

Supporting Domestic Accountability

East and Southern Africa Practice Brief

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This Practice Brief shares lessons from SNV's practice to improve accountability in the delivery of public services at local level. It aims to offer empirical evidence of 'what works or doesn't', based on a range of initiatives supported by the Domestic Accountability Partnership, a pilot collaborative programme of the Netherlands Ministry for Development Cooperation and SNV. While still a work-in-progress, the diverse and context-specific experiences from Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zambia help to shed some light on what support organisations can do to amplify the voice of local stakeholders in demanding greater accountability from governments and service providers. The Brief links to and complements the already considerable body of work on domestic accountability within the international and national policy arena.



In **Zambia**, parents had complained for years about low education standards, but they lacked the means to take this up with the relevant authorities. Following the introduction of community scorecards (a participatory monitoring tool) in 28 primary schools in Kaoma District, community members quickly became aware of delays and irregularities in transferring school funds. For the first time, parents had a forum to discuss budgetary issues and highlight their concerns about the quality of education services and other issues.

In 2008/9, Bukoba rural district council in **Tanzania** received more than US\$33,000 from the central government to rehabilitate the in-patients' ward at Katoro Health Centre. Upon completion, however, the ward was turned into accommodation for staff. When a local youth group asked for an explanation it was informed that the ward was awaiting 'official inauguration'. The group then contacted the district executive director, who attributed the delay to the slow procurement process for hospital furniture. When a local newspaper published this exchange, new hospital beds were delivered within days and the ward was finally opened to patients.

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This is the first of a series of practice briefs published by the East and Southern Africa regional office of SNV Netherlands Development Organisation. It is based on the SNV Working Paper: ***Accountability at local level: Experiences from the partnership with the Netherlands Ministry of Development Cooperation on Domestic Accountability***

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Organisation of the Brief

We begin by briefly outlining the 'state-of-the-art' in the domestic accountability debate. The next section highlights some broad lessons that are emerging from the four SNV East and Southern Africa country programmes participating in the pilot project. In the following section, we explore some features of SNV's support for domestic accountability, with examples from specific sector experiences. The concluding section synthesises insights from our practice that can help inform broader governance processes and policymaking.

An emerging convergence

The growing attention to domestic accountability within development cooperation programmes is driven by a convergence of several factors. For donor agencies the incentive is that such a focus helps in achieving value for money, while at the same time it provides a practical entry point for operationalising a broader and more inclusive concept of development effectiveness, as set out in the Accra Agenda for Action. However, formulating a transformative development approach should not be left to closed-door discussions between government and donors. It requires societal support and underpinning. Including an accountability component in development aid helps to open up these processes to a broader cross-section of stakeholders. An example of how this approach is being applied can be seen in new-generation funding mechanisms as 'Budget Support Plus', in which a specific window is allocated for supporting complementary monitoring and accountability interventions.

At the same time, the domestic agenda in Africa is moving beyond the monitoring of aid flows to emphasise the fundamental contract between governments and citizens. Although most citizens remain disconnected from the state, the media in many countries is playing a greater role in informing citizens, fuelling debate and challenging authority. Coupled with an increasingly vocal and organised civil society sector, public demand for better governance is growing, revealing that corruption is not an issue for donors only.

Governments too are paying more attention to the institutional reforms needed to strengthen economic growth and boost domestic revenue. While this is partly driven by the prospect of dwindling aid flows, it is nevertheless providing a focal point for bridging public, private and civil society interests, which is critical in creating an enabling environment for improved governance and state building.

Nurturing Domestic Accountability: Key Lessons Learnt

This section provides a bird's-eye view of SNV's practice by highlighting three broad and interrelated issues that are emerging from our work on domestic accountability. First, it is increasingly clear that accountability interventions are more likely to succeed if they focus on real-life issues for citizens, which often touch on non-delivery, or the poor level of, basic services. Second, to serve citizens effectively, external support needs to take account of the large gap that exists between national-level policies and community-level realities. In SNV's experience, an explicit choice for the 'local' as the entry point for support can contribute to bridging this micro-macro gap. Finally, accountability interventions can contribute to improved governance by creating an enabling environment in which state and citizens can work together to improve services (co-production).

A practical and sector-driven focus

Accountability can be an abstract concept, but it comes alive for ordinary citizens if it involves looking at whether (and how) funding for services is distributed and spent at the local level. However, many accountability mechanisms promoted by development cooperation programmes tend to focus on actions at the national-level, such as budget audits, improved political oversight, civil service strengthening, and support for civil society networks. In SNV's experience building on concrete projects at the sub-national and lower levels can provide the missing link that can help turn higher-level policy objectives into meaningful action.

