EFFECTIVE DATA USE:

LESSONS FROM DATA FOR ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECTS.

TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY INITIATIVE

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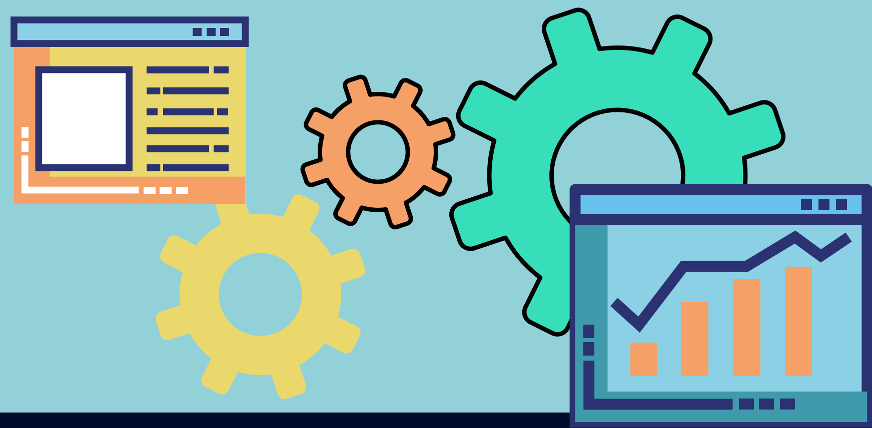
ABOUT THE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY INITIATIVE

The Transparency and Accountability Initiative is a donor collaborative whose members have over $600 million in active grants working toward a world where citizens are informed and empowered, governments are open and responsive, and collective action advances the public good. Our members are the Chandler Foundation, the Ford Foundation, Luminate, the MacArthur Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, the Skoll Foundation, the United Kingdom Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

ABOUT GLOBAL INTEGRITY

Global Integrity (GI) is a learning-centered organization that connects frontline actors and global players to help them navigate complex governance challenges with a systems change mindset. GI aims to support locally-led efforts to solve governance-related challenges and to ensure that public resources are used effectively, to deliver public services, and to meet people's needs.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More than a decade of investment in transparency efforts has resulted in the improved availability of government and corporate data, but there has been a persistent gap in translating more data into greater accountability. The Data for Accountability Initiative (D4A) was launched by the Transparency and Accountability Initiative (TAI) to explore why donor investments in the availability of data have not led to more impact. D4A focused on the use of data to solve problems related to public decision-making, corruption, and the misuse of public resources. The initiative included country scoping and subsequent funding of projects by: ***Transparencia por Colombia (TC)*** and ***Corporación Comisión de Juristas Akubadaura (CCJA)***, working with a focus on extractive industries in Colombia; the ***Human and Environmental Development Agenda (HEDA)***, working on tracing and repatriating illicit assets; the ***Public Private Development Centre (PPDC)***, working on open contracting in Nigeria.

Global Integrity (GI) was hired as a partner for the initiative to provide monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) support to the grantees, facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue, act as a bridge between TAI members and grantees, and distill lessons from each country and across countries.

The results from D4A and a review of recent literature on the use of data for accountability show that, while the focus on opening up data has created opportunities for data use and collaboration among stakeholders, further progress on achieving accountability requires approaches that start with sectoral problems and political economy analysis and, from there, develop innovations in project design, implementation, and MEL.

Investments in data availability and capacity (e.g., data cleaning to analysis to visualization) are still needed, but such investments in technical skills should focus more on strengthening projects to address sectoral and corruption problems.

Here are the key messages that emerge from this evidence and review:

- **FOCUS ON RELEVANT PROBLEMS FOR TARGET AUDIENCES.**

  This enables data for accountability programming to support audiences whose actions should be influenced by accurate data as they seek to mobilize government response.

- **INTEGRATE TARGET AUDIENCES INTO PROJECT DESIGN.**

  This enables organizations promoting the use of data for accountability to:

  > Improve capacity building and support to provide partners with guidance that meets their circumstances and is focused on problem solving.
  >
  > Surface and react to data and support needs that emerge as target audiences gain better understanding of the problems they are addressing and the related challenges and opportunities.

- **STRIKE A BALANCE BETWEEN DEMANDING IMPROVEMENTS AND HELPING TO FACILITATE CHANGE.**

  Increasing the availability of data is a delicate political process that requires organizations to engage diverse government agencies by balancing demand for improvements and support to implement them. Target audiences will require additional information to address the problems that matter to them.

- **ACKNOWLEDGE CONTEXT, REFORMS, AND POLITICAL DYNAMICS.**

  This enables organizations to build on target audiences' existing work and relationships, understand and navigate institutional challenges, and to use data to shift the incentives of those involved in the problem they are trying to address.

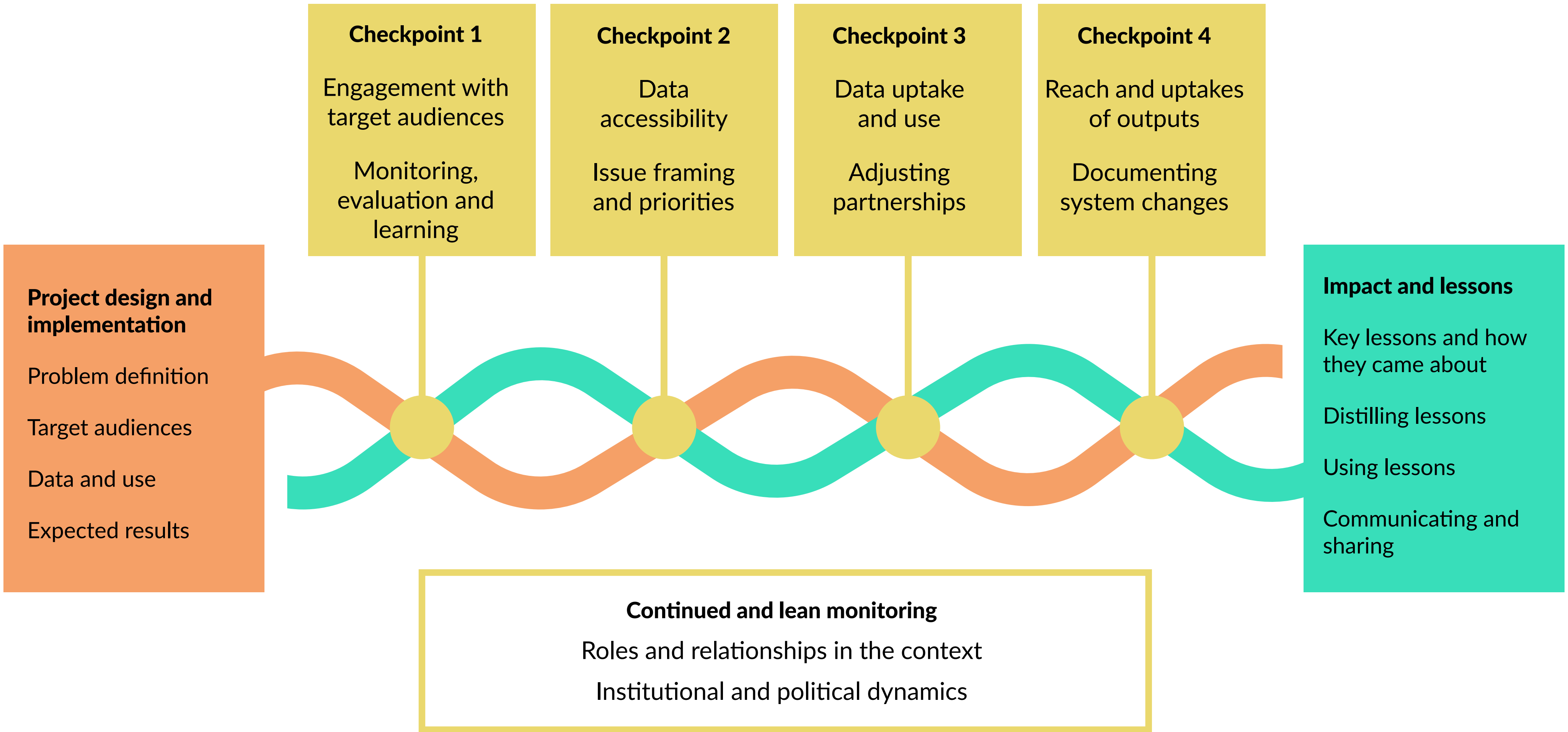
- **FACILITATE BETTER MONITORING OF DATA USE AND IMPACT.**

  Improving capacities and incentives for measuring data uptake and impact in ways that are non-linear, lean, and can be adapted during implementation, enables organizations to improve their approaches, innovate, and share lessons with peers and other relevant actors.

