Voice and Accountability for Improved Service Delivery

Background Paper

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List of Acronyms

AHDR  Annual Human Development Report
AS    Arab States
A2I   Access to Information
CO    Country Office
CBO   Community Based Organisation
CSO   Civil Society Organisation
DANIDA Danish International Development Agency
DMC   District Management Committee
DEO   District Executive Office
DSDSP Decentralisation and Local Development Support Programme
MDGs  Millennium Development Goals
MOLA  Ministry of Local Administration
NGO   Non Governmental Organisation
oPt   occupied Palestinian territories
PETS  Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys
POGAR Programme on Governance in the Arab Region
PTA   Parent Teacher Association
PTC   Parent Teacher Council
TI    Transparency International
UNCAC United Nations Convention against Corruption
UNCDF United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNDP  United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF United Nations International Children’s Fund
USAID United States Agency for International Development
V&A   Voice and Accountability

This paper is based on the Background Paper developed by the IDLgroup for the UNDP training event Developing Capacities for Accountability and Voice held in Sofia in October 2008. The document has been updated and contextualised for the Arab States region by an independent consultant. The analysis, opinions, conclusions and recommendations of this paper rest solely with its authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the United Nations Development Programme, its Executive Board or its Member States.
1. Introduction

Making service providers and public agencies more accountable and responsive to citizens can promote democratic governance, inclusive growth and human development. This paper explores some of the latest thinking on voice and accountability (V&A) and examines some of the ways in which V&A mechanisms can be employed at the local level to improve service delivery. Specifically, it addresses the following key question:

*How can one increase the responsiveness of local government authorities and service providers to the concerns of the poor, and how can poor people and their advocates (e.g. CSOs and NGOs) hold them accountable to the commitment to reduce poverty and provide services equitably?*

This paper has been developed as background reading for participants at the UNDP training on Voice and Accountability for Improved Service Delivery for the Arab States region. The target audience is therefore UNDP staff based in the region’s Country Offices as well as their national counterparts in government and civil society. The focus of the paper, as well as that of the training itself, is practical; it is linked to specific strategies for strengthening UNDP’s work in enhancing voice and accountability for improved service delivery, while at the same time accounting for the specific constraints placed on such initiatives by the socio-political context of the region.

The paper first provides an overview of key V&A concepts and a framework for promoting voice and enhancing accountability in local service delivery (sections 2 and 3). In section 4, the paper explores what can be done in practice to strengthen voice and accountability. Specific mechanisms for strengthening voice and accountability in policy making, planning, budgeting and the front-line delivery of services are explored and illustrated with examples from the Arab States region. The paper then presents a voice and accountability initiative in Yemen in some depth, to illustrate the ways in which a V&A mechanism has been applied in practice to strengthen citizen voice and accountability in service delivery, and to discuss some of the challenges of that process. The final section of the paper highlights some of the key challenges and entry points for strengthening voice and accountability in the Arab States region.

2. Voice and Accountability

What is meant by voice and accountability? Why do voice and accountability matter for achieving broader development outcomes such as enhanced human development, poverty reduction and democratic governance, particularly in the Arab States region?
2.1 Why voice and accountability matter

Over the past decades, significant developments have taken place in the Arab region. Indicators relating to education, health and life expectancy are improving. Most countries now hold regular parliamentary and local elections, and the number of civil society organisations has grown considerably since the 1980s.

However, the Arab States region is faced with a range of governance challenges to effectively address poverty reduction, human development, and the improvement of human rights. Since decolonisation, Arab states have been marked by low levels of democratic participation by citizens. The political climate is characterised by a tight control over electoral processes, extensive use of security services by the executive branch and prolonged use of emergency laws. States remain heavily centralised, and elected parliaments are dominated by the executive branch. Organisations which could potentially call for more distributive policies, such as political parties, professional associations and CSOs, are frequently weak and lacking political influence. Strengthening voice and accountability mechanisms is one way to address such distorted power relations so that governments can be increasingly held to account for their actions.

A related challenge is weak governmental capacity at both national and local levels in terms of state responsiveness towards citizens, combined with high levels of corruption. According to the World Bank Governance Indicators on voice and accountability, thirteen out of eighteen countries in the Arab States region rank among the lowest quarter of the scale. In many parts of the region, poor people are excluded from participation in the design and oversight of the policies and programmes that affect their lives. This in turn has implications for citizens’ ability to hold their governments to account over public service delivery. While public services have been expanded since the 1950s, service delivery remains inefficient. Access to public services may be determined by factors such as nepotism, tribal affinity, patronage or money.

At the same time, the centralised nature of the state leaves little room for effective local governance. Although local elections are increasingly taking place, elected local bodies have limited power. Decentralisation in the region is primarily administrative in nature, and the capacity of local governments to act responsively to needs in their local communities is often jeopardised by insufficient political and fiscal decentralisation. Voice and accountability mechanisms are needed not only at the point of service delivery, but for tracing resource flows from the central to the local level.

While the number of CSOs has risen significantly, some of this growth reflects the state’s inability to deliver essential services. The CSOs that have taken up the cause of marginalised groups have frequently been turned into paid service providers for the poor who operate in a contractual

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2 Cf. the Worldwide Governance Indicators Project web site.
3 2008 data.
relationship with the government, rather than a mutual partnership (Salem 2009). Developing capacities that encourage state-citizen relationships based on sustainable accountability relationships, rather than civil society replacing the state as service providers, is important in this context.

In sum, state responsiveness in the Arab region remains the exception rather than the norm. One the other hand, countries and territories with less authoritarian characteristics, such as Lebanon, Iraq and the oPt, struggle with internal conflict, foreign occupation, or a combination of the two. In both contexts millions of citizens are affected, especially those from poor and marginalised groups, who are unable to access basic services of sufficient quality. This in turn constitutes severe obstacles to poverty alleviation, strengthening of democratic governance, and effective human development.

