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VOICE MECHANISMS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT FISCAL OUTCOMES: HOW DOES CIVIC PRESSURE AND PARTICIPATION INFLUENCE PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY?

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Introduction

Accountability “has been a dominant, if not the dominant, concern for the designers of democratic political systems” (Peters, 1996: 112). It is also arguably the main concern in structuring public sector administrative systems, and has been the driving focus of many development initiatives. Such initiatives increasingly emphasize the role of civic ‘voice’ in ensuring the accountability of public officials to the public at hand. This emphasis is especially evident in local-level reforms and decentralization initiatives, where policymakers see local voice—or the ‘participation’ of citizens in various aspects of the governance process—as a potential source of discipline, guidance and demand in such process.

Many national governments and international development organizations have recently attempted to facilitate voice expression with such influence in mind, hoping that enhanced ‘voice’ in local and regional governments will promote greater accountability in such (with voice having a positive ‘accountability effect’). This research paper asks a pertinent question related to these reforms: Are the many ‘voice mechanisms’ introduced by reformers making governments more accountable and responsive to citizens?

The first section raises this question in the context of relevant literature and reform experience in the developing world. The second section discusses the research method adopted to address the question. This method merges an analysis of over fifty literature-based cases of voice mechanism adoption around the developing world¹ with the analysis of first-hand cases of such reform in South African local governments²—experiences that are generalizable to other developing country settings.³ The third section presents observations from the literature-based and South African cases, which suggest a high degree of variation in the ‘accountability effects’ of reforms involving voice mechanism adoption:

- In many instances voice mechanisms had no impact on accountability at all.

¹ Cases were selected in the desk study to reflect the broad patterns of voice and participation mechanism adoption at the sub-national level throughout the developing world since the early 1990s.

² The South African study involved the analysis of a national government survey, the Project Viability survey of July 2000, 19 case studies of planning reform (that included a participation concentration) conducted by the German development agency GTZ in 1999, and primary case study research conducted on selected municipalities using semi-structured email-based interviews in 2001 and 2002.

³ South Africa was selected for specific study to facilitate comparison of the desk analysis and to allow for detailed investigation of the adoption of voice mechanisms. The subject governments in this study, small urban governments existing in South Africa between 1995 and 2000 (called Transitional Local Councils or TLC’s), are widely representative of urban governments throughout the developing world, both in terms of their demographics and their governance challenges. A national survey conducted in 2000, asking about participation at the local level (amongst other things), yields a sample of 273 TLC’s (62% of the total population) that displays the kind of variation common in developing countries—municipalities differ significantly in size (from under 500 constituents to over 500,000) as well as socio-economic standing and service provision performance. The TLC’s all faced a common legislated mandate to develop participation mechanisms into their governance process—also similar to situations faced in developing countries from Bolivia to the Philippines to Tanzania.

- In other instances voice mechanisms facilitated improved accountability of government to narrow interest groups.
- In yet other instances voice mechanisms facilitated improved accountability of government to society as a whole.

The fourth section develops on these initial observations to suggest why different reforms have had different 'accountability effects'. Based on evidence from cases, the section argues that different accountability effects arise because of differences in the focus and influence of voice expression through reform-based mechanisms.

- No 'accountability effect' was in evidence in cases where voice mechanisms failed to facilitate the influential expression of civic voice.
- A narrow accountability effect was evident in cases where voice mechanisms facilitated influential expression of civic voice, but those expressing voice were from a narrow (or highly focused) social segment.
- A broad accountability effect was evident in cases where voice mechanisms facilitated influential expression of civic voice, and those expressing voice were from a broad section of society.

These differences are explained in terms of identifiable variation in the voice mechanism characteristics and in the environments where such mechanisms are adopted.

Background

Accountability has always been emphasized as a primary goal of governance and of governance reform. The concept has many meanings, however, and is thus difficult to evaluate or discuss in a clear sense:

- In the typical Weberian model of government (which traditionally prevailed in developing countries) accountability involves adherence to a set of process requirements and rules. According to this model governments are accountable if they adhere to established processes when governing.
- In the market and participation models responsible for new public management and democratic decentralization reforms accountability has a different meaning, focused more directly on how government interacts with (and

what government provides for) citizens. In this approach governments are considered accountable if they engage with citizens in a transparent way and are responsive to citizen needs (Peters, 1996).⁴

Recent definitions of accountability tend to combine these two approaches, suggesting that accountability should involve both conformance and performance dimensions. Manasan, Gonzalez and Gaffud merge the traditional process-orientation with a citizen focus in describing accountability as a multi-faceted concept involving the need for responsibility “for government behavior,” especially related to resource use, and responsiveness “to the needs of the citizenry” (Manasan, Gonzalez and Gaffud, 1999: 152-153). Describing accountability as “the central and perhaps most powerful element of good governance,” Schneider suggests a similarly broad approach to the concept, involving “political, administrative and legal dimensions” that “form a rather complex web of accountability which relies on clear rules of transparency, and on the threat of legal, administrative or political sanction in case of non-compliance” (Schneider, 1999: 523).

These definitions help to illustrate what ‘accountability’ is and facilitate identification of questions relevant for accountability evaluation:

- Are governments operating within the bounds of legislation?
- Are governments being responsible in their resource use?
- Do governments maintain high levels of procedural transparency?
- Are political officials responsible for the mandate they receive from constituents?
- Do governments allocate resources to priorities identified by citizens?
- Do governments report reliably and accurately on resource use?

⁴ Both approaches have been interpreted in the institutional literature. In the Weberian model accountability involves conformance to formal rules of procedure and legislation, while in the market model accountability involves adherence to the less formal social rules of performance.

- Do governments have channels set up for citizen interaction and for potential discipline of political and administrative officials?

The Link Between Public Sector Accountability and Civic Voice

These questions relate to both procedural and outcome aspects of governance. Both aspects have received attention in reforms aimed at enhancing accountability in developing countries. The role of citizens in the governance process has been a prominent concentration of such reforms, with the intention of getting citizens involved in the procedures of governance, and making citizens' interests the basis of governance outcomes. Blair, for example, states that, "Accountability means that people will be able to hold local government accountable for how it is affecting them" (Blair, 2000:22).

It is believed that people will be best positioned to 'hold government accountable' if they have a strong potential to 'voice' their demands, displeasures and directives to governing officials. The importance of 'voice' is widely recognized, with Hirschmann (1970) describing it as one of the main tools consumers have to deal with problems of performance deterioration in the private production of goods and services. Samuel Paul and others extend the application to the public sector, with the argument that the force of public 'voice' is imperative in influencing public organizations to be accountable, responsive and efficient in their service provision. Paul (1992: 1048) defines 'voice' as "the degree to which they (*the public*) can influence the final outcome of a service through some form of participation or articulation of protest/feedback." Following on this research, "an awareness" has developed in many countries and development organizations "that the "voice" of the people should inform and influence the decisions, actions and accountability of government" (Paul, 1996: 37).