These findings show that the challenge in increasing the impact of data for accountability programming lies in reviewing how we approach the issue and developing ways to design and implement projects differently. This shift requires strengthened grantees capacities, not just for data generation or analysis, but for political economy analysis and MEL; areas where often grantees do not have dedicated in-house expertise or ready access to complementary support.

In order to contribute to this shift in thinking and practice, we set out a lean approach to integrate the insights derived from the D4A initiative and current approaches to adaptive management. The approach starts with the design of the project, including how to include checkpoints for reflection and adaptation, as well as continued monitoring of contextual factors; then, it specifies how reflection and adaptation can be used and documented at each checkpoint, including practical examples. It concludes with insights on communicating, implementing, and sharing learning.

CONTINUOUS AND LEAN MEL FOR DATA FOR ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECTS



Finally, we set out recommendations to provide guidance to help donors create an enabling environment for this shift in investment and programming, and to support practitioners and researchers in reviewing their approaches. These recommendations are organized into three areas: programming and approaches; generation and use of evidence; and coordination and collaboration.

1.RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING PROGRAMMING AND APPROACHES

- Create incentives for aligning global, national, and local work in the use of data for accountability.
- Promote reflection about the problems that reformers are trying to address and prioritize funding projects that address problems defined by local organizations.
- Enable peer learning across global and local organizations working on accountability, anti-corruption, sectoral results, and open data, with a focus on the problems they are trying to address and how data can contribute.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE GENERATION AND USE OF EVIDENCE

- Generate incentives for the improved use of MEL by organizations working on data for accountability by increasing funding for MEL to improve project implementation, document processes, and assess results.
- Provide tailored guidance and support to grantees in relation to the definitions of problems and the use of MEL.
- Invest in actionable research into incentives and disincentives for the publication and use of data for accountability at the national and subnational level.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

- Increase dialogue among donors (including TAI members, non-TAI members, and multilaterals) to improve coordination among portfolios at the national and subnational levels.
- Invest in generating evidence about the power dynamics and relationships that perpetuate service delivery failure and exclusion, and the ways in which data and accountability can contribute to shifting them.
- Promote increased conversation among donors, grantees, and government reformers working in shared contexts to enable improved understanding of problems, opportunities to address them, and areas where investment can be useful.

BACKGROUND

Members of the Transparency & Accountability Initiative (TAI) collaborative, as well as many other donors, have invested heavily in increasing accessibility and promoting the use of data for accountability. Despite the improved availability of data in many countries, successful use of this data to solve problems related to public decision-making, corruption, and the misuse of public resources are rare. The impact of these investments remains limited and there is not much relevant evidence available. According to TAI, "this may reflect donor assumptions that investments in the production and disclosure of governance data would be sufficient to yield their intended outcomes on transparency and accountability". It might also reflect "the challenges of actually attributing impact to the role of data in complex change processes, as well as achieving and sustaining progress on governance reforms more broadly".

To identify possible issues hindering impact and ways to address them, TAI launched the Data for Accountability (D4A) initiative, which included country scoping and the subsequent funding of four projects in Nigeria and Colombia. Global Integrity (GI) was hired as a learning partner for the initiative. GI provided monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) support to the grantees, facilitated multi-stakeholder dialogue, acted as a bridge between TAI members and grantees, and distilled lessons from each country and across countries. This report is part of a series of D4A outputs including: a scoping report for Nigeria; landscape reviews for Nigeria and Colombia; notes about donor collaboration in Nigeria and Colombia, and GI's role as learning partner; pieces drawing lessons from the work in Colombia and Nigeria; and a note reflecting on the implications of these findings for future donor investments (this report).

This report condenses lessons from projects carried out by: ***Transparencia por Colombia (TC)*** and the ***Corporación Comisión de Juristas Akubadaura (CCJA)***, focusing on extractive industries in Colombia; the Human and Environmental Development Agenda (HEDA), working on tracing and repatriating illicit assets; and the Public Private Development Centre (PPDC), working on open contracting in Nigeria.

Early in the initiative, donors and grantees co-created a learning agenda to provide a framework to explore issues related to the promotion of the use of data by target audiences and to the different factors that can enable or hinder the use of data to achieve government action. The learning questions raised by partners and TAI donors are presented in the following table.

THEME	LEARNING QUESTIONS
Facilitating data use by target audiences	What strategies are effective in facilitating data use among target user groups? How do these strategies differ across user groups and how do those differences affect the achievement of project goals?
Encouraging government response	What strategies are effective in encouraging government agencies to take action to increase responsiveness and accountability? How do these strategies differ across administrative levels and how do those differences affect the achievement of project goals?

FINDINGS FROM THE DATA FOR ACCOUNTABILITY INITIATIVE

In Nigeria, grantees were selected based on a TAI-led scoping, while grantees in Colombia were selected based on emerging findings from research carried out by TAI, the International Finance Corporation, and GI (see part one and two in this blog series about the selection). **The theories of change** guiding grantees' work are presented in the following table. The methods used for MEL varied in important ways given the availability of resources and the areas in which grantees worked.

ORGANIZATION	THEORY OF CHANGE
HEDA Human and Environmental Development Agenda	Increasing the capacities of, and collaboration between, target audiences will lead to multi-stakeholder efforts to trace and repatriate stolen assets. This will, in turn, lead to an increase in investigations about tracing and repatriating stolen assets.
PPDC Public Private Development Centre	Improving the accessibility, availability, and quality of procurement data and the capacities of target audiences for using the data will lead to more effective use of data, and this will promote improved contracting disclosure practices by public institutions.
TC Transparencia por Colombia	Improving the use of data on royalties from the extractive sector by partners will enable them to enhance advocacy and strengthen efforts to demand accountability on the use of these resources at the subnational level.
CCJA Comisión de Juristas Akubadaura	Improving the availability and use of information about projects that affect indigenous people can enhance their participation in discussions and decisions about the use of royalties and improve their results.

FACILITATING DATA USE BY TARGET AUDIENCES

All partners were able to achieve increased use of data by their target audiences, which included representatives from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and media in Colombia, and representatives from government in Nigeria. The strategies used by grantees generated changes in the following areas:

- **CAPACITIES** – increasing participants' awareness about what data is available and how to request additional information, as well as ways to use data.
- **OPPORTUNITIES** – enabling participation in multi-stakeholder groups, carrying out investigations, and monitoring the use of public money.

- **MOTIVATION –** improving participants' perception about the use of data and collaboration with others to conduct investigations and strengthen advocacy.
- **USAGE –** using data to carry out and publicize investigations, engaging governments to request changes in published data, filing requests for investigations, informing the decision-making of indigenous organizations, and collaborating with government agencies.

In Nigeria, both partners worked with civil society, media, and government representatives using methods such as user-centered design and exploratory research to **understand the interests, needs, and challenges faced by their audiences.** In Colombia, less structured approaches were used for supporting organizations at the national and subnational level.

In both countries, grantees deployed additional approaches for ensuring engagement and interest from their audiences. Grantees provided tailored support to existing initiatives, identifying partners that were already interested and motivated to take action, and then **providing support that boosted their work through the use of data.** Grantees also worked to **incentivize collaboration among different target audiences**. This enabled them to strengthen relationships, facilitate peer learning, and create space for collaborative problem solving with government agencies on issues contextually relevant for partners.

It is important to note that the results achieved by grantees were enabled by prior publication of data about public procurement and budget data, as well as data on projects funded with resources from extractive industries. The processes for improving the availability, and promoting the use of, data has opened spaces for data use and collaboration among stakeholders. However, further progress on data use by target audiences requires the consideration of additional factors and focusing conversations about data publication and use on problems related to sectoral goals and development results.

ENCOURAGING GOVERNMENT RESPONSE THROUGH THE USE OF DATA

The results related to encouraging government response through the use of data varied across projects and countries, given the themes on which grantees worked, their goals, and the approaches they used.[1] The results achieved by partners ranged from the **inclusion of recommendations in policy reforms and improvements in the publication of data and subnational practices for data reporting and dissemination to corrective actions to deliver public works and the initiation of anti-corruption investigations.** Not all engagements led to action by government agencies. In many cases, grantee efforts were hindered by: a lack of effective response to information requests; the capture of key institutions by political elites; and the dismissal of evidence by government representatives due to the complex distribution of responsibilities.

