GovernanceNotes

Governance Global Practice

Driving Results through Public Institutions

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Leveraging Surveys to Strengthen Local Accountability and Improve Service Delivery

Prepared by the Public Service Delivery Global Solutions Group [1]

Executive Summary

Recent work has highlighted the importance of understanding and actively engaging within the local context of governance and service delivery challenges to actually improve services to the poor. A number of tools have been used to help assess local governance and service delivery challenges, monitor local performance, and build citizen-government-service provider connectivity. Multi-stakeholder face-to-face surveys at the local level can potentially support policy development and implementation, especially when data is shared widely with civil society and local leaders as well as policymakers. Other enhancements include civil society involvement in instrument development, use of cost-effective ICT to engage with citizens, and integrating survey tools and results with government systems.

1. Focusing on Local Performance for Better Service Delivery

Moving from national, average service performance data to specific, local, actionable data is essential to empower citizens. Governments and development partners have focused for some time on central government systems, and country-wide performance systems. While important, actual improvements in service delivery take place not nation-wide, but clinic by clinic, school by school. While system-wide information can provide valuable averages, trends and benchmarks, monitoring performance and understanding constraints needs to happen at each location, to address the specific bottlenecks at that location. To improve efficiency and responsiveness, reduce corruption, enhance citizen trust and engagement, the underlying local governance context, local incentives and accountability, need to be understood and addressed directly.

Evidence suggests that formal and informal institutions at the local level are key and complementary to central top-down institutions in shaping service delivery processes and outcomes (Mcloughlin and Batley 2012; Brixi et al. 2015). In addition to informing managers and policy makers as the basis for accountability within the public sector, relevant information about local service delivery performance can also spur action outside by citizens, CSOs, donors, and other stakeholders, when combined with top-down state-led responsiveness and changes in the political incentives within the state (Fox 2015; Devarajan et al. 2011).

Traditional indicators of government effectiveness are often presented as aggregated-level values (Recanatini 2012). The emerging trend is to obtain data that can be *disaggregated* and used to design effective reform policies *tailored* to the local needs, while also being comparable over time for monitoring purposes. Many of these tools have proven to be effective in identifying common service delivery challenges of access and quality of services, together with their observable governance correlates in local settings, such as corruption, providers' incentives, transparency, public administration procedures, informational accountability norms, among others.

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2. Select Examples of Existing Micro-Level Tools

A number of tools exist to measure service delivery performance at the national or central level, such as Service Delivery Indicators (SDIs), Quantitative Service Delivery Indicators (QSDS), and Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS), among others. However, a number of micro-level tools have also been developed to assess the linkages between local governance, access, and quality of service delivery. Satisfaction surveys gather data on citizen perceptions of public services. Other surveys collect experience-based information (versus opinions) to help increase objectivity.

The **Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI)** is a time-series national governance and public administration performance monitoring tool launched in Viet Nam. The Index is exclusively based on citizens' *experiences* with public service delivery and the underlying local governance factors across six dimensions: participation at the local level, vertical accountability, transparency, control of corruption, public administrative procedures, and public service delivery. Since its inception in 2009, PAPI has captured and reflected the experiences of over 60 thousand citizens, and monitored changes in citizens' experiences through yearly implementation (**figure 1**).

The **Governance and Anti-Corruption (GAC) Diagnostic** surveys differ from PAPI by using a *multi-stakeholder approach* -- targeting citizens, public officials, and business people -- to triangulate responses. This approach generates comprehensive evidence on governance and institutional bottlenecks in personnel and resource management, access to services, and the efficacy of existing citizen feedback mechanisms. Survey results then feed into concrete action plans to improve public services. This *participatory survey approach* allows mapping the quality of government institutions and potential areas for reforms, while actively developing policy capacity in the process, and activating stakeholders and forging networks. This approach has also been employed elsewhere with **Citizen Report Cards**, where a beneficiary satisfaction survey is often combined with objective indicators to benchmark facilities and/or schools against each other (Ringold et al. 2012). The