2.2 Key voice & accountability concepts

Voice is the capacity to express views and priorities, and to demand one’s rights and entitlements. Voice can be exercised through the participation of citizens and clients in decision-making processes, service delivery or policy implementation processes. It can also be exercised through lobbying, protests or complaints.

Accountability is the obligation of power-holders to take responsibility for their actions. From a human rights perspective, accountability is best understood as the character of the relationship between two sets of actors: rights holders and duty bearers. An accountable relationship is one in which duty bearers (leaders, government departments, administrators and service providers) are obliged to account for and take responsibility for their actions, while rights holders (citizens or clients) are able to hold these duty bearers to account by exercising voice.

Accountability requires both answerability and enforceability. To be accountable, politicians, civil servants and service providers must be answerable for their actions; they must explain or justify what they do and why they do it. It must also be possible to sanction or reward decision makers for their performance (enforcement), so that action is taken or redress provided when accountability fails.

In a democratic governance context, an accountable relationship is one in which voice is met by responsiveness. Citizens must not only have voice, the state and service providers must be receptive to their views and be willing and able to modify their actions accordingly. Amplifying citizen or client voice can often stimulate greater accountability. However, voice is not sufficient, in and of itself, to ensure accountability. Without responsive and capable governments and service providers, voice can go unheard or have limited impact on decision making or service provision.

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4 This section is based on the World Bank (2004) and UNDP (2010).
Accountability can be vertical, horizontal or both. It can also be upward, downward or outward. Box 1 defines these different forms of accountability. Horizontal and vertical accountability are central to creating an accountable government, responsive services and an empowered citizenry. The focus of this paper however, is on social accountability, which relies on civic engagement to build state and service provider accountability.

### Box 1: Aspects of accountability

Accountability can be horizontal, vertical or hybrid:

**Vertical accountability**: Imposed externally on governments, formally through electoral processes or indirectly through citizens and civil society, including mass media. These external actors seek to enforce standards of good performance on officials. The most common mechanism for the exercise of vertical accountability is an election.

**Horizontal accountability**: Imposed by governments internally through institutional mechanisms for oversight and checks and balances, and refers to the capacity of state institutions to check abuses by other public agencies and branches of government, or the requirement for agencies to report sideways. As well as mutual checks and balances provided by the executive, legislature and judiciary, other state agencies that monitor other arms of the state (institutions of ‘horizontal accountability’) include anti-corruption commissions, auditors-general, human rights machineries, ombudsmen, legislative public-accounts committees and sectoral regulatory agencies.

**Social accountability**: a form of accountability which emerges from actions by citizens and civil society organization (CSOs) aimed at holding the state to account, as well as efforts by government and other actors (media, private sector, donors) to support these actions.

Accountability can be upward, downward or outward:

**Upward accountability**: Defined as the answerability of lower ranks to a higher-level authority, such as that of local government bodies to a national body.

**Downward accountability**: The answerability of a higher rank to a lower level, for example, a Ministry of Finance to municipalities that receive part of their funds from central level.

**Outward accountability**: The answerability of domestic/national actors to external donors or development partners.

*Source: Goetz and Gaventa (2001), Goetz and Jenkins (2005), UNDP (2010)*
3. A framework for engaging in voice and accountability in service delivery

The accountability relationships between government, service providers and citizens are complex. The 2004 World Development Report, *Making Services Work for the Poor*, provides a useful framework for exploring this complexity. It also offers a way of assessing V&A mechanisms that are appropriate for enhancing voice and accountability in different contexts.

The framework highlights three key sets of actors in the delivery of services:

1. **Citizens/clients**: individuals and households are simultaneously citizens and clients of services (e.g. healthcare, education, electricity).

2. **Politicians/policymakers**: Politicians are elected or unelected officials who regulate, legislate and tax, while policy makers implement and enforce these ‘rules of the game’.

3. **Providers** can include public line ministries, departments, agencies or bureaus; autonomous public enterprises; non-profits (e.g. religious schools); or for-profit organisations (e.g. bus companies, private hospitals). Frontline providers are those who come into direct contact with clients (e.g. teachers, doctors, police, engineers).

‘In an ideal situation, these actors are linked in relationships of power and accountability’ (The World Bank 2003):

- Politicians regulate, legislate and tax while the policymakers (civil servants) implement the rules. Both politicians and policymakers are subject to horizontal accountability (judicial review, parliamentary scrutiny etc.). Policymakers have **comacts** with organisational providers; they set and enforce the rules of the game for the provision of services. Organizations **manage** frontline providers who ensure that goods and services are delivered.

- Citizens exercise **voice** vis-à-vis politicians through a ‘**long route of accountability**’. They use elections, lobbying, information campaigns and other forms of social accountability to monitor and sanction elected leaders. Citizens do so individually or through organised groups, coalitions and civil society (e.g. NGOs, labour unions, business associations).

- Finally, citizens exercise **client power** with frontline providers through a ‘**short route of accountability**’. In this situation, providers are held to account for their actions by the clients (individuals and communities) they are supposed to provide a service to. Client power is most obvious in situations where individuals can ‘exit’—they can choose a different service provider. In practice, however, there is often little choice available. In these circumstances, clients must look to voice mechanisms to influence providers, including community monitoring and user groups.
In much of the Arab States region, however, both types of accountability relationships are frequently weak or unbalanced. Citizens, especially those who are poor and marginalised, often have little power over their service providers. They are often unable to access enough information to monitor the performance of providers and have little ability to sanction them for misdeeds or underperformance. The long route of accountability is also often fraught. Elections are an imperfect and infrequent method for sanctioning politicians over specific issues or shortcomings. Citizen voice is often constrained; people frequently lack fundamental information about policies, budgets and performance and their ability to organise may be restricted.