Grantees also worked to **create opportunities for partners to engage authorities.** In Nigeria, grantees used Anti-corruption Situation Rooms that brought together partners, anti-corruption agencies and open contracting working groups

1. *Grantees also faced challenges because of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and institutional changes for government response.*

that promoted collaboration among procurement authorities, government agencies, and citizens. In Colombia, grantees built on existing mobilization processes. At the national level, they worked with the indigenous social movement and the [Mesa de la Sociedad Civil para la Transparencia en las Industrias Extractivas,] which coordinates civil society participation in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). At the subnational level, they supported indigenous authorities and local organizations working on social accountability, governance, and local development. Supporting existing initiatives allowed grantees to **build on partners' existing knowledge, relationships, and operations in their own systems.** Grantees complemented this with activities that enabled a more **nuanced understanding of the incentives and narratives used by government representatives.**

Grantees' used **problem-centered approaches** to guide their support to partners. This meant that projects focused on a general thematic area, such as open contracting, and then tailored their support to target audiences based on narrower goals, such as poorly delivered projects, investigations about the use of resources implemented by politically exposed people, and implementing government initiatives for data disclosure and dissemination.

Starting with specific problems enabled grantees to support their partners in u**sing additional data sources and research to provide context for their work** and to understand the reasons behind poor service delivery or the misappropriation of resources. This support also enabled partners to **identify alternative advocacy and engagement targets** and to diversify their strategies. Grantees provided this tailored support by **building on their existing organizational capacities.** This support included: legal accompaniment to present complaints and obtain responses to requests for information; knowledge of institutional and political dynamics related to the problem they were addressing; and facilitating relationships with government agencies and relevant stakeholders that could provide assistance.

These adaptations led to diversifying strategies for engagement: alternating exposing corruption with exploring opportunities for **collaboration with government agencies to address problems** that affected service delivery involving the production, publication, and dissemination of data. This also enabled grantees and partners to shift conversations with government agencies from a focus on compliance to a focus on responding to citizen demands.

DATA FOR ACCOUNTABILITY FINDINGS IN CONTEXT

In recent years, there have been efforts to take stock of evidence and distill lessons from the work of donors and practitioners related to the use of data for accountability.[2] This document highlights the main trends of these reviews and uses this information to analyze the findings from the D4A initiative. The review by TAI in 2018 about Investments in Governance Data provides a useful framework to categorize the trends in research around the use of data for accountability:[3]

- Support governance data activities that start with problems, not those driven by data.
- Take steps to encourage user engagement throughout implementation.
- Prioritize efforts to produce or leverage actionable data.
- Align country support for governance with country reform and power dynamics.
- Review approaches for measuring data uptake and impact.

STARTING WITH PROBLEMS

Roy calls for approaching corruption using politically located data, starting from a political economy problem to identify the required data, the data users, and the incentives encouraging the use of the data to bring about change. Similarly, Adam and Fazekas conclude that ICT approaches, including transparency portals and big data, can work better when targeting issues that can be measured and when it is easy to connect results to the performance of government officials. TAI's review of Investments in Governance Data also highlights that it is better if problems are defined by actors who are close to them and if approaches consider the costs, risks, and benefits of data publication and use.

The recent paper by the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD) on reimagining data and power also places an important emphasis on the ways in which data production, sharing, and use are affected by, and affects, power relationships in society. GPSDD calls for increased agency or individual and community capacity to shape data governance and the use of data for accountability. This includes ways to hold decision-makers accountable for decisions about data and based on data, as well as the factors that can empower people and groups to use data to improve equity and development. While the paper focuses

2. For more detailed reviews, see this one on the role of ICTs in anti-corruption, this one on the role of information in accountability, and this one on the use of data for accountability.

3. The review by TAI also highlights issues related to coordination among donors to connect initiatives related to the supply of, and demand for, data. These issues will be covered in the section about recommendations.

on personal and community data, it shows the increased salience of considerations about the system dynamics around data production and use. In their words, "there is an urgent need to reimagine relationships between data, power, and development".

The work with grantees in Colombia and Nigeria provides reflections on why starting with problems can be useful and what is required to do so. All projects were designed using a sectoral approach (e.g., extractives, illicit assets or open contracting), but this sectoral framing was refined during implementation based on engagement with target audiences. The approaches included: collaborative planning to understand what problems were relevant to target audiences, how they worked on those problems and how data could contribute; and asking prospective participants to share their experiences and expected outcomes in their applications for training and support.

These approaches enabled partners to continuously refine and strengthen their support to target audiences and their approaches to the problems they were working on by:

- Focusing on how data could meet the interests of partners and participants, so they could see it as a useful tool for their work even after the project.
- Identifying alternative ways to use data to navigate institutional bottlenecks and overcome dependency on particular participation or accountability mechanisms that could be captured.
- Moving away from a focus on the use of particular datasets or data tools, and into identifying what data – and other information – can be helpful and how to use it.

This type of approach can be demanding. It required grantees to build on their existing capacities, including, for instance, legal support for corruption complaints, connecting participants to other project partners, or building on strong local networks. Additionally, work by GI, the Open Data Charter, and the Open Data for Development Network found that there are technical and political challenges that make it hard for local reformers to design and implement data for accountability programming to address corruption problems. As such, they would rather continue to focus on prioritizing the disclosure of information. Some examples of these challenges include the lack of technical capacity to define corruption problems and weak political buy-in for projects that acknowledge the prevalence of corruption in specific sectors. These three organizations have developed guidance for reformers on how to connect the use of data to sectoral issues and for the development of commitments in the Open Government Partnership.

USER ENGAGEMENT

There are several approaches to understand and engage users. These include the identification of use cases, methodologies for understanding user needs such as user-centered design, and wider reviews about data supply and demand. An additional approach involves strengthening data infomediaries so they can turn data into products to reach wider audiences.[4] TAI's review highlights user-related issues that projects should pay attention to including: identifying users; understanding their needs; engaging them throughout implementation; and diversifying the ways to make data available to meet their needs.

Nevertheless, user engagement and the role that data can play in empowering communities remain as important questions for those promoting the use of data. The 100 Questions Initiative – a project led by Govlab to unlock the potential of data – ranked issues related to user engagement and empowerment as two of the most pressing questions for improving governance.[5] GPSDD's paper on reimagining data and power also highlights the need to use a community approach to empowering data users; approaching data literacy as an issue that goes beyond technical capacities and provides communities with the tools and opportunities to hold decision-makers accountable and to address their problems in their own ways.

D4A projects tested different ways to engage target audiences that were contextually relevant. Basic data capacities were indeed relevant for data use by target audiences, but these capacities need to go beyond particular datasets, data tools, or accountability mechanisms. **There are at least three important additional types of capacities and support that should be considered to promote the use of data:**

POLITICAL, LEGAL, AND INFORMAL DYNAMICS THAT SHAPE DATA USE.

- This can include decision-making processes that shape service delivery, who takes part in those decisions and how they can be reached.

ADDITIONAL DATA SOURCES AND INFORMATION THAT ENABLE USERS TO CONTEXTUALIZE THE PARTICULAR PROBLEM IN MOTIVATING DATA USE.

- The data published and the tools used to make it available are important, but so are the additional contextual factors. This data can include: information on rules and regulations; budget allocations, policies, and expected results; existing accountability mechanisms; and oversight of data publication and administrative practices (e.g., compliance with procurement regulation).

ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO DEMAND ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH DATA.

- For instance, not only exhausting knowledge about a particular accountability mechanism, but providing partners with different approaches to demand accountability (e.g., advocacy or storytelling) and covering those capacities or providing guidance about where partners can access support.

4. See also this Helpdesk Research Report on infomediaries and accountability.

5. These questions were: If citizens have greater access to data and information, does that mobilize them to take action and engage politically? Under what circumstances does that happen? How does government budget and expenditure transparency at different levels impact community monitoring and the quality of public service delivery?

Accompaniment to target audiences also surfaced as an important, if not new, issue because **the needs of data users are in constant evolution.** As target audiences use data to understand a particular problem (e.g., the misappropriation of resources by politically exposed people), they may realize they need additional data or information to be able to take action (e.g., who approved the use of the resources and what were the conditions for use of these resources). Failing to account for this evolution in data needs can lead users to roadblocks that hinder action and affect their motivation to use data beyond particular projects or issues. All projects included ways to accompany partners as their data needs evolved, including support with filing requests for information, creating space for questioning government officials, and identifying key informants that could provide more information. Projects also provided support on demand to facilitate partners' efforts to use this information.

ACTIONABLE DATA

Recent reviews have focused on the role that information can play in encouraging citizen action and the types of information that might be more salient for citizens. Based on citizen efforts to improve service delivery, Integrity Action identifies that the information citizens need to demand accountability includes: promises made by politicians and government agencies; information on delivery or failure to deliver, and why that is the case; and information on processes to provide feedback or demand accountability. Additionally, the information needs to be accessible, detailed, comprehensive, reliable, provided in the right formats, and interlinked (e.g., promises related to health should be connected to results and the mechanisms citizens can use in the sector).

