Democratic Accountability in Service Delivery

A practical guide to identify improvements through assessment

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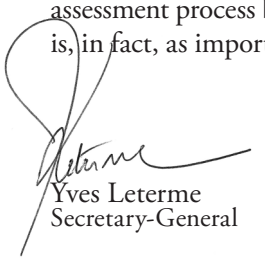
Preface

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) has long held democratic accountability at the core of its work. To realize its potential for improving people's daily lives, International IDEA has developed a citizen-led framework to assess democratic accountability in service delivery. This framework is the most recent addition to citizen-led frameworks developed by International IDEA, specifically *State of Democracy* and *State of Local Democracy Assessments*. The foundation of these frameworks is that they are led and owned by local teams.

With this new assessment framework, International IDEA aims to support domestic actors across the political spectrum to assess the extent to which people can hold government officials to account for service delivery through democratic means. At the same time, the framework seeks to facilitate reform proposals aimed at improving existing accountability mechanisms or creating new ones. These reform proposals can address a range of challenges, such as: collective action problems; lack of capacity; maladministration; corruption; and systematic discrimination of particular groups like indigenous peoples.

This guide aims to strengthen democratic accountability (both social and political accountability) in service delivery in both emerging and consolidated democracies. As democracy is ultimately about popular control over decision-making and political equality, International IDEA has designed a methodology that allows for a broad and participatory assessment process based on local ownership. A participatory approach is, in fact, as important as the assessment process and its findings.



Yves Leterme
Secretary-General

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CDD-Ghana	The Ghana Center for Democratic Development
GES	Ghana Education Service
International IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
SoD	State of Democracy (assessment framework)
SoLD	State of Local Democracy (assessment framework)

Introduction

Citizens support democracy not only because it is a desirable end in itself, but also because they expect democracy to provide them with a better quality of socio-economic and political life. This was very much in evidence during the 2011 Arab uprisings, when people poured onto streets and squares calling on their governments to ensure their needs and human rights (chanting, for example, slogans like 'bread, freedom and human dignity'). People expect their governments to deliver public services in an efficient manner that meets their needs and recognizes their human rights. People expect to be able to raise their concerns and to be listened to.

This guide makes the case for the idea of democratic accountability by incorporating the political dimension of service delivery into a debate that has primarily focused on social dynamics. Governments that are accountable to voters or to representative and oversight bodies—such as a national assembly, political parties or a supreme audit institution—capable of imposing consequences on them are more likely to respond to citizens' demands than governments that are not. It is in the democratic checks and balances that accountability can be a driver for change in service delivery. Research shows that countries with low levels of service delivery tend to have one thing in common: they have no provisions, or only very weak ones, for effective sanctions or rewards (International IDEA 2013a).

The assessment framework focuses on relationships linking individuals, their elected representatives and the state, including at the local level, where public services are delivered, ideally in ways that fulfil the human rights of men, women, boys and girls. In this sense, the assessment framework is as much intended to guide an assessment exercise as it is a means to jointly devise concrete actions to deepen democratic accountability in the provision of services.

This guide aims to strengthen democratic accountability (meaning both social and political accountability) in service delivery in countries that are emerging or consolidated democracies. As democracy is ultimately about popular control over decision-making and political equality, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) has designed a methodology that allows for a broad and participatory assessment process based on local ownership. A participatory approach is in fact as important as the assessment results.

About this guide

This guide enables its users to assess the degree to which public service delivery is subject to democratic accountability checks and, based on that knowledge, identify areas of concrete action for improvement. Its users will be able to answer the following overarching questions:

- Can men and women hold elected and non-elected officials to account for the delivery of public services by democratic means?
- If not, why not?
- What can be done about this?

The guide offers advice for action and proposes a methodology for in-country dialogue on reforms to close existing gaps in democratic accountability.

The lack of effective accountability in service delivery can also be explained by factors outside the influence of formal political institutions. A crucial aspect of the guide, therefore, is to help users examine how informal dynamics influence the delivery of services and systems of accountability. The guide helps to differentiate between cases in which a service provider chooses not to provide quality services and cases in which it is unable to do so. The former could be related to a lack of incentives or space to do the right thing, while the latter is a matter of capacity.

For the most up-to-date version of this guide and additional material, see <http://www.idea.int>.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is useful for anyone interested in understanding accountability, from a democracy perspective, in service delivery in their own

country. This includes a wide range of potential users in society, the government or diverse institutions (such as oversight institutions). Examples of the guide's users might include:

- academic research institutions and think tanks;
- municipalities and other local government entities and associations;
- organizations representing the interests of service users;
- ombudsman offices;
- supreme audit institutions;[1]
- political parties;
- parliamentary committees, local assemblies and their staff;
- government agencies (at the national and local levels);
- social movements, interest groups and other civil society organizations, such as trade unions;
- private-sector companies; and
- the media.

It goes without saying that several of these actors could join forces to conduct an assessment. Joint assessments make efforts at reform more likely to succeed, provided that the political context is conducive to cooperation.

What is in the guide and how to use it

Chapter 1 describes the concept of democratic accountability in service delivery. It emphasizes that democratic accountability encompasses the roles of both social and political actors as rights and claim holders. It explains services in terms of the policy process or how issues are placed on the political agenda, translated into policies and practically implemented. It describes the criteria against which accountability relationships can be assessed.

Chapter 2 presents the methodological logic, scope and characteristics of the assessment framework and how it can support the different groups of potential assessors.

Chapter 3 explains how to apply the assessment framework and how to develop recommendations for action. It guides readers through the process, describing the workflow and the roles and responsibilities of the drivers of the assessment: the initiators, the assessment team and the consultative group. It provides support to identify problems and the accountability relationships associated with them, as well as to analyse such relationships using assessment criteria based on democratic principles.

Chapter 3 also provides suggestions to develop recommendations to improve accountability in the service. Next, it offers advice on how to validate and communicate those recommendations in order to achieve influence. Not least, it provides the drivers of the assessment with advice on how to use such outputs in facilitating reform-oriented dialogues.

At key steps, checklists are provided to facilitate the understanding of workflows. Case studies outline the concrete problems of earlier accountability assessments in different countries and political settings. Assessors are encouraged to adopt their own approach to learning. This means testing and adapting the techniques and strategies provided here, and learning from experience.

The assessment process is incremental, yet it allows flexible handling of the steps as the users of the guide make progress. Assessment is a process of planning, analysis, reflection and, above all, action.

Chapter 1

The Assessment Concepts

The Assessment Concepts

Broadly speaking, for people around the world, democracy means popular control over public decision-making and political equality in exercising that control (International IDEA 2008: 20–21). Democracy must offer citizens the means to articulate and voice their concerns in a way that effectively reaches their representatives. A fundamental assumption is that the practice of accountability mechanisms in a democratic system ensures that public officials provide services of the highest possible standard to the people or face consequences if they fail to do so. When officials are held accountable and democratic principles are observed, there is a better chance that service provision will improve, in the form of faster, higher-quality or better-implemented services.

The citizen-led approach to assessing democratic accountability in service delivery is based on the conviction that the nationals of a country are in the best position to assess whether their country's democratic practices fit their own ideals and expectations. Moreover, the approach entails a combination of methods with one goal—reform.

1.1. What Is Democratic Accountability?

Holding public officials to account lies at the heart of democracy. Democratic accountability offers citizens, and their representatives, the mechanisms to voice concerns and demand explanations about, and, if need be, impose consequences for, the performance of elected and unelected officials.

The notion of democratic accountability encompasses both political and social accountability—direct or indirect, vertical, horizontal or diagonal or any other mechanisms based on the core democratic principle of popular control over public decision-making. Democratic

accountability entails the ability of citizens to articulate their demands in order to influence decision-making through, for instance, electoral processes. Other democratic means include public demonstrations, investigative journalism, legislative initiatives, public debate and referendums. Democratic accountability also refers to less direct means, such as the checks, balances and other mechanisms available to specific institutions in order to exert control over the management of a state. These include, for example, hearings by legislative committees, questions posed by the political opposition and the reviews or investigations of ombudsman offices or supreme audit institutions, to name just a few. Accountability is not exclusive to democracies, but when accountability is democratic, it has the potential to promote better government performance. Thus, by using the term *democratic accountability*, this guide aims for a broad, all-encompassing and integral notion rather than a narrow, restrictive and exclusive one.

1.2. How Does Democratic Accountability Work in Public Service Delivery?

We can say that there is democratic accountability in service delivery when citizens or their representatives question or provide feedback on a public service, and the political actors and service providers either act on that feedback or face consequences.

It follows from this basic notion that accountability entails a relationship between two types of actors:

- **Duty bearers** are elected or unelected officials or private-sector providers with the power and responsibility to fulfil a mandate and a duty to explain and justify their actions—and to face the consequences (positive or negative) of their actions.

- **Claim holders** are citizens or political institutions representing citizens with the right or the mandate, respectively, to check the duty bearers, question and pass judgement on them, and impose consequences when required.[2]

Box 1 Examples of duty bearers and claim holders

A duty bearer could be the government of a country or a municipal office, a ministry, an ombudsman office, a parliamentary committee, parliament itself, a private-sector company or any public or private

Box 1 *[cont.]*

office or organization that has been given a mandate to deliver a service. Such mandates often fall to more than one actor.

On the other side, citizens are the clearest example of claim holders, as they are the ones who delegate power to the duty bearers and often pay for the services they receive. Other examples of claim holders could be opposition political parties, an oversight institution with the responsibility to investigate and prosecute corruption among public officials, a parliamentary commission in charge of overseeing the implementation of public policy, or a wide array of political and social actors with the mandate to hold to account those with duties to provide a service.

Democracy is often equated with the assumption that accountability mechanisms are at work. The reality is much more complex than that. An array of forces, groups and contextual conditions affect how services are delivered and how accountability mechanisms work. Such mechanisms are often non-existent, barely function or discriminate on the basis of identity (such as linguistic, ethnic, religious or gender identity), sexual orientation[3], age, income, disability or power.

Box 2 The capacity of parliament as a claim holder

A parliament's ability and space to hold the executive to account depends, for example, on the power balance and dynamics within parliament and between parliament, the executive and the judiciary. Other key factors include the effectiveness and ability of committees to access, analyse and act on information, and the extent to which these committees are composed of genuinely development-oriented politicians and staffed by competent officials.

Box 3 Citizens' spaces to claim accountability

There are many spaces in which citizens can voice their concerns and demand accountability from officials, for instance through electoral processes, party primaries, social media, street protests, petitions, public meetings and so on. These and other spaces are important platforms for voicing demands, providing mechanisms that can raise public awareness and ensure responsiveness.

This guide first helps to determine whether mechanisms of accountability between duty bearers and claim holders are at work throughout the entire policy process that leads to the provision of public services, and secondly, to devise actions through which such mechanisms of accountability can be improved.

1.3. Which Policy Phases Are Relevant to Democratic Accountability?

The delivery of a public service, such as clean and safe water from a well or piped to a tap, is the final step in a complex and fluid policy process involving politicians, public officials, citizens or their representatives, social movements and interest groups, and the private sector. From priorities set by a monitoring agency audit, a panel review or media scrutiny of a ministry-led national plan, through to the agreement on acts and rules to regulate a service, to the implementation of such rules through delivery and final use, there is a policy process. This guide focuses on the three core phases of this process:

- **Agenda setting** is the phase in which issues or concerns become priorities for citizens, politicians, officials or other private or international bodies that shape the public agenda. Priorities might be shaped through electoral campaigns, public debates and international summits, as well as meetings between public- and private-sector officials. In ideal cases, agenda setting may be influenced by reports from formal monitoring or oversight bodies, such as a government regulatory agency, the office of an ombudsman or a supreme audit institution, or through advocacy by social movements and interest groups. How issues become priorities and who pushes them are fundamental questions of power and influence.

  Examples of agenda setting:

  - sector or service evaluations, reviews or audits by, for instance, the office of an ombudsman or parliamentary committees;
  - electoral campaign events such as debates and the launch of party manifestos;
  - periodic or thematic conferences of political parties;
  - budget formulation or budget expenditure oversight and ensuing debates in national or sub-national assemblies;
  - debates, op-eds and special reports or other coverage by media outlets;
  - campaigns by social movements and interest groups;
  - national development planning debates;

- constitutional reviews;
- advocacy by trade unions, professional societies, private-sector service providers and local government associations;
- hearings in national or sub-national assemblies or councils; and
- non-violent street protests or consumer boycotts.

- **Policymaking** is the phase in which representatives or office holders weigh options of policy to determine which choices are workable, translating them into regulation. It entails compromises between politicians from different political parties, as well as advocacy by private companies, non-profit and social organizations, donors, and other groups with an interest in policy outcomes. This involves a trade-off between effectiveness, political priorities and the allocation of financial resources. Ideally, policymaking can also be shaped by input from monitoring or oversight bodies.

