



Report
on the
GPSA Global Partners Forum 2017

December 20, 2017

1. Introduction

Welcome to our report on the 2017 GPSA Global Partners Forum. Its purpose is not to give a complete record of all the knowledge gathered at the Forum, but a synthesis that captures important takeaways while helping to preserve a record of important lessons for participants and others interested. It is also an important input for actions by the GPSA and its partners going forward.¹²

2. About the 4th GPSA Forum

The 4th GPSA Global Partners Forum took place from October 30 to November 1, 2017 at the World Bank Headquarters in Washington DC. It attracted more than 300 participants, with over 85% coming from civil society, academia, donor community and governments. World Bank staff including GPSA team members, TTLs, managers, and senior management made up another 15% of participants. Over 1,000 people joined the Forum virtually by watching the live video stream.

3. Forum theme

'*Citizen Action for Open, Accountable and Inclusive Societies*' was the theme unpacked during the eight plenaries and 17 breakout sessions on the Forum [agenda](#), a theme picked to align with Sustainable Development Goal 16. Meanwhile, the Forum [concept](#) recognized that the world faces an unprecedented set of challenges, such as rising fragility, conflict and violence, eroding trust in institutions, and constraints to civic space, among others. Key Forum sessions therefore explored these emerging governance challenges and opportunities, and what role social accountability can play to tackle them for the benefit of the poorest. In the words of Jim Yong Kim, President of the World Bank Group, who opened the Forum in a video address: "There is a need for radical transparency to combat corruption."

The key questions the Forum sought to answer were:

1. How does the changing governance landscape directly affect the field of social accountability and what responses have emerged to address these challenges in new frontier areas?
2. How can social accountability be transformative, especially in challenging environments?
3. What roles are emerging innovative approaches, organizations, and funding mechanisms playing in the social accountability field, and to what extent are they delivering on their promise and aspirations?

4. Forum Outcomes

4a. Key takeaways for the social accountability field

Scaling and sustaining social accountability. Participants underscored the importance of scaling up and sustaining social accountability interventions across the globe for meaningful impact. To achieve this, citizens must be engaged at all levels and all areas of countries' governance systems. They noted that

¹ This report is based on notes taken of the Forum's proceedings. Details have been added to some sections for clarity. Comments and suggestions for edits are welcomed as part of the continued dialogue with GPSA Global Partners. The takeaways expressed in this work do not necessarily reflect the views of The World Bank, its Board of Executive Directors, or the governments they represent.

² This report was prepared by Emilie Fokkelman, GPSA Knowledge and Learning Coordinator, together with Jeff Thindwa, Program Manager of the GPSA and Yasha Moz, GPSA consultant.

social accountability should be regarded as a cross-cutting issue in all development work, similar to issues such as gender, youth and disability. However, participants cautioned against tokenistic actions that can undermine sustainability and called for investments that can help sustain social accountability at the grassroots level. International agencies were called on to support civil society organizations (CSOs) in countries with appropriate resources and context-sensitive capacity building while helping to improve conditions for the empowerment of citizens. To further advance this goal, Global Partners suggested that the GPSA establish a global charter on social accountability as an expression of the Partnership's commitment and collective will to advance transparency, accountability and citizen participation.

GPSA as a Knowledge Platform. The platform and opportunities created by the GPSA are widely recognized as an important contribution to the growth and progress of the social accountability field. Participants therefore requested that the GPSA continue to convene the GPSA Forum and offer its Knowledge Platform. GPSA Partners have much to learn from each other's social accountability initiatives, to improve their technical capacity and apply the knowledge that has been generated over the years. The GPSA and its partners should create communities of practice or learning strategies around key themes to document and sustain the field's rich experiences, especially those originating in the global South. There was a call to invest in technical assistance and research on engaging political actors and institutions, leveraging the knowledge and skills of partners. Furthermore, participants recommended more integrated strategies for capacity building of CSOs and governments for collaborative action, across all levels. Meanwhile the GPSA was asked to continue supporting CSOs to deal with the challenges in their engagement with governments and for the Bank to leverage its own operations to increase governments' capacity for learning, collaboration and accountability and in particular to respond to citizens' feedback.

