decisions, such as deciding over an earmarked portion of the budget or giving recommendations (participatory budgeting), to raise complaints or verify accounts (budget monitoring) or to execute quantitative exercises tracing the flow of resources from origin to destination (public expenditure tracking survey). Ideally, these approaches establish an on-going dialogue between community, governments, and service providers with the effect of building trust, capacity, confidence, and greater integrity on both sides. A few water sector case studies have shown mixed effects, however. Beall et al⁵³ suggest a positive link between participatory mechanisms and water provision, yet these studies do not only refer to budgeting processes. A case study from Peru that analyses the link from PTB to coverage and water service quality indicators finds no statistically significant relationship between PTB and measures of coverage and service continuity, even though in this case, PTB is backed by a constitutional norm, and it is mandatory at all sub-national governments levels.⁵⁴ Moreover, it shows that PB in the water sector may also lead to inequitable outcomes, as the poor have greater costs of participation.⁵⁵

Research question

As mentioned earlier, PTB is one of the few areas where there is evidence of the positive impact of SAcc in specific sectors (eg health, education).⁵⁶ However, evidence and systematic studies within the water sector is scarce. Hence, to address this gap, the

51. WIGO 2016.

52. For example, Water Aid has extensive experiences with participatory budgeting in various countries. Other examples include Budget Formulation in Porto Alegre, Brazil; Budget Review and Analysis in Gujarat, India; Expenditure Tracking, Uganda; Performance Monitoring and Citizen Scorecards in India and Philippines (see World Bank Institute).

53. Beall et al 2011.

54. Jaramillo and Alcazar 2013: 9.

55. Jaramillo and Alcazar 2013: 9.

56. Cornwall and Shankland 2008; USAID, 2005.

present study analyses SAcc mechanisms in two country contexts that have introduced and implemented variations of PTB. With this focus, we raise the question:

How do participatory and transparent budgeting mechanisms contribute to increased integrity in the water sector and under which conditions do they do so?

This question encompasses the following sub-questions:

- How do the similar PTB initiatives implemented in different contexts differ in terms of implementing agency, approach, process, and outcome (in regard to service delivery, sound financial management, and integrity)?
- What outcomes, enablers, and challenges in relation to establishing water integrity can be observed, and how do they differ across various country contexts?

The Integrity Wall as a research tool

The underlying assumption of legal and economic definitions of corruption – that is, the abuse of public power for private gain⁵⁷ – presupposes a strong distinction between the public and private spheres, suggesting that those spheres can be easily defined and delineated from one another, for instance, the distinction between public office holders and the beneficiaries of public services. In this conception, public processes and public administration ideally follow clear and formal processes, guidelines, rules, roles and positions, a violation of which has detrimental effects on the provision of public goods. While such legal and economic definitions of corruption provide a good understanding of how the practice disturbs, challenges, and distorts formal legal, public, and administrative processes, those concepts are less appropriate in communities where informal arrangements co-exist, overlap, and interact with formal settings.

To circumvent these analytical challenges, this study focuses on the extent to which water integrity as an affirmative notion can be established through indicators of transparency, accountability, participation, and anti-corruption. In this context, we follow the Water Integrity Network's (WIN) definition of water integrity as based in a form of 'decision-making that is fair and inclusive, honest and transparent, accountable and free of corruption'.⁵⁸ WIN provides four indicators of governance principles to effect an improvement in water integrity: transparency, accountability, participation, and a clear stance against corruption. These four principles (TAPA) are understood as

57. World Bank 1997: 8

58. Water Integrity Network, Delft Declaration 2013.

integrity enablers that lead to reduced instances of corruption, promoting respect for the rule of law, triggering responsiveness, and ultimately leading to improved services in the water sector.⁵⁹ The outcome of the analysis allows analysts, policy makers and other practitioners to check how ‘waterproof’ their actions and policies are, and to strengthen enforcement mechanisms with a clear focus on those who are affected most strongly – the poor and marginalised.

Figure 1. The Integrity Wall



TAPA in participatory and transparent budgeting processes

Transparency

Transparency as an indicator for water integrity refers to an open flow of information. As applied to participatory and transparent budgeting, transparency requires that accounts, intentions, projects, and steps of the budget cycle are openly published, accessible, timely, and reliable. This also requires that the corresponding roles and responsibilities, including rights and obligations, be clear, understandable, and comprehensible for all stakeholders.⁶⁰ The key is that information is delivered in an accessible format and with understandable language so that it allows citizens to engage with it.

Accountability

Accountability is the process of holding actors responsible for their actions. To make accountability effective in PTB means that the lines of accountability must be not only

59. WIGO 2016: 34-35.

60. Alt and Dreyer-Larsson 2006; Kopits and Craig 1998.

clear and transparent, but also functional. This means that roles and responsibilities of involved actors are clear and comprehensible⁶¹ and that mechanisms are in place which enable decision makers to respond to citizens. Furthermore those decision makers not only have to be willing, but also must possess the skills, capacity, and resources to respond, and, perhaps most importantly, it must be the case that they can be made liable in case of non-action.⁶² With respect to PTB, this raises questions about whether lines of responsibility in governance and funding systems are clear, whether budgets and plans are made public, whether it is relevant to improve water justice for all stakeholders, how large and important the budget under review is, etc.

Participation

Participation is a crucial factor in promoting water integrity. As previous experiences from other sectors have shown, all PTB processes face the risk of addressing only a selected group or particular members of the targeted community. The ability to familiarise oneself with budgeting issues requires a level of education that often only the wealthier sections of the population have achieved. The mechanism thus faces the risk that the process ends up captured by local political elites that use it to advance their personal interests, thereby reinforcing existing inequities with regard to less powerful groups.⁶³ Issues surrounding participation raise questions about who participates and why, how marginalised people are included in the process, the gender balance of the participants, and the degree to which capacity-building mechanisms are in place to ensure effective participation.

Anti-corruption

A clear stance against corruption must strengthen regulators and law enforcement systems and provide opportunities to speak out against corruption and build platforms to discuss integrity. In regard to PTB this raises questions about how the government legislates the PTB mechanism and integrates it as part of larger governance/government programmes, the extent to which the mechanism addresses corruption directly, whether complaint mechanisms are clear and accessible, and whether there are penalties in place for abuses and protection for whistle-blowers.

61. Mulgan 2006.

62. eg Shah 2007.

63. McNulty 2016; Holdo 2015; Baiocchi and Ganuza 2014; Shah 2007.

Analytical framework

The four TAPA principles provide a framework for understanding and assessing the experiences observed in the two case studies of this report. For this purpose, we describe each case along three research dimensions:

- **Outcomes**

The various ways in which the mechanism is operationalised and how successful it is in relation to its own goals.

- **Enablers**

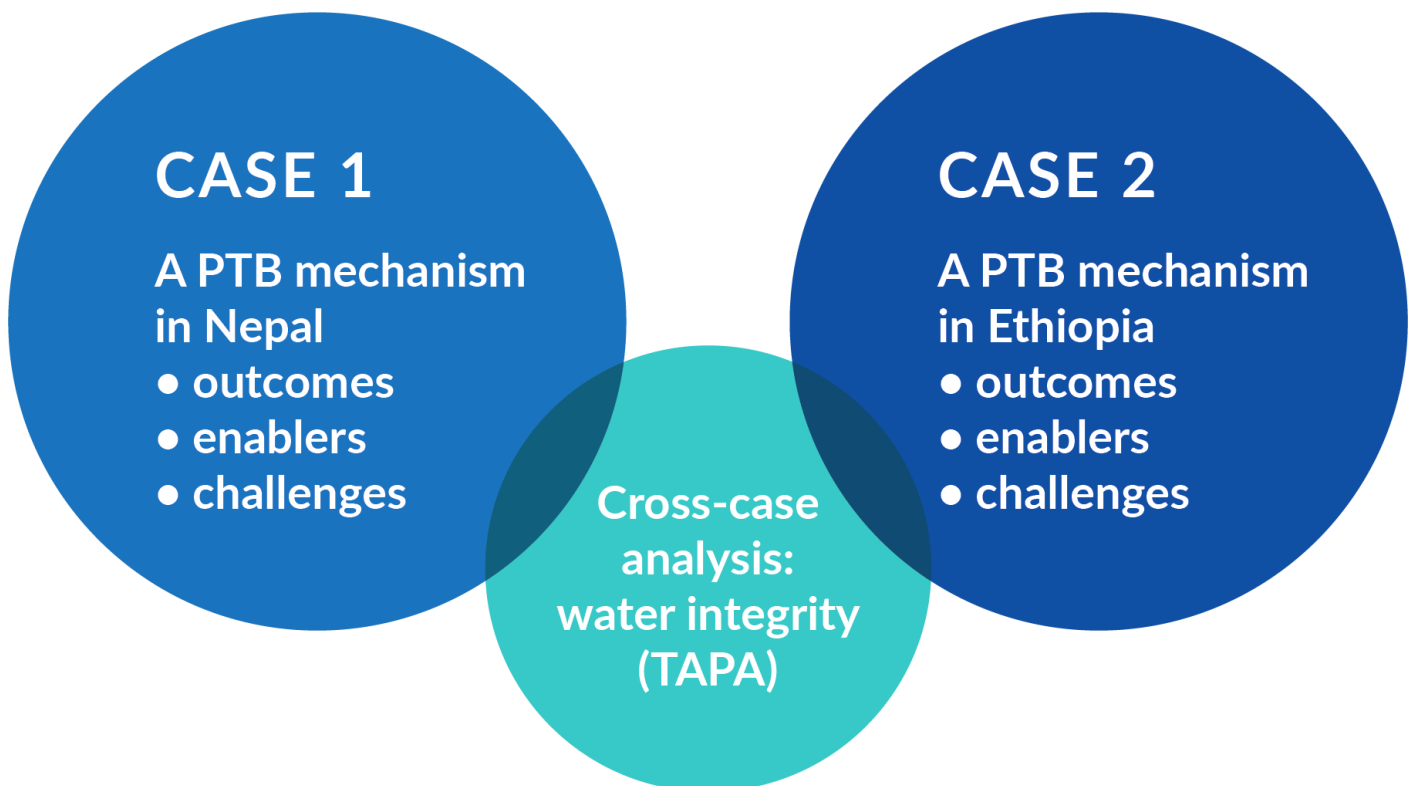
The contextual and contingent factors that contribute to the outcomes of the mechanism.

