Strengthening citizen demand for good governance in the African context

by Fletcher Tembo

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* Disclaimer: The views presented in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) or the Mwananchi partner organisations.
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Acronyms

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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>BCA</td>
<td>Baseline context analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAR</td>
<td>Capability, Accountability, Responsiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community based organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCO</td>
<td>Consultation coordination organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil society organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAC</td>
<td>OECD Development Assistance Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>UK Department for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>GTF</td>
<td>Governance and Transparency Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSC</td>
<td>Most Significant Change</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCO</td>
<td>National coordination organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSC</td>
<td>National steering committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODI</td>
<td>Overseas Development Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>RAPID</td>
<td>Research and Policy in Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>UN Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNECA</td>
<td>UN Economic Commission for Africa</td>
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<td>WGA</td>
<td>World Governance Assessment</td>
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Executive Summary

This paper lays out the conceptual foundations for undertaking an action research based programme that seeks to strengthen citizen engagement with the state and improve governance. The Mwananchi programme, as it is called, works to enhance political leverage for citizens as they engage with their governments at different levels so that citizen voice becomes one of the agents that makes state institutions more accountable and responsive to citizens. The strategy is to work with interlocutors of the citizen–state relationship: media, civil society organisations (CSOs), and elected representatives and traditional leaders.

This paper begins by outlining the importance of the programme by positioning the ‘good governance’ agenda as central to development. It then explains the importance of connecting voice and accountability through interlocutors before delving into challenges of working on governance projects in the African context and describing how the programme is structured with these challenges in mind.

The importance of good governance

Good governance is crucial for development. Improving the quality and efficiency of public institutions and processes is vital for progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and sustaining the environment, which in developing countries must often be done on limited budgets. A key aspect of improving governance is the state’s accountability to its citizens – governments that can be held accountable for their actions are more likely to respond to the needs and demands of their citizens.

In 2006, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) established the Governance and Transparency Fund (GTF) ‘to strengthen governance by supporting public demands for accountability’. As a recipient of a GTF grant in 2008, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and its partners in seven of the African countries (Ghana, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Southern Sudan, Ethiopia, Zambia and Malawi) developed the Mwananchi programme. The programme name comes from the Kiswahili word *mwananchi* (mwah-nah-‘in-chee), which means ‘ordinary citizen’.

The programme empowers these ‘ordinary citizens’ to demand good governance in these seven African countries, and it examines the role of evidence in that process. It does this by strengthening institutions through which poorer citizens are empowered and have their ‘voices’ expressed so that they can hold their local and national governments to account. It also uses its experience to attempt to more clearly understand what works for demand-side governance interventions and under what conditions.

The seven African countries were selected to help in that learning. They offer a diversity of governance characteristics in terms of institutions, organisations and state legitimacy. For example, decisive factors included: the nature of the political regime, OECD Development Assistance Committee development status, Human Development Index, World Bank Governance Assessments on Voice and Accountability and Corruption, women in parliament, and the Freedom House assessment of Press Freedom.

From ‘voice’ to ‘accountability’: the role of ‘interlocutors’

Improving the way that citizens are empowered and able to demand accountability from their governments is a complex and context-dependent process. There is no single way by which all citizens can make their voices heard to their governments and hold them to account. Nor is there
any single way by which governments take voices of citizens into the policy-making and implementation processes. In the African context, this two-way process is made more complex because it tends to be embedded in informal and patronage relationships. Outsiders might not have the right methods for listening, analysing and understanding the complexity of the citizen–state relationships in which they are seeking to intervene. Even when the voices of citizens are ‘heard’ by state actors, they often only come from elite members of society.

Citizen–state engagement and genuinely accountable relationships rarely happen for ordinary citizens – even with frontline service providers, such as teachers and nurses. More often, individuals and organisations within society act as interlocutors that mediate these relationships. Key interlocutors include: civil society organisations (CSOs), the media, and elected representatives (including parliamentarians and local councillors) and traditional leaders. Ideally, these interlocutors help articulate the voices of citizens and mobilise strategies by which ordinary citizens engage with the state.

Citizens engage with the state using strategies that depend on where they are positioned in society. ‘Strategic’ agency can be employed by ‘powerful’ citizens, whereas ‘powerless’ or marginalised citizens are often only able to assert ‘tactical’ agency. Strategic agency, as an indicator of citizen empowerment, refers to the ability to manipulate relationships from a position of autonomy. Citizens in this position have the freedom to engage politically. These actors have the ability to engage with other citizens and state actors. Strategic agency also assumes the ability to create new political spaces that are useful for achieving better livelihoods. Tactical agency is defined by actors lacking autonomy: they seize any opportunity that arises, and rarely have the opportunity to generate new opportunities to engage with state actors.

The importance of context

As is previously mentioned, one of the defining features of African governance is the coexistence of informal institutions alongside formal state institutions. This often means that policy-making is largely influenced by informal power and politics. Therefore, it is important to locate the understanding of government policy formulation and implementation processes, outputs and outcomes in the prevailing social and political relations. In order to understand what is going on within the policy arena, we need to look at the quality of representation and accountability processes at the same time as we are exploring government policy-making with the aim of enhancing citizen engagement in all these three processes. It is in the arena of representation that citizens’ interests are both constructed (for instance, by calling them voices of the ‘poor’) and contested; it is at the level of policy that these demands are framed for public action; and it is in the arena of accountability that feedback is given on how policies relate to the expressed citizen interests. Without exploring how citizens are engaging in all these three arenas, disconnects are overlooked and the initiatives for good governance with a focus on citizens are rendered less effective.

Different governance contexts will present different practical challenges for interlocutors to play their roles, find synergies, and use evidence to influence policies. This approach therefore moves away from normative characterisations of civil society, media and elected representatives as the basis for choosing which organisations to work with when implementing the programme. This is because the manifest characteristics of these interlocutors are also dependent on the character of the state. In other words, certain state institutional configurations will be more able to promote and include certain forms of media or civil society than others. In the context of the increasing waves of decentralisation in Africa, these state institutional configurations take on even more diverse characteristics, especially at the local level as the state seeks to locate itself within the localities of citizens, while managing its power from the centre.
How the Mwananchi programme addresses these issues

To facilitate greater citizen engagement, the Mwananchi programme focuses on enhancing role synergies among these interlocutors. The hope is to capitalise on their different institutional advantages to empower and enable poorer citizens to effectively engage with their governments. The programme also works to improve the interlocutors’ use of evidence in influencing policies and engaging citizens.

The following research questions have been set in order to guide the learning process among country-based implementing partners while they are providing small grants and implementing projects with local organisations:

- Is there evidence that poorer citizens are being empowered and enabled to effectively engage with their government at different levels through the work of interlocutors? Are there identifiable impacts of such engagements on their livelihoods?
- Are media, civil society, elected representatives (parliament and local councillors) and traditional leaders the most effective interlocutors of voice and accountability? Are there other interlocutors that are more effective? Does this vary according to context?
- Does the formation of coalitions of interlocutors make a difference to interlocutors’ ability to enhance voice and accountability?
- Are there tools, platforms or engagement strategies that citizens or interlocutors are using that show more effectiveness in achieving voice and accountability objectives than others? Under what conditions and for what sort of issues?
- Does the use of evidence make a difference to the effectiveness of interlocutors, either on their own or in coalitions, in influencing government policies and engaging citizens? In other words, does evidence matter for effective citizen voice and government accountability?
- Does a focus on representativeness, policy processes and accountability give us a better understanding of voice and accountability? What indicators can be used to measure this?
- Are the support-mechanisms provided appropriate for this kind of change?

The country programmes are designed and implemented around specific governance issues identified from a systematic analysis of evidence. At the local level, these issues are articulated in terms of citizen–state engagement around specific public service delivery projects, economic productivity or national poverty reduction strategy policy processes.

The programme consists of four output areas:

- creating dialogue platforms for interlocutors to discuss critical citizen engagement issues;
- supporting around ten pilot projects in each country to try out innovative ways of enhancing citizen engagement and policy change in working with interlocutors, while also observing interlocutors that are working in the same context without coalitions;
- providing capacity development support to interlocutors; and
- creating a community of practice around several initiatives that are being tried both within and across countries.
1. Introduction

The need to reduce the gap between the ‘governed’ and the ‘governors’, or the ‘citizens’ and the ‘state’,\(^1\) as a fundamental component of good governance and poverty-reduction, has taken centre stage in development efforts. Improving the quality of institutions and processes, including managing the changing roles of the state and civil society, is critical for progress in national efforts to reduce poverty, sustain the environment, and promote human development. The UK government white papers on international development for instance, argue that weak governance constrains development (DFID, 2006; 2009a). Thus, the Governance and Transparency Fund (GTF) was established, ‘to strengthen governance by supporting public demands for accountability’ by strengthening the role of media and civil society as watchdogs (DFID, 2006).

DFID’s interest in this approach to governance reflects the broad shift in donor priorities and investment patterns toward the reconstruction of donor–state and state–citizen relationships (Hudson and GOVNET Secretariat, 2009; O’Neil et al., 2007). These shifts further reflect the new thinking around aid effectiveness as embedded in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Acora Agenda for Action, through the ‘strengthening country ownership’ principle (OECD, 2005, 2008). The focus has been on developing mechanisms for supporting civil society that enable better donor harmonisation around approaches to supporting civil society, strengthen domestic accountability around aid, and deepen democracy (Scanteam, 2007; Tembo and Wells, 2007; Hudson and GOVNET Secretariat, 2009). These new approaches to supporting civil society, therefore, are an integral part of the good governance agenda.

Traditional approaches to good governance tend to be technically focused on institutional reform for increasing government effectiveness and accountability. Recent approaches, however, are informed by a new understanding of the workings of the state in relation to its citizens through analyses such as ‘Drivers of Change’, and more recently, ‘Political Economy Analysis’. This has emphasised the primacy of politics in rethinking governance interventions. In this context, DFID, for example, include political elements concerned with state engagement with citizens in their governance definition. The argument is that good governance comprises three elements, encapsulated in the ‘C-A-R’ framework. The ‘C’ is for ‘state capability’, which is the ‘ability and authority of leaders, governments and public organisations to get things done’, the ‘A’ is ‘accountability’, which is defined as ‘the ability of citizens to hold leaders, governments and public organizations to account’. Lastly, the ‘R’ stands for ‘responsiveness’ referring to ‘how leaders, governments and public organisations actually behave in responding to the needs and rights of citizens’ (DFID, 2007b).

With regard to the GTF’s aim ‘to support civil society, a free media, parliamentarians and trade unions – those working to improve transparency and enable more effective accountability mechanisms between citizens and state’ (DFID, 2007b, p. 16), the emphasis is on the ‘A’ and ‘R’. Of the two concepts, ‘A’ is both more complex and yet more fundamental because it focuses on improving the quality or nature of the relationship between the state and its citizens (Moore and Teskey, 2006). On the other hand, ‘R’ just focuses on the behaviour of the state – getting closer to people in order to better identify and meet their needs, which does not necessarily require building strong relationships with the citizens involved.

Governments that can be held accountable for their actions are more likely to respond to the needs and demands of their citizens than those governments that do not account to their citizens (Rocha Menocal and Sharma, 2009). As one of the 38 successful GTF applicants, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and its partners set out to allow citizen demand for good governance to be more clearly heard using evidence-based approaches in seven African countries (Ghana, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Southern Sudan, Ethiopia, Zambia, and Malawi). The idea is to help

\(^1\) The state is defined as ‘an abstract yet powerful notion that embraces a network of authoritative institutions that make and enforce top-level decisions throughout a territorially defined political entity’ (Chesterman et al., 2005, cited in Fritz and Rocha Menocal, 2007, p. 532).
strengthen institutions through which the ‘voices’ of poorer citizens can be expressed so that they can hold local and national governments to account.

Goetz and Jenkins (2005, cited in O’Neil et al., 2007) offer three reasons for promoting citizen voice in the context of accountability. In the first instance, it can give people the freedom to express their beliefs and preferences. Second, it is only in speaking up that poor people can enhance their chances of having their preferences, opinions and views accommodated in government policy priorities and implementation. Lastly, the actual practice of making voices heard creates collective benchmarks, inbuilt with people’s values and norms of justice and moral standards, which are then used to measure the performance of power-holders.

This paper locates the governance challenge of moving from simply hearing citizens’ voices to ensuring that these voices result in improving state accountability, from the premises of the ‘ordinary citizen’ or ‘mwananchi’ (mwah-nah-‘in-chee) in Kiswahili. The emphasis on voices of ordinary citizens in the ODI’s GTF-funded programme was adopted from the name ‘Mwananchi,’ which was chosen during consultations with partners in seven African countries. These countries were selected on the basis of their diverse governance characteristics in order to maximise opportunities for learning what works, how it works and under what conditions. From the perspective of ‘good-enough governance’ (i.e. the minimum level of governance necessary for effective development), these countries were seen as having the potential to provide sufficient diversity in terms of institutions, organisations and state legitimacy (Grindle, 2007). This is important in learning lessons about governance interactions between citizens and states that can be exchanged across countries.

The idea is to establish a series of Mwananchi programme interventions, in order to explore, from an action research perspective, what works for achieving citizen voice, state accountability and responsiveness in different governance contexts. The ideas in this paper are put forward for debate among practitioners and researchers within the project itself, and beyond, as part of the learning process, which is integral to the design and implementation of the Mwananchi GTF programme. The learning process is an exploration of pilot studies across the seven African countries, and the countries themselves can also be considered as case studies. The programme is designed to bring together learning from individual case studies within a country and to provide room for comparative analysis, both within and across countries (see Booth, 2008, on case study approaches).