In a review of transparency in the extractive industries, Kazemi and Jarvis identify different ways in which political factors can affect the transparency lifecycle. For example, power dynamics shape issues such as whether or not to publish data, the types of data that are produced and shared, and the practices for sharing that data and promoting its use. They call for increased efforts to conduct more country contextual analysis, to review systematically how political factors affect decision-making, and to produce more real-time political economy analysis to inform programming in given contexts.

Two of the projects supported as part of the D4A initiative, namely TC and PPDC, focused on improving the publication of data by government agencies. These projects supported the launch and improvement of open data portals – the auditores ciudadanos platform in Colombia and the Kaduna State Open Contracting Data Portal – and efforts by the government agencies in charge of these portals to continuously improve data publication and user engagement. While assessing the attributes of the data published in these portals went beyond the scope of the D4A initiative, **these experiences provide lessons about political dynamics in the context of improving the publication of data:**

6. See also this paper on the politics of open government data.

- Progress is the result of long-lasting engagement with government agencies focused on changing narratives and practices related to data publication and the promotion of data use.

- Engagement with government agencies highlights the different roles that government agencies play with regards to data, and requires different engagement and support processes in response. For instance, engaging the agency that publishes the data is not the same as interacting with those who produce the data as their incentives, roles, and capacities will differ.

- Data tools are subject to technical and political challenges that require engagement to balance demanding improvements in data publication with providing support for continued improvement of the tool and related data. For instance, PPDC's recent assessment of the publication of procurement data by government agencies complements their support to procurement authorities.

- Even a good quality and complete data source will require data users to use additional sources to access the information they would need to take action.

These lessons resonate with emerging findings from the Curbing corruption in procurement project by David-Barrett and Fazekas – supported by the Global Integrity Anti-corruption Evidence Program – which has facilitated the development of data tools for procurement analysis in Uganda and Jamaica. This project also highlights the need to add strong data quality processes to data publication and to integrate indicators that can make data usable and useful.

It is important to note that investments aimed at increasing the availability of data as well as strengthening the technical capacities of civic actors to use data for accountability are still needed. However, the findings from the D4A initiative show that data availability and technical capacities to use data should not be treated as stand-alone priorities for donor support. Rather, they need to be addressed by taking other contextual factors into consideration and to be complemented with support for additional relevant capacities such as those for political economy analysis and MEL. TAI hinted at this finding in an early publication which assessed the extent to which different civic organizations require strong data capacities or can be better off by building on the work of others in their context.

COUNTRY REFORM AND POWER DYNAMICS

TAI's review highlighted that the outcomes of investments in data depend on the environment in which data is introduced and used. Country level power dynamics are one theme that has increasingly gained salience in governance programming, including approaches such as problem driven iterative adaptation and applied political economy analysis. Power dynamics play an important role with regards to the opportunities, incentives, and practices to use data.

Roy points out that efforts to use data often follow a logic which assumes "that once demands for transparency are made violations will be exposed; and that this will result in improved outcomes because of greater accountability". However, she highlights that often these assumptions do not hold in practice. In most cases, powerful actors have little to no incentives to enforce the production and dissemination of data or to use the data to bring about change; and in most developing contexts, accountability mechanisms are non-operational or co-opted by those powerful actors to carry out selective sanctioning of transgressive behavior.

Most research related to citizen efforts to demand accountability – with or without an open data focus – have prioritized straightforward approaches that go from publication of data, to the use of the data, and to the change in accountability and results. Yet, these approaches leave out many important factors related to the ways in which data is used, the types of changes in government that are sought, and the actual activation and effectiveness of accountability mechanisms. In practice, the strategies used by advocates are often less straightforward, combining engagement with different types of stakeholders at different levels of government. Kazemi and Jarvis highlight that, for data use to be effective, users need to be interested in the data, perceive ways to use the data that can be effective in eliciting government action, and have a sufficiently open operating environment to voice their demands.

The findings from the D4A initiative also hint at other relevant points raised by the 100 Questions Initiative: "What are the key factors contributing to effective civic engagement at national and local levels? Which skills or incentives do citizens need to participate in public decision-making?" The results suggest a need to further disaggregate the questions and generate evidence about different approaches, user goals and needs, and the context in which data use is happening.

D4A projects were not originally designed in ways that factored in incentives and power dynamics. These issues became salient during project implementation and were used to inform activities to encourage government action. These activities ranged from combining collaboration and pressure to activate accountability mechanisms, to supporting government agencies in improving data publication, to using data to strengthen advocacy for institutional reform, and to informing the position of CSOs in participatory spaces such as the EITI secretariat and those for indigenous people. The experience from partners raises issues to consider while using data to elicit government action:

WHO USES THE DATA?

The interests, experience, capacities and relationships of those using the data, as well as the diversity of target users and potential collaboration among them, need to be factored into project implementation. Some questions to consider include:

> What problems do users care about and how can data contribute to addressing them?
>
> How do users work and how can data be used to boost, or transform, their approaches?
>
> What relationships do users have and to what extent can these relationships be leveraged? Would creating opportunities for building other relationships be needed?

WHERE IS DATA USE HAPPENING?

The context in which data use happens is important for several reasons. Some questions to consider include:

What is the existing civic space and what does this mean for user strategies?

What else is happening in the context with regards to the problem relevant for users (e.g., policy reform, implementation of programs, scandals, citizen mobilization or elections)? And how can this be leveraged to support or block the achievement of goals?

At what level (national, regional or local) are political and technical decisions taking place and how can data be used to understand these dynamics?

HOW CAN DATA BE USED BY TARGET USERS IN THEIR CONTEXTS?

There are always factors that will hinder data use. Data availability and quality might make data ill-suited for some approaches, users might perceive approaches as irrelevant for them, and accountability mechanisms might be ineffective. Acknowledging these challenges and finding ways around them is key for supporting the use of data. Some questions to consider include:

What complementary measures (e.g., access to information requests, agreements with government agencies to access more data, etc.) can be included in the project to address data quality and availability issues?

What additional approaches or mechanisms could be used to engage government agencies or demand accountability on the problems relevant for target users?

Who else in the context is interested in the issue – either in favor or against – and how can data be used to shift their incentives and behavior?

As a tool, data will only be as strong as those using it and the approaches they adopt. Acknowledging this has important implications for how efforts to use data are designed and supported, including additional programming related to specific sectors, economic development, anti-corruption, and the inclusion of vulnerable groups.

MEASURING DATA UPTAKE AND IMPACT

Measuring the uptake of the data and the impact that can be achieved through its use remains one of the main challenges with regards to harnessing data for accountability. This challenge was also flagged by the 100 Questions Initiative, where leaders prioritized the question, “Does open governance affect the accountability of those in power; facilitate public debate and participation; and lead to more inclusive, transparent and timely decision-making?” This challenge, and the dynamics around it, affects funding for these efforts, project design and implementation, and the narratives and theories of change used at global and local levels. There are at least three issues that can explain why this challenge persists.

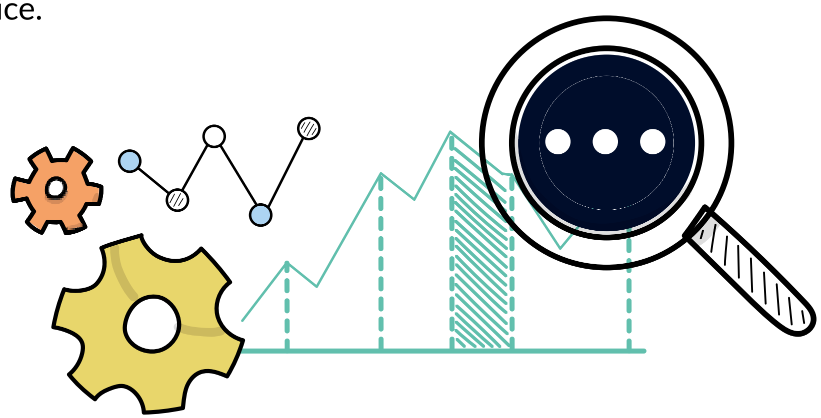
First, making the connection between data publication and the use of the data for accountability is difficult. As expressed by Kazemi and Jarvis, “evidence of impact is complicated by shifting goalposts, long results chains and the challenge of assessing deterrent effects of transparency on behaviors”. There are many political, institutional, and contextual factors, along with timescales, that make it hard to define what success would look like and how it would come about. TAI's review highlights that results about something as straightforward as whether or not data is used are contested. As TAI puts it, ”there is currently a misconception that the governance data produced is not being used; when in fact, there is often significant use of the data, but the stories and evidence are not yet being captured rigorously or systematically”.