- **Challenges**

The unforeseen consequences that have an impact beyond the framing of the particular mechanism.

These dimensions serve as a basis for the cross-case analysis that focuses on the four TAPA principles.

Figure 2: Cross-case analysis



Case selection and data collection

The present report is based on a *case study analysis* with qualitative methods, namely interviews and observations.⁶⁴ This report is based on two individual studies, each of which is based on a heuristic analysis of two particular PTB mechanisms two different countries. Each case study draws out how the particular PTB mechanism works, what outcomes it produces, what its enablers are, and what challenges it faces. In a second step, a cross-case study analysis juxtaposes these two individual studies along the integrity-TAPA principles of the research framework.

Case selection

The case studies were carefully selected based on the SAcc mechanism that each employs, their similarities, as well as research access to the field. After a literature review on social accountability mechanisms in general and examples from the water sector in particular, as well as interviews with selected experts from WIN's and U4's networks, we compiled a list of SAcc cases in the water sector. We ordered and assessed them based on a number of selection criteria drawn from our research questions. The criteria included: social accountability mechanism (similarity in form of engagement and how directly it addresses corruption and integrity issues); sector (rural and peri-urban, WASH and livestock/ irrigation or multi-purpose); key accountability problems identified by implementing actor; duration of initiative (completed/ongoing); outcome (as presented by the initiative); legal/political context (level of democratisation/political will, enabling legal frameworks, etc); focus on the poor/marginalised; availability of existing studies; possible existence of baseline data; feasibility of the mechanism; and access to the field (for research/study of the mechanism in action).

After sampling and discussing three possible research projects, the research coordination team decided on a scenario that includes two cases from two very different countries, but which nonetheless share the same phenomena. The two cases present a PTB intervention in Nepal and Ethiopia. In both these cases, PTB interventions address the planning and monitoring processes of the construction of a water scheme in a small rural or peri-urban community. Thus, the PTB mechanism in these case studies refers to oversight of investment expenditures in small water scheme projects. While the focus is on local-level initiatives, these projects are integrated into larger national programmes.

The case studies therefore focus on two *similar* SAcc interventions (here: participatory and transparent budgeting) in a relevantly *similar* sector (WSS and irrigation / livestock

64. Santos and Eisenhardt 2004; Yin 2003.

in rural and peri-urban areas) in *different* country contexts (Ethiopia, Nepal). Each case had a pro-poor and pro-vulnerable population focus.

The Nepal case focuses on two communities that followed a three-step participatory budgeting process (public review, public hearing, and public audit) for the development of a water scheme as part of the nationwide WUMP programme coordinated by the Swiss development NGO Helvetas. The case represents a setting in which the PTB mechanism operates as a long-term project by an international development organisation implemented by local NGOs, and in which government authorities play a limited role, mostly due to a lack of elected officials in this particular context.

The Ethiopian case, on the other hand, focuses on two communities that implemented a budget monitoring strategy for water scheme development as part of the so-called Community Managed Project Approach (CMP). Even though this programme is not directly related to the nationwide Ethiopian Social Accountability Programme (ESAP-2) launched by the Ethiopian government in 2012 to strengthen citizen action in service provision, the case is interesting as it operates in an environment that formally endorses social accountability.

Data gathering and research teams

The present approach takes as a starting point, the viewpoint of members of the observed community and relates them to the aforementioned principles of water integrity. Two different research teams separately gathered data for the individual cases. To ensure a coherent framework for both cases, we translated the three research dimensions and the TAPA principles into a comprehensive research protocol. Throughout the data collection process, the observations and findings were shared with the research coordinator and the other participating researchers to refine the questions and support the analysis.

The research teams gathered data via desk research of relevant documents of each case and via semi-structured interviews with the actors engaged in the SAcc mechanisms (local government officials, service providers, CSOs, and water user organisations). In addition, the researchers conducted focus group discussions, engaged in participatory observation of selected events, and collected stories (about corruption) from the participants and from other publications (radio reports, newspaper reports, etc). The researchers aimed to draw out the specific problems and issues the particular community encountered when aiming to build water integrity. This also required a general awareness of how these practices and their meanings change or have changed over time.

Both research teams provided a report that presents their case along the research dimensions (outcomes, enablers, and challenges) followed by a cross-case analysis based on the TAPA principles that focuses on the mechanism's impact on water integrity.

Findings: The impact of participatory budgeting for the water sector in Nepal and Ethiopia

CASE 1: Nepal—Public hearing, public review, and public audit in two communities

Helvetas' Water Resources Management Program (WARM-P) in Nepal

Nepal has set ambitious goals and targets on drinking water and sanitation, both in its sector development plan and its commitment to the attainment of sustainable development goals (SDGs). Given that Nepal holds one of the lowest rankings on the Corruption Perception Index—130th amongst 168 countries⁶⁵—those water sector investments are vulnerable to illegitimate loss. But efforts are underway to improve governance and curbing corruption. An example is the development of the Nepal's Water Supply, Hygiene and Sanitation Sector Development Plan (WASH SDP),⁶⁶ which acknowledges the importance of good governance and water integrity in the effectiveness of water projects and service provision.⁶⁷ Several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and development organisations have used SAcc mechanisms in their intervention in the water sector.⁶⁸ The tools most commonly used are public hearings and public audits. Community scorecards and community feedback and accountability mechanisms are additional tools WaterAid employs in partnership with the Federation of Water Supply and Sanitation Users Nepal (FEDWASUN).

In this context, Helvetas – a Swiss NGO – initiated WARM-P in Nepal in 2001. The programme aims at supporting improved planning, co-ordination, and partnership to create a fair and equitable environment for communal water resource management. WARM-P is implemented in the Dailekh, Jajarkot, and Kalikot districts in the Mid-

65. TI 2015.

66. 2016–2030.

67. MoWSS 2016.

68. eg CECI & PRAN 2013; Helvetas 2004, 2014; SAP-Nepal 2015; WaterAid 2010.

Western region and Achham in the Far-Western region of Nepal, regions characterised by the highest concentration of poverty in Nepal.⁶⁹ WARM-P introduced participatory and integrated water resource planning at the lowest administrative unit level, the village development committee (VDC).⁷⁰ The planning process involves several stakeholders (local people from different social groups, local government, and politicians) in the VDC to prioritise water resource development based on water availability, current uses, and future needs.⁷¹ The process leads to the development of a Water Use Master Plan (WUMP). Once the WUMP is completed, Helvetas funds the construction of a few of the prioritised schemes in each VDC area under WARM-P. The selection of the scheme is based on the WUMP priority setting, but also depends upon the cost of each scheme and budget available under WARM-P, as well as the financial capacity of the local government, which must contribute a share of the budget (water users have to contribute with both unpaid and paid labour for the construction work). Once the four main parties (Helvetas, local partner NGO, user committee, and VDC) have approved the design of a particular scheme, the participatory construction project formally begins. It includes three social accountability events: public hearing, public review, and public audit (Figure 3). This first case study of this paper describes and analyses these three events in two Nepalese villages.

The research process

The research team selected two communities that are located in two of the four districts where WARM-P is implemented for this case study. The team made the selection in consultation with Helvetas, the implementing development organisation, and made it based on the criteria of a) caste/ethnic heterogeneity and b) individual/collective taps. Moreover, it was possible to observe one of the three PTB steps directly in one community. One drinking water scheme included individual taps and one included collective taps shared by several households.

