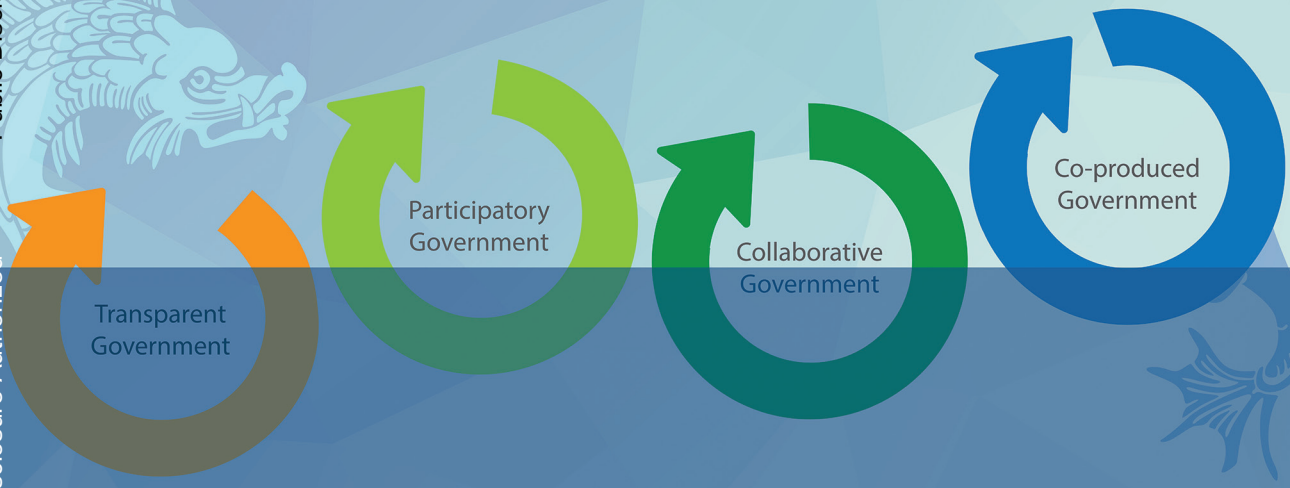

DIRECTIONS IN DEVELOPMENT
Public Sector Governance

Closing the Feedback Loop

Can Technology Bridge the Accountability Gap?

Björn-Sören Gigler and Savita Bailur, Editors

THE WORLD BANK

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Potential for Empowerment through ICTs

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Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have exploded in the last decades. Analog radios, televisions, loudspeakers, and cassette decks—the "old," nondigital technologies—have been joined by Web browsers, mobile phones, smartphones, and interactive television, to name but a few of the available information technologies. These ICTs provide a tremendous diversity of tools that enable citizens to participate in the governance of villages, cities, states, and countries. By now, popular as well as academic papers on the critical role of social media in the 2010–11 Arab Spring are ubiquitous. Phrases such as Government 2.0 (Chun *et al*. 2010) and "we-government" (Linders 2012) have been used to describe the collaborative nature of governance owing to participation through ICTs. Prominent examples of "people power" through ICTs include the crowdsourcing platform Ushahidi, first launched in Kenya during the 2007 election violence, which allowed citizens to use short message service (SMS) and e-mail to report acts of violence that were then mapped online, and Daraja, a nongovernmental organization (NGO), which facilitated citizen use of mobile phones and SMS to report on government water provisioning in rural Tanzania.

The proliferation of these initiatives and the potential of ICTs have led to high expectations of technology as "empowering." Larry Diamond coined the term "liberation technology," which he sees as "any form of information and communication technology (ICT) that can expand political, social, and economic freedom" (Diamond 2010, 79). The day Hosni Mubarak resigned as president of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Wael Ghonim, Google's Middle East marketing director and Egyptian activist, told CNN, "If you want to liberate a society, just give them the Internet" (Hofheinz 2011, 1417). Ghonim stated that the potential of technology to connect, unify, and organize ensured that "the power of the people is stronger than the people in power" (Hofheinz 2011, 1421).

More cautious thinkers advise that instead of immediately assuming a causality—that more technology leads to more political engagement—we need to analyze the factors necessary for empowerment (Bertot, Jaeger, and Grimes 2010; Hofheinz 2011; Wade 2002). Hofheinz states, "It is almost as if we are constantly searching for political utopia through the next generation of technology," which he calls a "nextopia" (Hofheinz 2011, 1423). Instead of embracing the next new technology, it is more helpful to look at historical and long-term patterns of engagement, personal and group dynamics, and political, social, economic, and financial conditions that are necessary *in addition* to technology for citizen engagement. Why do some initiatives succeed and others do not? How do we move from short-term impact to long-term change? What factors are necessary for this long-term change?

The chapters in this book, written by both academics and practitioners, provide a base of evidence for citizen engagement through ICTs. Each chapter demonstrates how technologies enhance access to information, participation, collaboration, and empowerment. The outcome is accelerated progress toward closing the "accountability gap"—the space between the supply (governments, service providers) and demand (citizens, civil society organizations, communities) that must be bridged for open and collaborative governance. This collection explores multiple ICT initiatives that aim to engage citizens in governance and examines two principal questions: To what extent are technologies an accelerator in closing the accountability gap? Under what conditions does this occur? This collection is a critical addition to existing literature on ICTs and citizen engagement for two main reasons: first, it covers a range of interventions, from mobile phone reporting to crowdsourcing to interactive mapping; second, it is the first of its kind to offer concrete recommendations on how to close feedback loops.

In the next section, we briefly summarize each of the chapters. We then discuss the key terms in empowerment—empowerment itself as well as transparency, accountability, and participation—and how examples from the chapters illustrate these. We proceed to examine the challenges within the assumptions of empowerment, transparency, accountability, and participation, critique the assumed relationships between them, and demonstrate how some of the cases in the following chapters exemplify these challenges. Finally, we introduce an overarching framework of factors that may enable or inhibit citizen empowerment through ICTs. We label this the STEP framework, which considers *social*, *technical*, *economic,* and *political* factors that influence empowerment. This framework is pervasive throughout the chapters in this book, which return to it as a guideline for enabling or inhibiting factors.

Theories and Cases Presented in This Collection

This book is structured as follows. In chapter 2, Gigler develops an alternative evaluation framework of the impact of ICTs on human development, based on Amartya Sen's capability approach, a more pluralistic means of assessing development than simple economic development, by seeing what people are capable

of being or doing with the goods to which they have access. He devises an *informational capability* framework, which assesses whether people have the capability (a) to use ICTs in an effective manner (ICT capability); (b) to find, process, evaluate, and use information (information literacy); (c) to communicate effectively with family, friends, and professional contacts (communication capability); and (d) to produce and share local content with others (content capability). Informational capabilities refer to a person's positive freedom to use ICTs within the institutional and socioeconomic setup of a society. The expansion of informational capabilities can then be translated into agency and the expansion of a person's well-being in the economic, political, social, and cultural spheres of his or her life. The chapter sets the theme for the rest of the book: we need to look beyond the technology and seek to understand the value of ICTs.

In chapter 3, Wittemyer, Bailur, Anand, Park, and Gigler deconstruct the definitions, assumptions, and challenges to transparency, accountability, and participation in governance. The authors review a sample of initiatives targeting these goals and make preliminary conclusions about what evidence exists to date and where to go from here. Cases illuminate the approaches that open government initiatives take, including collecting, analyzing, and visualizing data; accessing and disseminating information; and organizing and unifying communities. The summary of cases also allows for determining trends and gaps in practice areas, with many examples of efforts to improve service delivery and fewer examples of efforts to improve legislative and judicial accountability.

In chapter 4, Shkabatur reviews the process of interactive community mapping (ICM). This engages individuals in mapping their own community and potentially in creating empowerment through both the process (capacity building) and the results (changes in political behavior or development outcomes). Two types of ICM are assessed—maps to support general development (such as Map Kibera in Nairobi's largest informal settlement) and maps to mitigate natural disasters (such as the environmental consequences of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill). Shkabatur identifies necessary enabling factors including a supporting information infrastructure, the need for information, civil society capacity, government cooperation, the quality of collected data, and incentives for community mappers. Although she recognizes the unintended negative effects of ICM (including elite capture), the benefits of harnessing collective wisdom and local knowledge are immense, as is the sense of ownership in ICM. In turn, this sense of ownership allows for better assessment of local needs and concerns and more effective future development activities.

In crisis situations or fragile states, interactive mapping can serve an immediate purpose, whether tracking aid flows, reporting on incitement, or organizing grassroots movements. In chapter 5, Bott, Gigler, and Young examine crowdsourcing, defined as "the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call." Examples of crowdsourced mapping are given for crisis situations, such as in Guinea, Haiti, Kenya, Libya, and Sudan, when government intervention is weak. The challenge arises when governments reconstruct after

crisis situations, in which case their own commitment and leadership are essential.

In chapter 6, Shkabatur reviews Check My School (CMS)—a community-monitoring project that aims to promote transparency and social accountability in the Philippine education sector by tracking the provision of services in public schools. Spearheaded by the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific, the project engages local community volunteers in monitoring the existence of sufficient numbers of textbooks, working toilets, teacher attendance, use of school funds, and other issues in public schools. This information is then made available on public websites in an easily accessible format, allowing citizens to comment on the accuracy of the data collected and to voice related concerns and issues. While the CMS project relied on a variety of ICT tools, the case study highlights the importance of non-ICT issues, such as the need for constructive, cooperative relations between civil society groups and government and "complementarity with ongoing government projects" to create an environment conducive to initiatives. The case study also demonstrates that, even (or perhaps especially) in ICT-related initiatives, an organized presence on the ground of local networks of civil society organizations and youth groups is critical for the success of a community-monitoring project.

In chapter 7, Madon introduces four key citizen-governance initiatives in primary health care in India, focusing on the southern state of Karnataka. These range from the "no-tech" Village Health and Sanitation Committees and community monitoring report card to the "higher-tech" Health Management Information System and a Beneficiary Verification System, which has been recently piloted in Karnataka with a view to statewide implementation. Through the analysis of these coexisting systems, Madon concludes that, while the efforts made have contributed to improving basic primary health care, much learning is needed and many programs have to be consolidated for accountability to be improved, and technology is not always necessary for accountability.

In chapter 8, Gigler, Custer, Bailur, Dodds, Asad, and Gagieva-Petrova examine the World Bank Institute's use of ICTs to expand citizen input on economic and social development projects. The aim is to understand the extent to which ICTs can either engender a new "feedback loop" or ameliorate a "broken loop." The authors primarily interviewed World Bank project staff working in the Africa region and technical experts working on issues related to the delivery of public services as well as governance, accountability, and social inclusion issues across the different regions. Staff expressed a clear preference for using hybrid technology or multiple streams rather than depending solely on comprehensive cell phone or Internet penetration. Two interrelated suggestions are to reduce the cost and increase the benefit of participation. A feedback system is recommended for understanding five components: the purpose, people, process, tools, and environment into which the ICTs are introduced.

To conclude, in chapter 9, Gigler, Bailur, and Anand return to the original question of how ICTs contribute to participation and transparency to achieve accountability. Specifically, they introduce the "Loch Ness model" to sum up how

technologies have contributed to shrinking the accountability gap by accelerating citizen engagement. Four dimensions of ICT-led citizen engagement—information, participation, collaboration, and empowerment—provide a framework for analyzing the enabling and constraining factors that exist. Taking this forward, they open up the conversation to next steps for addressing the barriers and elucidating the unaddressed ethical and regulatory issues that have arisen with the increasing use of ICTs for closing the feedback loop.