Figure 1. Change in Mean Scores by Dimension, PAPI Scores, Viet Nam 2011-2014
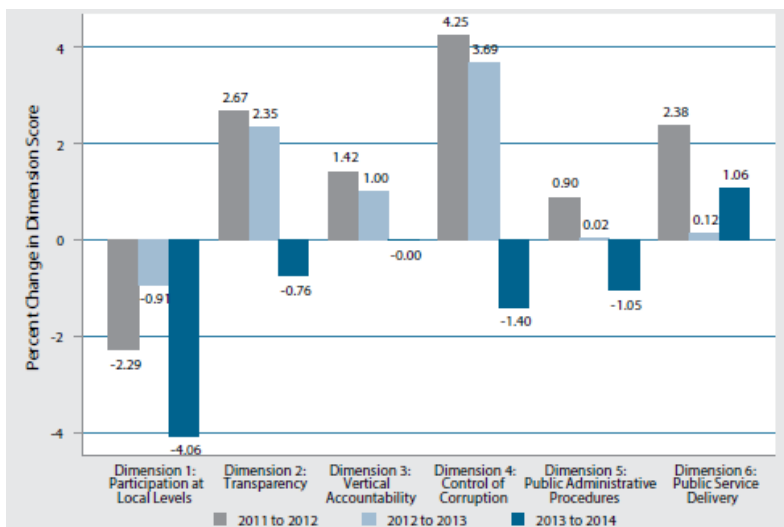
approach directly increases social accountability, service provider public accountability and responsiveness, through media coverage of the results and civil society advocacy.

GAC surveys can be tailored to sector-specific social service delivery challenges. The **Kyrgyzstan Corruption and Poverty Survey** used the GAC diagnostic corruption module, adding questions on household consumption that allowed calculation of the impact of corruption on different income groups. The questions focused on the household experiences with different service agencies, including informal payments, and allowed the dynamics of corruption to be studied, where and how it manifests, and the household-level economic impact.

Experience from the implementation of these existing tools has shown that collecting quantitative survey data alone may not provide sufficient context for the findings or generate momentum for follow-up action. A number of tools have therefore used mixed methods to compliment survey data with group discussions or facilitated meetings. The GAC framework, for example, includes post-survey focus group discussions to adapt the instrument and analyze survey results. **Citizen Scorecards** employ a direct, facilitated interface between providers, governmental officials, and citizens to discuss results and draft action plans to improve services.

Figure 2. Perceptions of Corruption by Municipality in Tunisia
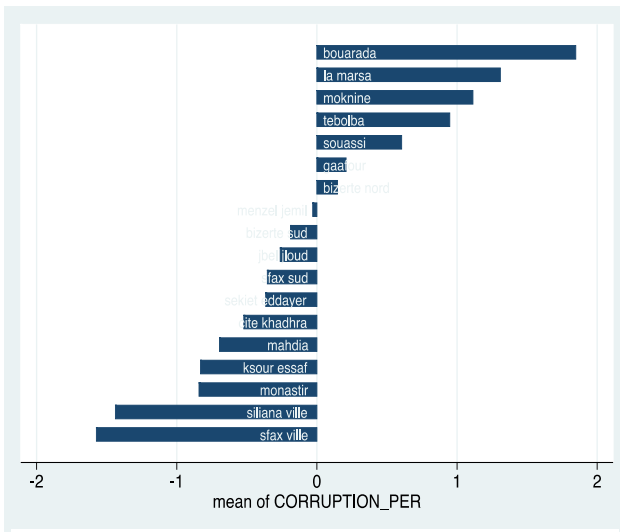
Source: LGPI data

3. Next Generation of Tools [2]

A new phase of micro-level tools are now being developed to assess how governance factors engage with the local context to improve service performance. These governance factors can include administrative institutions such as public finance management or performance management in the public sector, relations between state and non-state actors, norms and incentives at the local level, and citizen trust and engagement. These new tools also incorporate active client discussion and follow-up action planning.

