

Chapter 5

Conclusions and strategic orientations to improve support to accountability

This chapter presents the conclusions and strategic orientations to improve support to accountability. These revolve around three areas: (1) basing support on realism and a political economy analysis; (2) taking a systems approach to programme design; and (3) monitoring and evaluating risks and results. These issues have a number of implications for how development co-operation programmes for accountability are designed and implemented.

As we have seen, donor support to domestic accountability needs to take greater account of the realities of power, politics and incentives; to do much more to ground support in strengthening core accountability functions; and to identify and bring together key institutions, groups and networks around local reform agendas. Recognising that domestic accountability works as a system which brings together a number of actors/institutions and incentives may be particularly helpful, and will support a focus on functions and mechanisms that work.

Our work suggests the following promising actions, described below. These raise a number of implications for programme design, implementation and evaluation (Box 5.1).

Base support on realism and a political economy analysis

- Ensure accountability support is political, not just technical, in its approach and design. The use of political economy analysis or other forms of political and social analysis can be particularly helpful in understanding incentives and power dynamics and ensuring a more politically-grounded approach.
- Work towards more shared analysis and pooled funding among donors, in order to strengthen coherence and co-ordination and promote an appropriate division of labour across the local donor community.
- Focus the analysis on identifying the core accountability functions – and core weaknesses – to be addressed, rather than starting with a particular accountability actor. This allows one to work with the grain of local reform processes and to find “best fit” rather than standardised “best practice” approaches.
- Understand the interactions between formal and informal institutions, such as the roles of traditional chiefs, as highlighted in the Mali case study (Box 3.3).
- Accept the need for longer timeframes and greater realism when setting the objectives for support.

Take a systems approach to programme design

- See donors’ roles in accountability support as conveners or facilitators of locally-driven processes.

- Shift the focus of support towards the wider enabling environment for accountability and core accountability functions, rather than particular actors in isolation. More system-oriented strategies may be better placed to engage with sectoral dynamics, thematic issues or operational problems. Any work on particular issues or sectors should do much more to build links between local and national levels, and to address ongoing challenges where isolated accountability initiatives do not go to scale.
- Reflect on how development co-operation relationships overall shape the scope for domestic accountability. Donors need to be mindful that aid can undermine accountability relations between government and citizens. Avoid encouraging organisations to compete for funding rather than collaborating to achieve change.
- Increase the transparency, predictability and co-ordination of the aid. Support needs to be given to improve how available information can be used and acted upon by different groups.

Monitor and evaluate risks and results

- Prioritise approaches to monitoring and evaluating the results – and risks – of accountability. An accountability systems approach should make it easier to assess the wider context and the enabling environment for accountability reforms. This can help develop more realistic theories of change, which consider the incentives and relationships between actors – and thus ensure that project and programme objectives will be more realistic and easier to measure. However, much greater evidence is needed, as are new tools to better measure, monitor and manage political risks and to better capture results in this area.
- In reality, many providers of assistance to domestic accountability are likely to continue to channel separate funding lines to particular groups, organisations and institutions of accountability. Specific sets of principles for supporting parliaments, political parties, the media and electoral processes are contained in Part II to guide donors in achieving more effective, and more politically aware, programming in these areas. These principles make clear that the design of support to any of these organisations or processes must: 1) start with an assessment of the wider system or context; and 2) take care to consider the implications of support for one actor for other actors or institutions within that system.

Box 5.1. Core recommendations for programme design, implementation and evaluation

Programme design:

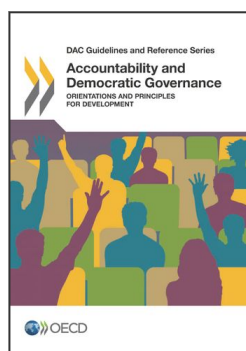
- Draw on available context analysis (and where not available, consider commissioning analysis) as well as evaluations.
- Consider joint donor analysis or funding arrangements to develop shared understandings of the accountability system, and use this to avoid fragmented effort.
- Map formal and informal actors, institutions and processes which shape accountability. Understand the relationship among these actors and systems and draw on this as a basis for designing support programmes.

Programme implementation:

- An accountability systems approach means thorough analysis of the whole accountability system, and then targeted support to address particular weaknesses or gaps.
- Provide support in ways which build relationships, bring together coalitions and support dynamic change processes. This may require different ways of working, including brokering, facilitating and supporting local reform processes.
- Consider working with unconventional actors – such as the private sector, political parties, trade unions and others – as well as on new issues (taxation).
- Ensure greater transparency over how aid is given, integrate aid into partner country accountability systems and improve aid management in the field.

Programme monitoring and evaluation:

- Develop a theory of change for each intervention, underpinned by realities, which makes explicit assumptions about how and for whom a programme is intended to work.
- Reassess these assumptions at milestones throughout the programme and revise them where needed.
- Build in assessments of the wider context and risk management throughout the programme cycle (for monitoring and evaluation).
- Combine evaluation methods to capture medium-term and longer outcomes.



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