  Examples of policymaking:

  - plenary debates and voting on legislative amendments or new legislation in national or sub-national assemblies;
  - court rulings and decisions;
  - government decisions and action plans;
  - organized interest groups' advocacy with government and other decision-making bodies;
  - government agencies drafting sector-specific policies and detailed priorities; and
  - initiatives by the executive submitted to, and scrutinized by, national or local assemblies.

- **Implementation** takes place when a government gives a public- or private-sector agency responsibility for translating policy into action and for delivering the service in question. At this stage, budgeted resources are dedicated to execution, and services are supposed to be delivered to people. Examples of policy implementation include the following:

  - budget transfers between different levels of government to secure service delivery;
  - service compacts or contracts between state and private-sector providers;
  - pricing and collection systems for fees and charges;
  - planning of service infrastructure and carrying out works;
  - distribution and supply systems, such as for water, electricity, gas or food;

- public procurement of goods and services, such as medicines, school books, vehicles or maintenance;
- staff recruitment procedures, such as merit-based examinations for teacher recruitment, employment rules and payroll systems;
- consumer services and feedback systems;
- quality public health, security, anti-discrimination, corruption and environmental controls;
- government officials dealing with requests from men and women for title deeds; and
- an agricultural extension officer providing free advice to a farmers' cooperative.

Figure 1. The policy process

The processes of oversight, monitoring and evaluation bring concerns into public debate, thereby ideally closing the loop in the policy process on agenda setting: first, concerns become priorities, and then political choices can be made and the implementation of policies can follow. In addition, after reviews, audits or evaluations in the policy cycle, findings, debates and adjustments feed into new rounds of agenda setting. The oversight, monitoring and evaluation of service delivery can be top-down, through monitoring authorities such as supreme audit institutions, or bottom-up, by the men and women who use or receive the service, raising their concerns collectively. Oversight appears to be most effective when top-down and bottom-up monitoring are combined. Oversight can enable legislators, political parties, government inspectorates, supreme audit institutions, public officials and public-or private-sector service providers to reappraise a service, identify new concerns, select future policies and improve their implementation.

Ideally, implementation should be subject to regular monitoring in order to provide feedback on progress, problems and efficacy. Government regulatory bodies, such as a government inspectorate of primary and secondary schools, can play a crucial role in monitoring compliance with standards, principles and policies, provided that they have the space and capacity to do so.

Box 4 Oversight in practice

Sanitation in Ghana is a telling example of how oversight can unveil delivery problems in reality. Research highlights cases in which reforms aimed at allowing for community management of public toilets resulted, in practice, in the creation of a source of political patronage: local politicians used contracts to run public toilets to reward their clients. This reality of toilets becoming a significant revenue earner for politicians, in combination with a lack of bureaucratic discipline, resulted in a lack of functioning public toilets in spite of government policies and plans. Moreover, follow-up was undermined because the Waste Management Department and environmental health officers had no space to sanction those who ran the public toilets. Local politicians enjoyed too much protection (Ayee and Crook 2003).

1.4. What Are the Principles of Democratic Accountability?

Democratic accountability is based on three fundamental principles that allow citizens and their representatives—claim holders—to hold to account those public or private officials that are responsible for service provision, in other words, the duty bearers. The three principles are answerability, responsiveness and enforceability.

These principles will help assessors to identify which conditions are present or can effectively improve accountability relationships. As noted, assessors must ascertain whether the principles are observed in concrete interactions between claim holders and duty bearers.

Answerability gauges the extent to which a government carries out its duty to explain and justify its decisions to the public. Much of the effectiveness of answerability is linked to how claim holders articulate their demands, but it is also related to the space, capacity and willingness of officials to answer for their actions. For instance,

electoral rules (district or electoral formulas) or organizational rules for the recruitment, supervision and removal from office of public servants define who elected and unelected officials, respectively, might be answerable to.

Responsiveness is about whether public officials take opportunities to consult citizens or their representatives before a policy or law is approved, so that the content of such decisions reflects their views, their demands or human rights principles (International IDEA 2008: 24). To a large extent, the political incentives for governments to remain responsive to citizens are linked to the nature of the party system, the electoral rules and other institutional arrangements. Incentives might also be shaped by the availability of technical, human or financial resources. Responsiveness can also take place through informal interactions between duty bearers and claim holders, such as public opinion surveys, private meetings, advocacy campaigns or protests.

Box 5 In an ideal democratic-accountability relationship, duty bearers:

- are answerable, explaining and justifying their performance;
- are responsive, integrating the views and policy preferences of citizens; and
- face credible consequences that are enforceable.

Enforceability is about the formal or informal consequences that duty bearers may face and that they should respond to. The possibility of enforcing positive or negative consequences tends to contribute to improving accountability. Such consequences may be formally laid down in rules or informally accepted in practice. Some claim holders might be invested with the power to enforce these consequences, as is the case for supreme audit institutions with judicial and administrative authority to make judgements, parliamentary committees with the authority to request changes to a policy framework, or a court with the power to nullify a fraudulent electoral process. Claim holders with no formal enforcement powers (such as citizen groups, parliamentary committees without powers of inquiry, or ombudsman offices in some countries) will need to engage with those agencies entrusted with such enforcement powers. The degree of these enforcement agencies' financial and political autonomy affects whether there are likely to be any consequences.

Box 6 In an ideal democratic-accountability relationship, claim holders:

- access information on duty bearers' performance;
- question duty bearers;
- have a say on the content of policies; and
- impose consequences on duty bearers' performance.

Participation and transparency can potentially enable the realization of these three democracy principles. Participation entails the human right to associate, to assemble, to express opinions and to exert influence over the policy process. Transparency is the availability of open, accurate and accessible information about actions, planning, management and commitments between the state and citizens or between one state agency and another.

When examining these principles and how they relate to accountability mechanisms, it is necessary to pay attention to whether they are applied equally, or whether some groups in society are marginalized or discriminated against. Also, political incentives for politicians and the failure of political systems to represent the population are important elements to take into account. For instance, do women have as much capacity and space as men to demand answers from duty bearers? Are government officials as responsive to people living in poverty as they are to the wealthy?

Box 7 Reducing teacher absenteeism in primary schools in Ghana

'In a country that spends 80 per cent of its education budget on teachers' salaries, teacher absenteeism can lead to significant wastage in public spending on education. While it was widely known that teachers were frequently absent from class in Ghana, the Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) decided to quantify the extent of absenteeism in primary schools and to look more closely at the trends, potential causes and solutions for this chronic problem.'

'In early 2008 the CDD-Ghana research team began conducting multiple visits to 30 public primary schools to study the incidence of absenteeism among teachers in the school. The first visit made to each school was used to collect quantitative and qualitative information about teacher and school characteristics, and about

Box 7 *[cont.]*

the proximity of the school to other facilities, such as health centres or banks. At least two subsequent visits […] were used to verify the presence of teachers against a roster provided to them by district education directorates. Finally, the CDD-Ghana team conducted focus-group discussions with […] parent-teacher associations and school management committees to ascertain […] the causes of absenteeism and whether monitoring or sanctions were undertaken.'

'[…] The CDD-Ghana found that 47 per cent of the teachers were absent during at least one of the visits, and the average absenteeism rate for the 192 teachers sampled was 27 per cent. […] Although the most frequently cited reasons for absenteeism were illness and medical check-ups, another reason often cited was "attendance at distance learning lectures" [on Fridays]. […] The learning programmes, run by universities across the country, were held over weekends starting on Fridays after the end of primary and secondary school day. However, attending the programmes required teachers with posts a significant distance from the university to leave class early in order to arrive on time.'

The CDD-Ghana pitched this story to journalists and received an enthusiastic response. Articles about the research findings appeared in six newspapers. The CDD-Ghana recommended to government officials, including the director of basic education at the Ghana Education Service (GES), that the training schedule be reorganized so that it no longer conflicted with class and teaching time. This recommendation led the GES to adjust the programme. The CDD-Ghana pitched the problem in a way that led the duty bearer to take public notice, while at the same time presenting a potential solution that was easily adoptable.

Source: Heck and Tolmie 2012: 22–24

Chapter 2

The Assessment Framework

The Assessment Framework

The assessment framework is designed to facilitate the identification of actions aimed at improving democratic accountability for service delivery. In particular, it focuses on the intersection between democratic principles and the policy process. It asks whether democratic practices are being thoroughly applied. It is an action-oriented methodology because its application allows users of the framework to devise improvements in areas where there is an accountability deficit. The framework builds on research, a wealth of experience from various actors, and the application of International IDEA's State of Democracy and State of Local Democracy assessments (International IDEA 2008 and International IDEA 2013b).

2.1. The Logic of the Framework

The key assumption of the assessment framework is that by promoting accountability in the context of service provision at different levels of government, not only is democracy legitimized and reinforced, but the quality of services delivered will also eventually improve, thereby bettering the lives of men, women, boys and girls, particularly those living in poverty. In reality, politics will be much messier, and it may be that neither politicians nor people in general have the space, capacity or incentives to organize and change things for the better. Such reality checks should by no means prevent an assessment effort; instead, they serve to manage expectations and sharpen tactics with respect to how to carry out an assessment effort and how to use the findings.

By accessing and analysing information, users of the framework can assess democratic-accountability relationships for service problems throughout the entire policy process and devise actions to improve them. While assessing relationships, formal or informal practices

must be examined in light of the three principles mentioned above (see Section 1.4). For instance, policies may show the priority given to children's right to education, women's right to sexual and reproductive health, or providing access to safe drinking water; however, in reality, problems such as the misallocation of funds, leakage of spending throughout the expenditure chain and an unequal distribution of services mean a lack of accountability in service delivery. In the end, children might only get a low-quality education, women may not have access to sexual and reproductive health services, and safe drinking water may not be available.

2.2. What Is the Scope of the Framework?

The framework targets the extent to which government officials or other service providers can be held accountable through democratic means. This means that assessors can suggest options for accountability improvements. To this end, the analytical tools contained in this guide can be used directly or after customization to assess a wide variety of public services regardless of their nature or organization. It is generally paramount to look beyond formal processes and to concentrate on how these services work in practice and why problems remain unaddressed even though they have been flagged by duty bearers and claim holders alike. Assessment teams need to analyse not only political actors and formal political decision-making processes, but also broader issues such as power structures and relations in society; the capacity of, and space for, activists to mobilize and engage collectively; and historical legacies explaining contextual factors.

For instance, research shows that service delivery can be undermined where societies are divided as a result of fragmentation and exclusion. In such cases, power is often won by candidates lacking policy orientation and instead showing leader-centric or identity-based strategies (Wild et al. 2012).

In addition, problems with service delivery may be related to policies, mandates and arrangements that are overlapping or contradictory within and across sectors, as well as grand policies that lack implementation plans and funding. One such example is provided in Box 8.

Box 8 Barriers to democratic accountability

In 2002, a reform programme of the water sector in Kenya set up a large number of parastatals, companies or agencies owned or controlled wholly or partly by the government. Horizontal coordination involved at least 10 ministries. In addition, decentralization further increased the number of autonomous local bodies. This proliferation of actors, combined with a large influx of donor funds, significantly increased opportunities for corruption. In situations with such a complicated pattern of responsibilities, citizens are likely to have a hard time holding their elected representatives to account for a lack of drinkable water (Rampa with Piñol Puig 2011).

2.3. What Are the Characteristics of the Assessment Framework?

The framework is focused not only on identifying problems or gaps in accountability but also on how these can be overcome. In order to devise possible actions leading towards reform, the assessment process needs to demonstrate a number of characteristics that allow a locally owned process to take place. More specifically, the framework is designed to be:

- service-specific, as it targets particular services and how democratic-accountability mechanisms perform in such services;
- problem-based, as it requires the identification of particular problems at specific phases in the policy process, which are then subject to the assessment;
- action-oriented, as it seeks to lay the groundwork for improving accountability arrangements along the policy chain, thereby providing means of redress where providers fail in their obligations; and
- inclusive, as it is open to integrate a variety of political actors and other stakeholders in the analysis of accountability in the delivery of public services.

Figure 2. Basic Assessment Framework

Principle	Basic Assessment Framework		
	Agenda Setting	**Policymaking**	**Implementation**
Answerability	How answerable is [duty bearer] to [claim holder] for [agenda-setting duty]?	How answerable is [duty bearer] to [claim holder] for [policymaking duty]?	How answerable is [duty bearer] to [claim holder] for [implementation duty]?
Responsiveness	How responsive is [duty bearer] to [claim holder] for [agenda-setting duty]?	How responsive is [duty bearer] to [claim holder] for [policymaking duty]?	How responsive is [duty bearer] to [claim holder] for [implementation duty]?
Enforceability	To what degree can the [claim holder] impose and enforce consequences on [duty bearer] for [agenda-setting duty]?	To what degree can the [claim holder] impose and enforce consequences on [duty bearer] for [policymaking duty]?	To what degree can the [claim holder] impose and enforce consequences on [duty bearer] for [implementation duty]?

