

CREATING SPACE FOR SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY: THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

This is the first 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. This note briefly presents the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA). It explains why and how the GPSA's application process assisted us in thinking about strategic social accountability. The note series presents results from systematic analysis of more than 600 applications submitted to the Global Partnership for Social Accountability.

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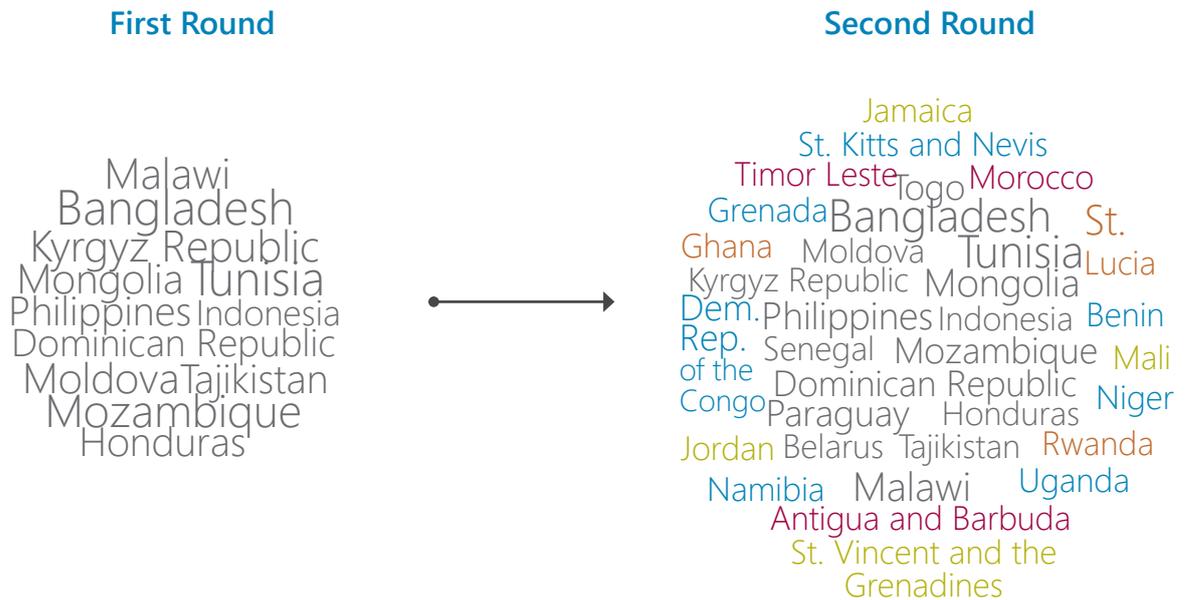
I. THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) is a global multi-stakeholder coalition of donors and development actors investing in strategic social accountability initiatives. **It provides strategic and sustained funding along with knowledge and learning-centered support to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in developing countries that are working together with governments to solve critical governance and development challenges.**

Specifically, the GPSA's activities consist of a *grant-making component*, and a *knowledge and learning component*, supporting the implementation of strategic social accountability. This note focuses on the grant proposals submitted to the GPSA by CSOs working on social accountability in countries that have opted into the GPSA. For the first call for proposals in February/ March 2013, 12 countries had joined in. By the time of the second call (November 2013 to January 2014) the number had grown to 33 (See Graph 1).

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Graph 1: Countries that Opted Into the GPSA: From Round 1 to Round 2



Those seeking GPSA funds had to complete an application form, providing detailed information on their approach to social accountability, their theory of change, and justifying their approach considering the particular context they are working in. This enabled the GPSA to assess in detail whether applicants were proposing a strategic approach to social accountability.

The GPSA, with the support of World Bank country-based staff, also [tailored the call for proposals to each country's context](#). They hosted orientation sessions to raise awareness of the process in each country. The aim was to provide a fair, level playing field for all applicants.

The entries went through multiple expert reviews ([Round 1](#) and [Round 2](#)) to assess the fit between the GPSA's strategic approach to social accountability ([here](#) and [here](#)) and the civil society organization's **proposal**.

A small number of the proposals showed much potential.

However, the majority of the proposals, many of which had good ideas, did not contain the basic building blocks of a strategic social accountability intervention.

What's in a funders approach?

The key building blocks of the GPSA's strategic approach to social accountability are two: a) Up-to date knowledge and evidence about when, where, how, and why social accountability has more chances to work to achieve governance and development goals; b) Insights about the way in which the resources of the GPSA, the World Bank and its partners are more likely to add value to the social accountability field. We hope to discuss more about these issues in future notes. In the meantime, want to learn more? Check out [here](#)

Others views from the field: check out Ruth Levine's thoughts about identifying funder-grantee fit [here](#)

Ultimately, it was the GPSA Steering Committee (comprised of CSO, government and donor agency representatives) that decided which applications fit best the GPSA's objectives and would receive funding. Successful civil society organizations receive grants for periods of three to five years, with **disbursement** tranches linked to agreed project milestones.