Second, most approaches seeking to assess whether and how data can contribute to accountability focus on particular linear paths from information and data use to government response. For instance, in a synthesis of evidence about the relationship between information and accountability, Tsai, Morse, Toral, and Lipovsek identify three mechanisms leading from information to accountability: information on performance and ways to monitor enhances citizens' capabilities; sanctions and incentives can motivate citizens and government officials; and information can reduce monitoring costs. However, they do not find conclusive evidence showing the results of these causal mechanisms. The prioritization of these types of linear pathways has an effect on what finally gets measured, on the methods that are developed and used, and on the incentives that advocates have to assess impact.

Third, even if organizations want to measure the results from their activities; it is hard. There is an "indicator gap" and a lack of capacities and incentives to use alternative methods rigorously (e.g., outcome mapping and outcome harvesting). On the side of indicators, Tolmie highlights three important gaps in available assessment indicators: government actors' capacities, incentives, influence and power – or political will;[7] the capacity and influence of civil society organizations in the (eco)system; and the engagement and mobilization of audiences.

The lack of easy-to-use indicators is exacerbated often due to the lack of clear and effective incentives for investing scarce resources in MEL. Most organizations are funded by donors with differing interests in terms of the evidence and results they would like to see from projects, while also needing to deliver in implementing activities and remaining relevant on day-to-day issues in their contexts. Often, it is hard to cost these activities and to ensure that costs are included throughout different grants and that staff with the capacities required can be recruited and retained. Additionally, there are no safe spaces for acknowledging and sharing failures evidenced by these assessments and any adaptations carried out in response. This makes efforts to generate evidence futile in the eyes of those implementing projects, and limits the potential of using the evidence to inform conversations at the organizational, national, and international levels.

The evidence from the D4A initiative, as well as that from GI and others on the issue, resonates with these challenges and why they persist. The experience of collaborating with partners in Nigeria and Colombia provides three reflections for advancing research and investment in measuring data uptake and impact, and on how to use that evidence in practice.



7. See here for a useful reflection on how and why to unpack political will.

- **CURRENT NARRATIVES ABOUT WHY AND HOW TO INVEST IN MEASURING DATA UPTAKE AND IMPACT DO NOT PROVIDE A COMPELLING ARGUMENT OR CLEAR GUIDANCE FOR THOSE PROMOTING DATA USE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL (E.G., GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY).**

  Linear approaches from data to accountability to results almost never play out. Instead, they lead organizations to focus measuring – if not action – around a specific dataset and response mechanism. Data use or accountability that do not follow this assumed path are seen as failures and, as such, tend to be disregarded or only recorded as interesting anecdotes.

- **USER ENGAGEMENT IMPLIES ADAPTATION OF PROGRAMMING AND, AS SUCH, REQUIRES THE ADAPTATION OF THE WAYS IN WHICH PROGRESS AND IMPACT ARE MEASURED.**

  As laid out in previous sections, user engagement and data use imply developing a better understanding of problems that are relevant to target audiences, the capacities needed to address those problems, and the response mechanisms that might be more effective. This requires rethinking the indicators that would be useful and the documenting methods that can provide effective information to assess progress and impact.

- **IN ADDITION TO AN "INDICATOR GAP", THERE IS A GAP IN TERMS OF GUIDANCE FOR ADAPTING PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION, DOCUMENTING THE PROCESS, AND COMMUNICATING THESE ADAPTATIONS TO PARTNERS AND FUNDERS.**

  Often, learning happens throughout project implementation. However, spaces for surfacing lessons, decisions to turn those lessons into action, and processes to share such lessons tend to be informal or non-existent. This hinders the evolution of conversations, research, and innovation in practices and methods.

A PROCESS FOR STRENGTHENING DATA FOR ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRAMMING

Recent literature and practice with regards to adaptive management and systems thinking, as well as the results from supporting projects in Colombia and Nigeria, enable reflection about data for accountability programming and how it can be strengthened. Here are the main messages that emerge from this evidence:

- While the focus on opening up data has created opportunities for data use and collaboration among stakeholders, further progress on achieving accountability requires approaches that start with sectoral problems and political economy analysis and, from there, develop innovations in project design, implementation and MEL. Investments in data availability and capacity (e.g., from data cleaning to analysis to visualization) are still needed, but investments in technical skills should not be the main focus. Instead, they should aim to strengthen projects to address sectoral and corruption problems.

- Focusing on problems that are relevant to target audiences enables data for accountability programming to support them as they use mechanisms and channels to mobilize and achieve government response.

  Building continued engagement with target audiences into project design enables organizations promoting the use of data for accountability to:

  > Refine their capacity building and support activities to provide partners with guidance that meets their capacities and resources, and is focused on addressing problems.
  >
  > Surface and react to data and support needs that emerge as target audiences get an increased understanding of the problems they are addressing, and the related challenges and opportunities.

- Increasing the availability of data is a political process that requires organizations to engage government agencies with different roles in ways that balance demand for improvements and support to implement them. Also, target audiences will require additional information to be able to address the problems that matter to them.

- Working in ways that acknowledge context, reforms, and political dynamics enables organizations to build on target audiences' existing work and relationships, understand and navigate institutional challenges, and employ additional approaches to use the data to shift the incentives of those involved in addressing problems.

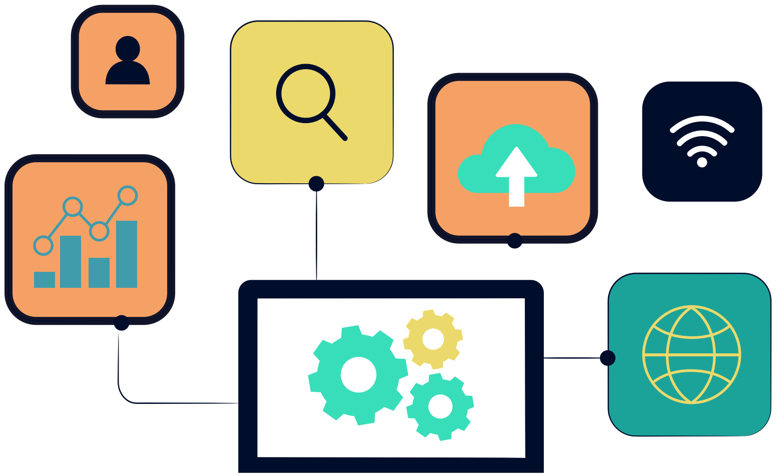
- Improving capacities and incentives for measuring data uptake and impact in ways that are non-linear, lean, and can be adapted during implementation can enable organizations to enhance their approaches, innovate, and share lessons with peers and other relevant actors.

These reflections are being put into practice in other types of relevant governance and development programming. For instance, Hudson calls for approaches to use data for accountability which "starts with problems, pays attention to the power dynamics in particular places, works actively to identify politically feasible reforms, and then and only then considers whether changes to the informational environment brought about by increased transparency might help to create coalitions for reform that can shift the dynamics that would otherwise hold problems in place". This framing is in line with efforts to acknowledge complexity in development programming and moves towards developing new ways of thinking about how change can be brought about and assessed.

Examples of these approaches include: the 5Rs framework developed by USAID, which identifies five key dimensions of the systems in which programs are implemented (results, roles, relationships, rules, and resources) and calls for the use of system practices for enhancing program design, implementation, and results; efforts by UNDP Innovation to tackle complex development challenges in ways that are non-linear and aim to shift power, politics, and systems; and other work such as that of the Chôra foundation and the Human Learning Center community.

These approaches are robust and useful, but putting them to use with regards to data for accountability programming requires significant effort, resources, and time, which most organizations developing programs to promote the use of data do not have. In order to contribute to thinking and practice in data for accountability programming, we set out a lean approach to integrate these insights into the practices of organizations and the support that donors provide through follow-up conversations and engagement.

The approach starts with the design of the project, including how design can incorporate checkpoints for reflection and adaptation as well as continued monitoring of key context relevant factors; then, it specifies how reflection and adaptation can be used and documented at each checkpoint, including examples of how adaptation might look like in practice. It ends with considerations on how to communicate, use, and share lessons.



PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The best place to start with project design is to set out clearly the problem that the project aims to address. **DEFINING A PROBLEM,** especially at the design stage, does not need to be a cumbersome exercise as it is not meant to include every detail. Rather, it should enable focusing on activities and foreseeing what types of changes the project might contribute to. When defining problems related to the use of data for accountability, it is important to consider the following:

- Do not define the problem as a lack of information, political will, accountability mechanisms, or laws, but focus on failures in delivery that might affect the provision of services or approaches and stakeholder behaviors that might limit responses.

- Do define the problem around something tangible (e.g., behaviors, capacities, opportunities, and outcomes) where quantitative or qualitative changes can be seen. For instance, focus on the capture of resources or the failure to deliver services, rather than on reducing corruption; or talk about low follow-up on citizen service delivery complaints, rather than a lack of accountability;

- Do not frame the problem in terms of how the lack of use or improper use of data prevents accountability. Instead, focus on the dynamics that lead to poor accountability or service delivery, such as inadequate incentives or capture by powerful elites, and the ways in which data use can help address those issues.