Chapter 3

The Process, Milestones and Workflow of the Assessment

The Process, Milestones and Workflow of the Assessment

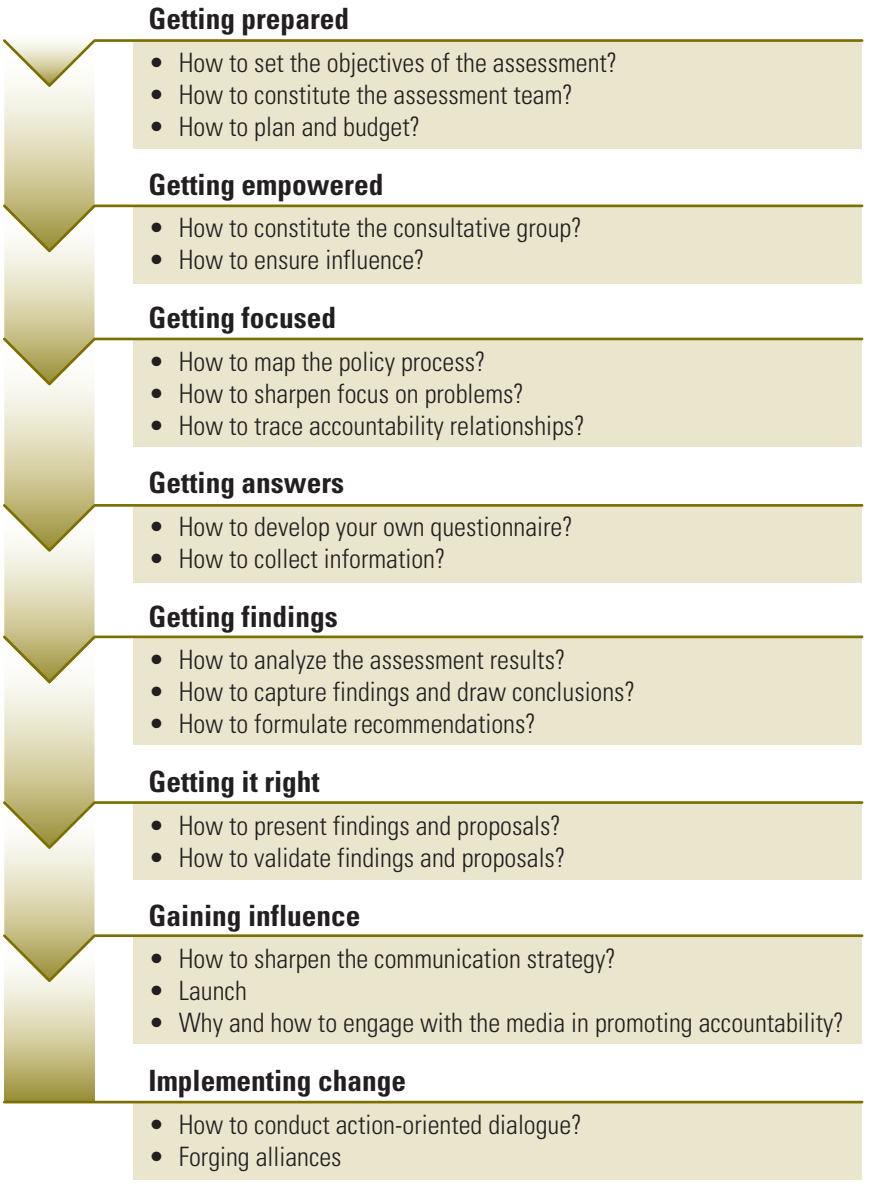
3.1. Getting Prepared

Let us imagine a group of women and men working for a community-based organization in an informal settlement. They want to know more about the problems with public service delivery in their neighbourhood, to identify the corresponding spaces where their contribution could make a difference, and to learn how to advocate for such improvements. Or let us imagine a municipal official trying to improve channels of communication for the community's feedback on the services the municipality provides. Such groups could be called 'initiators'.

The initiators have concerns about a service, such as the lack of solid-waste management in an informal settlement or the poor quality of education, and they want to improve the provision of the service by creating channels of communication or opportunities to voice their concerns. As their concerns result from their knowledge about the service, they are in an ideal position to facilitate the summoning of various stakeholders to drive an assessment. This guide will refer to such drivers as the assessment team. Initiators should also be well placed to nurture alliances between assessors and those with the power to push for reforms in the service, such as elected and unelected officials from local and national government, politicians from different parts of the political spectrum, oversight agencies, service providers, etc. These influential actors will have a role to play in the assessment process as part of the consultative group.

Change will occur not only as result of the assessment but also in the interaction among initiators, the assessment team and the consultative group throughout the assessment process. Space and opportunities for common reflection about concerns over service delivery and how to achieve improvements will inevitably increase mutual understanding

Figure 3. The assessment process



The assessment process is divided into nine milestones, each of which is subdivided into steps that allow stringent planning, execution and monitoring. The 'Learning lessons' step does not appear in the flow chart above, as it is an internal exercise that follows the dissemination of the assessment results.

between the assessors, the consultative group and the public- or private-sector service provider and other stakeholders. This creates the basis for change.

3.1.1. *How to Set Objectives for the Assessment*

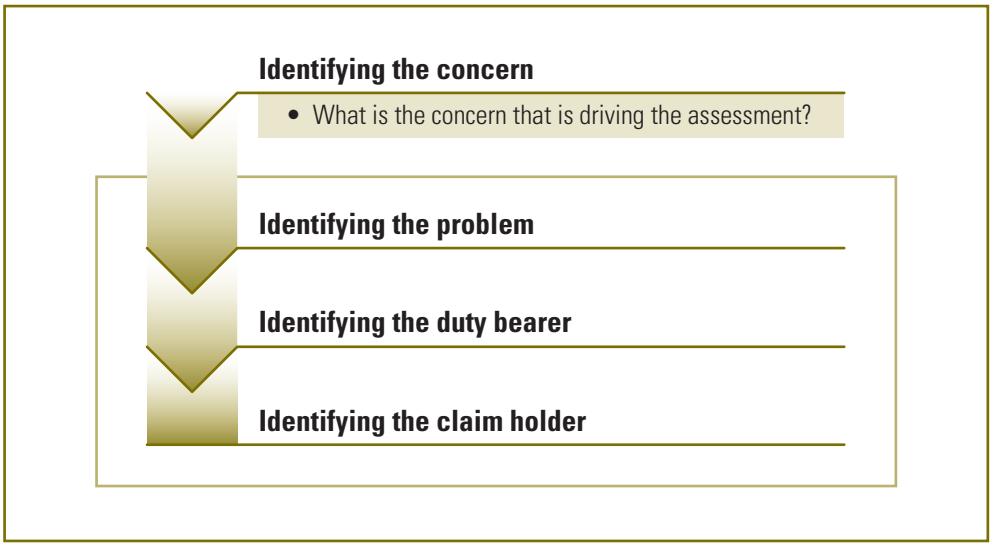
The next step of any assessment is to set objectives. An essential question that has to be answered is why an assessment is needed. Who will the recommendations be aimed at? When and how will the recommendations be made? The initiators can conduct preliminary consultations in order to answer the following questions:

- What are the most pressing concerns in public service delivery?
- Which actors are best placed to benefit from the assessment and to use the findings collectively?
- In what ways can the assessment of democratic accountability support politicians or officials to better fulfil their duties?
- In what way can the assessment empower claim holders to hold public officials to account?
- What would be the most appropriate ways of communicating the findings and recommendations?
- When would be the optimal time to advocate reform proposals?

From the general to the specific, from identifying concerns to identifying problems

Initiators will now have an idea about the topics they should be concerned about and that drive the assessment. What should work better? What is not working? What is missing? In general, such concerns refer to a malfunction in public service delivery, such as the lack of drinkable water in informal settlements, or of solid-waste collection in semi-urban areas, or the poor performance of students in publicly funded schools.

Figure 4. From the general to the specific



Box 9

Concern versus problem

A concern is what service users perceive as negative or not working properly in a service, while a problem is the reason behind the concern, something that is causing a tangible effect. For instance, neighbours from a district in a large city might be concerned about the low quality of water coming out of their taps. This will be their concern. The problems at the root of the poor quality of the water could be the lack of pipe maintenance, which has neither been scheduled nor budgeted for in decades. Accountability for such problems—who is responsible and to whom—is what this exercise will focus on.

3.1.2. *How to Constitute the Assessment Team*

Although the role of initiators is fundamental to setting up the process, the assessment will be carried out by an assessment team. This team will be in charge of all the operational work, undertaking research and leading the process towards achieving change. The team should ideally include members with proven objectivity, research capacities, expertise on the service and communication skills. A successful team is often one that brings together people from different disciplines, backgrounds and genders.

Interdisciplinary team

The initiators should aim to put together an interdisciplinary team. The team should possess as many of the necessary skills as possible so its members can complement each other and support the assessment process. An interdisciplinary team will have a diversity of views, which will also provide a comprehensive vision of the issues so that no sensitive topics or approaches are ignored.

How to organize teamwork

The organization of the assessment team should be determined by the initiators and the team itself. Ideally, the assessment team should endeavour to use the resources at hand, both material and human, effectively and efficiently. All their actions should aim to meet the assessment's objectives. As part of the responsibility for managing the process and conducting research, the assessment team should distribute work and responsibilities among its members based on their skills. In order to avoid misunderstandings and achieve a synergy in terms of the members' skills and capacities, clear management agreements should be made from the outset of the project.

It is important for the assessment team to maintain communication between the initiators, the consultative group (see Section 3.2.1.) and internally among the team members themselves. The team must ensure that space is created for regular team meetings in order to exchange information. In addition, each milestone in the process should be communicated with the other actors in the assessment; maintaining a constant flow of information with all actors involved will facilitate the achievement of common objectives.

Continuous learning and monitoring

The assessment team must ensure that learning and monitoring takes place throughout the assessment: the process must be participatory, and it should allow all members to monitor progress and highlight any revisions required. Ideally, every milestone should involve reflection within the team to discuss what went well and what can be improved in order to monitor and document accumulated learning. More guidance on how to learn from the assessment is provided in Section 3.9.

3.1.3. *How to Plan and Budget*

Obtaining data can be time-consuming and costly, as is also the case with communication and advocacy activities. Before embarking on the assessment, initiators and assessors must jointly agree on a work plan that includes feasible milestones, communication tactics, timelines and an estimated budget. The amount of resources available will impact the assessment's depth. The elaboration of a budget should include estimated costs for:

- human resources in the assessment team;
- study or field trips;
- consultations, including costs of meetings, if needed; and
- communications.

Assessment teams ought to plan the process according to both the human and material resources available. To ensure efficiency, assessment teams can build on knowledge that is already easily available, for instance, research reports produced in the country, statistics produced by national agencies, country reports by international organizations, or opinion surveys by local academics and think tanks. The team can then focus its work on the substantive areas that have been left uncovered and are worth following up.

Cost drivers

In order to complete the work plan and its budget, initiators and the assessment team must identify factors with the potential to increase costs or cause delays in the process, such as:

- overdependence on expensive consultants;
- numerous field trips, extensive studies or surveys;
- disagreements within the assessment team or between the assessment team and the consultative group that stall the work; and
- any form of corruption.

Both initiators and assessors are well placed to identify problems early and adjust strategies accordingly.

Cost reducer

A promising way to get a realistic idea about the work plan and the budget is to carry out a desk review of existing literature, reports and data on service provision from institutions such as:

- government agencies with service provision responsibilities;
- university research departments and think tanks;
- regulatory bodies;
- national statistics agencies;
- ombudsman offices;
- supreme audit institutions;
- national human rights institutions;
- watchdogs or citizen monitoring initiatives;
- international monitoring mechanisms such as the Human Development Index;
- general conclusions and comments from the treaty-monitoring bodies of the United Nations human rights conventions or their regional equivalents, such as the African Court and Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights;
- reports by the independent human rights experts under the special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council; and
- other international instruments, such as declarations adopted by UN conferences, that pertain to the provision of public services.

An initial exploration of these resources should be undertaken prior to a decision on the budget. The checklist in Annex I provides a basic example of a work plan and timeline.

Strategic communication

An important part of the assessment team's work is focused on communication. Assessors need to plan the assessment's communication activities in advance. These may include:

- keeping members of the consultative group informed;
- regular briefings of relevant political party focal points or parliamentary committee staff related to the service selected;
- a regular newsletter on milestones achieved;
- news about VIPs who are members of the consultative group;
- live-streaming of public events, if appropriate; and
- social media, such as updates on blogs, Twitter, Instagram and other platforms that target strategic actors.

