



GLOBAL
PARTNERSHIP FOR
SOCIAL
ACCOUNTABILITY



GPSA NOTE 16

INTEGRATING ADAPTIVE LEARNING IN GRANT-MAKING

THE CASE OF THE GPSA

FLORENCIA GUERZOVICH AND MARIA POLI¹

This note was written in October 2016 and was not updated since.

The Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) is recognized as a leading voice in the implementation of adaptive learning principles in development² and in the transparency and accountability field.³ This note takes stock of the integration of adaptive learning in GPSA's strategy, programming, and operations through November 30, 2016.⁴ It feeds into the GPSA's strategy review and informs and builds bridges with other efforts within the Governance Global Practice (GGP) to address the issue of adaptive learning in the development field. Overall, the note explains why and how the concept was integrated into the GPSA's theory of change and Results Framework and briefly reviews how this integration is evolving across its core programmatic components. The last chapter offers conclusions and key messages in the areas of program- and project-level adaptive learning.

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- 1 This work is a product of the staff of The World Bank with external contributions. It was written by Florencia Guerzovich and Maria Poli of the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA), World Bank, in 2016 and published in May 2020. Only the references have been updated. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this work do not necessarily reflect the views of The World Bank, its Board of Executive Directors, or the governments they represent. The World Bank does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this work. Please cite the work as follows: Guerzovich, Maria F. and Maria Poli. 2020. "Integrating adaptive learning in grant-making: the case of the GPSA." Global Partnership for Social Accountability Note 16. World Bank, Washington, DC. <https://gpsaknowledge.org/integrating-adaptive-learning-in-grant-making-the-case-of-the-gpsa/>.
 - 2 See, for example, <https://oxfamblogs.org/wp2p/where-have-we-got-to-on-adaptive-learning-thinking-and-working-politically-doing-development-differently-etc-getting-beyond-the-peoples-front-of-judea/>.
 - 3 For more information, see <https://www.transparency-initiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/supporting-learning.pdf>.
 - 4 For more information on the GPSA's mission and strategy, see <https://www.thegpsa.org/who-we-are>, and for the GPSA's approach on social accountability, see <https://www.thegpsa.org/about/what-we-do>.



Adaptive Learning within the GPSA's DNA

The GPSA understands learning as the extent to which a program, project, or organization gains and uses knowledge, from both its own work and that of others, to influence its policy, strategy, plans, and actions (ICAI 2014). Within GPSA's mandate, knowledge and learning generation is a process directly linked to action-oriented capacity development. The concept encompasses both learning and management improvements. As a result, for the GPSA, adaptive learning includes the idea of improving program- and project-level management.

Adaptive learning principles were introduced in the GPSA's Results Framework early for the following reasons:

- ▶ *Learning for improved results.* Beneficiaries have greater knowledge and practice of social accountability, and civil society has greater capacity to implement social accountability initiatives.⁵ This is one of GPSA's four pillars.
- ▶ *Evidence in the social accountability field.* The nature of problems the GPSA aims to contribute to solving are complex and contextually specific, and entail winners and losers.⁶
- ▶ *Cornerstone of the GPSA's business model.* Having different stakeholders think and work together to implement solutions to concrete local problems was innovative and called for the development of new capacities and ways of doing social accountability (Guerzovich and Poli 2014b).
- ▶ *How learning happens.* Incipient evidence about how development organizations and their partners and clients learn provided insights that support these principles.⁷ This evidence was consistent with tacit knowledge in social accountability about the opportunities and challenges for learning for impact.⁸

5 Social accountability is a process that enables the inclusive participation and collective action of citizens and civil society organizations in public policy making and implementation so that state and service providers are responsive to citizens' needs and held accountable.

6 The literature cited in the GPSA Results Framework is vast (Tsai and Guerzovich 2015). Also see Grandvoisinnet, Aslam, and Raha (2015).

7 Sources include evaluations on learning by the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group and Independent Commission for Aid Impact, and the U.K. Department for International Development.

8 For contemporary efforts see <https://bit.ly/36g62UY> <https://bit.ly/2AHZBv>.



At the time, no conclusive evidence showed that these “new” principles for learning in the development world were more conducive to wider governance reforms than business as usual (Rao 2014). For the GPSA, adopting an adaptive approach emerged organically and was driven by its particular mandate and programmatic implications as well as by evidence from the social accountability field (Guerzovich and Poli 2014a).

Experience to date from the GPSA suggests that processes of trial, reflection, and adaptation — as opposed to linear assumptions and replication of best practices — are better able to support the solution of complex governance and development problems at the country level. For example, the GPSA’s operation in Morocco initially proposed replicating, at a larger scale, a “blueprint” from a successful, yet localized small operation led by civil society to solve problems in education delivery.

The success of the pilot, which relied on using a community scorecard process, led the team to assume that the previous approach would work. However, early discussions with the field team showed the approach wasn’t being adapted to the local, regional, and national context. Contextual adaptation involves, for example, taking time to understand how the novel idea of social accountability could be undertaken by schools at a regional scale (and potentially at a national scale) and to identify entry points from ongoing reforms.

Fail-fast approaches that aim to quickly correct flawed processes, learning, and iteration enabled the multistakeholder team to combine global and local insights and chart a new path toward using social accountability to solve education problems at scale.⁹ In other words, the GPSA’s trajectory is consistent with the operationalization of the key messages of the *World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law* (World Bank 2017).