At this point, it is also important to consider: the scope of the problem, as it will be different when thinking about a sector (e.g., health or education), a population (e.g., indigenous people or youth), or a specific issue (e.g., maternal and newborn health or the delivery of subsidies to youth); the level of change you want to work towards in terms of the reach (e.g., international, national, regional, or local level); and the types of response you would like to see (e.g., delivery of specific projects, or changes in the planning or implementation of policies). Considering the scope of the project and the desired level of change will have implications for how you try to address it in terms of who you engage with, what approaches might be useful for doing so, how to assess whether or not the project contributes to change, and the extent to which data use can contribute to addressing the problem.

A second element to consider when designing the project is **DEFINING THE TARGET AUDIENCES** you will support in the use of data. It is important to specify who they are and why the problem is relevant to them. Avoid general categories such as "citizens" or "beneficiaries", rather focus on those you will engage, such as organizations working on the issue, community leaders, journalists covering these types of stories, or government representatives either directly involved in service delivery, oversight, or decision-making. Defining these audiences will enable you to develop initial ideas about how to reach them, the challenges they face, and how your project can help them. It is important to note that these would be initial assumptions based on your experience and existing literature on the issue; good enough to provide direction, but not overly detailed so as to limit the options for engagement and support.

Given the focus on the use of data for accountability, it is important to think about **THE ROLES THAT DATA CAN PLAY IN ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM.** Avoid focusing on a linear pathway to change (e.g., identify instances of corruption to file complaints that lead to sanctions). It is much more useful to consider how the use of the data can enable target audiences to approach the problem. Some general categories include: understanding the extent of the problem and its causes; identifying stakeholders who are causing the problem and those trying to address it; and assessing the feasibility of approaches to make progress in addressing the problem. Focusing on how data can be used in relation to the problem will provide better direction on what capacities, opportunities, and incentives target audiences would need to use the data, and how to be more open and innovative with regards to the development – and improvement – of methodologies and tools to reach and mobilize these audiences.

Finally, factoring all the different elements, you should consider how your project activities might **CONTRIBUTE TO ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM** and how this problem might change because of your work. Most problems are complex and will require work over many years to be solved. Rather than thinking about how the situation would look when the problem is solved, it might be more useful to tease ways in which the project can change the dynamics around the problem. Some general categories that could be considered at this stage can include: changes in practices by the relevant stakeholders; changes in policies that address the issues identified by target audiences; changes in the rules and enforcement practices that respond to the issues identified; and ways in which the use of data can help stakeholders to shift power dynamics and generate alternative approaches. It is acceptable for these envisioned changes to be general at this stage, given that they are based on an initial understanding of the problem. Defining these expected results can provide a satisfactory direction of travel, going beyond counting outputs (e.g., launching a campaign, a website, or carrying out a workshop) and into changes that can be seen (e.g., changes in practices, overcoming institutional bottlenecks, and the delivery of projects). At this point, you can define relevant indicators for tracking progress. Some useful indicators can be found in this database and, on this website, you can find relevant methodologies.

MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING TO IMPROVE IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS

This part of the process provides guidance on how organizations implementing data for accountability projects can, effectively and continuously, generate evidence about their work and the context in which they work, and how they use this evidence to inform project implementation and communicate about impact. To achieve this, the process includes two types of monitoring activities that are interlinked to project implementation: continuous and lean monitoring; and checkpoints for reflecting on evidence, adapting project implementation, and MEL. It is important to note that the process aims to be simple and to be used by partners in contextually relevant ways. After all, through the D4A initiative and continued engagement with other stakeholders promoting the use of data for accountability, we have seen that often MEL capacities are low, with MEL activities being carried out by those leading projects or by a very small number of MEL staff that does not have the bandwidth to go in depth across a varied portfolio.

CONTINUED AND LEAN MONITORING

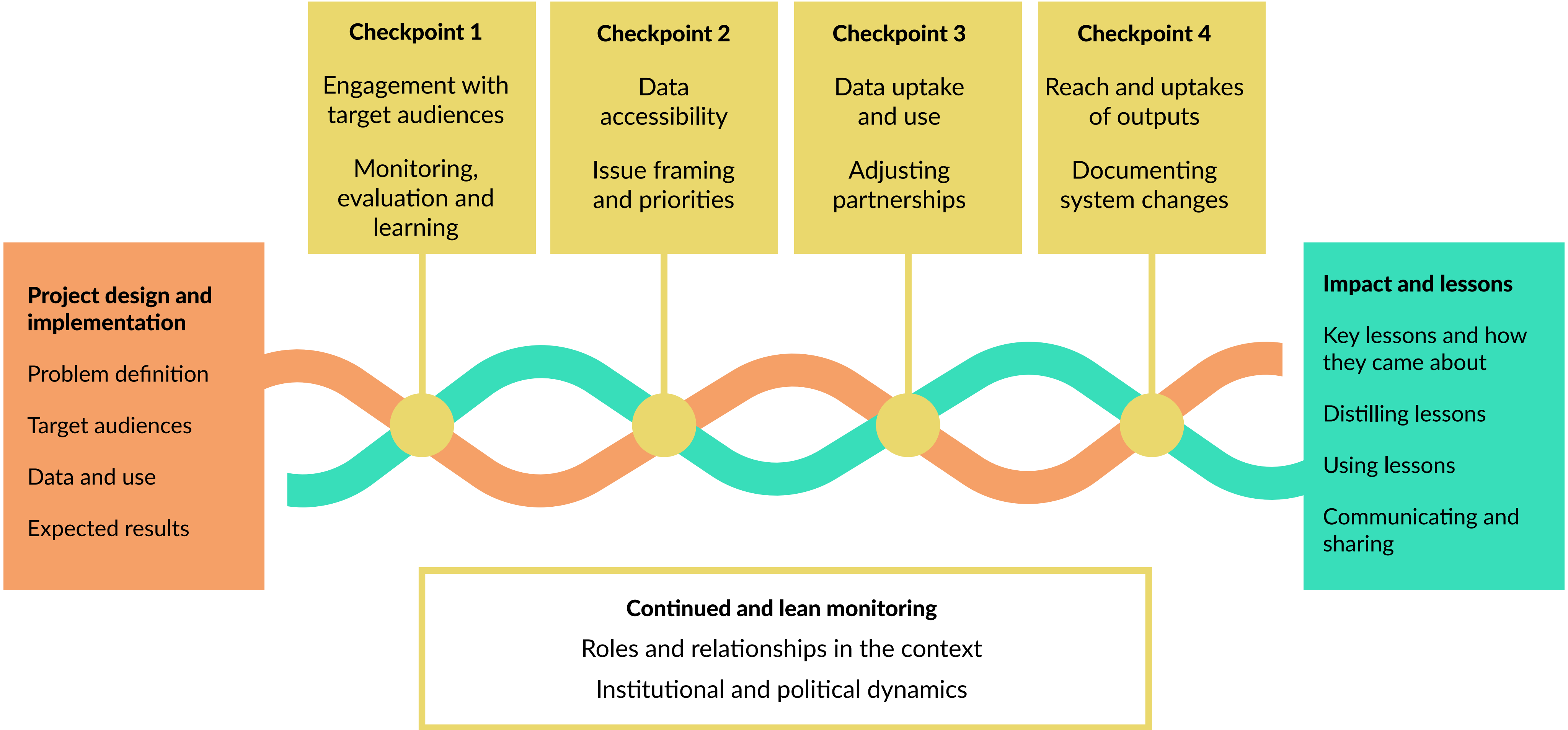
There are two main elements important to monitor continuously as they shift constantly and create opportunities and challenges during project implementation: roles and relationships and institutional and political dynamics.

Roles are the functions that individuals and organizations play with regards to the problem you are addressing in the context(s) where you are implementing the project. Roles might vary depending on the problem, but they usually include at least those delivering services, those overseeing service delivery, those in decision-making positions, those related to the production and dissemination of data, and those that benefit from the services. Depending on the problem, there might be other relevant roles. For instance, in the delivery of medicines, other roles include intermediaries and contractors, or, if there is a national policy, there might be different levels of decision-making, oversight, as well as data collation and publication. It is important to analyze the roles in terms of the context and the actors. There might be actors who play more than one role, such as a civil society organization overseeing and advocating, while also providing services, as well as roles that actors are mandated to play, but do not actually play.