Tips on the use of social media

Assessment teams may consider the use of social media platforms—such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram—as part of their communication strategy. Each tool has a specific use and audience. Social media provide a means of keeping targeted audiences informed and of sustaining a constant flow of information. Social media channels can help to promote events, activities and press releases, as well as gather momentum and enhance interest in assessment activities. It is important to note, however, that the use of social media is time-consuming and requires knowledge of particular platforms. The value of using social media increases if team members have previous experience, if there is an available audience, and if social media use is part of a broader communication strategy.

In order to ensure policy influence and to advocate for change, assessors should try to engage in a regular exchange with relevant stakeholders and target audiences. If the context allows, assessors might consider initiating partnerships with advocacy or interest groups. Obviously, such partnerships will only be meaningful if the partner is truly interested in pushing for improvements in the democratic accountability of service delivery and has the capacity and space to do so. The team could, for instance, try to link up with social movements and interest groups engaged in improving service delivery or, inter alia, local government associations, political parties, government regulatory agencies or the ombudsman office. Relevant and feasible joint activities could be agreed upon by partners and could include co-hosted public debates at the local level and knowledge sharing or discussions on the most appropriate time to release issue briefs and final reports. The publication of the final report(s) should be timed to ensure the widest-possible dissemination and promotion so that the findings are fully debated.

In addition, the team may wish to consider a possible partnership with a media outlet, again, provided that this is not only feasible but also appropriate for both parties. Ideas to consider could range from exclusive reporting of milestone events to the printing of abridged pull-out versions of the final findings and recommendations, if these are considered newsworthy (see Section 3.7.).

Box 10

An example of a successful communication strategy: Democratic Audit UK and *The Guardian**

Dr Stuart Wilks-Heeg, director of Democratic Audit UK, when asked about their communication strategy, stated: 'The assessment was launched online via exclusive coverage of it in *The Guardian*

Box 10 *[cont.]*

newspaper, which is one of the most-visited media websites globally. To coincide with this coverage, we sent printed copies of the executive summary of the assessment to 100 key politicians, journalists and bloggers, think-tanks and academics, and circulated electronic copies (PDF) of the summary to 100 further individuals from these groups. We also approached leading blogs and bloggers to write about our assessment, wrote blog posts of our own for a number of leading UK politics/media sites, and ran a sustained social media campaign' (extract from an interview with Dr Stuart Wilks-Heeg, August 2012).

The article about the assessment was the most-read item on *The Guardian* website for 24 hours and attracted large numbers of comments on Facebook (shared 1,400 times) and Twitter (tweeted 777 times). Other media outlets also covered the launch of the assessment, including *Time* magazine. Most importantly, the assessment reached its target audience and was cited in both chambers of the UK Parliament.

*The report 'How Democratic is the UK? The 2012 Audit' was published by Democratic Audit UK on 7 July 2012. The report is based on International IDEA's State of Democracy (SoD) assessment framework. SoD is the inspiration for the assessment framework in this guide. For more information, see <http://www.idea.int>.

Obtaining funds

Fundraising to cover core expenses related to technical needs and human resources is the next crucial point. An ideal scenario would be for the entities interested in the assessment's recommendations to cover the costs themselves. One positive side effect of doing so is that their involvement could possibly increase the likelihood of their guidance and endorsement of the assessment's conclusions.

Realistically, most potential users of the recommendations have other pressing financial priorities. Nonetheless, groups that are not directly involved with the service at present, but could be in the future, might be potential contributors to funding the assessment process, such as:

- multilateral development banks;
- development cooperation agencies;
- non-governmental organizations;
- philanthropic foundations or private-sector companies; and
- research institutions.

Where the assessment is carried out as part of the duties of a public body, such as an ombudsman's office or a parliamentary committee, seeking funding might not be necessary. If not, the initiators and assessors should keep political balance in mind when seeking financial backing. Some potential funders may be so directly involved in the provision of the service in question that their financial contributions might raise questions of objectivity.

Milestones: getting prepared

- Setting the objectives of the assessment
- Constituting the assessment team
- Elaboration of a work plan and budget

3.2. Getting Empowered

Once the initiators have established an assessment team and secured funds for the assessment, they can pull back and let the assessment team proceed. However, the assessment team should not work alone. As mentioned above, the assessment team will need support and opinions from key people with legitimacy, genuine engagement in, and some degree of power and influence over, the identified service. A consultative group will play that supporting role through regular meetings to discuss the progress of the assessment and its recommendations.

The consultative group should ideally represent a genuine plurality of political leanings and perspectives on the service. Its composition must ensure that the views of those marginalized from the provision of the service are represented in terms of gender, age, minority or indigenous status, sexual orientation, urban or rural residence, class, ethnic or faith-based identity, and disabilities.

3.2.1. *How to Constitute the Consultative Group*

The consultative group is called on to perform three main functions: (1) to provide legitimacy to the assessment team; (2) to convey the results of the assessment and reach those with the capacity to generate change; and (3) to provide guidance and advice. In order to carry out these three functions successfully, the consultative group should be composed of people with influence over the service. They will be

potential users of the results of the assessment, those with an interest in improving how the service is being delivered, and with the power to push for the reform of democratic accountability through the policy process. To provide the assessment with legitimacy, the consultative group should ideally reflect in its composition actors from society, all or the most salient political leanings, and those with a stake in the service. Their involvement from the beginning of the process increases the chance that influence can be obtained at the right level and with the right stakeholders. Good relationships between the assessors and the consultative group, as well as potential funding bodies, will support timely progress. It is up to both groups to take measures to guarantee that the assessment is led with objectivity and pluralism.

Moreover, the consultative group should be involved, in conjunction with the assessment team, in devising possible activities around the results obtained in the assessment phase. The consultative group will be responsible for actions to make the proposals resulting from the assessment a reality. The consultative group and the assessment team should decide how their relationships will be established. Due to the daily responsibilities of consultative group members, the assessment team must ascertain how best to use the limited time available for discussion with the group members. The checklist in Annex II provides ideas to shape successful cooperation between these essential bodies in order to drive the process forward.

3.2.2. *How to Ensure Influence*

The main vehicle of influence is the consultative group. The group's members are chosen for their position and knowledge regarding the service. Their empowerment and ownership of the process will increase the likelihood that the assessment results will influence decision-making.

In any case, the assessment team and the consultative group should explore all other possible paths of influence. One strategy to achieve more influence is sharing reports and invitations to participate in events with key institutions and organizations, such as political parties, parliament, ombudsman offices, supreme audit institutions, government inspectorates, regulatory authorities, civil society organizations or the interest groups of private-sector service providers. In general, any organization or institution that provides a vehicle to influence decision-making will be an excellent complement to the work and influence provided by the consultative group.

Strategic timing

Assessors need to devise possible uses of the results of the assessment and decide how the proposals can become more influential. It is important to target key decision-making moments in terms of achieving maximum exposure and influence. These moments might be, for instance, an upcoming general election, a national policy revision, the completion or revision of a five-year national public health-care plan, or an upcoming country report to a UN treaty-monitoring body or its regional equivalent on, for example, gender equality in the country.

The following questions can help to identify such strategic entry points:

- Is the policy governing the service or its implementation going to be evaluated and revised in the near future? Is there an ongoing debate about the problem and sustained media attention, including through radio broadcasts?
- Has there been a persistent push to improve the service by at least some political parties, the parliamentary committee in charge or by social movements and interest groups? Or is there near-complete silence, which would entail an uphill battle in identifying entry points?
- Is there an upcoming review of a national development plan, national sector plans or a more specific plan related to the service? Will there be a constitutional review or a review of relevant legislation and policies in the near future? Is a review of the service planned by the ombudsman office or the supreme audit institution?
- Is there a state report due to any of the treaty-monitoring bodies of the UN human rights conventions, or a visit by any of the independent human rights experts under the special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council or their regional equivalents related to the service?
- Will there be a general election in the next two years?

The timing of implementation and advocacy plays a major role in translating conclusions and feasible recommendations into action-oriented dialogue. Thus, the team must adjust its tactics to achieve tangible change throughout the assessment. Paying attention to these entry points is one tactic that can increase the impact of the assessment exponentially.

Box 11 Step-by-step internal reporting

To guarantee that all perceptions are documented, it is advisable to produce and validate short briefings, for instance, when key milestones are achieved. This builds on the fact that a series of straightforward texts is more likely to be used as a learning tool than long and extensive volumes.

Milestones: getting empowered

- Constitute a consultative group
- Identify the users and uses of the assessment results, and instances of well-timed input

3.3. Getting Focused

The assessment team and the consultative group, with their respective responsibilities, will at this phase start the technical application of the methodology. The assessment team will be tasked with mapping out the service throughout the policy process in order to identify and formulate the main problems and to identify who has responsibility for each problem and the accountability relationships at work.

3.3.1. *How to Map the Policy Process*

The next step in the assessment is to map out the service's policy process, i.e. by carefully answering the following questions in order to determine *who* does *what* and *how* they do it at each stage of the service's policy process:

- Who has the power or influence to set the sector's priorities and who contributes to financing the service or makes decisions on the allocation of the budget? (agenda setting)
- Who decides on the service's regulatory framework? (policymaking)
- Who is in charge of implementing these regulations and executing the budget? (implementation)
- Which agencies have a mandate to monitor and oversee the process?

One of the key aspects of the mapping process is to distinguish between the tasks of the central and sub-national levels of government. Furthermore, it is important to determine their respective mandates, as well as the resources that they have available for planning, regulating and implementing the service and for meeting their responsibilities. The policy process is often multilayered, as different levels, offices or agencies of government have different responsibilities, which can either be complementary or overlapping. It is therefore of paramount importance that the assessment team map how different levels of government have different responsibilities for the service.

The assessment team must also understand the formal and informal factors at work in the process. For instance, whether sub-national governments and authorities are elected or appointed will inevitably affect who they are, in reality, accountable to. In addition, deep-seated informal practices and power networks might influence how the service is delivered, as well as the formal accountability relations in the country in question. Often, traditional authorities may have significant power and influence, even if they have no formal role in the political process—or may even be formally excluded from it. Another example is interest groups, which may influence policy outcomes by exerting pressure on policymakers. The assessors must identify these informal actors and their concrete means to influence the services provided.

3.3.2. *How to Sharpen Focus on Problems*

Once the assessment team has mapped out the policy process of the service, it will be in a position to identify the problem(s) that will affect the service. Problems identified will define the scope of the assessment, the actors and relationships to be assessed, and the questionnaires, and thus the direction of the reform-oriented recommendations.

First, remember that in step 3.1.1, initiators were prompted to assess accountability through a highly specific concern over the provision of a service. Such concerns are linked to obstacles that prevent the service from achieving its purpose. These obstacles are the problems that the assessment will focus on.

At this step, assessors need to:

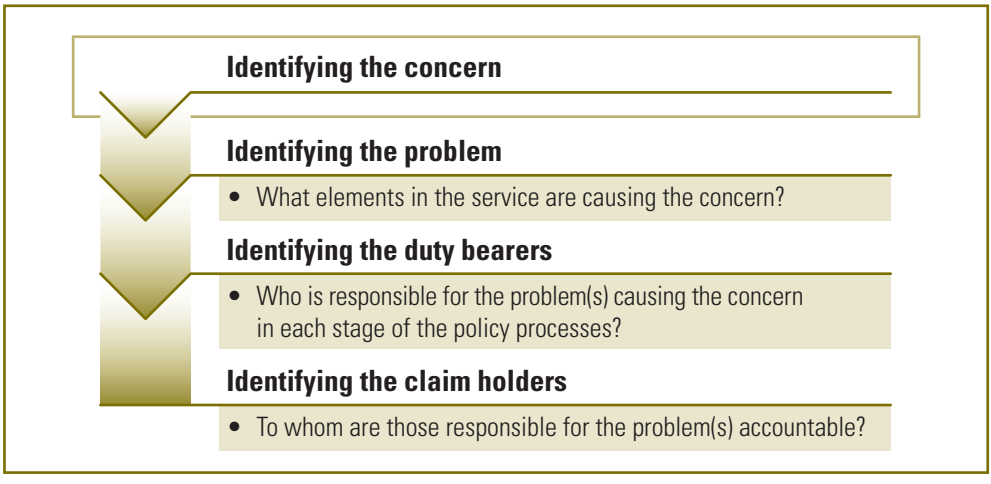
- **Formulate problems** in terms of the policy process they just have mapped out. The team will use the mapping to gain an understanding of the causal links behind the problem. It will identify which concrete

responsibilities and duties in the policy process are being overlooked or poorly carried out or are absent altogether, thereby preventing the service from achieving its purpose.