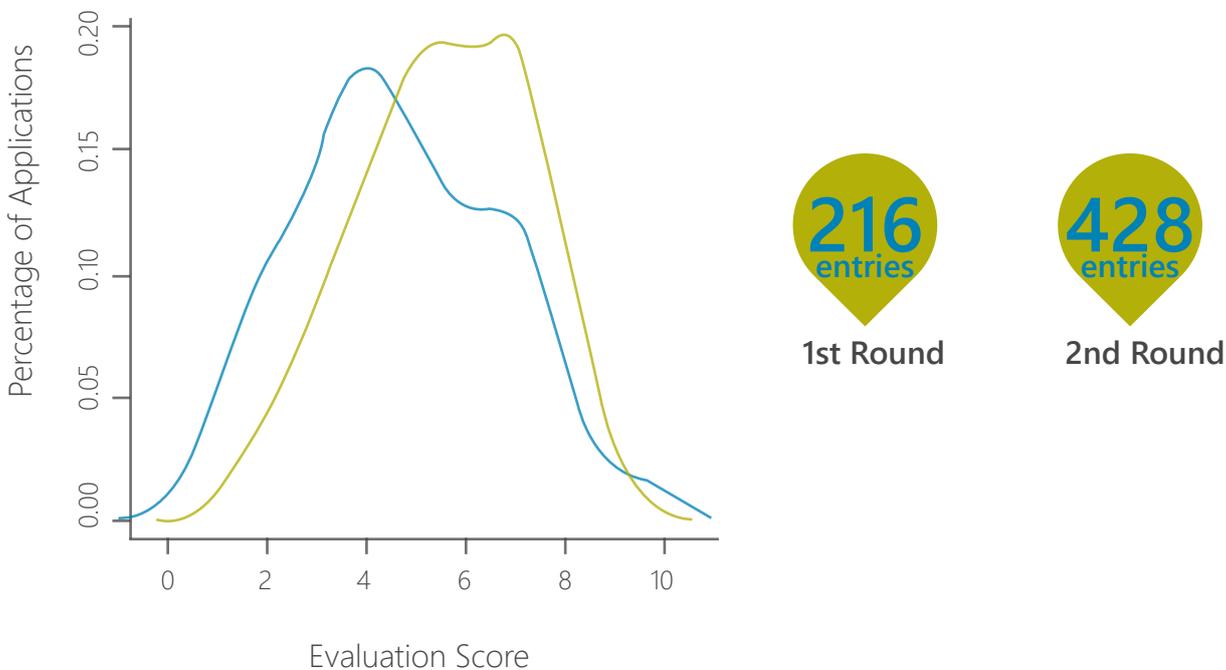
II. FIRST LOOK: APPLICANTS' RESPONSE TO THE GPSA

In 2013, the GPSA issued its first two calls for applications. The first round awarded in 2013 received 216 entries; the second round awarded in 2014 received 428 entries. The average amount of funding requested from the GPSA was \$800,686. To-date, the GPSA has approved approximately \$15 million in funding for [22 organizations](#).

Expert reviewers evaluated the applications for

each round. Graph 2 provides a snapshot of the scores in Rounds 1 and 2. The average evaluation scores in the second round (for those projects deemed eligible) were nearly a point higher on the ten-point scale than in the first round, suggesting slight improvement in the quality of applications. Still, **the overall quality of applications suggests that there is room for further improvement.**

Graph 2: Distribution of applicant scores, GPSA Rounds 1 and 2



In this six-part series we will take a hard look at these results, in order to understand how the applicants in both rounds responded to the GPSA's application process. Our aspiration was that applications would be strategic and complement the technical aspects of social accountability interventions with an understanding of the local political drivers and obstacles to tackle concrete problems. The strategic applications incorporating these considerations were likely to be designed quite differently because they can navigate the political context.

Notes 2-5 explore this, by reviewing to what extent applications articulated strategies that incorporated four strategic elements:

- A. Strategies That Harness the Context*
- B. Strategies That Are Responsive and Multi-Pronged*
- C. Strategies That Pick Partners and Allies That Bolster the Social Accountability Efforts*
- D. Strategies That Employ Adaptive Learning*



HOW DID WE GO ABOUT ANALYZING THE APPLICATIONS?

Much of the data from the GPSA's 644 applications is qualitative. To systematically analyze the degree to which these applications accommodated strategic political thinking we made the following choices for the analysis:

1. We identified four key components that we think matter for strategic social accountability. We based our decisions on the [GPSA's theory of change](#), application forms and guidelines and its governing documents.

We also discussed the issues with the GPSA's Secretariat. We corroborated that these components were consistently highlighted by recommendations from existing reviews of evidence on the impact of social accountability.