The starting point for this paper is an explanation of the conceptual challenge of good governance when approached from the side of citizens – in other words, the demand-side. Issues around possible entry points into enhancing citizen engagement with their governments are then highlighted. The discussion on this point highlights the need to be very specific in the areas where engagement is likely to create discontinuities and the importance of recognising that, in African societies and governments, power is embedded within both informal and formal relations. The paper then delves into the role of ‘interlocutors’ and their potential role in shaping citizen–state relations, while acknowledging that these interlocutors can also be part of the problem rather than the solution. The paper discusses how synergies between various interlocutors can be explored and enhanced, while also noting that their interactions could also be problematic. The role of evidence-based approaches to policy influencing is then discussed, emphasising the need for case studies in order to better understand the politics around the use of evidence in influencing change in institutional relationships. The paper finally puts forward the action research agenda of the Mwananchi programme.

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2 Voices ‘refers to the capacity to express views and interests and to the ways in which they do so through a variety of formal and informal channels and mechanisms’ (O’Neil et al., 2007).
3 The term ‘ordinary citizen’ allows us to interrogate citizenship and governance issues more strongly in the voice and accountability debate than the term ‘citizen’ per se. Section 4 of this report provides the origin of this term.
4 These included the nature of the political regime, DAC development status, Human Development Index, World Bank Governance Assessments on Voice and Accountability and Corruption, Women in Parliament, and Freedom House assessment of Press Freedom.
2. The ‘demand-side’ good governance challenge

Whereas good governance is a key dimension for achieving the Millennium Development Goals worldwide, it is specifically important for Africa’s progress (Commission for Africa, 2005; Lockwood, 2005; UNECA, 2005). Academics have underlined the coexistence of the formal and informal institutions as the main defining feature of African governance. Informal relations, structures and processes significantly inform the workings of the formal processes and structures. This in turn affects the way policies are formed and implemented, since policy-making in Africa happens more through personal relations than through formal authorities (e.g. constitutions, laws or procedures) (Hyden, 2010).

Hyden argues that Africa’s history of colonialism produced hybrid states. While colonial administrations started to formalise African institutions, the transformation was incomplete and ended up with states that merged elements of both formal (from the West) and informal (from African societies) characteristics. This dynamic has continued in its various configurations into the post-colonial and multi-party democracy eras of many African countries. In these situations, the power of the public office holders appears formal in nature but in reality draws much more from personal relations than from authority. These informal relations are, in part, sociologically explained as an expression of their rootedness in the African sense of ‘being’, ‘belonging’ and ‘believing’, which work in ways that are different from the Western world and are, therefore, not easily understood and appreciated (Chabal, 2009). One outcome is that these informally imbedded processes produce a considerable level of unpredictability in response to governance interventions, especially those aimed at changing the way citizens might relate to the state and work with it for development.

These governance challenges exist on both the supply-side (enabling state capability and responsiveness through reforms within the state) and demand-side interventions (enabling state accountability and responsiveness by empowering institutions outside the government). This paper focuses on the demand side. This is not to prioritise the demand side over the supply side, but to provide greater clarity on what happens on the demand side (e.g. working with civil society or media), in line with how the GTF was initially conceptualised in the DFID White Paper. This section explains why thinking about demand-side good governance within the ‘good-enough governance’ framework (Grindle, 2007) makes more sense in Africa than might be the case in other contexts.

2.1 Good enough governance

The notion of ‘governance’ has been variously defined and it is still open to different interpretations. For example, some have argued for a clear demarcation in the definition between the constitutive and the distributive elements of governance (Hyden et al., 2008). Hyden et al. argue that, in essence, it is the constitutive aspects (‘rules of the game’) that influence the distributive elements (policy and its implementation), such that the emphasis in defining governance should be on the former rather than the latter. From this understanding of governance, it is the ‘rules in use’ or processes that are given primacy rather than the state of governance as derived from standard measurements. This position aligns well with the need to understand and work with informal institutions in Africa and regard them not as problems but as factors that can either enhance or constrain good governance. There is a need to understand what local actors perceive as ‘good’ governance as a focal point of negotiation and interventions.

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5 As Chabal (2009) rightly warns, the concept of ‘informal’ should not be equated with traditional and therefore less important.
6 According to this view, governance refers to ‘the formation and stewardship of the formal and informal rules that regulate the public realm, the arena in which state as well as economic and societal actors interact to make decisions’ (Hyden et al., 2008).
The notion of ‘good governance’ has always lent itself to externally determined standards of how things ought to be, and how they ought to be measured. In theory, this approach to governance is useful for comparing between countries because they focus on standardised and measurable outcomes. In reality, however, standardised accounts often end up with countries refuting the results because they perceive themselves as holding different understandings of what counts as ‘good’. As a result, most externally-driven governance assessments easily lose their effectiveness as tools for generating actual improvements in governance beyond the name and shame influence (Fritz and Rocha Menocal, 2007).

An alternative proposition that has recently gained currency is the conceptualisation of ‘good enough governance’ (Grindle, 2007). Good enough governance puts the emphasis on minimal conditions necessary to function and looks at existing governance in a particular context as the first step in building to better governance. As a result, it tends to be less stigmatising, more context-sensitive and pragmatic; and a way to build an effective bridge between concerns for results and the process or rules of the game (Fritz and Rocha Menocal, 2007).

According to Grindle’s formulation, putting good enough governance into practice demands that analytical attention be given to understanding: i) context, with a view to identifying existing policies or processes on which to build towards the desired governance changes; ii) content of possible interventions, in terms of their characteristics and with insight into which actions if implemented could be difficult, or could result into conflicts and which ones could easily get support; and iii) process – the complexities of ongoing negotiation, agreement or rejection of issues (or elements of issues) as attempts are made to include changes into public agendas over time. It is also important to understand the conditions that influence the implementation and sustainability of the emerging governance changes. With this kind of analysis, rather than follow a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach, it is possible to identify effective actions and focus on finding explanations for these in a way that then informs the re-designing of institutional change interventions.

Currently there are efforts to improve on the context-informed reform agenda around specific sectors and problems, using Political Economy Analysis7. This is a step beyond the original ‘Drivers of Change’ studies that usually focused on the general state of governance analysis, and on institutions and agents of change, without focusing on the dynamics around a particular sector or problem (DFID, 2009b). However, it is still unclear as to how to solve the problem of engaging citizens as active contributors to policy and practice, and enhancing their ability to demand change and hold public office holders to account. This is a different perspective from one where citizens are just regarded as consumers or target beneficiaries of government policies.

The focus has to be on the incentives and interests of citizens to engage with the state and edge it towards greater accountability, as well as looking at the incentive structures and interests of the state actors toward citizens to involve them in policy processes. The challenge is to inform and support incentives that best link citizen ‘voices’ to opportunities for these voices to transform state institutions towards more accountable, transparent and responsive characteristics. Improved citizen–state relations, through linking voice to accountability, are critical to a realistic agenda on good governance (Foresti et al., 2007). The realisation that strengthening citizen voices to demand accountability as a way to achieving good governance is, however, complex for African societies and countries because it has to be seen in the context of a governing power of the state that is embedded in neopatrimonial relations. These relations have not been properly analysed, understood or accommodated because of the dominance of western theories, research approaches and understandings of good governance and how to achieve it (Chabal, 2009). The next sub-section unpacks this challenge at the conceptual level, from an African perspective, before delving into possible solutions.

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7 ‘Political economy analysis aims to situate development interventions within an understanding of the prevailing political and economic processes in society - specifically the incentives, relationships, distribution and contestation of power between different groups and individuals - all of which greatly impact on development outcomes. Such an analysis can support effective and politically feasible donor strategies, as well as realistic expectations of what can be achieved, over what timescales, and the risks involved.’ GSDRC Topic Guide on Political Economy Analysis: http://www.gsdrc.org/go/topic-guides/political-economy-analysis (DFID, 2009b).
2.2 Linking voice to accountability

In terms of conceptual developments from the demand side, the past decade has seen a convergence of development approaches towards rebuilding relationships between citizens and their governments, and engendering new forms of participation, responsiveness and accountability (Gaventa, 2004). In terms of political theory, this is a project that seeks to bring together improvements in representative democracy (through elections) and participatory democracy, through promoting creative ways in which citizens can engage with their governments around development projects, for instance. The focus is on enabling a kind of government accountability where citizens are able to exact such accountability on the state beyond use of the ballot box, as part of deepening democracy (Gaventa, 2006).

Elections have inherent weaknesses when being used as accountability mechanisms. These weaknesses include the problematic and unequal power relations between representatives and less powerful citizens outside of elections and with very weak accountability to the electorate between elections. Further, representatives can simply pander to constituencies just before an election, thus appearing more accountable than they have been in the intervening period. Another weakness lies in the differences that characterise relations between electors and the elected in terms of holding essential information about government and governing. Often the former knows much more about government processes, which facilitates their ability to manipulate how accountable they are to the latter (Przeworski, 1999). Even more importantly, there is little evidence that politicians under the wide-spread multi-party system in Africa are regarded by the citizens that they represent as more accountable than those who previously held office under one party rule (Chabal, 2009).

In both participatory citizenship and representative democracy perspectives, the central theoretical and practical challenge has been to link voice to accountability as a key mechanism for enabling better citizen–state relations as a form of good governance. The challenge is that although voice and accountability are intimately related, they mean completely different things. Voice pertains to people expressing opinions, based on the assumption that these are in turn based on their interests (O'Neil et al., 2007). Accountability, on the other hand, concerns the relationship between principals and agents. The only instance where voice can meet accountability is where those exercising their voice seek accountability from those to whom the tasks to be performed were delegated. Voice can strengthen accountability, including through demands for greater transparency; and accountability can encourage voice by demonstrating that exercising voice can make a difference. Goetz and Jenkins (2004 in O’Neil et al., 2007) put this problematic, and yet useful, relationship between voice and accountability succinctly:

But, whilst voice is necessary for there to be accountability – for questions to be answered, someone must be asking them – it is not sufficient. Voicing demands can strengthen accountability, but it will not on its own deliver accountable relationships. Indeed, the extent to which voice does or does not deliver accountability is something which will vary between societies and political contexts, depending upon existing power relations, the enabling environment, the nature of the state and its institutions, and the social contract between the state and its citizens, (Goetz and Jenkins, 2004, cited in O’Neil et al, 2007, p.4-5).

In other words, the project of linking voice to accountability has to start by exposing and then addressing the specific discontinuities between voice and accountability in a given governance context. As others have emphasised, ‘voice does not automatically lead to accountability: citizen voice without concrete mechanisms to effectively hold the state accountable is not likely to achieve change’ (Foresti et al., 2007, p.1). This translates into various analytical and programmatic recommendations, including, for instance, the need for donors to do more on accountability mechanisms rather than just concentrating on ‘voice’; taking into account the role of politics in various contexts, especially exploring how informal mechanisms work in tandem with formal mechanisms; diversifying mechanisms of voice; and attempting to tackle the supply and demand
side within the same intervention (Rocha Menocal and Sharma, 2009; Sharma, 2009; Foresti et al., 2007).

Foresti, et al. have gone further and developed a theory-based approach, which seeks to explain the implicit assumptions and theories of change (how x contributes to y) that underpin complex development interventions, as shown in Figure 1 below. The argument is that an intervention theory for voice and accountability as they relate to good governance can contribute to a better understanding of the cause and effect chains linking activities, outputs and results, by allowing exploration of multiple causal strands as well as multiple levels of causality.

**Figure 1: A theory-based voice and accountability intervention logic**

![Intervention logic for V & A](image)

Source: Foresti, et al. (2007, p.11)

As shown in Figure 1, they argue that interventions to improve voice and accountability have to take into account the prevailing socio-economic and political context, including formal and informal rules of the game between different state and societal actors. They recommend that an analysis of the political context should explore the causes of poor governance and how societies and states are transformed, rather than just focus on symptoms of bad governance. A flexible approach, based on observed opportunities, constraints and entry points, in relation to this context analysis, would then follow. The actual programmes and projects would thus focus on building capacities of both non-state actors (to demand or express citizens’ views in policy processes) and state actors (to properly respond in the form of policy-making, implementation and accountability to citizens).

Additionally, the understanding of channels of voice and accountability has to be broadened in terms of the actors involved and the actual support mechanisms being employed. There is a clear need to go beyond working with obvious stakeholders such as the ‘right’ states, and civil society organisations (which often leads to working only with NGOs), to include ‘non-traditional actors’ such as media, political parties and citizen watchdog organisations (Tembo and Wells, 2007; Foresti et al., 2007). With regard to support mechanisms, there is a general trend towards working...
with intermediary organisations, often informed from the donor harmonisation agenda and the urge to reduce transaction costs (Tembo and Wells, 2007; Scanteam, 2007).

This theory-based approach to enhancing voice and accountability for good governance is informative. However, it does not explicitly describe how the link between voice and accountability can be established in these various contexts. In other words, there is still need for a theory-based framework that can be the basis for informing how citizens having a ‘voice’ is programmatically linked to this voice being the agent of state accountability and responsiveness, as the good governance challenge in different contexts. It is this framework that could also effectively inform how political context analysis should be conducted, and/or use results from such analysis; the understanding of opportunities, constraints and entry points, the selection of appropriate programmes and projects; and the actors to work with and the mechanisms to adopt to properly support them in order to achieve and measure the desired governance outcomes.

The following section discusses the proposed theoretical premise for linking voice to accountability for good governance, as located in the African context.

