Research terms of reference:
"Does citizen monitoring save public money?"
in Northern Ghana

Introduction

Integrity Action and SEND GHANA are starting a new, two-year programme in March 2021 in which groups of citizens in Northern Ghana will be enabled to monitor the delivery of important infrastructure projects and essential services within their communities. As part of this programme, we wish to generate evidence on whether, and under what conditions, public money is saved through this citizen monitoring approach. We are now searching for a research team or research organisation to work with us in gathering this evidence.

Integrity Action's and SEND's long experience of citizen monitoring approaches tells us that such approaches have the potential to improve services like education, health or infrastructure. We have seen teacher absenteeism improve, facilities upgraded, and stalled construction projects completed, to name a few. However, we lack evidence for what these improvements mean in financial terms. How much public money is saved when a particular service or project is improved through monitoring? By what kind of mechanisms or pathways might that money be saved? Under what conditions is the money saved greater than the money spent on monitoring? Evidence like this could help build a compelling argument for the value of these approaches, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on government spending makes this kind of evidence particularly important.

This terms of reference sets out the full details of this work. The deadline for responses is **25th January 2021 (end of day)**.

We would like the selected research provider to work with the programme team throughout the programme – this includes working with us at the beginning to devise an appropriate research methodology that complements, and blends well with, the citizen monitoring methodology.

The total available budget is 80,000 USD over the 2-year period.

We appreciate that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic poses a challenge to data collection, but believe that there is still much that can be done if we are adaptive in our plans. However, proposals that require international travel will not be considered.

Background

Integrity Action

Founded in 2003 and headquartered in London, Integrity Action is a non-profit organisation that helps citizens living in poverty to fix the essential services that are failing them – including schools, clean water and healthcare.

We do this by equipping citizens to "review" services where they live, report problems publicly, and work with those responsible to ensure the problems are fixed. Citizens across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East have now identified, and found solutions for, thousands of problems — from crumbling schools to dirty drinking water — and in so doing, have transformed hardships into real benefits for their communities.

We work with various partner organisations in places where the need for effective services and infrastructure is critical. Whether it is secondary school teaching in Afghanistan, water systems in DR Congo, or the reconstruction of homes after Nepal's 2015 earthquake, essential services and projects impact every aspect of citizens' lives.

Our approach involves three core components:

> **MONITORING:** we enable citizens to become monitors of essential services and development projects. They learn how to access information such as infrastructure contracts, and then check that whatever was promised is being delivered.

> **TECHNOLOGY:** citizens we work with often use a simple tablet or smartphone app to record their findings. This can lead to quicker reporting and resolution of feedback, as well as easy analysis of the data and publication of service performance.

> **SOLUTIONS:** monitors don't just report problems; they are actively involved in finding solutions, by convening service providers, officials, community members and other stakeholders and sometimes turning to other strategies like advocacy or targeted media coverage.

SEND GHANA

SEND GHANA, an affiliate of SEND West Africa, was founded on August 4, 1998. The organisation has evolved into a reputable and credible national Non-Governmental Organisation with specialty in; policy research and advocacy focusing on pro-poor policy and development programme monitoring in Ghana and; service delivery through the promotion of livelihoods security. The main constituents of SEND GHANA include socially excluded and marginalised groups such as women, persons with disability, small holder farmers and in general poor people. SEND has developed an innovative framework as a tool for public policy advocacy, known as the Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. It has four key components including; policy education, participatory research, policy engagement and policy responsiveness phases.

The framework has been used to monitor a number of government pro poor programmes and policies. Key among them is the Ghana School Feeding Programme; the Capitation Grant; the National Health Insurance Scheme; agricultural and trade policies; maternal health promotion and the use of local government revenue and mineral royalties.

The successful application of the framework has led to the establishment of platforms for civil society–government engagement at the district, regional and national levels. At the national level, SEND GHANA has developed effective working relationships with various parliamentary select committees and key ministries with an objective of influencing government policies through citizens' feedback mechanisms. Besides that, SEND GHANA has strengthened the advocacy capacity of district civil society organisations and community-based organisations, especially women groups and people living with disability to champion the demand for alternative policies. As a result of these engagements SEND GHANA has successfully pushed for improvement in good governance practices by monitoring the implementation of pro poor government interventions.