The team conducted a total of 44 interviews as well as observations of one key event in each village, one focus group discussion in each village, and transect walks. The snowballing method was deployed to locate individual households within

69. MoF 2016: 16.

70. The VDCs were the local-level government units in Nepal until their restructuring in 2017. After a major constitutional change in 2015, the Local Level Restructuring Commission in 2017 ‘restructured’ most of erstwhile local government units (which were approximately 4000) into a total of 753 new local government units, comprising Municipalities or Rural Municipalities. We refer in this study to the older structure as primary reference as our field study was completed within the contexts of that older structure.

71. Helvetas and RVWRMP 2015.

categories of different castes, neighbourhoods, ethnic groups, and wealth status to ensure the representation of a diversity of social actors, views, and perspectives.

The case study was conducted by the Nepal office of the International Water Management Institute (IWMI). The team of two researchers (one Nepali, one foreigner living in Nepal) worked in close consultation and coordination with the country team of the implementation agency Helvetas, both in Kathmandu and with the local WARM-P team in Surkhet district. The research team received field access from Helvetas staff and their local partner NGO as well as documents and field communication support. The IWMI researchers were present during one public audit in one community.

Table 1: Characteristics of two case studies in Nepal

Case Attribute	Sanakanda scheme	Kalikhola Bandalimadu scheme
District	Dailekh	Achham
VDC, locality	Goganpani VDC, wards 8 and 9	Mastabandali VDC (now Kamal Bazaar Municipality), Gheghad (Nayabada), previously Doombada
Date of preparation of the WUMP	2002, updated in 2015	2011, updated in 2016-17 due to change in administrative status and boundaries
No. of households	52	67
No. of people	365	407
Main caste/ethnic groups	Dalits (Kami), Chhetri, Bahun	Thakuri, Dalits, Bahun, Magar
Type of scheme	Individual taps	Collective taps shared by households
Usage	Drinking water	Drinking water and homestead land irrigation
Project cost	NPR 3,504,845 (US\$ 32,317)	NPR 1,792,146 (US\$ 16,525)
Date of scheme initiation and first user meeting	Oct. 2014	Dec. 2013
Public Audit held on	18/09/2016	25/12/2014

Contextual factors of water management schemes in Nepal

As the elections for local governments in Nepal were suspended from 2002 to 2017, local politics faced an impasse regarding spaces for democratic deliberation and good

governance. In the vacuum caused by the absence of elected officials, resource allocation and service delivery was largely organised by widespread informal practices. A 2012 study pointed to widespread practices of patronage, pork-barrel politics, and kickbacks in local government units,⁷² noting that the existence of patronage and distributional coalitions often offset entitlements citizens receive from the state. The generally patrimonial nature of the Nepalese state⁷³ is particularly pronounced in local level politics. Local powerbrokers, such as local government bureaucrats, politicians, and important school teachers, frequently control local people's access to local government services.⁷⁴ These practices can reproduce exclusions that continually keep segments of society, especially those belonging to Dalit or indigenous communities, at the margins of the society.

From 2002 onwards, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Local Development (MOFALD) developed several measures aiming at enhancing transparency, accountability, and participation (TAP) in the absence of elections. These included the 14-step process of planning,⁷⁵ the creation of citizen fora, and citizen awareness centres as well as provisions for adopting social accountability mechanisms. A total of 20 anti-corruption and oversight agencies and various other laws have been put in place to prevent corruption in Nepal. However, there has been a lack of confidence in these anti-corruption institutions, and a recent assessment suggests a large gap between law and practice.⁷⁶

At the same time, a multitude of existing community institutions still ensure the functioning of local governance. Several grassroots institutions have developed fairly well established, democratic, and transparent decision-making processes. Many of them survived through the hardships of the Maoist insurgency, even when governmental agencies were displaced from rural areas.⁷⁷ They have a system of regular meetings, joint planning, a certain degree of communication with government officials, and many have been around for about two decades on their own. These traditional institutions rely on the continued trust the local population has in them and they offer institutional capital for water and sanitation user groups in many communities.

Nepal relies on aid projects to finance development. While fund flows from government agencies to the local level create opportunities for bribes and rent-seeking,⁷⁸ aid also has

72. TAF 2012.

73. cf Whelpton 2005.

74. Pfaff-Czarnecka 2008; Sharrock 2013.

75. TAF 2012.

76. TI Nepal 2014.

77. Nightingale 2010.

78. Hancock 1994.

the potential to change incentives for integrity in state institutions and other actors. Here, donors can play a positive role in infusing ‘good governance’ principles into the development of laws and policies. For instance, the Helvetas WUMP model is now adopted under national guidelines by the Government of Nepal.⁷⁹

Helvetas put in place SAcc mechanisms starting in 2002, and they gained momentum after a few years when the government introduced good governance laws.⁸⁰ Other agencies adopted SAcc mechanisms on their own, but those became increasingly streamlined under the rubric of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. SAcc in WASH projects became all the more important as the government now sets ambitious targets for sustainable development goals (SDGs). In 2015, the government revised the targets on drinking water and sanitation for 2030 and emphasised governance as a key component of the new WASH Sector Development Plan (SDP). The SDP also stresses the need to enhance the accountability of politicians, policy-makers, and service providers and has put in place mechanisms to ensure that their actions are transparent. The SDP also sees social action as playing a potentially important role in enforcing compliance, especially where there is a dearth of effective regulatory institutions, as in the case of Nepal.

To sum up, there has been an increased awareness and demand for good governance in the WASH sector and beyond. However, the lack of strong institutions and the lack of accountability among local and national policy-makers have largely kept this demand from being met. Entrenched interests of patron-client relationships and distributional coalitions have become pervasive in the absence of regular cycles of elections. These pose important hurdles to the effectiveness of reform efforts.

PTB in theory: Public review, public hearing, public audit

The first SAcc mechanisms that Helvetas introduced in 2002 in WARM-P were *public hearing*, *public review*, and *public audit*.⁸¹ The NGO issued guidelines on downward accountability for community-managed infrastructure across its different programmes across several sectors in 2004.⁸² The adoption of these mechanisms gathered further momentum after 2004, notably thanks to the emergence of new regulations on the compulsory use of public audits by government agencies in Nepal for the allocation of block grants and the construction of public schemes. Helvetas Nepal also developed its

79. MoFALD and MoDWS 2016.

80. Helvetas 2004, 2014.

81. Helvetas 2014.

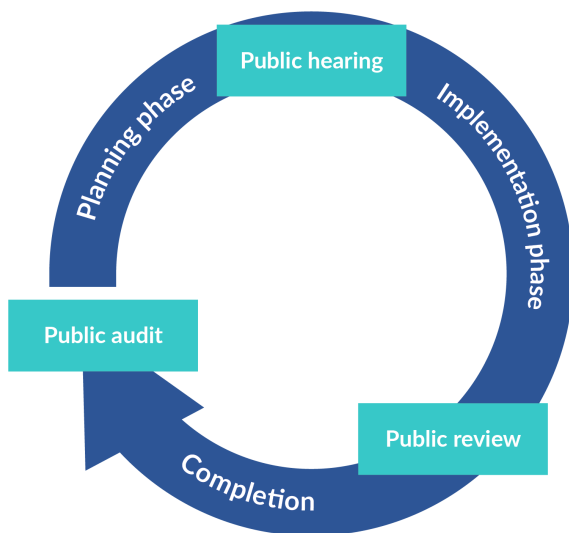
82. Helvetas 2004, 2014.

own Manual on the Public Audit Practice, which is in line with the Government of Nepal’s guidelines.⁸³

The three tools are linked in a project cycle, as shown in Figure 3. Once the four main implementing actors (Helvetas, local partner NGO, user committee, and VDC) decide to go forward with a particular WASH scheme and they receive a detailed technical plan from a professional service provider, the project cycle formally begins.

Each of the four actors have different roles and responsibilities. **Helvetas** supports the development of WUMP in its programme jurisdictions, engages with government and civil society entities from the central to the local level, and provides the highest proportion of funds in cash and in kind. They also recruit, fund, and supervise the local **NGO**, which is in charge of social mobilisation and/or technical support. The NGO’s role is to act as ‘social accountability practitioner,’ assisting the community with organising the PTB events, mediating between water users and WARM-P, and providing support to community leaders with respect to procurement of construction materials. Both the NGO and Helvetas provide community capacity training to ensure committee members have the right skills to manage construction work, handle its meetings and accounting, and understand the rights and responsibilities of the committee members, local users, and others. Helvetas retains the technical and financial capacity to enforce its procedures via SAcc tools.

Figure 3: PTB project cycle



The **local government** provides around five percent (expected share: 5-10%) of project cost, and monitors and supervises the progress of the scheme implementation. The user committee represents the **local community**. According to Helvetas guidelines, the

83. interview Helvetas, September 2016.

elected user committee is supposed to reflect proportionate representation by caste and a fair representation of women (33%). It receives the funds and coordinates the project's implementation. The chairperson often comes from previously formed committees active in the locality. It is often the case that the same person, most often a local leader of a dominant political party, leads several committees in the village, such as those for schools, cooperatives, or forest user groups. The table below describes the various steps of the project cycle.