2.3 Citizenship and governance: enhancing citizens’ political agency

The search for new opportunities of enhancing the citizen voice for government accountability can be based on a research-based analysis of citizen–state engagement case studies. The central idea to be explored is how to move from citizens merely expressing their views to one in which this voice catalyses the transformation of state institutions. The idea is to support success stories of enhancing the citizen's political agency at the interface between the state and citizens, as well as incentives to the state actors to work with citizens in ways that enable greater accountability to citizens.

Grindle (2007) emphasises the need to go beyond this construction of the necessary interventions to committing to understanding the processes and conditions that are associated with state-citizen engagement successes. It is also important to move beyond occasional and ad hoc events of success, as is often registered in project monitoring systems, into supporting and observing everyday practices of success in citizen–state engagement at the level of accountability.

In other words, as a programmatic initiative, the aim of the demand-side governance agenda is to develop interventions that provide political leverage\(^8\) to marginalised citizens. Following Villareal's characterisation of this citizen political leverage, we can consider four key factors of citizen engagement, including: i) citizens’ specific understandings of their citizenship; ii) understandings of their rights and obligations; iii) the extent to which citizens understand the workings of both their immediate institutions and those of the state apparatus; and finally iv) the ability of citizens to negotiate their identities and representations as they engage with the state actors (Villarreal, 2002).

In terms of specific understandings of citizenship, and rights and obligations in the African context, Mamdani's (2007) analysis is insightful. He argues that the state influences understandings of citizenship by prescribing the concept of what citizens are in state laws and policies. This process often draws on the country’s history and hence predefines different categories of citizenship (e.g. based on ethnicity or regional boundaries) which privilege some citizens over others in terms of status, and their access to the state and its resources. The relationship between the various created categories of citizens and the state is, therefore, based on these politically (rather than biologically or culturally) inscribed identities. In this context, Mamdani argues, the tendency to conceptualise citizenship through the lens of the three categories of rights as ‘civil’, ‘political’ and ‘socioeconomic’ has to be revisited. The relevant analytical question is not ‘what rights?’, but rather

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\(^8\) Political leverage refers to ‘the advantage that an actor has over others, which enables him/her to achieve his/her objectives, among other actors who are politically pursuing their objectives at the same interface’ (Tembo, 2003a, p.172). In this formulation, it is argued that enabling political leverage is a more authentic form of citizen empowerment than a generic project of citizen participation can offer.
‘whose rights?’ In other words, who has the right to rights or the right to be a citizen? Only those who have been categorised within certain privileged forms of citizenship can exercise voice – especially voice in a way that demands accountability from public office holders.

A useful political economy analysis, therefore, might have to unpack different configurations of citizen identities and categorisations, which will affect how different citizen groups engage with the state, and vice versa. In doing this, we have to bear in mind the danger of categorising citizens in ways that they do not themselves recognise. For example, it is easy to categorise some citizens as ‘youths’ and design interventions accordingly, when they might not see themselves that way and hence will not engage in the manner anticipated. Constitutions of many African countries contain these constraining citizenship prescriptions and possess a lack of clarity over the way that ordinary citizen’s immediate institutions, such as traditional authorities and customs, relate to how politics is played out in the country. Often, politicians take advantage of this lack of constitutional clarity to further undermine the contribution of particular groups of citizens to policy-making processes, including their ability to hold governments to account.

African states often suffer from disparities between the formal rules of the game, of which ordinary citizens are often not aware, and traditional institutions, which people often know well but cannot use effectively because they are not part of the formal legal system. In other words, citizens often lack the basis for engagement with state actors that are based on the rule of law.

Honwana (2007), citing Michel de Certeau, usefully posits the notions of ‘strategic’ versus ‘tactical’ agency to distinguish citizen action by ‘powerful’ citizens compared with that by ‘powerless’ or marginalised citizens. Strategic agency refers to the ability to manipulate relationships from a position of autonomy. Citizens in this position have the freedom to engage politically. These actors have the ability to engage with other citizens and state actors. Strategic agency also implies the ability to create new political spaces that are useful for achieving better livelihoods. Tactical agency, on the other hand, is a feature of the powerless. Where the actor lacks autonomy, they seize any opportunity that arises, and rarely have the ability to force new opportunities to engage with state actors. Honwana contends that tactics are used to take advantage of any opening that a given moment can offer, so that trickery and deception easily come into play in order to take action. This is contrasted with the visible power that is used by strategic actors, which enables them to create multiple opportunities for themselves as they connect with state actors through various avenues within their reach. In Africa, this is likely to include those who have good connections and networks with those in power, which can be sustained over time.

Therefore, in order to enhance political leverage of ordinary citizens, so that they can both have a voice and be able to hold their governments to account, the starting point has to be understanding the strategies they are using. In other words, it is important to understand the way they organise their actions and how, through specific tactics, they create room for manoeuvre (Scott, 1985). This suggests that actions of ordinary citizens should be mobilised in ways they themselves identify with, and should be supported through carefully tailored projects and capacity development initiatives that focus on expanding the political, economic and social capabilities of individuals or groups. In many cases, economic disempowerment has also meant political disempowerment in African societies. Citizens often find themselves relying on patronage relations with public office holders that they put in power through voting, because they need to access resources for their livelihoods.

In researching what works to change citizen engagement, there is need to go beyond individual instances of successful citizen engagement, to being able to identify repeated practices by citizens and supporting these as strategies for institutionalisation, in terms of both citizen schemes of

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9 In another paper, I tried to unpack the effects of different identities, representations and categorisations of citizens on agency (Tembo, 2003b).

10 Sen (1999) explains political freedom as referring to “opportunities that people have to determine who should govern and based on what principles, and also includes the possibility to scrutinize and criticize authorities.” (p. 38).

11 It should be noted that power visibility here does not necessarily mean the use of formal mechanisms or institutions. Power can also be evident in informal patron–client relationships.
engagement with the state and state responsiveness to citizens. These practices will likely be a combination of forms of tactical agency, especially if the state is oppressive, and through carefully provided external support, some of them could be transformed into strategic agency actions. In other words, these actions are specific to the context and actor.

These dynamics of citizen–state engagement require a nuanced approach that broadens the analysis of citizen engagement beyond the singular focus on policy. In the African context, where informal and formal relations underline policy-making, policy-making might itself be relegated to the political imperatives of the day, so that political decisions determine policy rather than the other way round (Hyden, 2006). Therefore, the starting point should be to define critical citizen–state interface areas and then analyse and support the ways in which citizens and their organisations are mobilising and engaging with state actors around these areas.

The Mwananchi programme, then, will scrutinise closely the dynamics and politics of these critical interface areas of citizen–state interactions and identify appropriate interventions for enhancing the political agency of citizens to express their voice and hold state actors to account. The appropriateness of interventions is to be established through provision of support to projects identified by local organisations themselves in their different governance contexts.

2.4 Critical citizen–state engagement interface areas

The identification of critical interface areas\(^{12}\) could enable a broader approach to understanding citizen–state engagement for voice and accountability that would go beyond the narrow focus on policy making, since this alone would not be relevant enough for Africa. Identifying these points of interaction can provide a focus for action research.

Figure 2 below shows the three critical interface areas of representation, policy-making and accountability that were identified in past research.\(^{13}\)

**Figure 2: Critical interface areas for citizen engagement for good governance**

\(^{12}\)Critical interface areas are arenas where contradictions or discontinuities in the engagement between the state (and its governing mechanisms) and citizens occur or are likely to occur (Tembo, 2003a). The idea of an ‘interface’ in this case, goes beyond the face-to-face actor interactions to include the imaginary interactions that an actor can have with another actor, based on the images that they have formed of them (Long, 2001).

\(^{13}\)These critical interface areas and their linkages were evident in the results of empirical research on voices of the poor and engagement with poverty reduction strategies from case studies in selected countries in Africa and Latin America in 2004 and 2005 (Tembo, 2005). The lessons were discussed at a series of case study-based workshops (attended by academics, think tanks and practitioners) that were held at the Annual CIVICUS World Assemblies in Glasgow in 2005 and 2006.
In Africa, where policy-making is embedded in informal power and politics, we need to locate policy in social and political relations, which, in this case, will mean looking at representation and accountability in addition to policy making itself. It is in the arena of representation that citizens’ interests are both constructed (for instance, by calling them voices of the ‘poor’) and contested; it is at the level of policy that these demands are framed for public action, and it is in the arena of accountability that feedback, based on citizen interests, is given. In other words, the processes of accountability, representation and policy are all linked. Without exploring what is happening in all these three arenas, disconnects are overlooked and the initiatives for good governance are rendered less effective.

The sections that follow further clarify the concepts of representation, policy and accountability, and the kind of analysis that is possible for understanding citizen–state engagement in these areas. This could, in turn, also work for identifying a number of context-based proxy indicators of voice and accountability from within this engagement analysis, rather than deriving indicators from external processes or donor frameworks such as the DFID ‘C-A-R’ framework.

2.4.1 Representation

A representative is someone who has been authorised, at least temporarily, to act with relative independence from the one who has delegated the authority to act on their behalf (Peruzzotti, 2006; Santos, 2005). A typical state-citizen engagement, however, is characterised by both direct citizen involvement (participation or self-representation) and indirect citizen involvement (elected representation). In terms of participation, as ‘self-representation’, the governance challenge is often seen in terms of turning passive participation in the planning of development activities and the implementation of these, into active participation by citizens. Interventions are commonly aimed at activating this participation, while concomitantly changing institutions of governance to enable greater responsiveness to citizen participation, for example, through decentralisation so that citizen activism at the grassroots level can produce results.

2.4.1.1 Participation as ‘self-representation’

Terms such as ‘participatory citizenship’ emphasise the importance of self representation and recasts the idea of participation as a political project. In this case, it is the remoulding of citizens to become ‘makers and shapers’– rather than ‘users’ or ‘consumers’ (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001). Gaventa (2004) argues that, from this political perspective, a number of strategies have emerged that are currently contributing to both strengthening representative democracy and participatory poverty reduction outcomes. The focus of analysis in this case is on understanding power within ‘closed’, ‘invited’ or ‘claimed/created’ spaces so that citizen participation is informed accordingly. Gaventa further argues that this analysis should take into account the dynamics at local, national and global levels in order to ensure an appropriate understanding of the transformational potential that exists in each given space and the power of the actors involved.

It should be noted, however, that to be effective, the challenge of turning nominal participation into participatory citizenship needs to go beyond redefining participation as citizenship and power in given spaces, to addressing the flaws of the theoretical premises of participation. Leeuwis (2000) argues, for example, that the dominant models of participation are based on Habermas’s theory of ‘communication’ and ‘communicative action’ as key ingredients for social learning. These theories and approaches underestimate the significance of strategic actions that the stakeholders bring to the participatory space by promoting communication to meet common goals. The reality is that in the context of limited resources and differences in what participating in a given activity means to different people, their interactions are characterised by a struggle to be understood and find ways to gain advantage over other people who are also participating in the same activity. In this situation, depoliticised models of participation could do more harm than good to those who are not being understood and failing to find their way through to benefits of participation (see Hickey and Mohan, 2004).

Therefore, in the case of participatory citizenship, power should be construed as essentially ‘the ability to achieve a desired outcome in competition with other actors who lay claim to the same
resources needed to produce that outcome’ (Hyden, 2008). The case for enhancing citizen’s political agency, or ‘strategic agency’ as discussed above, becomes a case of how citizens work with their governments in order to lay successful claims that relate to their interests at a particular power space, in a given governance context. In this case, participation as a process of negotiation and bargaining between citizens and state actors is, therefore, a way to approach participatory citizenship as a mechanism for enhancing good governance (Tembo, 2003a).

Through this approach, it might be possible to describe or measure the extent to which governance situations are changing. This could be approached by looking at citizens’ gender, education or income levels, along various levels of decision-making structures or themes – for example, in budgets (Santos, 2005). This analysis of the quality of participation would, over time, give the good governance project an opportunity to relate any changes in the prevailing rules of the game or changes across the spectrum of ‘invited’, ‘closed’ and ‘claimed’ power spaces, in a given governance context to changes in the agency characteristics of the particular categories of citizens. However, it is the elected element of representation, as a form of ‘deepening democracy’ (Gaventa, 2006) that is the central issue in this paper, and hence the rest of the paper is devoted to unpacking and making use of elected representation to enhance good governance. The Mwananchi programme has embedded the role of elected representation in its assumptions of what works for demand-side good governance.

2.4.1.2 Elected representation

Elected representation, when considered as ‘acting in the best interest of’ (Przeworski et al., 1999), is a critical mechanism of cultivating relationships between citizens and state, and for providing the basis for voice and accountability. The promotion of this form of relationship has taken centre stage in the context of the rise in multiparty democracy (in which several political parties compete during elections) in Africa over the past decade. In this case, a multiparty democratic system is seen as an effective way to provide citizens with more chances to elect representatives of their choice (often every five years) so that they can deliver on their interests.

Conceptually, representation concerns the use of delegated authority to inform or formulate policies based on the interests of citizens (as principals), and potentially a stronger relationship with citizens than participatory citizenship. In Africa, this representation and ‘representativeness’ has to be understood within the politics of belonging and, hence, reciprocity takes a very vital role in its characterisation (Chabal, 2009). Chabal argues that it is reciprocity (exchange relations) that informs an individual’s (in this case the elected representative) sense of obligation within networks and communities where they belong, and the nature of political power. It is from these relations of exchange (albeit unequal because of disparities of power) that elected representatives derive their political legitimacy and therefore, the practice of representation is directly linked with how they manoeuvre around these relations, in both material and symbolic ways. They have to fit in with particular constituency identities (e.g. ethnicity), align with the interests of their community, and display these according to the expectations of the community to which they belong. In this case, what the representative gives back to their community (in the sense of belonging and reciprocity) might be called ‘corruption’ to the Western world, but could be deemed appropriate within the society to which the representative belongs.