Even if citizens are articulate and organised, politicians and policymakers may not be responsive to these demands. In many contexts, political relations are shaped more by clientelism than by issues-based politics or de jure political structures and processes. In clientelist systems, politicians use budget allocations and their regulatory authority to reward supporters and sanction detractors. For instance, in a clientelist political system a minister might channel more resources and services to municipalities run by their political allies than to municipalities run by the opposition. In this context, formal accountability mechanisms may exist, but are often captured or sidelined and politicians and policymakers are only accountable to elites or special interests. In other cases, regional disparities may affect service provision, such as a structural bias against rural areas where people are further removed from the centre of power and less able to hold politicians and providers accountable. Further, clientelism may also be based on ethnic, religious, or cultural affiliations.

There are circumstances where the accountability relationship between the state and service providers is also weak. The state often lacks the capacity and information to oversee and enforce its compact with service providers. In many cases, policy makers have not established standards for service provision. They also often lack fundamental information about the performance of service providers with which to adequately manage them or the capacity to sanction underperformance. In some cases, providers of services are oligarchs whose interests overlap with those of line ministries, political party officers or parliamentary committees.

In the face of these constraints, social accountability offers considerable scope to improve the responsiveness and accountability of service providers. Social accountability mechanisms acknowledge constraints on the agency of individuals, especially the most disadvantaged. By focusing on collective action, social accountability is premised on action by groups with shared needs and interests, which may render responsiveness by public officials more likely. Furthermore, social
Accountability mechanisms also work in the period between elections, enabling groups to monitor services and make demands vis-à-vis providers on an ongoing basis (Joshi 2008). In the next two sections, we will look more at how UNDP can work to strengthen these routes to accountability in different and often difficult governance environments, including conflict or post-conflict contexts.

4. Strengthening voice and accountability in practice

In recent years, UNDP and other development partners have increasingly invested in programmes and projects to amplify voice and strengthen social accountability in service delivery. From UNDP’s perspective, the accountability agenda is central to the Human Rights Based Approach to programming, as well as to the UNDP Strategic Plan 2008-2011. Support to capacity development of duty bearers and rights holders (including the civil society organisations that represent them) strengthens voice and accountability mechanisms; it empowers citizens to claim their rights and supports public officials to meet their obligations. There is a growing number of tools and approaches which can be used to enhance voice and accountability. To understand which of these mechanisms are appropriate for a specific context it is important to ask:

- **Accountability for what?** What is the purpose of enhancing accountability? (e.g. to improve the responsiveness of service providers? To ensure that policy makers include the needs of poorer citizens in their policies, plans or budgets?).

- **Accountability of whom?** Whom are you trying to hold to account (politicians, policy makers, service providers)?

- **Accountability to whom?** Who is holding decision makers and providers to account (citizens, clients, politicians, policy makers).

The framework presented in section 3 above helps us to begin to address these questions. It identifies three sets of relationships that matter for improving accountability for service provision: the relationships between the state and service providers, between citizens and the state and between citizens/clients and service providers.

As figure 2 illustrates, different actors can draw on different tools and mechanisms to strengthen the accountability of other actors in this framework. Citizens, for instance, might improve the accountability of service providers by...
**accessing more and better quality information** about the quality of services. They might utilise feedback mechanisms such as **citizen report cards** to comment on the performance of service providers. Citizens can also create **user groups and community planning and management committees** to engage directly in the planning and monitoring of services.

Higher level state administrators can use a range of mechanisms to improve the accountability of providers including: performance management systems, setting and enforcing standards of services, ensuring better monitoring and evaluation of frontline service organisations, and promoting competition between service providers (where appropriate). Some of these mechanisms for strengthening voice and accountability for local service delivery are outlined in the next section. Each mechanism is briefly described and several are illustrated by a relevant example. Descriptions of more social accountability tools can be found in the UNDP Guidance Note on Social Accountability on pp. 25-27.

**4.1 Creating preconditions for voice and accountability: Access to Information**

Information can be empowering. Access to information about individual and organisational performance can enhance the ability of citizens to hold service providers and politicians to account. Timely access to information can strengthen the voice of citizens and non-government actors in planning and budgeting processes as well as the monitoring of service delivery.

Legislative measures (e.g. Freedom of Information Acts), can strengthen the enabling environment for V&A by reinforcing the rights of citizens to access to information and the duties of government to provide it (see Box 2). The effectiveness of these reforms, however, depends on their implementation. For these rights to be claimed, civil servants must be made aware of their obligations and must have well-organized information management systems and procedures. Effective redress machinery such as an ombudsman must also be in place for citizens to stake claims on information (see 4.4.2).

On the demand side, civic education, information campaigns and other awareness raising activities can improve citizens’ awareness and knowledge of their rights and entitlements. Building public awareness of the right to information can enhance citizens’ willingness and ability to take advantage of opportunities and make claims on services providers.

Free, independent and professionalised print, electronic and broadcast media can play a key role in disseminating information, raising awareness and giving voice to those who might not otherwise have an outlet. The effectiveness of different methods for disseminating information is context dependent. In some settings conventional approaches such as media campaigns and billboards may be effective. In other contexts more direct and social methods of communication including road shows and working through customary leaders and social networks may be more effective.
Box 2: Freedom of Information Acts in the Arab States region

By February 2010, 82 countries worldwide had adopted national laws regulating access to information. In the Arab region, civil society, media activists, journalists and anti-corruption organisations have recently come together to support the adoption of access to information laws. During the regional conference on access to information (A2I) held in Cairo in January 2009, entitled Information is a Right for All, participants from six countries endorsed the Cairo Declaration on the Right of Access to Information in the Arab World, and adopted a draft set of Principles on Arab Media and the Right to Information. The Cairo Declaration called upon Arab governments to endorse the right of access to information and to revise and amend all legislation that obstruct access to information.

In 2007, Jordan became the first and the only country in the region to enact an access to information law (Law of Access to Information no. 47/2007). However, challenges remain in terms of implementation and public awareness of the law. In February 2009, an opinion poll conducted by the Al Urdun Al Jadid Research Center showed that 42% of media personnel and journalists were not aware that the law existed. Subsequently, workshops were held for journalists, media professionals, private sector actors and government officials to raise awareness and disseminate knowledge on access to information and the implementation of A2I legislation.