As illustrated by the 21 case studies that form the back drop to this Brief (see the full list on page 8), approaching domestic accountability from the bottom up entails working on an eclectic range of issues: from supporting local communities to get a non-functional cattle dip working again and negotiating with traditional leaders, to finding innovative ways to fund small-scale business enterprises. The bulk of the cases explore bottlenecks faced in delivering services to local populations, and how they can be addressed. From an immediate focus on achieving practical results, there is a gradual expansion of the democratic space as local communities become more confident about asking critical questions and demanding better governance - from local leaders initially, but increasingly from higher-level institutions as well.

Understanding local dynamics

The focus on local level processes by SNV and its partners is in part a practical response to decentralisation processes being pursued by governments across the region. While the intention is to 'bring government closer to the people' such processes often overlook the fact that the gap between local and national is not simply the result of poor communication and obstructed information flows, but has structural features as well. Contrary to conventional wisdom, local institutions are not miniature versions of national institutions, nor is local political context a reflection of the national level.

Several of the interventions facilitated by the Domestic Accountability Partnership entailed developing localised political economy tools to arrive at a deeper understanding of why certain accountability approaches work, or not. The ensuing analysis helped to generate better insights on the dynamics at play in both formal and informal local politics and how this influenced service delivery. A case in point is the divergent interpretations of how to work with informal practices. At the national level, informal processes are most often perceived as subverting bureaucratic procedures, whether in employment practices, the awarding of tenders or the granting of favours. In local contexts, however, traditional authorities or institutions (though regarded often as informal) can provide legitimacy to local communities.

Strengthening citizen-state relations

The impact of the disconnect between state and citizens is particularly evident at the local level. Unable to trust their local government to provide equitable access to (public) goods and services, citizens may choose to 'opt out': children drop out of school, or are enrolled at (often poor quality) private schools; patients reject the state health system and turn to traditional health services, or private clinics. A vicious cycle sets in and is perpetuated as state services decline even further. Support for domestic accountability can help to reconstruct and transform such perverse relationships and restore confidence that 'people power works'. At a time when many donor agencies are focusing their domestic accountability interventions at the national level - where the gap between state and citizens is even greater - our experience is that using day to day (sector) issues as an entry point - from the quality of education to access to agricultural markets - helps to stimulate greater engagement by ordinary citizens.

Local governance in Tanzania: 'An unholy alliance?'

One of the assumptions behind current national policies is that the distinction between ruling and opposition parties also applies at local government level, with the opposition parties holding the ruling party to account. However, a Strategic Governance and Corruption Assessment (SGACA) carried out jointly by SNV and the Dutch Embassy in Tanzania found that it is common practice for ruling parties to co-opt opposition politicians into their fold. Opposition council members do not demand explanations for poor services or when cases of corruption emerge, nor are wrong-doers taken to task. In two of the districts covered by the localised SGACA, ruling party councillors recommended that opposition councillors be termed '*wenzetu*' (our kind), not '*wapinzani*' (opposition). It expresses a type of alliance which some observers have derogatorily referred to as '*ushoga*' (indecent cohabitation).

Localising Domestic Accountability

SNV and its partners aim to contribute to an environment in which accountability relations can grow, and subsequently to strengthen the capacities of local actors to effectively utilise these relations. Although the focus of the four country programmes participating in the Domestic Accountability Partnership are quite diverse, a number of common strands in their approach can be distinguished. This section provides a quick overview of four of these elements, accompanied by brief illustrative case studies.

1. Providing objective information and analysis

A simple, yet potentially powerful catalyst for building accountability relations is the provision of relevant and accessible information. Within SNV monitoring tools such as inventories of infrastructure (water points, cattle dips, school latrines, and so forth) and the performance of public institutions (such as through budget tracking) have been widely used to facilitate informed debate at the local level. The real value of such inventories lies not only in the information conveyed, but the opportunity it offers to trigger public debate and increased awareness about the actual reality on the ground. When local officials and institutions are involved in such discussions and endorse the agreements made to improve services, this creates a basis for greater accountability.

As the following case shows, once key stakeholders gain a broader understanding of the problems faced they are likely to be more willing to explore solutions that are workable and acceptable to all parties concerned.