A systematic review of the GPSA’s operations’ portfolio seems to confirm that adaptive learning may be a constituent part of its business model in which social accountability interventions led by civil society coupled with the World Bank’s unique in-country position will lead to processes of multistakeholder coproduction in policy, delivery, and accountability solutions around local problems.¹⁰

9 For example, see <https://www.thegpsa.org/stories/helping-local-partners-have-voice-morocco%e2%80%99s-public-education>.

10 This insight builds on the growing literature on coproduction. See Guerzovich and Schommer (2016).



Designing and implementing operations to work in adaptive ways is time consuming and challenging. Often discussed is the need to reconcile flexibility to manage systemic uncertainty with management processes that call for up front, detailed work plans and budgets against which an operation will deliver quantifiable results. Also tending to be part of the equation are reporting systems that only serve compliance and accountability purposes or knowledge management systems built around products to support marketing efforts or the promotion of best practice models for replication.

The GPSA has addressed these challenges by innovating with the grain. This means the Program has not “bought wholesale” an existing approach and implemented it, but has taken cues from experience to develop an approach organically for its circumstances. In so doing, it has taken into account the opportunities and limits of World Bank systems and the practices of the social accountability field.

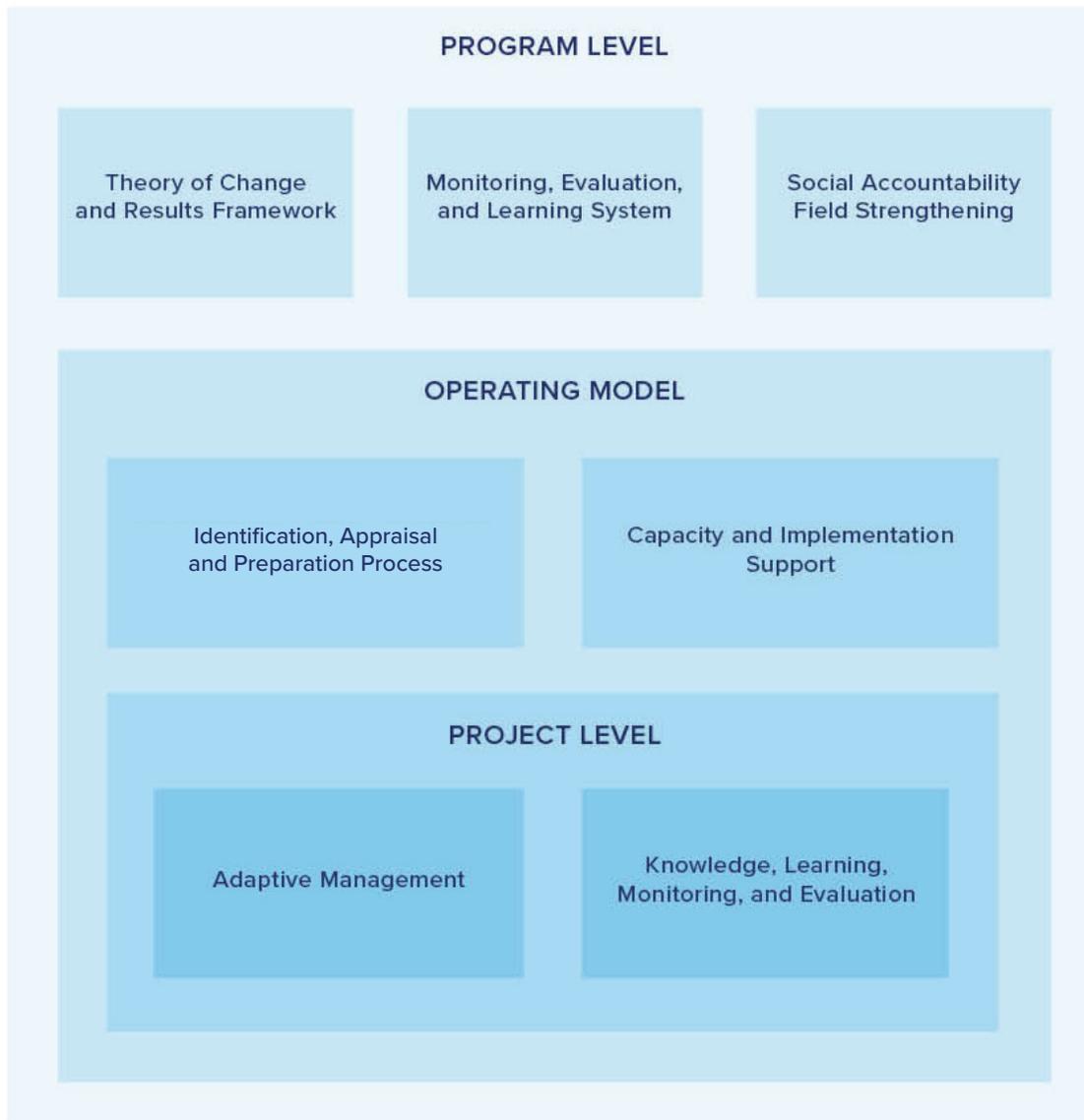
A more critical obstacle, however, are the organizational cultures and incentives in social accountability and development operations management that the GPSA on its own cannot change. Options are being explored to work on these contextual issues, which is expected to lead to a new component of GPSA’s Vision 2020, which identifies areas in which the GPSA can leverage its comparative advantage through its mission, model, experience, and portfolio.



GPSA's innovations in learning for better results

The GPSA's approach to adaptive learning encompasses interrelated conceptual and operational components of an adaptive approach (see figure 1). A detailed discussion follows.

