

# HOW DOES SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY HELP RESOLVE THE LEARNING CRISIS?

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GPSA Dissemination Note Summary\*



## *Collaborative social accountability: an approach that can improve World Bank interventions in education*

In the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals, countries committed to ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning. Three years later, the 2018 World Development Report warns that education globally is in a crisis. Learning outcomes remain poor, schools are failing learners, and systems are failing schools. The WDR identifies policy actions to turn around the learning crisis. The 2017-18 Global Education Monitoring Report calls for broad based engagement of stakeholders to increase accountability in education policy and service.

This document aims to briefly present pathways that can support World Bank teams working with country stakeholders to address the learning crisis. It draws on analysis from a forthcoming GPSA Note ('the Note') that sets out concrete ways in which social accountability, an approach for engaging citizens and civil society organizations in public decision-making and in holding government accountable for its actions in the management of public resources, can help their efforts.

“Social accountability is an approach to

governance that involves citizens and civil society organizations in public decision-making and in holding government accountable for its actions especially in the management of public resources (Bousquet et al. 2012).”

The Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) supports approaches to social accountability that are collaborative and problem-driven. Social accountability is ‘collaborative’ when civil society actors adopt non-confrontational, constructive strategies aimed at collectively solving problems and delivering results, as opposed to confrontational strategies that are based on the development of civil society’s countervailing power (Fung and Kosack, 2014; Guertzovich and Tsai 2014; Guertzovich and Schommer 2016).

The GPSA’s experience illustrates that integrating multi-stakeholder collaborative social accountability approaches into education-sector interventions can pay off in terms of achieving, scaling and sustaining their results. Collaborative social accountability processes help nurture systemic conditions for change. The Note draws on the approaches taken by 14 civil society partnerships in collaboration with

governments and World Bank teams in 12 countries.



### *Rethinking Social Accountability for Solving the Learning Crisis*

Accelerating learning is more complicated than it looks. Where available, increased access to schooling has not necessarily delivered quality education. Politics and system dynamics get in the way of sound design and implementation of policy that would improve the situation. The 2018 WDR therefore urges practitioners to consider a range of entry points and drivers of change. Education institutions and actors cannot deliver better learning through technical solutions only (for example, adopting a technically sound decentralization reform). Locally-driven multi-stakeholder reform coalitions are the key to support the effective implementation of reforms that address the learning crisis.

The education sector abounds with examples of parent and community involvement using social accountability tools in all levels of the education system, from schools to the national policy level. Although such engagement leads to valuable information input, especially at the school level, there is no consistent evidence of positive impact on student learning outcomes. The tactical use of citizen engagement and social accountability tools falls short of delivering accelerated learning.

This Note introduces a different approach to social accountability's value-add, taking cues from recent practice in the field. The social accountability projects supported by the GPSA take a "second generation" approach that involves iterative processes of collaborative, multi-stakeholder problem-solving. In the long term, the approach helps reset stakeholders' incentives, preferences, and beliefs (i.e. their behavior) to collectively pursue development goals.

**The resulting collective action** – involving education authorities, providers, parents, learners, and their

communities - is helping to target the immediate causes of the learning crisis identified by WDR18. Moreover, because it resets stakeholders' behavior, collaborative social accountability also changes the nature of ongoing public-sector reforms and systemic dynamics. State officials, providers, citizen groups, and other stakeholders are primed to address obstacles to the implementation of reforms. In so far as collaborative social accountability joins public authorities and citizens in common cause it has the potential for enhanced contestability that can also strengthen the formal mechanisms by which citizens are engaged in such reforms.



### *GPSA's Strategic and Operational Insights*

The GPSA is in a unique position to support multi-stakeholder processes for learning at country level. It is housed in the World Bank's Governance Global Practice. It collaborates closely with the Education Global Practice and Country Management Units. It has a broad network of civil society partners who are equally focused on building capacity and knowledge sharing for social accountability. The GPSA is utilizing its comparative advantage to support the Education sector's work on operationalizing the 2018 WDR. Below is a brief overview of how the GPSA's projects are doing so, grouped according to how they address each of the entry points for addressing both the immediate and system-level causes of the learning crisis, listed by the WDR18.