The programme
Integrity Action and SEND GHANA are planning a two-year programme based in two districts across two regions in the northern belt of Ghana where poverty and inequality is high. These areas will include the West Gonja Municipal Assembly in the Savanah Region, and East Mamprusi Municipal in Northern East Region. The West Gonja and East Mamprusi Municipal are selected because they serve as regional capitals for the newly created Sanavah and North East Regions, as a result of which many infrastructural projects are being undertaken and/or planned to be constructed. The choice of the Yendi municipal is informed by recent resolution of the long-standing chieftaincy disputes paving the way for new infrastructural projects to be initiated.

The programme will engage 40 citizens to act as monitors, across 10 specific communities (4 monitors per community). We intend for the participating monitors to guide us on what they wish to monitor – it is important that they monitor projects or services that are of importance to them. However, we anticipate that there will be infrastructure projects incorporated, as well as some services such as health or education.

In addition to the monitoring activity itself, the programme will also feature:
- Collaborative problem solving, through meetings/dialogues at project/service level and district level
- Engaging with the media on monitoring findings at national and district level
- Publication of fact sheets, monitoring reports, feature articles etc.
- Two national level policy dialogues on monitoring and research findings

Integrity Action and SEND GHANA will develop a programme-specific theory of change in early 2021. For reference, Integrity Action's organisational theory of change is provided as a diagram with this ToR (appendix 3), and can be found on Integrity Action's website with an accompanying narrative here: https://integrityaction.org/what-we-do/approach/theory-of-change.

Research questions and purpose

The purpose of this research is to generate evidence on public money saved through the implementation of citizen monitoring, so that:

- Integrity Action and SEND GHANA can use this evidence to engage stakeholders such as government officials and service providers and secure buy-in for citizen monitoring;
- Integrity Action and SEND GHANA can promote the value of citizen monitoring approaches to donors, development actors and governments;
- Other organisations, donors and researchers can derive useful learning on how information on financial savings can be generated.

The draft research questions are as follows, though we expect these to be refined further with the research provider:

1. What are the different mechanisms or pathways by which monitoring of projects or services could save public money?

2. In the mechanisms or pathways identified in Q1, by what methodologies can the amount of public money saved be assessed?

3. During the project, what tangible improvements are observed to the monitored projects or services, and to which of these did the monitoring approach make an important contribution?
   a. *Note: the citizen monitoring methodology involves citizens collecting evidence on problems with projects/services and subsequent solutions. Therefore, this research question may involve verifying the information gathered, or building on this evidence.*

4. How much public money was saved through the monitoring approach (in specific instances and across the whole project), how does this vary between different types of improvement, and how does this compare with the amount of money spent on implementing the monitoring approach?

It is important to note, as per point 3a above, that the collection of evidence on project/service performance is central to the citizen monitoring approach. In line with this, the research provider will have the opportunity to influence what information the citizen monitors collect, to facilitate answering the above questions.

While we see this as a piece of research, we recognise that it is significantly evaluative in nature, i.e. it involves generating evidence on positive outcomes brought about by the programme (Q3).

We also recognise that this research is unlikely to give firm answers to these questions, particularly Q3 and 4. We expect the research provider to use multiple complementary methodologies to assess financial savings, in order to build a comprehensive picture, rather than arbitrarily choosing one figure. We also recognise the difficulty in assessing the counterfactual, i.e. what public money would have been spent if the citizen-led monitoring was not happening. At this stage we do not wish to run an RCT, partly due to budget constraints, and partly because we believe the research needs to focus

on developing methodologies for assessing savings as well as implementing them. However the research provider may wish to consider gathering evidence that can be used for comparison, such as public spending from previous years or from comparable districts.