The importance of 'voice' and participation focused on enhancing such is often emphasized in areas of the governance process where decisions are made regarding which services are provided and how they are provided, like budget and planning processes. It is argued that increased

participation and voice—public influence—in such areas will facilitate the attainment of higher levels of citizen-oriented accountability, a better knowledge of demand and thus more effective and efficient use of resources and improved public sector responsiveness to citizen needs (Paul, 1996). ‘Voice’ is also seen as a centrally important factor in the move towards performance based government (and citizen-oriented accountability implied in such). In making such connection, Gopakumar (1997: 282) states that, “There could be no better way to gauge performance than the ‘voice’ provided by the end user.” ‘Voice’ is also considered a key ‘check’ on public organizations, and a vital tool required if developing countries are to meet their area-specific service demands, generally shaped by the peculiar and often highly localized influences of poverty.⁵

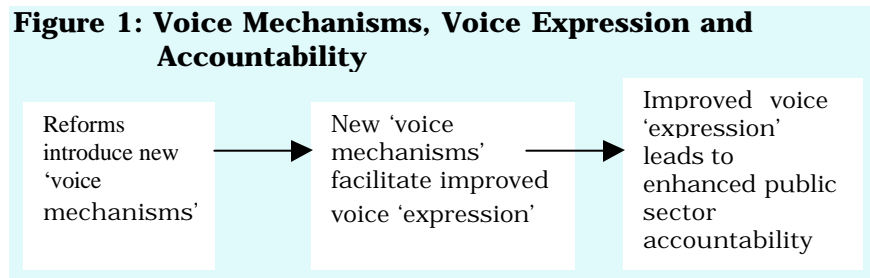
Reforms Focused on Enhancing ‘Voice’ and Accountability

Buoyed by apparent links between voice and one or other dimension of the expanded version of accountability, governments across the developing and transitional world have been challenged to free the expression of social voice in their governance process. To this end, a developmental approach has emerged that concentrates on developing mechanisms and tools that facilitate voice expression at the local and regional level.⁶ In this concentration, “A wide range of mechanisms” is seen to “serve as (*potential*) agents of accountability” (Blair, 2000:27 bracket inserted). Paul presents these ‘voice mechanisms’ as important “options available to improve public accountability” (Paul, 1992: 1054). Such mechanisms are designed to provide regular channels, “windows” or “dedicated bodies” through which citizens can access governments (Schneider, 1999: 530). In keeping with

⁵ Mitlin (2000) argues that influences such as voice are vitally important in facilitating responsiveness and accountability in local governments, and a pro-poor attitude in service provision.

⁶ Evidence of this new concentration is available in national legislation throughout the developing world, which increasingly requires municipalities and the like to adopt such mechanisms. Countries with such legislation in place include Bolivia, South Africa, the Philippines, Uganda, India and Malaysia.

this work, ‘voice mechanisms’ are presented as policy options available to governments or development agencies that are looking to enhance citizen influence over public entities. The reform logic is shown in Figure 1, which represents the argument that voice mechanisms facilitate voice expression, which enhances accountability in the governance process.



Particular references to voice mechanisms are evident in the participations literature, with its emphasis on “Strengthening public accountability through participation” (Paul, 1996). This literature stresses the importance of various tools and techniques in enhancing civic influence over the governance process, especially focused on identifying “ways of improving the capacity of marginal people to participate in governmental processes” (Desai, 1996: 218; Rietbergen-McCracken and Narayan, 1998). Three literature-based examples of such mechanisms are the citizen committees characterizing the healthy cities program in León, Nicaragua, the 300 community-based management committees in the environment and development programs in Ilo, Peru and the participatory budgeting initiative in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. In all three examples, “The extent to which poor groups can influence urban government structures (*the extent of their 'voice expression'*) obviously influences the extent and nature of “pro-poor” policies and activities” (Mitlin, 2000: 7 brackets inserted).

A research question: Do voice mechanisms always facilitate improved accountability?

The effect Mitlin points to is generally the one hoped for (and publicized) when voice mechanisms are introduced into governance processes (and shown in Figure 1): Reforms

introduce voice mechanisms, which facilitate improved voice 'expression, which then leads to enhanced public sector accountability and responsiveness. Reflecting the general expectation of such 'positive accountability effect', Awio (2001: 80) writes of participatory budgeting reforms in Uganda: "It was hoped that increased participation by local communities under decentralized management structures would enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of budgeting, with priorities better reflecting the needs of the local community."

The literature suggests that this hope or expectation is not always met, however. Various authors point out that reforms involving voice mechanism adoption have varying effects on community empowerment and different implications for the 'voice effect' in the governance process (Desai, 1996; Mohan and Stokke, 2000; Souza, 2001; Andrews, forthcoming).⁷ This line of critique suggests that the connection between participation, voice and accountability in developing countries remains questionable. Crook and Manor (1998) find, for example, that reforms focused on decentralization and voice creation in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire do not appear to have increased responsiveness or accountability. Charlick, in his comment on recent studies, states that, "Limited data suggests that even if participation (*and the voice expressed through such*) does expand with the reform of local government, the opportunities for participation do remain very unevenly distributed and local governments may not become more responsive and accountable" (Charlick, 2001: 150 brackets inserted).

The comment raises important questions: Are the many 'voice mechanisms' introduced by reformers making governments more accountable and responsive to citizens? If not, why does participation (and voice expression) emerging from reform not always enhance responsiveness and accountability?

⁷ Much research assumes that participation is about empowerment (Blair, 2000: 22). On the contrary, Mohan and Stokke (2000: 254) argue that governments often use the concept of 'participation' and local government for ends other than real social development. They suggest that research into participation should "examine the use of 'the local' by various actors." Hyden and Bratton (1992: 158) emphasize that much of the policy talk about participation is mere rhetoric.

A Research Approach

Research on participation and voice typically focuses on a limited number of case studies (Pelling, 1998; Schneider, 1999; Blair, 2000; Andrews, forthcoming). This method facilitates the identification of significant detail as regards the specific mechanisms in place in specific situations, the factors influencing adoption of such and the influences such have on accountability. The method's weakness lies in the difficulty to generalize from specific to universal experience (while cases in the literature might provide for interesting comparisons with other experiences, it is very difficult to transfer the findings from a limited study to a general population).

To retain the strength of this approach but also promote generalizability beyond individual cases, the current study involved the analysis of two information sources:

- First, over fifty literature-based cases were analyzed. This meta-analysis approach facilitated both a general view (across cases) and a specific view (within selected cases) of experience with voice and voice mechanism adoption in developing countries.
- Second, the literature-based analysis was supplemented with a study of participations and voice mechanism adoption in South Africa between 1995 and 2000.⁸ A national survey indicated which kinds of participation mechanisms municipalities adopted during this period.⁹ The sample of 273 municipalities allowed for a general view of the kinds of mechanisms in place, and also facilitated the identification of specific municipal experiences warranting further study. These experiences were examined using cases conducted by the German development agency GTZ and first hand email correspondence and site visits.

The research approach is fairly novel in that it combines secondary analysis (the case studies) with primary analysis

⁸ This situation relates well to that in countries throughout the developing world, characterized by transition, decentralization, and an accountability focus (with local governments required to increase their citizen emphasis and to manage resources effectively and efficiently) (Africa, 1999).

⁹ The Project Viability Survey was conducted by the national Department of Provincial and Local Government.

(the South African study) as well as large sample analysis (of the cases and the South African survey) with specific analysis (of individual literature-based and South African cases). This research method is considered appropriate for addressing the questions at hand in a reliable way, reflecting a form of triangulation necessary to investigate complex social situations. This triangulation of different means of data collection increases the reliability of the information reported on and of inferences based upon such (Yin, 1998, Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Observations About the Link Between Voice, Voice Mechanisms and Accountability

In order to address the research questions, this study sought to examine whether accountability effects associated with different reforms were as variable as papers like Mohan and Stokke (2000) and Charlick (2001) represent them to be. The first step in such search involved identifying ways in which voice can be expected to improve accountability. On the basis of such 'accountability indicators', cases were examined for evidence of any influence voice, as expressed through the new voice mechanisms, may have had on accountability.