Morocco and Egypt are currently drafting new legislation on access to information, and bills on the right to information have also been debated in Lebanon, Palestine, Kuwait, Yemen, and Bahrain. Preparation and advocacy for access to information laws by civil society groups is taking place in a range of Arab countries, including Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait, Sudan, Egypt and the oPt.


4.2 Selected mechanisms for enhancing service provider accountability to the state

4.2.1 Public expenditure tracking

Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS) help to track budget flows from higher to lower tiers of government to determine whether the funds actually reach service providers (e.g. schools or clinics)(The World Bank 2003). In conjunction with participatory budgeting processes (below 4.4.1), PETS can improve the quality, appropriateness, efficiency and effectiveness of service provision. PETS boost accountability by identifying bottlenecks and leakages in the public financial management systems at different levels. They can highlight abuses of public funds and capture of public services. They also provide information that can be used by government at all levels to improve performance of service providers. If the results are well-publicised, PETS can also provide citizens with a concrete platform to exercise ‘voice’ to call for improvements of local level services.
4.2.2 Organisational performance management

As highlighted above, the relationship between policy makers and service providers should ideally be a compact in which policy makers are able to oversee the delivery of services at a distance. Performance management is a strategy through which this compact can be strengthened and accountability enhanced. Sometimes referred to as ‘governing for results’, performance management is ‘a system of regularly measuring the results (outcomes) of public sector programs, organizations, or individuals, and using this information to increase efficiency in service delivery’ (Hatry, M. et al. 2007). Performance management requires that results are made explicit and measureable. It also entails a focus on outcomes (actual results) not outputs (the quantity of the services provided or the activities carried out). To govern for results, policy makers and administrators need the information with which to evaluate, reward and sanction service providers. A range of performance measurement tools including the mechanisms outlined here (e.g. PETS and citizen report cards) can help provide this information.

If carried through, performance management can help local governments set priorities and oversee the provision of more flexible and appropriate services. It can also improve channels of upward and downward accountability, as both administrators and clients have greater access to information about the performance of service providers.

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**Box 3: Public Expenditure Tracking in Uganda and Tanzania**

The impact of PETS on the educational section in Uganda is generally held as one of the most successful examples of the application of public expenditure tracking. In Uganda, leakage in primary education capitation grants was reduced from an average of almost 90% in 1991-95 to less than 20% in 2001. This was achieved through the regular application of PETS, newspaper publications announcing financial transfers from central to the district levels, awareness raising campaigns, and capacity development that enabled local stakeholders to trace the money.

Tanzania was one of the first countries to follow Uganda, and conducted PETS in 1999 and 2001. These two PETS did not capture exact leakages, but suggested that only half or less of the funds intended for health and education frontline services actually reached the local level. Unlike the Ugandan PETS, however, they did not form part of larger sustained programmes to improve transparency and empower user committees to hold government accountable. Consequently, the kind of national dialogue that the PETS provoked in Uganda, did not occur in Tanzania.

PETS have also been undertaken in countries such as Cambodia, Chad, Ghana, Honduras, Macedonia, Peru, Senegal and Papua New Guinea.

*Source: Sundet, G./ U4 (2007)*
4.3 Selected mechanisms for enhancing the accountability of service providers to clients

4.3.1 Service oversight and management committees

Individual recommendations or complaints, even in the wealthiest countries, are less likely to be heard than those that are voiced collectively. When citizens are able to voice their concerns and channel their recommendations collectively to service providers and to local government, they create a stronger basis for holding service providers to account. Local-level service committees such as parent-teacher associations (PTAs), health facility committees and water management boards provide collective fora for greater participation, voice and oversight over service providers.

Box 4: Service oversight and management committees: Parent Teacher Councils in Kosovo

The Parent-School Partnership Programme (PSP) in Kosovo was a civil society development initiative operated by Catholic Relief Services and funded by UNICEF. It sought to promote civic engagement in education through the creation of Parent Teacher Councils (PTC) in primary schools throughout Kosovo. The intended results were greater community participation in the education sector, leading to the development of accountable local, municipal and national level education institutions. PTCs were tasked with involving parents and communities in planning and management of school activities, including identifying community needs for education as well as priority areas for school improvements.

As a result of the project, linkages were formed between local, municipal and national level education institutions and PTAs. The registration of PTAs as NGOs played an important part in building these links. Legal recognition formalised their status as official organizations as opposed to ad hoc collections of interested individuals. This in turn granted them access to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and individual school administrators in a way which they were not previously able to achieve, as education institutions are obliged to consult with civil society groups. As a result of these links, the role of PTAs has been recognized by educational institutions.

Source: UNDP (2008d)

4.3.2 Feedback mechanisms: citizen report cards

A range of mechanisms have been developed in recent years to provide improved citizen/client feedback to service providers. These mechanisms include complaints procedures, client exit surveys and citizen report cards. Citizen report cards are a simple tool for providing feedback on the quality and performance of service provision. Through report cards, citizens/clients are asked to assess their experience with public services: How accessible are services? What is the quality of services? Is there corruption (e.g. bribery) in service provision? Are there other grievances? These surveys can then be used to assess the performance of individual service providers and to compare service provision across providers, municipalities or regions. Report cards also generate benchmarks for tracking
progress in service delivery. By aggregating citizen perceptions, report cards convert individual perspectives and issues into collective ones. Citizen report cards provide evidence with which:

- Citizens/clients and advocacy groups can negotiate improved access to and better quality services and hold service providers to account;
- Progressive politicians and administrators can improve policies and regulations for service provision; and
- Administrators can pursue organisational reforms to improve service delivery.