- **Consult well-informed actors.** For their understanding to be sound, assessors need to make use of their own expertise and that of other well-informed actors with relationships with the service. Think, for instance, of what might be causing a lack of access to drinkable water or the poor performance of certain minorities in schools. It is possible that the assessors will know the rules that govern the expansion of the water network or whether pupil attendance is high. Other experts could help to identify underlying reasons, e.g. that transfers from the centre of investment in the water-distribution infrastructure are not being sent to local authorities in a timely manner or that pupils' nutritional intake is below the minimum required for performing intellectual tasks. Such a detailed understanding of the problems is a necessity. Only by having a clear idea of what lies at the root of the initiators' concerns will assessors be able to focus their assessment on the relevant problems affecting the service.

- **Trace problems through the policy process.** Once problems have been identified, assessors should organize them and think of their implications. Is it policymaking or budget allocation? What are the implications for implementation? By tracing the problems back to the precise stage in the policy process at which they occur, the assessment team can identify which office has a duty or responsibility for those problems (the duty bearer), as well as those to whom the duty bearer must explain and justify their actions (claim holders).

Figure 5. Identifying the concern



Identified problems have to be relevant

Assessors are very likely to identify several problems across the policy process, so they must tread lightly to identify those that are most relevant. One way to prioritize and focus is to consider the number of accountability relationships that originate from a given problem: concerns that are too general and broad, such as a lack of quality education for youth, might involve many accountability relationships, making the assessment complicated. Conversely, assessors should avoid working on problems that are too simplistic or specific, such as the poor state of the road signs on a particular road connecting two communities, as they might not be worth the effort that a full assessment process requires.

The following questions are helpful for identifying relevant problems:

- Is there available and accessible information? Is this information relevant to the problem?
- Are the accountability relationships tangible?
- Does the assessment team have the capacity, time and space to analyse information relating to the problem?

Box 12 Spotlight on Malawi: from concerns to problems

An assessment carried out by the Office of the Ombudsman identified as a concern the unhealthy situation regarding solid waste in urban areas around the capital, Lilongwe. There is no system in place to manage the solid waste generated by residents in urban areas. Tracing the service delivery chain enabled the team to determine that the concern was caused by a financing obstacle. The gaps in services were linked to a lack of stable and regular financing to cover the costs. Knowing these facts enabled the Office of the Ombudsman to refine the problem by looking more closely at actors, responsibilities and the context surrounding them, thus analysing the accountability relationships governing the service. Problem identification influenced the whole assessment and defined its action-oriented recommendations (International IDEA and the Office of the Ombudsman in Malawi, 2014).

Different problems, different incentives for accountability

The assessment team should be aware that there may be a higher degree of democratic accountability in some sectors or sub-sectors than in others. Politicians who face elections may be more interested in services that are visible, salient and targetable. The construction of schools, for instance, might yield more concrete, positive feedback from citizens than something intangible such as the quality of education. The amenability of sub-sectors to democratic accountability may also depend on the space for, and capacity of, citizens to access information about schools and to organize collectively to push for improvements.

When analysing how different problems create different incentives and disincentives, assessors should consider the following three elements. First, the characteristics of each sector will influence the incentives and disincentives for political actors, service providers and service users to commit resources to service delivery, and for political actors and service providers to be accountable to citizens for service performance. Second, the particularities of each sector will affect the balance of power between policymakers and the providers of public services. Third, the traits of each sector will affect the space and ways in which citizens can mobilize collectively to push for improvements (Batley and McLoughlin 2012).

3.3.3. *How to Trace Accountability Relationships*

Once pertinent service problems have been identified at each stage of the policy process, the assessment team should proceed to identify duty bearers and claim holders for each of the problems. In other words, the assessors should identify who is responsible for the problem (the duty bearer) and who they are accountable to (the claim holder). It is important to keep in mind that problems might have more than one duty bearer and claim holder and that several other actors might informally affect the service and play a part in causing the problem. Assessors should consider these actors and their contextual impact when attempting to find solutions.

Assessors need to focus on all the actors and accountability relationships that influence the service problem(s) and identify each relationship separately. The goal is to identify the most relevant relationships at each stage of the policy process. Exhaustive assessments are likely to yield the most useful conclusions.

Box 13 Mapping relationships

Mapping key actors and accountability relationships with, for instance, flipcharts or simple post-it notes provides the basis for identifying the relationships between actors and institutions around the problem(s). When mapping actors, the diagram in Annex III can be used to illustrate how these actors relate to one another.

Diagramming relationships delivers useful information and creates insights into the context in which:

- service delivery takes place;
- various relationships interact;
- decisions are made and incentives provided or retracted;
- laws are or are not applied; and
- actions are or are not taken.

It also highlights the possibility of the formation of groups of actors that support or oppose reform and identifies how much power and space they might have. Groupings of this kind provide important information because actors with similar profiles can reinforce each other's supportive or critical attitudes to the assessment. Most importantly, however, assessors can identify the central accountability relationships in relation to the problem(s) and diagram the system in which they are embedded—politically and socially—in order to track opportunities to influence or affect these relationships.

As assessors complete this step, they should be able to complete the matrix in Figure 6. Annex IV provides an example of a matrix completed by an assessment team.

Figure 6. Identifying accountability relationships

Identifying accountability relationships				
Policy stage	**Service problem** Obstacle preventing the service from achieving its objectives	**Duty bearers** Actors with responsibility for the problem	**Claim holders** Actors using services, groups with interest in changes	**Alliances and influence** Actor relationships: Who opposes or supports reform? Actors with a high or low level of influence?
Agenda setting				
Policymaking				
Implementation				

This matrix can be used by the assessors in step 3.4 of the process (Getting Answers) to summarize the information gathered in this phase. The identification of problems and accountability relationships will give shape to the questionnaire and guide data collection, hence the importance of the exhaustive identification of actors and accountability relationships.

Milestones: getting focused

- Identification of most pertinent service problems
- Identification of actors' accountability for service problems—duty bearers and claim holders
- Identifying accountability relationships

3.4. Getting Answers

The assessment team has mapped out the service, identified the problems and mapped the accountability relationships for those problems. Now the team needs to analyse the accountability relationships. The questionnaire guides the information-collection process and the analysis of democratic accountability for the service problems. The questionnaire is based on the three democratic

principles of accountability (answerability, responsiveness and enforceability) and the two enabling factors (participation and transparency), and its structure is based on the three policy stages (agenda setting, policymaking and implementation).

3.4.1. *How to Develop Your Own Questionnaire*

Assessors need to tailor their questionnaire to the specific problems and relationships they are assessing. The questionnaire is nothing more than a guide to drive, focus and target the collection of information. Answering the resulting questions will provide structured information that will facilitate the analysis.

- The questionnaire has nine guiding questions. Each guiding question results from the intersection between a democratic principle and a stage of the policy process (see Figure 7 for a full presentation of the guiding questions and the issues to look for).

  How **[principle]** *is the* **[duty bearer]** *to the* **[claim holder/s]** *for the* **[duty at policy stage]***?*

- Each guiding question is then broken down into four sets of issues to look for. Each of these sets corresponds to one of the highlighted parts of the guiding question.

  The sets of issues to look for provide further guidance on the specific aspects of reality that have to be investigated.

  Only on the basis of a tailored questionnaire can the assessment team assess the full extent of accountability problems and devise specific recommendations for action aimed at improving these relationships. Needless to say, everything from language to actors, concepts and so on must be context-sensitive.

  Annex V contains an example of a questionnaire completed by an assessment team.

Figure 7. Guiding questions

Principle	Guiding questions		
	Agenda Setting	**Policymaking**	**Implementation**
Answerability	How answerable is [duty bearer] to [claim holder] for [agenda-setting duty]?	How answerable is [duty bearer] to [claim holder] for [policymaking duty]?	How answerable is [duty bearer] to [claim holder] for [implementation duty]?
Responsiveness	How responsive is [duty bearer] to [claim holder] for [agenda-setting duty]?	How responsive is [duty bearer] to [claim holder] for [policymaking duty]?	How responsive is [duty bearer] to [claim holder] for [implementation duty]?
Enforceability	To what degree can the [claim holder] impose and enforce consequences on [duty bearer] for [agenda-setting duty]?	To what degree can the [claim holder] impose and enforce consequences on [duty bearer] for [policymaking duty]?	To what degree can the [claim holder] impose and enforce consequences on [duty bearer] for [implementation duty]?
	Issues to look for: - The duty bearer's will, capacity and space to explain and be transparent about choices and decisions. - The claim holders' will, capacity and space to ask questions/demand actions from the duty bearer; and claim holders' collaboration with each other in doing so (paying special attention to the preferences of those marginalized from the service due, for instance, to discrimination on the basis of gender, age, social status, faith, disabilities, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc.). - How available, adequate, inclusive and effective the answerability mechanisms are, including the extent to which reviews and audits by oversight institutions have any influence. - How the context influences the diverse answerability mechanisms, keeping in mind the power dynamics, political incentives/disincentives, structural conditions and historical legacies.	**Issues to look for:** - How effective is the duty bearer at addressing claims from diverse claim holders (including from those marginalized from the service due, for instance, to discrimination on the basis of gender, age, social status, faith, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc.). - The claim holders' ability to effectively voice the preferences of service users and to influence the duty bearer, and claim holders' collaboration with each other in doing so. - How available, adequate, inclusive and effective the mechanisms for responsiveness are. - How the context influences the diverse responsiveness mechanisms, keeping in mind the power dynamics, political incentives/disincentives, structural conditions and historical legacies.	**Issues to look for:** - Duty bearers face credible consequences (sanctions or rewards) from claim holders irrespective of their gender, age, social status and so on. - The will, capacity and space of claim holders to effectively impose consequences (feedback, sanctions, praise, etc.) on duty bearers, including claim holders' collaboration with each other in so doing. - How available, adequate, predictable and effective the consequences are, including the capacity of oversight and enforcement agencies to enforce them. - How the context influences the diverse enforcement mechanisms, keeping in mind the power dynamics, political incentives/disincentives, structural conditions and historical legacies.

3.4.2. *How to Collect Information*

As there is no one correct method for proceeding with what may be a laborious task, assessors must collect data using the techniques and approaches they feel most comfortable with, such as consultation, observation, participant observation, individual or collective interviews, surveys, desk reviews, text analysis and so on.

Data-collection strategies

There are two types of data the team could collect—primary and secondary. Primary data are generated directly by the team, while secondary data are generated by others but used by the team. Using secondary data, where reliable and relevant, is preferable to creating new or duplicating existing data. Assessors are advised to consider collecting primary data after secondary sources have been exhausted, as collection is time- and resource-consuming. The advantage of using primary data is originality. Ideally, assessors should choose a combination of sources, including existing sources, allowing for a balanced body of data.

Depending on the context, a considerable amount of information might already be available. Examples of sources are:

- disaggregated statistics;
- academic research;
- opinion surveys;
- official sector-specific reports published by public agencies;
- news or investigative reports;
- local government associations' reports;
- reports published by independent organizations such as trade unions;
- a state party report to, and the general conclusions from, a treaty-monitoring body on relevant UN human rights conventions or their regional equivalents;
- civil society shadow reports to those state party reports; and
- country-oriented reports by global or regional organizations such as the WHO, UNESCO, the World Bank, the Organization of American States, the Asian Development Bank, or the UN Economic Commission for Africa.

Quantitative and qualitative data

Quantitative and qualitative data complement each other. Quantitative data can provide a representative sample of the population that will help identify trends and tendencies in social, economic or political behaviour. Such data are, obviously, numerically represented.

Qualitative information can be used to describe people's views and experiences, which can potentially be helpful sources for devising change. During interviews, the team should therefore be sure to ask what the interviewees think needs to be improved or changed and how to make change happen.

No one correct method

Each data-collection methodology should be used in an appropriate way. When combined, they allow a degree of cross-checking. By using a combination of methods to research a problem, the methods can complement one another and thus provide a more accurate explanation. Awareness of each method's limitations helps take possible bias into account when analysing the data.

Examples of methods that may overlap or be complementary are:

- stakeholder interviews or in-depth interviews that are semi-structured, face-to-face or conducted by telephone;
- focus groups or workshops;
- participant observation;
- structured discussions and consultations; and
- quantitative surveys.

A plurality of perspectives on how to collect data is positive; consensus is not required at this point. Differences in opinion about how to interpret data can be provided in the report(s).

Data disaggregation

In order to assess accountability in public service delivery from a plurality of views, this framework suggests measures to ensure that all views are sought, in particular from marginalized groups (see Box 14). One method to discuss here is the use of disaggregated data.