Table 2: Key features of PTB processes adopted under WARM-P

Attribute of PTB measure	Public hearing	Public review	Public audit
Main objectives	Lay out/discuss the project purpose, stakeholder roles, budget; endorse the project, get agreement, fixing the hoarding board	Monitor the progress; clarification of issues; settle expenses and make request for funds release; revise work plan	Provide information on cash, in kind, and labour contribution for the project; present final statement of income and expenses; decision in case of embezzlement etc;
When	At the beginning of project	Implementation	Completion of the project
Frequency	Once	Twice	Once
Who should attend?	At least 60% of water users are required, along with the user committee, VDC, local NGO partner, and Helvetas representative		
Follow-up project activity	Contracting on the project Release of the first instalment	Release of instalments from WARMP (and VDC)	Final clearance

PTB in practice: the communities

The water schemes explored in this case study – the Sanakanda scheme in the Dailekh district and the Kalikhola Bandalimadu scheme in the Achham district – serve a population of 4546 and 2931, respectively. Both communities experience strong outwards migration, meaning that almost all male villagers seasonally go to India for employment because insufficient water resources make it impossible to grow off-season vegetables to sell at the nearest market. While there are many ‘sources’ of water, almost all of them have a very small flow. The communities had an established Water Resource Management Committee even before Helvetas implemented the WUMP. Yet, as many men are away and because women do not step into public affairs due to social norms, it

is often difficult for local people to hold people in power (who are largely male) accountable.

The Sanakanda scheme was part of the WUMP process in Goganpani that was first prepared in 2002 under the lead of Water Resource Management Committee by a consulting firm and updated in late 2015.⁸⁴ The Kalikhola Bandalimadu scheme was part of the WUMP process in Mastabandali and prepared in 2011.⁸⁵ In both cases, it was clear that the WUMP provided a basis for Helvetas and its partners to implement the PTB public hearing, public review, and public audit during the construction phase of the scheme.

In these communities, the WARM-P project operated in four participatory arenas: the preparatory meetings of the WUMPs, the regular user group meetings, the meetings for the public hearing, public review and public audit, and the construction work as such. In both villages, the PTB process (ie public hearing, public review, and public audit) took a little more than a year and included 14 and 23 meetings, respectively. While the first public hearing initiated the project by providing information on the parameters of the project, the public reviews that took place later focused on the expenditure against received instalments, enforced community rules, and supervised the construction of the schemes. At the end of the construction of the scheme, the public audit acknowledged that the schemes were ready for commissioning after detailed technical and financial checks.

Outcomes

Generally, the PTB mechanism focused on enhancing the information the user committee provided to the users. For instance, during the Sanakanda public audit, the chairperson presented the actual expenditures versus the estimated budget, the type and number of structures completed (intake, tap, etc), the status of the maintenance fund, the financial contribution of the community, the progress/achievements on total sanitation, and a list of tasks still to be completed. The chairperson communicated the information using non-vernacular, official language. While Helvetas documents suggest using an information billboard to display financial information,⁸⁶ in this case, the chairperson communicated the budget headings and amounts only orally. Without any visual aids, it was difficult for participants to make sense of the long list of figures enumerated. An anonymous suggestion and grievances box provided an opportunity to raise questions. At the end of the session, the NGO facilitator read aloud anonymous comments ('grievances') that had been collected in a box during the meeting, and the chairperson

84. Goganpani VDC 2002, 2015.

85. Mastabandali VDC 2011.

86. Helvetas 2014.

responded. However, the responses were not discussed. In sum, this observation showed that the information provided during this public event predominantly informed users about achievements, costs, and expenditures (Table 3).

Table 3: Information provided to water users during the social accountability events

Attribute	Public hearing	Public review	Public audit
Information provided to users	Agreement about project initiation, basic information about the project, the collection of maintenance fund, the opening of the bank account, and the identification of funding agencies.	Expenditures against received instalments, enforcement of community rules, execution of total sanitation programmes, clearance of financial compliance, progress on the project's work and remaining work, action plan	Total cost of the project, itemised costs and costs for individual households for private tap connection, cost sharing between the participants – cash and in-kind contributions from WARM-P and the local government

Source: Minutes of the meetings

Further interviews with users also indicated that respondents received information about the project's progress and wage payments, but could not recall the amount of the specific budget. Male users of the Kalikhola scheme who frequently travel to India for work, reported that they did not know about the budget because of their frequent absences. Nevertheless, most respondents were clear about the extent of their labour contribution and their wages for this contribution.

The practices of the respective user committees in the two schemes differed in significant respects. While one committee was less transparent regarding detailed expenses, the other committee had published all the figures. The latter also had more detailed and specific plans of action of all activities during the public audit and specified the chairperson and one more member for procurement of construction or sanitation materials (water filter). These differences may be attributed to a more active and literate population in the latter village.

The role of water users varied greatly. They participated in monthly meetings when levies were collected. Sometimes, these meetings were formal and minuted, but in other instances, locals gathered in a designated place and held informal deliberations. Users participated to various degrees in the decisions about construction, such as procurement of materials, transportation, labour contribution, paid work in digging and filling the mainline and branch line, and construction of structures. Helvetas staff supported procurement decisions in consultation with the committee chairperson. All households

participated in the paid work in digging pipelines, but also made personal contributions in the form of ‘unpaid’ labour. Some discontent regarding the payments arose, but most villagers seemed to trust the wage distribution.

The PTB mechanism provided a platform to discuss the scheme’s finances and, in one instance, led to a revelation of fund misappropriation. The revelation was possible as the information about construction materials was openly available and because the person in question was willing to speak up against a leader.

Enabling factors

The presence of the NGO worker and of the Helvetas representative provided, to some extent, a means to ensure that the chairperson was responsive to the users, and their presence built in some enforceability. At the same time, the public forums provided a channel to enhance the accountability of the NGO and Helvetas.

Moreover, Helvetas mitigated some of the corruption risks related to cost estimation and procurement through specific institutional arrangements. As the implementing agency, Helvetas hired external engineers, located outside of the programme districts, for the design of the scheme and for cost estimates. Helvetas also directly provided most of construction materials. Helvetas’ primary motive in procuring most of the material was to ensure the availability of materials, low prices, and good quality by purchasing material in bulk. Thus, opportunities for corruption lay only in the procurement of smaller items like private taps and sanitation materials, which the chairpersons of the user committees purchased themselves.

Challenges

Both committees included women, marginalised groups (Janajati, Dalit), and representatives from different localities of the villages. The Sanakanda user group was relatively mixed in terms of ethnicity and was chaired by a Brahman man, who was also a prominent village leader. In the Kalikhola water user group, about 90% of the households are Dalits, but the chairperson of the executive committee was a high caste Chhetri man. During one of the interviews, a Thakuri woman leader shared that she wanted to stand for the chairperson position but the NGO facilitator discouraged her from taking this position due to her gender. She eventually became a member of the executive committee. Such an anecdote reveals, however, that there are structural barriers that limit the opportunities for new political leaders when creating user groups. Thus despite the representation of women and disadvantaged groups on the committees, in this case, the key positions remained with individuals from socially dominant groups and already established political leaders.

The observation of a public audit also showed that the committee chairperson spoke almost exclusively, which reflected the power relations within the community. Moreover, whereas formally, the user committee leads the public audit, in this case, it was the local NGO facilitator who drove the event. Even though such public audits ideally facilitate discussion, this instance reflected a knowledge and power imbalance between the NGO personnel, local leaders and community members: the chairperson presented most information using official, formal language and steered the event, while seeking approval from the NGO facilitator. He made an oral presentation of the figures on costs that would be difficult even for an educated person to comprehend. As a result, even though participants were invited to voice their claims, nobody spoke up.

Moreover, two neighbourhoods of a predominantly indigenous group were not included in the drinking water scheme in one village. These residents expressed strong resentment about being excluded, and that point also appeared in the public audit. Helvetas indicated that the source availability was too low to include all settlements, especially those located far from the source, and the priority was to provide water to areas where hardship was more prominent (a focus on need-based approach). Nevertheless, the resentment seemed to emerge from concerns around inclusion.

The interviews and observations revealed that some of the project information was unequally distributed amongst water users. For instance, those holding leadership roles in community organisations remembered the total project cost, while most respondents suggested that they ‘heard about’ the budget but did not recall the amount. Instead, they had knowledge about what concerned them the most, such as knowing about their own labour contribution, the wage they would receive, or the work they had to do for sanitation. Thus it turned out that one’s position, level of education, and migration status shaped one’s knowledge of the project.

The PTB mechanisms addressed or responded to most of the demands from the users, but the PTB mechanisms failed to address fully some of the concerns during the construction phase. For example, some water users continuously demanded an increase in the capacity of storage tanks. The project officials, however, mentioned that they could not meet their demands as they followed the government guidelines. Thus, technical norms, topography, and source capacity also come into play when aiming to achieve equitable water distribution.