Figure 1. Adaptive Learning at the Program Level





PROGRAM-LEVEL ADAPTIVE LEARNING

THEORY OF CHANGE AND RESULTS FRAMEWORK

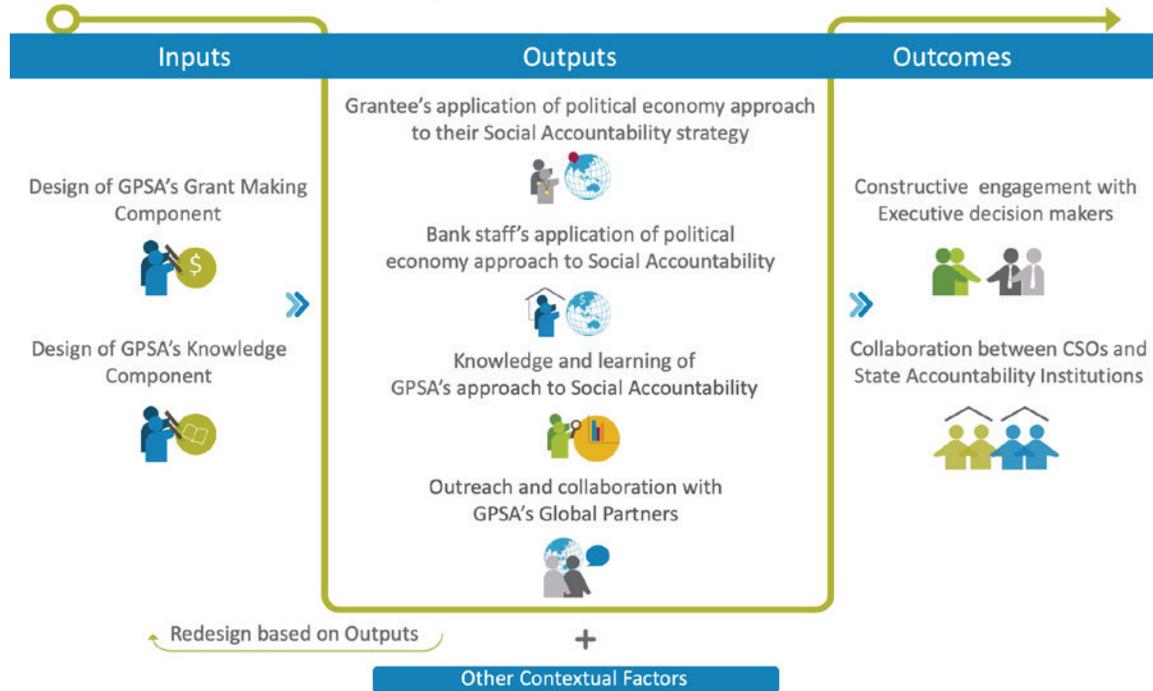
The GPSA’s Results Framework is based on a theory of change that embeds adaptive learning in its social accountability conceptual framework. The theory of change itself reflects an “ongoing process of reflection to explore change and how it happens — and what that means for the part organizations play in a particular context, sector, and/or group of people” (James 2011, Executive Summary).¹¹ It is worth mentioning that the current theory of change is the result of an initial iteration that took place immediately after the Program began operating. It became evident that the original results framework that had been commissioned wouldn’t serve the purpose of guiding programmatic and operational directions.

Consistent with adaptive learning principles, the GPSA’s theory of change tool is a “compass” to inform decision making about the Program’s contribution to changes in complex, uncertain contexts given its knowledge at a point in time. It also requires GPSA to use new experiences and knowledge (tacit or codified) to continually review its assumptions about how governance and development problems are solved and how it may better contribute to solving them (see figure 2).

11 For more information, see <https://www.odi.org/comment/9882-four-principles-theories-change-global-development>.



Figure 2. GPSA's 2013 Theory of Change



Source: Tsai and Guertzovich (2015).

The GPSA's theory of change reflects insights that link evidence in the field to the emerging adaptive learning agenda. These agenda items include:

- ▶ a problem-driven economy approach to social accountability;
- ▶ locally driven, problem solving that is informed and supported by cross-context knowledge;
- ▶ acknowledgment of the plausible, unique contributions of GPSA operations given contextual opportunities and constraints;
- ▶ focus on processes (output and outcome-level indicators) in addition to end results; and
- ▶ attention to learning with and from operations, including from potential synergies between GPSA grant operations and other World Bank operations.



The GPSA is exploring how to adjust its theory of change to reflect new knowledge drawn from its portfolio and formative evaluation, its experience and possible contextual shifts, and new evidence in the field.

The GPSA's portfolio includes a large proportion of grantees that work in "challenging environments." These are environments in which:

- ▶ the collective capacities of the implementation compact are particularly low; and
- ▶ the political context is challenging (e.g., closing of civic space, fragile and conflict-affected situations); and
- ▶ articulation of interventions led by civil society with ongoing state reform efforts, including but not limited to World Bank operations, is not straightforward.

In these contexts, the GPSA's theory of change needs to be customized — assumptions about the environment do not hold. One way in which the Program is mitigating risks is by increasing capacity and delivery support investment ahead of the intervention. The Program expects the proportion of work in social accountability in challenging versus enabling environments to grow in the near future, given broader trends in the sector and areas of focus of international development partners. In this context, it seems reasonable to systematically and systemically address environmental challenges ahead of particular interventions.