Disaggregation divides data into smaller units in order to sharpen one's understanding of the information. Without disaggregation, subsequent policies and programmes run the risk of overlooking the interests and views of minority and/or marginalized groups. Data can be disaggregated on the basis of:

- income;
- age (children, youth, adults, the elderly);
- gender identity;
- location (rural/urban);
- minority or indigenous group status;
- sexual orientation;
- social status, disability, faith; and
- other categories that reveal differences

Disaggregating data allows the identification of patterns of exclusion or discrimination. Often, marginalized populations are made visible only through disaggregated data, and the assessors can find valuable information depending on how the data are presented once disaggregated.

Box 14 Tips to make the assessment more gender- and diversity-sensitive

- Targeted consultations: Ensure that people from marginalized groups are heard throughout the assessment from the moment concerns are formulated to the final formulation of recommendations.
- Diverse composition: The assessment team and consultative group must be gender-balanced and include people with knowledge about, or mindful of, the interests of different societal groups.
- Variety of methods: The team needs to identify views that are representative of the whole population. Face-to-face interviews can gather the views of those left out of official databases, such as migrants or citizens without documents.
- Local languages: People proficient in local languages or dialects need to be included in the team, and materials need to be translated and disseminated in these languages.
- Special needs: In order to include people with disabilities, the assessment team must be prepared to arrange wheelchair-adapted meeting spaces, use sign-language interpreters, or other means.

Generally speaking, data disaggregation is a positive strategy to reveal more nuances and help the assessors to identify problems affecting different sectors of society. If the team decides to use data disaggregated beyond gender and age, it must reflect on the possible negatives of data disaggregation, because exposing such data can reinforce discriminatory policies and practices.

The team should be aware of any sort of ethnic or religious tension when using disaggregated data. Some countries forbid ethnic or racial classification, which makes disaggregation with respect to these categories impossible. Others do the same for religious affiliations. Moreover, the people concerned need to agree to be identified as belonging to externally defined groups. The identification of groups could, in some contexts, endanger the security of the group in question, such as religious minorities or transgender people. It is legitimate to assume that there are individuals who do not wish to be categorized and who prefer to be identified as citizens. Thus, data disaggregation should only be used under circumstances that ensure that people's security and integrity will be protected.

Access to disaggregated data can have a considerable impact on the design of action-oriented dialogues. Again, the assessment team needs to agree on the extent of disaggregation that is both required and possible for the assessment.

Milestones: getting answers

- Identification of issues to look for
- Creation of the assessment's customized questionnaire
- Data collection

3.5. Getting Findings

The translation of information into conclusions is an important step in the assessment, but this is by no means automatic. The challenge for the assessment team is to provide a structure to the information, and to use it to answer the questions posed by the questionnaire. Devising clear strategies for change with the potential to improve accountability in service delivery must be the goal of any such translation.

3.5.1. *How to Analyse the Information*

Analysis requires a creative, forward-looking effort. Using consistent, objective methods to draw conclusions ensures that they will suit the needs of the assessment. The assessment team will undertake a comprehensive analysis of all the information obtained from each of the nine questions in the questionnaire. In this way, the different information from each policy stage and each principle will be understood in its appropriate context.

To draw conclusions, assessors should analyse the information and the proposals shared by people, posing broad questions such as: What is working and what is not working? Why? What could be done to improve accountability relationships? Who has the formal or informal power to bring about change? Who could cooperate with whom to bring about or prevent change? These questions, among others, will provide information that can be used to conduct a general analysis of the topic.

Assessors might benefit from structuring information under the intersection between principles and policy stages. Once the information has a structure, the team should start to look for patterns and explanations for why the problem is occurring, and which accountability relationships are either not working or are absent. The information collected, ideally both quantitative and qualitative, will highlight trends, but it can also provide explanations for the process, including reasons for why it is being conducted in the first place.

3.5.2. *How to Draw Conclusions*

Analysing the information is like piecing together a puzzle. The team should take a step back and observe the picture the pieces create: therein lie the team's conclusions. By understanding the findings, the team will be able to support their conclusions.

The team should also use their findings to gain an understanding of which priorities for making improvements and recommendations are the most urgent, which goals will be more or less challenging to achieve and which level of government their findings should be addressed to. Answering these questions will ensure that future proposals are realistic, timely and tailored.

3.5.3. *How to Formulate Recommendations*

Having drawn their conclusions, the team will have created a narrative capable of answering the nine guiding questions. The picture resulting from the analysis will help the team to understand the most urgent priorities for improving accountability in the service. In order to transform these conclusions into recommendations, the team must first formulate hypotheses for change. Some of these hypotheses will be selected to become recommendations.

These hypotheses should ideally be formulated as propositions with a cause and an effect (if A, then B). The hypotheses must outline plausible, realizable improvements to elements of accountability (see Figure 8). They need to be realistic and to propose changes that are time- and context-sensitive. In order to achieve these things, hypotheses for change should answer the following questions:

- What opportunities exist to change the way things are?
- What challenges are posed by those resisting or undermining change?
- What are the potential consequences of change?

Box 15 An ideal type example of hypotheses turned into recommendations

Pineraica, a region of Rotunda, has undergone an assessment focused on primary education. The problem driving the assessment was the poor performance of many pupils in primary education in rural areas and the low levels of teacher training. An analysis of the information gathered showed that, although parents had been consistently demanding that the regional education authority (duty bearer) improve the training of teachers, these demands had not been met, even though the office is legally obliged to do so.

The assessment team produced a number of hypotheses for change, and selected three from among them. These are their recommendations to try to influence the national review of the Quality of Education Act:

- If the Quality of Education Act guarantees parents' right to obtain written answers to questions regarding school performance that are posed during meetings with the regional education authority, and such a duty is supervised by the Office

Box 15 *[cont.]*

of the Ombudsman, then the regional education authority is likely to be more responsive to requests from parents.

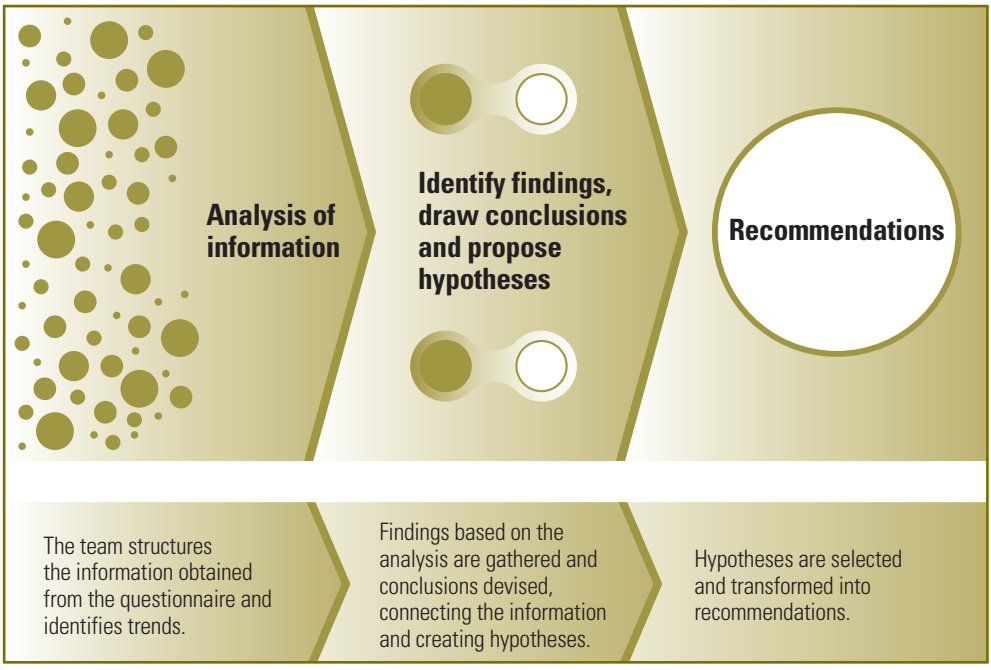
- If local elected politicians faced consequences for not implementing the Quality of Education Act, this would provide further incentives for elected officials to respond to users' demands, thereby improving the service.
- If parents' associations were consulted during the revision of the Quality of Education Act, the bill would be more attuned to reality, and it would contain measures to improve teachers' knowledge and qualifications.

The proposals were taken up for consideration by the committee in charge of the national review of the Quality of Education Act and accepted as a valid input to the discussion by all the parties involved.

The hypotheses must be shared and discussed thoroughly by the members of the assessment team and then presented as a menu of options to the consultative group. That group's insights are crucial to determining whether the proposed changes are viable, that is, which ones present the most realistic opportunities and the fewest challenges.

The final selection of recommendations for action can either present a number of different hypotheses, including conflicting ones, or focus on those deemed the most likely to succeed. This will depend on whether the consultative group can reach an agreement on a subset of hypotheses. In the absence of agreement, the assessment team must explain the implications of all the hypotheses presented, especially if they are conflicting.

Figure 8. From analysis to recommendations



Milestones: getting findings

- Analysis of information collected in response to the questionnaire
- Findings captured and conclusions drawn
- Formulation of recommendations

3.6. Getting It Right

Presenting the findings and proposals is not a straightforward process, since, ideally, they should not be limited to a single report. The team must aim to tell a story by editing a draft report and/or a series of briefs. Technically, all the information can be used as editorial input for the draft. Telling a story means linking data, evidence, the mapping of actors and relationships, statements, judgments and, most importantly, analysis and recommendations in order to develop a coherent picture of the assessment.

3.6.1. *How to Present Findings and Proposals*

The draft should be written in simple terms and strive to get past mere symptoms and engage with underlying causes of problems. Dissenting opinions among members of the assessment team or consultative group can be documented to add to the plurality of perspectives. Decisions must be taken on form and length, for instance, on whether to do one final report or a series of shorter reports. It is important to note that it is less likely that lengthy reports will be read thoroughly, although they are able to provide a more accurate picture of the process. Concise, targeted reports are better able to capture the attention of the audience, but they might not reflect the whole process. That said, a number of short briefings targeted at specific audiences tend to be better received and taken up.

Assessors can also build on different milestones in the process. This can be done by producing and issuing briefs at each milestone or by communicating through social or traditional media outlets when milestones are reached. All the reports and briefings should be guided by the objective of the assessment, stating the main outcome of the assessment or milestone and how it can help officials to fulfil their duties or empower people to hold officials to account.

3.6.2. *How to Validate the Findings and Proposals*

Validation is in itself an accountability exercise designed to obtain feedback on the draft. This feedback can consist of corrections, new ideas or approaches not contemplated during the analysis, requests for further elaboration or clarification and even objections to certain claims. Validation can take place at two different levels. A more technical or expert level will provide input on the technical accuracy and feasibility of analysis and recommendations. A political validation will, on the other hand, generate input on the political possibilities, allies, obstacles and buy-in of the assessment's proposals.

Validation meetings with government authorities, private-sector service providers or other stakeholders that might be on the receiving end of criticism are also a good idea. If given a chance to correct any misunderstandings and provide nuance as appropriate, they are likely to be less defensive in subsequent public debates about reform.

Note that, at this point, it is important to protect the integrity of the process. The assessment team may come up with unwelcome or

sensitive findings and might be asked to formulate these in more diplomatic language or to completely discard them. There is no right response to this, only a case-by-case consideration of the best course of action with regard to the original objective of the assessment—to influence those with the capacity to improve accountability.

Assessors must be aware of their privileged position. The basis for the findings and proposals summarized in the draft are not personal opinions, but rather, evidence-based judgements that support their hypothesis. However, a main element in building the report's legitimacy and usability is its validation in specific core forums.

The assessors are advised to validate the report with the following actors in order to build legitimacy and usability:

- the consultative group;
- the key informants, including representatives of service users; and
- the anticipated users of the report, most notably those with the clout to turn recommendations into action.

Consultative group

The first and core source of validation is the consultative group, whose role throughout the process can be described as one of continuous validation, among other things. A validation meeting between the assessment team and the consultative group after the draft has been prepared can provide feedback on the consistency between conclusions and facts, the feasibility of the recommendations and tactics for moving from analysis to action.

The assessors and the consultative group must explicitly agree on the assessment's outputs and their use, in terms of style, content and purpose, which, among other things, might be to:

- catalyse and guide political and social dialogue;
- raise awareness among, and develop the capacity of, political and social stakeholders;
- contribute to building the political space to outline an agenda for action;
- provide input for sector-specific reviews or development plans to be drafted in the near future; and
- provide a basis for discussion with external actors on their role in weakening or strengthening accountability and their future support.

After the pre-validation with the consultative group, which is primarily to secure ownership, the assessment team can proceed with preparing both technical and political validation.