Underlying Theories of Empowerment through ICTs

More than 2,000 years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle defined citizens as *all* who share in the civic life of ruling and being ruled in turn and a good citizen as someone who must possess the knowledge and capacity requisite for ruling as well as being ruled (cited in Mansbridge 1999). Modern definitions of citizenship build on Aristotle's understanding in seeing citizenship as "the rights and responsibilities" of individuals who plead allegiance to the constitution of a country. But the difference is that for Aristotle a city-state ideally comprised 5,000 people. As country populations grow into the higher millions, knowing their rights and responsibilities is an immense challenge for today's citizens, particularly in developing countries. In theory, then, ICTs offer great opportunities for citizens not only to understand these rights and responsibilities but also to question governments when it appears that their rights are not being heard and for governments and other citizens to hold them accountable for their responsibilities. In practice, however, several complementary factors are necessary for such empowerment to occur. Before these factors are examined in detail, it is necessary to deconstruct the four terms that are frequently used but often ill-defined in the literature: empowerment, participation, transparency, and accountability.

First, what exactly is empowerment? As with participation, transparency, and accountability, empowerment is a fuzzy concept. A widely cited definition is that of the World Bank's *World Development Report*, which sees empowerment as "enhancing the capacity of poor people to influence the state institutions that affect their lives, by strengthening their participation in political processes and local decision making. And it means removing the barriers—political, legal, and socio-cultural that work against particular groups and building the assets of poor people to enable them to engage effectively in markets" (World Bank 2000, 39). Kabeer defines empowerment as "the expansions in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where the ability was previously denied to them" (Kabeer 1999, 262). Robert Chambers, a pioneer in participatory evaluation (known as participatory rural appraisals), saw empowerment as a process that gave the poor more control over their lives (Chambers 1993). An example may be having more female representatives in local government committees, thus providing an increased opportunity to ensure that their voices are heard, although inclusion or "participation" may not necessarily lead to "empowerment" if these women's voices are not acted upon (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004).

It has been stated that empowerment comprises two enabling factors: agency and opportunity structure (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007). Agency is seen as the ability to act on behalf of what we value and opportunity structure as the preconditions for effective agency. As an example, a young school graduate from a rural area may have all the skills and be willing to work in an entry-level job (*agency*), but she may have no opportunities, either economically or socioculturally, because such work is not considered appropriate for young women (*opportunity structure*). Agency and opportunity structure are both iterative and interdependent: the presence of agency may not necessarily mean that there is opportunity structure or vice versa, and it can be both a virtuous and a vicious circle. Thus empowerment is a complex process.

How can ICTs enable empowerment? First, they enable *downward* flows of information, from government to citizen. Second, they create the possibility of *upward* flows of information, from citizen to government, which are essential to inform decision making. Third, in theory they enable *horizontal* flows of communication, flattening hierarchies. Broadly speaking, these three functions can be related to transparency, accountability, and participation. An example may be a government agency that publishes its budgets online (illustrating transparency and downward accountability), requests and, in certain cases, enforces further inputs from citizens (upward accountability), and invites participation from both citizens and other agencies (horizontal flows and participation). Cutting across time and space, ICTs reduce the distance between the government service provider and citizen. Each has a right and a responsibility, and each is accountable to the other (indeed, the two are not exclusive: a government employee is also a citizen). In theory, and following Aristotle's thinking, ICTs also enable the "ruled" to be "rulers." In empowerment terms, ICTs can facilitate both agency (by providing the information and tools to develop what we value) and opportunities (by providing information and skills to develop opportunities).

Empowerment, then, is constituted by three other terms, frequently used in the following chapters: participation, transparency, and accountability. In order to be empowered, citizens need to *participate*, to raise their concerns and voices (whether their voices are heard is another step). In theory, ICTs provide an opportunity for empowerment because they lower the barriers to participation. Citizens can access information and communicate directly, instead of being dependent on intermediaries, with their own biases and insecurity regarding the sharing of power.

Transparency, too, is an often used, but frequently poorly defined, term. One definition of it is "any attempts (by states or citizens) to place information or processes that were previously opaque in the public domain, accessible for use by citizen groups, providers, or policy makers" (Joshi 2010, 3). A worldwide movement toward transparency is evident in the growth of right to information (RTI) acts, starting in 1766 in Sweden and spreading in the past decades to countries as diverse as India, Mexico, and the United Kingdom. Currently, more than 85 countries have implemented RTI acts. Again, the assumption is that increased transparency has the potential to enhance participation and empowerment.

The final concept in this quadrangular equation is accountability. Schedler (1999) defines accountability as the relationship between the power holder (account provider) and delegator (account demander). Joshi (2010) sees the key components of accountability as setting standards, acquiring information about actions, making decisions on the appropriateness of actions, and identifying and sanctioning unsatisfactory performance. Schedler collapses these into two major components: *answerability* and *enforcement*. Answerability encompasses the obligation of public officials to inform about and explain what they are doing, whereas enforcement is the capacity of accounting agencies, including civil society and the general public, to impose sanctions on those power holders who have violated their obligations. Significant numbers of stakeholders, institutional procedures, and regulations are necessary to ensure effective answerability and enforcement, and thus answerability does not always translate to enforcement (an issue that arises consistently when considering the role of ICTs).

As shown in figure 1.1, empowerment can therefore both support and be supported by participation, transparency, and accountability.

Yet all four terms are interdependent, but also relational. In addition, the gain to one may be accompanied by loss to another—for example, participation may not necessarily lead to empowerment (it may even disempower), if participation is not welcomed or has unintended consequences (consider the example of more female representatives in local government committees, which may mean empowerment in the committee, but create conflict in the domestic sphere).

In theory, ICTs can enable empowerment, participation, transparency, and accountability, as illustrated in figure 1.2.

However, caution is needed when assuming the causality shown in figure 1.2. First, there is a tendency to view ICTs homogenously as a black box. However, ICTs fall along a spectrum, from low-tech to high-tech. The lower-tech end of the spectrum includes narrowcasting (playing cassettes), using loudspeakers, or

Figure 1.1 Assumed Relationship between Empowerment, Participation, Transparency, and Accountability

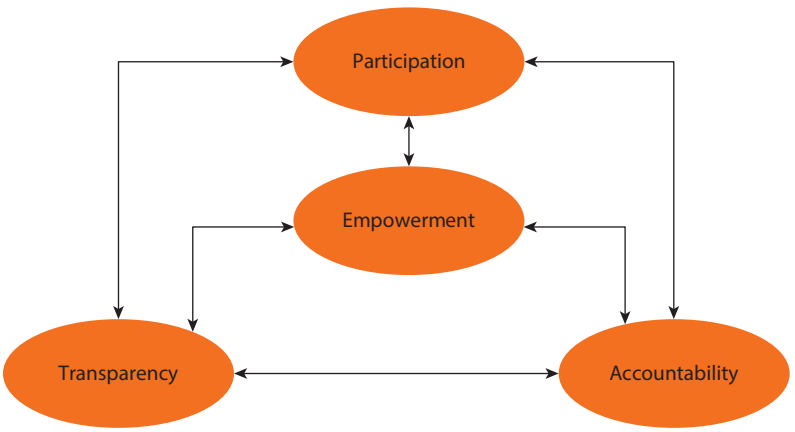
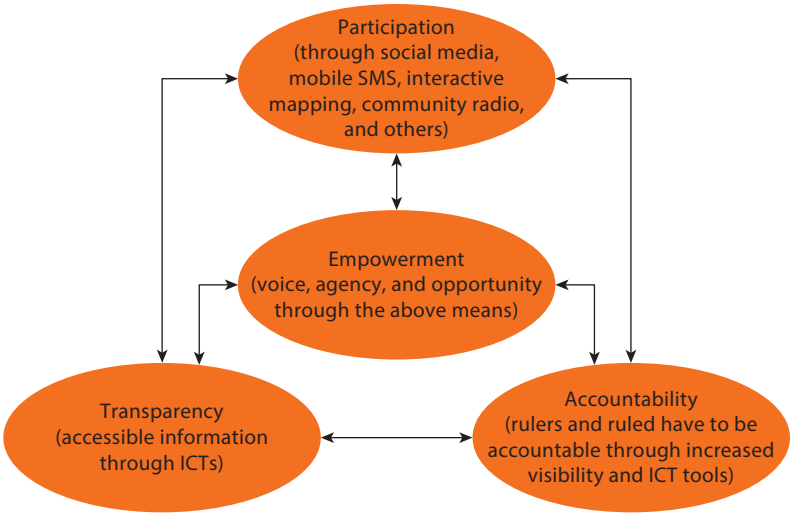


Figure 1.2 Assumed Impact of ICTs on Empowerment, Participation, Transparency, and Accountability



Note: ICT = information and communication technology; SMS = short message service.

making presentations to community groups for raising awareness about government policies and using paid SMS or call feedback to solicit views on government policies. On the other hand, features such as online forums, Facebook groups, and interactive mapping are more sophisticated and have greater reach, but may exclude those with no connectivity or skills to access such technology. It is important to recognize the spectrum of methods available in order to avoid designing technologically focused pilots.

Second, a more fundamental critique is the extent to which ICTs are truly capable of having this impact on government-citizen interaction and ultimately citizen empowerment. In order to address this in detail, we need to analyze the underlying assumptions in empowerment, transparency, accountability, and participation, discussed next.

A Critical Analysis of Factors Influencing Empowerment through ICTs

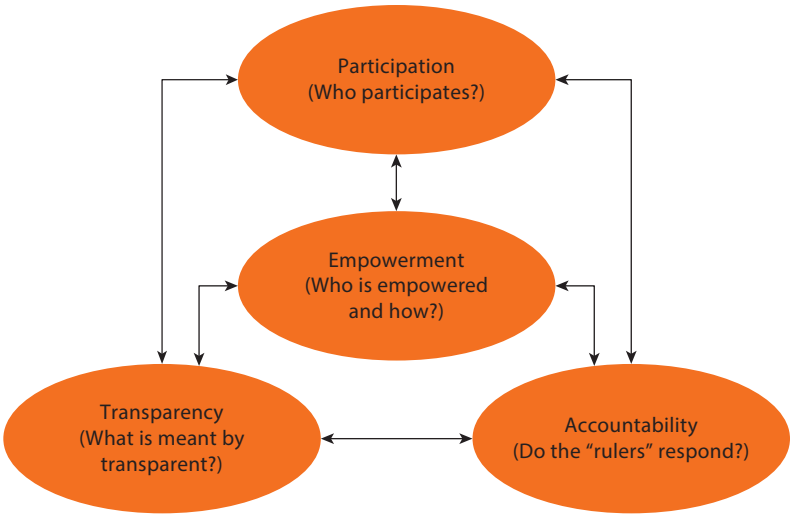
The cases in this book reveal preliminary evidence from the field. Yet they are also analytical. What is the evidence that, through ICTs, transparency will automatically lead to accountability and therefore empowerment? There is an increasingly urgent need to examine the claims made by both technological positivists (the "nextopia" described by Hofheinz 2011) as well as the popular press in the wake of the Arab Spring and the exaltation of ICTs, particularly social media, during that time. To do this, we first need to return to the roots of the assumptions made with regard to the terms empowerment, participation, transparency, and accountability as well as the causality between them.

These four seemingly innocuous words encompass vast concepts that contain both theoretical and practical challenges. As noted earlier, empowerment

requires both agency as well as the opportunity to execute this agency. It implies either the willingness of those who are empowered to empower others or the ability or agency of those who are not empowered to gain this power in some way, even without the support of those empowered. The willingness to empower others may be problematic for those in power because it challenges their own status quo and authority (Crewe and Harrison 1998; Guijt and Shah 1998; Nelson and Wright 1995; Rahnema 1992). The same is often true of participation, which, it is argued, implies "participation" in a project owned by someone else rather than outright ownership itself (Brett 2003; Chambers 1993; Rahnema 1992). Thus participation is seen in more instrumental terms as a means to an end of greater efficiency when the actual project "owner" may have different aims. Yet, with increasingly lower barriers to participation, due in great part to greater access to ICTs, there is a noticeable difference between "managed" participation for a particular development project and more free and unstructured citizen participation (for example, contributing to online discussions or community radio phone-ins).