The research will have an inception phase (see below for draft timeline). We would expect questions 1 and 2 to be addressed primarily within the inception period, in order to establish the methodologies that should be pursued during the remainder of the project (Q2). Integrity Action and SEND GHANA will be able to contribute to Q1 with pathways such as the prevention of cost overruns, prevention of poor construction that requires greater maintenance costs, and reduction in staff absenteeism (e.g. teachers, healthcare staff).

The evidence generated through this research will be published and shared openly[1], with potential target groups including:

- Citizens and civil society groups (in Ghana and internationally)
- Government officials and service providers (in Ghana and internationally)
- Donors, researchers and the international development sector at large, particularly the field of social accountability.

Research approach and principles

We do not have a preferred methodology for this research, and so applicants are free to propose the most suitable approaches. Approaches must, however, consider Integrity Action's *PICTURE* principles on quality evidence, appropriate practice, and responsible use.

These principles mean that we understand *quality evidence* as that which is:

1. Precise. Claims are not generalised, but are specific about their context and have findings disaggregated according to relevant social and demographic differences.
2. Inclusive. The perspectives of communities and other stakeholders are clearly represented in all evidence, with space given to divergent views.
3. Credible. The data and methodology accurately measures what it is intended to measure, with sample size and composition being in proportion to the conclusions sought.
4. Triangulated. Data is collected consistently from multiple sources, with tools to capture both quantitative and qualitative information.
5. Useable. Evidence is fit for purpose and responds to users' needs and timelines, with no data being collected unless there is a clear purpose or commitment to using it.
6. Results-focused. Evidence clearly demonstrates what (if any) changes have happened, and explores our contribution to these alongside the roles of other actors and factors.
7. Ethically collected, analysed and used. Quality evidence processes are ones that are *appropriate* and *responsible*, and that focus on improving the lives of participants.

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[1] All communication of evidence will respect anonymity and confidentiality requirements of those participating in the research, as per our *responsible use* principles (see Appendix 2)

As per the *E* of *PICTURE*, we view collection, analysis and use of quality evidence as an ethical issue, and the above principles set the framework for how we think about research ethics. 'Appropriate' and 'responsible' practices around evidence are further defined in Appendix 2 of this document.

In addition to the above principles, Integrity Action makes the ethical commitments also set out in Appendix 2, to which successful candidates would also be expected to commit. However, we understand that ethical practice can require more fluidity than just procedural compliance, and emergent issues are to be identified as they arise and will be managed by Integrity Action. Our policies on safeguarding and data protection are available at integrityaction.org/about/governance/, and would be applied.

Should a proposed research approach require formal ethical approval from any third-party government or body, this will be the responsibility of the applicant to obtain.

Available data

The research provider may wish to directly gather data on public spending and potential savings made. However, the programme itself will also collect some relevant data through the citizen monitoring approach. This may include:

- Contracts and specifications for public infrastructure projects
- Service standards for public services
- Budgets (of different types, e.g. budgets for a specific service facility, annual budget for a district's infrastructure investments)
- Audit reports
- Details on types of problems identified through citizen monitoring, for how long these problems persist, and any solutions implemented

Integrity Action and SEND GHANA can also provide data and experiences from other programmes they are running, or have run, which involve a citizen monitoring approach. This may help with identifying the likely types of problem that might be identified with projects/services, and what the solutions might be.

Anticipated risks and challenges

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic poses several challenges to this research, with risks including:

- Inability to travel, either internationally or nationally, or to meet stakeholders face-to-face
- Reduced capacity of monitors, programme stakeholders, and Integrity Action/SEND GHANA to engage (for example, due to illness or need to provide family care)

It is expected that candidates use their proposals to suggest ways of addressing the first of these risks; for example, through remote data collection or by leveraging existing networks of local data

collectors. The second risk will be managed by Integrity Action/SEND GHANA in conversation with the research provider.

Further risks to be considered by candidates (in their proposals and beyond) are:

- Over-burdening programme participants or stakeholders by requiring their intensive involvement in research activities.
- Damaging our existing or future relationships with key stakeholders.