Bridging social accountability-related work at the World Bank. Participants called for harmonization and scaling-up of social accountability practice across World Bank core operations in all countries, beyond the unique and direct support provided by the GPSA. World Bank projects provide an avenue for scaling and sustaining social accountability and open government processes launched by the GPSA and other partners. The World Bank should also be consistent across all its countries in playing the important role of 'honest broker', urging governments to include citizens in the development processes in countries. GPSA Global Partners also called for efforts to involve additional governments and CSOs in the GPSA, with some expressing the ambition to include all World Bank countries in the GPSA. Forum participants supported the close integration between the GPSA's work and the Bank's work on citizen engagement, open government and social and environmental safeguards, and urged the Bank to integrate social accountability more strategically in projects in order to avoid the risk of tokenistic citizen engagement. Responding in his closing remarks, Jan Walliser, Vice President for Equitable Growth, Finance, and Institutions at the Bank said that the GPSA was an important mechanism for teams across the Bank to learn how to conduct social accountability. The World Bank is committed, he said, to strengthening governance around the world through citizen engagement, as reflected in its Citizen Engagement Framework, and he noted that closing feedback loops through citizen feedback was essential to achieving the Bank's goals.

Building partnerships for social accountability. The success of social accountability is often dependent on the strength of the coalitions between state and civil society which are forged through constructive engagement. Participants recognized that more adversarial forms of citizen action can sometimes become necessary (for example, to complement and give leverage to state-society coalitions). The GPSA and other funders should provide strategic nurture to coalitions, supporting them through effective partnerships at

global, regional and country levels. An example of the crucial role of multi-stakeholder partnerships is the Transparency and Accountability in Mongolian Education ([TAME](#)) project supported by the GPSA. Participants expressed support for a vision where social accountability works as a system not only at national or local levels, but also the global level. Actors and institutions such as the GPSA, Open Government Partnership, and the World Bank itself should coordinate closely to foster enabling environments for social accountability, especially in restrictive contexts. In this spirit of partnership, GPSA Partners also asked to be more involved in setting the agenda of the partnership itself.

4b. Challenges facing social accountability

Social accountability has shown great potential in helping to address some of today's development challenges, such as forced displacement, disaster recovery, conflict and fragility. In turn, social accountability faces multiple challenges of its own, including:

Trust in crisis: A recurring topic at the Forum was the concern that citizens in many countries had largely lost trust in their governments. There was broad agreement that the lack of accountability, transparency and openness, corruption and the exclusion of certain segments of society from the policy arena were important factors and indeed drivers of fragility and conflict. This loss of trust also creates significant roadblocks to meaningful engagement between state and citizens. In environments of low trust, it is important to find non-controversial entry points to building accountability. For example, engaging informal institutions may garner more trust and needs to be explored. Social accountability also has a crucial intersection with political accountability, which should be carefully considered in any effort to build or restore trust between civil society organizations, citizens and government. Participants explored options on how trust could be fostered and observed that successful efforts often drew on a mix of approaches and formats for state-citizen engagement, as well as a considerable investment of time. They appealed to CSOs to take a lead role by going beyond advocacy towards implementing participatory social accountability mechanisms. For example, CSOs need to carefully consider the pros and cons of adversarial actions (such as 'naming and shaming the government'). In some cases, commending the government for doing good work can be more effective to build trust and advance cooperation.

Shrinking civic space and disengagement. Practitioners of social accountability in more and more countries face shrinking space for civic action and a challenging enabling environment. CSOs have difficulties in bridging political differences that exist within societies. Projects often have to deal with a lack or limited availability of public information. Moreover, when governments do open up, disclose and engage citizens, in many instances there is passivity and a lack of energy on the part of citizens to engage. Whereas in some situations citizen disengagement comes from a lack of trust, in others it is driven by the lack or distortion of information. In some areas, particularly in challenging environments, citizens do not trust the information their institutions provide, and instead rely on commonly shared (dis)information. Moreover, messaging about the mechanics, importance and impact of social accountability efforts is sometimes weak. Because the outcomes of social accountability are not always easily understood by citizens, they don't participate. This inertia is threatening the momentum of social accountability work, and the ability to sustain its results. Participants underlined the need to employ strategic messaging about social accountability to address this lack of understanding among citizens, as well as officials, so that they come to support it.

Lack of sustainability and scale. Social accountability achievements at the grassroots level often fail to connect with national policy dialogue. While practitioners face a shortage of sustainable funding, in projects, sustainability of achievements at the end of the implementation cycle (which is often relatively short) is often weak and projects do not have a defined exit strategy. Project staff and their partners do not have adequate or appropriate tools, resources and partnership-building capacities to continue the work. A clear business model for sustainability is key, but currently rarely available.