Box 5: Citizen Report Cards in Ukraine

In Ukraine, Citizen Report Cards (CRC) were used to solicit feedback on the quality, accessibility and efficiency of public services, and to measure change in the quality of services over time. Two urban communities were chosen to pilot CRC. Under the supervision of a local NGO, surveys were conducted among households, the business community and public officials to identify the key problems associated with major services, and to identify the public’s priority service needs. The information gathered was widely distributed through the local media, public discussions, and NGOs, putting pressure on local leaders to respond to specific criticism and open channels for greater participation.

The flow of information generated by CRC resulted in unprecedented actions by municipal authorities and by citizens’ groups working for improved public services. For example, municipal officials set up task groups to develop concrete solutions to the most critical problems identified by survey respondents. The surveys also mobilized residents to pressure the local government to create ‘service centres’ as one-stop shops where people can pay for all of their municipal services.

Source: UNDP (2008c).
4.4 Selected mechanisms for enhancing state accountability to citizens

4.4.1 Participatory budgeting

In many countries, budget processes have historically been opaque and have seldom entailed participation of non-governmental actors. Increasingly, however, participatory budgeting has provided a way for civil society actors to become more involved in efforts to influence public spending (deRenzio and Krafchik 2007). From its origins in Brazil, participatory budgeting has spread globally and is now applied in countries as diverse as Canada, Ireland and South Africa.

Participatory budgeting creates a channel for citizens to voice their priorities and monitor public spending. Through participatory budgeting processes, key stakeholders (including the poor and...
vulnerable, women, organised civil society, the private sector and parliament) ‘debate, analyse, prioritise and monitor decisions about public expenditure’ (The World Bank 2002). As a result, participatory budgeting can help to make the budget process more inclusive and equitable. It can also improve the transparency and accountability of decision making processes and reduce the scope for corruption and clientelistic practices. Participatory budgeting can also potentially improve service delivery by linking local needs to budget and planning processes.

Participatory budgeting can contribute to budget formation and expenditure monitoring and tracking:

• **Budget formation**: Modes of participation can vary. Citizen groups can participate more directly in the budget process by presenting their priorities and spending needs at budget forums and municipal assemblies; formulating alternative ‘citizen budgets’; or review a proposed budget against the government’s stated priorities and objectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Availability of seven key budget documents</th>
<th>Score 1-100%</th>
<th>Other results of the survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>5/7, + Citizen Budget</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>Only Jordan has codified the right to access government information into law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>3/7, no Citizen Budget</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>The legislature does not hold hearings on the budget in which the public can participate in any of the countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>5/7, no Citizen Budget</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>In all countries, the Open Budget Index notes that the independence of the Supreme Audit Institution is limited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>4/7, no Citizen Budget</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>2/7, no Citizen Budget</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>1/7, no Citizen Budget</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>0/7, no Citizen Budget</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>0/7, no Citizen Budget</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Open Budget Initiative monitors the availability of seven key budget documents: Pre-Budget Statement, Executive’s Budget Proposal, Enacted Budget, In-Year Reports, Mid-Year Review, Year-End Report, and Audit Report. They also record the presence of Citizens’ Budgets.

*Source: The Open Budget Index 2008, Open Budget Initiative*
• **Expenditure monitoring and tracking:** Citizen groups and civil society organisations can perform a key monitoring role by tracking whether spending is consistent with budget allocations. Along with tools like public expenditure tracking surveys, citizens can assess the flow of funds from higher levels of government to front line service providers and ensure that policy priorities are reflected through budget allocation and expenditure. The case study in section five provides an example of public expenditure management from Yemen.

4.4.2 Public oversight mechanisms

An ombudsman provides a check on government actions by investigating complaints and making recommendations. In general, ombudsmen can investigate corruption as well as incidents of maladministration and incompetence. They are designed to provide another avenue (in addition to the judiciary and parliament) through which citizens can oversee the actions of public officials.

Across the Arab States region, a range of public oversight bodies have been established to curb corruption or to implement internationally recognised human rights norms, such as the Office of the National Ombudsman in Egypt, the Commission of Integrity in Iraq, the Anti Corruption Commission in Jordan, the Superior National Anti-Corruption Committee in Yemen, and the Independent Commission for Human Rights in the oPt.

However, challenges remain across the region to achieve fully independent and effective oversight mechanisms. In many cases, these institutions tend to be organisationally weak and ineffective. In some countries (e.g. Lebanon), institutions exist merely on paper and are still awaiting implementation. In other cases, the oversight institutions are not politically independent, but may for example be located within the Ministry of Justice. In some countries, the establishment and implementation of oversight institutions have coincided with increased human rights restrictions on the part of the state (e.g. Algeria and Egypt). Finally, several institutions do not make their reports publically available, although there is legislation in place providing for such access by citizens (UNDP POGAR, forthcoming; Cardenas and Flibbert 2005).
5. Case Study: Promoting Participatory Local Governance in Yemen

5.1 Overview of the political and socio-economic context in Yemen

The Republic of Yemen was formed in 1990 with the merger of two territories (the Yemen Arab Republic and the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen) with distinct political orientations. The process of unification went hand in hand with democratizing measures (e.g. adoption of a new Constitution in a national referendum; ratification of major human rights conventions along with the lifting of most restrictions on freedom of association, expression and movement; etc.). A short but devastating civil war broke out in 1994, followed by political restructuring and economic and financial reforms. The Yemeni state continues to be fragile, with powerful informal structures operating parallel to state institutions and the presence of various conflicts (inter- and intra-tribal, secessionist movements, sporadic kidnappings and piracy) in different parts of the country.

With a population of approx. 23.8 million (2008 est.) and an annual growth rate of 3 percent, Yemen ranks 140 on the Human Development Index (2009) and is one of the poorest countries in the Arab region - 34.8 percent of the population live below the national poverty line (2005 est.). It is one of the few countries that are projected not to achieve any of the MDGs unless the annual economic growth raises to 7 percent for the remaining period of the MDG cycle (2010-2015).

Administratively, Yemen is divided into 22 Governorates and 333 Districts. Yemen remains a largely rural country, with three quarters of the population scattered in small villages or communities.