Identifying 'Accountability Indicators'

Broad sets of measures were identified as indicators of 'accountability effects,' reflecting the broad accountability definitions discussed earlier (that merge considerations of conformance and performance, procedure and outcomes). General indicators, with examples of experience, are:

- *Changes in resource responsibility*: Fiscal responsibility is a key aspect of accountability and involves official concern for public revenues and for behavior within codified fiscal processes. Feld and Kirchgassner (1999) argue that direct democracies in which strong voice expression is allowed tend to be more fiscally responsible than weak or indirect democracies (in which weak voice expression is evident).¹⁰ Social voice expressed through

¹⁰ Their argument is that voice creates a social disciplinary device that forces government officials to consider the revenues they raise seriously, and ensures that government officials behave within the socially

Participatory Poverty Assessments in Uganda appears to have had a positive effect on this accountability aspect, increasing the quality of money management in the education sector (Reinikka, 1999; Robb, 2000). In Cebu City, business has been effective in using voice mechanisms to influence government spending behavior, so as to control tax and debt burdens (Etamadi, 2000: 62).

- *Changes in responsiveness and performance:* Within a context of fiscal responsibility, public sector 'accountability' also has a dimension of responsiveness. Governments should be accountable for how they spend as well as how much they spend. Andrews (2002) uses a measure of service expenditure allocations to indicate whether South African municipalities adopting new participation mechanisms are more responsive to citizens and accountable for the 'developmental' mandate embodied in legislation.¹¹ Faguet (2000) uses this approach in evaluating the contribution of decentralization and voice mechanisms like the Popular Participation Law in Bolivia. The voice effect of the participatory budgeting initiative in Bello Horizonte is seen to facilitate accountable government in this light, with community activist Nadia deVillefort stating: "Although I still do not have the exact statistics about less poverty, I do know that life conditions of those living on the slopes regarding housing, sanitation, paving of roads and slope containment have really improved" (ESSET, 2000: 4). Similarly, the voice effect of public budget hearings in Villa Elisa, Paraguay, have led to significant budget allocations adjustments (in line with social demand): "Of the 98 petitions submitted, 55 percent received a favorable response and were included

determined and agreed code of fiscal management (including accounting rules). In relating to public choice theory, the argument is that "the principal-agent problem inherent in (more or less) representative democracies becomes less severe" when citizen participation and access is institutionalized and governments are made more accountable to local citizens (Feld and Kirchgassner, 1999: 153).

¹¹ This mandate required local governments to provide high class services to an expanded constituency in a short period of time.

in the projects slated for fiscal year 1998” (Domecq, 1998: 6).

- *Changes in process transparency:* Accountability and transparency are generally used as interchangeable terms in the reform literature. If voice mechanisms increase transparency in governance processes, they are also understood to have a positive effect on accountability. This was not the case in the South African municipality of Lichtenburg where participants in public meetings and committees were still isolated from decision-making processes and were not even given feedback on their own interactions (DCD-GTZ, 1999: North-West study 5). In Tlalmanalco, Mexico the municipal-level participatory planning process led to “the people of Tlalmanalco” developing a new Municipal development Plan in April 1997. The plan, embodying civic voice, did not enhance transparency in the early years: “Unfortunately, after the plan was approved, the municipal authorities were reluctant to implement it and not only failed to meet the commitments they had made but even secretly changed the document and produced a new version” (Moctezuma, 2001: 128). The process transparency was radically enhanced following this, as the community developed monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure accurate information provision.¹²
- *Changes in corruption:* The reform literature also suggests a link between accountability and corruption, arguing that governments with high levels of accountability are less corrupt. As an indicator of accountability, therefore, reported reductions in corruption in districts in Rajasthan, India suggest a positive accountability effect of social auditing mechanisms in those districts (with the literature showing links between the operation of the mechanisms and the reduction in corruption) (Jenkins and Goetz, 1999). As regards Uganda’s participatory budgeting

¹² Participatory monitoring was introduced partly so that NGOs leading the participatory planning process could evaluate the effect of voice on accountability and responsiveness, as evident in Moctezuma’s comment that, “The PUCSN (collaborative entity)...hopes to measure the efficacy of its interventions...” (Moctezuma, 2001: 131).

initiative, however, evidence suggests that “this participatory process is sometimes undermined by the reports of corruption including embezzlement and fraud that are reported regularly by The Public Accounts Committee of Parliament (PAC), the Auditor General’s reports, and the Inspector General of Government (IGG)” (Gariyo, 2000: 2).

- *Changes in political/administrative accountability*: A final area in which accountability effects were identified involved political and administrative accountability. Officials are expected to be more accountable, in this line of thought, where they are forced to relate to citizens in a responsive way. Voice mechanisms that facilitated the development of relational links and reward and redress avenues that tied officials more closely to citizens were seen to enhance accountability. District level democracy and the Participatory District Development Programme (PDDP) in Nepal had a positive effect on such accountability, bringing political representatives closer to their constituencies and forcing them to be more responsive. “The accountability of elected officials and local institutions” is seen to be the most important success factor arising from increased civic voice (through elections and the PDDP). In the words of one political representative: “They (citizens) will not vote for us again, unless I earn the total trust of the people, unless they believe that what I am doing benefits them, and makes their lives easier, and unless we show integrity and commitment” (Dixit, 2000: 16; UNDP, 2000).

Observed Difference in ‘Accountability Effects’

When these indicators were combined, and evidence collected on the strength of such,¹³ it became apparent that there was varied experience as far as the accountability effect of voice and reforms involving the adoption of voice mechanisms. This finding confirms the comments from Charlick and others cited earlier, as well as research by authors like Andrews (2002) who shows that different South African municipalities adjusted their fiscal allocations

¹³ With the authors making subjective judgments based on case and other evidence.

behavior differently after adopting voice mechanisms, and Schneider (1999) who finds that some voice mechanisms (like the Malaysian Public Complaints Bureau) have a positive effect on accountability,¹⁴ while others (like Bangladesh NGOs and new election laws preserving seats for women in local government to facilitate their voice in Bangladesh) have a “rare” impact on government (Schneider, 1999: 528-9). The study conducted here led to the identification of three types of accountability effect associated with voice mechanism adoption: no (or negative) accountability effects, narrow accountability effects and broad accountability effects.

Experiences Where Voice, Voice Mechanisms Have No ‘Accountability Effect’

The first kind of accountability effect identified from the sample of cases and South African experience is that where voice mechanisms have no effect or a negative effect on accountability. Such effects are difficult to find in the board literature on participation and voice-based reform, as they generally suggest reform failure. The literature is largely focused on disseminating what could be called ‘best practices’ in reform and thus seldom provides evidence of such failure (in many cases there is little evidence provided of actively positive results either, which makes it difficult to provide any kind of assessment of the effects voice mechanisms have had on governance systems and accountability). The South African study provides a good counter to the literature in this sense. Without the ‘best practice’ bias, the study reveals that many cases of voice expression through adopted voice mechanisms in local governments do not improve accountability (and in some cases could lead to less accountability).