Key informants: emphasis on facts

Key informants are the next source of validation. The principle here is that any source of information is also a source of validation. In addition, key informants would like to see their input taken into account in the assessment, and to know how and why it has been nuanced. It is important to keep in mind that the report is composed of information obtained from people who have different vantage points with regard to the service. Even if information is first-hand, it has to be nuanced by contrasting it with other information, which is something that should be explained to the key informants. Presenting different and common views will provide strength, giving interviewees, referees or experts a chance to comment on the way facts have been used and presented.

As part of the validation process, assessors can rely on key informants to raise issues that require further discussion, integration or feedback. In addition to receiving a draft copy of the report(s) or material produced, a group of key informants could, for example, gather to discuss those issues with the assessors.

Users of the report: emphasis on recommendations

Finally, the report should contain a number of action-oriented proposals, the feasibility of which must be validated with potential users of the report who are in a position to turn proposals into action. The objective of this validation is to test the feasibility of the proposals so their inputs can support the design of accountability improvements. By testing feasibility with those who have the capacity to bring about change, the assessment will also create buy-in: interest in, and momentum for, the main conclusions and recommendations to be publicized and debated.

It is important that the users of the report be approached to have a chance to at least discuss the report's findings and conclusions. Such a strategy is not only fair but can also help to avoid defensiveness in multilateral validations. Depending on the specific case, findings and proposals can be presented, shared and debated in any appropriate forums or meetings or with any entities and organizations, such as:

- open committee hearings in national or sub-national parliaments;
- thematic advisers from ministries and government agencies;
- political parties' focal points or shadow ministers;
- public debates in conjunction with the launch of reports by an ombudsman office, national human rights institution, supreme audit institution or government inspectorate;
- conferences of trade unions or professional associations;
- public- or private-sector associations of providers and consumers/users, such as health-care providers or national health consumers' associations;
- NGOs and human rights defenders;
- research conferences;
- annual conferences of local government associations;
- mobile road shows, where findings can be communicated through theatre or short films shown on temporary screens followed by public debates;
- debates on radio, television and social media; and
- opinion formers such as newspaper columnists or bloggers.

Validation meetings

The way in which validation takes place is determined by the assessors and the consultative group. The content of the draft report can be presented in one main validation meeting or more specifically in separate follow-up meetings. The technical validation by experts must always take place prior to the political validation.

In order to get the most out of validation meetings, they must be well prepared and structured. Some factors to consider include:

- an invitation with a short briefing on the process;
- meeting moderation and facilitation;
- an agreed agenda and specific guiding questions for participants;
- reports and briefs produced by the assessment team; and
- meeting logistics, including catering, a venue and timing that ensure the widest possible participation.

Moreover, representatives of marginalized groups should be invited to a meeting dedicated to ensuring that the draft report takes gender, diversity and political dynamics and sensitivities into account.

In many cases, the quality of comments and discussion by participants will lead to significant revision and improvement of the assessment report.

The checklist in Annex VI can be used to prepare validation meetings.

Milestones: getting it right

- Presentation of findings and proposals
- Validation of findings and proposals

3.7. Gaining Influence

Validations of the assessment outputs—reports or briefs with conclusions and recommendations—will have built awareness of service problems among key political and social actors. For such awareness to grow into political will, capacity and space, and eventually materialize into action, it needs to meet the type of public interest that is conducive to reforms.

Although general interest in service problems and accountability deficits may already exist (e.g. because of notorious corruption or maladministration), actual reform requires debates of realistic options to address those problems. Ideally, the assessment should produce precisely those realistic options.

3.7.1. *How to Sharpen the Communication Strategy*

Having a successful communication strategy that is able to convey key messages to target audiences through the appropriate channels is fundamental. The strategy should plan on how the reports and results of the assessment are going to be disseminated in the most effective and efficient way. Such planning must include the identification of the key messages to be communicated, the audiences that are going to be ideally reached, timing, and the channels of communication most suitable for the strategy. Apart from the dissemination of reports and briefs, assessors should also plan other activities focused on creating public interest in the topic.

The communication strategy should not be limited to a single debate or printed publication. This strategy should include a menu of options and means best suited for the assessment drivers to maximize the reach and credibility of all assessment outputs. The decision to print one report or many briefs, for instance, must depend on such a strategy.

The team could benefit from seeking the advice of an expert on strategic communication who could suggest key messages, target audiences, key media to engage with, potential formats for dissemination and the timing of targeted launches of proposals.

Choice of formats

In general, the members of the assessment team and the consultative group decide on formats for communicating conclusions and proposals based on their collective expertise and knowledge. Possible options are:

- oral presentations, such as targeted briefings with the leaders of, and experts from, national and local branches of political parties, including youth wings, women's leagues or party think tanks, or participation in open hearings by parliament or local councils;
- a single report or a series of articles;
- pull-outs on topical issues in the print media;
- articles in special-interest magazines;
- articles in peer-reviewed academic journals;
- articles on online discussion forums;
- op-ed pieces; and
- sharing of material with opinion formers such as columnists, bloggers or talk-show hosts.

Choosing topics that will be of interest for separate publication could provide 'hooks' for media attention and is a beneficial way of publicizing the assessment.

One promising strategy is to produce short summaries for the media, as lengthy reports are often overlooked. Such short summaries still need to be based on verifiable facts. Human-interest stories focusing on the team's work or key challenges and successes may also be suitable for attracting media interest.

3.7.2. *How to Launch the Assessment Report*

Following publication, it is a good practice to organize public launches of the report in the localities covered by the assessment, as well as at the national level. It is advisable to make good use of such landmark events, as proper launches can ignite interest in the recommendations, facilitate further dialogue and empower all those who provided input into the process.

Special events

One way to disseminate key findings and recommendations is to set up special events dedicated to particular audiences. Assessors must ensure that opinion makers such as journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders and academics or think tank personnel engaged with the particular service are invited to the event, which should ideally offer points of connection to the assessed service.

Traditionally, a media briefing or a press conference is the most common event. Possible alternative options include:

- a television or radio event with a speech by a highly respected individual;
- debates organized by community-based radio stations;
- public meetings or conferences;
- seminars or workshops, live-streamed or filmed and posted on websites;
- Twitter messages targeting relevant Twitterati and hash tags; and
- road shows, to reach remote areas, where findings can be disseminated through theatre plays or short films shown on temporary screens followed by public debates.

3.7.3. *Why and How to Engage with the Media in Promoting Accountability*

High degrees of media freedom and independence tend to reduce the incidence of misuse of public resources. Ideally, the media can empower citizens by:

- supplying citizens with information to enhance their understanding of government policy;
- providing citizens with space for policy debate and participation;
- driving opinions and shaping the public agenda; and
- investigating cases of corruption and abuse of power.

The media can play a watchdog role by investigating government policy for the sake of the public interest and to ensure accountability. The media can also maintain state responsiveness by bringing problems in society to public attention and pressuring duty bearers for a response. It is important to remember that media outlets can also be dependent on financial interests, on special-interest groups and on powerful businesses.

Moreover, people's media consumption can be hampered by lack of access to print, online or social media and by low levels of literacy or a lack of time, in particular among women.

As the media require stories, assessors can be reasonably sure to find allies in reporting findings and proposals, provided that the editors judge these to be newsworthy. A brief and precise press release about the findings can be sent to all print, online and broadcast media. Assessors should not feel pressure to publish every detail of the assessment. The press release announces that the assessment is complete and also announces its most important findings. It must be internally approved prior to publication, like any other item intended for dissemination.

To produce the press release, the assessors should answer the following chain of questions:

- What happened to whom, where, when and why, and what were the consequences?
- What can be done to reform and improve the service and who is for or against such reforms?

Milestones: gaining influence

- Fine-tuning of the communication strategy to effectively disseminate the results of the report
- Launch the report(s)
- Strategic engagement with the media

3.8. Implementing Change

An assessment is intended to go far beyond the production of a written report, into a phase of dialogue and debate on proposals for reforms, engaging people with the clout and incentives to push for these proposals. This step focuses on the anticipated users of the report(s) and initiating action-oriented, forward-looking dialogue built on the assessment's proposals; it is about creative thinking and looking for improvements.

Assessors will need to keep in mind that the timescale for advocacy has a bearing on the opportunities for meaningful dialogue and

reform proposals. For this reason, this process is devoted to engaging those willing to push for reform to accomplish the main goals of the assessment: reform.

Reforms do not just happen by themselves, merely based on the publication of a report. The purpose of dialogue is not only the provision of information, but the facilitation of action. The capacity to work collectively to resolve accountability problems is crucial, which is why strategic alliances between the various groups engaged in resolving problems are so important, be they parliamentarians, ombudsman offices, human rights activists or service users. It bears repeating that oversight appears to be most effective when top-down and bottom-up oversight are combined, and when collective interest in mobilization and organization for change is facilitated.

Box 16

The work of the Office of the Ombudsman in Malawi and solid-waste management

Between April and November 2013, the Office of the Ombudsman in Malawi embarked on an assessment of solid-waste management by the Mzuzu, Lilongwe, Blantyre and Kasungu Town Councils, as well as by Lilongwe and Blantyre District Councils.

The Office of the Ombudsman carried out extensive fieldwork to consult city council officials, neighbours and other service users. It found inadequate structures for dealing with waste management. Councils did not outsource any of their waste-related services, and the budget for waste management was allocated on an ad hoc basis, which caused many operational limitations such as an inadequate vehicle fleet, understaffing and a lack of monitoring mechanisms. The limited operational capacity was used mostly to serve those who paid specific fees, such as owners of market stalls. Moreover, communities and individuals were unclear about their role in ensuring that their neighbourhoods were clean. The Office of the Ombudsman highlighted the fact that political representatives did not face electoral consequences for inadequate service provision (councillors were not elected between 2005 and 2014), and that the public had no space to influence the councils' priorities or ways of working. Solid-waste management featured low on the policy agenda and did not influence election results. In sum, the principles of answerability, responsiveness and enforceability were not being met, which had a negative bearing on accountability for waste management.

Box 16 *[cont.]*

The Office of the Ombudsman initiated a number of discussions to help devise strategies for the district and town authorities to enable improved urban sanitation, the role of local communities and the incentives required to motivate local authorities in this area, as well as to stiffen the penalties that could be put in place to punish councils that do not deliver in this important area. At a national consultation in Lilongwe in November 2013, all these issues were discussed openly by city councils, civil society organizations and national government representatives. At the consultation, the national director of sanitation agreed to include the issues as part of the discussion of a National Sanitation Bill to be submitted to parliament.

According to the ombudsman of Malawi, Justice Tujilane Chizumila, the framework enabled the office to extend its mandate. It opened channels of communication between the Office of the Ombudsman and different authorities, increasing the ombudsman's capacity to influence service delivery.

3.8.1. *Action-oriented Dialogue*

Establishing action-oriented dialogue, either in existing or newly created spaces, is a possible strategy to achieve change. By discussing together, under agreed-upon terms, the different conclusions and proposals of the assessment, relevant stakeholders might find spaces for consensus building for change through real and tangible actions.

Dialogue geared towards change must be owned by those participating in it, be sustainable and inclusive and take stock of political sensitivities. Action-oriented dialogue ought to include those with interest, capacity and space to bring about change, as well as stakeholders with interest in the service. As dialogue may facilitate alliances to collectively address service problems, drivers of the assessment are advised to invite all relevant groups engaged with the service, including providers themselves (public and private), policymakers (e.g. members of parties, parliament), agenda setters (e.g. representatives of the news media, interest groups, civil service), oversight bodies (parliamentary committees, supreme audit institutions), or other potential claim holders (e.g. service users, opposition politicians, leaders of social movements, interest groups, and community-based organizations). These groups

should own the dialogue process, which is a fundamental condition for achieving sustainability (Kemp 2013).

It goes without saying that dialogue has to be planned and implemented in ways that are sensitive to gender and diversity.

3.8.2. *Forging Alliances*

Forging alliances with political and social stakeholders is essential. A report by itself hardly ever leads to action. It has been stated but bears repeating: what is needed is the facilitation of collective action based on knowledge. The assessment team and consultative group may therefore wish to broker contacts between political actors, on the one hand, and social movements and interest groups committed to improving democratic accountability, on the other. Ideally, they would have the space and capacity to devise joint actions to resolve the problems, including follow-up of joint action plans to ensure that things really happen. The capacity to work collectively to resolve service delivery problems is crucial. A single individual can only do so much. Action-oriented dialogue based on the assessment's findings can nurture strategic alliances that in turn can bring about improvements in accountability relationships related to the service and, as an indirect consequence, more effective and better-quality delivery of public services.

Box 17 illustrates the outcomes that can be achieved when the media and civil society cooperate to reveal accountability gaps and to advocate for change on the basis of an assessment in Indonesia. By coming closer to its citizens and becoming more responsive to their human rights claims, the municipal government of Makassar fundamentally reformed the availability and accessibility of public health services.

