

PICKING PARTNERS AND ALLIES THAT BOLSTER YOUR SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY EFFORTS



This is the fourth note in a six-part series discussing whether the social accountability field is already primed with the knowledge and capabilities to design, implement, fund, and learn from strategic interventions. Where implementing change relies on action being taken by many diverse actors, coalitions and partnerships are crucial to achieving impact. This note uses data from the first two rounds of GPSA applications to reflect on how the field is picking their partners and building platforms for collective action towards social accountability. It presents results from systematic analysis of more than 600 applications submitted to the Global Partnership for Social Accountability.

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I. GLOBAL AND LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS IN THE GPSA

The GPSA supports civil society and governments to work together to solve critical governance challenges in developing countries. To achieve this objective, the GPSA provides strategic and sustained support to CSOs' social accountability initiatives aimed at strengthening transparency and accountability. It builds on the World Bank's direct and ongoing engagement with public sector actors, as well as an extensive and diverse [network of Global Partner organizations](#), to create an enabling environment in which citizen feedback is used to solve fundamental problems in service delivery and to strengthen public institutions.

The GPSA's grant-making window requires applicants to submit projects that rely on multi-stakeholder **partnerships and coalitions**.

"Partnerships" vs "coalitions" vs "multi-stakeholder initiatives"

In this paper, formal partners may include both state and non-state actors → they form **partnerships** with those whom they consider necessary to achieve the project's objectives.

A **coalition** is a loose network of explicit and tacit alliances across the state-civil society spectrum that can contribute directly or indirectly to a project (private sector and unions as part of the civil society compact, and the 3 branches of government, horizontal accountability, international development partners, etc.). In many cases, these stakeholders will remain as informal allies to the CSO.

Multi-stakeholder initiatives are those in which representatives from different organizations are brought together in hopes of facilitating cooperation and exchange. More on these initiatives and their impact see [here](#) and [here](#).

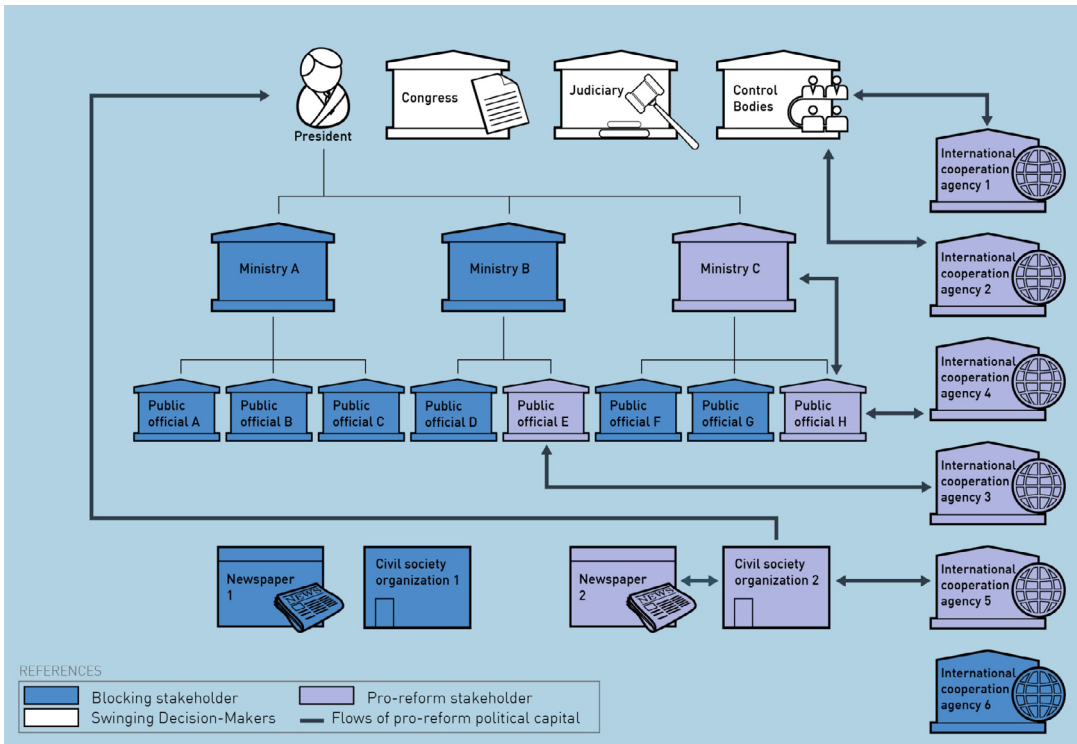
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The Global Partnership's ask, consistent with insights from knowledge about social accountability and political economy work, is for applicants to justify whether the partners and allies they pick make strategic sense. That is, do these partners and allies