Critiques of accountability and transparency inevitably abound. There are degrees of transparency—a government may make data and information available—for example, online—but how *accessible* is this to the average person? The data may need to be interpreted and analyzed by NGOs or other third parties, but even when a government makes its data publicly available, such intermediary institutions may be weak or nonexistent. Similarly, with regard to accountability, in Schedler's (1999) definition, who is the account provider and who is the account delegator? These roles are interchangeable and subjective. In large government bureaucracies, it may be all too easy to pass on the responsibilities of account provider to another department or entity. A bigger question is whether the account demanders can gain sufficient power and confidence to suggest and enforce sanctions when they themselves may be at risk by doing so, as they are *not* the power "holder". Once again, ICTs have the potential to empower here (for example, under the protection of anonymity on the Internet), but how does this happen in practice? Second, in addition to the concepts themselves, the assumptions made on the causality *between* the concepts may be problematic—for example, that participation will lead to empowerment, transparency will lead to accountability, and so on. According to Heeks (2002), the assumption that ICTs enable empowerment is based on the conditions that (a) data are made available and transparent; (b) this information is accessed by stakeholders who are able to assess it and transform it into information; (c) it can be acted upon; (d) it is used to initiate citizen-government and citizen-citizen dialogue and activism; and (e) government takes action based on these processes. Instead, as Gigler illustrates in chapter 2, we need to understand how humans understand and apply information, in order for it to be translated into agency. In addition, in transparency and accountability initiatives in governance, we need to ask, Who provides the data? Is the information reliable? Is it understandable? Who accesses it? Do they have the means to assess it? How do they apply it? How can they act on it? The impact of ICTs therefore is closer to that shown in figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3 Questioned Relationships between Empowerment, Participation, Transparency, and Accountability



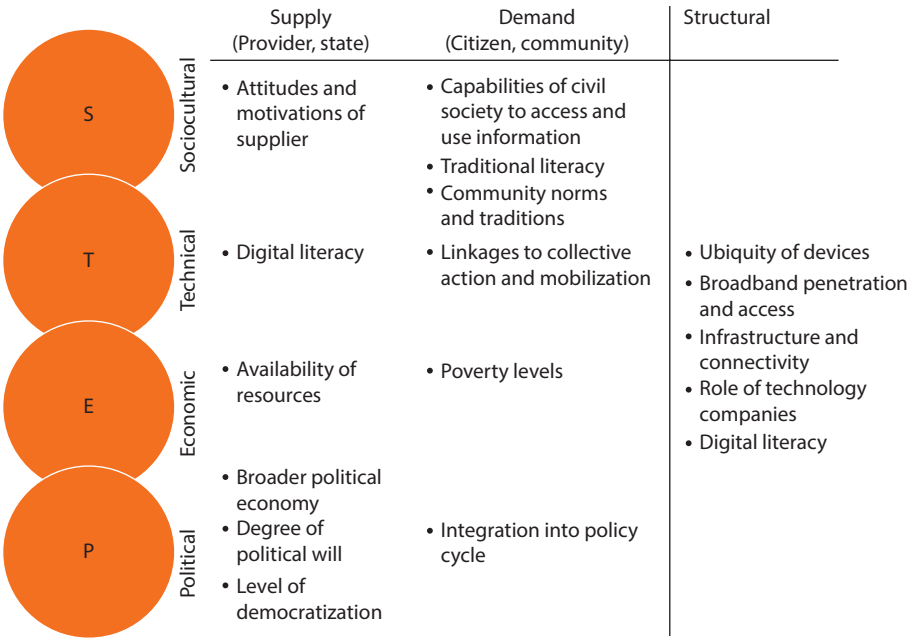
In sum, all of these critiques of the definitions of empowerment, participation, transparency, and accountability lead us to ask, under what conditions and in what circumstances can ICTs enhance empowerment, participation, transparency, and accountability?

A Framework for Analyzing Empowerment through ICTs

Access to ICTs cannot *ensure* empowerment. Instead, technology is a *potential* tool for empowerment. Relevant *sociocultural technical*, *economic*, and *political* conditions are critical for this potential to be realized. These conditions—distilled into what we call the STEP framework (figure 1.4)—are applied in this volume and discussed next.

In the *sociocultural* dimension of empowerment through ICTs, we need to understand the *motivation* for participation and empowerment. As Meer, Sever, and Mukhopadhyay (2004) argue, citizenship is a complex, interpreted concept. To be a citizen infers rights and responsibilities that are conditions for belonging to any group, community, or network, but to become a citizen (or be born one) is to pledge allegiance to a very complex, abstract concept of a constitution (Heater 2004). The relevance of such a pledge is not immediately obvious, especially if individuals do not believe that they have sufficient—or any—rights or know what rights they should have (Anderson 1991; Hall 1990). In this case, some may be more motivated to participate than others. According to Haste (2004), participation is almost always motivated by morals such as compassion, anger, outrage, or identification. Shirky (2009) famously writes of "cognitive surplus": while television made passive consumers of the majority of the world's

Figure 1.4 The STEP Framework



population in the latter half of the twentieth century (and this is no developed-versus developing-country divide, as evidenced by the number of satellite dishes in some of the world's most impoverished areas), people are increasingly becoming not just consumers but also producers because they both identify with these issues for discussion and, which is crucial, have the tools to do so.

Motivation to participate is perhaps one of the key enabling or inhibiting factors to empowerment through ICTs. Shirky believes that, fundamentally, "People want to do something to make the world a better place. They will help when they are invited to" (Shirky 2009, 17). Benkler and Nissenbaum (2006) use examples of commons-based peer production such as Wikipedia and Slashdot to argue that participation initiates and fosters a virtuous cycle of increasing participation and commitment to the values of democracy and community. However, the majority of citizens are motivated only when a critical mass of participation begins to build. A common language of communication here sounds obvious but is nonetheless important—the reasons the Arab Spring events happened in such quick succession include Haste's (2004) motivating factors of compassion, anger, outrage, and identification, because these events were occurring in neighboring countries but also because they could be understood through a common language. However, language does not have to be the only motivator. ICTs enable an empathetic far-flung diaspora to participate in viral campaigns (and are able to do so precisely *because* of ICT innovations) because they identify with the culture, even if a second or third generation does not understand the language.

Here, one can see the problematic link between the individual and the collective, the psychological and the sociocultural. People may very well want to help, but they may not be convinced that their actions will make a difference. How can a lone voice create a global, collective movement? There needs to be sufficient motivation but also an expectation that the result will be worth the risk (Rinke and Röder 2011). If there is fear of harassment, none but the most ardent of online activists and protestors may consider the risk worthwhile. The aggregating and multiplying aspect of ICTs means that they can encourage citizens to participate by creating a feeling that "the power of the people is stronger than the people in power" (Ghonim cited in Hofheinz 2011). However, security features need to assure individuals that their lives will not be at risk if they do participate.

These security features comprise the "T" of the STEP framework, or the *technical* artifacts necessary for empowerment through ICTs. There is insufficient discussion of the design of the method of interaction or infrastructure to support it. What kinds of tools are available? How are they designed and by whom? What kind of infrastructure exists? Is there service provision in underserved areas? Does the technology exist for two-way communication (participation) as well as one-way top-down information? The nature of the technical features is what defines the extent of participation, collaboration, and connection—that is, it brings lone voices together (Bertot, Jaeger, and Grimes 2010). The "architecture of participation" (Thompson 2008, 825) in "Web 2.0" (O'Reilly 2007) is critical. Simply posting information online (Web 1.0), for example, is not as valuable as adding features of searchability or real-time interaction (Web 2.0). Similarly, the tendency has been to group "social media" together, but there is a need to distinguish the features of each—for example, Twitter is enhanced by trending and hashtags (Lotan *et al.* 2011), while Facebook provides more opportunities for adding multimedia (Harlow and Johnson 2011) or engaging in more detailed discussions. At the same time, it is important not to be diverted by the more sophisticated technologies and to remember that participation is also possible through other technologies, including mobile phones, SMS, and community radio phone-ins and discussions.

Another precondition for empowerment through ICTs is *economic*. In the early 2000s, many warned against the increasing digital divide between the "haves" and "have-nots" (Heeks 2002; Norris 2003; Wade 2002; Warschauer 2004). Much is made of the term "elite capture" with regard to ICT initiatives for democracy or participation in governance. The concern here is that because of the relatively high barriers to entry for ICTs (depending on what exactly these are—for example, radio may be cheaper than the Internet), only the elite may participate, which creates a circle of participation: the economic and political elite become more politically engaged, governments only respond to their concerns, and so on. First, can citizens afford the *cost* of the necessary ICT artifact (phone, computer, Internet access, community radio, and so forth)? Second, can citizens afford the *time* to participate? What is the opportunity cost of participation? An *Economist* article gives the example of a South Indian telecenter intending to provide ICT access (albeit simply basic ICT training and access to

agricultural information, not political participation) to an illiterate fisherman who is dependent on an unstable income and therefore cannot afford to visit the center.[1]

One solution to these economic barriers is to lower the cost of artifacts and provide more flexible payment plans—for example, in the use of mobile phones and computers. Another is to use cheaper and more accessible technologies such as community radio. In the haste to embrace technology, a third essential, but often overlooked, solution is to mediate between the technological and nontechnological or between the digital and nondigital—for example, use blogs or social media to organize street protests or plays. Here, the role of intermediaries is critical, whether individuals or organizations—for example, civil society organizations (Bailur and Masiero 2012; Fung, Gilman, and Shkabatur 2013). This runs the risk of intermediary bias and influence. In addition, even if access to technology is made cheaper and intermediaries provide assistance, citizens need to be convinced that participation is worth their time. To understand how this might be possible, the social and psychological aspects of empowerment need to be examined.

Finally, *political* conditions are necessary to foster an empowering ICT initiative. In Heeks's framework, the first factor is the ability to "access" data. Yet most countries in the world filter Internet content and track usage (Deibert *et al.* 2010). How can citizens act on data in the absence of information transparency? In addition, even if there is access to information, a government is needed that encourages or at least tolerates activism both online and offline. Citizens need to engage without fear of reprisal: "If I speak up, I will be beaten up" (Rinke and Röder 2011).

A second political factor is the execution of ICT initiatives. Returning to the inherent challenge of empowerment—one group may be reluctant to empower another that threatens its own grasp on power, even if a nation's politicians are willing to empower them—what is the attitude of the administrators (civil servants and field-level government servants) who may feel threatened by this empowerment or be deprived of a means of corruption (Bertot, Jaeger, and Grimes 2010)? This question is linked to the critical need for a key champion of empowerment, one who has sufficient motivation, influence, and resources to see through an ICT initiative while not alienating or threatening others. However, an important point here is that we can never simply bifurcate the "powerful" and "powerless" in empowerment—there are multiple stakeholders with diverging and often conflicting interests.

Two final interlinked political factors to facilitate empowerment through ICTs are the presence of a free media and external (international) pressure. Underlying both are the factors of transparency and accountability. A free (but regulated) media can bring to light and scrutinize political activity, making governments answerable (accountable). Amartya Sen (1999) famously gave the example that famines could not occur in democracies because criticisms are expressed through elections and a free media. Equally, a free media inside a nation facilitates transparency for the outside world, leading to the potential for

external pressure for change. The speed with which information travels as a result of ICTs also ensures rapid transnational media coverage (for example, the coverage of Arab Spring events by Qatar-based Al Jazeera when media outlets were shut down in Egypt). Both operate on the principle of the "glare effect": when media coverage is given to an initiative, citizens are likely to participate more.

The STEP framework, although simplistic, is an effective structure for analyzing the enabling factors of empowerment through ICTs. Each of the following chapters deconstructs which of the factors are relevant in the cases discussed. In most cases, a key champion, political support, strong intermediaries, low cost, or existent technology are critical factors. However, the evidence to follow also demonstrates that the challenges of elite capture, scale-out, gaps between design and reality, and sustainability of pilots still exist. In presenting these issues objectively, this collection offers a valuable addition to the existing literature on citizen empowerment through ICTs.