Conclusion

The study undertaken of the two villages in Nepal of public hearing, public review, and public audit revealed several following insights:

First, compared to ghost public audits/hearings that government agencies practice,⁸⁷ the public audits / hearings conducted under WARM-P intervention were ‘real’: they actually happened. Second, the PTB measures provided opportunities for the users to have information and knowledge about the project, to participate in significant ways in the management of the project’s construction activities and partly in the design, as well as in decision-making about how to run the drinking water scheme in the future. The provision of the user committee thus served as a platform for improved transparency, accountability, and participation. However, the study also showed that the implementation of the same scheme in relatively similar localities will still produce very different outcomes in terms of actual information provided and actual user participation. This suggests that it is important to take into account a community’s specific characteristics when managing how to translate a particular SAcc mechanism into practice.

One problematic issue that arose in the process was that the scope and scale of the mechanism was not always clear: While the mechanism focused primarily on the local user committees and on their financing of the water scheme, the public fora stirred up discussions about other issues and created demands that went beyond the scope of this particular PTB mechanism (i.e. development of the scheme) and thereby left some citizens disappointed and dissatisfied.

“It is not only elite capture, but also technical standards or topography that can limit the effectiveness of the mechanisms.”

Lastly, while user committees did have provisions for the inclusion of different social groups, high caste or elite domination still persisted. However, it is not only elite capture, but also technical standards or natural features such as topography that can limit the effectiveness of the mechanisms and leave some groups feeling excluded.

Therefore, the results indicate that the SAcc measures have enhanced information access, transparency, and participation, and have established accountability to a certain extent. At the same time, the measures operated on an uneven playing field characterised by high levels of social inequalities that the mechanism itself cannot alleviate.

87. ‘Ghost’ public hearings or public audits are carried out on paper only, as a show of compliance to a government requirement. A few of the interviewees in Achham suggested that such ghost audits were a commonplace in local governments.

CASE 2 - Ethiopia: Synergising activities between government, NGO, and water users

The One WASH National Plan (OWNP) and the Community Managed Project (CMP) approach in Ethiopia

Over the last few decades, Ethiopia has come a long way with regard to improving coverage of water and sanitation. In March 2015, it achieved the MDG 7c target on access to drinking water supply. Despite this progress 43% of the population still does not have access to improved water supply, while 72% does not have access to improved sanitation in their daily lives. The development of Ethiopia's Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) is shaped by the sector-wide One WASH National Plan (OWNP), which features, among other things, the Community Managed Project (CMP) approach, and is the focus of the second case study. While the nation-wide Ethiopian Social Accountability Programme 2 (ESAP-2) that the Ethiopian Government launched in 2012 has since sparked a great deal of discussion, the present case study focuses on the CMP approach instead.

The CMP approach was initiated in 2003 with the aim of accelerating the establishment of the water supply in the Amhara region of Ethiopia as part of the 'Rural Water Supply and Environmental Programme' (RWSEP). The Ethiopian Government and the Government of Finland jointly finance this programme.⁸⁸ In 2010, the World Bank evaluated the CMP approach positively and recommended mainstreaming the approach nationwide. Soon thereafter, it became one of four rural WASH financing modalities in Ethiopia. By 2015, the government had implemented it in 76 *woredas* (districts) spread over five regions and covering nearly 3 million people with improved water supply.⁸⁹ Similar to the WUMP programme in Nepal, the CMP approach entails that a local committee representing the community monitors and manages funds for the construction of a communal water scheme construction in order to improve the implementation, ownership, and sustainability of interventions. The CMP approach goes a step further, though, as it requires that funds for the physical construction and maintenance of water schemes be directly transferred to a community-managed account (of a micro-credit institution) over which the local committee has control. The local committee is also directly responsible – and here the approach differs from that of the previous case – for procuring the goods and services required for water scheme construction and installation.⁹⁰ The second case study of this paper centres on the CMP

88. Suominen and Rautiainen 2015.

89. Suominen and Rautiainen 2015.

90. Suominen and Rautiainen 2015.

approach and is based on interviews, focus groups, and observations in two communities of the Oromia Region close to Addis Ababa.

The research process

The research team selected two community water supply schemes with CMP for field research. Both, Ela community and Quare Gora community, are located in the Jidda *Woreda* of the Oromia Region close to the capitol, Addis Ababa. The two communities were selected based on their accessibility and the fact that ESAP is also being implemented in the same *Woreda*.

The team collected qualitative data from different sources including *Woreda* WASH Team (WWT) members, CMP supervisors, WASHCO members, and the general user community. With regard to in-depth interviews, we interviewed seven WWT members and supervisors (all male) and 16 users of the two water supply schemes (six female and ten male). In addition, we held two focus group discussions. For comparison, we visited one institutional latrine constructed at a high school and the neighbouring water supply schemes. Along the way, we paid special attention to the sustainability, quality of construction, and management approach of the water supply schemes.

A state of emergency affected the research process during field research in 2017. At the time of research, the military did not allow people to come together and discuss socio-economic or political issues. The Command Post, the defence military that leads the country during a state of emergency, had to grant a permit for any meeting in advance. This created insecurity and confusion among both citizens and the government as to which public actions were allowed or prohibited. Understandably, the research team encountered a sense of reluctance on the part of many stakeholders to discuss accountability and corruption, and this reluctance may be reflected in the research results.

MetaMeta – Netherlands and MetaMeta – Ethiopia carried out the study.

Table 4: Characteristics of Case Studies in Ethiopia

Case attribute	Ela community scheme	Qare gora scheme
Kebele	Manga Qore kebele	Daga Gora kebele
No. of households	47	28
No. or people	212	150
Type of scheme	Community hand pump	Community hand pump

Case attribute	Ela community scheme	Qare gora scheme
Usage	Drinking	Drinking
Cost	41,400 ETB	34,500 ETB
Completion date	February 2014	April 2013

Contextual factors of water management schemes in Ethiopia

Ethiopia, officially a democracy, has enjoyed double digit growth over the past decade, yet most communities are still characterised by very low levels of development and poverty, especially in rural areas. While urban centres are rapidly developing, rural areas have been left behind, particularly in terms of basic service delivery. Moreover, not all ethnic groups, minorities, and regions are equally represented under the current administration. Gender equality is also very challenging and Ethiopia ranks 0.84 on the global Gender Development Index.

Community engagement in Ethiopia has a long tradition in form of the ‘iddir,’ which is the traditional community-based mechanism that ensures that community members support each other financially and with labour. Additionally, the ‘iqub’ is a customary credit and saving scheme through which members receive a sum of money periodically on a turn-by-turn basis. These traditional mechanisms play a key role providing socio-economic support to its members, and it is those experiences which feed into newer models of social accountability. While these traditional mechanisms are strong, formally organised civil society has a shorter history in Ethiopia. The famine periods in the 1970s and 1980s led to a growing number of civil society actors, which mainly focused on relief and humanitarian interventions. This number has grown steadily after the fall of the *Derg* leadership in 1991 until today. In October 2016, the Ethiopian government announced a nationwide state of emergency following almost a year of unrest and protests against certain policies. This strongly affects the exercise of civil society engagement and is considered to “undermine basic rights, including freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly”.⁹¹ At the same time, the current situation is embedded in the country’s broader history of autocratic rule and mistrust between civil society institutions and government agencies. For example, in 2009, the government passed into law the Charities and Societies Proclamation, which placed severe restrictions on civil society organisations engaging in human rights advocacy. In practice, this means that the government has to support fully every social accountability measure.

91. Human Rights Watch 2016.

In 2012, the Government of Ethiopia launched the nation-wide Ethiopian Social Accountability Programme 2 (ESAP-2) that coordinates SAcc-related activities at the *kebele* and *woreda* levels. The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED) endorses those activities and stipulates that CSOs must allocate a maximum of 30% to administrative costs and at least 70% to programme costs. While the present study is concerned with the PTB process of the Community Managed Project Approach, it is noteworthy that ESAP 2 also includes PTB initiatives. Unlike the CMP, in ESAP-2 initiatives funds are not directly transferred to a community managed account; however, communities are directly involved in various steps along the budget planning and expenditure process. Ethiopian NGOs throughout the country manage the process, and funding for actual implementation of WASH services comes from different government levels.⁹²

The development of Ethiopia's Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector is currently shaped by the One WASH National Plan (OWNP) that links together the various water sub-sectors, developing a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation framework and increasing attention and resources on hygiene and sanitation. This is the first sector-wide approach in WASH in Ethiopia and brings together four Ministries with the aim to cover all regions of the country. The CMP approach has an official implementation modality status within this programme (others are: Woreda Managed Project Approach; NGO-implementation; self-supply).