Water Point Mapping and Monitoring (Mozambique)

Mozambique's coverage of clean water supply is one of the lowest in Africa. At just 20.7% water coverage, Nampula province has been identified as the most disadvantaged region in the country. Since 2010, SNV has supported a water mapping exercise in Mogovolas District to determine the distribution of water points, their level of functionality, and whether local communities are aware about their maintenance. At a district-level meeting to discuss initial results, stakeholders agreed on two key actions to improve the situation:

- *Improve water point monitoring:* 60 members of the district water commission were trained to collect data for regular updating of the monitoring system;
- *Strengthen technical capacity at local level:* 31 local artisans were trained on water point maintenance and rehabilitation, as well as the construction of latrines. An important element of the training involved enhancing the entrepreneurship skills of the artisans so they could generate an income as local technical service providers. Following the training, two artisan associations were legalised. The availability of skilled local technicians has improved the management of water points, while reducing maintenance costs. An additional benefit has been the inclusion of artisans in the district water commission, enabling them to contribute to planning for water and sanitation provision in the district.

Gilda Uaciquete, SNV Mozambique

2. Brokering accountability relationships

In a poorly-functioning public service environment that they feel powerless to change, citizens may 'opt out' of services that they view as irrelevant or inadequate, or even set up parallel arrangements to address their needs. As part of its support for domestic accountability, SNV often helps to negotiate arrangements through which government institutions and citizens resolve conflicting interests and define new modes of engagement between state and civil society that can help achieve desired development results. This brokering to create collaboration can take the form of one-off interventions (such as multi-stakeholder platforms) or get institutionalised, such as in the case of Rwanda below.

Joint Action Development Forum (Rwanda)

Since 2001, SNV has supported Rwanda to experiment with multi-actor forums for participatory governance. In 2001, the country formally established the Joint Action Development Forum (JADF) as a mechanism for development planning and monitoring, and to promote cooperation between the private sector, civil society and the public sector at the local level. JADFs are now operational in all districts. In some districts, JADFs bring together more than 70 stakeholders. Initially, the JADFs were chaired by the local government, but a recent study found that JADF with civil society and private sector leadership were more successful. Consequently there has been a policy push for civil society and private sector members to take on leadership.

The JADF mechanism foresees the installation of sub-commissions for economic development, education, health, water and sanitation, and governance. These sub-commissions report to the general JADF. The JADFs are established to ensure full participation of citizens in the local development processes and it provides a space for inclusive dialogue and accountability. The JADF can then be seen both as a means to an end (a partnership arrangement to achieve the specific goals) and as an end in itself (as a dialogue between actors to enhance accountability and foster democratic governance).

Emmanuel Ruzibiza and Michiel Verweij, SNV Rwanda

3. Engaging with political processes and power dynamics

In an effort to overcome entrenched bottlenecks in the delivery of public services, facilitators of multi-stakeholder platforms at the local level can sometimes create parallel structures that overlook, or even undermine, elected leaders and other establishment actors. This can hamper the building of democratic and accountable institutions at the local level. SNV interventions are therefore increasingly aware of the need to recognise power dynamics and engage more explicitly with political leaders and processes. Within some of the country programmes, corruption issues are being discussed more openly, providing an opportunity to tackle specific incidents. In some cases, such engagement is opening up opportunities for an honest debate on the limitations of external interventions in politically-charged processes and how to deal with the consequences of 'stepping on toes'. The following case from Tanzania shows how support for domestic accountability can encourage political actors to take responsibility for service delivery.

Coaching of local councillors (Tanzania)

In Tanzania, there are often large discrepancies between budget planning and actual resource utilisation in the water, sanitation and hygiene (WaSH) sector at local government level. This contributes, for instance, to poor functionality of water points and their unequal distribution between and within districts. According to water point mapping studies in 10 districts, the functionality rates of water points varies widely, from as low as 17% in some areas to 82% in others.

Within the local government system, elected councillors are formally mandated to set, amend and approve the Council's plans and budgets, and to oversee implementation. However, due to an interplay of factors, including a limited understanding by councillors of their mandate; poor access to both internal and external data sources; and sparse contacts with service users, this formal responsibility is rendered rather meaningless. In line with the approach of most development agencies, SNV interventions avoided dealing with this 'political' situation, as it was seen as being beyond the remit of a technical development agency. With the adoption of the accountability approach, however, interventions to improve institutional dynamics are now viewed as a crucial element in sector support. Hence, SNV Tanzania has recently designed and implemented a councillors' coaching programme to pilot this approach in Mvomero District. The programme enhanced skills in understanding WaSH specific planning, budgeting and implementing, while using the existing data in the field and contacts with citizens as a monitoring mechanism for keeping the executive accountable.