While a general econometric analysis suggests that any effort at incorporating citizens in budget and planning processes in South African municipalities enhances the accountability of local governments to the national service expansion mandate (and responsiveness to local service

¹⁴ Schneider says that the Public Complaints Bureau had an effect of increasing “transparency and accountability in the public sector,” as well as improving responsiveness and enhancing public awareness of governance reforms (Schneider, 1999: 529).

demand),¹⁵ more detailed study of individual cases shows that voice and participation mechanisms do not always have positive accountability effects. Evidence from detailed cases of participatory reform linked to the planning-budgeting initiative called the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) shows that participatory mechanisms are “not affecting the outcomes of the plans being prepared” (The Planning Initiative, 1999: 11). In some cases the IDP-related participatory reforms, focused on technical planning, could actually be reducing the accountability effects of civic voice. This is suggested in a multiple case study which finds “a decline in participation related to a non-empowering way of involving people” (DCD-GTZ, 1999: 6). It appears that, because the planning reforms were “viewed as highly technical,” they facilitated a process by which technical experts could decrease planning and budgeting transparency (in the name of ‘doing the plan correctly’) and limit “participation to certain (*and immaterial*) parts of the process—leaving other crucial elements to the dictates of technocrats” (PLANACT, 1999: 3, brackets inserted).

This evidence relates to many cases in which new ‘voice mechanisms’ did not improve accountability in South African municipalities, measured on any of the dimensions. In the uThungulu municipality, for example, the council held workshops in which “women, youths and the poorer strata of society were not adequately represented.” The new workshops did not have a systematic effect on budgets or spending activities (either how much was spent or how money was allocated), transparency, corruption or citizen/government relationships. Explicitly negative comments relate to the allocations, transparency and relational dimensions of

¹⁵ In Andrews (2002) an index variable representing the strength of the participatory mechanism developed at the local level (a composite of answers to questions about adoption of participation paths in budget processes, facilitation of help desks, provision of response mechanisms associated with help desks and such) was found to have a positive and significant effect on the degree to which municipalities expanded their real service expenditures in the 1995-2000 period. Service expansion was a key focus of the ‘developmental mandate’ incorporated in national local government policy and legislation. Responsiveness to service need and to this mandate is a central factor in overall municipal accountability.

accountability. Instead of voices from workshops influencing allocations, for example, the participatory approach is described as “mere rhetoric” with dominant interest groups able to exert their influence “without checks and balances”—even though voice mechanisms were in place. The process is further described as having no ‘transparent’ methodology, and the case report states explicitly that the participation mechanism did nothing to change the way government related to its citizens: “Neither scanning people’s priorities nor involving people in the decision making process (and allowing them to take over responsibilities) were conceptualized (as part of) how participation was organized” (DCD-GTZ, 1999: KwaZulu-Natal study 10-16).

Another example of a voice mechanism adoption with a low accountability effect is the mixture of public meetings and planning committees in the town of Cradock. Case reports indicate that civic voices emanating from the meetings and committees have had little effect on the budgeting process: “The poor link between technical planning components and community contributions jeopardize the extent to which communities would influence the planning outcome” (DCD-GTZ, 1999: Eastern Cape study 24-5). There is further evidence that the council still relates to its citizens in a top-down, controlling manner, largely ignoring their voice:

“The lack of recognizing and using information generated in workshops can be illustrated by the following examples:

- 1) Workshop participants raised a concern regarding influx from farming community. This emphasized the need for cooperative planning... Unfortunately this was not explored.
- 2) The lack of participation in the planning process is mentioned in the workshop. This would have provided an excellent opportunity to explore the reasons and develop possible solutions” but such opportunity was not taken (DCD-GTZ, 1999: Eastern Cape study 24).

An example of a similar accountability effect in the broader international literature is Pelling’s description of participatory planning and project implementation in Guyanese local authorities. Voice mechanisms in this case facilitated participation of specific groups offering expertise or support to the ruling party or controlling administrators. This meant that, “despite a rhetoric of limited but inclusive participation

in decision-making the national framework for participation continued to exclude large sectors of the population” (Pelling, 1998: 478). The participation program focused on engaging communities only where they were seen to contribute to the functioning of status-quo administrative and political processes. Contributions (even by invited groups) had no material influence on who governed or how they governed, however, as officials tended to value and consider contributions only where they reflected established interests (which were already driving the governance process). Pelling (1998: 481) implies that, despite the rhetoric about participation and voice, the decentralized governments were neither bottoms-up nor inclusive: there was no community accountability as a result, a lack of transparency characterized decision-making, and there was an absence of community-level information dissemination and decision-making.

A second example of a reform in which voice mechanisms have been adopted with limited accountability gains comes from Bolivia where a local participatory planning reform was developed in response to the Law of Popular Participation in the early 1990s. According to this law “all municipal governments were legally obliged to prepare five-year Municipal Development Plans (MDP’s) in accordance with the government Manual of Participatory Municipal Planning” (Goudsmit and Blackburn, 2001: 588). The mechanism was introduced in conjunction with others, like the Vigilance Committees. In an econometric analysis similar to that done by Andrews in the South African case, Faguet (2000: 31) finds that such new localized voice mechanisms did generally affect public spending outcomes (an important accountability indicator) in Bolivia: “Decentralization did change local and national investment patterns in Bolivia, and...local preferences and needs are key to understanding these changes.” As with the South African example, however, case-based research shows that this general result fails to capture the variation in specific experiences:

- Goudsmit and Blackburn (2001) found, for example, that the new voice mechanisms often had no effect on fiscal outcomes (which were rather determined through negotiations between national and district governments).
- They also question the degree to which citizen voice mechanisms have effected improved transparency:

“planning teams have preferred to work behind closed doors (i.e. to get the job done as quickly as possible)” limiting civic voice into planning decisions, or transparency regarding the decision-making processes in such (Goudsmit and Blackburn, 2001: 593).

The general idea in such situations is that voice mechanisms adopted with the publicized intention of improving accountability, do not always have such effect. It is possible for governments to introduce participatory planning mechanisms, public meeting agendas or citizen committees without such mechanisms facilitating the kind of voice expression that enhances accountability in the governance process.

Experiences Where Voice, Voice Mechanisms Have a Narrow ‘Accountability Effect’

The second kind of accountability effect identified from the sample of cases and South African experience is that where voice mechanisms have a positive, though narrow, effect on accountability. What this means is that, on balance, the mechanism has a marked positive effect on accountability, but not to society as a whole. Rather, mechanisms in these situations focus governments on narrow segments of society. The mechanism has the effect of increasing the responsibility or responsiveness of public organizations to certain social voices, for example, or of enhancing transparency in the budgeting process for specific groups.

About sixty percent of the literature-based cases can be located in this category. An example is the participatory budgeting mechanism in Uganda, in which District Budget Conferences are held to elicit comment about government budgets. Evidence suggests that these mechanisms have effected improved fiscal accountability in governments, as evidenced through allocation adjustments and implementation improvements. In this light Gariyo (2000:1) simply states, “we can claim that there has been some impact on the budgetary policy formulation.” There is evidence of an increased incidence of corruption opportunity associated with the adoption of the mechanism, which tempers the positive effect on accountability. On balance, however, it appears as if the mechanism has opened the governance process to social voices, improved fiscal accountability and transparency and

facilitated a new citizen-orientation in some areas of government—generally, a positive accountability effect.

The voices speaking through the Budget Conferences and representing the parties to whom government now finds itself accountable are limited, however:

“The majority of the citizens of Uganda do not influence budgetary processes and policy formulation. This is because while they have a direct interest as taxpayers in the benefits, the mechanisms for constructing budgets are too complex and require skills and knowledge for this to happen. Thus only a small section of the elite has to date been able to influence the budgetary process and policy formulation in Uganda. These are drawn from the NGO sector, the academicians and researchers, the influential large business concerns through the Uganda Manufacturers’ Association.” (Gariyo, 2000: 1).