It is difficult to define a priori what happens at this representation interface, in the African context. Therefore, it is important to derive understanding from specific cases and contexts in terms of how citizens experience representation by elected officials and how elected officials experience representing citizens. Some general indicators of representation can form a starting point for this action learning process.

Santos (2005) indicates some of the issues that might matter to citizens in assessing their elected representatives and the quality of their representation14. These include i) representatives’ autonomy from the government in terms of both the structure and process of making decisions so that citizens’ priorities are not distorted into those of the executive; ii) the transparency of

14 These are drawn mainly from a Latin American context and hence should be treated as just possibilities
representatives to their constituencies or those who elected them, so as to ensure that the representatives’ views reflect those of the citizens; iii) the ability of elected representatives to communicate information from the main decision forum (e.g. parliament) to the citizens and vice versa. This has to take into account the fact that some of the information could be technically complex at the point of production, e.g. government budget information; iv) the frequency and quality of attendance at decision-making meetings where constituency views are made use of as evidence. For instance, an MP who continually misses parliamentary sittings, or does not contribute to motions in parliament, is unlikely to be able to assist citizens to engage in influencing bills as they become law. How relevant these issues are in the African context is a key research question. The nuances in the specific context could bring out a new set of relevant indicators. It is these indicators that can then help us to understand how policy works in Africa. The policy process is itself a complex arena, as the following subsection shows.

2.4.2 Policy

‘There is little evidence that key political actors in Africa view policy as a forward-looking instrument that mediates the relation between private interests and public goods --- Politics impinges itself on public policy making in ways that marginalize economic thinking’ (Hyden, 2006, p.136).

According to Western theories, in a representative democracy policy is an outcome of representatives doing or having done their work (having passed a relevant bill or law, for example which then the bureaucrats craft into a set of policies or a policy) (Przeworski et al., 1999). In the African context, however, the relationship between representation and policy-making is not that straightforward. These processes are conceptually distinct and need to be understood in terms of how politics is used to put forward decisions, since not all of them are coming from formal representation. In this case, even the legislature and local councillors could be playing little more than a minor role beyond endorsement of pre-calculated bills, or as part of the reciprocity network with some of the members of the executive.

More accurately, there is no guarantee that the outcomes from a good representation process will flow into policy, or that policy will be translated into practice. There are disconnects between policies and the interests that policies represent on one hand, and the way policies are translated into practical actions on the other. In the latter case, this concerns, among other things, translation of policy priorities into practical targets and translation of policies into actual resource flows and budgets at different levels of the governmental system. In other words, the whole policy-making process, from agenda setting, decision-making, and implementation to monitoring and evaluation often has many points of disconnection in terms of both the content and level of engagement by various stakeholder groups.

A more comprehensive demand-side good governance analysis, should, therefore, unpack this policy process challenge. This means exploring how citizen demands are translated into policies, starting from the agenda setting and decision-making levels and continuing to assess how they are, in turn, translated into practical actions where citizens are able to engage in policy monitoring and evaluation. In this context, it is important to understand how both the formal and informal rules of citizen engagement allow for citizen inputs into the policy process, while paying attention to the fact that it is possible that the formal context is not where actual decisions are made. In other words, too much preoccupation with the formal policy making stages can still result in an over-preoccupation with issues of ‘voice’ and neglect the effect on policy change and delivery.

In terms of indicators, therefore, it may be preferable to examine the rules in use in the setting of standards of service delivery, and how citizens participate in the workings of these rules. This would pertain to the participative dimensions at agenda setting level, in the formal sense (Teskey, 2006). In this case, it is possible to have a formal policy that includes the mention of children, for instance. However, this does not necessarily reflect the nature of ‘citizen engagement’ in the policy agenda setting. In order to reflect on citizen engagement, particular attention would have to be paid to the inputs of children as the citizens in question, or organisations that represent them. A political
economy analysis approach is required to capture the dynamics in policy agenda setting with regard to citizen engagement. In other words, it is possible to start with analysing a formal policy process and then use skills from political economy analysis to understand the political dynamics in order to illuminate the nature of citizen engagement in the process.

In essence, this unpacking of the process by which the policy agenda is set is also the start of understanding the ability of citizens to hold their government to account, because it is during agenda-setting that standards are set. The setting of standards is important because they become the benchmarks against which accountability can be demanded (Lindberg, 2009).

2.4.3 Accountability
Accountability can be defined as ‘a pro-active process by which public officials inform about and justify their plans of action, their behaviour and results and are sanctioned accordingly’ (Ackerman, 2005). Ackerman’s definition emphasises the ongoing relationship between citizens and the state, and not just the process of providing feedback. From this perspective, accountability also encourages ‘pro-active behaviours’ like information disclosure and the calling to account before, during and after decisions are made, and the application of sanctions (both positive and negative). In this case, Ackerman (2005) argues, ‘external’ forms of accountability and ‘superior authority’ is not necessarily required for accountability.

However, in the African governance context, accountability has to be located in the understanding of the public office holder’s sense of belonging, legitimacy and representation (Chabal, 2009). This throws up multiple accountabilities derived from both the way the incumbent perceives their exchange relations with the citizens and how citizens perceive the role or function assumed by the representative. This again speaks to the significance of understanding the informal mechanisms of accountability and ‘holding each other to account’ that could be visible or invisible, direct or indirect. It also explains the findings in Hyden (2010) research on parliamentarians in Ghana, where they say that accountability as responsiveness accounted more for how parliamentarians perceived and practised their role and position than accountability as ‘answerability’.

In accountability as ‘responsiveness’, Hyden argues, the elected representatives are held to account in terms of trying to meet the expectations of the electorate (what they have done to meet these expectations), while in accountability as ‘answerability’, elected representatives are held to account in terms of giving a report on how they have done it, and the measures that they have taken to address anomalies. In the Western view of accountability, it is ‘answerability’ that is sought after. And as Hyden (2010) found in Ghana, some elected representatives do their best to account in these terms. However, in the context of reciprocity, it is meeting the expectations of the electorate, which includes, but is not limited to, the distribution of resources based on patronage relations, that often prevails. The resulting situation is often one of MPs with multiple and dynamic accountabilities in the context in which they operate (Lindberg, 2010).

Therefore, the search for mechanisms of accountability that might work in the African contexts could be based on looking at the standard accountability indicators, in the more formal sense. The approach would entail an examination of how they express themselves when informal relations are taken into account. There is then the need to be open to looking at other indicators within specific citizen–state engagements that could be analogous to the concept of answerability in the Western sense.

These standard formal indicators of accountability could be drawn from concepts such as ‘investigation’, ‘answerability’ and ‘sanctions’ (Teskey, 2006). In this case, ‘investigation’ pertains to assessment of actual delivery of services (as policy implementation) against set standards, including those which citizens themselves participated in formulating as part of agenda setting. ‘Answerability’ refers to assessment of the extent to which public office holders are made to account for their performance against the set standards, and the extent to which citizens can make state or public actors answer for their performance. ‘Sanctions’ refer to punishments or rewards that citizens use to correct performance of government actors, as part of citizen engagement in
policy monitoring and evaluation. It is these indicators of accountability that apply much more to accountability as answerability rather than responsiveness, as in Hyden’s (2006) formulation. Therefore, the key question is: How do citizen investigation, answerability and citizen sanctions take place, in both formal and informal settings, and what is the relationship between them?

According to Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2006) who discuss citizen’s sanctions, social sanctions are most effective. These sanctions take the form of exposure and denunciation of wrongdoings with evidence of victims, victimisers and the extent of the damage which can then transform the issue into a general public agenda, forcing public officials to publicly answer for them. They can also activate the involvement of horizontal mechanisms of accountability (oversight agencies such as ombudsmen) by making them visible; and also vertically by increasing reputational costs which public office holders can fear in terms of the implications for future elections. Lastly, these social mechanisms can lead to the establishment of social watch-dog organisations, raising issues for horizontal institutions (such as Anti-Corruption Commissions) or engaging directly with state institutions, such as the judiciary, on behalf of citizens. The exact nature and configurations of these sanctioning mechanisms will depend on context and the prevailing citizen–state relations. In the African context, the workings of these strategies will have to be explored carefully through case studies in the Mwananchi programme. In cases where the boards of watchdog institutions are appointed by the president or the executive, the informal relations that the heads of these institutions have with the president and the executive are critical in shaping how effective they can be as horizontal mechanisms on which ordinary citizens can rely.

Ultimately, the discussion above shows that it is possible to locate three distinct, but interlinked processes by which citizen–state engagement is most critical and to assess changes in this relationship over time. Figure 3 illustrates what might be looked for in analysing and intervening (as enhancing political agency of marginalised citizens) in the ongoing processes, or representation, policy and accountability, from the perspective of citizen voice and accountability.

Figure 3: Generic questions/ pointers to developing indicators of citizen engagement
Furthermore, as indicated in Figure 3, understanding what happens in the interface areas of representation, policy and accountability, could be best approached, for learning purposes, if the focus is narrowed down to particular citizen engagement issues or areas where ‘policy controversies’ exist or are likely to be found. This is where the dynamics will be sharper and, hence easier to observe. They will likely provide action learning interventions with greater assurance of achieving some measurable outcomes within a shorter time frame than if a broad governance agenda was selected (Hyden, 2006). The Mwananchi programme, as described in more depth later in this paper, bases its action learning on specific governance issues that each National Coordination Organisation (NCO) and multi-stakeholder group (involving media, CSOs and elected representatives) identify through a systematic synthesis of evidence from research on their governance context.
3. A focus on the interlocutors

As proposed in section 2.3, effective demand-side governance interventions should enhance political leverage of marginalised citizens in their interactions with state actors. To achieve this, there must be a process that identifies what marginalised citizens themselves use for their tactics of engagement, and the way they organise these actions at the critical interface areas of representation, policy and accountability. The idea is to transform relationships towards those that are more strategic in the way citizens engage with the state. However, research and practice, especially in the African context, shows that there are various interlocutors\(^\text{15}\) that heavily orchestrate the engagement of citizens with their states. It is the interlocutors that mostly work on citizen empowerment, articulate citizen voices, mobilise identified citizen strategies, provide channels of this voice into policy, and work on exacting state accountability. In other words, interlocutors are often the active institutions involved in ‘hammering out the terms of the social contract’ between the governors and the governed, on which effective accountability depends (Teskey, 2006).

Although there are numerous interlocutors of citizen–state relationships, civil society organisations, media, elected representatives (parliamentarians and local councillors) and traditional leaders\(^\text{16}\), were selected as the focus of the Mwananchi programme. This was because evidence shows that these are the main interlocutors with the potential to effectively transform citizen–state relations around representation, policy and accountability. This has resulted in increased donor support to civil society, parliament and decentralisation processes, in order to promote actors outside government that enhance citizen engagement (Scanteam, 2008; AusAID, 2010).

It is these interlocutors, for instance, that are able to work with the *wananchi* (the plural of ‘*mwananchi*’) to develop clear standards of state performance around a particular domain or issue against which accountability can then be exacted (Linberg, 2009). There is usually a wide information gap between the *wananchi* and the politicians and policy-makers in general, and these interlocutors are able to work out the details of the required information and setting of standards for accountability to happen. Otherwise, there will still be more voice than accountability. The interlocutors are the ones that work out the details of achieving strategic citizenship through articulating the specific conceptions of citizenship; for example rights and obligations for citizens and states, increasing citizens understanding of the workings of institutions in the particular context; and enhancing citizens’ ability to negotiate multiple identities and representations.

The discussion of interlocutors is developed from a functional perspective, by looking at their inherent and potential characteristics, which then qualify them to play the defined roles that may lead to the changes in the way citizens engage with the state. In other words, it is the operational forms of these characteristics that can potentially contribute to the good governance agenda, not the labels of ‘civil society’ or ‘media’ per se; it is the function and not organisation that is the key point of focus. From this perspective, while civil society, the media and elected representatives can help solve weak or ineffective governance, they can also be part of the problem.

Different governance contexts will present different practical challenges to these functional roles and, hence, it is not only the internal characteristics of these interlocutors that matter for good governance;

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\(^{15}\) According to the World English Dictionary, the word ‘interlocutor’ has three meanings, all of them having elements that strongly relate to the function that these actors play according to this discussion paper: a) a person who takes part in a *conversation or dialogue*, (b) the man in the middle of the line of *performers* in a minstrel troupe, (c) a person who *questions; interrogator*. The words in bold reflect concepts of interest in the citizen-state spaces where the interlocutors in discussion play their role. Despite its inherent flaws thanks to Steve Commins for bringing out this concept during our informal discussion.

\(^{16}\) It should be noted that the focus on media, elected representatives and civil society was validated at the ODI’s consultation with the multi-stakeholder group that was organised for proposal writing in Malawi in 2008, as part of the pre-GTF application activities. However, it was after consultations were conducted in the other six countries, post GTF approval, that ‘traditional leaders’ as a separate and significant interlocutor was added.
the type of government in the context matters as well. This approach suggests moving away from attempts to predefine categories of civil society, media and elected representatives, because the manifest characteristics of these interlocutors, especially in the African context, are also dependent on the character of the state (Karlstrom, 1999). In other words, certain state institutional characteristics are more able to promote and include certain forms of media or civil society, than others. The neopatrimonial characteristics of most of the African states have a significant influence on the functioning of civil society and other non-state actors. The research by CIVICUS, using their Civil Society Index, illuminates the diverse nature of these engagement spaces in different country contexts. Consequently, it is inappropriate to prejudge these interlocutors. Instead, the process of selecting which interlocutors work effectively in a given governance context or on a specific issue becomes an empirical political economy analysis question, rather than something that can be derived from a typology of organisations.