The relationships between the actors playing these roles is also key as these might change due to the implementation of project activities or additional institutional and political factors (see below). There are attributes of relationships that are important for programming, including: the types of relationships, for instance, formal, informal, or even “secret” – such as those that might exist with whistleblowers or among actors co-opting the delivery of services; the strength of relationships, including weak, strong, inexistent, or not operational – when relationships are mandated, but do not exist in practice; and the types of exchanges, such as one-sided, collaborative, of mutual benefit, and of opposition – exchanges that also pertain to data and the promotion of data use. Identifying the key roles and relationships, and understanding whether and how these change over time, can provide opportunities to: prioritize the approaches to be used; adjust data dissemination strategies; explore different uses of data for oversight; and change narratives around the problem over time. Being aware of the roles and relationships, and how they change, will also be useful in understanding the extent to which the project is changing the existing dynamics around the problem and how these changes can contribute to results.

Finally, it is also important to continuously track institutional and political dynamics and how they change. There might be many institutional dynamics at play in relation to the problem you are trying to address, but some of the main ones include changes in: legislation and policy; the allocation and use of resources; the distribution of responsibilities and decision-making spaces; practices for service delivery; the production, dissemination, and use of data; and the mechanisms for enforcement and oversight. All of these dynamics might not change during the period of project implementation (e.g., there might be no major changes in legislation), while others are more related to rapid changes such as the allocation of resources, or practices for service delivery and oversight.

CONTINUOUS AND LEAN MEL FOR DATA FOR ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECTS



Political dynamics can be major forces of change, or lack of change. Some of these include: elections, which might bring about changes in priorities or policies; scandals related to the problem that can affect relationships within elites; changes in government officials or service providers; and public opinion around the issue. These dynamics are relevant for project implementation as they can shift the incentives and behavior of the actors or their relationships and roles. These changes can be leveraged throughout project implementation and inform decisions about issues to prioritize, stakeholders to engage, and tactics that can promote change.

There are approaches to identify and monitor roles, relationships, and political and institutional dynamics, including political economy analysis and systems strengthening. However, even just including these issues from the initial engagement with target audiences and throughout project implementation can provide very useful information to act upon and to assess any contribution to changes around the problem and other relevant results. It is important to define early on how to document and share information about these issues among those implementing the project. It might be something as easy as a shared journal to annotate changes as the team and target audiences identify them, or just including it as an issue to discuss during team meetings and check-ins with target audiences.

Checkpoints for Reflection and Adaptation

Checkpoints for reflection and adaptation provide an actionable tool for organizations implementing data for accountability projects to use evidence gathered through implementation and MEL activities. They also provide funders with ways to focus and increase the relevance of follow-up conversations with grantees, so they can more easily understand and comment on the evidence gathered by partners and the decisions these partners make with regards to implementation and MEL. These checkpoints are not exhaustive or rigid; they should be adapted during project design to align with strategies and project implementation plans. The information gathered using continued and lean monitoring will be useful for reflection and adaptation at these checkpoints.

CHECKPOINT 1: LOCALIZING THE PROBLEM

The first checkpoint can be seen as a reality check, as it enables project implementers to validate assumptions made in project design with their target audiences by bringing to the table their interests and perceptions of the problem and the context. The types of assumptions that are tested in this checkpoint include: the problem definition and the potential ways in which the problem can be addressed; the roles that data can play in target audiences' efforts to address the problem; and the expected results of the project. The information from engagement with target audiences can lead to several adaptations of project implementation including:

- Reviewing capacity building approaches so they are relevant to target audiences' interest with regards to the problem and the opportunities they perceive as relevant. This might include complementing data-focused capacities with other relevant capacities such as understanding of the institutional design around the problem (e.g., who is responsible for what), legal support, or the use of advocacy, mobilization, and institutional mechanisms to achieve government response.

- Adjusting support activities for target audiences to align with their existing relationships and work. This can include, for instance, shifting from activating accountability mechanisms to increasing the salience of the issue in the public agenda or promoting collaboration with government officials and contractors to achieve proper implementation of projects.

- Identifying additional data, information needs, and tactics to get and use this information.

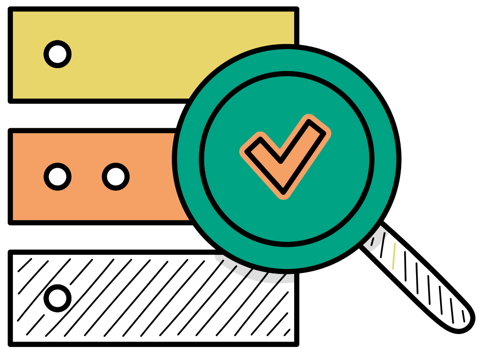
Identifying these adaptations early on will enable implementing organizations to assess the extent to which they can provide this support within the project or if other partnerships might be needed. It also enables organizations to adjust their expectations for the change they will contribute to, why this change matters, and how it might come about. This does not mean abruptly changing the project goal, but it can provide space for revising how the project can have increased impact in ways that matter to target audiences, for identifying pathways that can lead to those changes and related indicators, and to articulate narratives that are more grounded in the interests and needs of target audiences.

CHECKPOINT 2: ASSESSING THE CONTRIBUTION OF DATA TO ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM

After understanding target audiences and their perspectives on the problem and carrying out project activities to promote the use of data (e.g., training, support, facilitation, research, etc.), it is important to revise whether or not target audiences are able to effectively access and use the data, and the ways in which their experiences can inform project implementation. Some areas of reflection and adaptation to consider include:

- Assessing whether or not target audiences have been able to access, understand, and use the information that is relevant to meet their needs. The results of this can provide useful evidence on issues with the data, the formats in which it is published, and the channels used for disseminating it.
- Understanding issues related to target audiences' required capacities and support, and identifying corrective actions to reinforce capacities or tailor support.
- Exploring the implications of target audiences' use of the data to assess whether or not it might be useful to include additional data approaches (e.g., methodologies for data gathering, analysis, and visualization) or tools that can enable them to advance their work.

These types of adaptations will contribute to increased effectiveness of capacity building, data accessibility and quality, and data use. They might also have implications for MEL, as there might be some types of changes and ways to achieve them that can be less relevant or feasible and others that can be more relevant or achievable. This can lead to decisions to prioritize targets and reformulate MEL, and to communicate why these changes were made and how they can contribute to results.



CHECKPOINT 3: DATA UPTAKE AND SYSTEM DYNAMICS

Once target audiences have attempted to use the data and received support for doing so, there are opportunities for learning and documenting their successes and the remaining challenges they face. Taking stock of these issues enables implementing organizations to identify valuable information to enhance programming, and to improve the publication of data and their advocacy and engagement approaches. Some areas for reflection and adaptation include:

- Consolidating data and additional support needs and whether or not these have been met. Identifying these emerging issues can lead to the provision, if possible, of additional lean support or enable the documentation of what worked and what did not.
- Assessing the extent to which collaboration within and across target audiences has happened, or not, including enabling factors and what they have achieved. This information can be used to prioritize relationships to be further promoted and to assess whether to include other relevant stakeholders.
- Identifying additional factors beyond the data and its use that might be enabling or hindering the use of data, citizen mobilization, and engagement with government agencies. This can inform decisions about creating opportunities for target audiences to engage other relevant stakeholders in government.

The documentation of successes and remaining challenges might not lead to changes in project MEL. It will be useful to identify what elements contribute to project results and which ones are not, and, based on this, decide if it would be useful to address them or work around them.

CHECKPOINT 4: DUPTAKE OF OUTPUTS AND DOCUMENTING CHANGES IN THE SYSTEM

At this point, the project is close to completion. This is a good time to assess whether and how the data outputs produced during the project (e.g., tools, methodologies, investigations, research and recommendation reports) have been received by target audiences or other relevant stakeholders. This would also contribute to identifying any progress towards the expected results of the project with an eye on changes in the system. Here are some activities to include in this checkpoint:

- Workshops or calls to promote peer learning and reflection across target audiences and project implementing staff.
- Reflection notes on issues of interest from the project that can enable reporting and inform future programming.
- Identification of interesting stories, results, and challenges, as well as assessing if any additional documentation about these might be needed.

This checkpoint will enable implementing organizations and target audiences to reflect on what the project meant to them, the extent to which results were achieved or not, and information that would be needed to report and tell the story of the project. This will also enable them to go beyond listing the activities and outputs produced in the project and move towards using the experience of the project to inform their own programming, as well as programming by others in the same context and the field in general.