The discourse on corruption in Ethiopia is two-fold. On the one hand, several studies have demonstrated encouraging results showing that, compared to its African peers, Ethiopia has lower levels of petty bureaucratic corruption in basic services.⁹³ However, corruption levels in other sectors (eg land, mining, pharmaceuticals) are high and political corruption is widespread, leading to diminished trust in public institutions.⁹⁴ Moreover, it is important to keep in mind Ethiopia's drive toward decentralisation, as those structural changes often create new opportunities for corruption, though there may be substantial regional differences in corruption incidences and risks.⁹⁵

PTB in theory: The CMP approach

In 2003, the Government of Ethiopia and the Government of Finland initiated the Community Managed Project (CMP) approach as part of the Rural Water Supply and Environmental Programme (RWSEP) to accelerate the implementation of water supply in the Amhara region of Ethiopia. The CMP approach aims to make communities

92. ESAP 2014.

93. Plummer 2012.

94. Abegaz 2015.

95. Plummer 2012.

responsible for planning, procurement, implementation, and maintenance of communal water points. Under this approach, the programme transfers funds for the physical construction of water schemes directly into a community-managed account at a micro-credit institution. The fund includes both community-generated funds (ca. 25-30%) and government subsidies provided for capital expenditures. A community-elected Water and Sanitation Committee (WASHCOs) manages the procurement, construction, and operation and maintenance process of the water scheme.⁹⁶

The CMP approach comprises several steps: First, the water district office provides information about various technological options (hardware information) and suitable sites for water points as well as information about the CMP process. In the second step, the community elects a Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene committee (WASHCO) that is responsible for the management of the proposed scheme and its funds. The five to seven members of the WASHCO are elected for a period of two to three years. The committee must include at least 40% women, members have to be direct beneficiaries of the scheme, there has to be a balance between older and younger people, and at least the secretary and the accountant have to be literate.⁹⁷

Third, the WASHCO develops a project application and submits it to the Woreda WASH Team that advises, assesses, and approves the project. In parallel, the WASHCO raises the community's cash contributions for the scheme. Upon the water district office's approval of the scheme, the district head and the WASHCO chairperson sign a funding agreement between themselves. After this, the WASHCO team receives four days of training in procurement, financial management, recording and reporting of construction processes. After that training, funds can be released to the community. Fourthly, the WASHCO supervises the daily follow up on the construction, including the procurement of material and services mostly from local artisans. After the completion of the scheme, a community public audit is carried out to assess the WASHCO's work. After this audit, the WASHCO receives further training on O&M management and on tariff setting and collection.⁹⁸ Until now, the CMP approach mainly dealt with simple, low-cost technologies such as hand-dug wells and other types of shallow wells. In the case of more complicated, costlier solutions, the CMP approach outsources the tendering procedure so that it takes place at the level of the regional capital.

The funding request process entails the following sub-steps: The WASHCO submits an official request to the WASH team at the *woreda* office, then the *woreda* bureau submits the request to the zonal bureau, which forwards it to the regional bureau. Then, the

96. Suominen and Rautiainen 2015.

97. Suominen and Rautiainen 2015.

98. Suominen and Rautiainen 2015 and field notes.

microfinance institution at the regional level transfers the money in instalments to the WASHCO account at the *woreda* level. The WASHCO must report any use of funds has with receipts before a it can request any further withdrawals. The WASHCO also deposits 1,000 ETB up front in cash at the local account (collected from households in the community) to be used for operation and maintenance (O & M). There are separate bank accounts for funding construction related costs and for O & M related costs. The construction account is closed upon completion of the scheme. Other substantial community contributions include labor and locally available construction material, while the regional government and COWASH provide the rest of the investment costs and the capacity building costs respectively. The WASHCO fully manages the finances and does the financial tracking of the investment costs and regularly reports on its undertakings to the water district office and the wider user community. The WASHCO arrives at budget decisions via a consultation process in which everyone has to agree on amounts and specific budget utilisation.

The CMP is intended as a bottom-up approach as it transfers complete decision-making responsibility as well as fund disbursement to the community for which the scheme is developed. A team delegated from the community even bears responsibility for initiating and executing a tendering process to find an appropriate service provider to install the technology.

PTB in practice: The communities

This research focused on two small communities: Ela und Quare Gora communities (*kebeles*) in the Jidda *woreda*, close to Addis Adaba. Here, rural water supply coverage has been fluctuating since the early 2010s. After a steady increase from 40.61% in 2010 to 86% in 2014, it dropped slightly again in 2015 due to a change in parameters for coverage. The CMP approach was implemented in 2011. Its goal was to ameliorate water shortage and low sanitation coverage by responding to community demands and to ensure sustainability by institutionalising a participatory budgeting system. As outlined above, the CMP approach transferred funds for the physical construction of a water scheme to a community-elected WASHCO to build and maintain the scheme. The projects in the two communities were completed in 2013 and 2014, respectively. The Oromia Regional Government, the Water, Minerals and Energy Bureau (WMEB), and the Bureau of Finance and Economic Development (BoFED) as well as COWASH-Finland carried out these projects

Outcomes

Each *kebele* constructed one water supply source with the CMP approach. The WASHCO representing the user community defined the amount of contribution,

operation time of water supply scheme, and monthly operation and maintenance contribution/tariff for the community. In the studied communities, out of seven WASHCO members, four members were women. The WASHCO made an effort to use local knowledge and local resources, as community elders helped select the site, and local artisans and masons customised the well construction to the community. In general, all stakeholders know who, how, when, and what contributed to and invested in the CMP-enabled wash scheme. The CMP website made all material used, all contracts, and all capacity-training reports accessible via the progress and monitoring reports. Although all communication and training was done in the local Afaan Oromo language with adequate explanation on water-related parts that have no equivalent local terms, it remains a challenge to verify if those who are illiterate voice their questions and concerns in a similar manner to those who are literate.

Based on the interviews, the construction was completed as planned and the scheme seemed better maintained and more functional than in another non-CMP scheme of the same *Woreda*. Respondents attributed this success to the greater sense of ownership established through the participatory CMP process – ‘the community takes care of the scheme’- as well as to the existence of a specific fund that the WASHCO manages for maintenance of the scheme. Respondents also reported that long term engagement and participation in the process was high, which they attributed to the transparent process as well as to the fact that the approach had already been known and tested in other parts of the country. Respondents also claimed that the successful construction ‘boosted’ the community’s confidence. This confidence was on full display, for example, in the community’s willingness to demand a similar mechanism for the construction of a cobbled road. According to the respondents, the joint meetings provided a forum and enabling environment to actively request the development of other infrastructure like roads and power supply. This highlights a positive outcome of the CMP approach, as it reflects the fact that the community has developed the capacity to articulate demands for the prerequisites for decent livelihoods. Overall, the implementation of the CMP approach also resulted in an increase in the budgets allocated for WASH purposes, yet respondents also revealed concerns about the sustainability of the project over time, specifically a decrease in their activity and cuts to the overall budget by COWASH and the regional government. However, the reduction in resources might have been due to an overall increase in the number of CMP intervention *woredas*. As mentioned earlier, the CMP approach received official recognition from the One WASH National Program Policy when it was recognised as one of the official national implementation modalities.

Enablers

Respondents reported that PADet, an NGO that was already engaged in both communities as part of the Ethiopian Social Accountability Project (ESAP), deserved a

lot of the credit for the successful implementation of the CMP approach. PADet provided support to the CMP approach through their awareness building for community members to demand and question development activities. For example, they educated community members about their roles and responsibilities as well as about their rights and entitlements with respect to certain government budgets. According to respondents, PADet's work reinforced the achievements of the local CMP project by stimulating participation. Respondents stated that it took less effort to convince the community to engage in the development of the scheme compared to other areas without PADet intervention. At the same time, respondents pointed out that the PADet engagement only reached the *kebele* WASH team, but not the WASHCO, the main implementing body. While respondents valued PADet's work on raising awareness, they appreciated that the CMP approach actually provided a budget for the physical construction of projects. In this sense, the two projects complemented each other. The case study thus shows that the CMP approach and ESAP do not work in isolation from one another, but can actually create synergies.

COWASH management highlighted the Finnish government's long-term support over a period of more than two decades as crucial for building trust in the programme and for its overall success. Compared to previous approaches where regional governments paid a 'matching fund' to the donor fund, regional governments in this case pay the lion's share of the project and the Finnish government contributes the 'matching fund' to the regional project.⁹⁹ As some respondents noted, this created confidence and a long-term vision that encouraged lasting change and adjusting the approach according to needs of stakeholders.

Challenges

Respondents also reported a number of challenges during the process. A recurring response was that the lack of specific technical knowledge led to the selection of inferior quality materials for the construction. Soil collapse during the digging process, along with the fact that workers could not dig a deep well in the very hard soil, also hindered the actual construction of the wells. This restricted the availability of water resources for livestock use. Some respondents mentioned that even after CMP was implemented, they still had to travel long distances to find water sources for their livestock. Thus, while the programme improved water supply for domestic use, the programme did not address sufficiently the demands for livestock, a key livelihood for the communities. Unfortunately, this particular scheme could not provide a more complex technical solution for deeper wells that would provide water for livestock. However, at the time of this research, the scheme had addressed the specific issue of

99. Suominen 2017.

water scarcity, and provided some prospects of deploying a more complex solution in the future.