Jan Meelker, SNV Tanzania

4. Linking local and national processes

While linking of the micro and macro levels is central to SNV's way of working, accountability interventions call for a more proactive stance in engaging with national-level actors. In a number of countries, SNV has looked for allies and coalitions at national level to support societal transformation and institutionalise some of the results of its interventions at community level. This can relate for instance to a redefinition of Ministerial guidelines in dealing with farmers or new rules for accessing district development funding. Within the context of the partnership with the Dutch Embassies at country level, this channel is also being used to feed back lessons from local accountability interventions to inform national-level policy discussions. Furthermore, as the next case shows, when citizens feel empowered to influence local processes, they can quickly scale up their demands to higher level authorities and elected officials – an important step in achieving broader societal transformation.

Farmers claim services (Zambia)

SNV supports the development of the rice value chain in Chavuma, where more than 600 farmers produce an estimated 250 tons of rice per year. However, the poor state of the road leading from the west bank of the Zambezi River where rice is produced, to the market on the east bank, has prevented farmers from selling their paddy rice at favourable prices. Government is primarily responsible for the construction and maintenance of roads.

In August 2009, SNV facilitated a multi-stakeholder forum attended by all relevant stakeholders (rice producers, processors, government departments, provincial administration, district administrators, development organisations and traders) to discuss the issues that critically challenge the rice sector. As a result for the forum, the district resolved to take up the issue of the road with the central government and designed and implemented a lobby, utilising a number of different channels, including informal ones. Their efforts were successful and the government has contracted a company to construct the East Bank Road that connects the districts to Zambezi District.

Motivated by this success, the District Agriculture Office was put under pressure and thus held accountable by the farmers during the forum to resolve the issue of low extension services. Consequently, extension services are now being rendered locally: farmers from the west bank are being trained to provide extension support to other farmers instead of these services being rendered from afar.

Etah Manda and Clair van der Kleij, SNV Zambia

Conclusion

In conclusion, the experiences of the Domestic Accountability Partnership throw up a number of issues that could help inform wider policymaking and practice in this area.

Domestic accountability interventions enhance citizen agency

Not least inspired by recent events in the Middle East and North Africa, there is increased recognition and appreciation for the agency of citizens around the world. Within other parts of Africa too, there is a growing awareness of the role of citizen agency as a force for change. The Domestic Accountability Partnership works to foster such civil-led initiatives, not just by amplifying the *voice* of ordinary citizens, but through facilitating citizens' engagement with government in co-production arrangements (and thus creating shared responsibilities). By getting citizens involved in specific activities for improved delivery of services, their agency in other domains is likely to be enhanced as well.

A local accountability approach can help to build effective multi-actor capacity

The collection of lessons learnt by the Domestic Accountability Partnership can hardly claim to deliver a panacea to all development problems. The interventions on which they are based aimed at solving specific development challenges, and required collaboration by multiple actors. However, they do serve to demonstrate that the accountability approach is an effective way of creating the right basis and dynamics for bringing the key actors around the table in order to jointly improve the delivery of services.

To effectively deal with accountability, an integrated approach is required

Many of the interventions under the partnership use a systems-based understanding of accountability relations. Our interventions emphasise the three 'multis'. They are **multi-actor** processes that go beyond 'the usual suspects' by working directly with communities and traditional authorities, or through institutional arrangements at the sub-national level. They are **multi-phased**: starting with making information available to as many grassroots actors as possible and gradually moving up the 'accountability chain' of local and higher-level institutions. Finally, our interventions address issues from a **multi-level** perspective, either through tackling the local and national level simultaneously and inter-dependently, or using informal networks at different levels (from the local councillor to the President).

Local approaches offer alternatives to (re)constructing democratic relationships

Many prevailing accountability interventions are modelled on the Rights-Based Approach (RBA) in which civil society (often equated to a few NGOs) is seen as a watchdog that holds government to account. While there is growing recognition of the need to involve a much broader group of actors - including members of parliament and the media - in democratisation processes, ideas on how to practically engage citizens in building a truly democratic society are few and far between. In this sense, the experiences of the Domestic Accountability Partnership could offer alternatives for bridging the disconnect between citizens and governments that contributes to some of the fundamental problems besetting African development.

TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL CONSENSUS?

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Since its first meeting in Paris in 2005 the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness has helped to focus international attention on practices that can contribute to, or hinder, development effectiveness. From an initial emphasis on accounting for aid investments, there is growing recognition that international partners should help nurture efforts by developing countries to create the institutional conditions in which true accountability can thrive.