IDENTIFYING, USING, AND SHARING IMPACT AND LESSONS

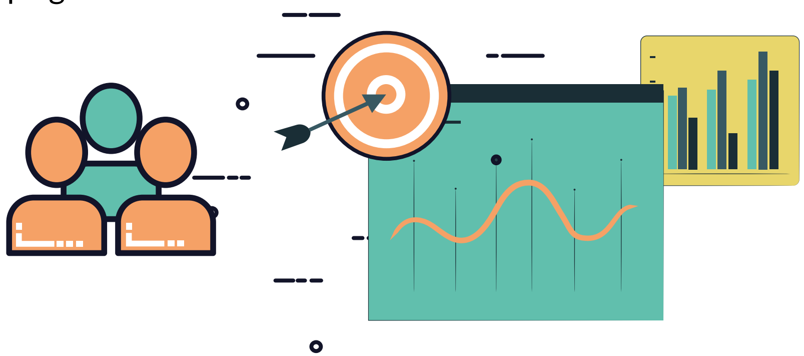
After project implementation using these checkpoints and monitoring, there will be enough of the right kind of information to assess the extent to which the project was able to shift the dynamics around the problem you were trying to address and deliver results. The final part of the process is focused on how to document, use, and share this information within the implementing organization, as well as with target audiences, donors, peers, and other relevant stakeholders.

The information gathered with regard to project implementation, indicators, and changes in MEL will be useful to assess whether **changes in the system and results were achieved and how this happened,** as well as to understand what results were not achieved and what factors might have caused this. Depending on the available resources and organizational priorities, additional methodologies – such as [outcome mapping] and [outcome harvesting] – can be used to generate robust evidence about the results of the project, or to carry out research on the factors that hindered the achievement of results and ways in which they can be addressed.

Whether additional methodologies are used or not, reviewing the documentation of the process, the adaptations implemented, and how these adaptations played out in practice will enable implementing organizations to **distill lessons to inform the development of future projects and the refinement of organizational strategies.** It is useful to not limit this revision to the staff that implemented the project, but also to include other key stakeholders and colleagues in the process for distilling lessons. This will provide new perspectives and ensure that the lessons can be easily understood by others. This engagement can happen in reflection workshops, but it could also be a conversation to have in staff meetings or calls with relevant stakeholders to present and discuss these lessons.

During and after the process of distilling lessons, it is important to consider **how these lessons can be used** by colleagues in the implementing organization, by target audiences, and by other relevant stakeholders. Some of the lessons might point towards potential new areas of programming, opportunities for research, or areas of collaboration with other stakeholders in the context.

Finally, you should also think about whether and to what extent you want to **communicate and share these lessons with others in your context and beyond.** Some results from this process might be used only for reporting and for internal consumption within the organization, but there will likely be many that can prove useful to others or be used to shift narratives around the problem the project tried to address at different levels. An example of this can be the identification of remaining data gaps and their causes, which can be turned into an advocacy note to inform the work by other areas of the organization and provide a rallying point for advocacy campaigns.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DONORS SUPPORTING DATA FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

The following recommendations are meant to enable donors to refine their investments in data for accountability and improve the support they provide to grantees for project implementation and the generation of evidence from this work. The general message from the results of the D4A initiative is that, while the focus on opening up data has created opportunities for data use and collaboration among stakeholders, further progress on achieving accountability requires approaches that start with sectoral problems and political economy analysis and, from there, develop innovations in project design, implementation and MEL. Investments in data availability and capacity (e.g., data cleaning to analysis to visualization) are still needed, but investments in technical skills should not be the main focus. Instead, they should aim to strengthen projects to address sectoral and corruption problems.

The following recommendations provide guidance for donors to create an enabling environment for this shift in investments and programming, and for practitioners and researchers to review their approaches. They are organized in three areas: programming and approaches; generation and use of evidence; and coordination and collaboration.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING PROGRAMMING AND APPROACHES

1. Create incentives for aligning global, national, and local work in the use of data for accountability. For example, putting the needs and interests of local organizations at the forefront, while ensuring that global advocacy and the development of methods and tools aim to meet those local needs.

2. Promote reflection about the problems that reformers are trying to address and prioritize funding projects that address problems defined by local organizations, with support from global organizations. This can be achieved by:

a. Supporting projects that prioritize the use of data as a way to address specific sectoral or corruption problems and work back to improve the supply and use of data.

b. Incentivizing approaches that go beyond investigating individual instances of corruption and towards leveraging findings to inform mid to long-term strategies for changing government narratives and practices for service delivery, oversight, and development.

3. Enable peer learning across global and local organizations working on accountability, anti-corruption, sectoral results, and open data, with a focus on the problems they are trying to address and how data can contribute. This peer learning could be focused on issues such as:

a. Developing assumptions about political incentives that create or perpetuate a lack of accountability and exploring how data can be used to shift those incentives.

b. Sharing information about the successes and failures of approaches they use to engage different target audiences and government agencies.

c. Identifying and using political opportunities and institutional dynamics to improve the availability and use of data to inform decision-making, action, and citizen engagement.

d. Strengthening existing approaches, and developing innovations for improving the capacities, opportunities, and motivations needed to use data to address problems and generate opportunities for collaboration across target audiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE GENERATION AND USE OF EVIDENCE

4. Generate incentives for the improved use of MEL by organizations working on data for accountability. This should not contribute only to generating evidence about the impact of particular projects, but also strengthen the capacity of grantees to distill lessons from their work and use them to inform their organizational strategies. Some ideas to move in this direction include:

a. Increasing the allocation of funds or on-demand external support for MEL to improve project implementation, document processes, and assess results, perhaps by including MEL in the expected outputs and results of projects.

b. Incentivizing early and continued revisions to the design of projects, activities, and MEL.

c. Including questions about data use and results in follow-up conversations with grantees, with themes as those outlined in the previous section. These follow-ups can also be a good time to discuss the rationales for any adaptations implemented and to reflect on the type of evidence that might be more useful for grantees, project beneficiaries, and donors.

5. Provide tailored guidance and support to grantees in relation to the definitions of problems and the use of MEL. Often organizations implementing data for accountability projects do not have the capacities or resources to carry out MEL that effectively informs the implementation of projects, research on the issue, and reporting to donors. It is important to increase funding for these activities in addition to developing better guidance. This guidance should include the design and tailoring of lean MEL methods. It should also cover issues such as:

a. The definition of problems and the use of participatory methods for doing so.

b. The connections that can be made between data availability and use, and efforts to address sectoral problems.

c. The alignment of data for accountability projects with wider organizational strategies.

d. The use of evidence to improve strategies and tactics.

e. The use of rigorous methodologies and approximated costs, such as including the provision of on-demand support or guidelines for prioritizing the use of these methods.

6. Invest in actionable research into incentives and disincentives for the publication and use of data for accountability at the national and subnational level. This research should:

a. Focus on complementing existing evidence by paying greater attention to political economy, institutional design, and the role that additional stakeholders (e.g. the legislative, judiciary, subnational government agencies, the private sector, and accountability bodies) play in the dynamics impacting data availability and use.

b. Enable innovation in methods for learning and adapting in the field, focusing on the problems organizations are addressing, rather than on the themes and types of data that organizations work with (e.g., procurement, beneficial ownership, extractives).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

7. Increase dialogue among donors (including TAI members, non-TAI members, and multilaterals) to improve coordination among portfolios at the national and subnational levels. Some ideas to kickstart the conversation include:

a. Focus on existing, or potentially relevant, connections between programming focused on the use of data for accountability and sectoral and population focused programming.

b. Discuss the contribution to change in particular contexts around problems that are relevant to organizations and groups in those contexts.

c. Assess the connections between global and country level programming and ways to strengthen the relationship between portfolios at these levels, especially in light of the tendency many donors have shown to increase locally-led programming.

8. Invest in generating evidence about the power dynamics and relationships that perpetuate service delivery failure and exclusion, and the ways in which data and accountability can contribute to shifting them. This could include research on different issues such as:

a. How issues such as state capture and kleptocracy affect service delivery and the ways in which data and accountability can contribute to shifting the political and institutional dynamics in particular contexts.

b. The types of problems that generate service delivery failures and how these connect to data, accountability, and anti-corruption issues. Such research will prove useful in enabling organizations working on open data, accountability, and anti-corruption to further specify and strengthen their programming.

c. The ways in which global initiatives (e.g., the Open Government Partnership and EITI) are enabling multi-stakeholder problem solving on sectoral and corruption issues through the use of data.

d. The existing experiences of linking citizen mobilization processes, service delivery, the inclusion of vulnerable populations, and the use of data, aiming to understand how these links came to be and how they could be promoted in different contexts.

9. Promote increased conversation among donors, grantees, and government reformers working in shared contexts. These conversations can enable an improved understanding of existing problems, opportunities to address them, and areas where investment can be useful. These spaces should include dialogue about:

a. Gaps in evidence and support about problems affecting service delivery, inclusion, and the enforcement of laws and regulations.

b. Institutional designs and implementation gaps, aiming to identify where there might be ineffective laws, regulations or poor implementation, and the related reasons.

c. Failures and lessons learned from the implementation of particular policies, programs, and activities.

EFFECTIVE DATA USE:

LESSONS FROM DATA FOR ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECTS.

TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY INITIATIVE