The issue of local governance has been at the core of the political debate and discourse ever since unification. Centuries of elite rule in the South and rule by Imams (Zaydi Islamic jurisprudence) in the North have created a state system that was perceived as an elite-dominated, tribute collecting predatory system, with no links to the people. Decentralization was seen as a means to promote democratic norms at the local level, promote good governance and build institutions that respond to the needs of the people. This process of establishing a singular decentralized administrative system was expected to facilitate a nation-building process badly needed to cement the new state. Most importantly, it could also assist in a gradual reduction of the influence of tribal loyalties in the provision of services at the local level, and address the grievances of the southern provinces about northern dominance and unfair control of resources through efficient fiscal decentralization.

The Local Authority Law was passed in 2000. It provides the legal foundations for the local authority and is based on the following principles: broadened popular participation through elected local

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5 This case study is an updated version of the case study presented in UNDP Communication for Development – A glimpse at UNDP’s practice, Oslo, 2009.
councils, financial decentralization, administrative decentralization, and decentralization of service functions.

5.2 Local governance and decentralization in Yemen

The Local Authority Law of 2000 gave significant responsibility to locally elected councils and their administrative units at the district level for infrastructure development and service delivery (water and sanitation, rural electricity, roads, education, health and agriculture development). It also gave the local public administration mandate to protect the local environment and manage natural resources as well as promote local economic development.

However, the decentralization process was not able to yield satisfactory results and live up to the expectations of the public due to number of factors. While the Local Authority Law of 2000 delegated authority to the local level, there were inconsistencies between the law and other legal frameworks which resulted in a lack of clarity between central and local authorities on the division of roles and responsibilities, particularly in relation to service delivery. In addition, sufficient funds and resources were not allocated to the local administrative units and efforts were not made to build their capacity to support participatory processes.

The local governance structure is a mix of an elected and appointed system and in most cases the line of accountability between the elected representatives and appointed administrative staff is extremely weak. Briefly, the local governance structure consists of an elected council at the district level headed by the Secretary-General who is elected from the council members. The council is structured into committees. The secretary general and the committee heads form the District Management Committee (DMC), which is chaired by the District Director. The DMC has oversight over the implementation of the council’s policies and plans. Local administration staff, including the District Director and the sector department staff, are civil servants appointed by the central government. The District Executive Office (DEO), consisting of the District Director, the secretary general and heads of the sector departments, has the mandate to coordinate and implement all activities.

The centralized fiscal administration and limited local financial autonomy also contributed to a weak downward accountability system. The sector ministries continue to manage a significant portion of the national service delivery budget and deliver services bypassing local participatory planning and prioritization processes. This creates a situation at the local level where local administrative staff focus more on implementing nationally planned and financed programmes over locally planned programmes.

Further, appropriate systems were not established at the local level to address existing power relations and support community/citizen participation in decision making processes, including planning and allocation of public resources. One major impediment to addressing power relations and hindering participation of people at the local level in early 2000s was the dependence of Yemen on oil revenues. This granted the State autonomy from the local economy and created a power
nexus which gives substantial power to tribal leaders, army officers and other socially influential characters, and led to the prevalence of patron-client relations and centrist tendencies.\(^8\)

In 2003, UNDP supported the Ministry of Local Authorities to organize a workshop to outline a national strategy for decentralization. Four critical components were identified for establishing an effective decentralized administrative system: a legal and regulatory framework for decentralization reforms; development of mechanisms for streamlined and predictable transfer of funds to the local authority (LA) as well as generation of local resources; creation of demand and support for capacity building of local authorities to develop appropriate procedures, techniques and organizational structures to support resource mobilization and public expenditure management at the district level; and, finally, establishing institutions of support and supervision to local authorities to ensure both upward accountability to the state and downward accountability to citizens and civil society.

### 5.3 The Decentralization and Local Development Support Programme (DLDSP)

UNDP in partnership with UNCDF developed the multi-donor funded ‘Decentralization and Local Development Support Programme’ (DLDSP) to support decentralization in Yemen from 2003 to 2008. DLDSP built on the experiences of various community-led development programmes supported by other development partners and donors in Yemen. It was supported by the Government of Yemen and implemented through the Ministry of Local Administration (MOLA) with the support of the Social Fund for Development (SFD), the Government of Italy, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Danish Government (DANIDA), the Government of France and the Public Works Project. UNDP and UNCDF provided the necessary technical assistance to the Ministry of Local Administration to implement the four components identified in the 2003 workshop. DLDSP was implemented both at the national and local level.

The project was initially piloted in eight districts in two governorates and later expanded to 48 districts in eight governorates. As a first step, DLDSP focused on developing the awareness among local councillors and civil society about the Local Authority Law, concepts of local development, the value of participatory planning, and the roles and responsibilities of local authorities and civil society under Yemen’s decentralized local governance system.

It further developed and piloted the Public Expenditure Management (PEM) system and procedures. The PEM system ensures participation of people throughout the local planning cycle and enables them to influence planning processes and set priorities for local development. The PEM cycle includes: participatory needs assessment, integrated participatory planning, budgeting, procurement, implementation, asset management and monitoring and evaluation of system outputs.

DLDSP focused on supporting mechanisms for citizens to participate in and inform local planning processes. It also sought to build the capacity of local governance units to support participatory processes, incorporate citizens’ feedback in local development plans, and adopt mechanisms for

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participatory implementation of the plans. One of the objectives of the capacity building of the local governance units was to strengthen their downward accountability to local communities.

Initially, DLDSP focused heavily on building the capacity of the local authorities in PEM. It established and trained ‘Mobile Teams’ in facilitation skills and in integrated participatory planning and budgeting. The Mobile Teams in turn trained ‘District Facilitation Teams’ (DFT) consisting of 3-4 civil servants from the Governorate level. The DFT provided the necessary support and capacity building programmes to the local authorities in the pilot districts. A core team of 22 members consisting of elected council members, the DEO, and representatives from sector departments were supported by the DFTs to develop district integrated plans and programme based budget. DLDSP tried to ensure participation of women officials in the core team. Local CSOs and CBOs participated in the core team meetings as observers and provided input as necessary. They also assisted in raising awareness of the general public on decentralization and participatory planning processes.