2. We identified precise questions about these four components based on the literature on what matters for strategic success (see Table 1). We piloted our approach using three first round grantees to confirm its value before applying it to a broader range of cases. We learned valuable information and refined individual questions, in turn.

3. These questions sought to identify whether applicants provided relevant information regarding the strategic nature of the proposed project. This approach seemed particularly important as the GPSA's call for proposals was itself tailored to local context. For example, while in some countries it called for projects in the education sector, in others it called for projects in the health sector (see the range of country tailored calls [here](#) and [here](#)).

4. The applications had previously been analyzed to ensure they meet [formal eligibility criteria for GPSA funding](#). Teams of independent reviewers had scored the applications on a scale of 1 to 10 to evaluate their funding potential. We took advantage of this information to stratify the eligible applications.

5. We took a random sample of 40 applications (20 from each of the two rounds). Given time constraints, we opted for assessing a small proportion of applications in detail, in order to get thorough evidence on many dimensions of the strategic approach, at the expense of scoring a larger proportion of applications.

6. The random sample was stratified by prior evaluation score. Since evaluation scores were normally distributed (see Graph 2), this implies oversampling, focusing disproportionate attention on the best and worst applications. In other words, ours is not a representative sample but places extra weight on understanding the strategic elements of the least and most promising applications. This approach was selected to ensure the full range of application competencies was apparent and to assess the potential contrast between the weaknesses and strengths of applications.

7. We scored each application in the sample against each question using a three-point scale to assess whether strategic thinking was a) absent, b) partial or c) present.

We analyzed the data and identified trends. Then, we cross-checked whether our insights matched broader trends.

Our analysis is intended to provoke reflection (even controversy). We hope others can take more time to continue exploring the GPSA and other social accountability applications data. For instance, we are curious: would CSOs respond the same to other funders? After all the GPSA is based in the World Bank. Does this play a role?



“Think with us about what the data means for the social accountability community and how to push the field closer to a more promising, strategic social accountability”

Table 1: Key Questions to Identify Strategic Social Accountability

Strategic Components	Key Questions	
A. Strategies that harness the context (GPSA Note 2)	1	Does the project identify a concrete problem?
	2	Does the project identify what is being done by others to address it?
	3	Does the project identify the public officials with the authority and capacity to change the processes/outcomes being targeted?
	4	Does the project identify the incentives of those with power and influence to affect the problem?
	5	Does the project tap on the existing incentives of the various public sector institutions- those with influence and power over the issue-to respond in a positive way to the intervention and to change or seek to strengthen those incentives?
	6	Does the project assess the expected range of responses of public officials to the interventions?
	7	Does the project treat institutions as they operate, rather than as 'perfect' formal institutions?
	8	Do the project components and plan of activities complement existing actions that public officials are already taking?
	9	Does the project explain why their choice of social accountability tools is realistic and likely to be actionable and effective, given the structure of the policy process in their context and the political incentives and constraints facing key government actors?
	10	Does the project disaggregate the information that it will generate across the different information users being targeted?
	11	Does the project make a case of how the feedback loops the project seeks to create, linking citizens to public officials, comes to fill/close a feedback gap? And how does it complement existing reform processes?
	12	Does the project identify actors with vested interests in the status quo and develop appropriate strategies to overcome or bypass vested interests?

B. Responsive multi-pronged strategies (GPSA Note 3)	1	Do the project's proposed tactics align with the project objectives?
	2	Is the Social Accountability approach developed inductively (based on actual policies and opportunities) rather than deductively (based on formulaic, generic approaches)?
	3	Do the project's proposed actions target the logical steps required to deliver results (is the strategy multi-pronged)?
	4	Does the project clearly specify all the steps in the causal chain between project interventions and outcomes?
	5	Does the project leverage legal and institutional entry-points to focus and scale-up impact in areas where state capability can be harnessed and built (e.g. legal authorities and regulation, horizontal accountability agencies)?
	6	Does the applicant identify key political/policy windows of opportunity (e.g. dates/stages in the policy or electoral cycles)?
	7	Does the project justify why proposed instruments are the best tools to implement the project in comparison to other alternatives available?
	8	Does the applicant identify and integrate specific types of tactics at the national and sub-national levels considering where decisions are actually made (especially when it expects to be working in partly decentralized service delivery systems)?

B. Responsive multi-pronged strategies	9	Does the plan of action spell out a sequence of actions (steps) that can be reasonably implemented within the time frame proposed?
	10	Does the project explain the different types of information that will be generated through the deployment of the social accountability tool(s) and mechanism(s) and the specific channels that will be used to input the information into public management and decision-making processes?

C. Picking partners and allies that bolster social accountability efforts (GPSA Note 4)	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 threats 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?

D. Adaptive Learning (GPSA Note 5)	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/best practices for others to take up?
	3	If the project aims to produce lessons for others to take up, does it take specific measures / propose concrete MEL approaches that will explain under which conditions their experience will be useful for others?
	4	What is the projects' 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 that are 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?