

# Generating Genuine Demand for Accountability

## Module 3

### *Learning Exercise: Case Studies in Mobilizing Public Opinion*



Towards A New Agora  
Innovative Solutions for Governance  
Communication for Governance and Accountability Program  
Operational Communications, External Affairs



World Bank Institute

Public opinion processes matter if governance reform initiatives are to succeed. In this learning exercise, we introduce the concepts of public opinion and the public sphere as dynamic elements in governance reform efforts. We also present the concepts of persuasion and framing. These are two concepts of communication influence which we consider essential in mobilizing public opinion. Understanding these concepts and processes involved can help in mapping strategic approaches to ensure genuine citizen demand for accountability.

## Case Studies



**South Africa - *Independent Budget Analysis***

**Philippines - *Audit of Public Works Projects (Abra)***

**Kenya - *Citizen Report Card (Nairobi, Kisumu, Mombasa)***






**Colombia - *Evaluation of Public Services (Bogota)***

**India - *Citizens Complaint System (Mumbai)***

You will note from this list of illustrative case studies that the approaches used are as diverse as the country contexts and implementation levels they represent. The South Africa example is an initiative implemented at the national level, the Abra case in the Philippines' is at the provincial level, and in Kenya, Colombia and India, the social accountability efforts were aimed at the city-level.

# Mobilizing Public Opinion

## – real change from real-world contexts

				
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>South Africa</b> Independent Budget Analysis</p> <p>In 1994, South Africa held its first democratic elections. It marked the beginning of profound changes after two decades under an apartheid regime. It was the same year that the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa), a South African public interest organization committed to democratic consolidation, established the Budget Information Service (BIS). The BIS involves the analysis and dissemination of critical, timely, and accessible information. ... &gt;&gt; <a href="#">more</a></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Philippines</b> Citizens' Audit of Public Works Projects in Abra</p> <p>An article in the local newspaper sparked action from the Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG), a non-partisan group of individuals committed to monitor public spending. The news article, which was based on a government report, praised the "20 Successful Infrastructure Projects in the Region". To the uninformed reader, this would seem like a piece of good news. The CCAGG members, however, knew some of the projects had not even started yet. Since 1987, the group began to actively mobilize community ... &gt;&gt; <a href="#">more</a></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Kenya</b> Citizen Report Card 'Roadshows'</p> <p>In Kenya, two key challenges highlighted the need to go beyond the technical surveys – one is the untested terrain of citizen report cards in Africa and the other is the inherently contentious debates on water issues. The Water and Sanitation Program in Africa and the Public Affairs Foundation started off with awareness creation and consensus building efforts as important preparatory work prior to the survey. An innovative approach of "Report Card Roadshows" was adopted as part of the consultation process in each of the project sites...&gt;&gt; <a href="#">more</a></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Colombia</b> Evaluation of Public Services in Bogotá</p> <p>An election campaign in 1997 led to the creation of Bogotá Cómo Vamos (Bogotá How are we doing?), a citizen-based social accountability mechanism designed to monitor political campaign promises and their impact on the quality of life in the city. Empowered by the 1991 Constitution's mandate granting citizens the right to exercise oversight of public administration, a group of private sector representatives developed an educational monitoring ...&gt;&gt; <a href="#">more</a></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>India</b> Citizens Complaint System in Mumbai</p> <p>Mumbai's rapid population growth has posed significant pressures on its urban public services. The city, which has the largest slum population in India, suffers from a severe shortage in housing and infrastructure, poor water supply and sanitation, and an overall decline in economic activity. The Brihan-Mumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) is one of the public agencies responsible for the overall governance of municipal services. Through its many programs, BMC strives to improve and expand the coverage and quality of public services... &gt;&gt; <a href="#">more</a></p>

After reading the case studies, you are asked to complete a case study exercise.

Upon completion, you will have a better appreciation of the communication processes and mechanisms used to inform and engage citizens, the methods to promote dialogue and public debate, and the positive results derived from organized and collective citizen action.

# Case study Exercise

## Review Questions

Please answer the following questions for each of the case studies you have read.

1. How was information accessed?
2. Briefly describe the process of mobilizing public opinion.
3. How did they use the media?
4. What are the relevant lessons learned from the case studies.

This exercise requires you to reflect on the case examples you have read and draw insights and lessons from these various country contexts.

Please answer the following questions:

- How was information accessed?
- How was public opinion mobilized?
- How did they use the power of the media?
- What are the relevant lessons?

You can use the sample template provided in the next slide.