4c. Lessons on social accountability practice

Analysis of context must drive practice. Since social accountability works differently in different contexts, approaches must be tailored to the local circumstances. A thorough analysis of context can help understanding of relevant actors, incentives, power dynamics, processes, mechanisms, as well as potential collaborations and synergies with available partners. This is especially pertinent in fragile contexts.

Adapting and learning. Projects should experiment with best-fit approaches that combine adapting sustained best practice with discovering customized solutions. The approach should allow for learning from moments of failure. This involves nurturing a culture for doing adaptive and iterative work and creating mechanisms and instruments to capture and integrate lessons as a project unfolds. Knowledge being brought into the project about social accountability mechanisms and tools that worked in other projects and countries, for example on the use of evidence and data, must be carefully adapted.

Local ownership. For social accountability to succeed, ownership at country level by citizens themselves is important. Efforts by international donors seeking to foster collective action and instill greater accountability and transparency may not always work. Participants suggested that funders should go beyond traditional grantee-grantor relationships and seek to refrain from prescribing solutions. Rather, core financial support should be given and solutions should be driven locally by local coalitions of CSOs and stakeholders, thereby increasing the chances for advancing innovative approaches that include effective partnerships with private sector, civil society and agencies. Funders may want to pool funds to address risks involved in such an approach. Ultimately, CSOs must empower citizens to be the eyes and ears of social accountability work.

Feedback loops must be closed. Effective political, administrative, and social institutions are essential. To improve public services, policy makers, public servants, and service providers must be accountable to citizens, and citizens must trust and engage with public institutions in a continued and reinforcing feedback loop that rebuilds social contracts. “Transparency from governments, combined with citizen’s feedback produces positive results,” said Sanjay Pradhan, CEO of the Open Government Partnership.

Collective action. In her keynote address Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, underscored the importance of collective action to get policies that help people achieve better lives. Whether the issue is education, health or public spending, collective action is a powerful social accountability mechanism and ‘check and balance’ for democracy and governance, which is important in fighting for equality, equity and freedom. “At the end of the day, if we do not work together, we won’t have a world our children and grandchildren can call home,” she said. When people have a meaningful voice in their society and they can exercise it regularly, she argued, and when governments are

transparent, responsive and accountable, then the level of anger and discontent seen in many countries around the world today would not exist.

5. Highlights of key discussions

5a. Social accountability at the intersection of changing international development priorities

Forum participants observed that today's international development environment is palpably different from that which inspired the creation of the GPSA and other major social accountability and open government initiatives in the past six years, such as the Open Government Partnership and Making All Voices Count. Both the priorities and policy environments in donor countries as well as the realities in developing countries in which these initiatives are implemented have changed. The new challenges for the implementation of openness and accountability interventions were discussed in the panel '*Open Governance and Social Accountability in Changing Times*'. Key challenges of today include forced displacement, disaster recovery, conflict and fragility, and ensuring that development aid reaches the targeted recipients. The narrowing civic space discussed earlier, as well as reluctance by governments to engage with citizens are further complicating efforts. In response, Suneeta Kaimal, Chief Operating Officer at Natural Resource Governance Institute, stressed the need for better coordination and more coherence among international actors, including the World Bank, in combating increasing restriction of civic space around the world. She also emphasized the role of private sector and sub-national engagement in rich countries for accountability.

Meanwhile, changing circumstances have also given rise to new opportunities. The Sustainable Development Goals, for example, provide a framework and a rationale for increasing participation and engagement of citizens, as a goal in itself and as a means to achieve all other development goals. The "*Open Governance and Social Accountability in Changing Times*" plenary discussed experiences of navigating the changing times and ensuring the continued relevance of open governance and social accountability initiatives for the foreseeable future. The Open Government Partnership (OGP) was highlighted as a key platform for advancing social accountability efforts and embedding them strongly in country governance reform programs. By bringing together government and civil society reformers to co-create solutions to shared governance challenges, OGP is well-positioned to catalyze reforms that close the feedback loop using social accountability techniques. Furthermore, there was agreement that social accountability interacts with and reinforces political accountability and ultimately contributes to democracy. Thuli Madonsela, former Public Protector of South Africa, considered that "economic inclusion is not enough. People need to be included in how governments work. Social inclusion democratizes democracy."