Moreover, the preparation of bidding documents and contract agreements proved to be a difficult job for the members of WASHCO, despite their capacity training workshops. Thus, they often required assistance from *Woreda* government staff. However, both capacity training and waiting for assistance from the *Woreda* level take time, and both stalled or delayed the process at different points. These factors highlight how crucial it is to adequately train the WASHCO representatives on project management, operation and maintenance, as well as to provide continuing assistance in the preparation of various documents and bid evaluations. They also show that while most of the roles and tasks have been devolved to the community, government staff maintains a key role as facilitator by providing guidance and capacity building. The government's roles are thereby changing from initiator, financier, and implementer to financier, capacity builder, coach, and guide.

All respondents asserted that there have been no incidences of corruption related to the implementation of the CMP approach in the two cases. That is not to say that corruption is alien in those communities, as respondents reported other incidences of corruption unrelated to the water scheme. Most respondents, however, mentioned that the CMP approach allows for a less bureaucratic and more transparent WASH service provision (compared with the conventional approach) as it increases the sense of community ownership. And many respondents saw this sense of ownership as well as the fact that WASHCO members live close to and are direct beneficiaries of the scheme as barriers to corruption.

Lastly, during the time of research the Ethiopian Government issued a state of emergency in the Oromia region that curtailed many of the citizen rights that the CMP approach endorses. This move undermined much of the leverage and room that was created in recent years for people to voice their concerns and hold service providers and the government accountable. During the state of emergency, people are not allowed to come together and discuss socio-economic or political issues. Any meeting must receive permission from the so-called 'Command Post,' which is made up mainly of members of the military defence forces. While the Ethiopian Government continues to implement and support the CMP approach, the state of emergency nevertheless raises new questions about how such political developments affect social accountability mechanisms. In particular, it is important to explore the extent to which such initiatives become vulnerable in a context of drastic government changes, as the freedoms that the mechanism tried to enable become restricted.

Conclusion

The study conducted in the two water points in Jidda *woreda* revealed that in the development of a low-tech scheme, the end users liked the CMP approach and bought into it readily, thanks to the transparent and participatory nature of the approach. The study team observed that the community felt clearly that they had ownership of the scheme and had confidence to manage its maintenance fund. Moreover, the positive experience encouraged the community to demand a similar process for the construction of cobbled roads. The NGO PADnet played an important role as an enabler for the success of the approach, as it laid crucial foundations in encouraging community participation and raising awareness of rights, which shows that the CMP approach and ESAP can create successful synergies. There was a close and improved feedback loop (responsiveness) between government and community due to the close interaction between the designated WASH team at the *Woreda* level and the WASHCO. However, the fact that the WASHCO depended heavily on the expertise of the WASH team at the *Woreda* level delayed the process in some cases. Overall, the relationship between the municipal government and the community has changed, with more responsibility having been devolved to the community, but with the government continuing oversight and remaining the most important financier of the scheme. Yet, with the devolvement of the entire process to the community, it remains unclear who remains accountable and responsible if the infrastructure project is not successful.

Cross-case analysis

The effects of PTB mechanisms on water integrity

The data collected during the research phase included the contextual circumstances of the PTB mechanism, their operation, and their challenges and successes in relation to their stated goals. Each case study of these two specific PTB mechanisms highlighted different aspects that contribute to our understanding of social accountability in the water sector. The Ethiopia case, for example, showed the potential vulnerability of such initiatives in a context of drastic government changes, as here the implementation of a government-ordered state of emergency restricted some of the freedoms that the mechanism tried to enable. The Nepal case, on the other hand, in which the mechanism filled a space normally occupied by weak government authorities, gave insights regarding how local power structures persist. The following cross-case analysis attempts to provide insights on the extent to which each of these mechanisms contributed to increased integrity in the water sector based on their impact on transparency,

accountability, participation, and anti-corruption (TAPA). The following section relies on the Integrity Wall as a research tool to organise and compare the insights of both studies in regard to TAPA.

Transparency in PTB

The PTB mechanisms in the case studies required the initiators to openly publish the budget cycle and other information. In both cases, all contract documents, expenditures, overviews of the amounts contributed by different stakeholders, and the O&M manuals were accessible to anyone interested. In the Ethiopia case, all of the data was available online. With regard to data sharing and openness, the Ethiopian CMP approach seemed to have a pioneering effect and went further than many other development initiatives in Ethiopia, leading to its implementation as a nationwide policy. In each case, the CMP approach took measures to ensure that the information was comprehensible for the different users. In pursuit of that objective, the stakeholders received information in both written and oral form on information boards and in meetings in Nepal and in the local Afaan Oromo language in Ethiopia (with specific explanations of water-related parts that have no equivalent local terms). As a result, local users generally knew who, how, when, and what was contributed and invested, or, at least received basic information about the project. Generally, users ended up with greater knowledge of the scheme than they had had before.

“If one wants a water budgeting and construction scheme to be understandable for all stakeholders, the process cannot include very complex schemes.”

Despite all of the positive outcomes, the approach still faced some challenges. Sometimes the information did not reach the relevant stakeholders, because it was still too complex, particularly in regard to the use of technical and financial terms. Methodologically, it was difficult to verify to what extent those who are illiterate or have less affinity to financial processes engaged sufficiently or directly voiced their questions or concerns (Ethiopia). In Nepal, difficulties associated with the complexity of the budgeting process led to a situation in which knowledge about (and, consequently, engagement with) the project was shaped by one’s socio-economic position, level of education, and migration status. In other cases, the published information was not directly for the stakeholders, because it did not sufficiently or directly correspond with their needs. This suggests that if one wants a water budgeting and construction scheme to be understandable for all stakeholders, including those who have no expertise in finance or engineering, the process cannot include very complex schemes.

The Ethiopia case showed that while the details of the scheme were transparent and available, a lack of technical knowledge slowed down construction or impeded the construction of more complex technical solutions (such that local authorities had to outsource more complex technical solutions to the regional level). Secondly, the comprehension of the published information has a direct effect on participation. In Ethiopia, some of the local users did not find that the scheme was directly beneficial for their needs and therefore did not engage.

While many researchers and funding agencies assume that increased transparency automatically increases citizen action and thereby accountability and government response, this study demonstrates that one cannot take such a linkage for granted.¹⁰⁰ Thus governments must implement transparency measures with well-established procedures for response mechanisms, and those transparency measures must actually address the needs of the stakeholders.

Accountability in PTB

The case studies of PTB mechanisms in Nepal and Ethiopia revealed that a number of measures were in place to ensure effective accountability. Manuals provided clear descriptions of roles and responsibilities, and decisions were made with the knowledge of the beneficiary community (Ethiopia). The Ethiopian CMP approach clarified rules, budgeting processes, and procurement procedures through a number of capacity workshop trainings for participants of the user committee. Respondent considered this to be an important step toward creating spaces for scrutiny that would otherwise allow for mismanagement or misappropriation of funds.

Importantly, the interviews showed that the public budgeting meetings developed into a space that allowed for community debate that extended well beyond the scheduled discussion for the specific water construction scheme. For example, in Ethiopia the meetings led to the articulation of broader demands on issues such as road construction or power supply. In Nepal, the meetings made visible and challenged the exclusion of marginalised village groups from water provision and also clarified many details regarding payments. Generally, respondents perceived these ripple effects as positive and as a sign of increased community confidence. They also thought that the meetings improved the relationship between the local government and the user community.

Even though on the local level CMP strengthened existing and new lines of accountability, a number of difficulties also emerged. In the Ethiopian scheme, for example, actors underestimated the time it took to train participants for the respective

100. Guillan, Halloran, and Lavin 2016.

oversight groups. Another problem was the high turnover rate in these groups, which led to delays in the construction of the scheme. Similarly, the Nepal case study showed that not all demands articulated at the public meetings could actually be met due to technical limitations. This latter point speaks to a larger issue that is well known in the development community: there is often a mismatch between beneficiaries' expectations and those of the implementing agency that can lead to the beneficiaries' being disappointed in the outcomes the mechanism ultimately provides.

Participation in PTB

The case studies revealed that the developers of the mechanism tried to ensure that user communities participated in several steps of the development and construction cycle. The Ethiopian CMP approach goes further in terms of shifting responsibilities to the community, as the participatory process includes the design and the procurement of the scheme, while the Nepali case refers to monitoring the spending of an allocated budget. In both cases a user committee is responsible for the construction (and maintenance) of the scheme. The PTB mechanism studied in Nepal consisted of a three-step process of public hearing, public review, and public audit (i.e. three community meetings at the beginning, middle, and end of the process), the CMP approach also ended with a public audit as well as a 'completion ceremony'.

Both studies revealed that participation improved significantly in Nepal and Ethiopia as a result of the CMP approach and that user community members and stakeholders participated in development undertakings regarding WASH services as stipulated and detailed in the agreements. The observations showed that women actively participated in the budget management process, and both cases included a quota for female representation on the committees. However, it is important to note that in both the cases of Nepal and Ethiopia, other pre-existing mechanisms and local civil society groups (Nepal: WUMP; Ethiopia: PADnet) also catalysed successful participation. In general, it is clear that participation in user committees and in the final public audits was 'real' as opposed to being made up of 'ghost participants,' as happens frequently in other projects.