3.1 Assumptions about interlocutors

There are three major assumptions in working with these interlocutors which, taken together, form the hypothesis for action learning in the Mwananchi programme. Firstly, the interlocutors all have distinct institutional roles in working with both citizens and state actors. These roles also provide these actors with comparative advantages over each other in enhancing good governance. Enhancing the clarity and performance of these roles, therefore, would significantly contribute to improving citizen–state engagement for good governance. Secondly, improving relationships among these actors, and in their interactions with state actors, can help clarify their roles and increase opportunities and effectiveness in engagement with citizens on the one hand, and state responsiveness on the other. Thirdly, the use of evidence might enable these actors to be more effective in influencing representation, policy and accountability processes.

3.2 Clarifying institutional roles of interlocutors

The idea behind this section is to propose ways in which a governance project can identify and support the development of the positive functions that exist among interlocutors and suggest how to increase the emergence of such characteristics as part of the capacity development of the programme. The discussion also considers what might happen when the state with which they work exhibits both formal and informal characteristics.

3.2.1 Civil society

Edwards (2004) tackles the contested definitional issues of civil society from its theoretical foundations, and suggests three categories. These are: ‘associational life’ (advancing common interests and collective action); ‘good society’ (breeding ground for good habits, attitudes and values such as cooperation, love and trust); and ‘public sphere’ (public deliberation, rational dialogue and active citizenship).

These categories offer an analytical framework for understanding how civil society could strengthen its relationship with ordinary citizens and the state in representation, policy and accountability. For instance, civil society as ‘associational life’ has attributes of the building of social capital, making it important for strengthening citizenship and participatory representation. This is particularly useful for citizenship as it is applied to marginalised citizens. Furthermore, civil society as ‘good society’ could positively contribute to reinforcement of integrity and transparency.

Neopatrimonialism refers to a particular governance logic where both formal institutions (e.g. the state structures and policies) and informal rules, norms and practices (e.g. personalism, clientelism, patronage, de facto centralised control of state resources, etc.) are used by the rulers and those in opposition in order to gain legitimacy and advantage in a ‘winner-takes-all’ competition for control of the state (O’Neil, 2007).

Michael Edwards defines civil society from the association life perspective as ‘all associations and networks between the family and the state in which membership and activities are “voluntary” – formally registered NGOs of many different kinds, labour unions, political parties, churches and other religious groups, professional and business associations, community and self-help groups, social movements and independent media’ (Edwards, 2004, p.20).
in individuals if that is cultivated in the society. This can then become the basis for creating a solid foundation for accountability if an individual from that society is then elected into public office.

Furthermore, when civil society plays this role, it enhances social accountability, so that citizens themselves then engage with state actors based on their projects, concerns or issues, through learning to negotiate new spaces. The conceptualisation of participatory governance and social accountability programmes is based on this direct citizen–state engagement model. According to this view ‘the potential for participatory governance is greatest at the local level, where citizens can directly engage with local authorities on issues of direct relevance to their lives (such as the provision of essential services, the development of the community, the management of shared resources and the resolution of conflicts) (CIVICUS, 2006). Much of the progress on participatory governance, which can also be labelled ‘co-governance’ is dependent on political will on the part of the state and willingness and capacities of citizens and civil society (Marlena, 2009).

Civil society, as a group of associational organisations, also independently holds governments to account. In this case, civil society provides the additional checks and balances to those that come from the horizontal mechanisms inside the state establishments, such as the office of the auditor-general or ombudsmen, or otherwise activates the actions of these horizontal institutions of accountability. These established institutions have the mandate, often stipulated in the constitution, to work from the legal accountability platform, which is a stronger basis to work from than lobbying by NGOs. However, these institutions tend to be weaker in neopatrimonial states as they can easily be undermined by the executive or ‘the big man’. In these situations, the continuous push by CSOs might make a difference in leading them to act where they would otherwise not have acted. In this case, it can be argued that civil society is playing a role on the constituent side of representation rather than the political side where elected representatives belong (Peruzzotti, 2006).

From this position, CSOs can be creative and provide innovative actions that can fill in the gap of demand for government accountability in between elections because they are part of the citizen category, the vertical mechanisms of accountability. These roles are significant for enabling good governance (DFID, 2006; 2007a; 2007b), although the aim is not to create a co-governance process, as is the case when citizens engage directly in a social accountability project (e.g. citizen report cards), described above. In this context, Peruzzotti argues that the right question to ask of these organisations is not ‘Who do you represent?’ but ‘What do you represent?’ (Peruzzotti, 2006, p. 52/53).

It should also be noted, however, that these direct engagement processes by CSOs, can lead to the creation of parallel structures to the vertical accountability institutions that are based on elections, which undermines rather than strengthens these local institutions. Evidence has shown that since NGOs are not elected, they can easily promote a ‘de-politicised’ agenda, even in their provision of services, and lead to an erosion of effective political processes that are imbedded in the electable processes of governance (Lange, 2008). Most NGOs attest to being ‘apolitical’, when in fact, by taking away opportunities from citizens to engage politically with their local political structures, they indirectly undermine political accountability on which the good governance agenda depends.

This situation can arise in the way NGOs work with community based organisations (CBOs) at the local level. For example, research on CBOs in Tanzania showed that although these organisations theoretically exhibit strong associational life because they are local and often self-formed, they are often depoliticised or otherwise used to divert attention from the political dimensions of local governance. They are provided with resources, mostly by NGOs, and often run parallel development processes to those promoted under the local government decentralisation process, where there are elected councillors and members of parliament (Lange, 2008; Dill, 2009). The

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19 Social accountability is ‘an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e. in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability’ (World Bank, 2004, cited in Ackerman, J. M. 2005, p.1). It also includes actions on the part of government, media or other actors that promote or enhance these efforts. (Malena and McNeil, 2010)
NGO sector is also characterised as being poorly coordinated and hence easily vulnerable to state capture which in turn leads to lack of ability to put pressure on governments (Tripp, 2003).

This analysis of civil society functions, as played around representation and accountability, shows that there could be more effectiveness in working with civil society to enhance voice and accountability in ways that go beyond the focus on policy processes per se. However, the civil society roles described above also demonstrate that it might be helpful to focus attention on what is happening, rather than what ought to happen, in the work of various dimensions of civil society as instruments of citizen–state engagement for good governance (Kasfir, 1998). In other words, the locally determined configurations of interactions between citizens and the state, and the role of civil society in these interactions, could be the focus of interventions rather than pre-judging what civil society should do, which is an action research agenda.

3.2.2 Media

Independent media and think tanks are also included within the definition of civil society. However, for the purposes of this discussion paper and the Mwananchi programme, media organisations are treated as a special category of interlocutors of the relationship between citizens and the state, especially where the move towards the public sphere is desirable. Research shows that the media are principal orchestrators of new forms of political dialogue in democracies, and increasingly so as freedom of both association and information are seen as key foundations of good governance. Pippa Norris, for example, identifies three key roles of the media in contributing to democratisation and good governance,

‘as a watch-dog over the powerful through promotion of accountability, transparency and public scrutiny; as a civic forum for political debate, facilitating informed electoral choices and actions; and as an agenda-setter, for policy makers, strengthening government responsiveness for instance to social problems and to exclusion’ (cited in Buckley et al., 2008, p. 12).

Furthermore, the rise in what is now called ‘mobile activism’ in Africa, is perceived to be breaking new ground in allowing citizens to bypass traditional structures and engage with policy-makers (Ekine, 2010). It is argued that media are a crucial source of information for citizens and a mechanism for giving citizens voice by creating a powerful communicative platform for citizen–state engagement. This is in addition to the role of media as a public watchdog – monitoring and reporting on government activities and public issues. The media can, therefore, be regarded as an integral part of transparency, public awareness, informed debate and accountability. As such, the media is worth exploring in terms of its role in strengthening representation, policy and accountability as discussed in this paper. In terms of representation, the media’s role is now seen as going beyond informing and entertaining, to being a medium of articulation of culture and identities, using visual and symbolic mechanisms that have existed for a long time and are well known to ordinary citizens, especially in the African cultures (Buckley et al., 2008).

It is worth noting that, in neopatrimonial states, governments always attempt to control the independence of the media through the management of registration processes (Cammack, 2007). Cammack notes that governments can block registration of independent radio stations on ‘technical grounds’ or otherwise prevent them from broadcasting news. This results in few, or weak, independent media outlets. Most newspapers in African states tend to be owned by politicians or their families, who use them as part of their party propaganda machinery. The tendency is that, even though newspapers and radio stations owned by people who are not in power can be utilised to demand openness from government, their stance soon changes as their patrons get into power. ‘Such media do not serve as watchdogs in any real sense’, argues Cammack (ibid, p. 603).

3.2.3 Parliaments

Elected representatives (parliamentarians and local councillors) provide a direct opportunity to citizens because the election process is dependent on the ability of citizens to delegate authority to
representatives who become agents, while the citizens themselves assume the role of principals. This creates a potential situation for political accountability\textsuperscript{20} (Lindberg, 2009). There could, therefore, be more opportunities in this case for enabling the move from citizen voice to citizens able to hold government to account than CSOs can achieve because CSOs are not elected. Furthermore, members of parliament are theoretically positioned on both the demand and supply sides of political governance. In other words, they work on both the vertical and horizontal sides of state accountability (Hudson and GOVNET, 2009; Hyden, 2008). It is through their legislative role, for instance, that parliament is able to pass laws that then become legal frameworks for government policy formulation and implementation. It is not possible for either media or civil society to play this legislative role. It is also the parliamentary oversight role that helps to check the already dominant power of the executive on the budget, and to ensure a general rebalancing of power between legislature, executive and judiciary. In other words, parliaments have the functional role to engage as representatives, policy makers or influencers and in accountability, which can be explored and enhanced for enhancing voice and accountability.

It is within informal relations that we need to find roles played by parliamentarians that work for citizens and through a much closer exploration of what works for representation, policy making and accountability. For example, research on parliaments in Ghana shows that, contrary to popular perceptions of the effect of clientelism on the poor, there are some forms of clientelistic behaviour of MPs in Ghana that privilege the provision of public goods to their constituencies, rather than private ones (Lindberg, 2010). Although these results cannot be generalised to all the seven Mwananchi programme countries, nor to the rest of Africa, they are indicative of the potential to find political tipping points for how MPs could work for the good of citizens and become answerable based on public good provisions.

In Africa, it is parliamentarians with good relations with the president who tend to be more powerful than those from opposition parties or those acting as independents (Cammack, 2007). Even when parliamentarians have been voted into power by citizens as independent MPs, such parliamentarians may switch allegiance to the ruling party. Most of these MPs will have campaigned on promises of good roads, food security and similar provisions. This results in a huge difference in terms of access to government resources between ruling government MPs and those acting as independent MPs or members of the opposition. On the side of MPs in the ruling party, the position of the ruling party often also means that these MPs ‘can rarely initiate independent-minded legislation or reject policies coming from the president; instead they tend to rubber-stamp his [sic.] initiatives’ (Cammack, 2007, p. 603).

3.2.4 Local councillors

Owing to their proximity to the people, elected representatives at the local government level provide a unique interface between the citizens and the state in terms of linking traditional and formal institutions of governance. In the African neopatrimonial state, it is characteristic of governance overall that elected representatives at the local level have greater organisational and institutional opportunities to mediate formal and informal governance institutions. The process of decentralisation, which in its various forms (devolution or delegation) is currently underway in most African states, including the seven GTF countries, provides important opportunities to build relationships between local government, community-level organisations and the media.

Local politics, however, suggest the existence of contests for power and access to resources that go beyond the technical elements of decentralisation reforms and capacity development at the local level. Systemic issues are both created and sustained by a multiplicity of interests, including those of the bureaucracy (for instance district commissioners), traditional leaders, MPs, councillors,

\textsuperscript{20} Lindberg (2009) argues that for an accountability relationship, there is need to exhibit five characteristics: (a) there needs to be an agent or institution that is to give and account; (b) an area, responsibilities or domain subject to accountability; (c) a principal or institution to whom the agent is to give an account; (d) the right of the principal to require of the agent to inform, justify decisions with regard to their ascribed responsibilities, and (e) the right of the principal to sanction the agent if the agent fails to justify the decisions or actions they performed in accordance to the ascribed responsibilities.
NGOs and several other players, which produce diverse centres of power at the local level (Cammack et al., 2007). Furthermore, evidence from research conducted in Tanzania (Lushoto district) shows that the relationship between local councillors is characterised by competition for drawing resources to their individual wards. This creates avenues for ‘veranda\(^{21}\) politics’ between councillors and the district commissioner, as they attempt to find ways to access resources outside the formal route (Harrison, 2008).

3.2.5 Traditional Leaders

Traditional leaders tend to exercise the most influence at the local level (Logan, 2009), at which there is evident contestation and struggle for resources and their allocation among the local government officials and the elected leaders (members of parliament and local councillors). In other words, the role of traditional leaders is not limited to being cultural, ceremonial or advisory, as is often perceived by those at the national level. On the contrary, at the community level these authorities may compete with local government officials for power – over land, tax revenues or other resources, over responsibility for dispensing justice, for influence over community activities and decisions, and even for votes.