PROGRAM MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING SYSTEM

The GPSA's Results Framework requires a sound monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) system that can gather, aggregate, and link program- and project-level data. The Program's formative evaluation underlined the challenge of ensuring that "the results achieved by the grantees can be aggregated at the GPSA program level in order that the wider significance and cumulative impact of these investments is captured systematically to generate wider lessons and evidence" (Robinson 2015, 5). It



also recommended commissioning an impact evaluation “toward the end of the initial phase of the program, around 3 to 4 years after the current exercise, with the aim of capturing the results of GPSA program investments by gathering evidence on project outcomes and the overall impact achieved by different components of the program” (Robinson 2015, 5).

The GPSA Secretariat is addressing these recommendations and has taken steps to improve the integration of its grant-making and knowledge components. The adaptive nature of the Program may require considering alternative evaluation approaches, including but not limited to developmental, realist, or theory-informed iterative evaluations that help bridge monitoring, learning, and strategy development while ensuring accountability for results.

FIELD STRENGTHENING

Thought leadership, conceptual framing, and evidence. Initiatives innovating with adaptive models generally work to support frameworks and legitimize these principles and practices.¹² The GPSA is a leading voice in this conversation in the social accountability field. The Program has produced content about adaptive practices and learning in social accountability (or lack of thereof) as well as curated and disseminated content produced by others.

This focus has emerged for two reasons associated with its mandate and operational experience. First, the GPSA’s Knowledge Platform has become an important space for knowledge exchange in the field, including but not limited to learning and adaptation for improved results. Second, the GPSA’s diagnostic about the conditions for implementing its approach — including challenges faced in the identification and selection of projects, design, and implementation processes, along with its limits to shape the field on its own — have incentivized the Program to engage in this particular conversation proactively.

12 For more information, see <http://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/where-have-we-got-to-on-adaptive-learning-thinking-and-working-politically-doing-development-differently-etc-getting-beyond-the-peoples-front-of-judea/>.



Generating knowledge and evidence for adaptive social accountability. The GPSA's Results Framework sets out the production of systematic analysis of grantees' experiences as an expected output. This knowledge is expected to generate both operationally useful knowledge for civil society organizations (CSOs) and rigorous evidence of the contribution of social accountability to improving public governance and service delivery. Both are public goods that the GPSA has a mandate to provide according to its Board Paper (World Bank 2012). It could contribute to advancing the operationalization and evidence-base in relation to adaptive approaches.

Knowledge management for adaptive social accountability. The GPSA is learning by doing what it means to support learning-oriented adaptation in its own practices and how to embed these principles into its products to support knowledge exchange among peers (e.g., through its Knowledge Platform and in-person events such as brown bag lunches and forums). The GPSA approaches this goal by:

- ▶ **Focusing on content.** It curates and disseminates content that is about not only adaptation and learning itself, but also space to share practices and inquire how these principles are applied to concrete social accountability projects in diverse contexts.
- ▶ **Rethinking knowledge management approaches.** The Program, along with its grantee Fundar, is transforming a knowledge management strategy based on information stored and interpreted by experts into a series of processes that put emphasis on the users and uptake of the information rather than on particular products (Fundar 2013). The GPSA is also nurturing spaces for continuous peer-to-peer and grantee-funder exchange (Ørnemark 2015).



OPERATING MODEL

IDENTIFICATION, APPRAISAL AND PREPARATION PROCESS

The Program based its grant-making strategy around global calls for proposals with tailored country calls in accordance with the Board paper and the GPSA's Operations Manual.¹³ To date, the Program has completed three global calls in 41 countries, receiving more than 1,000 grant applications.

The grant project selection process was structured around an electronic technical review system carried out by a global roster of experts (comprised of World Bank and external social accountability, sector, and country experts). Moreover, the process was organized in stages that correspond to the Bank's project cycle (identification, concept, appraisal, approval, and supervision). The GPSA worked with Operations Policy and Country Services (OPCS) to agree on a standard template for grant projects and on a process flow that distinguishes the various stages. This process is aligned with the 2012 GPSA Board Paper and OPCS guidelines for small recipient executed grants.

Identifying proposals that respond to needs within country contexts. Although global calls are designed to prioritize country themes identified by country management units (CMUs) in consultation with local stakeholders, the experience has demonstrated that the overall process might be more efficient and effective if it was able to operate on a rolling basis. This would reinforce the demand-driven element of funding decisions by responding to specific opportunities and needs, in addition to offering a better fit to the GPSA's approach of adding value to ongoing public sector reform processes that call for multistakeholder collaboration around specific problem solving. The Program is experimenting with this approach through a first country call for proposals in the Dominican Republic and planned tailored support (in partnership with the U.S. Agency

13 The GPSA Operational Manual (OM) outlines streamlined project processing procedures applicable to all GPSA recipient-executed trust fund grants subject to the World Bank Board Paper and Resolution establishing the GPSA (World Bank 2012) and World Bank OP/BP 14.40, Trust Funds. The Secretariat revised the January 2013 GPSA OM to reflect new processes (e.g., eliminating procedural redundancies) to gain efficiencies in GPSA's grant-making process. The revised June 2014 GPSA OM was developed in consultation with and endorsed by the World Bank's Operations Policy and Country Services and Legal Services as well as the GPSA Steering Committee (World Bank 2014).



for International Development) through the GGP's operations in Honduras and Mexico. Similarly, tailored regional and country-level calls coupled with capacity and implementation support activities are being defined under a partnership with the Water Global Practice through a water trust fund.