In both cases, the guidelines of the mechanisms ensured representation of the different groups by explicitly stating that no one could be excluded based on sex, religion, language, economy, education, gender, and political power (Ethiopia/Nepal). In practice, however, this was not always the case. An observation of one public budgeting meeting revealed that the committee chairperson spoke almost exclusively. As a result, most of the participants became spectators, which reflected existing power relations in the community. Furthermore, as women's participation in Ethiopia is traditionally relatively low, the public audits found no evidence that the mechanism improved this

situation. Thus, while in principle every community user has the right to voice his/her own concerns and choices, it is not the case that every community member always does so. In the Ethiopian context, an historically very strong state and its authoritarian control makes it difficult to address issues of individual rights and duties. Meanwhile, in the Nepali context, socially dominant groups continue to be in key positions, such that the domination of high caste persists.

“While SACC/PTB may not level existing power structures, it is important to be open to long-term ripple effects of building of trust and raising citizens’ awareness of their rights and duties.”

In conclusion, the SAcc/PTB mechanisms presented in these case studies illustrated that it is extremely difficult to change locally embedded social or caste hierarchies that dominate local processes and exclude minority groups.¹⁰¹ At the same time, each of the case studies revealed at least one instance where otherwise excluded or marginalised voices did actually get a space to be heard or where issues that were neglected before ended up being discussed. Thus, while the SACC/PTB may not radically transform existing power structures, it is nevertheless important to notice the small effects and be open to unexpected or long-term ripple effects that emerge due to improved negotiation skills, the building of trust, and raising awareness of rights and duties among citizens.

Anti-corruption in PTB

The PTB measures in this study did not explicitly implement concrete anti-corruption measures, such as whistle-blower protections or rules against conflicts of interest, collusion, and favouritism, and so on. But some interviews in the Ethiopian case suggested that in other projects, individuals felt empowered to report incidents. In Nepal, the measure installed an anonymous complaint and feedback box, which many stakeholders used and very much appreciated. Here, the implementing organisation, Helvetas, pre-empted corruption risk in procurement by providing the materials themselves. While users generally did not report incidences of corruption, the studies nevertheless showed that political capture never fully disappears, even in these processes: in small communities, no matter where they are, single individuals often dominate and remain unquestioned. This is why it is all the more important that the users considered trust building to be a valuable outcome.

101. Pradhan et al 2012.

“The studies showed that political capture never fully disappears: in small communities, no matter where they are, single individuals often dominate and remain unquestioned.”

Conclusions and recommendations

This report provided empirical insights on the conditions and challenges of social accountability mechanisms on improving water integrity, in particular of PTB. In so doing, we presented two PTB mechanisms in two different countries. Both cases represented demand-side accountability mechanisms, in which citizens directly monitored an allocated budget. After assessing their type of engagement, outcomes, and challenges, we analysed the findings based on the building blocks of water integrity.¹⁰² By focusing on the extent to which these mechanisms addressed the principles of Water Integrity – namely, transparency, accountability, participation and anti-corruption – we provided an empirical account of the successes, but also highlighted the difficulties associated with implementing SAcc mechanisms. If we had to provide a single or simple conclusion, we would say that despite their challenges, both case studies found evidence that the mechanisms created new deliberative spaces in which citizens in some way collaborated with or challenged existing state institutions, thereby filling a space left open by weak institutions or carving out such a space in the case of a more authoritarian setting.

TAKE-AWAY 1: Strengthen the links between TAPA

As illustrated in the literature review, the underlying rationale of social accountability mechanisms assumes a direct link between transparency on the one hand, and participation and accountability on the other. Most practitioners and funding agencies rely on the view that if citizens receive information on their rights and duties (transparency), they will become empowered to express their voices and demand better services (participation), which will in effect hold duty bearers accountable to improve their performance (accountability) and to provide better services.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, studies have begun to provide evidence that question this causal pathway, criticising it as an overly simplistic representation of what happens during these processes.¹⁰⁴

102. *The Integrity Wall*, WIGO 2016.

103. eg Hepworth, 2016: 4.

104. eg Fox 2015.

The insights from our case studies illuminate some of the complex interrelationships that influence the outcomes of the initiatives. In general, users seemed to appreciate the WASH improvements, namely the construction of much-needed schemes, which improved the trust relationship between stakeholders. Other citizens, however, expressed concern that the implemented scheme was not sufficient for their needs, though one should argue that the fact that this sentiment could be expressed at all already is a measure of the success of the initiative, i.e. empowering individuals to be critical and engaged citizens.

Not all of the implemented practices delivered their intended outcomes, but neither was it the case that the implementation of the mechanism itself brought about all of the successful or undesired outcomes. Much of the credit for the success of the CMP approach in the Ethiopian community of this study, for example, should go to a scheme-independent NGO that had laid important groundwork for the successful activation of citizens. Thus, the success and effectiveness of the schemes turns out to be a complex combination of multiple factors that influence the effectiveness of the mechanism. To learn from this, it is necessary to ‘re-think the metrics of success’.¹⁰⁵ Doing so requires taking a learning approach towards social accountability mechanisms, an approach that is sensitive to existing power relations and provides considerable leverage to include and respond to the views of the community.

TAKE-AWAY 2: Appreciating deliberative capital and trust building

PTB processes usually face the risk of being captured by local elites or external institutions. Other community members often refrain from engagement based on the threat of reprisals.¹⁰⁶ Practitioners often do not sufficiently address this constraint on engagement. Hepworth¹⁰⁷ states, ‘there can be a tendency to idealise the role of citizens and civil society without recognising the huge diversity of views, capacities, access, skills, knowledge, interests and motivations which influence demand side capabilities to act in the collective interest.’¹⁰⁸ Such a blind spot became particularly evident in the case of Nepal, in which the implementing NGO had a strong voice in the deliberation forums and the chairperson was perceived as the only educated and suitable person for the position.

105. Hepworth 2016.

106. Fox 2015.

107. Hepworth 2016.

108. Hepworth 2016: 7.

At the same time, the mechanisms did contribute to strengthening the deliberative capital of the community,¹⁰⁹ meaning that the communities were enabled to raise their concerns and voice their discontent. This is a positive achievement in its own right: an increase both in the capability of citizens and in the space for them to express grievances and demand action. This achievement had a number of unforeseen, potentially long-term ripple effects. Respondents from the Nepal and Ethiopia case both asserted that the increased sense of community arising from the PTB process generally established both greater degrees of trust relationships and a better understanding of others' interests and values.

In the cases studied, improving ownership and participation in the development of WASH services and its funding helped generate deliberative capital. The mechanisms provided capacity trainings that improved financial literacy and awareness of rights and duties. These practices contributed to increasing the respect for and trust in public services, as citizens were more directly involved in and responsible for the functioning of their services. However, this also changed the various roles of the different stakeholders.

TAKE AWAY 3: Awareness of changing roles and responsibilities

The cases have shown that participatory and transparent budgeting mechanisms for social accountability do not only clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders, they also change them. In both cases, the introduction of the mechanism instigated a change of the various roles of the different stakeholders. One may argue that the mechanism became an enabler of the municipality, thereby facilitating more effective state functioning. Nonetheless, one could argue that transferring financial resources to the user community and making it responsible for the construction of the scheme moves accountability away from the government.

Yet the fact remains that the government has the responsibility to ensure that WASH facilities are sustainably constructed and that the tendering process is carried out properly. Thus, its role has changed from provider to that of facilitator, capacity builder, regulator, and (still) partial financier. But one could argue that the approach takes Participatory and Transparent Budgeting even a step further, by transferring the funding directly to the community and giving them autonomy over it. This argument can be supported by the fact that some of the expressed citizen demands the SAcc mechanisms

109. Holdo 2015.

enabled were not actually met, simply because the state agencies did not have the capacities or skills to respond.

As social accountability mechanisms aim to empower citizens by enabling the awareness, knowledge, skills, and confidence to foster democratic processes to demand effective water institutions, practices are only effective if such institutions respond to the citizens' demands. This effectiveness presupposes the recognition that social accountability is a political process that aims to equalise power and influence between citizens and their state.¹¹⁰ That means that mechanisms must be tailored to local contexts of patronage-based inequalities and must focus on deliberation and information flows in order to nurture critical voices among community members. In other words the goal is to build a deliberative environment for soliciting feedback and discussing grievances from the water users, encompassing different caste/ethnic groups and minorities. Despite the difficulties involved in creating such critical consciousness and local spaces that have the ability to challenge entrenched authorities, PTB remains a noble goal.

Recommendations

- Openness towards expanding the range of the PTB mechanism and taking a learning approach that leaves space to integrate demands that are raised beyond the proposed scheme
- Establishing enough time, resources, and capacities to answer to arising demands
- Openness to engage with other, sometimes unexpected, actors
- Appreciating the expression of dissatisfaction by citizens, as it is an indicator for the next steps of improvement
- Acknowledging informality and elite capture as reality and recognising that addressing such issues can be a crucial to building trust and negotiation space without individuals losing face.

110. Hepworth 2016.

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