

Chapter 6

Introduction to principles for assistance to accountability

The second part of this document sets out specific principles for targeted, support to key components of domestic accountability systems: electoral assistance, parliamentary support, political party assistance and media assistance. Taken together, these principles provide a guide for how to achieve more effective, and more politically aware, programming for support to particular actors or institutions, or as part of a wider systems approach. These principles have been developed through a series of high-level roundtables and seminars on support to election, political parties, the media and parliament held by GOVNET in addition to the case studies undertaken.

As highlighted in Part I, supporting accountability implies “working with the grain” of societies and developing country-specific strategies which fit their context best. This requires greater emphasis on facilitating or convening locally-driven reform processes. Such processes cannot be disconnected from the institutional actors who have initiated them and whose functions involve pursuing them in the long run. These include electoral commissions, parliaments, the media and political parties.

As part of its programme on accountability, GOVNET held a series of high-level roundtables and seminars during which it gathered expert advice in a multi-pronged effort to identify international good practice and develop several principles to guide support to key domestic accountability institutions such as political parties, parliaments, civil society and the media (Box 6.1).

Box 6.1. GOVNET high-level seminars

Between 2010 and 2012, the OECD (DAC and GOVNET) held a series of high-level roundtables and seminars to identify the trends in support to accountability actors and institutions. The first GOVNET roundtable – *International Support for Elections: Effective Strategies and Accountability Systems* – was held on 1 March 2010 with the support of DFID, the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division, Department of Political Affairs, United Nations Development Programme, European Commission, European Commission-United Nations Development Programme: Joint Task Force on Electoral Assistance, and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). A seminar on *Trends in Support of Accountability: Political Party Assistance* was then co-hosted by GOVNET and International IDEA on 9 December 2011. In addition, a seminar on *Trends in Support of Accountability: Media Assistance Today* – jointly sponsored by The World Bank Institute, Internews, BBC World Service Trust and the GOVNET – took place on 7-8 June 2011. Finally, the GOVNET hosted the *Fourth Annual Donor Co-ordination Meeting on Parliamentary Support* on 23 April 2012.

This part of the publication sets out specific principles for targeted, institution-specific support to key components of domestic accountability systems – electoral assistance, parliamentary support, political party assistance and media assistance – emerging from these seminars and roundtables. **Electoral assistance** has received most international attention because of the pivotal role of voting in providing the public with a political voice and calling the executive to account for its actions. While democracy involves more than holding free and fair elections, they are a fundamental building block of effective accountability. By contrast, **political parties** have been regarded more cautiously by donor agencies, being hesitant to

interfere in the domestic politics of another sovereign nation. Yet political parties are an equally vital part of the public sphere, providing the principal vehicle for expressing and representing public concerns within the political systems of accountability. The quality of the party system is intrinsically linked with the quality of accountability. And, as Tom Carothers notes in the paper prepared for the seminar on Trends in Support of Accountability: Political Party Assistance (Box 6.1), party aid is inevitably political, but it has a legitimate place in foreign assistance which pursues democratic and development goals.

In addition, effective governance also depends on a functioning public sphere – where citizens come together (even virtually), share information, and deliberate on public issues. This depends on a **vibrant media** which provides information, highlights key issues and facilitates public debate, acts as a watchdog for the public interest and holds state and non-state actors accountable. The very nature of the media means that it interacts with accountability systems at all levels, and increasingly international assistance is seeking to buttress this vital role.

Parliaments are the key institution for securing executive accountability. While governments are directly accountable to voters at elections, in between elections it is the duty of parliamentarians to hold ministers and their departments to account on the public's behalf. Parliaments derive much of their authority from the fact that a number of accountability institutions usually report to them – ranging from the supreme audit institution, the ombudsman and the electoral commission, through to utility regulators, inspectorates and agencies. In other words, parliaments should sit at the centre of a web of domestic accountability and are potentially vital allies for donors in securing accountability and improving the quality of public services.

Taken together, the principles presented in this part provide a guide for how to achieve more effective, and more politically aware, support to particular actors or institutions, or as part of a wider systems approach. In particular, they stress the need to:

- **Take context seriously:** Assistance to any domestic accountability actor needs to be based on a deeper understanding of local conditions and examine the interconnections between institutions, sectors and actors.
- **Align support programmes with wider accountability objectives:** Reflecting the interdependence of systems of accountability, projects must be tied to other governance support efforts. A programme in a particular area – such as elections –

should actively complement any assistance efforts in other areas – such as parties, parliaments or media.

- **Establish realistic objectives:** Improving domestic accountability processes and institutions is likely to be slow and incremental. Projects need to be based on a realistic assessment of what is feasible, which will often mean having limited objectives rather than seeking to overhaul the entire system.
- **Ensure local ownership:** Achieving meaningful change means altering patterns of behaviour as much as increasing resources, reforming institutions or creating new laws. However, behavioural change cannot be imposed from outside – it must emerge from within. Projects should be fully “owned” by local partners and aligned with local incentives and coalitions for reform.
- **Build long-term support:** Because change happens slowly, support must be based on a multi-year commitment. The assurance of a long-term presence is likely to enhance the relationship with local partners and increase the chances of genuine impact.

Core elements of these principles are summarised in Box 6.2.

Box 6.2. Support to domestic accountability actors

General principles for all domestic accountability support:

- Take context seriously and align support programmes with wider accountability objectives.
- Establish realistic and long-term objectives.
- Ensure local ownership and work with incentives for reform.
- Pay attention to gender issues and inequalities.

Principles on international elections assistance:

- Be alert to electoral risk and the long-term causes of political violence.
- Ground electoral assistance in complementary diplomatic policies but don’t instrumentalise it.
- Recognise the role of regional organisations.
- Be as comprehensive as possible.

Box 6.2 Support to domestic accountability actors (*cont.*)

Principles for political party support:

- Be aware of but not paralysed by the sensitivities of party aid.
- Build on the interconnections between party aid and other elements of political aid.
- Don't confuse party diplomacy with party aid.
- Don't assume common goals between providers and recipients.

Principles for media assistance:

- Incorporate media indicators and audits into governance diagnostics and needs analysis.
- Co-operate with media development CSOs and determine media objectives and outcomes, not methodologies.
- Support independent, sustainable, and capable local media in developing countries.
- Support systematic research on the effects of media and information access on domestic accountability.
- Learn about and harness new technologies.

Principles for support to parliaments:

- Focus on institutional change leading to behavioural change.
- Understand parliaments' incentive structures.
- Don't ignore political parties.
- Identify and address the causes of underlying parliamentary weakness.



From:

Accountability and Democratic Governance Orientations and Principles for Development

Access the complete publication at:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264183636-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2014), "Introduction to principles for assistance to accountability", in *Accountability and Democratic Governance: Orientations and Principles for Development*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264183636-9-en>

This document, as well as any data and map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area. Extracts from publications may be subject to additional disclaimers, which are set out in the complete version of the publication, available at the link provided.

The use of this work, whether digital or print, is governed by the Terms and Conditions to be found at <http://www.oecd.org/termsandconditions>.