Through the PEM, the DLDSP was able to support the core team to develop integrated participatory plans and budgets through a nine step methodology. The core team was supported to verify the secondary data (development indicators) used by the DEO to develop district level planning. The team was divided into small subgroups which visited different uzlas (a district subdivision). The subgroups held discussions with local people in a variety of forums: traditional channels such as meetings facilitated by local sheikhs or tribal leaders; and discussions with clients at public service delivery points, e.g. at the local clinics and water or irrigation points to confirm the data (from the primary source) used in district level planning. These discussions allowed for participatory district level planning, as subgroup members were able to verify the quality of public services, identify service delivery challenges and develop strategic development objectives and projects.

During the consultations at the uzla level, efforts have been made to seek the views and priorities of the most vulnerable people. In some uzlas, in order to obtain the views of women who are unable to participate in public meetings, NGO representatives on the subgroups have either visited them at home or in settings where women feel comfortable.

By 2008, 281 projects in various sectors (mainly in road works, water supply, health centres and schools) were implemented. A ‘Local Authority Development Fund Facility’ was created by the DLDSP and the fund provided budget support of up to US $100,000 per pilot district to supplement district resources towards the implementation of identified project. The idea behind providing seed-funding was to enable local authorities and communities to ‘practice’ integrated participatory planning, budgeting and implementation of projects. It was hoped that the seed-funding would help in improving fiscal transparency and allow for greater interaction between local authorities and citizens around project implementation. This would also enable local authorities to identify their own capacity needs and create a demand-driven capacity building programme.

DLDSP also attempted to enhance accountability of the local authorities to the citizens. In addition to the integrated participatory planning, local councils and the executive office were provided with logistics (computers and other office equipment) and trained to make information about the development initiatives in their districts publically available. In 2007, DLDSP embarked on a public awareness campaign with an overall objective to strengthen partnerships between the local
authorities and the public by increasing awareness of citizens’ rights and responsibilities within the local authority system, and by improving the understanding of the local authority officials of the system and their responsibilities to the public. As part of the awareness campaign, the DLDSP supported radio programmes on decentralization to raise public awareness and also issued six newsletters in English which summarized DLDSP programme activities and policy support. DLDSP also supported sector ministries to articulate sector decentralization reform packages, and to disseminate information on these reforms to their departments to get their support for the decentralization process.

5.4 Results

One of the major achievements of the DLDSP was to utilize the experiences and lessons learned from the PEM pilots to inform the development of the ‘National Strategy for Transition to Local Governance’ in 2008. DLDSP as a whole was considered a successful programme that helped in moving Yemen in the right direction towards full decentralization, despite differences in the actual results achieved from one district to another and between districts in the north and the south, which were primarily due to different traditional practices and development levels. According to the 2008 evaluation of the DLDSP, the project:

1. Substantially strengthened local governance in the pilot districts, which needs to be deepened through increased community involvement, including women’s groups;
2. Effectively built institutional capacity within the pilot districts for budgeting and planning;
3. Substantially contributed to the development of a national decentralization policy & strategy, including fiscal policy on allocation of resources;
4. Significantly increased service delivery infrastructure (schools, clinics, water and sanitation facilities) through the implemented projects.

As a result of participating in planning processes local communities now have greater expectations of their local authorities and are increasingly holding the latter to account for their decisions. NGO representatives regularly attend local council meetings to review local plans and budgets. Although they do not have a formal vote they often express concerns that are eventually addressed in the plan and budget. Budgetary support to local authorities is now earmarked for projects that respond directly to the concerns and priorities voiced by local communities. There is some evidence that financial resources are being channelled more effectively towards meeting local needs.

An important contribution of the DLDSP project is increasing the awareness of and demonstrating the value of participatory local planning to local authorities as well as to policy makers, central government institutions and other actors involved in supporting decentralization processes in Yemen. The local development plans developed through participatory planning in the pilot district more accurately reflected and responded to the needs of the people. It enabled efficient allocation

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of resources to meet the needs of the people. In addition, the project also facilitated knowledge sharing by developing a comprehensive planning manual and a community participation manual which provided detailed guidance to local authorities on implementing a full participatory planning cycle and supporting community participation.

The 2008 evaluation specifically recommends widening and deepening involvement of communities not only in planning, but also in implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development projects. It also stresses the importance of ‘thickening’ engagement of the civil society organizations, particularly of the poor, and include women, youth and sector-focused organizations, to inform the general public about allocation of resources for various projects, progress made on these projects and also channel community feedback to the local authorities. The evaluation report suggests that this could potentially strengthen the local ownership of the infrastructure projects and promote better use of the services.

Communication has improved not only between citizens and local authorities but also across local government institutions. Working jointly on outreach activities has resulted in different local government departments communicating more effectively. Due to more systematic and regular interaction, communication between districts and governorates has also improved significantly and this has contributed to the increased efficiency and effectiveness of the local authority system as a whole.

At the same time, the socio-political situation in Yemen and the fragile nature of the state makes programming in this area challenging and calls for a more conflict sensitive approach that takes into account the particular challenges that Yemen is facing in terms of security, armed conflicts, regional differences and territorial integrity. Technocratic approaches that do not sufficiently analyse the political economy of a country at both the national and local level are also unlikely to effectively address the parallel governance structures that exist in Yemen.

Building on the DLDSP, a four-year UNDP – UNCDF Local Governance Support Project was initiated in 2010 to support the development of a comprehensive local governance legal framework as well as participatory Local Development Planning processes - with an increased emphasis on strengthening the capacity of the MOLA and other local government departments to promote participatory decentralization across Yemen. While UNDP is taking steps to make the programme more conflict sensitive, a further challenge remains contextualisation to the divergent political realities of different areas of the country.