Box 17 Why alliances with the media are a key factor of success

Decentralization has become one of the key features of democratization processes, and health is seen as a tracer sector for effectiveness because of the extent to which health underpins many other areas of development. In Indonesia, the Local Government Act that was passed in 1998 and reviewed for a second time in 2008 gives districts and municipalities responsibility for planning

Box 17 *[cont.]*

and managing the local development process. They are responsible for delivering services, such as health care, social services and public infrastructure, to citizens.

Makassar, the capital of South Sulawesi, has 1.4 million inhabitants. In the first years after the adoption of the Local Government Act, the municipal government's policy focused on increasing the number of health centres. It assumed that if services and facilities were available, and citizens had sufficient knowledge about the importance of health care, they would be able to access the facilities. However, this policy was not responsive enough to citizens' needs and ignored the important fact that people living in poverty cannot pay fees to use services.

TOP FM, the biggest radio station in Makassar, began to broadcast news about problems with service delivery. Soon, the radio station was followed by a local newspaper, which allocated specific pages to accommodate citizens' complaints and questions regarding service delivery, as well as replies from local government agencies. As the media began to play an active role, local NGOs started to prioritize similar issues. The Communication and Information Forum for Non-Government Organizations started activities promoting policy reform in service delivery, participatory development and HIV prevention.

The media asked NGOs to write opinion pieces for their newspapers or to join in discussions with spokespeople from local government on talk shows. At the same time, NGOs invited the media to cover the implementation of their programme. An alliance was born between the media and NGOs, supporting citizens to exercise control over the performance of local government by optimizing accountability mechanisms.

Newspapers and radio stations continually exposed the grievances of people living in poverty about their limited access to, and inability to afford, fees for health facilities. The coverage prompted public discussion about the issue. Criticism of the way the government handled the problem began to increase. Facing mounting public pressure, a mayoral decree gave all registered inhabitants equal access to health-care services, such as medical treatment, routine check-ups, and maternal and children's services, without regard to their income status (extract from Triwibowo 2012).

Milestones: implementing change

- Transform recommendation into real change
- Initiate action-oriented dialogue
- Forge alliances

3.9. Learning Lessons

Now that the assessment has been completed, disseminated and debated, it is time for the team to reflect and learn from its own experiences, as well as from the outcome of the assessment. Throughout the assessment, some things worked well and others less well. This step is essentially about how to get the team to come together with a common goal of productive learning.

3.9.1. *Internal Debriefing*

An internal debriefing held, for instance, after dissemination activities will help to collect the stakeholders' and assessors' perceptions in a systematic manner. This specific feedback can be helpful for improving both the process and the methodology of the assessment from various perspectives: human resources management, fundraising, research methods, strategic communication, conflict management and other primarily internal issues.

Each step and milestone in the process may have concluded with reflection on what was working, what could be improved and what the assessors would advise other assessment teams to do. Now the consultative group should undertake the same exercise. Based on these step-by-step reflections, the team should have no trouble compiling their internal experiences.
The following are some guiding questions that can be asked:

- What were the professional experiences within the assessment team and consultative group?
- What worked well?
- What could have been done differently?
- How did the distribution of roles and relations within the assessment team work?
- What specific lessons can be shared with other assessment teams and International IDEA for mutual learning purposes?

International IDEA is keenly interested in the findings from internal debriefings. Learning from them could refine the methodology for the benefit of future assessment teams and consultative groups.

3.9.2. *Learning through Monitoring and Evaluation*

Before concluding the assessment process, it is advisable to identify and summarize the outputs and outcomes of the work. What did the assessment team and the consultative group actually achieve? How were the recommendations taken up by those engaged in improving democratic accountability in service delivery? These are crucial to pin down. Might there be opportunities for recurring assessments of the same service in order to track progress? Or are there opportunities to expand the assessment to other sectors/parts of the country? International IDEA is highly interested in the findings from such exercises as well.

The assessment team and consultative group could simply have a focus-group discussion as an exercise in self-assessment, which carries very little cost. They could also consider other complementary methods, such as the Most Significant Change approach[4], which requires careful preparation. It selects and discusses stories about the most significant changes that assessors experienced as a result of an assessment or throughout the process and is thus more focused on outcomes.

If the assessment team decides to apply this method, the main steps in the process are:

- defining the reporting period;
- collecting stories and selecting the most significant ones;
- verifying the stories;
- providing feedback on the results of the selected stories to stakeholders; and
- revising the process of the accountability assessment.

The method involves different stakeholders discussing the stories and the systematic selection of the most important of these. Once positive or negative changes have been identified, people sit down together, read the stories aloud and have in-depth discussions about the value of the reported changes. This promotes ongoing dialogue and learning about how the assessment can be improved to better meet its aims. Stakeholders and assessors therefore focus their attention exclusively

on outcomes. This method takes account of the fact that answers to questions about change are often in the form of narratives: Who is responsible for what? Why? And what are the consequences?

Other options include Outcome Harvesting, a practical tool from the outcome mapping community of practice[5]. In brief, the method can be used for real-time monitoring and evidence gathering from complex development processes that involve multiple stakeholders, such as an assessment of democratic accountability in service delivery. The method was inspired by the definition of outcome as a change in the behavior, relationships, actions, activities, policies, or practices of an individual, group, community, organization, or institution. Unlike some evaluation methods, Outcome Harvesting does not measure progress towards predetermined outcomes or objectives, but rather collects evidence of what has been achieved, and works backward to determine whether and how the project or intervention contributed to the change. In particular, Outcome Harvesting works well when outcomes, rather than activities, are the critical focus.

Recent pilot experiences by the World Bank in applying Outcome Harvesting to service delivery showed that the tool 'can be used to gather evidence on key interventions and identify essential lessons, such as how best to adapt successful efforts to different contexts and how to choose the best mix of actors to involve.' (World Bank 2014)

Again, assessment teams in other countries and International IDEA would be most interested in the findings from such exercises, as they can contribute to further improvements in the assessment framework and learning about democratic accountability in service delivery in general.

Democracy is ultimately about popular control of public affairs on the basis of political equality. International IDEA has therefore sought to design a methodology that allows for a broad and participatory assessment process. A participatory approach is, in fact, as important as the assessment results.

Milestones: learning lessons

- Internal debriefing and lessons learned from the assessment
- Applying a monitoring and evaluation framework

Notes

1. There are two basic types of supreme audit institution, the court model and the auditor-general model. Although there are many variations of these models and a number of hybrids around the world, several basic distinctions are noteworthy. In particular, the auditor-general model is based on closer interaction with the legislature than the traditional court audit model. The court model tends to focus on the legality of spending, while the auditor-general model has proved innovative in developing different types of audits, such as performance audits. The auditor-general model is most prevalent among Commonwealth member states, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and many Caribbean, Pacific, South-West Asian and Anglophone sub-Saharan African countries. In the court model, the audit court has both judicial and administrative authority. It is independent of both the legislative and executive branches of government and is an integral part of the judiciary. This model is used in particular in Roman-law countries. It can be found in the Latin countries of Europe (France, Italy, Portugal and Spain), Turkey and many Latin American and francophone countries in Africa. See the International Organizations of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI), <http://www.intosai.org>, and the International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions (ISSAI), at <http://www.issai.org>
2. The term claim holder has been selected to cover both people, who have rights, and institutions, which have mandates. People are also rights holders, but the term claim holder better conveys the comprehensiveness of the idea of democratic accountability.
3. 'Sexual orientation' refers to an individual's physical and/or emotional attraction to the same and/or opposite gender. 'Gay,' 'lesbian,' 'bisexual' and 'straight' are all examples of sexual orientations.
4. More information at <http://mande.co.uk/special-issues/most-significant-change-msc>
5. More information at <http://www.outcomemapping.ca>

Annexes

Annex I: How to plan

This checklist is helpful to get an overview of the assessment in terms of activities and timing.

How to plan			
Work plan			**Timeline**
Milestones	**Activities**	**Responsible**	**Estimated timeframe**
Getting prepared			
Getting empowered			
Getting focused			
Getting answers			
Getting findings			
Getting it right			
Gaining influence			
Implementing change			
Learning lessons			

Annex II: Cooperation among teams

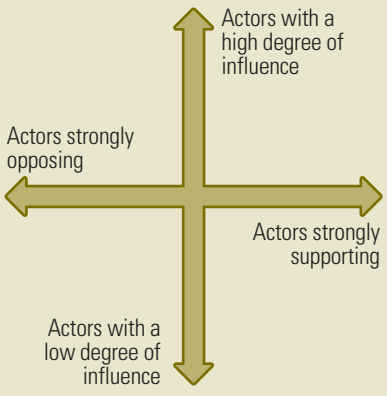
This annex provides an optional checklist for assessment teams that could be used to improve successful cooperation between assessors and the consultative group.

How to shape successful cooperation	Evaluation			Measure to improve cooperation
	+	+/-	-	
Joint coordination platform established				
Binding terms of engagement defined				
Joint milestones defined				
Conflict-management rules formulated				
Trust-building activities taken place				
Evaluation/success stories shared				

Annex III: A possible method to map accountability relationships

This diagram can be used to map accountability relationships in order to focus on data collection that can close information gaps. By using this grid, assessors will also be able to identify actors who are both supportive and influential. In addition, assessors will be able to identify the most powerful opposing actors and the relationships between actors.

How to map accountability relationships



Graphics	Significance
———	Close relations of exchange, coordination, etc.
- - - - - - - - - -	Informal or weak relationships
⇨	Formal, institutionalized alliances
⌐	Tensions or different interests
——//——	Interrupted relations

Place the selection of the most relevant actors on the grid. Start with those with the greatest interest in achieving change, and use the graphics to describe the relationships between them. To find out more about tactical mapping see <www.newtactics.org>.

Annex IV: Identifying accountability relationships

In an assessment focused on the provision of adequate infrastructure to provide access to water throughout the country, the assessment team identified a number of problems, duty bearers and claim holders, as well as various alliances, throughout the three core phases of agenda setting, policymaking and implementation.

Identifying accountability relationships				
Policy stage	**Service problem**	**Duty bearers**	**Claim holders**	**Alliances and influence**
	Obstacle preventing the service from achieving its objectives	Actors with responsibility for the problem	Actors using services, groups with interest in changes	Actor relationships: Who opposes or supports the change/reforms? Who has a high or low level of influence?
Agenda setting	The public debates/ parliamentary debates preceding the drafting of a new law build on an unrealistic/uninformed assessment of the water needs of the population.	Political parties	Citizens	The two major political parties control much of the media in the country, no space in media to contradict their positions on the new law. There is a strong citizens' movement in favour of a new water law.
Policymaking	Law regulating procurement does not clarify when private companies can be selected to deliver a service.	Governing party	Opposition parties	Governing party has close links with external, private-sector companies with a large stake in the new law. The local government association, however, strongly advocates for input of local communities, experts and citizens into the new law.
Implementation	Procurement of service is done in a non-transparent way, and usually only major funders of the governing political party are awarded contracts.	Procurement authority	Anticorruption commission	Contracts are awarded to funders of the governing party. International bilateral donors prefer the system because 'it gets things done'. International multilateral donors are pushing for an open procurement process to avoid corruption.

Annex V: Assessment Questionnaire

This is the customized questionnaire based on the information compiled by the assessment team (shown in Annex IV).

Principle	Guiding questions		
	Agenda Setting	Policymaking	Implementation
Answerability	How answerable are **political parties** to **citizens** for using incorrect calculations during the public debate on the new water law?	How answerable is the **governing party** to **opposition parties** in parliament during the policy drafting process?	How answerable is the **procurement authority** to **the anticorruption commission** for the procurement of the service?
Responsiveness	How responsive are **political parties** to **citizens** for using incorrect calculations during the public debate on the new water law?	How responsive is the **governing party** to **opposition parties** in parliament during the policy drafting process?	How responsive is the **procurement authority** to **the anticorruption commission** for the procurement of the service?
Enforceability	To what degree can **citizens** impose and enforce consequences on **political parties** for the wrong assessment of the water needs?	To what degree can **opposition parties** impose and enforce consequences on the **governing party** in Parliament for flaws in the legal framework?	To what degree can **the anticorruption commission** impose and enforce consequences on **the procurement authority** for the lack of transparency and granting contracts to the governing party's funders?

Annex VI: How to validate findings and proposals

This checklist supports preparations for the validation meetings on findings and proposals.

How to validate findings and proposals		
Who?	**What?**	**Validation modalities**
Consultative group	Consistency between facts and conclusions, and between conclusions and recommendations	Writing/discussion meetings
Key informants	Presentation and use of facts	Discussion meetings
Users of the report	Anticipated use of the report, feasibility of recommendations	Action-oriented dialogue

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The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with a mission to support sustainable democracy worldwide.

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