The **Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI)** is a new tool that examines citizens' experiences across different public services and the root causes of poor performance. Similar to PAPI, it focuses on sub-national variation through regionally representative sampling (**figure 2**), which is useful for policy makers in monitoring policy implementation and benchmarking progress by locality, and for local leaders and citizens in prompting action toward performance improvement. The LGPI measures citizens' attitudes and experience with their local governments, which underline their trust, as well as citizen participation. The tool includes a state-citizen module on how

citizens view the obligations and responsibilities of various stakeholders, the extent to which they use personal connections to obtain services, whom they turn to for help, and whom they view as responsible. The tool also examines the role of non-state institutions and actors in service delivery and governance -- citizens often turn to non-state actors to help access public services -- by including a social tie module, enabling these political economy issues to inform service improvement design and implementation. The LGPI citizen module can be complemented by surveys targeting service providers and civil servants, and enable mapping the incentive structures across the service delivery chain, such as the GAC and SDI surveys.

Another tool is the **Bottom-up Governance of Service Delivery Diagnostic (BGDD)**, recently developed and piloted in India. Similar to LGPI, the BGDD uses a mixed survey method, including household surveys, key informant interviews and focus group discussions to: (i) benchmark citizens' access, experience and perceptions; and, (ii) unpack correlations and explanatory variables to identify potential policy reforms. The BGDD – derived from existing evidence on governance and service delivery – innovates by (1) focusing on interaction of informal/traditional and formal/modern institutions in delivery, and how informal institutions can be more decisive than formal institutions in explaining many service delivery processes and outcomes, and (2) going beyond quantitative benchmarking to identify *why* services are delivered as they are, which helps design policy responses. The tool tries to encompass the relationship between formal and informal sources of authority; citizens' perceptions and expectations (i.e. the social contract); accountability and oversight mechanisms; and, the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion in service delivery.

Surveys may be complemented with innovative ICT tools that enhance reach and effectiveness at lower costs, and enable real-time feedback, effectively becoming a monitoring mechanism to service delivery and field staff. For example, the **Citizen Feedback Model** implemented in Punjab, Pakistan, targets identified beneficiaries using SMS messages to log their experience with specific public services. Collected data is instantaneously reported to live dashboards for management review and follow-up action is communicated to the public to increase their trust and willingness to engage.

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[2] Please note that we use the term "next generation of tools" on a select number of tools that are considered fairly recent in their application and exhibit high potential in presenting new approaches that attempt to address some of the present gaps.

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4. Initial Ideas for Future Applications

Initial experience from implementing these tools indicates they can effectively assess the quality of service delivery, institutions, and accountability mechanisms at local levels. This information can be useful both internally (public sector monitoring and incentive systems) and externally (citizen engagement), and can also provide a quantifiable baseline that can be monitored through repeated measurements over time.

Citizen and CSO involvement in the development and use of these tools can increase their effectiveness. Engaging external partners from the outset helps foster dialogue, builds local capacity (learning by doing), and enhances ownership of the results, as was seen during many GAC surveys in LAC and AFR. This increased engagement can become part of the process to generate motivation and momentum for reforms.

Despite the initial successes profiled here, however, questions remain on when, and how, to effectively employ these new tools for strengthening state responsiveness and accountability in delivering services to citizens. Given the time and resources required to administer micro-level surveys, many governments may ask for support to fund or administer surveys, and for assurances of results. Furthermore, coalitions involving government reformers together with other stakeholders at the local and national levels may be necessary to launch such surveys, make their findings publicly available, and turn them into tools for responsiveness and accountability in service delivery.

Previous studies have shown information provision alone is not a sufficient catalyst for citizen action or service improvements – real change requires a responsive government (Fox 2015; Recanatini 2013). These tools, therefore, may be most effective when mainstreamed into government performance management or M&E systems and used to inform ongoing government reform efforts. Such initiatives require high levels of political will to hold public servants to account and a clear strategy for overcoming political economy obstacles. Where governments have made credible commitments for reform, however, these new tools can be an effective way to understand the local context, identify potential reforms, and engage and activate stakeholders in the process of improving service delivery.

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