5b. New frontiers in social accountability

Much discussion at the Forum centered around the exploration of less-traditional areas in which social accountability can make a difference. The discussion on "new frontiers" of social accountability focused on the growing recognition of the useful role of social accountability and citizen engagement in challenging environments where the main characteristics were often the lack of social cohesion, weak state legitimacy, disenfranchisement, injustice and corruption as well as risk of cooptation of accountability efforts by political interests. In a panel discussion on how social and political action can contribute to empowerment and accountability in FCV settings, John Gaventa, Research Director at the Institute of Development Studies, stressed that "in fragile countries, there can be enough arenas for social

accountability.” Often, a particularly useful entry point is service delivery, which matters greatly to citizens and where steady efforts on accountability can add to rebuilding trust.

A few conclusions were also drawn in a workshop on the same theme. There is a need to align incentives for government officials, service providers and citizens, and none of these groups should be considered homogeneous. Each requires nuanced engagement and tailored capacity-building, and sometimes the development of new, tailored social accountability tools that build on strands of social cohesion that may have existed prior to a situation of fragility or conflict. Taking a gradual approach to build a consensus among citizens and officials is key. Meanwhile, since the impact of stakeholders’ local-level actions may be limited by their small scale, it becomes important for donors to set realistic expectations and adopt a long-term perspective. Efforts should focus on combining capacity development for civil society monitoring with collaborative problem-solving and conflict prevention to rebuild social cohesion.

Other frontier areas of social accountability were also explored. Debbie Wetzel, Senior Director of the World Bank’s Governance Global Practice which hosts the GPSA, linked social accountability work to the findings of the World Development Report 2017 on Governance and the Law. The [WDR](#) discusses how power asymmetries affect policy implementation in countries, and underscores the need for inclusive policy-making to ensure that policies address the needs of all citizens, particularly the most marginalized ones. “Transparency, citizen engagement, openness, accountability, and effective media are all a core part of improving policy design and implementation,” Wetzel said. She also reminded participants that [IDA 18](#) includes Governance and Institutions as a special theme, with commitments to advance citizen engagement using grievance redress mechanisms, as well as transparency and open governance platforms that can improve the delivery of services.

5c. Is Technology Transforming Social Accountability?

The role of technology in advancing social accountability also featured as an important topic of the Forum. Various speakers, especially in the panel ‘*Civic Tech: Is Technology Transforming Social Accountability?*’ shared examples of how technology is helping to amplify citizen voice. Although ICT infrastructure is still very limited in many places of the world, young people predominate, and access to internet is quickly expanding. ICTs such as mobile applications, websites and SMS offer an opportunity to mediate citizen engagement, reach disadvantaged groups, and expand space for civil society. Technologies have proven useful for building trust networks at small-scale levels.

While all agreed that technology has an important role to play, there were also important caveats. Some cautioned that technology can lead to frustration when feedback loops are not effectively closed. There is a risk that this happens: “technology makes it easy to amplify citizen voices but an adequate response from government is much harder to achieve,” said Fletcher Tembo, Director of the Making All Voices Count program, which supported 177 research, innovation and implementation grants in the past four years. Moreover, among citizens, technology can lead to distortions in the information conveyed, and creates limitations for participation by less tech-savvy groups such as very destitute communities and disabled people. Because technology in social accountability tends to be fluid and change in the process of implementation, funders on their part need to be flexible and agile if they want technology interventions be successful. Investments are needed to ensure that information shared through new technologies is independently vetted for accuracy before being disseminated.

Ultimately, participants agreed that technology was a useful tool for social accountability but not a silver bullet. They stressed the importance of understanding and adapting social accountability approaches to local context, and using technology strategically as a component of a comprehensive human-centered approach focused on informing and mobilizing civil society for the public good. Informed citizens are more likely to have collaborative and empowering engagement with government, especially when working together with innovation champions in government. The design of technology solutions should be informed by the stakeholders (citizens) who have the best understanding of accountability gaps and solutions. To be successful, initiatives should also build government's capacity to respond to citizen inputs. Civic tech should be used together with other means such as radio, voice services and deliberative methods such as focus groups and town hall meetings. When used in such an integrated way, ICTs can have a profound impact by connecting citizens and governments directly with each other.

5d. GPSA's 2020 Strategy

On the Forum's second day, GPSA Program Manager Jeff Thindwa, in a dialogue with Jonas Rolett, Special Advisor to the Chairman at Open Society Foundations, gave an update about the GPSA's 2020 Strategy.