The multiple roles of traditional leaders tend to create environments for other forms of politics as well, for example between members of parliament and local councillors. Local councillors often aspire to become MPs because the position is perceived as being well connected at the national level, thereby allowing greater access to power and resources. The competition happens around incentivising the support of traditional leaders, and in some countries parliaments have not supported local government elections as a result.

3.3 Creating synergies among interlocutors and with state actors

A key hypothesis of the Mwananchi programme is that bringing parliaments, civil society and media together to work collaboratively would provide a greater opportunity for strengthening citizen demand for good governance than working on each individually. Each agent has different capabilities as interlocutors of citizen–state relationships. It is, therefore, possible to create complementary and synergetic relationships among them that will work for good governance if political relationships among them are factored into the process (Tripp, 2003). The aim is to take advantage of the implicit synergies in roles to provide better ways to articulate citizen voices into the policy arena, and mechanisms for holding the governments to account at the various levels of engagement.

From the critical citizen–state interface areas elaborated in Figure 2, it is possible to argue that, whereas civil society, on the basis of associational life, can strengthen the quality of representation, good policy formulation requires proper aggregation of interests either at regional or national level. Civil society associations, however, also harbour inequalities and sectoral tendencies within themselves (based on, for example, ethnic, cultural or religious grounds) which, although representative, would result in weak policies.

In this case, the media, who are theoretically able to generate information and dialogue without necessarily being directly involved, may help civil society in the aggregation and communication of citizen interests. For example, the media are able to influence a policy process by bringing closed debates into the public arena, where different stakeholders can engage and government transparency can be enhanced. In other words, the media can improve accountability by publicising the decisions and events that lead to specific outcomes of public interest, which would otherwise have remained hidden. These revelations could then put public pressure on public watchdog institutions with constitutionally defined roles to check government actions, to act in ways that they would otherwise not have acted.

\(^{21}\) A veranda is the corridor where people wait and take advantage of any opportunity to talk to the district commissioner without any formal appointment because they know that they are seeking an audience informally.
Elected representatives, on the other hand, operate largely within an institutional structure of parliamentary debates at the national level (or, in the case of local councillors, at sub-national level). However, additional mechanisms for national and regional citizen interest aggregation, including MP constituency surgeries, opportunities for people to attend council meetings, and so on, are increasingly emerging as new practices through which parliamentarians enhance their representational roles. This could enhance the role of parliaments, which have both vertical and horizontal accountability mechanisms, unlike the media and civil society. This means that the increasingly vertical and informal relations could potentially be checked by well-functioning parliaments. Furthermore, parliaments tend to have access to privileged information through select committees, for instance, which is critical for effective monitoring and holding of government to account. In this case, although it is often CSOs and media that are involved in social accountability exercises, such as budget tracking, it is parliamentary committees that are able to have access to sufficient information, rendering effective tracking and sanctioning possible.

In the African context, the workings of the public sphere has a different meaning because most deliberations happen in both formal and informal spaces. Thus, sufficient attention should be given to actor knowledge frameworks, social networks, power and use of evidence, so that synergetic actions can be facilitated.

### 3.3.1 Knowledge interfaces

Civil society, media and elected representatives use different knowledge frameworks or ways of interacting with the world around them. These knowledge frameworks influence the view that these different actors form of each other and of the governance issue itself (Tembo, 2003b), which in turn shapes the stakeholder’s actions. We cannot, therefore, settle for agreements on broad goals in a given situation, such as poverty reduction, without exploring the knowledge frameworks and images that each stakeholder has (Jones and Tembo, 2008). Use of interface analysis tools can help to show how these interactions are taking place and their effects on representation, policy and accountability processes.

### 3.3.2 Knowledge networks

Understanding knowledge networks\(^{22}\) is critical. These are the immediate channels and mechanisms available to actors (including policy-makers), through which relevant information is shared and transformed to fit their interest. This can often inform which evidence counts for policy-making, as well as who policies benefit. This happens through various means of communication, legitimisation and integration into each of the actors’ life-worlds and across them (Long, 2001). Knowledge networks facilitate the creation of common agendas in the process of bonding, bridging or the creation of alliances from local to national levels and vice versa. However, they are also responsible for conflicts within and among civil society, media and elected representatives, depending on how the different actors perceive their role versus that of others and, hence, their perception of inclusion or exclusion, at the level of knowledge and how it is produced.

The idea for promoting synergy among interlocutors could be to work with networks towards forms (flow, configurations and content) that optimise civil society, media and elected representatives’ engagement with each other and the state. This will start with areas where there is a consensus that joint action is necessary, and then work towards more intricate relational areas, where contestations over resources are likely. The idea of networks should not be limited to the formalised networks that usually exist in a country. In this way, it also possible to analyse networks for their effects on the quality of citizen participation representation, the quality of policy delivery, and the effect of networks on accountability in terms of government answerability and citizens’ application of sanctions.

\(^{22}\) Knowledge networks imply that there are knowledge patterns that are shared among certain groups of actors and not others, and hence they use these different understandings, often embedded in language, to both include and exclude other actors.
3.3.3 Power

In terms of interfacing knowledge frameworks, power is the ability to have one stakeholder’s views define the direction of action, in spite of the views of other actors (Tembo, 2003b; Hyden, 2008). As a result, power shapes how the different actors (civil society, media and elected representatives) engage with each other, and with citizens, during their different projects. The key question, therefore, is ‘whose interpretation of the governance interventions prevails and how is it negotiated?’

When power is considered from this perspective it is possible to see its direct effect on the participation and representativeness of a policy process. For example, NGOs or local councillors could claim to represent particular citizen groups at the local level, when in fact the mechanisms used to engage with citizens are not able to accommodate the differences in the ways that citizens communicate their views.

3.4 The role of evidence

In a context where decisions are made within patronage politics and networks of reciprocity, policy making itself might neither be a direct objective nor a clear frame of reference for guiding the actions of public office holders (Hyden, 2006).

Evidence-based approaches can play a critical role in enabling interlocutors (CSOs or media) to effectively work to improve citizen voice and accountability, with regards to policy influencing and citizen engagement. Equipped with robust evidence, interlocutors might be better able to influence engagement processes than they would be without evidence, even within the patron-client relations. In this case, the available evidence and its presentation might become the point of reference and perhaps be useful for dealing with some of the informal links that are used in the citizen–state engagement spaces. The informal relations themselves might not be completely removed as a result of use of evidence, especially those relations that are embedded in the sense of ‘being’, ‘belonging’ and ‘believing’, as discussed in section 2 (citing Chabal, 2009). However, their outcomes might become more developmental, and accountability could become more about answerability than just responsiveness.

Thus, we need to learn which type or aspect of evidence positively enhances representation, policy and accountability around specific issues (as discussed in section 2.4 above) and locate more entry points for enabling the move from voice into accountability relationships between citizens and the state. This approach requires ethnographically informed questions including: What kind of evidence is in play in this context? How is this evidence used? Who uses the evidence to influence decisions of whom? This is a different approach from the situation where the concern is only for civil society or media organisations to develop greater skills in using evidence to steer policy towards an objective that they have themselves defined. In this latter case, the preoccupation is to find answers about a body of evidence that civil society or media organisations have or have access to. The key questions on evidence are, hence, framed around availability, accuracy, objectivity, credibility, generalisability, relevance and practical usefulness (Court et al., 2006).

From the perspective of what kind of evidence ‘counts’ (if evidence counts at all) and how such evidence is used and who uses it, it may be important to further distinguish practical from strategic evidence. Citizens or CSOs and the media use evidence to engage with the state to meet their practical needs. In this case, the state can improve its responsiveness and can work collaboratively with civil society and citizens, but no changes in the rules of the game and power shifts are involved. Strategic evidence results in the expansion of opportunities for engagement and the definition of new rules of engagement.

For example, research-based evidence might show that the number of women represented in parliament or a local committee is lower than is stipulated in a country’s constitution or the local government act. This evidence would be of practical importance in terms of improving policy that enables more female representation. However, it is only when there is evidence of the specific
political influence of these women that this evidence will be of strategic importance, in terms of leading to stronger links between voice and accountability. This is because there is often a huge difference between the way policy makers categorise people and the perceptions that people have of themselves, and this creates an environment with so many possibilities for manipulation of agency (Tembo, 2004). In other words the kind of evidence and how it is used could have significant effects on the nature of participation that citizens have as well as the quality of their negotiation with public office holders. The idea is to influence the transformation of public office holder behaviours towards answerability rather than just responsiveness. It is from this perspective that it is important to consider the politics of uptake and use of evidence into policy in the African context, in relation to citizen engagement. In this case, in relation to how interlocutors work with evidence in engaging state actors to influence policies and engage citizen’s in these policies, including also the monitoring and evaluation of policy.

Furthermore, strategic evidence could help interlocutors and citizens to advocate for information transparency in a more strategic way. This is because, whereas giving out information to the public is necessary in a practical sense (as most governments might do), it may not be sufficient to ensure answerability of state actors and enabling citizens and interlocutors to sanction their performance. This is because only certain forms of information can generate certain kinds of accountability (Fox, 2007). On this point, Fox usefully distinguishes between ‘opaque or fuzzy transparency’ and ‘clear transparency’. Opaque transparency is the revelation of information to the public that does not show how institutions behave in practice, in the way they make decisions or act on decisions made. This kind of transparency can achieve some ‘soft accountability’. In order to achieve ‘hard accountability’, in terms of being able to see citizens or organisations enforce answerability and sanctions, ‘clear transparency’ is required. This is when insight into institutional performance and official responsibility and behaviour is also made available. This is seldom given in situations of patronage politics, where power is personalised.
4. The action research agenda

Systematically understanding how to increase citizen demand for good governance requires that one be prepared for unexpected insights that should be treated as a central part of action research rather than an exception (Future State, 2010). Out of the many definitions of action research, the following definition is the most appropriate for the purposes discussed in the previous sections of this paper. In this case, action research is defined as:

...a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes... It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (Reason & Bradbury, 2001a:1; cited in Reason, 2005, p.6)

The significance of voice and accountability to the good governance agenda is the 'worthwhile purpose'. The exploration itself has to be based on a clear theory of change and its underlying assumptions. The theory of change is that linking voice and accountability, as in enabling citizens to have a voice that is the agent of transformation of institutions towards better government accountability and responsiveness to citizen interests, is required for good governance to be achieved from the demand-side. In order to get this outcome in Africa, the roles of key interlocutors of citizen–state relations (media, civil society, elected representatives and traditional leaders) need to be better-defined; the interlocutors need to improve their use of evidence in order to influence policies.

We have, therefore, selected seven African countries that have differing governance contexts. Furthermore, realising that in the African context formal policy processes are often influenced by informal social and political relations, where politics often drives policy rather than the other way round, we also assume that if we can locate the engagement issues not only around policies but also representation and accountability mechanisms, we are likely to generate better lessons on indicators of change in the various citizen–state engagement spaces. It is these assumptions that lead to specific research questions, which, in sum, could amount to understanding what works or does not work on the demand-side good governance agenda. These questions include:

- Is there evidence that poorer citizens are being empowered and enabled to effectively engage with their government at different levels through the work of interlocutors? Are there identifiable impacts of such engagements on their livelihoods?
- Are media, civil society, elected representatives (parliament and local councillors) and traditional leaders the most effective interlocutors of voice and accountability? Are there other interlocutors that are more effective? Does this vary according to context?
- Does the formation of coalitions of interlocutors make a difference to interlocutors' ability to enhance voice and accountability?
- Are there tools, platforms or engagement strategies that citizens or interlocutors are using that show more effectiveness in achieving voice and accountability objectives than others? Under what conditions and for what sort of issues?
- Does the use of evidence make a difference to the effectiveness of interlocutors, either on their own or in coalitions, in influencing government policies and engaging citizens? In other words, does evidence matter for effective citizen voice and government accountability?
- Does a focus on representativeness, policy processes and accountability give us a better understanding of voice and accountability? What indicators can be used to measure this?
- Are the support-mechanisms provided appropriate for this kind of change?23

The action research approach adopted is one in which the practical processes of rolling out the Mwananchi GTF are designed and implemented incrementally, through an ongoing action and

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23 This last research question is slightly different from the others in that it does not address the theory of change per se. However, support mechanisms are a significant part of the change process as shown in previous research (e.g. Tembo and Wells, 2007; Scanteam, 2007; AUSAID, 2010).
reflection process, which accounts for the ‘empirical and evidential dimensions of inquiry’ (Reason, 2005). The central features of this process, including retaining the design and implementation of the Mwananchi programme as an emergent process, and worthwhile purposes (always engaging multi-stakeholders at country level to ensure that the processes is relevant to them), accommodates many ways of approaching and understanding a situation, and is participative and democratic in nature (as in the governance structure and its set up). At the time of this publication, some of the cycles of action and reflection and re-designing, have already taken place. Action and learning is centred around four outputs as stipulated in the GTF proposal that was submitted to DFID:

- creating dialogue platforms for media, CSOs, elected representatives and traditional leaders, as the selected interlocutors, to discuss critical citizen engagement issues;
- supporting a maximum of ten pilot grants per country to try out innovative ways of enhancing citizen engagement and policy change in working with interlocutors while also observing interlocutors that are working in the same context without coalitions;
- providing capacity development support to interlocutors; and
- creating a community of practice around several initiatives that are being tried both within and across countries.