The general impression of the participatory budgeting voice mechanism in Uganda is thus that it has makes government more accountable to select social groups, influential NGOs, academics and leading business interests. This is a positive, though narrow, accountability effect.

This accountability effect is also in evidence in a small subset of South African municipalities, including Bothaville in the Free State. In this town a ‘Representative Structure’ and ‘Management Team’ facilitates participation by select members representing established community-based organizations (which appear to be related to political parties or to business). Participation in this case is explicitly described as narrow (because of the reliance on organized channels rather than more open forms of public access) (DCD-GTZ, 1999: Free State study 25, 26). The Representative Structure is proving influential in transmitting the narrow voices, however, serving as “an effective base for information flows and participation.” The voices expressed through the mechanism appear to be influencing fiscal accountability, as decisions taken by the structure are fed back to the council and have a defined and marked effect on planning outcomes (DCD-GTZ, 1999: Free State study 26). The mechanisms also seem to have enhanced access of specific community representatives (the narrow group participating in the process) to the budget process—a transparency improvement. The narrow accountability effect is evident in the municipality’s new development plan, which

reflects the voice of the Representative Structure, especially its specific interests and focus, providing “very little information...on issues of poverty, health education and access to services” (DCD-GTZ, 1999: Free State study 28-29).

Such voice mechanisms facilitate some civic influence over governing officials and make governments accountable to parties outside of the public structure. The fact that the groups to whom governments are held accountable are so narrowly defined raises some interesting questions, however. In the first place, one has to ask whether the formal voice mechanisms (the participatory planning processes in Bolivia and Representative Structures in Bothaville) are really necessary to facilitate the kinds of voice expression that they do. In many instances the groups expressing themselves through such mechanisms (the wealthy, the powerful, the educated, and the politically connected) could reasonably be expected to develop their own informal channels of voice expression and influence (without the costs of a reform or the time taken to develop a complex voice mechanism). In the second place, there are concerns that narrow accountability relationships developed through such mechanisms facilitate government capture. This is an especially important consideration at the local level in developing countries, where social inequalities often create the conditions for such capture (by educated, wealthy elites, for example) (Oates, 1993). Voice mechanisms that fail to counter such inequalities can easily lead to municipal capture and ultimately stimulate a governance system in which there are low levels of accountability to vulnerable groups.¹⁶

¹⁶ The potential for reforms involving citizen participation and voice enhancement to facilitate government capture is reflected in concerns Dolny expresses regarding work with cooperatives in Mozambique. Dolny (2001: 27) attempted to improve accounting and financial literacy among members of agricultural cooperatives, to enhance their ability to interact and communicate (and voice their presence) to district and provincial administrators. Dolny explains that she “was committed to the idea that each cooperative would have a group of members who understood their own accounts” such that the people could be “in charge of their own affairs.” She emphasized training a group of people in each cooperative so that individuals would not be empowered to the point that they could capture the entity: “...The quest to create a group who had shared knowledge was also an insurance attempt to make rip-offs more difficult. There were too many stories about the corruption that had harmed many

The Howick municipality in South Africa is an example of a positive, though narrow, accountability effect associated with voice mechanism adoption in which signs of capture are apparent. The voice mechanism introduced in the setting is focused on the planning process. Attendance at community meetings is through invitation only and business leaders dominate, with a member of the National Business Initiative actually facilitating the process.¹⁷ Business leaders in the planning committee elected through such meetings appear to have set the planning agenda and determined whose voices would be heard in plenary and private. The narrow business voice has proved influential through the mechanism, with the municipality being active in developing tourism-related infrastructure (R15 billion worth) while decreasing spending on other areas (such as direct services in poor areas)¹⁸ (DCD-GTZ, 1999: KwaZulu-Natal study 35-47). While the new voice mechanism has enhanced government accountability in this case and many others, the group that government finds itself accountable to is extremely limited in size and interest. The narrow interests are having a significant affect on governance processes and outcomes, while other perspectives and voices remain unheard (and government has no accountability link to such constituencies).

of the Ujamaa cooperatives in Tanzania a decade earlier.” Dolny’s implicit warning is an important one: reforms that are designed to empower the disempowered can create skewed accountability and responsiveness relationships (and facilitate government capture) if they empower voices of individuals within groups (or cooperatives) rather than empowering groups themselves.

¹⁷ The GTZ case cites major involvement of the National Business Initiative in the town. This involvement involved facilitating community meetings and an active partnership with the council, focused on garnering a casino license for the jurisdiction and developing tourism infrastructure. The Steering Committee is described as gender and poverty insensitive.

¹⁸ Andrews (2002) finds that Howick had a 10 percent decline in real service-related expenditures in the 1996-2000 period, when the national average showed a 2 percent increase in such (as calculated from the 273 municipality Project Viability database).

Experiences Where Voice, Voice Mechanisms Have a Broad ‘Accountability Effect’

The third kind of accountability effect identified from the sample of cases and South African experience is that where voice mechanisms facilitate broad social accountability. What this means is that, on balance, the mechanisms have a marked positive effect on accountability of government structures to society as a whole; the mechanisms have the effect of increasing the responsibility or responsiveness of public organizations to society in general, for example, or of generally enhancing transparency in the budgeting process (such that all citizens have an improved ability to observe and evaluate government processes, behavior and outcomes).

This accountability type is often touted in the literature, and is a hallmark of the democratic ideal (Peters, 1996). It is also the basic form of accountability envisaged in decentralized systems, where a large number of localized governments are considered more likely to be accountable to broad social voice than are a small number of centralized (and distant) governments. The literature’s ‘best practice’ bias reflects such belief, with at least a third of the prominent cases telling tales of voice mechanism adoption that leads to broad, influential voice expression and a ‘broad accountability effect.’

An example is Nepal’s new district level democracy and their Participatory District Development Programme (PDDP). The mixture of a local democratic system and a participatory program focused on the planning and budgeting process has facilitated broad accountability. This is evident in changes in expenditure allocations in many districts (in favor of poverty reduction initiatives), increased transparency and a greater ability of citizens to hold officials responsible for their behavior (Dixit, 2000; UNDP, 2000). Another example is the participatory budgeting (or budget hearing) initiative in Villa Elisa, Paraguay. This involves setting up 64 budget committees in regions of the city of 48,000. The large number of committees ensures broad representation (across geographic and demographic boundaries) and the accountability effects are evident in changes in expenditure patterns, enhanced transparency, lower corruption opportunities and a new social ability to monitor the mayor (Domecq, 1998: 6). Pope (2000 Ch 13) discusses these

accountability effects with regard to similar experience in Asuncion:

“Promoting transparency and citizen participation in this way opens channels of communication between city officials and the public, and creates a genuine forum for participation. As a result, citizens are better informed on public affairs and finances, they have an opportunity to air their own views, and the forum provides a way for public budget decisions to be explained. As a consequence of greater transparency, there is less room for corruption and citizens find that their opinions actually can influence government.”¹⁹

In contrast to the large group of cases in which the literature shows voice mechanism adoption stimulating broad accountability, there are no specific experiences in the South African case that could fit this category, suggesting the difficulty of facilitating such. Some observers do argue that the successful local government election process in South Africa generally facilitated increased, broad-based accountability, however. Elections are often assumed to constitute effective mechanisms for broad voice expression and social accountability. Blair (2000:27) writes of this: “Free, fair, regularly scheduled elections and universal suffrage are the most direct mechanism for ensuring that those who govern are accountable to the citizens.” Such thinking is foremost in the minds of those commentators arguing that the elections materially influenced accountability in South African municipalities. The counter argument is that the elections and local government structures did not effect significant administrative change or change in service provision, or enhance transparency in the budgeting process, particularly in the period between elections (the five years between 1995 and 2000) (Swilling, 1997 and 1998; Africa, 1999; Andrews, 2002).