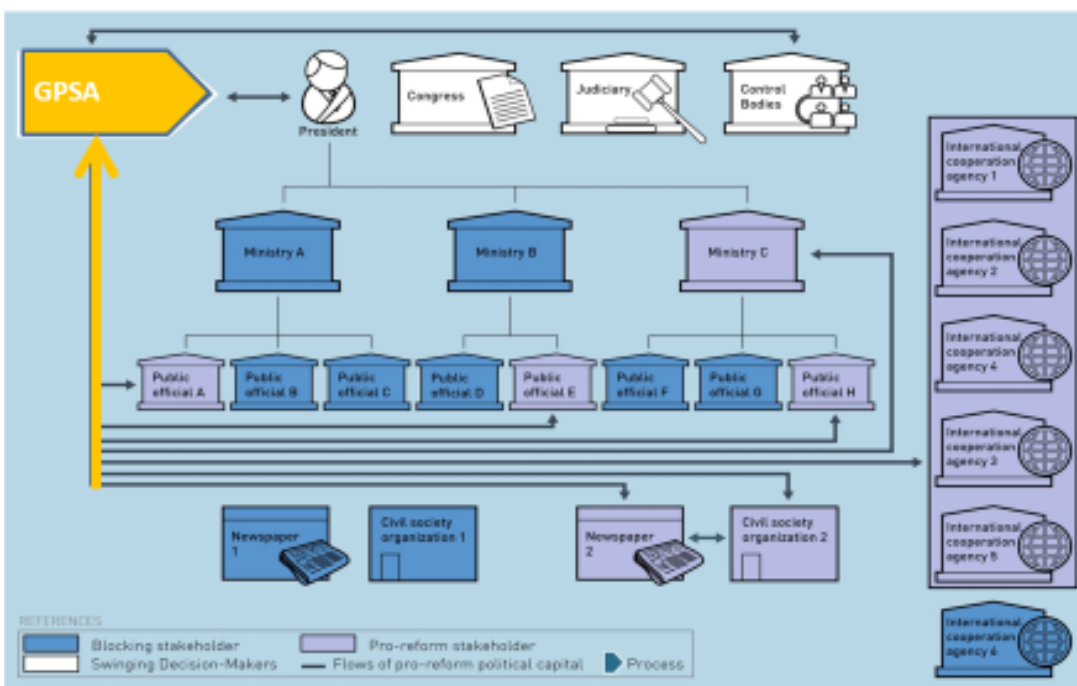
plan to continue business as usual dividing tasks and go about their work in parallel routes (Graph 1)? Or do they plan to pool together strategies and resources in ways that bolster the proposed project's impacts (Graph 2)?

Graph 1: Business as usual in social accountability coalitions and partnership



Source: Florencia Guertzovich. 2011. How to Articulate and Strengthen Pro-reform Coalitions: The Case of the Participatory Anti-corruption Initiative in the Dominican Republic. The World Bank. Unpublished Manuscript.

Graph 2: GPSA's bet regarding strategic social accountabilities



Source: Adapted from Florencia Guertzovich. 2011. How to Articulate and Strengthen Pro-reform Coalitions: The Case of the Participatory Anti-corruption Initiative in the Dominican Republic. The World Bank. Unpublished Manuscript.

The GPSA's ask is a difficult one when we consider that a recent study by GEOfundes argues that while partnerships and coalitions are an effective way for civil society groups to increase their impact, many times these groups do not have the capacities to overcome **collective action problems** and advance joint projects.

Moreover, there are significant risks to investing in a true partnership as each side places their trust in the integrity and commitment of the other side. Partnerships between civil society and public officials therefore require a high level of commitment, trust and active management in order to succeed.



Collective action problem: a situation in which there are multiple individuals who would benefit from a certain action, but the fact that costs or benefits are shared across individuals makes it unlikely that any one individual can or will undertake it on their own (see [Olson 1965](#)).

Our approach to drawing lessons from GPSA Applicants:

- Selection of a sample of 40 of 644 GPSA applications
- Scored each for their strategic political approach
- Extra attention to the best and worst applications
- 4 Components of social accountability strategies coded as present, partial or absent

Keep in mind that our analysis did not fully reassess the country context to determine whether an application responded precisely to local circumstances. Rather, we assessed to what extent the applicant discussed, analyzed and showed evidence of responsiveness to their own assessment of the local context.