It is envisaged that with this approach, it is possible to achieve the voice and accountability outcomes and impacts resulting from direct support to policy influencing and social accountability projects through the four outputs listed above, and outcome mapping progress markers on governance. In other words, the Mwananchi programme is expected to generate outcome and impact level results both qualitatively (e.g. improvement in the quality of dialogue that citizens have with their representatives) and quantitatively (e.g. actual increases in incomes of people participating in programme, or improvements in access to health services), as part of the ‘action’ element of the design. It is also expected to provide an in-depth understanding of what works and does not work, from the research and reflection elements of the design. At the time of this publication, some of the cycles of action, reflection and re-designing, have already taken place.

4.1 Locating the place of the citizen and the state

The name ‘Mwananchi’, which is a Kiswahili word for ‘citizen’, was chosen by programme partners at the country level and refers to a responsible ‘common man [sic.]’, as Masolo (1986) indicates:

The common man [sic.] — popularly known in Swahili as wananchi, a term designating a class of people considered as ‘ordinary’ because they do not have any outstanding (political and/or financial or administrative) powers and privileges in public or private sectors (p. 176).

It is interesting, however, to note the variations in the meaning of mwananchi, when the political dimensions are considered. For example, mwananchi also refers to ‘child of the land’, which signifies belonging to the nation (Kessler, 2006). According to Kessler, this highlights the paternalistic orientation of the post-independence government in Tanzania. In this rhetoric, each member of society easily recognised his or her proper role in supporting the overall good of the national family. In neighbouring Kenya, the same word has fragmented into further meanings reflecting the socioeconomic status of the citizens, as Kagwanja (2003) notes:

The widening gap between the rich and the poor also found articulation in the social discourse on citizenship. The public discourse distinguished became wananchi (Kiswahili for the ordinary citizens) and wenyenchi (owners of the nation). With the endemic corruption, a new category was introduced, the walanchi (‗eaters‘ of the nation). This distinction has been especially used to express popular disillusionment with the elite who continue to live luxuriously, in spite of the dire economic conditions of ordinary citizens. It is also a commentary on the scandalous and cynical corruption and crude accumulation by the elite, which has take a toll on the lives of ordinary citizens (wananchi) (p. 29).

The word ‘mwananchi’, therefore, is used to emphasise the common woman or man, but one who experiences and exercises different forms of citizenship in different contexts. These different forms
of citizenship are also associated with different contestations over meanings, power and resources between citizens and their governments. These contestations on the one hand allow for greater accessibility by the masses of citizens to government nation-building projects (which is good for development). On the other hand, they can be used to undermine spaces for certain classes of citizens. In other words, citizenship cannot be taken as given: certain people may have the right to citizenship of a certain kind, which is not available to others (Mamdani, 2007). This governance programme, therefore, uses the word ‘citizen’ or ‘mwananchi’ as a social construct that acknowledges undercurrents of differences in ‘citizenship’ across certain countries and societies. It allows investigation into the different forms of citizenship as the basis for meaningful interventions into good governance from the side of citizens.

4.2 Understanding the context

In order to understand the socio-economic and political context (as in the theory-based logic of voice and accountability interventions discussed in section 2.2), a Baseline Context Analysis (BCA) methodology was developed. It comprises two parallel tiers.24

- Primary data collection: a survey of national stakeholders’ perception of governance in each GTF country. The survey is based on a common set of indicators and on structured data collection and analysis. This is to ensure that there is a balance between relevance and use at the national level and cross-country comparisons based on statistical analysis.
- Secondary data collection: a synthesis and meta-analysis of existing country-level governance assessments and analysis. This data collection and analysis process is conducted by a local governance-related think tank in each country, based on an agreed terms of reference and managed by a Country Consultation Organisation (CCO)25 identified by ODI.

It was realised from the start that, whereas this approach offers some important opportunities, it also has some limitations. In particular, this kind of BCA cannot be used as a ‘standard’ project baseline as it does not allow the tracking of progress of specific projects, activities, or milestones. Furthermore, given the complexities of attribution, it is not possible to use the baseline to assess the overall impacts of GTF activities on broader governance issues within a country. Rather, the BCA can ensure that the GTF objectives in a specific country are (i) relevant to the country’s political and socio-economic context, and (ii) tailored to the specific governance challenges, as defined and perceived by national stakeholders. In terms of the role and function of the BCA in the programme’s broader monitoring and evaluation plan, we expect that the findings will enable us to:

- formulate hypotheses on the underlying factors causing 'bad governance';
- identify priority areas for GTF-funded interventions;
- define sharper and smarter objectives and indicators for each country and sector of intervention;
- develop a knowledge base for ongoing monitoring of the relevance of GTF objectives, which could lead to changes and improvements as the programme develops.

In this way, the BCA activities allow programme partners to make explicit (and if necessary to challenge) the assumptions they hold as to what constitutes ‘good governance’, how to achieve it, and the main obstacles at country level. In turn, this will help to formulate realistic and achievable objectives based on sound evidence and analysis. Such an approach accords with the theory of change, as discussed above. Within the framework outlined here, the specific objectives of this BCA were to:

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24 Both tiers are informed and validated through a country consultation process with key governance informants and potential implementing organisations, conducted at the beginning and end of the BCA.
25 In each country, a Country Consultation Organisation (CCO) is initially identified by ODI in order to manage the start up processes. After a country plan or strategy has been developed, a wide group of stakeholders then selects a National Steering Committee of eminent persons to oversee the country programme, which then selects a National Coordination Organisation to manage the day to day implementation of the programme.
- provide an overall assessment of the key features of governance in a country;
- help identify specific areas, sectors and themes of governance on which to focus GTF interventions in a country;
- provide a relevant baseline dataset for assessing the relevance of specific GTF objectives within the country;
- build the capacity of local partners and national coordinators in statistics, survey techniques and data analysis skills;
- develop an evidence base for civic engagement and advocacy activities (mainly for local partners and implementers); and
- inform the development of the monitoring and evaluation action plan and enable learning about governance and transparency.

The BCA was always preceded by an initial multi-stakeholder consultation process, undertaken in one month on average, aimed at drawing on people’s directly lived experiences to: (a) gather information on organisations, governance activities and any other relevant information that could assist the development of the programme in the particular country; (b) introduce the programme to a wide range of organisations belonging to and/or working with the media, civil society, parliament and local government; (c) start soliciting a number of case studies of networking and collaboration among civil society, media, parliament and local government, so as to generate knowledge on what is already happening that could be supported through the Mwananchi programme.

The primary data collection was undertaken using an adaptation of the World Governance Assessment (WGA) to develop an assessment framework useful for Mwananchi GTF purposes: that is, to focus on the Mwananchi GTF theory of change. Each survey took four months to complete on average, including: identification of local researcher, training in use of Survey Gizmo software, sampling, administration of questionnaire, validation of initial report to in-country multi-stakeholder group, and producing a final report. Some of the key features of the WGA of particular relevance for Mwananchi GTF are:

- A focus on governance at national level: national actors carry out the survey and participate in data analysis. The assessment is based on the perceptions and experience of ‘well informed national stakeholders’
- A comparative dimension: the WGA allows the findings of the national surveys to be compared. This is possible because (i) the sampling of respondents within each country allows for some statistical analysis at the aggregate level, and (ii) a common set of indicators and typology of respondents is used in all country surveys
- It avoids preconceived definitions of good governance based on existing standards or donor-driven models. Rather, it focuses on national stakeholders’ experiences of governance
- Capacity building: all national coordinators who are responsible for administering the questionnaire and analysing the data are trained in survey design and statistical data analysis.

The survey took into account lessons from two previous rounds of WGA surveys conducted by ODI in over 30 countries across the world in the past eight years. These include improving the method to ensure that the findings are used for communication and advocacy activities at the national level. This implied (i) a greater role for the national coordinators, not only in carrying out the survey, but also in analysing the data; and (ii) a review of the indicators and associated questions to ensure that they are relevant for advocacy and civic engagement purposes at the national level.

In principle, the WGA approach to defining and assessing governance is highly compatible with the spirit and conceptual underpinning of the Mwananchi GTF. The aim of WGA is to achieve a better understanding of governance in terms of the ‘rules of the game’ and the norms underlying what is deemed legitimate or not. As a result, WGA focuses on process rather than performance and on

26 http://www.odi.org.uk/pppg/politics_and_governance/what_we_do/Governance/WGA.html
rules rather than results. Governance is treated as both activity and process in the sense that it is viewed as reflective of human intention and agency but is itself a process that sets the parameters for how policy is made and implemented. The political process is separated into six separate but inter-related arenas: civil society, political society, government, bureaucracy, economic society, and the judiciary.

The WGA also differs from most other instruments aimed at measuring governance in that it tries to avoid assuming that ‘good’ governance means the standards adopted by liberal democracies in the West. Its purpose is not to rank countries in terms of how close they are to an ‘ideal’ based on a particular model of governance. Instead, the assessment relies on six principles that are not specific to a country or region but that reflect more universal human values. These six theoretical principles, inspired by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and drawn up through consultations with a number of academics and practitioners, are: (1) participation, (2) fairness, (3) decency, (4) accountability, (5) transparency, and (6) efficiency. The first three of these refer to state-society relations, while the latter three refer to operational aspects of the state. This approach allows the WGA to be more holistic and reflective on what determines the quality of governance in a country at any one time.

The WGA questionnaire is based on 36 indicators derived from the combination of the above arenas and underlying governance principles. In the BCA questionnaire, each WGA indicator is covered by a question and it is scored on a 5 point scale (from 1 for a rating of ‘very low’ to 5 for a rating of ‘very high’). The original WGA set of questions was, however, revised in order to take into account the focus of the Mwananchi programme. In order to capture relationships among interlocutors (media, CSOs and elected representatives) for example, the following areas of assessment were included i) ‘quantity’ of the relationship, i.e. whether media and CSOs, or media and elected representatives, have opportunities to meet, access each other's information and work collaboratively; ii) ‘quality of the relationships, i.e. who is involved, for how long, how open or transparent is the relationship etc; iii) ‘equality’ of the relationship, i.e. the respect between actors, equal access to policy agenda setting, decision making, implementation and monitoring and evaluation processes, the agreed ground rules and commitment to respect them etc; iv) ‘performance’ of the relationship, i.e. if the relationship leads to concrete outcomes, how they are used, who uses them, etc.

Finally, secondary data collection was conducted in every country in order to complete an overall assessment of the key features of governance in the country using systematic secondary data generation techniques. The objectives were (i) to identify specific areas/sectors/themes of governance to focus on Mwananchi interventions; (ii) to provide an accessible database for assessing the relevance of GTF specific objectives; (iii) to build the capacity of local partners/national coordinators in creating annotated bibliographies and lists of projects that work on governance in their country; and (iv) to inform the development of the monitoring, evaluation and learning action plan for the Mwananchi programme, using examples of monitoring and evaluation techniques that are being used by other agencies in the country. The various reports on governance assessments that have been conducted in the country were also examined as part of this exercise, with most of them based upon well-grounded political economy analysis, such as Drivers of Change or Country Governance Assessments, and those focused on civil society, such as the CIVICUS Civil Society Index.

4.3 Identifying contentious areas of citizen–state engagement

The local stakeholders (comprising media organisations, CSOs and elected representatives) synthesised the three data sets (the WGA results, secondary data and consultations) in order to identify the issues and potential entry points for the specific governance interventions for the lifetime of the country programme. Country planning teams developed plans based on this evidence. To ensure that the evidence trail is credible and informative, the project made use of a trusted independent facilitator, who understands governance processes and concepts well, to facilitate the synthesis process. The actual process involved working through:
clarification of the key findings of each data set (it was important to ensure that the evidence was understood and that stakeholders were convinced of the accuracy of the conclusions that were drawn by researchers);
exploring the divergence and convergence in findings from the three datasets in case some of the findings were contradictory; and
arriving at a list of key issues on the basis of evidence weighting; findings supported by robust and reliable evidence had to be chosen above those that appeared conjectural.

The triangulation process, undertaken by a multi-stakeholder group, led to the generation of a list of governance issues in the country. It is from this list that the particular issues on which the Mwananchi country programme would focus were prioritised, based on a variety of criteria including:

- concrete issues around which collaboration and coalition of media, civil society and elected representatives can take place;
- issues with clear linkages to the institutional issues highlighted in the baseline context analysis;
- simple issues that capture the interest of media, civil society and elected representatives (noting that it may not be possible to get all of them interested at first);
- potential to strengthen citizen–state engagement at the various levels of the government system; and
- issues with which poorer citizens will identify, so that when institutional changes are taking place, these citizens can easily take advantage of them and actively engage.

In order to further guide the selection of issues from the survey data, a matrix analysis was used. The participating stakeholders were then able to identify interventions in order to work with interlocutors and citizens to enhance citizen engagement and ultimately transform institutions within their spaces of influence. In this case, they had to discuss how the governance issues could identify concrete areas of citizen engagement, and then also define some of the possible interventions, most of them drawn from stocktaking work. The matrix in Figure 4 below shows the example of a matrix on the BCA findings in Zambia. In the matrix, most of the issues from the first two columns (enabling environment and ‘rules in use’/dynamics) were derived from the WGA and stocktaking reports, while those in the last two columns (interventions and Mwananchi citizen entry points) were generated in the discussions during synthesis meetings and often also drew on existing interventions as reported in the stocktaking reports.