### *Social Accountability and "Acting on Evidence to Make Schools Work for All Learners"*

The immediate causes of the learning crisis are found at the school level. There are a range of sector-specific tools and policies that aim to improve the preparedness of learners and teachers, as well as school inputs and school management. These factors, in turn, improve learning. Social accountability complements these interventions.

School management is the entry point for the majority of education-focused projects in the GPSA's portfolio. These projects address challenges of the implementation of reforms centered on decentralization of decision-making in the sector. Often, such reforms fail at achieving their objectives, because of capacity gaps and power asymmetries that undermine them. Communities often lack incentives and tailored processes to take part in school management. Social accountability fills the gap by improving feedback loops that provide information (to address the capacity gap) and incentives (to address the power asymmetries).

The GPSA's Linking Education and Accountability for Development (LEAD) project operationalized the Projet d'école (School "improvement" Project) – a school management-focused part of the decentralization in Morocco that had stalled previously. By creating better dialogue among parents, teachers and school authorities it addressed conflicting incentives and dynamics in the system. LEAD has also informed policy dialogue between the World Bank and the government.

In Mongolia, the Transparency and Accountability in Mongolian Education (TAME) project introduced Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) in 28 schools, a way to engage school communities that was new to the country. PTAs are a mechanism to solve school level problems through collective action. TAME's approach has proven to be a vehicle to navigate the beliefs of nomad populations as well as risks of political capture at the school level. The World Bank sector team brokered a scaleup of TAME's PTAs component by building synergies with the school grants component of the WB-financed Education Quality Reform Project (EQRP – P148110). This arrangement would allow EQRP to harness social accountability mechanisms created under the TAME project for achieving its Project Development Objective (PDO) (i.e. improved school-level planning), and demonstrates how social accountability mechanisms established under the TAME project can be mainstreamed to improve performance of schools and thus that of the education sector as a whole.

Preparedness of learners and teachers – i.e. their skills and motivations – are the focus of several other in the GPSA's portfolio that are contributing to better education outcomes. They include social protection, public financial management and maternal health and nutrition programs.

In Paraguay, the Ñañoimorũ project implements a social accountability process designed to strengthen the country's Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT). The program provides education and health services to vulnerable and poor populations. The project was designed to complement an ongoing World Bank operation and engage beneficiaries for better social protection outcomes. Early indicators show increased children and teachers' attendance levels. Its lessons informed World Bank projects on financial inclusion and social protection as well as a USAID-funded program focused on school materials and school meals delivery.

The Citizen Voice and Action for Government Accountability and Improved Health Services project in Indonesia is similarly making large strides in improving maternal and child health services in remote areas, and is informing new operations. The Strengthening Social Accountability in the Education Sector project in Malawi emphasized teacher absenteeism. Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN) works with the communities and the Ministry of Education to ensure consistent supply of books. The projects are informing work on citizen engagement in education policies in Malawi. The Making Budgets Work for Ghana project is using social accountability processes towards more effective spending of budgets for and at schools.



*Social Accountability and "Aligning Actors to Make the Whole System Work for Learning"*

The systemic causes of the learning crisis pertain to system-level failures that are both technical and political in nature. Overcoming these barriers (such as perverse incentives and competing interests) and aligning actors across the system is critical, but efforts to date have been less than effective.

Collaborative social accountability can provide a way forward; again, particularly when designed in synergy with ongoing public sector reform processes.

The GPSA's project in the Dominican Republic exemplifies such an approach. Set against the background of ongoing policy reforms, it formed part of a decade-long citizen engagement effort in which several separate but interconnected initiatives have contributed to a gradual alignment of actors towards learning. The alignment in the system is visible in the recent adoption of major policy changes - from increased budgets to improved teacher training and regular learning assessments. Citizen-driven budget monitoring and campaigning, which were the focus of the GPSA project as well as other initiatives, contributed to raising the sector's budget. In the Dominican context, the key to aligning actors behind a focus on quality of learning was to align them in consensus on improving the quality of spending, first.