Want to learn more about the GPSA's selection process and our methodology? Check out [GPSA-Note 1](#).



IDENTIFYING PARTNERSHIPS AND COALITIONS THAT BOLSTER SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY EFFORTS

The expectation of the [GPSA's theory of change](#) is that while at country level there are many pro-accountability stakeholders and initiatives and sometimes they achieve great results, much more would happen if they could encourage politically smart collaboration and coordination, in particular between state and non-state actors. Indeed, the two key outcomes in the GPSA's theory of change are to:

(1) increase constructive engagement between civil society actors and government decision makers in the executive responsible for improved service delivery; and

(2) facilitate collaboration between the social accountability initiatives of civil society actors and state institutions of accountability (sometimes also referred to as "horizontal" or "independent" institutions of accountability)) in order to oversee actors in the executive who are responsible for service delivery.

This expectation is grounded on a growing literature and a wealth of tacit knowledge that suggest that the kind of concrete policy changes the GPSA aims to support are politically difficult because they often threaten powerful vested interests. These powerful actors benefit

from keeping things the way they are, so they have incentives to fight back and block change. Conversely, CSOs often have limited resources (votes, lobbying, and organizational capacity, etc.) for the magnitude of their task.

In this context, lone crusaders are unlikely on their own to pull off a project to meet GPSA-style ambitions. Pro-reform partnerships and coalitions that build on others' resources, bridging diverse forms of technical, institutional and political capital, increase the likelihood of change (see [here](#) also [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). These collective efforts, which can encompass a wide range of actors, including national and subnational politicians, policymakers, non-governmental actors, unions, and international donors, can increase the political space a lone CSO will have to implement reforms (see [here](#)).

But there are some catches. This kind of collective action, in which local stakeholders ideally

engage in politically informed, joint [problem-solving](#), is important, but difficult.

The costs to establishing partnerships and building coalitions are high and stakeholders often need to compromise and take risks if the other parties do not uphold their part of the deal. The GPSA aims to encourage partnerships and coalitions by acknowledging and financing the costs of working with other stakeholders. The GPSA encourages applicants to identify partners and allies who may complement the applicant's expertise, outreach capacity and influence in working towards the proposed objectives. As Box 1 discusses, the GPSA also aims to provide intangible resources to facilitate coalition building.

Furthermore, these partnerships and coalitions often need to be strong enough to outmaneuver the opposition coalitions that resist change. If these conditions are not met, the "willing" CSO is likely to fail in her attempt to reform and produce change, let alone to scale it or sustain it.

BOX 1

How can the GPSA facilitate politically savvy multi-stakeholder coordination?

The GPSA also aims to facilitate multi-stakeholder collaboration by linking and providing resources and information to overcome the lack of trust and organizational silos that often impede state-society communication. With its unique resources and convening power, the World Bank can create more space for state-CSO interaction and improve information-sharing between grantees and governments. By knowing when and where the 'windows of opportunity' are, the Bank can help to close the feedback loop and help transform engaged citizens into more responsive governments.

The **Participatory Anticorruption Initiative** (IPAC in its Spanish acronym) in the Dominican Republic provides a concrete example of constructive engagement between civil society organizations, the private sector and government decision makers in the executive branch facilitated by international cooperation agencies led by the World Bank. Through an explicit coordination effort, international agencies gradually enabled local and foreign pro-reform stakeholders to better articulate and strengthen a multi-stakeholder coalition. The resulting changes were modest, but they were ones on which many reformers had long given up. New opportunities also arose for concrete reform efforts. In 3 years, IPAC contributed to the following results: **US\$2 million per month savings** on procurement of medical equipment and medicines; **3,000 government bank accounts closed**, and a single Treasury Account established in all Central Government institutions; **25% reduction in the cost of insulin** in People's Pharmacies in 2 years. You can learn more about the IPAC's results in this [video](#).

To check whether GPSA applicants acted on these insights about the importance of carefully selected and structured partnerships, we identified a series of indicators that captured the most important strategic considerations and could readily have been included in applicants' submissions. We present the questions in Table 1.