Looking beyond South Africa, it is apparent that local-level elections are not a guarantee of broad accountability. In Nepal, local elections enhanced the responsiveness of local officials to citizens largely because they were complemented by mechanisms facilitating voice between elections (the

¹⁹ Rosenbaum (1999) analyses this experience and finds similar positive accountability effects.

Participatory District Development Programme). In countries where local elections have not been partnered with such mechanisms they are arguably not seen to facilitate broad accountability (at least not beyond any form of basic, temporal political accountability). Cote d'Ivoire is a good example of this. Local elections in that country are based on a list system, which results in the council being "a team put together by a powerful entrepreneur and his faction" (Crook and Manor, 1998: 159). The electoral mechanism has not facilitated broad accountability relationships because of a lack of supporting mechanisms to consolidate political-constituency ties between elections: "The evidence suggests that the lack of institutionalized constituency relationships and the lack of formal accountability mechanisms had a...serious impact on the accessibility of councilors" (Crook and Manor, 1998: 163).

Factors Influencing Accountability Effects

In related research two constructs, voice focus and voice influence, were identified to help differentiate between the types of voice expression resulting from voice mechanism adoption (Andrews and Shah, 2002). Analyzing evidence of accountability effects indicates that these constructs are also useful in identifying different accountability outcomes associated with the adoption of voice mechanisms:

- 'Voice influence' relates to the degree to which voice, as expressed through a voice mechanism, impacts on who governs (the formal governance representatives), how they govern (the governance process), what they consider (the governance agenda), and what they produce (governance outcomes). Cases in which influence is high also appear to be the cases in which positive accountability effects are observed. Cases in which influence is low also appear to be the cases in which accountability effects are absent.
- 'Voice focus' relates to whose voice is expressed through a given voice mechanism. In some cases voice focus is broad, and large segments of society are given the opportunity to express themselves. In other instances voice focus is narrow, and small segments of society are able to express their needs. The 'voice focus' determines whom governments are held accountable to (if there is an accountability effect) when voice is expressed.

Figure 2 combines the voice influence and voice focus constructs to show how their various combinations relate to the type of accountability effects observed.

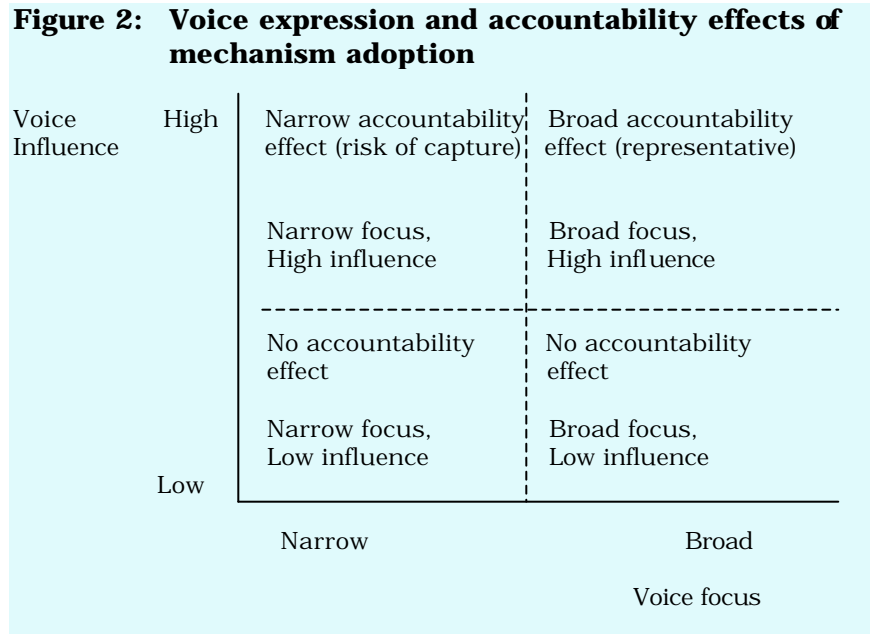


Figure 2 captures variation observed in the focus of experiences with voice mechanism adoption on the horizontal axis: in some experiences adopted mechanisms facilitated narrow voice while in others the mechanisms facilitated broad voice (with many experiences falling in the middle, indicating some degree of narrowness in focus or preference expression).²⁰ The figure captures variation observed in voice influence on the vertical axis: in some cases adopted mechanisms facilitated no voice influence, whereas in others mechanisms facilitated high voice influence (with mechanisms facilitating only some influence in other cases).

²⁰ Even electoral systems in openly democratic countries fail to facilitate the expression of all social voices. The youth, a large portion of society in developing countries that is usually unevenly affected by poverty, is generally given no voice through such mechanisms.

In most instances the experience of voice expression can be identified as falling into one of four quadrants in the space created to show the interaction of focus and influence: narrow focus, low influence; broad focus, low influence; narrow focus, high influence; and broad focus, high influence. The three accountability effects can be located in the quadrants as well, with the 'no accountability effect' in the bottom two quadrants (where influence is low). The 'narrow accountability effect' is located in the top left hand quadrant, where influence is high but focus is narrow. Where voice mechanisms facilitate this kind of expression and accountability effect, there is a danger of capture (as discussed and noted on the figure). The 'broad accountability effect' is located in the top right hand quadrant, where influence is high and focus is broad. This kind of accountability effect is generally the stated goal of participatory and voice-based reforms, especially those related to democratic decentralization initiatives.

In terms of the figure it is apparent that a high voice influence is a necessary condition for a positive accountability effect. Similarly, a broad voice focus is a necessary condition for a broad (and representative) accountability effect. These different voice influence and voice focus outcomes are explained in related research in terms of various factors including the particular voice mechanism adopted, the voice mechanism design, mediums for voice transmission, the political and administrative structure, and socio-economic conditions and social structure (Andrews and Shah, 2002). In affecting the 'voice' influence' and 'voice focus' outcomes related to voice mechanism adoption, these factors are also seen to have important impacts on accountability effects emerging from voice expression. Specific affects observed in the current research include:

- *Voices expressed into budgets and plans tend to be influential:* A general observation is that mechanisms yield high levels of voice influence when they facilitate voice expression into important areas of the governance process—like the budget and planning stage. 'Voice influence' was high in all participatory budgeting initiatives examined, for example, including the popular Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte cases, the less examined South American cases of Asuncion, Villa Elisa and Cabo de Santo Agostinho, and the international cases of

Kwaukuza (KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa), Uganda and Ukraine. Other new mechanisms, like participatory planning and report cards are either difficult to evaluate (because the literature fails to provide information to assess accountability effects) or yield varied accountability effects in different situations (with planning-participation reforms in Tlalmanalco, Mexico and Bolivia yielding different results (Moctezuma, 2001; Goudsmit and Blackburn, 2001). Where voice mechanisms designed to facilitate civic expression into planning processes actually did so (in Mexico) accountability improved, while accountability was not improved in situations where voices were kept separate from actual planning decisions (in Bolivia, Tanzania and many of South Africa's municipalities). As in the Bolivian case, simply saying one is adopting a 'participatory budget' or 'participatory plan' and then not engaging citizens in these processes does not ensure influential voice and positive accountability effects.