### *Social Accountability and "Assessing Learning, to Make it a Serious Goal"*

In addition to the immediate and systemic causes of the learning crisis, the WDR18 highlights another problem: Learning outcomes are not measured enough. As a result, education systems lack an understanding of who is learning what, and who is not. **Citizen-led assessments on student learning and school performance are well suited to complement official assessments to improve diagnostics and in turn, improve policy.** Such citizen data can shape the behavioral incentives of stakeholders across the system, particularly when coupled with other political actions for uptake. In the GPSA's projects, tools such as Participatory Scorecards are yielding crucial information from parents, students, teachers and other stakeholders. In Moldova for example, data collected through the Scoala Mea project is used to trigger discussions and actions among and across 100 school communities, including about learning

being used in national decision-making spaces and have informed policy decisions. They also informed the World Bank's Country Partnership Framework for 2018-2021 and the World Bank's Education Reform Project.



### *Leveraging the GPSA to Support Sectorial Operations for Learning*

The GPSA's experience suggests that **collaborative social accountability can complement the sector's actions.** Its portfolio provides concrete examples in a range of contexts. Due to its proximity to World Bank operations and country-level policy dialogue, the GPSA has a distinctive entry point to opportunities and challenges in ongoing reforms and those in the pipeline. These reforms have systematically informed GPSA funded projects in the education sector and will continue to do so. In brokering civil society action that fits the World Bank's portfolio and broader reform system, the GPSA is playing a role that no other donor in the social accountability space can take on.

The GPSA is uniquely well placed to support multi-stakeholder processes at country level. As designed by the GPSA, collaborative social accountability processes provide a vehicle to strengthen coalitions for collective action. **Furthermore, the GPSA can contribute to improved cross-country knowledge and learning on what works in designing social accountability-based solutions for sector-technical problems.**

The following summarizes a few practical takeaways on how the GPSA can support Bank project teams, divided in operational, advisory and experimental ways:

1) Operational: the GPSA can support Bank task teams with coalition-building activities that help achieve a Bank project's PDO, while helping it to fulfill corporate requirements such as the Citizen Engagement Framework. It brokers country-specific efforts, engaging civil society actors in reform efforts. It supports project development, implementation, assessment and

risk management.

2) Advisory: The GPSA could provide advice to ensure that social accountability processes are defined and embedded upstream in the initial definition of development partners' sectoral operations.

3) Experimentation: The GPSA provides an opportunity to fund innovation and experimentation with seed funding. This can include citizen-state collaboration around basic service delivery. All GPSA new projects align civil society efforts to operations and policy dialogue to better inform World Bank teams.

*This document was prepared by Florencia Guertzovich, Maria Poli and Emilie Fokkelman, and draws on the upcoming GPSA Dissemination Note 'Social Accountability and Citizen Engagement for Learning' (abstract published June 8, 2018 at <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3193036>). The authors would like to thank the following contributors: the project teams and World Bank team leaders of mentioned GPSA projects for their project information (by project name: Linking Education and Accountability for Development project in Morocco; Transparency and Accountability in Mongolian Education; Ñañomoirũ Social Accountability Project for Tekoporã Program in Paraguay; Citizen Voice and Action for Government Accountability and Improved Health Services in Indonesia; Strengthening Social Accountability in the Education Sector in Malawi; Malawi Social Accountability Strengthening Project; Making the Budget Work for Ghana; Scoala Mea in Moldova; Good Governance Practices for the Dominican Republic Project and Improved Social Accountability for Bettering Preschool Quality in Georgia); Steve Commins for guidance on the WDR 2018; Jeff Thindwa, Mauricio Ibanez, and Diana Ya-Wai Chung for their review.*