Table 1: Key Questions to identify politically-informed partnerships and coalitions

1	Does the project identify the stakeholders who are crucial to supporting the project and complementary to the organization's own capabilities (i.e. identify stakeholders' value add to the partnership or coalition)?
2	Does the project adopt specific measures such as formal collaborations – comprising regular feedback exchanges and specific commitments on the part of the stakeholders involved- to build the institutional basis of a coalition?
3	Does the project make efficient use of existing networks and platforms to enable collaboration (avoiding duplication)?
4	Does the proposal identify what benefits and threat the project creates for partners and coalition members?
5	Does the project spell out how the partnership or coalition will increase the political space, capital or resources that can be brought to bear?
6	Does the project identify the barriers that often pre-empt citizens from mobilizing and engaging in monitoring and accountability activities? Does it state how it will address these barriers to collective action?

III. ARE SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNERSHIPS AND COALITIONS FORGED WITH A POLITICAL LENS?

Below is what we found in our analysis of GPSA applications. In the GPSA application, applicants are expected to identify the contributions of other parties and spell out their value added. If partners are to take on specific responsibilities within the proposal that are directly related to its planned activities, outputs and outcomes,

they must be included as part of the project team and are expected to participate in the financial sharing scheme (see the [Proposal's budget guidance](#)). Partners were clearly valued in applications. Indeed, 25 out of the 40 proposals we reviewed, identify stakeholders who are crucial to supporting the project and complementary to the organization's capabilities.

Yet, it was rare that proposals provided a clear rationale for the partners they had selected, or demonstrated how they would help create the political space to promote reform. Perhaps the most striking finding is that applicants rarely, if ever, discussed how and why the costs of forging coalitions would be justified, for instance in terms of helping them navigate obstacles to reform. Nineteen out of forty entries failed to spell out how the partnership or coalition will increase the political space, capital or resources that can be brought to bear. A further eighteen only provide tentative or somewhat loose explanations.



In terms of the coalition building process, we think that allies must have a reason to participate in a coalition. Yet only one single proposal in our sample identifies what benefits and threats the project would create for partners and coalition members. More generally, 37 proposals out of 40 did not acknowledge that there are barriers that could prevent citizens from mobilizing and engaging in monitoring and accountability activities, let alone address how the project would counter them. Old and new research about elite civil society organizations, citizen mobilization, and technology enabled feedback loops suggest that presuming that these allies and partners will have a straightforward interest in joining in is problematic at best (see e.g. [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)).



Another problem is lack of engagement with existing organizations who are well-positioned to influence social accountability processes. For example; applicants fail to refer to parent-teacher associations in social accountability projects at the school level; or they propose to form new citizen groups, such as "Citizen Budget Forums," without acknowledging whether others already do this work. Applicants often focus on one sector and few build bridges to other sectors (or let us know they are aware of what is happening there).



Encouragingly, 22 out of the 40 applications propose to use existing platforms and networks to enable collaboration. Only 17 spell out specific measures to strengthen the institutional foundations for the coalitions they propose.



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EXISTING PLATFORMS AND NETWORKS

One new frontier for strategic social accountability is the potential role of horizontal state accountability institutions, such as ombudsman offices or supreme audit institutions, in overseeing service delivery by the executive branch. **These** state actors matter because they can influence the enforcement and design of official state institutions for bureaucratic accountability. Despite the potential for these collaborations, only 27% of the 100s of eligible applications received in the two rounds proposed collaborating with public accountability institutions such as ombudsmen and audit offices, and only 26% proposed to use information generated by these agencies.



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PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY INSTITUTIONS

IV.

OUR TAKEAWAY

In short, proposals provide very limited analysis of coalition-building as a broader tactic to align the incentives of public, private and civil society actors. In omitting how they will join up their interventions and how they will take advantage of the GPSA's offer to pay for the transaction costs of building meaningful partnerships, too many entries look like they are proposing to implement social accountability as usual (on the need of building meaningful joined-up interventions in the social accountability field, see e.g. [here](#).) In too many cases, the proposed project seeks to build the capacity of new groups so that they can implement the work on their own. These new groups are likely to be more inexperienced, unfamiliar and politically threatening than pre-existing groups. They also promote a 'lone crusader' approach, working in isolation from the public officials responsible for implementing change, rather than establishing the connec-

More on civil society-state accountability institutions cooperation?

- (1) GPSA Results framework
- (2) Carolina Cornejo, Aranzazu Guillan & Renzo Lavin, "When Supreme Audit Institutions Engage with Civil Society: Exploring Lessons from the Latin American Transparency Participation and Accountability Initiative," U4 Practice Insight No. 5 (Bergen: Chr. Michelson Institute, 2013):

<http://www.cmi.no/publications/file/4999-when-supreme-audit-institutions-engage-with-civil.pdf>

tions of trust, information and communication that are at the heart of strategic social accountability relations.