Note

1. "Behind the Digital Divide," *Economist*, March 10, 2005 (http://www.economist.com/node/3714058).

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CHAPTER 8

Closing the Feedback Loop: Can Technology Amplify Citizen Voices?

Björn-Sören Gigler, Samantha Custer, Savita Bailur, Elizabeth Dodds, and Saher Asad, with Elena Gagieva-Petrova

Strengthening civic engagement in the planning and implementation of development assistance is not a new aspiration. It has been part of the international development dialectic since the late 1960s and 1970s. However, translating this ideal into reality has proven to be elusive. International development agencies, governments, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have been hampered by time, cost, distance (Kapur and Whittle 2009), and their own organizational cultures (Easterly 2006) in bridging the gap between hearing and responding to "the voices of the poor" (World Bank 2000). Citizens also experience challenges to providing feedback due to information asymmetries (Cecchini and Scott 2003), fear of retribution (IRIN 2008), high perceived costs relative to benefits, and inaccessible channels of participation (Baer *et al.* 2009).

The rapid proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) raises the possibility of harnessing increased connectivity to amplify citizen voices in the development process, thus enhancing local ownership, accountability, and results (Chambers 2010; Gigler 2004). At the same time, low penetration rates for newer technologies (United Nations 2012) and

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high barriers to access with regard to cost, literacy, and hardware indicate that additional considerations must also be addressed. Thus technology-enabled citizen feedback poses not only possibilities, but also drawbacks that must be managed. Addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by ICTs requires consideration of not only platforms, but also processes of stakeholder engagement and the enabling institutional environment (Morris 2011; North 1990).

This chapter asks, to what extent are ICTs capable of ameliorating a "broken feedback loop" in development assistance by strengthening civic engagement throughout the project cycle? It has four sections. The first clarifies the broad concepts of citizen feedback, participation, and civic engagement, which tend to be used interchangeably in the literature, and describes the complex role of intermediaries and third-party actors. The second constructs a five-point systems framework to derive a more holistic approach to integrating technology into citizen feedback mechanisms. The third analyzes primary research collected from surveys and interviews with World Bank staff and other development experts to assess the current understanding of, use of, and demand for ICT-enabled feedback. A final section points to the future for technology-enabled feedback.

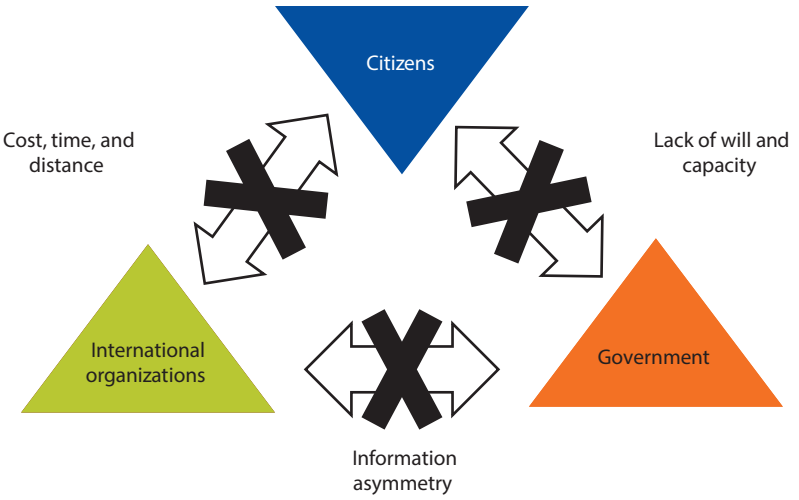
Conceptualizing Citizen Feedback in Development Assistance

Development practitioners and aid critics alike recognize a fundamental dilemma in development assistance: distance, including both geographic distance between provider and recipient as well as political distance arising from power imbalances between providers and recipients (Baer *et al.* 2009; Barder 2011; IRIN 2008). The problem with distance is that it perpetuates information asymmetries, weakens accountability, and reduces the ability of international donors to hear the voices of citizens. This distance has given rise to what has been termed a "broken feedback loop" in development assistance, in which those who receive assistance are geographically and politically separated from those who fund and provide it, making it challenging for citizens to engage with funding and implementing agents in the development process. This has given rise to gaps in the transparency, accountability, and effectiveness of development assistance (Martens *et al.* 2002; Milner 2006). While many development agencies and governments are committed to seeking robust interaction with beneficiaries and citizens, several barriers give rise to the broken feedback loop. These barriers are visualized in figure 8.1.

Attempts to repair the broken feedback loop tend to invoke the broad concepts of citizen feedback, participation, and civic engagement. Before proceeding, we distinguish between these terms and the understanding employed in this chapter.

The concept of a *citizen feedback loop*, as captured by Jacobs (2010, 57), is "a systematic approach to collecting the views of [beneficiaries] and other key stakeholders about the quality and impact of work undertaken by

Figure 8.1 The Broken Feedback Loop



Source: Samantha Custer, adapted from Custer, Novin, and Palumbo 2011.

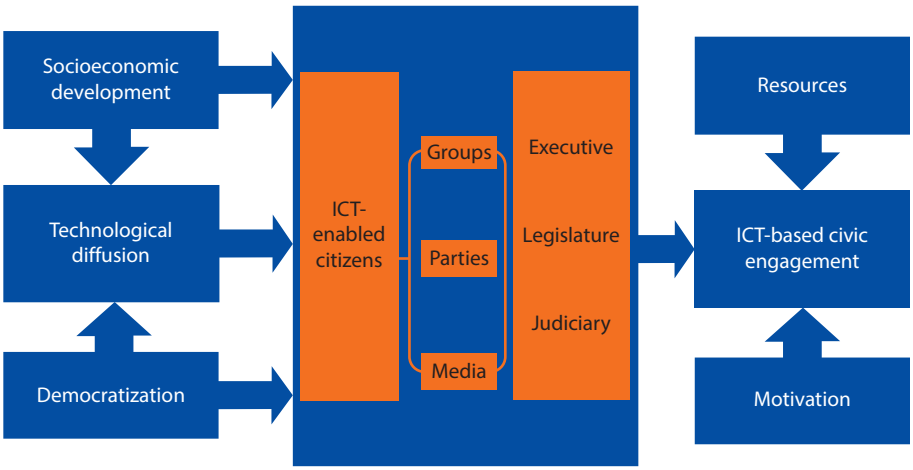
a development agency." The process of citizen feedback in development has been seen as comprising "three, interconnected steps: (1) sharing information, (2) giving feedback, and (3) taking action and communicating back" (Custer and zum Felde 2012; World Bank Institute 2011). The rationale is that feedback will contribute to successful planning, management, and evaluation of development projects. From this perspective, citizen feedback is typically not the end goal in and of itself. Rather, it is instrumental to improving the results of development interventions and achieving other goals, such as social accountability, good governance, and citizen empowerment, that are the driving forces for why development actors invest resources.

Citizen participation—another commonly used but vague notion—has broader governance connotations. More than 2000 years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle defined citizens as *all* who share in the civic life of ruling and being ruled in turn (cited in Mansbridge 1999). Modern definitions of citizenship build on Aristotle's understanding of citizenship as "the rights and responsibilities" of individuals who plead allegiance to the constitution of a country. In development, participation is a complex, contested notion (Hickey and Mohan 2004; Mohan 2001), with discourse addressing beneficiaries both as stakeholders participating in project decision making (Bhatnagar and Williams 1992; Paul 1987; World Bank 1996) and as citizens participating in political processes to inform public policies (Parry, Moyser, and Day 1992). Participation viewed from a social accountability perspective differs from the more narrowly defined instrumental participation in two respects. First, the shift in focus from "participation" to "accountability" implies a shift in power from citizens participating in a project *owned* by someone else to citizens holding donors or governments responsible as duty bearers for their actions (Fox 2007). Second, the issue of *who* participates

changes from direct project beneficiaries to an entire citizenry. This broader conceptualization moves closer to the definition of civic engagement.

Civic engagement implies a broader process that includes not only citizens but also intermediaries and state and nonstate third parties. Ehrlich (2000, vi) sees it as "working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes." Engagement also connotes exchange and interaction. Participation typologies connect civic engagement to various objectives, such as "enhancing citizen power," fulfilling public consultation requirements, "improving problem solving to avoid disputes," "engaging continuous involvement of citizens in planning processes," and enabling citizen "self-mobilization" (Cornwall 2008; Pretty 1995; Schlossberg and Shuford 2005). For Ehrlich (2000, xxvi), "A morally and civically responsible individual recognizes himself or herself as a member of a larger social fabric and therefore considers social problems to be at least partly his or her own; such an individual is willing to see the moral and civic dimensions of issues, to make and justify informed moral and civic judgments, and to take action when appropriate." In addition, Norris (2003, 171) defines civic society as "the multiple organizations buffering between citizens and the state, including [political] parties, … news media, traditional interest groups such as trade unions and professional associations, … [and] alternative social movements such as environmental organizations, the women's movement, human rights groups, and peace activists." The emphasis is therefore on a society comprising citizens, state, and nonstate actors. Norris makes a distinction, shown in figure 8.2, between citizens, civic engagement, and the use of ICTs.

Figure 8.2 Distinction between Citizens, Civic Engagement, and the Use of ICTs



Source: Norris 2003, 15.
Note: ICT = information and communication technology.

We make the distinctions between these terms intentionally because they are often used interchangeably both in the literature and, as will be seen, in our primary research. However, it is important to distinguish between these concepts as they relate directly to the questions we discuss as well as help to unpack the overall purpose and objective of feedback in development. Are we discussing citizen feedback on already designed projects? Is the aim of feedback to ensure successful projects? Or is it broader, to build stronger capacity for participation and civic engagement? And in the distinction between citizens and a broader society (the implication of *civic engagement*), what is the role of intermediaries or third parties? While ICTs were originally thought to bring about "*dis*intermediation," as is increasingly realized, in fact, they necessitate "*re*intermediation"—new intermediaries (or new roles for existing intermediaries) to address persistent information asymmetries and bridge digital inequality resulting from high costs, low ICT penetration, low literacy, and low ICT literacy skills, among other factors. What new dynamics and negotiations are created here? These are deeper questions on the critical role of ICTs in propelling social change, as we are witnessing worldwide. While these questions connect with some of the discussions in this chapter, we focus specifically on analyzing citizen feedback mechanisms within the broader political economy context of civic engagement and participation (boxes 8.1, 8.2, and 8.3 describe several approaches being taken at the World Bank). At the same time, we recognize that this lack of conceptual clarity is one of the challenges to understanding what citizen feedback is and what purpose it serves.[1]

Box 8.1 Integrating Feedback from Civil Society and Beneficiaries into Project Implementation: The E-ISR+

Since 2005, the World Bank has used Implementation Status and Results (ISR) reports to track progress of a project from inception through implementation. Historically, such information was available exclusively to project staff; however, the launch of the World Bank's Access to Information Policy in July 2010 provided an opportunity to make these reports available to the public. Consequently, the World Bank's Africa Region, as part of its commitment to enhancing project effectiveness and results, initiated the External Implementation Status and Results Report Plus (E-ISR+) in 2010. The E-ISR+ is a systematic mechanism for incorporating external feedback on project performance and evaluation. As designed, it is intended to "disclose current project information to external stakeholders, to obtain feedback from non-state players on project progress and results, and to systematically reflect external feedback in implementation reporting" (Kalathil and Wilson 2013, 3). It integrates multiple aspects of citizen feedback, including social accountability, third-party monitoring, and participatory monitoring and evaluation.

Originally piloted in five African countries (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia), E-ISR+ activities were then implemented in Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Zambia.

box continues next page

Box 8.1 Integrating Feedback from Civil Society and Beneficiaries into Project Implementation: The E-ISR+ *(continued)*

The methodology for eliciting feedback from third parties varied by country. For example, in Zambia, feedback was collected from direct and indirect beneficiaries through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. In Ghana, feedback was collected primarily through focus group discussions with civil society organizations (CSOs) and direct project beneficiaries.