The GPSA. Currently, the GPSA supports 34 projects in 25 countries, selected from among more than 1,500 proposals. Broad stakeholder consultations at country level lead to the definition of governance problem areas that GPSA projects focus on resolving through social accountability mechanisms. Projects are also aligned with World Bank's portfolio to ensure maximizing the Bank's comparative advantage in government engagement. Each of the GPSA's projects is driven by 'implementation compacts' – a coalition of the grantee and its civil society partners, GPSA social accountability advisors, staff in World Bank sector and country units, and sometimes staff from other development partners. These compacts receive funding and implementation support to collaborate in working with the public sector, mobilizing citizens and supporting multi-stakeholder interfaces at different levels of government.

Four lessons from GPSA's first four years. 1) From its three global calls for proposals the GPSA learned that a more targeted selection of projects was needed. Instead of global calls, the program will now hold country, regional and sector-based calls. This should enable the program to better align with in-country opportunities for advancing social accountability and achieving results and sustainability. 2) CSOs embrace collaborative social accountability but there are significant capacity gaps in the field (analytical, organizational, civic and adaptability capacities) among different stakeholders. For GPSA, this means it is necessary to closely work with grantees to nurture those capacities across the project's partners. 3) As projects get underway, it is important to pay attention to the process and outcomes of collaborative engagement, instead of just focusing on technical capacity to use specific tools. This means that GPSA implementation compacts must invest time to carefully and adaptively manage an ongoing dialogue between civil society and governments. 4) Such tailored support for implementation compacts is particularly indispensable in "challenging environments", where limited contestability of the policy arena, low civic capacity, closing civic space, fragility and conflict prevail.

The GPSA's 2020 Strategy. The GPSA consulted stakeholders as part of its "Vision 2020" process which identified five areas in which the GPSA can leverage its comparative advantage, through its mission, model, experience and portfolio. The five areas are:

1) *Leveraging country-level partnerships*: The GPSA will build on its ongoing experiments in designing project support based on leveraging country donor partnerships, funding and coordination working with World Bank Country Offices.

2) *Sector partnerships for social accountability to improve service delivery*: While governance for improved service delivery is already a strength of the GPSA's current portfolio, the program aims to further integrate social accountability mechanisms into sectoral work that is contributing to sustainable development goals. The GPSA will build partnerships within the Bank and with other donors and stakeholders to develop its thematic-based programming further.

3) *Open government*: The GPSA's co-creation approach allows the program to provide tailored solutions to countries' open government implementation challenges. The GPSA will also support and create synergies with the multi-stakeholder coalitions implementing Open Government National Action plans.

4) *Social accountability in Fragile, Conflict and Violence-affected Settings*: The GPSA will facilitate platforms for state-civil society collaboration to address governance and service delivery constraints as well as third-party monitoring by CSOs to ensure transparency, accountability and effective delivery of IDA18 in selected countries. This will involve knowledge, learning and capacity building strategies.

5) *Making the 2017 World Development Report operational*: the WDR 2017 identifies the problem of pervasive failure of policy and argues the centrality of governance. The GPSA will a) leverage its sectoral and thematic social accountability as well as partnerships to facilitate citizen voice in the policy arena; b) support GPSA implementation compacts with the tools to better analyze and address power asymmetries that foster exclusion, capture and clientelism in its social accountability approaches especially in service delivery; and, c) apply its collaborative business model, including coalitions, to foster commitment, cooperation and coordination toward more effective policy implementation.

6. Conclusion

The answers to the core questions posed at the Forum can be summed up in three overarching takeaways. First, the Forum reinforced that 'the development field has understood the right of citizens to have a hand in their own development', in the words of Thomas Carothers, Senior Vice President for Studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Social accountability is a crucial way to achieve this, and it is being supported by a critical mass of actors, networks, coalitions and organizations, so the 'reckless existential doubt' as to whether we are making progress is needless. Second, the Forum firmed up the field's thinking on the role of innovations and technology in social accountability. The Forum concluded that although ICTs and innovations are not stand-alone solutions, they are giving citizens vast opportunities for influence. When embedded properly in strategically designed social accountability projects, their role can be transformative. Third, the Forum reaffirmed that the key value-add of social accountability is its ability to solve development challenges. Civil society actors must further refine the role that they can play in this respect drawing on adaptive, meaningful support of external actors including the World Bank in order to tackle effectively the challenges facing the field, which are profound and complex.

The important discussions launched at the Forum and documented in this report will be continued through the [GPSA Knowledge Platform](#) and sectoral and regional affinity groups that connect 300+ GPSA Global Partners throughout the year.