- *Voice focus is narrowed where mechanism designs limit voice access:* Devices incorporated into mechanism design to regulate access to the mechanism (and thus to the governance process) affect voice expression, particularly voice focus. Cases of voice mechanism adoption in which voice focus can be classed as 'narrow' invariably had some kind of device controlling and limiting voice mechanism access. 'Narrow' focus cases from the South African study are illustrative of the point: In KwaDukuza Stanger groups and citizens had to pre-register to attend workshops, in Uthungula the strategic selection of meeting locations automatically limited the size of attendance and the identities of attendees, in Cradock and Howick meeting and committee attendance was by invitation only (DCD-GTZ, 1999). The influence of access devices on voice expression is also evident when considering cases of broad focus, where voice mechanism designs facilitated openness: In Thabanchu, South Africa, public planning meetings and workshops were announced in the media, which is also used to announce meetings in Uganda, Malaysia and Nepal, where governments also stimulate access by placing

announcements on public notice-boards at the point of service.

- *Highly technical processes yield low voice influence, narrow voice focus:* A common problem in participatory reforms relates to the highly technical nature of governance procedures. In many of the South African municipalities, Uganda, Tanzania and Bolivia, government planning processes were simply too complex and technical to allow broad or influential voice contributions. Voice mechanisms in these situations were not designed to bridge the gap between civic expression and technical process. In Cradock in South Africa, for example, “The linkages between community participation and technical knowledge were not successfully integrated” to facilitate influential voice (DCD-GTZ, 1999: Eastern Cape study 24). In Uganda the influence of civic participation was limited by the complex language of the budget, which was “too abstract for ordinary citizens to comprehend”, and documents relating to the budgetary process, which were “only accessible by donors, academic institutions and some Non-Government organizations” (Gariyo, 2000: 4,5). The failure to attend to these design issues has led to narrow participation in participatory budget reforms. Where voice mechanism design fails to enable citizen participation it hinders the influence of the voices expressed through the mechanism on governance. An example comes from Thabanchu, South Africa, where design issues hindered the ability of citizens to impact on planning and budgeting decisions. Individuals were seen to “lose confidence because of a lack of understanding of concepts” and hence withhold their voices. At the same time, officials were quick to ignore contributions from those with poor information or communication difficulties: “Where individuals articulate issues that don’t fit in with the process consultant’s definition of the session, the information (mostly useful) becomes lost in the process” (DCD-GTZ, 1999: Free State study 18).
- *Experimentation with varied mechanisms yields influential, broad voice:* Experience shows that reforms yielding broad and influential voice expression and a strong positive accountability effect are characterized by

experimental designs (involving various voice mechanism types and simplified processes). This approach reflects “Robert Chambers’ principle of the so-called ‘open manual’” in which all parties in the participation process have “the opportunity to experiment with participatory methodologies and techniques” (Goudsmit and Blackburn, 2001: 590). This process facilitates identification of technical and other voice impediments and allows the development of accountability enhancing voice mechanisms.

- *Built-in evaluation devices stimulate voice influence:* Many of the experiences where voice mechanisms facilitated influential expression were designed with a defined monitoring or evaluating device in place. In Tlalmanalco’s participatory planning mechanism, for example, participatory monitoring was introduced partly so that NGOs could evaluate the effect of voice on accountability and responsiveness, as evident in Moctezuma’s comment that, “The PUCSN (*collaborative entity*)...hopes to measure the efficacy of its interventions...” (Moctezuma, 2001: 131 brackets inserted).²¹
- *Voice influence is low where there is no medium for voice transmission:* Voice transmission mediums are devices that transmit ideas, feedback and criticism voiced by citizens through participatory budgeting forums, public meetings and such to governing officials who actually make decisions. These mediums have a particularly important impact on the influence of the voices expressed through a voice mechanism, and thus on the accountability effect (or non-accountability effect) of such. They can be built into voice mechanisms or they can be separate from such. There is evidence that suggests voice influence is lower, and accountability effects absent, where voices are not transmitted from the point of expression (through the voice mechanism) to

²¹ The combination of local elections and the Participatory District Development Programme in Nepal is another example of a voice mechanism facilitating a broad, high influence form of voice expression. In this case assessment and evaluation devices were also used to effect change and ensure that voice had influence (UNDP, 2000).

decision-makers. In Nelspruit, South Africa, for example, public workshop results are considered “hardly any use” (i.e. un-influential) because they are not processed, interpreted, translated and transported into the planning process (DCD-GTZ, 1999: Mpumalanga study 12). In the Kentani municipality voice has no apparent influence or accountability effect largely because “feedback structures/systems have not been formulated” (DCD-GTZ, 1999: Eastern Cape study 20). In the Eastern Cape town of Cradock (South Africa) the lack of transmission medium is again seen to limit influence and accountability effects, with no mediums to ensure “in-departmental analysis” of citizen contributions in workshops (DCD-GTZ, 1999: Eastern Cape study 24). Where mediums exist that ensure voices, once expressed through participation mechanisms, are transmitted to decision-makers, these voices tend to be influential and accountability effects are evident.²²

- *Centralizing political structures limits voice influence, narrows focus:* Paul (1992: 1050) observed the importance political structures could have on voice expression when he commented that, “Legal and institutional barriers to voice may exist in a country,” which “could be traced to the nature of the larger political system or ideology.” This perspective is well reflected in the literature and in evidence of voice expression, which suggests that political systems institutionalize “opportunity structures that can facilitate or hamper collective action” and that higher-level political and administrative appointments create hierarchical responsive structures that are difficult to break (or to open to social influence) (Mohan and Stokke,

²² In Naga City, the Philippines, for example, local governments were entrenched in national law (constituting a supportive context for local government) and the council developed an appropriate internal medium for voice consideration (the Empowerment Ordinance, which made consideration of civic voice an integral part of the hierarchical governing process). In combination, the effective medium and supportive context helped to facilitate highly influential voice expression through the Naga council. Accountability gains in this city have already been alluded to, and relate broadly to fiscal changes, transparency and political accountability.

2000:260; Benjamin, 2000: 45). Evidence from the cases shows that, if the existing political process is undemocratic, centralized, or unrepresentative, disadvantaged citizens are more likely to be disenfranchised in the governance process, and voice mechanisms tend to facilitate narrower, less influential voice expression. Centralized political systems tend to tilt power and influence towards central political leaders and technical administrators. Voice expression through mechanisms adopted in South Africa (as in many similar countries) have been negatively affected by political structures even though the nation is both democratic and decentralized, however (Andrews, 2002).²³ A major issue in such newly decentralized settings is the intergovernmental political and fiscal structure, which often focuses local representatives on national-level party agendas or high-level government policies rather than the voices of their own constituencies. Beal (2001: 365) writes of the national-level influence of a quasi-political group (SANCO) supposedly providing a voice mechanism in Johannesburg: “When local-level concerns become subverted to national-level ambitions...(*the local level concerns*)...have to balance their accountability downwards towards their membership of local residents, alongside their accountability upwards towards the broader aims and objectives of the national organization.” In light of this, Domecq (1998:6) comments that, “Decentralization of power and resources, political will to make government transparent and citizen participation are the three pillars underlying public budget hearings.”