E-ISR+ solicits citizen feedback via third-party organizations, such as civil society or private research companies, in order to "add [another] layer of transparency, accountability, local ownership, and stakeholder participation to ongoing Bank operations. … The E-ISR+ Initiative has proved to be extremely useful in providing Bank staff with a credible source of nonstate actor feedback on various projects. In some cases, this data has been used to improve some of the projects and has had a particular bearing on the development of subsequent demand-side mechanisms" (Kalathil and Wilson 2013, 16).

Box 8.2 Complementing Existing Feedback Mechanisms with ICT Platforms: OnTrack

Under the Open Development Technology Alliance (ODTA),[a] OnTrack is a platform that supports short message service (SMS) and Web-based feedback loops between citizens, civil society, government, implementing agencies, and World Bank staff around World Bank–funded projects. The platform enables stakeholders to provide feedback as well as to view, monitor, analyze, and act on the feedback and inputs provided. Enhancing the capacity of implementing agencies to communicate project objectives should empower beneficiaries and civil society organizations (CSOs) to engage with project implementation in their locality. Streamlining the adoption of information and communication technology (ICT) tools should also enhance the collection and resolution of feedback and facilitate reporting on and iteration of project design and implementation. The ultimate goal is to improve project implementation.

OnTrack is being developed in four countries and nine projects: Bolivia (two), Ghana (four), Nepal (one), and Zambia (two).

In *Bolivia*, it is being implemented in two World Bank–financed projects: the Rural Alliances Project (PAR) and the Bolivia infrastructure program, Barrios de Verdad (PBCV).

The PAR seeks to "improve access to markets for poor rural producers in selected areas of the country by implementing a productive rural partnership model." This is achieved by promoting economic partnerships, strengthening farmers' organizations, improving access to productive assets and technology, and promoting better practices among local service organizations. OnTrack enables rural producers to provide feedback using broad-based technologies, such as mobile phones. It also serves as a means of communication between beneficiaries, the public, and government implementation agencies. OnTrack is now integrated into

box continues next page

Box 8.2 Complementing Existing Feedback Mechanisms with ICT Platforms: OnTrack *(continued)*

the official website of the PAR.[b] So far, beneficiaries have submitted 146 messages, and more than 70 beneficiaries have participated via either the platform or text messages.

The PBCV works with residents on the outskirts of La Paz on projects to improve physical infrastructure as well as to strengthen community participation and improve the quality of life for the poorest households. By 2015, the program aims to upgrade 200 (190 urban and 10 rural) neighborhoods of the 539 neighborhoods in the Municipality of La Paz. OnTrack facilitates direct communication between residents via SMS, social media, and the Internet, reducing the time and resources needed to submit a comment or a grievance. According to a neighborhood leader, "It takes time to write a letter, take it to the SITRAM offices, and follow up on the status of the case. We lose time and spend money on transportation. Now the system makes this process take much less time."[c]

In *Ghana*, OnTrack augments the E-ISR+ pilot described in box 8.1. The E-ISR+ surveys use innovative, cost-effective, efficient, and culturally appropriate approaches, including mobile telephony, to collect and track feedback from communities on seven projects. The information collected is fed directly into the ISR reports for projects in small and medium enterprise development, rural water and sanitation, transportation, nutrition, and malaria.

Feedback is gathered from respondents through the use of unstructured supplementary service data (USSD) and interactive voice response (IVR). The USSD platform is in English only, targeting relatively educated groups where texting is not a barrier to use. The IVR platform is in English, Dagbani, Hausa, and Twi, ensuring that language is not a barrier to use.

Respondents provided 4,608 individual responses to 48 sets of questions under four thematic areas. Because many of the respondents did not use Web-enabled mobile handsets, the IVR and USSD platforms will remain the most effective means of generating feedback. In the future, OnTrack will be a key component in the monitoring and evaluation of World Bank–financed projects in Ghana.

In *Nepal* OnTrack is being implemented within the Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF), a community-driven development project targeting the needs of the poorest. OnTrack provides a space for citizens to share feedback, submit suggestions, and report issues with pictures or documents and for project implementation units to manage and track issues as well as publish project information in real time. The platform was recently tested in the district of Kapilvastu and was expected to be launched and extended to 39 more districts in 2013.

In *Zambia*, OnTrack is being used by the Irrigation Development and Support Project, implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, and by the Promoting Innovative Approaches to Periurban Sanitation Improvement Project, implemented by the local utility Lusaka Water and Sewerage Company. Both projects provide direct services to poor rural and urban communities. OnTrack is used to improve project monitoring and help implementing agencies to respond to the needs of citizens.

a. The ODTA aims to enhance accountability and improve the delivery and quality of public services through technology-enabled citizen engagement. An initiative of the World Bank, it is anchored by the World Bank Institute, the ICT Sector Unit, and the Social Development Department. See http://odta.net.
b. See www.empoderar.gob.bo.
c. The PBCV refers to OnTrack as Barrios Digitals, which can be found at www.lapaz.bo.

Box 8.3 Initial Challenges of Integrating Mobile Technology in Feedback Mechanisms: Nigeria's Third National Fadama Project

The Third National Fadama Project (Fadama III, following Fadama I and II) is a World Bank–assisted agriculture and rural livelihoods project aiming to increase the incomes of *fadama* users on a sustainable basis. *Fadama*—irrigable land—has been a source of conflict among farmers, fishermen, and pastoralists. This project adopts a community-driven development approach to empower local community organizations to develop, implement, and monitor their own development plans. The US$450 million Fadama III is being implemented in 35 states and the Federal Capital Territory (World Bank 2010).

In 2012, as part of the World Bank Institute's information and communication technology (ICT) for Social Accountability Program, Fadama III piloted the use of a short message service (SMS)–based feedback mechanism, called MyVoice, in two states (Nasarawa and Federal Capital Territory). The SMS-based mechanism aims to complement the ongoing engagement with beneficiaries through community associations and user groups. It enables local farmers' organizations to answer satisfaction surveys, send in grievances, and respond to follow-up questions from state governments via SMS. For example, it asks, How is your project going? If it's good, send "1." If you are not satisfied, send "2." (Reboot 2012). In an effort to incentivize citizens to participate, the SMS tool is also being used to communicate information back to farmers' groups, such as information on program processes and events, best practices in farming, and local weather conditions. The SMS feedback is then integrated into the project's monitoring and evaluation efforts. The issues identified in this way are addressed by World Bank, government, and civil society stakeholders and used to inform the design and administration of the project in the future. This is combined with a Web-based dashboard to assist local and state government agencies in tracking, processing, and responding to the feedback they receive in a much more systematic way than before. In the words of the World Bank's Merrick Schaefer, the intention was to create an approach that moves beyond "grievance collection … to actual redress" (Custer and zum Felde 2012). This pilot is intended to be scaled up to other states where Fadama III is operating.

An early evaluation found that the rate of mobile penetration in Nigeria is relatively high (expected to reach 79 percent by 2015), but the technological literacy of potential users is low. Only a fraction of participants in the pilot (24 percent) could use the SMS tool without external support, while 57 percent required support and 19 percent were deemed "not suitable for [using] the system." For example, "Only 15 percent of testing participants knew how to use the Reply function on their phone to respond to text messages [and] generally did not use the phone's Address Book application." Moreover, of those users identified as able to use the system independently, 81 percent were men, and most resided in the Federal Capital Territory, a largely urban area, reflecting a common gender and socioeconomic imbalance (Reboot 2012).

An additional challenge was the limited ability of users to comprehend the nature and content of the system as well as their unmanaged expectations regarding the system's outcomes. During the pilot, many users texted their unstructured thoughts, which did not constitute actionable information. There was also significant variation in the expectations of participants regarding who would receive their feedback as well as how and when it would be addressed.

box continues next page

Box 8.3 Initial Challenges of Integrating Mobile Technology in Feedback Mechanisms: Nigeria's Third National Fadama Project *(continued)*

It is important to manage the expectations of respondents in an effort to avoid disillusionment, apathy, or reporting fatigue. To address this risk, the system is now designed to send follow-up responses within a certain amount of time regarding whether a complaint was resolved and to ask whether the user is satisfied with the outcome or process, with a recommended monthly check-in.

The role of intermediaries or "infomediaries" in ICT-mediated feedback initiatives must be examined in more detail. By enabling citizens to make sense of project data, infomediaries can facilitate the link between individual citizens and communal "civic" action (box 8.4). As Norris (2003) notes, these infomediaries may include news media, trade unions and professional associations, religious, environmental, women's, and human rights groups, political parties, and peace activists. In addition, infomediaries can include informal networks, such as friends, colleagues, and family. However, while infomediaries may minimize the risk of elite capture and facilitate inclusion, they also bring their own biases and perspectives (Bailur and Masiero 2012; Sein and Furuholt 2009). The manner in which they translate ICT-based feedback mechanisms on the ground must be observed and supervised.

Overall, evidence suggests that technology can support civic engagement through the creation of new avenues for citizen participation, but the open question is, How do we use these tools to best achieve outcomes? For inclusive participation, citizen feedback mechanisms should ideally adopt a combination of new technologies (Internet and mobile phones) for expansive reach, older technologies (community radio), and no-tech approaches (in-person consultations). Furthermore, it is imperative for the architecture of feedback mechanisms to situate the choice of technology and platform within a broader discussion of citizen feedback as a set of interlinked and mutually reinforcing components. The next section presents a five-point systems approach to feedback applied in the context of World Bank–funded projects.

A Five-Point Systems Framework

What are the essential components needed to amplify the voices of citizens in development, and what is the appropriate role of ICTs within such a framework? Drawing on lessons learned from the literature and World Bank practice, this section identifies five interlinked and mutually reinforcing components that collectively constitute a systems approach to the design and implementation of technology-enabled citizen feedback initiatives. The five components of this framework are purpose, people, process, tools, and environment.

Box 8.4 The Challenge of Digital Inclusion and Incentivizing Participation: Daraja's Maji Matone Project in Tanzania

In many developing countries, efforts to improve rural access to water are hampered by geographic distance, dispersed populations, and lack of information regarding rural water supply (Thomson, Hope, and Foster 2012). Traditional monitoring mechanisms are costly and infrequent, often requiring field visits to remote areas. Mobile-enhanced technologies provide a promising platform for enhancing monitoring and evaluation of rural water service delivery sustainably and cost-effectively. At the same time, significant challenges remain to implementing information and communication technology (ICT)-enabled citizen feedback initiatives. Daraja's project to improve rural water supply in Tanzania using mobile telephones demonstrates how such initiatives can fail to mobilize citizens to provide feedback.

Daraja, a Tanzanian civil society organization (CSO), initiated the Raising the Water Pressure/Maji Matone Project in 2009 to encourage citizens to use mobile telephones to provide feedback on access to water in rural areas. As of 2011, only 40 percent of Tanzania's rural population had access to a water source and only 54 percent of public water points were functioning (Taylor 2011). To address this challenge, Daraja, with primary support from Twaweza and its funders,[a] developed short message service (SMS) tools to enable citizens to report the status of water point functionality in their area. The specific objectives were to "(a) share information about water point functionality with the public in accessible formats, (b) enable citizens to update functionality information in real time via SMS, and (c) analyze and publicize responsiveness of government to citizen notification."[b]

In 2010 the Maji Matone Project was piloted in three districts in the south of Tanzania, and the SMS feedback collected was integrated into a water point map. Although considerable resources were spent to promote the program through posters, leaflets, and radio broadcasts, the six-month pilot received and forwarded to district water departments only 53 messages (compared to a target of 3,000 messages).[c] Although the project resulted in the repair of several water points across the three pilot districts, progress was hampered by the lack of citizen engagement. The evaluation attributed this to "the lack of mobile access for women in rural areas who are the primary household member to collect water [and] the challenge of supporting a project without any certainty of a result or change in the individual's water supply situation."[d] This supports the potential exclusivity of ICT-enabled feedback mechanisms, particularly in rural areas.