6. Challenges and entry points for voice and accountability

This paper has explored how voice and accountability for local service delivery in the Arab States region can be strengthened in theory and practice. It has provided a broad overview of key concepts of voice and accountability, highlighted the importance of V&A in democratic governance, and demonstrated the centrality of V&A in a human rights based approach to development.
The framework presented in Section Three provides a way of exploring the key actors and relationships entailed in delivering accountability in service provision. It also provides a means of assessing which V&A mechanisms might be appropriate in specific contexts.

Using descriptions and examples of specific V&A mechanisms, the paper has explored what development partners can do in practice to support accountability and amplify voice for service provision. The case studies not only highlight the successes, they also illustrate the significant challenges remaining before substantive and sustainable accountability can be achieved in many contexts.

This concluding section explores the broad challenges and potential entry points for promoting voice and accountability for improved service delivery in the Arab States region. During the workshop, we will have time to explore these issues in more detail, and to discuss potential strategies and approaches for strengthening voice and accountability in the region.

6.1 Challenges

The environment of many Arab countries entails a range of significant and persistent challenges to voice and accountability. These contextual factors shape the entry points for strengthening V&A. They also shape the effectiveness and sustainability of specific V&A mechanisms in practice.

Civil society continues to operate under a range of restrictions. The AHDR 2009 reports three main categories of obstacles for CSOs in the region: firstly, restrictions on their formation and ability to operate, secondly, state authority to dissolve, suspend or terminate the associations or their boards of directors, and, finally, tight restrictions on their sources of funding, particularly when funds originate from abroad (p. 59). While the nature of these restrictions vary significantly across the region, this generally affects the capacity of CSOs and CBOs to engage in initiatives for increased accountability and transparency.

Further, citizens’ trust in the state, and thus their belief that they can hold the state to account, is very low. There is also a lack of awareness among citizens of the legislation and oversight mechanisms that do exist, and the rights that they afford. Since the active participation of citizens is a vital pre-requisite for successful social accountability initiatives, popular distrust and cynicism are significant challenges for the effectiveness of voice and accountability initiatives.

A third challenge concerns the development and implementation of legal frameworks that effectively support accountability and transparency. While the majority of the Arab states have adopted legislation to comply with UNCAC as well as legislation to increase transparency and accountability, implementation remains slow, crucial oversight mechanisms are frequently lacking or inefficient, and there is generally a disparity between legislation and practice. UNCAC compliance, the development of independent judicial systems, ensuring access to information for citizens,
the presence of free media are key aspects of an effective enabling environment for citizens to hold
governments to account over delivery of services.

Finally, several countries in the Arab States region struggle with **conflict, occupation, internal
divisions, or post-conflict related challenges**. As state institutions are usually negatively affected by
conflict, there is a strong correlation in the region between (post-) conflict contexts and the absence
of accountability and transparency. Further, external actors such as donors and foreign powers may
be the dominant stakeholders in state building or development processes, which is likely to
encourage outward accountability and place further challenges on citizens’ ability to hold those in
power accountable. Conflict can also severely affect the ability of citizens to collectively claim their
rights due to factors such as lack of physical security, displacement, or fear of retribution if they
involve themselves in political activity. Because (post-) conflict contexts often lack stability and
continuity, this also makes programming challenging as there may be a need to continuously adapt
your approach and strategy to a changing and unpredictable political and social environment.

### 6.2 Entry points

As outlined in the **UNDP Guidance Note on Social Accountability**, it is important to critically analyse
the political, social and institutional context, the relevant service sector, and UNDP’s relative
advantage, before designing and operationalising voice and accountability mechanisms for improved
service delivery. It is through this careful analysis that you will identify your optimal entry points for
programming. The Guidance Note provides a range of indicative questions that can help UNDP
Country Office staff analyse both the political as well as the programmatic context as part of the
planning and design process, and in turn identify the most suitable approaches and opportunities for
engagement.

The ‘**social accountability checklist**’ for voice and accountability mechanisms outlined in the
Guidance Note is one specific tool that is useful during the planning phase, and which can help
locate potential entry points for programming. The social accountability check list helps identify
whether specific mechanisms and processes are in place for citizens to voice their concerns and hold
duty bearers to account, and also assesses the capacities of politicians, policy makers and service
providers to respond and be accountable. It places poor and marginalised groups at the centre of
the analysis, and has an integrated gender perspective so that potential differences in men and
women’s capacities to exercise voice can be recognised. More generally, sections four and five of
the Guidance Note provides extensive advice on how to put V&A principles into practice.

A **technically sound, but politically astute** strategy for strengthening voice and accountability is
further one that:
• Is opportunistic and responsive: it looks for windows of opportunity and is responsive to changes on the ground, including changes in leadership and emerging issues around which coalitions of change can be supported.

• has a holistic perspective and therefore builds political support for strengthening voice and accountability in the longer term by providing the kinds of capacities and ‘quick wins’ that governments want in the short term.

• Bridges voice and accountability: As a trusted and multilateral partner of both governments and civil society, UNDP has a comparative advantage in working across the divide that often separates the supply and demand side of accountability. It is well positioned to help create space for collaborative government-civil society work on specific issues (e.g. the delivery of services) that can open up space for greater accountability in the long run.

• Builds on existing projects and programming: A voice and accountability initiative is likely to be most effective when it is part of overall CO programming and has strong linkages with other areas of UNDP’s work. Attempting to identify entry points for strengthening voice and accountability within the existing project portfolio, rather than creating stand alone projects, is therefore important. One possible way of doing this is to integrate a voice and accountability component into an already existing project.

• Identifies the informal ‘rules of the game’ that shape state-society relations, in addition to conducting an analysis of the formal institutions, regulations and procedures of the state and civil society. By capturing the informal dimension, a wider range of potential entry points as well as possible obstacles to successful implementation can be considered and taken into account.
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