Selecting proposals and CSOs with adaptive capacities. The GPSA's approach to social accountability requires partners with capacities, attitudes, and behaviors who are open to working with others, learning by doing, and sharing cross-context knowledge to improve their results. The grant application requires applicant CSOs (i) to explain how they would contribute to the GPSA's fourth pillar, Learning for Improved Results, through a dedicated Knowledge and Learning (K&L) component, and (ii) to explain the lessons and prior learning considered to justify proposed interventions. These aspects are also reflected in the technical review criteria used to evaluate grant applications.

At the request of the GPSA's Steering Committee, the Secretariat commissioned a systematic analysis of rounds 1 and 2 grant applications (published in a series of short dissemination notes), which analyzed, among other elements, the readiness of CSO applicants to embed adaptive learning in their social accountability proposals (Guerzovich and Poli 2014a). Annex A includes a set of questions developed for this review to assess if GPSA applicants used and planned to use learning as a basis to justify and improve on their proposed social accountability project strategies — complementing a traditional focus on social accountability technical capacities.

Overall, the GPSA's analysis of grant applications found that social accountability approaches put forth in CSO proposals tend to be ill-informed, lack politically savvy to solve context-relevant problems, and tend to be tool driven rather than driven by sound problem and sectoral political thinking and action. The proposals showed limited or no capacity to apply political economy analysis to targeted problems. This weakness was reflected in the CSOs' theories of change and operational plans, which in turn could put at risk the projects' chances of delivering. Furthermore, while the formal elements of monitoring, learning, and evaluation were sometimes present, the purposes to which



learning could be put were rarely made explicit. Learning from past experience to inform the project proposal was near absent with a small number of applicants considering alternative strategies. A small percentage of applications took advantage of learning for course correction. Moreover, learning was not sufficiently constrained in scope to provide recommendations that were adapted to local context (Guerzovich and Poli 2014a, c).

These findings, coupled with project preparation support provided by the GPSA to pre-selected grantees, have also informed the Program's implementation support model (discussed later).

Preparing projects through adaptations to original proposals. During the appraisal stage, the Secretariat works with pre-selected grantee CSOs to revise the original proposals. The review considers feedback received from the Steering Committee, technical reviewers, and the government. Task team leaders (TTLs) are also engaged once CMUs appoint them. The Secretariat also provides technical guidance to pre-selected grantees on (i) overall social accountability approaches with a focus on assumptions and theories of change, political economy and problem-driven analysis, strategies, and operational roadmaps; (ii) Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL) and the Results Framework; (iii) project budgets and staffing; and (iv) overall preparation of draft project package documents. The latter involves a partially centralized function, whereby the Secretariat is responsible for entering project packages in the system, working with the Legal Department on the preparation of grant agreements, and monitoring the approval process until packages are approved by country directors.

The revision process at the appraisal stage implying an adaptive learning exercise in itself. Experience to date suggests the operating model may need to be revised to explicitly acknowledge the need to allocate adequate funding and preparation time to the process. For pre-selected CSOs, this process takes place before the organization receives the GPSA grant funds, requiring them to invest time and their own resources. In some cases, dedicated project teams have not been recruited yet. The GPSA has mitigated this shortcoming by asking pre-selected CSOs to appoint a project manager as soon as the revision process is initiated.



For TTLs, most have been willing to dedicate time to the process even without having a budget code available to allocate their time to the task. At this stage, CMUs must also endorse the pre-selection of country grant proposals, designate TTLs, and pre-allocate funding for supervision. Experience shows that not only CMUs but also sectors are open to supervising GPSA grant projects and linking them to ongoing World Bank support for sectoral reforms. This confirms that the operational design feature of requiring grant projects to be transferred to sector supervision — and not remaining in isolation from sectoral efforts — has been a correct path. However, the investment required for the preparation process has been underestimated.

This timing issue diminishes the insights that go into building adequate and realistic project plans and increases the possibilities of miscommunication among different parties. GPSA's guidance to mitigate this risk has been setting broad parameters to ensure approved projects will have systems and mechanisms in place to integrate monitoring, evaluation, knowledge, and learning.

Revisions to the appraisal and preparation process — coupled with a more strategic identification process — could help to further align GPSA grant projects to existing opportunities and resources available at the country level.

Budgets, learning goals, and implementation team buy-in. Knowledge and MEL systems for adaptation call for specific budget allocations, but funding is not enough for shifting toward more adaptive management practices without alignment between donors, management, and implementation team's goals. In round 3, the GPSA encouraged better alignment between adaptive management principles and budgets. It provided written guidance coupled with individual support to pre-selected grantees and TTLs for jointly revising proposals.

The GPSA has also worked to adapt project package documents within the parameters of World Bank operational policies and procedures. Adjustments to project documents, introduced early on and progressively improved through experience, have included:



Milestones-based disbursements. Grant projects disburse against milestones agreed on between the grantee CSO, TTL, and GPSA. Initially, the Secretariat worked with the disbursement department to agree on standard parameters to define and assess the achievement of milestones for the approval of disbursements. To the extent that most Bank projects rely on disbursements against statement of expenditures and financial statements, this implied a different process based on agreeing on milestones that would reflect the achievement of outcomes supported by evidence of deliverables.