As the Maji Matone Project demonstrates, "Systems relying on user feedback are not purely technical and reside within existing social and political structures … where crowdsourcing may either challenge or inadequately address existing and established social norms and power relations" (Thomson, Hope, and Foster 2012). In this case, it could not be assumed that the lack of citizen feedback implied that water points were functioning well. Instead, many people did not send messages because they were afraid that doing so would bring retribution or "earn them a reputation for being a troublemaker,"[e] despite the fact that users could send messages anonymously. The review also uncovered low user expectations regarding government responsiveness to feedback, particularly given "a long history of unfulfilled promises

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Box 8.4 The Challenge of Digital Inclusion and Incentivizing Participation: Daraja's Maji Matone Project in Tanzania *(continued)*

from politicians, government, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and others … in relation to water supply services."[f] The Maji Matone Project failed to demonstrate the connection between citizen feedback and improved service delivery, lowering the incentives of citizens to participate and unintentionally excluding a large portion of the population of interest (women) through its reliance on mobile technology.

a. The Swedish International Development Authority, the U.K. Department of Foreign and International Development, the Hewlett Foundation, the Netherlands Development Organization, and the Dutch International Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries.
b. "Daraja: Raising the Water Pressure," Twaweza, February 10, 2010 (http://twaweza.org/go/daraja-raising-the-water-pressure).
c. "Maji Matone Hasn't Delivered: Time to Embrace Failure, Learn, and Move On," Daraja, December 14, 2011 (http://blog.daraja.org/2011/12/maji-matone-hasnt-delivered-time-to.html).
d. "Monitoring Report 2011: Daraja; Raising the Water Pressure," Daraja (http://twaweza.org/uploads/files/Daraja%20Monitoring%20Report%202011.pdf).
e. "Monitoring Report 2011: Daraja; Raising the Water Pressure," Daraja.
f. "Why Did Maji Matone Fail? 3. Citizens' Engagement, Risk, and Apathy?" Daraja, February 20, 2012 (http://blog.daraja.org/2012/02/why-did-maji-matone-fail-3-citizens.html).

Purpose: Articulating the Broader End(s) That Feedback Seeks to Facilitate

Four common drivers that are evident in the citizen feedback initiatives of World Bank–funded projects are likely to be broadly applicable: social accountability, demand for good governance, project effectiveness, and citizen empowerment.

Accountability is a state "whereby information about desirability, quality, or impact of an activity [is shaping] the behavior of decision makers" (Kapur and Whittle 2009). Implicit in the notion of accountability are relationships based on mutual obligation, standards of behavior, and expected consequences of misconduct (Bovens 2007a, 2007b). Social accountability emphasizes the involvement of citizens or civil society in exacting accountability directly from governments and other actors. Citizen feedback contributes to this through improved transparency and reduced information asymmetries.

Governance is "the use of power exercised through a country's economic, political, and social institutions" in the setting of policies, provision of services, and rule of law (World Bank 2012a). Good governance is characterized as addressing issues of professionalism, effectiveness, transparency, participation, and accountability (World Bank 2012b). Citizen feedback is relevant to demand for good governance, as it bolsters the ability of citizens and nonstate actors to hold the state accountable, redresses information asymmetries, and supports enforcement.

Project effectiveness has evolved as a concept from simple efficiency calculations of impact per development dollar and avoidance of malfeasance to a multifaceted understanding of projects that are sustainable, locally owned, and appropriate to particular contextual challenges. Whether viewing project effectiveness

narrowly as reducing waste from corruption or broadly as communities owning and sustaining their own development, citizen feedback serves a monitoring or grievance function to catch wrongdoing as well as increase the understanding of local preferences, opportunities, and constraints. Finally, *citizen empowerment*, interlinked with ideas of "voice" and "choice," views citizen feedback as a vehicle for enhancing the involvement and ownership of beneficiaries in project decision making and evaluation by establishing a two-way flow of information.

While individual drivers may be evident to different degrees, the motivations to seek citizen feedback are typically complex, and projects are likely to employ multiple drivers. The extent to which initiatives identify and make explicit the purpose of citizen feedback for all stakeholders is a critical component in achieving their intended objectives. Clarity of purpose is instrumental to shaping performance expectations for those providing and responding to feedback, evaluating the efficacy of the mechanism in achieving broader goals, and informing the architecture of the feedback system so as to facilitate the objectives. However, this component is frequently neglected, resulting in initiatives that are poorly integrated, insufficiently communicated, or ill-suited to the purpose.

People: Weighing Trade-Offs of Inclusivity and Complexity in Choosing Who Participates

Who participates is a second important component of a systems approach. Citizen feedback initiatives should clearly identify the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders within the feedback loop. This involves consideration of not only who is involved, but also their roles with regard to providing, monitoring, responding to, or acting on the feedback. There are trade-offs in the degree of inclusiveness of feedback mechanisms and the complexity of managing them. Determining the breadth of actors involved has far-reaching sociopolitical implications regarding who is involved and who is left out, potentially altering the power dynamics or "deepening exclusion" (Cornwall 2008; Mohan 2001). This study identifies five groups interested in feedback systems: direct project beneficiaries, implementing agencies or host governments, domestic third-party organizations, the wider citizenry, and donor agencies (Custer, Novin, and Palumbo 2011).

Who Provides the Feedback?

Traditionally, the vast majority of feedback on development projects has been provided by implementing agencies, third-party organizations, or a representative sample of beneficiaries, rather than an entire citizenry. The use of such intermediaries has been viewed as a necessity because barriers of cost, distance, and time limit the utility of interacting directly with a broad base of citizens. However, the vulnerability of these groups to conflicts of interest around funding sources or "elite capture" may create perverse incentives to skew feedback (World Bank 2000).

At issue is the reality that intermediaries do not simply channel feedback, but interpret what is relevant, deciding how to aggregate and present information. That being said, in developing countries where civic literacy and information capabilities of the citizenry are nascent, civil society organizations (CSOs) continue to play a vital role as intermediaries, helping to track, analyze, and communicate information on public and private sector performance (Gigler, Custer, and Rahemtulla 2011).

Technology-enabled citizen feedback is seen as democratizing development by broadening the base of those participating in designing, monitoring, and evaluating development projects. In determining who provides feedback, projects may focus narrowly on hearing from representative subsets of beneficiaries or more broadly on hearing from a larger number of beneficiaries or even an entire citizenry. Projects prioritizing breadth of participation seek to ensure a minimum degree of involvement by many people. Participatory budgeting initiatives typify projects seeking a very broad scope of participation with large numbers of citizens providing input directly through open processes. In contrast, projects prioritizing depth of participation contend that the number of people involved is not as important as the degree to which they participate. Such projects may emphasize having a smaller number of specially trained citizens who provide input in concrete ways. In between these two poles are other permutations, such as representative participation through organized committees of elected or appointed beneficiaries or mechanisms by which individual beneficiaries could elect to report a grievance.

Optimally, it is best to engage the views of individual citizens to expand, not replace, the contribution of civil society in order to capture a comprehensive and balanced picture. Individuals and organized civil society may assume distinct, but complementary, participation profiles, illustrated by the World Bank's experiences of participatory budgeting in Latin America. Assessing lessons learned from participatory budgeting initiatives worldwide, Wampler (2007) notes that citizens are more likely to participate in discussions of specific public works projects, whereas CSOs are more willing to engage in dialogue around general spending policies and trends (Shah, Thompson, and Zou 2004). Applying this to feedback more generally, individual citizens will be more motivated to provide feedback on projects that are highly visible, proximate, and of shorter duration, while CSOs will be better positioned, at least initially, to engage on less-visible, nationwide, and longer-term projects (box 8.5).

Who Monitors, Responds to, and Acts on the Feedback?

The most fundamental accountability relationship is a "social contract" in which citizens pledge to recognize the legitimate authority of the state in return for the assurance of public goods. In the context of governance, domestic governments are the legitimate and responsible actors ultimately accountable to their citizens. Therefore, to sustain feedback mechanisms and ensure local ownership, domestic governments should be responsible primarily for processing and responding to citizen inputs. Yet governments are not monolithic entities. The challenge is to

Box 8.5 Engaging Citizens and Civil Society to Improve Governance through Mobile Technology: The Democratic Republic of Congo's ICT4Gov Project

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, governing institutions have been weakened by many years of conflict and corruption, and local and national governments suffer from limited legitimacy and weak capacity to provide basic services. In an effort to improve the quality of governance and service delivery, in 2006 the government mandated the transfer of revenue and government functions from the central to the local level. However, government mistrust remains problematic due to "asymmetry in information, low level of understanding of budget procedures, and low engagement with civil society" (Balbo Di Vinadio 2012, 2). According to the World Bank's Tiago Peixoto, "It became very clear early on that a great deal of mistrust stemmed from budgetary issues. When money did reach the grassroots level, community members felt they had no say in how it was spent" (Custer and zum Felde 2012).

To facilitate decentralization, the government launched the information and communication technology for Governance (ICT4Gov) Program in 2009 in the conflict-affected province of South Kivu. ICT4Gov integrates mobile technology into participatory budgeting to enhance citizen, government, and civil society engagement as well as provide greater access to information. While many citizens in South Kivu lack electricity or running water, many have access to mobile phones. Mobile penetration (16 percent in 2013) is rising rapidly and is expected to reach 47 percent (Estefan and Weber 2012). Building on in-person consultations and assembly meetings with citizens on budget priorities, the project uses short message service (SMS) messages, word of mouth, and community postings to invite citizens to assemblies, where they vote on community projects in which they would like government to invest, hear the voting outcomes and decisions of local government, and provide feedback on project implementation and outcomes. Local governments then direct a percentage of the local budget to the projects selected.

Unequal access to mobile technology could limit the inclusiveness of the project's ICT-enabled approach and reinforce gender or other inequalities, but the risk is mitigated by the use of face-to-face meetings. As Peixoto explains, both approaches are needed because "participatory budgeting goes into a level of detail in deliberation that you can't get through the characters of an SMS" (Custer and zum Felde 2012).

Crucially, the ICT4Gov Project targets activities to multiple local stakeholders, including provincial and local governments, citizens, and civil society organization (CSOs). CSOs monitor local projects and communicate this information to local communities in person and using SMS, helping to ensure sufficient buy-in for the program. Developing close partnerships with government and other local stakeholders is crucial. As Peixoto explains, "Without local knowledge we wouldn't last two days … from identifying stakeholders and inviting them to the workshop. They wouldn't have come otherwise; [these local partners] brought everyone to the table" (Custer and zum Felde 2012).

As a result of the pilot, 54 classrooms were repaired, a bridge was built in Luhindja, a health center was created, the sewage system was repaired in Bagira, and a water fountain and toilets were built in local markets in Ibanda. An external evaluation found that, since implementation, local tax collection has increased up to 20 times in some cases, suggesting that citizens

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Box 8.5 Engaging Citizens and Civil Society to Improve Governance through Mobile Technology: The Democratic Republic of Congo's ICT4Gov Project *(continued)*

might be more willing to pay taxes if they can see the link to improved service delivery and outcomes (Balbo Di Vinadio 2012). In the words of a citizen in Bagira, South Kivu, "What I like the most about participatory budgeting is the participation … and the transparency. Before I did not know how much money our city made. Now I know how much we have collected in tax, how much we have spent. And we have a say in how this money is spent" (Custer and zum Felde 2012).

More than 250,000 text messages were sent (Estefan and Weber 2012), but rigorous evaluation is needed to verify the accuracy and content of SMS messages received and to ensure that the approach is relatively immune to elite capture or exclusivity.