## Answer sheet

Country	Information access	Mobilization process	Use of media	Lessons and insights

You can use this answer sheet to note down your answers to the review questions. Once you have filled in this template, your responses will provide you with a comparative profile of approaches and lessons of experience in mobilizing public across different country contexts.

## South Africa Independent Budget Analysis



- Focus on key target audiences:
  - Executive branch, legislative CSOs and the media
- Platform for national dialogue on budget issues
- Issue-specific and audience-targeted dissemination
- Strategic use of media for informed public opinion

- *Budget Watch*
- *Budget Briefs*
- *Democracy Radio*
- Advocacy tips and stories
- Public debate – national, provincial budget issues
- TV panel interviews
- ICT – internet, email

Let's review some of the notable highlights in the different case studies.

In South Africa, IDASA's Budget Information Service provided valuable and timely information and analysis of the executive budget. Public opinion was mobilized through strategic and broad educational outreach across various sectors of South African society. Audience and issue-specific dissemination tools communicated key messages that resonate with the target audience. For example, the Budget Watch technical magazine was primarily targeted for the executive and legislative branches of government, and the Budget Briefs for NGOs and CBOs. Framing of issue-specific articles helped draw attention to important budget implications on programs affecting vulnerable groups including women, children and the elderly. Media was actively engaged and their informed opinion of the budget was shaped through early engagement and information-sharing, creating a positive working relationship. Radio programs kept people informed and engaged. The BIS program rode on the popularity of community radio stations to reach people in the remote areas. The program became a platform for national dialogue on budget issues. Through the persuasive power of informed media, greater public awareness and knowledge of the executive budget allowed the citizens to engage in dialogue with government, even on larger debates involving policy priorities of the country.



## Philippines Citizens' Audit of Public Works in Abra Province



- Initiative formed by former election watchdogs; organized communities to monitor public spending
- Media advocacy to popularize issues of concern and shape public opinion
- Organized citizen action exposed anomalies in roads projects
- Mobilized support from clergy and business groups

Direct lobbying with public officials

Letters of complaint and citizens signed affidavit to top officials

Primetime radio program "Echoes" on-the-air twice a week

Partnerships with national coalitions key to amplifying voice

Networking with other national organizations to influence policy dialogue

In the Philippines, the accountability initiative led by 'Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government' benefited from a mobilized public whose attentive and active members were committed to fight corruption in public works spending. Empowered by the information gathered from the citizen-led investigation, they used the evidence and persuasive arguments to make a strong case against public officials who engaged in anomalous transactions.

The concerned citizens of Abra mobilized 'pressure from below'. Citizens signed an affidavit voicing strong opinions about the corrupt actions of public officials. They sent strong letters of petition, made personal visits and used direct lobbying with public works officials.

The group was organized and actively demanded accountability. They kept pressing forward and pressing upward. Citizens brought the 'glare effect' of social accountability and the 'heat effect' of mobilized public opinion. The citizens' investigation eventually led to the suspension of public officials on charges of corruption.

The former election watchdogs are now referred to as the 'corruption busters'.



## Kenya Citizen Report Card 'Roadshows'



### • Innovations in citizen engagement :

1. Report card 'roadshows' - individual stakeholder consultations and multi-stakeholder consultations
2. Citizen evaluation of tool – “Critical 8” indicators
3. Public opinion mobilized through open dialogue of stakeholder alliances at national and city levels
4. Strategic use of media

Print and electronic media – ‘glare effect’ on service providers

Slogan “Come all. Let’s discuss and agree” appealed to public sentiment for cooperative dialogue

TV chat shows and live call-in radio encouraged public debate

Newspaper columnists kept issues alive

In Kenya, the citizen report card for water and sanitation created innovative approaches to encourage citizen engagement and mobilize public opinion. Conducting roadshows added an effective complement to media strategies adopted. The individual consultations focused on creating awareness about the citizen report card as a social accountability mechanism, while the multi-stakeholder consultations provided the deliberative space to discuss and debate the contextual fit of the report card.

Stakeholder alliances at the national and city levels facilitated the process of deliberation and public debate on the results of the citizen report card on water and sanitation. And the introduction of “Critical 8” indicators provided a systematic way of generating direct citizen input in evaluating the applicability of the tool based on important criteria. Open discussion and deliberation created citizen ownership of the tool and the report card results.

The report card process used framing to create a sense of unity among citizens, service providers and policy makers. A slogan which read “Water and Sanitation? Come all, let’s discuss and agree!” was designed to evoke positive attitudes about engaging in cooperative dialogue and challenged the usual confrontational atmosphere of public debate on water issues. Effective use of the media created public interest during the launch and the continued coverage of newspaper columnists kept the issues alive.