The Secretariat has provided general guidance for defining milestones so that project teams are able to link them to critical outputs included in operational plans and outcomes included in results frameworks. This has included providing evidence of project strategies and operational plan adaptations and adjustments informed by implementation experience. The overall process has called for both internal and external adaptations — from TTLs who weren't used to assessing disbursement requests against outcome-based milestones, to CSOs that were more accustomed to reporting on outputs without linking them to progress toward the achievement of outcomes. For round 3 grant projects, revised GPSA guidance also embeds requirements in project log frames to provide well-reasoned, informed justifications to periodic adjustments and taking these as a measure of success. This way, the GPSA is experimenting with milestones that trigger disbursements as a key tool to improving the structure of incentives that may enable open, reasoned, and documented adaptations.

Results frameworks as management tools. World Bank project papers require grantee CSOs to complete a log frame and to define project development objectives (PDOs) and project-level indicators before grant approval. Experience has shown uneven and limited understanding across grantee CSOs about the use of these log frames as a management tool. In response, the GPSA has reinforced its guidance to support the preparation of results frameworks and include advice on defining appropriate learning-related outcomes and indicators, as well as qualitative indicators such as milestones and incremental changes throughout implementation that may improve tracking of project achievements.



Reasonable expectations for the PDO to balance accountability and flexibility for improved results. Some TTLs have expressed concerns that the CSOs' initial proposals set unrealistic expectations at the PDO-level, given project timelines and budget. The GPSA has worked to craft compromises through which grantees are accountable for delivering against a realistic objective, while also dedicating resources to pilot more ambitious problem-solving interventions that go beyond the objective. The goal of the pilots is to produce knowledge for improved, scalable social accountability interventions. Grantees are accountable for generating these products, which gives them room for experimenting with and analyzing successes and failures.

FROM PREPARATION TO SUPERVISION AND IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT

Setting up responsive and collaborative capacity implementation support. The project preparation process has served to prime the implementation team, under the overall guidance of the TTL and with support from the GPSA Secretariat. After round 1 proposals were approved, several TTLs and grantees requested GPSA's technical assistance to improve social accountability approaches. The GPSA Secretariat appointed a capacity and implementation support senior advisor to coordinate the delivery of support. As round 1 projects began implementation and round 2 projects were pre-selected, the demand for support increased, with a total portfolio that grew from 11 to 22 operations.

The Secretariat carried out a needs assessment across projects, identified TTLs with social accountability expertise, and contracted with additional consulting experts to meet specific support needs — where TTLs had sectoral but not social accountability advisor expertise. Hence, the role of social accountability advisor was defined to bring in this expertise to support TTLs and grantee CSOs. A dedicated Capacity and Implementation Support area was set up with the aim of meeting this need.¹⁴

A review of the portfolio has shown that implementation compacts, comprised of grantee CSOs, TTLs, and GPSA social accountability advisors play a critical role to ensure implementation quality. The Secretariat has provided this additional support on a needs

14 For more information on the Capacity and Implementation Support area, see <https://bit.ly/2Uggkjl>.



and demand basis, consistent with the capacity levels of grantee CSOs. In terms of adaptive learning, implementation compacts have provided spaces for continuous discussion of project progress, and more importantly, for timely adaptations and iterations that are critical to this type of intervention. This is further reviewed in the next section.

Overall, the GPSA has been experimenting with integrating adaptive learning since its inception, and this is an evolving process. The Program's core mandates include an inherent recognition of the need for learning uptake to be embedded in its operations, which has encouraged adaptations in practice. To date, learning from experience and the resulting tried and tested adaptations are informing improvements to the GPSA's overall business and operating models. In particular, the learning has helped to address challenges in the operating model, which the Program is still addressing.

PROJECT-LEVEL ADAPTIVE LEARNING

Operational model to support adaptations on the ground. The GPSA's operating model has evolved since its inception and has emphasized a hands-on and solution-driven approach, focused on providing high-quality and rapid response support to TTLs and grantee CSOs. It is modeled on the World Bank's experience supporting governments through lending and nonlending operations as well as prior experience supporting CSOs through grants.

Work to support project-level adaptations combines tailored assistance and mentoring for grantees and TTLs. It focuses on integrated support for core capacities through joint reflection and action to increase implementation effectiveness while contributing to complex change processes that go beyond a grantee's own direct influence. Assistance is allocated based on project needs and requests for support to address design or concept and implementation challenges. The work involves more than technical knowledge associated with a particular task and political economy know-how. Needs differ by project cycle stage, geographic location, organizational and partnership characteristics, governance landscape, and sectoral political economy. Consequently, the allocation of limited resources available to provide this time and resource-intensive, in-kind support also needs to shift across the portfolio.



Other collective and individual types of support are also offered. They include expert consultants on specific issues (e.g., public procurement in education) and virtual and onsite capacity development sessions (e.g., strategic media and communications, formative evaluation, and peer-to-peer reflection meetings).

Moving from a traditional knowledge management approach to embedding an adaptive learning approach. The GPSA requires that all grantees contribute to the “learning for improved results” pillar and funds this component accordingly. This approach is consistent with its Results Framework. The GPSA encourages learning about political economy that has explicit impact on the decision making of grantees, including decisions about making program choices; creating and updating theories of change; choosing delivery mechanisms; and adapting and improving implementation of activities. The Program will not penalize grantees that correct their course of action as a result of improved understanding of their political circumstances and the political economy context of their problem of interest.

All GPSA grants include a K&L component and are expected to include a K&L plan, budget allocation, and staff as part of their project package. Grantees identify areas in which they would like to invest resources. Funding and space for iterative learning and adaptive management of grant project are encouraged.