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27 The facilitator goes through these points at the start of the issue selection process during the meeting.
28 Think tanks are included among CSOs in this case.
### Figure 4: A matrix for identifying governance issues for Mwananchi in Zambia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enabling environment/governance issues</th>
<th>Rules in use</th>
<th>Interventions</th>
<th>Mwananchi citizen entry points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civic engagement/elected reps/interest aggregation</td>
<td>There is limited consultation between elected representatives and their constituencies.</td>
<td>Championing the establishment of mechanism that will ensure that citizens are consulted by their elected representatives.</td>
<td>Citizens are able to effectively participate and influence the making of rules that govern the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National constitution and electoral regulations do not compel political parties to act in a transparent manner</td>
<td>There are no effective mechanism to hold elected representatives to their election promises.</td>
<td>The media &amp; CSOs have the opportunity to create a platform upon which citizens can hold their elected representatives accountable for their pre-election commitments and also on how they represent their constituency in various policy debates.</td>
<td>Citizens have a clear mechanism for them to engage with their elected representatives either on a regular basis and/or around emerging policy/legislative issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No policy for addressing the imbalance in low women representation in the legislature</td>
<td>Political parties do not often consult their members regarding selection of candidates to contest elections.</td>
<td>More sustainable mechanism need to be identified to encouraging disadvantaged groups to via for being elected into office</td>
<td>Citizens are able to influence the process of selection of candidates to stand for elected office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No mechanism/regulation on legislator communication with constituents</td>
<td>Political parties do not have well-enshrined internal democratic systems that lead to holding of party positions.</td>
<td>- Low accountability to the public despite parliamentary offices in constituencies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No mechanism to make MPs pass legislation that is in the interest of the people</td>
<td>- Transparency is a problem in 3 areas (a) financial, (b) internal party democracy (c) national laws that govern political parties</td>
<td>- Public funding of political parties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitution does not provide for a recall of non-performing MPs</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Laws on independence of democratic institutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existence of Constituency offices but elections on party tickets mean more accountability to the party</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Dialogue for a on the effect of party financing on legislature accountability and how to do it well?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the matrix, a combination of issues that have possible immediate and long-term impacts were then selected. Issues were classified as sectoral or thematic, or of a more generic nature. Countries were advised to focus on a maximum of three issues in order to learn in a programme implementation timescale (3.5 years on average) and budget. For example, the issues of focus in Uganda are on social protection policies, social justice (access to justice by the marginalised) and property rights (land) while in Zambia, they are on deepening policy implementation and creating a conducive labour environment for women, children, youths and persons with disabilities.

### 4.4 Selecting interlocutors to work with and building coalitions

Interlocutors have been selected from CSOs, media, elected representatives (parliament and local councillors) and traditional leaders to work together as ‘coalitions for change’. They are provided with pilot grants of around UK£4000 per organisation per year for two years to support their innovative ideas around citizen voice and accountability, in accordance with the theory of change articulated above. The projects are also called ‘action learning projects’ and each country has a minimum of five projects. The action research thinking leads to interest in the voice and

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29 Most of these issues were not as clear as they could be for proper project designing but it was felt that they would get sharper as part of the ongoing action and reflection process. It was also felt that they would become more specific when local organisations develop their specific project proposals.
accountability outcomes, impacts and processes, and in both what works and does not work, so that rich descriptions can be provided for these actions and reflections at the grassroots and national levels.

There was a discussion among participating partners as to whether to use an open and competitive call for expressions of interest and proposals, or select the interlocutors on the basis of their known function. The advantage of using a call for proposals methodology is that it draws individuals who actively want to be in the project. However, the downside is that it creates a bias towards larger organisations that are capable of writing articulate proposals, and excludes local organisations that may have a strong constituency representation but are not well skilled in proposal writing. Most of the ‘non-traditional civil society organisations’ tend to belong to this excluded group (Tembo and Wells, 2007). We attempted to correct for this bias, but the question remains as to whether some interlocutors were still excluded by this methodology.

One way in which we tried to include smaller organisations was to get those whose expressions of interest were accepted to attend a proposal writing workshop to sharpen the understanding and expression of the specific changes that each initiative is meant to achieve. So far, Malawi, Ghana, Uganda and Zambia have already gone through the Expression of Interest and proposal writing stage and granting to local organisations has also started. The formation of coalitions is also discussed during this workshop, emphasising that the applicants are actually coalition leaders, who, therefore, need to demonstrate in their proposals how they have formed, or will form, coalitions that are a mixture of CSOs, media, elected representatives (MPs or local councillors) and traditional leaders.

Coalitions for change are being formed to address a tightly defined governance challenge and thereby enhance citizen voice and government accountability by drawing on the comparative advantages of each participating coalition member. Coalitions are treated as a means to an end with an inbuilt flexibility to change members of coalitions as either the issue gets understood better or the governance issue itself changes. In terms of the theory of change, coalitions form based on the understanding that policy change happens through coordinated activities among actors with shared core beliefs about the policy issue that they are facing (Stachowiak, undated). According to this view, secondary beliefs, such as budgetary allocations and administrative rules, are regarded as not critical to the performance of the coalition as long as the core beliefs are established. The idea is that ‘coalitions typically will explore and pursue multiple avenues for change (e.g., engaging in legal advocacy and changing public opinion), often simultaneously, to find a route that will bear fruit’ (ibid, undated, p.6). Furthermore, due to the collaborative nature of the Mwananchi programme, reformers within the state can be brought into the coalition at specific and strategic junctures in the citizen–state engagement process where they can, for instance, provide vital information for lobbying for change from the ‘inside track’ type of information flows that happen spontaneously within the bureaucracy.

The targeted pilot grantees (coalition leaders) are supported in carrying out a self-assessment of their existing capacity to deliver governance changes. The assessment process covers capacity to engage in policy as well as capacity to engage citizens, networking or working together with other stakeholders, and the extent of the learning culture. The capacity development process includes developing strategies for addressing the systemic issues that underlie capacity challenges that impede political engagement, in addition to organisational capacities (Tembo, 2008). This is because most of the issues in the Mwananchi programme are to do with addressing the rules of the game that shape citizen–state engagement for good governance on specific issues.

^30 Lessons on coalition building for governance projects were drawn from the Coalitions for Change programme in Nigeria (Bertram, S and Olowokure, M, 2005). The difference with the Nigeria case is that the C4C programme was focusing on issues identified from Drivers of Change, while in Mwananchi, the issues were themselves selected by the local actors involving CSOs, media and elected representatives, from the synthesis of evidence from WGA and stocktaking research conducted by local think tanks.
Transparency of governance structures for managing this process at country level is paramount. In each country a core stakeholder group selects an independent National Steering Committee (NSC) of eminent persons, which in turn selects an appropriate organisation to become the National Coordination Organisation (NCO). This is meant to be done through a competitive process, with each interested organisation presenting their case in terms of both their proven experience of working on the identified thematic areas and their ability to serve the interests of a wide range of civil society, media and elected representatives. The idea is that promoting a culture of transparency and accountability within the selection process of the NCO and NSC would reinforce good practice from within, and establish strong working principles before supporting good governance externally to the programme. The oversight of the country programme by the NSC has been designed to create a downward accountability mechanism for NCOs to the local stakeholder community in ways that organisations who bid for them directly to external donors do not usually achieve. In Zambia, Uganda, Ghana and Malawi, for instance, that NCOs have to present their reports to the NSC before they submit them to the lead organisation.

The NSCs in all countries are comprised of eminent persons that are able to oversee the direction of the country programme and reduce political risks as projects support citizen engagement in government policy processes. The composition of NSCs vary across the different countries; in Malawi, the NSC includes a former Deputy Secretary to the President and Cabinet, a former Director for the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, a retired UNDP employee, and a lecturer on governance from the Catholic University. In Ghana, the NSC comprises a representative from the Federation of Muslim Women in Ghana (FOMWAG), a representative of the House of Chiefs, a former clerk to parliament, the director of a think tank - the Centre for Communication Studies at the University of Legon; and a representative from the Christian Health Association of Ghana (CHAG). These NSC members are very articulate and are well engaged with the dynamics in the governance projects within the country as well as national politics.

This type of support mechanism belongs to the category of ‘indirect-intermediary-project’ support model (Tembo and Wells, 2007; Scanteam, 2007). However, instead of the intermediary being an international NGO or a donor-created secretariat, as was the finding of previous research into the emerging support models (e.g. Tembo and Wells, 2007, and Scanteam, 2007). In this case they are selected democratically by a multi-stakeholder group of local organisations, supported by their elected NSC. International NGOs are not directly involved in the governance structure and in the decisions being made. This model is meant to draw on the strengths of using intermediary organisations (as discussed in Tembo and Wells, 2007 and Scanteam, 2007 and to address the upward accountability challenge that intermediary organisations still face, even in the case of multi-donor civil society foundations with local boards. The focus on funding projects rather than core funding was also intended to enable the action research approach to be used in the Mwananchi programme, requiring a deeper study of actions rather than just monitoring outcomes. Actions that are proven to work would then be made visible and available for scaling up through other modalities. However, this Mwananchi model still needs to be tested in practice as to how effective it is, hence the added research question above.

4.5 Designing the appropriate monitoring, evaluation and learning system

As Reason (2005) points out, action research is based on everyday experiences of those involved and is concerned with the development of live, situational knowledge. Therefore, the process of inquiry is as important as the specific outcomes. In implementing the Mwananchi programme, the log-frame has provided the basis for project design and monitoring results of interventions (via the ‘objectively verifiable indicators’ and their means of verification). However, the design of voice and accountability projects on this basis relies on the theoretical assumption that, by producing a

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31 This was usually a group of five representatives from the consultation coordination organisation, media organisations, the private sector and elected representatives.

32 This was learnt from research on multi-donor support to civil society, in the studies that ODI undertook or participated in, where programmes such as G-RAP in Ghana, and Manusher Jonno Foundation in Bangladesh, used eminent persons on their boards (see Tembo and Wells, 2007; Scanteam, 2007).
certain set of outputs – often stated in terms of capacity (e.g. enhancing levels of budget literacy among citizens) – citizens would be better able to monitor budgets in practice. This, unfortunately, is not often the case in everyday practice (Holland and Thirkel, 2009).

The thinking underrates the political economy factors that govern the relationships between citizens and the state. In order to make good progress, outputs that capture behaviour change also need to be made explicit in the log-frame. However, the challenge lies in how to measure these kinds of behaviour-change indicators alongside indicators for the capacity to engage at both the output and outcome levels of the log-frame. To resolve this, the Mwananchi programme has started experimenting with the fusion of the log-frame, based on ‘capacity to engage’ indicators, and the outcome mapping methodology, that has proven to be effective in capturing behavioural changes among main stake holders (Roduner et al., 2008). In this case, the main stakeholders are the interlocutors - media, civil society and elected representatives. In terms of the theory of change regarding influencing policy, the focus on actors also suggests that we use ‘actor-oriented theories’, where it is the behaviour, relationships, perspectives and political interests of policy actors that matters the most (Jones, forthcoming; Mendizabal and Clarke, 2010). Figure 5 shows the conceptual framework for the fusion of the logical framework and outcome mapping approaches as articulated by Roduner et al. (2008).

**Figure 5: Fusion of Logical Framework and Outcome Mapping Approaches**

![Diagram showing the conceptual framework for the fusion of the logical framework and outcome mapping approaches](Source: Roduner, D.; Schlappi, W.; and Egli, W. (2008, p. 18))

Ultimately, for this framework to be used effectively, it has to be explored through several case studies and over a long period of time; the Mwananchi programme seeks to contribute to this exploration. As Reason (2005) rightly argues, ‘good action research emerges over time in an evolutionary and developmental process, as individuals learn skills of inquiry, as communities of inquiry develop, as understanding of the issues deepens and as practice grows and shifts change over time’. This implies that the questions, relationships, and what is regarded as important might all change. Thus, action research in programme settings cannot be defined in terms of hard and fast methods. The Mwananchi programme developed a practical tool for learning across three
domains of its practice, as shown in Figure 6 below. This is directly linked to the monitoring and evaluation framework discussed earlier.

**Figure 6: Mwananchi Programme Learning Framework**

As Figure 6 also demonstrates, the various levels of programme implementation prioritise particular aspects of learning. At the level of pilot grantees, learning focuses on understanding relations between particular groups of citizens and media or CSOs and how they are engaging with government at various levels though the initiatives. The focus is on descriptions (e.g. through stories being told), definitions, or perspectives of various citizen groups and the interlocutors (what, who, when, where). At the level of NCO and pilot grantees, the focus is on understanding patterns – strategy, practice, method, or approach (how things are done and what seems to work or not work). Lastly, in the domain of programme management and the NCO, the focus is on understanding principles (why?), or otherwise interrogating the theory of change. In all cases we try to answer the questions, ‘what do we expect to learn?’, how will findings be captured?’, who needs to be informed of lessons learnt?’ and ‘how will information be disseminated?’
6. Conclusion

This paper has laid the conceptual foundations for undertaking an action-research based approach to strengthening citizen demand for good governance, which is the main thrust for the Mwananchi GTF programme. The programme aims to enhance political leverage for citizens as they engage with their governments at different levels so that citizen voice becomes one of the agents that makes state institutions more accountable and responsive to citizens. The strategy is to connect citizen voices to government accountability as a continuum whereby representation, policy and accountability processes are the key interface areas where voices are negotiated, included or excluded in policy processes and in holding governments to account. In the African context, it is important to understand institutions as products of neopatrimonial politics. In this case, the formal and informal mechanisms of citizen engagement with the state are central rather than just coincidental factors.

Interlocutors such as media, civil society, elected representatives and traditional leaders are key in orchestrating citizen–state engagement, and this could be strengthened through programmatic support. The synergies between the roles of these interlocutors can be strengthened, and evidence used to enhance their roles in influencing policy and engaging citizens. This is the main aim of the Mwananchi programme. The seven African countries in which this programme is being implemented provide a diversity of governance contexts to enable learning about what works.
References