## India Citizens' Online Complaint System in Mumbai



- Unique e-governance initiative to address public dissatisfaction over poor consumer grievance handling
- Centralized complaint registration system
- Public opinion about quality of services communicated through various channels
- Use of mainstream media to raise public awareness

Petitions, letters of complaints

Personal visits, meetings with public officials

ICT-based communication (phone, fax, or internet)

Regular complaint audit to assess public satisfaction with complaint resolution

In India, the online complaints system in Mumbai used information technology as the platform for city residents to express their opinions and grievances directly to the agency responsible for municipal services. Direct citizen feedback and complaints about service provision were sent through various channels: the internet, by fax or phone calls, or through complaint letters and petitions. Every complaint had to be resolved within the stipulated time period as prescribed in the Citizens' Charter. And if a complaint is not redressed within the deadline, it is sent directly to the superior officer. This process of escalation is automatic and cannot be tampered with.

Public awareness about the service relied largely on mainstream media.

The program benefitted from the support of internal champions and a democratic public sphere supported by the Right to Information Act. The centralized system of grievance handling was a mechanism that facilitated the 'short route' of accountability where clients and service providers can engage directly and exert client power.



## Colombia Performance Evaluation of Service Provision



- Coalition of private sector groups formed initiative
- Performance standard-setting
- Citizen voice in service quality through annual perception survey
- Created forum for public debate
- Central role of media

El Tiempo, leading newspaper and local TV disseminate survey results

Quarterly bulletin distributed to local organizations, libraries, research centers, universities

Performance data posted on public website of Education Secretariat

Public opinion on service provision frame political campaign issues

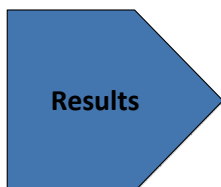
In Colombia, the Bogotá Como Vamos (How are we doing) project evolved in response to the lack of a citizen-based social accountability mechanism designed to monitor political campaign promises and their impact on the quality of life in the city.

The evaluation tool developed to assess service delivery is based on performance indicators drawn from technical sources and public perception surveys. Evaluation findings were disseminated through the mass media.

Making the information publicly available and accessible across broad sectors of civil society is considered to be the project's most visible effect.

The project has become an effective forum of public debate where citizens can discuss issues and concerns with city officials about the quality of public services.

## Why public opinion matters



### **Public opinion as genuine citizen demand and a critical force for state responsiveness and real change**

- **Institutionalized forum for public debate on budget issues (S. Africa), on service quality (Colombia, Kenya), on public spending (Philippines)**
- **Change in behavior and attitude of frontline service providers (Colombia, Philippines), public audit officials (Philippines), water service boards (Kenya), media (S. Africa)**
- **Policy and process changes linked to media-generated public debate and public pressure (all case examples)**
- **Constructive engagement of key accountability actors – state, frontline service providers, civil society and media**
- **Replicated in other provinces (Philippines), cities (India, Colombia)**

The various case stories demonstrate many lessons of experience, but the common strand across these examples is the overarching impact of informed and mobilized public opinion in generating genuine citizen demand for accountability. Given the information and deliberative space to participate, citizens become actively engaged and motivated to organize for collective action. Empowered by information about their rights and entitlements, citizens draw on their capacity and collective experience to come up with smart solutions, elicit a response from public officials, and effect real change. Clearly, the strategic role of media, both traditional and modern, played a vital role in increasing public awareness, and in facilitating meaningful two-way communication between citizens and the state. Local-level media and community radio provided a valuable channel for ordinary citizens to voice their opinions, discuss public issues, and shape the public debate. TV and radio commentators and journalists have become informed agents of persuasion using their respective channels of communication to reach their key audiences.

In many cases, mechanisms have been institutionalized, positive changes in attitudes and behavior among frontline providers and public officials have been reported, and a culture of broad participation and open and active public dialogue have been established – elements that are all critical in setting the stage for a robust and effective citizen-state interaction.

For example, the ‘roadshows’ in Kenya changed the negative perception and skepticism of public officials toward citizen-led interventions.

In the Philippines, public audit officials now have a positive attitude toward citizen-led monitoring after the successful investigation of anomalies in Abra. Public works officials have used the citizen monitoring reports as a basis for deciding budget releases for public works projects.

In South Africa, the persistent and persuasive efforts of educational outreach using high-quality work of BIS successfully turned lackluster public interest and media attention into significant public demand for information on the budget and its overall implications on issues and priorities of public interest.