Overall, the quality of K&L components is uneven across projects, with very few embedding adaptive learning. Most grantees prioritized technical know-how for staff and volunteers, rather than building organizational capacities. Activities and products are detached from the operations and the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system. This means that the projects’ results frameworks do not take advantage of the flexibilities and insights built into the Program-level Results Framework – both are not proactively aligned. Furthermore, even when the Program’s reporting documents ask about adaptive learning, most grantees only reported about activities and deliverables. One reason identified by grantees is that their projects did not prioritize learning nor allocate sufficient time and resources for this function (other factors are discussed later).



Over time, it became clear the Program had to course-correct its approach to increase the use of Knowledge Management and MERL to strengthen the improvement of strategies and tools — which, in most cases, social accountability advisors were already supporting in practice. The GPSA's approach today has been adjusted to emphasize learning by doing, based on adaptations to good practices in the field and on consultations with grantee CSOs and TTLs. While much progress has been made, the feedback loop between the GPSA and its grantees can still be further improved.

Putting reporting systems at the service of open reflection. Investments in regular monitoring are essential for donor and grantee learning and adaptation. Log frames updated in annual and semiannual reports are tools to ensure that joint reflection is focused, based on qualitative and quantitative data. The GPSA team has found that many grantees lack conviction about sharing insights from learning, or assume that donors are indifferent to these reports or may not be interested in contextual information despite explicit questions. Other grantees are unclear about the kind of learning-based information expected from them. Still, others exhibit a propensity to avoid reflecting on weak planning, project risks, contexts, and achievable objectives over concern they will appear incompetent or risk future funding.

To change this perception, the GPSA has been facilitating GPSA grantee-TTL joint reflections and has taken steps to increase openness about how adaptive learning is working in practice with the broader Program and social accountability community. For example, it is experimenting with producing blogs prepared jointly by TTLs and grantees with GPSA's support to capture reflections triggered by annual and semiannual reports. These reflections were also showcased during the 2016 Global Partners Forum and will be showcased at the 2016 Open Government Partnership Global Summit.

The GPSA also adapted reporting templates in consultation with grantees. The mid-year report now focuses on providing a qualitative assessment based on project learning (see box 1). Still, the GPSA is one of many funders most grantees are simultaneously reporting to, which limits its ability to modify perceptions and influence long-standing reporting practices.



Box 1. Extract from GPSA Grantee Mid-Year Technical Report

Please reflect on the progress achieved during the reporting period by focusing on the project's internal learning and adaptations to its implementation. You may use the points below as guidance in your analysis:

- ▶ How has the social accountability process evolved in the last six months? Did the project team and its partners make any adjustments to the project's social accountability strategy and its operationalization?
- ▶ Significant events or changes in the context (under and beyond the project's control) that have affected project implementation.
- ▶ Has the project team and its partners learned something that led to a change in the way the intervention is being implemented (including from monitoring and evaluation, reflection meetings, and so on)?

Focusing on few, but meaningful priority indicators as enablers of strategic dialogue on areas of key interest for decision making. Too often grantees include a large number of quantitative indicators in their proposal log frames. This means either they provide for indicators at the output level that are not logically connected to the PDO, or they commit to collecting a vast amount of data without providing for sufficient budgets and processes to collect and use the information. None of these practices is conducive for adaptive management and learning.

To date, the GPSA team has identified a small number of critical outcome-level variables associated with the hypothesis in its theory of change and practice to help prioritize and monitor process indicators across the life of third-round projects. It is up to implementation compacts to identify functional equivalent indicators to track meaningfully the evolution of these variables in context. Log frame indicators at the output level are few and generally flexible so the project does not invest in collecting data that may not remain relevant to track problem solving as project implementation evolves.



Include indicators that make assumptions about the value add of learning explicit.

GPSA grantees have expressed finding it difficult to decide which knowledge is worth sharing. It is not common practice for many organizations to systematize learning and they have an underdeveloped understanding of what constitutes learning and how to best capture it. A common response is to turn uncertainty into quantitative indicators of knowledge products. New GPSA guidance provides focused attention on a minimum of two specific “users” and uses of knowledge. At the output level, the project’s implementation compact uses knowledge to improve strategies and tools (grantee is 100 percent responsible). At the outcome level, the project contributes to but is not 100 percent responsible for key stakeholders using knowledge to inform decisions.

Embedding applied political economy analysis (not products). One of the knowledge uptake processes tracked for all implementation compacts is the ongoing analysis of political economy contexts (see box 2). The need to generate and publish new knowledge products to inform this process is decided on a case-by-case basis rather than conflated with their use.



Box 2. Political Economy for Strategic Social Accountability

Political economy analysis is concerned with the interaction of political and economic processes in a society. It focuses on power and resources, how they are distributed and contested in different country and sector contexts between different groups and individuals, and the processes that create, sustain, and transform these relationships over time.

Applying political economy savviness to social accountability approaches means much more than writing up a map of stakeholders and institutional and governance arrangements. For the GPSA, strategic social accountability is a process encompassing:

- ▶ the use of a combined set of linked, fit-for-purpose tactics, mechanisms, and tools including those that are formal (i.e., mandated by laws and regulations) and informal (set up or organized by CSOs and citizen groups themselves).
- ▶ the choice of mechanisms and tools grounded on several considerations. Examples include cost-benefit analysis of alternatives; analysis of the political and institutional context; assessment of needs and problems regarding the service delivery chain or the management process (among others) as well as entry points for introducing the process; and assessment of existing capacities and incentives for the actors to be engaged, including service users, CSOs, service providers, and public sector institutions.