Local governments and communities are working to implement another round of participatory budgeting without substantial external support. In late 2012, the Parliament of South Kivu passed a law institutionalizing participatory budgeting throughout the province. The initial success in South Kivu has encouraged other provinces to replicate the approach. Moreover, it has been adopted and implemented in Cameroon, and several African countries, including Kenya, Madagascar, and Mali, have expressed interest in replicating it. Facilitated by the ICT4Gov, local governments signed the African Charter of Citizen Participation at the Africities Summit in Dakar, Senegal, in December 2012.

identify reform-minded champions within government and empower them to achieve gradual change. Which agencies and levels of government should be involved and in what way? Numerous studies point to the benefits of decentralization for improved service delivery (Dickovick 2010; Work 2002; World Bank 2004). By extension, local governments, with whom citizens most frequently interact, should be the first line of response for citizen feedback initiatives. However, higher levels of government should be involved in oversight in order to create vertical accountability, especially in contexts of constrained civic space or low citizen capacity to hold local governments accountable for acting on their concerns (Dickovick 2010; Shah, Thompson, and Zou 2004). Specialized regulatory or anticorruption agencies may also be well positioned to monitor the responsiveness of local government to citizen feedback.

In developing countries with weak governance and limited resources, accountability relationships are complicated by the presence of development assistance and external donors. A persistent question in discussions with World Bank staff and external experts concerns the appropriate role of international donors, such as the World Bank, that fund, but do not own, development projects. Donors and other international actors are interested in capturing citizen feedback in the context of the projects they fund, as well as more broadly in the interest of building civic space and improving governance in developing countries. Their involvement can help to create incentives or build capacity for the government to launch or sustain a feedback mechanism. In cases where public trust is low, the involvement of international actors could give citizens confidence to participate.

However, these actors must avoid undercutting the citizen-state accountability relationship that endures beyond a project cycle or loan term.

International actors may instigate or support development of citizen feedback mechanisms; however, they should not usurp the primary responsibility of governments. This raises two difficult questions. First, to what extent should international actors use their resources to create exogenous pressure for borrowing governments to seek and respond to citizen feedback? Second, if a government is neither sufficiently capable nor committed to closing the loop, should citizen feedback be avoided altogether?

Navigating the political economy of reform and addressing the constraints on who is participating and their respective roles are critical to shaping the expectations of stakeholders, facilitating accountability of government and international agencies, and ensuring the sustainability of citizen participation and organizational capacity to respond. This lays essential groundwork for the third feedback component: process.

Process: Navigating Project Cycles and Avoiding a Tyranny of Participation

Citizen feedback initiatives should intentionally codify the rules and norms by which the project will engage with those providing, monitoring, and responding to feedback. This involves considering what type of feedback will be solicited and with what frequency, how the feedback will be integrated within the project cycle, and what additional organizational capacity is needed to manage the feedback mechanism.

What Type of Feedback and with What Frequency?

Feedback should not be viewed as a monolithic concept, but rather as a typology of the types of information or interaction being requested of the citizen (table 8.1). One typology identifies four types of feedback: complaints, suggestions, monitoring, and satisfaction (World Bank Institute 2011). While this typology shows that feedback mechanisms go beyond complaint or grievance mechanisms, it is important to stress the importance of soliciting individuals' perceptions about the services they have obtained. A key idea is that methodologies such as "customer satisfaction surveys" that are applied in the private sector should also be applied in the public sector and in international development (Bonbright, Campbell, and Nguyen 2008).

Table 8.1 Feedback Typologies

Type of feedback	*Description*
Complaints	Ask users to identify problems with service delivery
Suggestions	Ask users to generate free-form ideas to improve services
Monitoring	Ask users to assess project performance against predetermined indicators
Satisfaction	Ask users to assess their happiness with levels of service provision or their involvement in project decision making

Source: World Bank Institute 2011.

In differentiating types of feedback, there is a need to take into account unique challenges that are likely to manifest with each type of feedback. For example, asking citizens to submit complaints regarding service delivery or malfeasance of project staff may run into "cultural barriers" regarding the acceptability of "complaining" or fears of retribution (IRIN 2008). Other types of feedback such as suggesting project improvements and priorities or monitoring project performance against indicators may require higher-order critical thinking skills, constituting a barrier to entry for those unfamiliar with these activities.

Citizen participation is desirable throughout the life span of a project (Estrella and Gaventa 1998); however, there is no consensus on the extent or form of that participation. "Participation ladders" present citizen involvement as degrees of increasing contribution of time, effort, and influence with each rung (Schlossberg and Shuford 2005). The ladders convey "implicit normative assumptions," as lower rungs of participation are less desirable and higher rungs are preferable (Cornwall 2008). Burkey (1993) proffers a related conception of a continuum from "weak" to "strong" participation, the latter characterized by increasing autonomy on the part of participants to "identify problems … mobilize resources, and assume responsibility." Regardless of the typology, the decision-making burden of citizens increases with higher forms of participation. In fact, the expectations of "strong participation" (Gavin and Pinder 1998; Gosling and Edwards 2003) may evolve into an unhelpful "tyranny of participation," without regard for power struggles or citizen cost-benefit calculations (Brett 2003; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Heeks 1999).

Higher frequency of interaction has implications not only for citizens, but also for the parties responsible for monitoring and acting on the information gathered. The more feedback a government or development actor seeks, the more human resources it will need to devote to responding to and acting on it, which increases the danger of feedback outstripping capacity to respond (this example draws from Martin 2009). This danger was exemplified by the experience of Femina HIP, a "multimedia civil society initiative" in Dar es Salaam that launched a short message service (SMS)–based feedback mechanism to solicit citizen input on its sexual health interventions. This mechanism catalyzed an "overwhelming response" from citizens, generating a sufficiently large number of text messages that the organization was unable to manage the response. Lacking adequate internal ticketing, management information systems, and human resources, Femina could not respond in a timely manner, decreasing citizen motivation to participate.

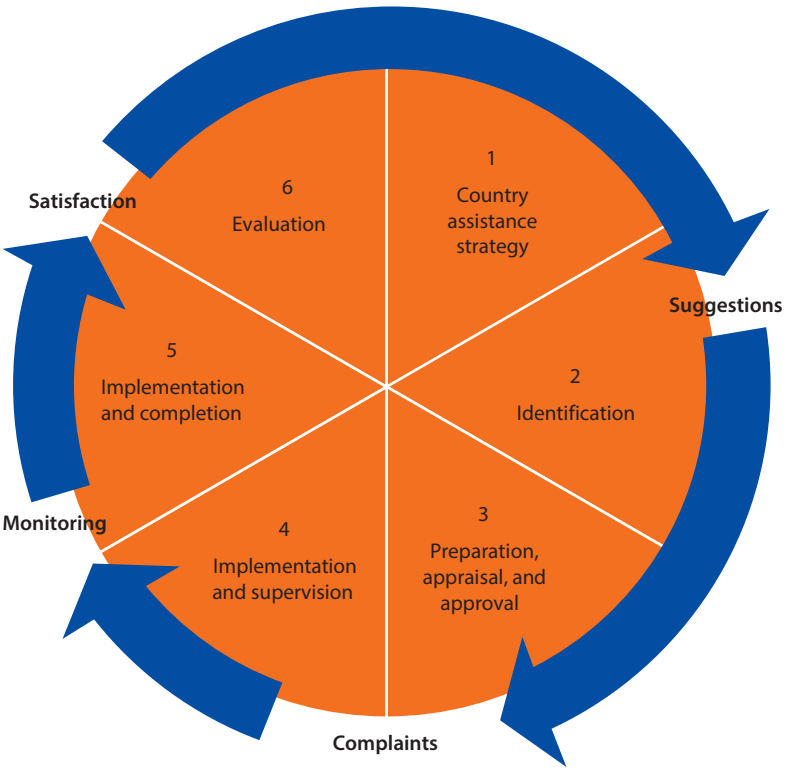
Integrating Feedback within the Development Project Cycle

While international donors publicly aspire to harmonize aid, diverse project cycles are still very much a part of development assistance. The complexity of the aid landscape is such that a single country may have numerous donors with their own project phases, despite the presence of multidonor trust funds that pool contributions. This gives rise to a fundamental dilemma between aligning feedback mechanisms with standing project cycles and recognizing that the

multitude of international actors may make a common feedback mechanism implausible. The unintentional by-product of feedback mechanisms unilaterally initiated by international donors could be to increase the burden on citizens and their governments to engage with a plethora of uncoordinated initiatives. This lends further credence to the importance of government ownership of feedback mechanisms.

To facilitate broader applicability, it is helpful to view citizen feedback in light of three generic stages of project management: preparation, implementation, and completion (World Bank Institute 2011). Ideally, citizens would be involved in shaping an entire project from conception through implementation and evaluation, providing various types of feedback (that is, suggestions, complaints, monitoring, and satisfaction). This idealized view may prove problematic to operationalize, with trade-offs between obtaining richer information to act and increasing the burden of participation. For this reason, the types of feedback solicited may vary at different stages of the project cycle, as illustrated in figure 8.3. Suggestions are particularly relevant in the early stages of project preparation. Complaints and monitoring become important during

Figure 8.3 Types of Feedback during the Project Cycle



Source: Adapted from the World Bank project cycle.

implementation and continue until project completion. Satisfaction is most prominent after the project is well under way and as part of ex post evaluation. These boundaries are porous, and numerous types of feedback may be collected at various stages.

For example, explicit community-driven development projects that feature many small-scale subprojects are likely to include more substantial engagement with citizens early in project preparation. The Tamil Nadu Empowerment and Poverty Reduction Project is emblematic of this. According to the World Bank's Samik Sundar Das, the project seeks feedback "not only in project implementation, but also [in its] design. … [For example, the project develops] a community operation manual for activities, then we take it to the community to go through the entire thing [together], … then the feedback comes [regarding] what will work, [and we revise accordingly]." Financing community institutions directly further cements ownership on the part of beneficiaries by prioritizing their needs, designing locally appropriate solutions, and managing the allocation of resources to achieve their goals (Custer and zum Felde 2012).

There is no definitive answer regarding whether some projects are more conducive to direct citizen feedback than others. That said, as discussed in the previous component, the participatory budgeting experience implies that citizens are most motivated to provide feedback on projects that are highly visible and proximate, are of short duration, and have direct benefits.

Organizational Capacity to Manage Feedback

Substantial human and financial resources are needed to sustain direct citizen feedback mechanisms, which require organizational commitment and capacity to interact with large numbers of individual end users rather than a limited number of third-party organizations. As closing the feedback loop is critical to motivating citizens to participate, governments and development actors should carefully consider the amount of feedback they can feasibly respond to and act on, perhaps prioritizing the quality rather than the quantity of feedback. Failure to devote adequate attention to follow-through erodes trust and negatively affects future participation.

Establishing clear rules and norms to govern the feedback mechanism is critical to harmonizing expectations between those providing and responding to feedback, ensuring consistent implementation of the process, and allocating adequate resources to support the feedback loop. While the impetus for creating a citizen feedback mechanism may be greatest at the start of a project, ultimately its efficacy will only be realized over time, as a culture of feedback emerges that endures beyond the project cycle. Paying adequate attention to the process is essential to sustaining citizen participation and government commitment for the long term. Communication tools for promoting information sharing and feedback collection can either enhance or detract from meaningful participation in these processes. This possible effect should be considered in designing feedback mechanisms.

Tools: Leveraging Technologies to Expand Reach, While Ensuring Inclusive Participation

Soliciting and responding to citizen feedback are primarily an issue of communication. Individuals and groups draw on a "repertoire" of mediums to access and share information. The resulting flows of information and communication form a "communicative ecology" as people make choices regarding the tools that best fit their needs and context (Tacchi, Watkins, and Keerthirathne 2009). In selecting technologies for citizen feedback initiatives, project staff should consider what conventional tools are already being used to collect feedback, what new options are available and their comparative value added, and the degree to which the options are appropriate to the context. Careful consideration of these components is critical to achieving an optimal balance between two important values: (a) expanding reach by leveraging new technologies in citizen feedback initiatives and (b) ensuring inclusivity of participation so as not to reinforce existing inequities.