In Colombia, citizens set the standards for service quality. District offices now use results of citizen surveys as core performance indicators of service quality. These are also now well-recognized at the policy level as the Secretary of Education webpage disseminates the same information. The performance standards also provide the strategic frame to highlight important issues in city. A citizens guide on trends and accomplishments was distributed in the 2000 mayoral campaign.

In India, despite some weaknesses in service improvements, strong demand for better governance has been created not only from citizens, but also from high-level pro-accountability institutions that are putting more pressure on local-level reforms.

Finally, the challenge of sustaining positive gains achieved underscores the centrality of ensuring that public opinion is front and center of accountability efforts. The institutionalization of mechanisms through replication bodes well for scaling up efforts needed to ensure broad-based and sustainable development outcomes. Meaningful results are likely to be achieved when a dynamic and effective synergy between citizens, politicians and frontline service providers exists as this creates the incentive for them to take coordinated action and pursue real change.

## Why public opinion matters



Challenges

- **Public awareness is still limited (India, Colombia), public apathy and tolerance with status quo (Kenya)**
- **Failure to anticipate resistance resulted in cancellation of participatory audit, political intervention (Philippines)**
- **Exclusion of marginalized groups and weak sanctions for unresponsive frontline service providers (India)**
- **Balancing civil society interests and keeping positive working relations with government (South Africa)**

The results and impacts of this small sample of cases are both promising and encouraging. However, it is also well-recognized that the path to sustainable governance and accountability efforts that lead to ultimate development outcomes is a long and arduous one. While these case examples show that overall efforts have produced meaningful results, obstacles that may have been overcome in the process of change could resurface and threaten the sustainability of hard-won gains.

For example, in India and Colombia, perception surveys and complaints audits indicate that despite public information efforts, public awareness of the programs remains limited. More needs to be done to broaden their reach and expand the scope of their media coverage.

in Kenya, the continuing challenge is reversing public apathy and complacent acceptance of poor access and quality of services. This provides significant opportunities to explore effective means of mass persuasion in building citizen competence and trust in their collective ability to demand change through organized efforts.

## Why public opinion matters



### Challenges

- **Public awareness is still limited (India, Colombia), public apathy and tolerance with status quo (Kenya)**
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In the Philippines, the failure to anticipate resistance from leaders resulted in the disappointing termination of established CSO partnership with the Commission on Audit. Even though the participatory audit exercise was declared a success by participating organizations, the new Audit Commissioner declared other priorities and shelved participatory audit exercises. Persuasion and lobbying could have been deployed to influence established beliefs about the auditing profession – that it requires both technical preparedness and client confidentiality – a clear bias that precluded CSO engagement in the audit process. There is also the inherent risk of political intervention in the citizen monitoring process which could easily dampen civic activism and weaken overall accountability efforts.

In South Africa, the recognized challenge is the need to strike the right balance between addressing civil society interests and maintaining productive government relations in the conduct of independent budget analysis.

## Public Opinion – a critical force in governance and accountability

### *Different country contexts*

**South Africa**

**Philippines**

**Kenya**

**India**

**Colombia**



### *Common Strand*

***Informed  
public opinion***

***and***

***effective use of  
the media***

The cases featured in this exercise offer contrasting experiences – each one unique in its accountability objectives and tools used, in implementation approach and communication strategies – not to mention challenges posed by their different political and social contexts.

The common strand and most important lesson that can be drawn from this set of contrasting experiences is the central role of informed and mobilized public opinion, and the strategic use of the media to engage citizens and build public pressure to demand accountability. The various examples benefited from the presence of internal champions and coalitions of supporters within an enabling environment supported by the existence of a democratic public sphere.

However, sustaining change efforts remain the most significant challenge. Setbacks and stumbling blocks are part of the difficult process of change – political buy-in wanes, vested interests persist, reform opponents prevail, while institutionalized structures can dissipate and mobilized publics can lose interest.

To mitigate such real-world challenges and sustain the momentum for change, vigilant and persistent efforts at keeping issues alive, engaging informed and active citizens and maintaining an organized cadre of reform champions and broad coalitions of supporters are key to sustaining hard-won gains of social accountability initiatives.

## Review

### Mobilized Public Opinion

- Changes the *incentives* of decision-makers
- Once mobilized, it cannot be ignored
- It is a critical force in governance

In this exercise, we examined case studies that illustrate various approaches in mobilizing public opinion and describe the results achieved in social accountability efforts. Through the process of consensus and deliberation, mobilized public opinion is important because it generates genuine demand for accountability. As these examples demonstrate, the 'heat effect' of mobilized public opinion can indeed influence change. It is a critical force in governance reform efforts.