This shift provides a window of opportunity to bridge international policy with ongoing political and economic reform processes in developing countries while, crucially, making links with civil society and other actors.

At a meeting in Paris in June 2011, GOVNET [a sub-committee of OECD/DAC] members reviewed a synthesis paper on accountability experiences so far, based on research in Uganda, Mozambique, Peru and Mali. The findings strongly resonate with the experiences highlighted in the SNV Working Paper, with a call for accountability interventions to:

- *Focus on strengthening state-society relations;*
- *Pay greater attention to local context;*
- *Adopt a systems approach that focuses on relations between key stakeholders; and*
- *Anchor accountability within specific sectors to facilitate effective monitoring of results.*

Overview of local accountability interventions highlighted in the SNV Working Paper on Domestic Accountability (available online at <http://www.snvworld.org/en/Pages/Publications-item.aspx?publication=897>)

Case 1: Resource tracking in Zambia's education sector by Pamela Opiyo and Clair van der Kleij

Case 2: Joint Action Development Forums (JADF) in Rwanda by Russel Mushanga and Beatrice Mukasine

Case 3: Applying governance assessment tools (SGCA) at the local level in Tanzania by Josephine Lemoyan

Case 4: Localised SGCA findings in Tanzania by Josephine Lemoyan

Case 5: Institutionalising the JADF in Rwanda by Emmanuel Ruzibiza and Michiel Verweij

Case 6: The loan scheme of Mogovolas district in Mozambique by Joshua Murandzicua, Hermnegildo Manuel, Rita Mutondo and Roberto Chipembere

Case 7: Parents empowerment in schools in Zambia by Donald Mwape and Claire van der Kleij

Case 8: School Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WaSH) in Tanzania: Opt out and cop out! by Jacqui Ngoma

Case 9: Cattle dip revitalisation in Tanzania by John Mlay

Case 10: The role of chiefs in education service delivery in Zambia by Tenso Kalala and Claire van der Kleij

Case 11: How did a youth group in Tanzania get involved in accountability? by Ayeta Wangusa

Case 12: The role of school pupils in School Self Evaluation in Zambia by Donald Mwape and Claire van der Kleij

Case 13: Water point mapping and monitoring in Mozambique by Guilda Uaciquete

Case 14: Informal institutions Benin by Edouard Fagnon

Case 15: JADF-facilitated new connections in Rwanda by Antoinette Uwimana

Case 16: Farms claim services in Zambia by Eta Manda and Claire van der Kleij

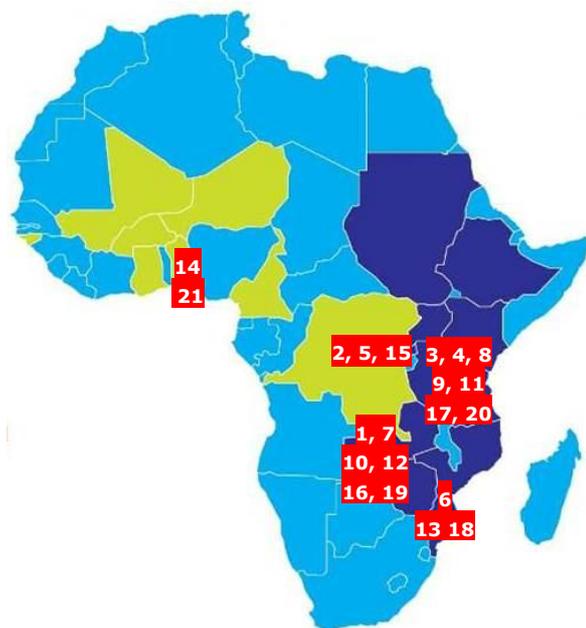
Case 17: Informal networking in Tanzania by Zaida Mgalla and Julie Adkins

Case 18: Operations and maintenance logbook in Mozambique by Edmundo Almeida and Martinus Ruijten

Case 19: Corruption in education in Zambia by Pamella Opiyo and Claire van der Kleij

Case 20: Coaching of councillors in Tanzania by Jan Meelker

Case 21: Majors and their communes in Benin by Edouard Fagnon



SNV is an international not-for-profit development organisation that works in 36 developing countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and The Balkans. The East and Southern Africa Region of SNV covers Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. We help empower local communities, businesses and organisations to break the cycle of poverty by providing them with the tools, knowledge and connections they need to increase their incomes and gain access to basic services. We do this by providing advisory services, knowledge networking and supporting advocacy in the agriculture, water, sanitation and hygiene, and renewable energy sectors.

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