For the purpose of discussion regarding citizen feedback, communication tools can be categorized as using no, low, or high technologies (table 8.2). The no-technology mediums rely primarily on in-person interactions. Low-technology mediums, while once new, have become ubiquitous over time and are rapidly approaching complete penetration. Community radio, for example, is available in rural and urban areas with relatively low barriers to access in terms of cost, literacy, and hardware (for example, Heatwole 2011; Kuriyan *et al.* 2011; Martin 2009). As a result of technology leapfrogging, developing countries are frequently bypassing traditional landlines in favor of cellular phones, mobile phones, and SMS technology and straddling the categories of low and high technology (for example, Gigler, Custer, and Rahemtulla 2011; Martin 2009; United Nations 2012). High-technology mediums are comparatively newer, with lower penetration rates and higher barriers to access (for example, Baer *et al.* 2009; United Nations 2012). At present, these include various Internet-based mediums, including specialized websites and social media.

In the context of civic engagement, the boundaries between the categories of no-, low-, and high-technology mediums are increasingly blurry. Services such as FrontlineSMS use a hybrid cell phone–Internet platform to aggregate individual

Table 8.2 Spectrum of ICTs

Technology category	*Description and barriers to access*	*Examples*
No tech	Relies on in-person interactions; negligible barriers to access[a]	In-person site visits, interviews, community meetings
Low tech	Increasingly ubiquitous and rapidly approaching complete penetration; low barriers to access[a]	Community radio or television, mobile phones (straddles low, high)
High tech	Comparatively new with lower penetration rates; higher barriers to access[a]	Internet, social media, mobile phones (straddles low, high)

Note: ICTs = information and communication technologies.
a. In terms of cost, literacy, and hardware.

text messages and sync them with an Internet site (Custer, Novin, and Palumbo 2011). Citizen feedback mechanisms increasingly include an "e-option," with the proliferation of electronic citizen scorecards, virtual town hall meetings, and mobile phone–based surveys underscoring the porous boundaries separating categories (Baer *et al.* 2009; Heatwole 2011; Heeks 2010; Holzer, Zhang, and Dong 2004). Ideally, citizen feedback mechanisms should leverage new technologies (that is, Internet and mobile phones) for expansive reach and use older technologies (community radio) or in-person approaches for inclusive participation. In order to realize which is appropriate and how, it is important to understand the environment in which the ICT is introduced (box 8.6).

Box 8.6 Complementing Existing Feedback Mechanisms with ICT Platforms: Nepal's Poverty Alleviation Fund

One of the greatest challenges to alleviating poverty in Nepal is ensuring equitable access to public resources and services. The Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF), financed by the World Bank, aims to address this challenge by empowering local communities to design, implement, and manage their own development projects. According to World Bank senior economist Gayatri Acharya, "The PAF was set up to support the poorest, most marginalized, most geographically remote, and most socially isolated communities in the country" (Custer and zum Felde 2012).

The PAF adopts a participatory approach to development by collaborating with local government and civil society organization (CSOs) to mobilize communities and form community organizations. The PAF is working with 14,831 community organizations and 418,000 poor households in the poorest 40 districts in Nepal. Contrasting the PAF with centralized approaches to development, Acharya explains, "The government uses a block grant system. They build a road because they hear that a community wants it … [but instead] the community [should] receive the money and then [it would be up to them] to buy the materials and build the road. [The reason this works is because the community] will be there and watch it every day" (Custer and zum Felde 2012).

Although regular community meetings are the primary avenue for collecting and communicating feedback, the PAF also leverages a variety of information and communication technology (ICT)–enabled platforms to ensure that citizens can communicate grievances or concerns at multiple levels and to monitor and evaluate the performance of CSOs in mobilizing communities. A grievance-handling mechanism, launched four years ago, includes a telephone hotline that beneficiaries can call or a website where they can post a message. A radio component allows beneficiaries to call or write in complaints or suggestions, to which a PAF spokesperson will respond on the air. This was intended to ensure inclusivity, given that access to phone and Internet is limited in many areas of the country. In an effort to streamline the process further, the PAF, with support from the World Bank Institute, is supplementing its existing approaches with a customized, online platform (OnTrack) that will enable beneficiaries to engage with project implementation units and public officials online and via short message service (SMS). OnTrack provides a space for citizens to share feedback, submit suggestions,

box continues next page

Box 8.6 Complementing Existing Feedback Mechanisms with ICT Platforms: Nepal's Poverty Alleviation Fund *(continued)*

and report issues using pictures or documents and for project implementation units to manage and track issues as well as publish results, project information, pictures, and documents in real time. The platform was recently tested in the district of Kapilvastu and was expected to be launched and extended to 39 more districts in 2013. In the future, OnTrack will also enable citizens to provide voice-based feedback.

These mechanisms are not intended to substitute for traditional monitoring and evaluation, conducted through household surveys and visits by board members, World Bank missions, and government officials; instead, they are intended to serve as complementary avenues. The performance of CSOs is evaluated by the PAF as well as by the citizens and community organizations that receive their support, each accounting for 50 percent of performance evaluation. The citizen feedback provided goes first to the community organizations and then to the district level, to the PAF, and up to the World Bank. A recent impact evaluation found that the PAF has had a measurable impact on household consumption, school enrollment, food insecurity, and the number of community organizations operating in PAF program areas.

Environment: The Institutional and Cultural Contexts

Citizen feedback occurs within an environment of formal and informal societal norms that enable or constrain it, such that "a combination of channels might increase the inclusiveness of processes, [but] by no means guarantees it" (World Bank Institute 2011). Creating an enabling environment to support broad-based participation, including but not limited to the selection of feedback modalities, is ultimately the best way to ensure inclusivity. This necessitates understanding and influencing the cost-benefit calculus of project stakeholders to facilitate greater citizen participation.

Formal and informal norms guide the interactions between citizens, their government, and outsiders and inform the "transaction costs" of participation (North 1990). The costs of increasing citizen participation are often assumed to accrue exclusively to power brokers, who lose decision-making autonomy or financing, while the benefits are seen to accrue to citizens, who gain increased voice. However, the costs to citizens of lost anonymity, exertion of time or money, and potential for retribution are often considerable (box 8.7). The perceived benefits are uncertain and based on the unknown commitment of project decision makers to act. Costs associated with previously proprietary information and the introduction of a new technology with ICT-enabled feedback adds further complexity.

Catalyzing and sustaining the motivation of citizens to participate are among the greatest challenges associated with feedback mechanisms. It cannot be taken for granted that citizens, when given the opportunity to provide feedback, will desire to do so. Yet many initiatives assume just that, resulting in low levels of participation. Citizens may lack time, money, or the informational

Box 8.7 Engaging Citizens to Reduce Corruption: The Punjab Government's Model of Proactive Governance

The Pakistani government of Punjab's Model of Proactive Governance harnesses information and communication technologies (ICTs) to gather citizen feedback on the incidence of petty corruption in basic service administration. Traditionally, information bottlenecks have allowed bureaucrats to request bribes without detection or retribution from senior officials. ICTs can "provide a powerful means of removing information bottlenecks that allow officials to underperform and to request bribes" (Callen and Hasanain 2011).

The Punjab model is structured in three stages. First, government offices record cell phone numbers of beneficiaries and details of transactions when a basic service is rendered. This information is transmitted to a call center via short message service (SMS) or online, and a random subset of numbers is sent to senior officials to allow them to contact beneficiaries directly. Beneficiaries are then contacted by the call center via SMS or a phone call and asked to provide feedback on the transaction and whether any bribes were solicited. Finally, feedback is aggregated and analyzed for patterns indicating multiple instances of corruption involving one individual or office. The World Bank's Zubair Bhatti describes the impetus for seeking citizen feedback as follows: "It's a pretty simple idea, but it has immediate impact. … You start today, collect the [cell] numbers tomorrow, you start making calls, and … corruption levels [decrease] … Why? Because … you can reach the citizen right away; the distance is gone. There is a great deterrence [effect] in the fact that [civil servants know you are calling to check on their performance], and if something happens you can find out and take action" (Custer and zum Felde 2012).

As of June 2013, the program had recorded nearly 2 million transactions, with more than 1.7 million citizens contacted via SMS regarding a transaction. These high numbers could be due to the proactive nature of the program: the government initiates the feedback rather than the citizens themselves. The program also identified instances of underprovided service delivery and bribery. For instance, the following text messages were received as part of the program: "They treated us fine, but no medicines were provided. They provided us only prescriptions for drips, injections, and tablets to fill out privately," and "My brother got a 10 marla plot transferred in his name, and the Patwari [village-level revenue officer] took more money than acceptable" (Callen and Hasanain 2011, 35–36).

Nevertheless, negative feedback was extremely low relative to the total number of messages received: 6,895 cases of corruption were reported, representing only 0.4 percent of citizens contacted by the program; nearly 10 percent of citizens contacted via SMS reported positive feedback. These findings are somewhat puzzling. As Callen and Hasanain (2011, 35) suggest, "There [may be] some stage at which the process is not yet successful in eliciting the truth from a large section of respondents."

The political and cultural context of the program could be significantly influencing its outcome. Citizens might feel a sense of gratitude toward the government for undertaking such an initiative: "Glad to see the government waking up," and "I've faced no problem. Thanks for your concern" (Callen and Hasanain 2011, 33). Furthermore, the Punjab model has attempted to personalize its outreach to citizens by playing a message from the chief minister whenever

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Box 8.7 Engaging Citizens to Reduce Corruption: The Punjab Government's Model of Proactive Governance *(continued)*

citizens receive a call and by having district coordination officers call some of their constituents directly "as a signal to proactive means to improve governance" (Callen and Hasanain 2011, 10). By bridging the distance between high-level officials and their constituents, the program could be generating a more positive attitude toward government. However, citizens could also feel "fearful of the official and report positively despite the repeated and sincere advice of the official to speak freely," particularly because citizens who report bribery are complicit in the crime (Callen and Hasanain 2011, 39). Finally, there may be strong political incentives to publicize the positive feedback received, given that the program was timed closely with national and provincial assembly elections. For this reason, the overwhelmingly positive feedback received was disseminated among the media as a sign of public endorsement for those in office.

These findings call attention to the potential for inaccurate or skewed reporting, even in cases in which the use of ICTs affords users a certain degree of anonymity. Although the program assumes that citizens have incentives to report bribes, this might not be the case. Feedback collected from citizens does not always reflect the reality on the ground, particularly if there are incentives not to disclose information. For this reason, rigorous evaluation is needed of the feedback mechanism, stakeholder incentives, as well as the information collected to assess the program's underlying assumptions and design.

capability to participate (Brett 2003; Custer, Novin, and Palumbo 2011). Alternatively, they may participate broadly *for a time*, but lose interest and suffer from "participation fatigue" if their participation is not reflected in the final policy or product (Cornwall 2008). While the feedback mechanism may be inclusive in theory, those participating may not be equally representative in practice, which exposes governments and development actors to information skewed by self-selection bias, as only literate, tech- savvy, or more assertive individuals step forward (Reinikka and Svensson 2005). This creates two obligations for governments and development actors: (a) incorporating measures of tracking the representativeness of those providing feedback and (b) aligning incentives to reduce costs and increase the benefits for citizens to participate in a nondistortionary manner (box 8.8).

Although critical to the success of a citizen feedback mechanism, considerations of design and implementation may disregard government and donor project stakeholders who have their own cost-benefit calculus of whether and how to respond to feedback. The timing of feedback at project close, lack of standards and processes outlining responsibilities for responding to citizen feedback, and nonexistent punishment for failure to act are all disincentives for duty bearers to move from only soliciting citizen opinions to also acting on them. These are among the many issues that arise in the primary research, discussed next.