Ideally, all stakeholders learn from each other (and even team up) to figure out options for strategies and solutions and put them to work. CSOs drive strategic social accountability interventions, but by no means, do it alone.

Source: Poli and Guertzovich (2014).



Getting comfortable about adaptation as the product of funder and grantee relationship. Practices and insights reflect knowledge from the time-intensive process of nurturing trust among implementation compact members and between them and the GPSA team. This note captures some of the ways in which the GPSA is trying to nurture this relationship. In terms of traditional M&E tools, it is critical to let experimentation and these relationships evolve without the pressure of delivering quick results, but taking advantage of those that emerge.



Main Conclusions

A key message is that while the implementation of an adaptive learning and management approach can occur organically, it is important to ensure that its various conceptual and operational pieces gradually fit together in a better way. This includes adaptive learning and management at the Program level, and its authorizing environment, evolving in tandem with adaptive learning and management at the project level— in landscapes of broader stakeholder groups. This chapter presents conclusions and key messages for program- and project-level adaptive learning.

PROGRAM-LEVEL ADAPTIVE LEARNING

The GPSA is experimenting with embedding adaptive learning and management in its programming and operations. Its mandate and theory of change encourage taking a proactive approach toward fast learning and adaptations.

Learning to date is informing new approaches to structure future processes that may include moving away from the architecture of global calls for proposals to an “inductive” grant-making approach through regional, subregional, and country grant making. This would enable the GPSA to identify opportunities and fill those niches where its approach to social accountability is needed to complement ongoing initiatives. At the same time, it would facilitate the identification of capacity development needs coupled with funding gaps. This way, capacity development would be better integrated at the concept stage. The Program’s flexible funding arrangements would allow it to leverage existing funding with additional funding from new parallel mechanisms and its multi-donor trust fund.

A second conclusion is that integrating adaptive management measures into the project cycle is possible. This step has required the GPSA to work closely with OPCS and task teams in order to align project preparation and implementation with the need



to enable adjustments and milestone-based disbursements, among other important considerations. Learning so far points to continue looking into additional revisions to further enable more agile, efficient, and effective project cycles.

PROJECT-LEVEL ADAPTIVE LEARNING

The in-depth work between the GPSA team, pre-selected grantees, and new TTLs has proved to be important to build a common vision and trust as well as to embed adaptive principles into the design of the operation.

TRUST BUILDING AND DEVELOPING ONGOING RELATIONSHIPS AS THE SOURCE OF LEADERSHIP TO BACK UP ADAPTATION

To implement GPSA's innovative approach to social accountability, continuous—rather than episodic—capacity and implementation support is better suited to the environment. The GPSA and its partners seek to solve complex, heavily context-dependent governance problems that likely require experimentation, reflection and refinement, or course correction as part of capacity strengthening for the implementation process.

This kind of behind-the-scenes support strives to gradually create abilities for multistakeholder, collaborative social accountability projects.¹⁵ Regardless of the level of support required, it entails gradual trust building between grantee and donor. Time allows for the effort needed for changes to take hold that are associated with developing strategic social accountability and relationship. This critical input ensures that the leadership needed for project adaptation will emerge, develop, and be sustained in light of contextual shifts and new knowledge.

15 Social accountability is “collaborative” when citizens, civil society groups, and public sector institutions engage in joint, iterative problem solving to improve service delivery, sector governance, and accountability.



CAPACITY AND IMPLEMENTATION RISKS

The innovative nature of the GPSA-style approach and the process of selection of partners and operations underscore the need to further develop and strengthen capacities for improved performance and impact. This is a significant consideration to mitigate risks and advance toward an evidence-based, collaborative social accountability approach.

VALUE FOR MONEY OF ADAPTIVE IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT

Adaptive programming requires more sophisticated capacity and implementation support from management and the World Bank than models of passively conveying off-the-shelf support from the top down. Implementation requires more time and more investment. Mentor-grantee fit is crucial for these relationships to work. It is difficult to identify the right mentor who can build the right type of relationship with grantees and have the technical, political, and collaborative skills to work with a range of partners. This is why higher implementation support costs need to be seen as investments in achieving greater impact rather than low value for money in the GPSA context. This view is demonstrated in GPSA's experience to date.



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APPENDIX A

Key Questions to Identify Adaptive Learning in GPSA Applications

1. Does the application provide a clear rationale to justify how past successes and failures inform strategies and tactics, including risk management?
2. Does the project approach learning as an exercise to course-correct and improve its work rather than as a tool to market success or best practices for others to take up?
3. If the project aims to produce lessons for others to take up, does it presume that the world can learn from their experience, or does it take specific measures or propose concrete monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) approaches that will explain under which conditions their experience will be useful to others?
4. What is the project's approach to scale? Does the project spell out a consistent approach to learning for scaling? Does this approach lend itself to taking into account contextual and politico-institutional factors likely to influence the implementation of these lessons?
5. Does the project explain how the MEL system will be used to help ensure its sustainability (i.e., the continuation of the project beyond the duration of GPSA funding)?
6. Does the project identify the timing and nature of opportunities for learning and iteration of approaches?
7. Does the project fully specify the trade-offs between alternative strategic interventions and provide clear justification for the chosen approach?
8. Does the application draw on and customize systematic evidence from social accountability initiatives in other countries or sectors?



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1818 H Street NW
Washington DC 20433
Telephone: 202-473-1000
Internet: www.worldbank.org

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