- *Closed administrative systems limit voice influence, narrow voice focus:* Technical administrators and administrative culture also affect governance processes and the possibility of voice expression in many developing countries (Brinkerhoff and Kulibaba, 1996:

²³ Andrews (2002) finds that local governments led by the African National Congress, which also ruled nationally and in seven of the nine provinces in the 1995-2000 period, had systematically lower levels of voice mechanism adoption. They were more likely to host un-directed civic meetings than to host help desks with direct connections to planning processes.

131). Where administrative decision-making is centralized, administrative processes are complex and information is unavailable (the administrative process is closed), voices tend to have low influence and narrowly focused. In such situations, technical administrators enjoy a powerful influence, which exceeds that of street level administrators, political leaders, and community members (particularly where these other role players lack technical skills and information access, as is the case in most developing countries). The dominant influence of administrators in such cases drowns out other voices, yielding them un-influential. Cases of low voice influence (such as Tanzania's participatory planning mechanisms) show that administrative inertia certainly prohibits the kind of openness in the governance process required for effective voice influence (Eriksen, 1997). In another negative case coming from Guyana, participation was limited to those who administrators thought would contribute positively to the governance process (without effecting unsettling change) (Pelling, 1998). This administrative impact is commonly called 'normal professionalism,' involving administrative officials only inviting participation from those with whom they have a 'professional' understanding (Chambers, 1983). Such administrative effect is observed in a comment regarding participatory reform in the Free State province, South Africa, where social leaders (like business leaders) were engaged in the planning process but "there was little appreciation of the possible direct contribution of other actors in the governance process" (DCD-GTZ, 1999: Free State study, 28).

- *In poor areas, voices are often ignored, or voice mechanisms captured:* Experience shows that the poor are less likely to participate in public sector decision-making than are the wealthy.²⁴ This effect is particularly manifested where participation has a large relative cost for the poor (Johnston and Clarke, 1982: 172). The poorer the society, the more likely it is that participation costs outweigh potential benefits (especially where social

²⁴ Atkinson et al.(2000) show that socio-economic influences also play out in participation levels according to specific classes and gender

capital is underdeveloped) and the less influence disadvantaged citizens have in decision-making (Bryant and White, 1982:213). Experience shows that technical administrators, advantaged citizens and central-minded politicians enjoy influence in such poor, high problem, and heterogeneous governments. Benjamin (2000) emphasizes the complex relational influences on poverty alleviation programs that emerge in such situations, arguing that many poor groups create partnerships of dependence with higher income groups to overcome their socio-economic voice constraints. Etamadi (2000: 69) implicitly suggests similar collaboration in arguing that non-professional, marginalized groups have had their voice heard by partnering with professionals in the participation process: “Advocacy supported by hard data, not just rhetoric, is more likely to gain the support of the administration and the public” Unfortunately, these partnerships could lead to co-optation of the voice expression process and the narrow expression of voice by wealthier sub-groups.

- *Weak social structures limit voice influence and narrow voice focus:* Where social organization is weak, experience reveals that the interests of technical administrators and advantaged citizens dominate the governance process—typically manifest in a limited and often un-influential voice expression through reform-based voice mechanisms. An example is Alice in South Africa, where public meetings and committees are not seen to facilitate broad or influential voice expression and “participation is complicated by poorly organized civil society in the isolated rural villages. Very few development/community committees function effectively” (DCD-GTZ, 1999: Eastern Cape study 27). Similarly, in the South African town of Kentani participatory structures are focused only on those communities that are organized: “The extent to which less organized communities, specific reference to isolated rural communities, are represented by the current structure is questionable” (DCD-GTZ, Eastern Cape: 20). Finally, the narrow voice focus in Uganda’s participatory budgeting reforms is partly explained by weak social structures: “The lack of a strong civil society is partly responsible for

the influence donors have over policy planning in a country like Uganda. Citizens' participation in the budgetary process and policy formulation is limited by lack of strong civil society organizations/institutions to mobilize them and act as lead agencies to involve citizens in policy dialogue" (Gariyo, 2000: 7).

Conclusion

The central research question of this paper is: Do voice mechanisms make governments more accountable and responsive? The answer given in the title is plain: Not always. When considering experience in the literature and in a study of South African municipal reform, it is apparent that voice mechanisms have different effects on accountability. In some cases accountability is not enhanced at all when voice mechanisms are adopted. In some cases accountability is enhanced, with governments called to account to narrow interest groups. In other cases accountability is enhanced, with governments called to account to broad constituencies.

The variation in accountability effects arising from the adoption of voice mechanisms reflects different forms of voice expression facilitated by new mechanisms. This is shown in Figure 3, an adaption of Figure 1 in the first (Background) section of this paper.

Figure 3: Voice Mechanisms, Voice Expression and Accountability (observed experience)

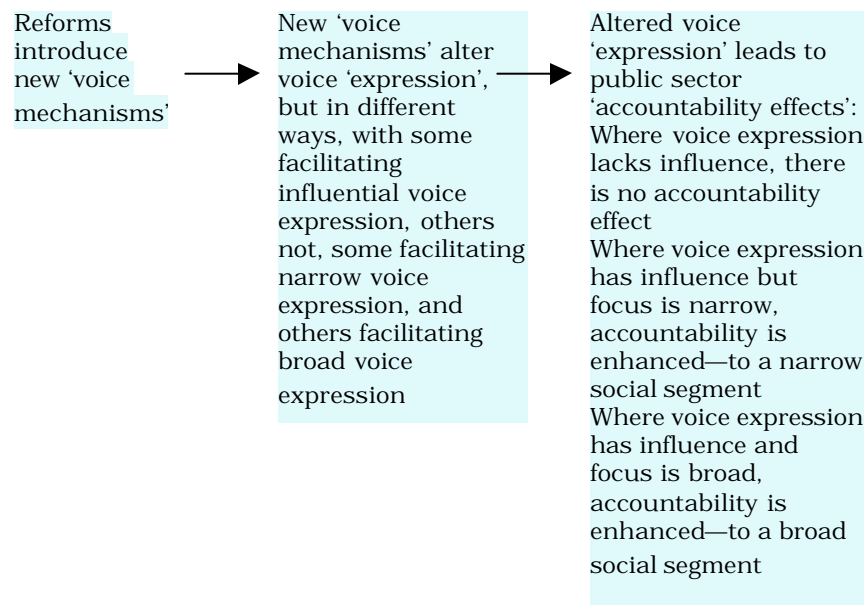


Figure 3 reflects the observed experience that:

- In those cases where voice expression lacks any kind of influence, voice mechanisms do not lead to improved accountability.
- Where voice expression is influential, but voice focus is narrow, accountability relationships are developed—but these are narrow and can facilitate government capture.
- Where voice expression is influential and voice focus is broad, resulting accountability relationships are also broad.

This last kind of accountability relationship is generally intended in literature and reforms touting democratic decentralization (and the power of voice in such settings)—as was shown in Figure 1. Through its analysis of cases of participatory or voice-based reform, the current paper shows that voice mechanisms do not always have this positive kind of accountability effect, however. This finding should re-focus literature and policymakers on assessing and managing factors facilitating influential, broad accountability effects. The various factors identified to affect voice influence, focus and accountability outcomes are intended to provide a first area of investigation for such research. These factors are also intended to guide policymakers who aim to develop voice mechanisms that facilitate broad accountability links between governing officials and the public at large.

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