Expected outputs, budget and deliverables

The key outputs are:

- An inception report, which will detail the research approach and plan
- Brief quarterly research updates, for Integrity Action/SEND GHANA only, with information on latest progress, learning and insights (completed according to an agreed template)
- A final research report

The following timeline is an indication of when key outputs are due, though the timeline is negotiable after a research provider is appointed.

Output / Activity	Date expected
Closing date for proposals	25th Jan 2021 (end of day)
Appointment of successful candidate(s)	15th Feb 2021
Inception report drafted and shared for feedback	30 Apr 2021
Revised inception report approved by Integrity Action	10 Apr 2021
Quarterly updates	Every 3 months from 1 Jun 2021
Final research report	31 Mar 2023

The available budget for this research is 80,000 USD. This is inclusive of all costs, including any professional fees, data-collection expenses (such as travel or interpreters where appropriate), translation and printing of any materials, and all relevant taxes.

Payment will be made in instalments, according to the following schedule:

1. 10% on submission and approval of the inception report
2. 10% on satisfactory presentation of each quarterly update (up to 1 Dec 2022; 7 in total)
3. 20% on submission and approval of the final report

Governance

This research has been jointly commissioned by Integrity Action's Head of Operations and Head of Programme Development, and will be managed by the Head of Operations. Regular updates are to be provided during the course of the research, on a schedule to be agreed by both parties.

Oversight will be provided by a steering group, whose role will be to ensure feasibility and suitability in design and implementation of the research methodology, as well as to take ownership of the research findings.

Final outputs will be owned jointly by Integrity Action and SEND GHANA, who will seek to make as much of it publicly available as is responsible and appropriate.

Application details

Applications are welcomed from individuals or teams, whether belonging to an organisation or otherwise. Due to the limitations on international travel, it is expected that the successful applicant(s) will either be based in Ghana or have existing networks in Ghana

The following skills and experiences are essential criteria for applicants:
- Strong understanding of appropriate methodologies, including their benefits and limitations
- Experience in conducting and/or managing similar or comparable studies, preferably within Ghana
- Excellent facilitation and communication skills, with experience of working collaboratively with civil society organisations and non-specialist audiences
- Ability to travel to Northern Ghana as required by the proposed methodology
- Ability to condense a range of inputs into clear and concise summaries or recommendations

Knowledge of the social accountability field within international development would be beneficial, as would relevant language skills. Applicants should have appropriate levels of both professional indemnity insurance and public liability insurance.

Interested parties should submit a proposal to Integrity Action, to include:

- A brief cover letter demonstrating how you or your team meets the essential criteria above, as well as any reflections you may have on the outlined approach and timelines or changes you would propose. This should be no more than two pages
- An outline of your proposed methodology, including explanation of why it is suitable for this research as well as any associated risks and proposed mitigations. This should be no more than three pages
- A draft work plan and associated budget, to include the daily rates of all individuals involved and a description of the roles they each play within the team (if applicable)
- CVs for all individuals, including references (references would be contacted after interview)
- Maximum two examples of previous work that demonstrates skills or experiences relevant to this research. These may be provided as links, or if unpublished then they may be attached and will be reviewed in confidence

Please send your complete proposals to derek.thorne@integrityaction.org by the end of 25th Jan 2021. Proposals will be scored and assessed against their understanding of the terms of reference (20%), appropriateness of the proposed methodology (35%), expertise and experience of the team

(35%), and quality of work planning and financial/HR organisation (10%). Consideration will also be given to a proposal's value for money.

Please note that we will not be able to give feedback on unsuccessful applications.

Appendix 1: Definition of terms used in this document or theory of change

In understanding the research questions, the following guidelines should be applied:

- *Duty-bearers* may be any actors upon whom citizens rely in order to enjoy their rights and entitlements. They include state actors (such as local and national governments), private-sector contractors and service providers, as well as development agencies and others. We may use the term to refer to the whole organisation or to the individuals within them, who have their own personal agency and integrity that may differ from their employer's.

- A *citizen*, by contrast, is the role that all persons are equally entitled to play as rights-holding members of the human family. Integrity Action's use of the term recognises that not everybody holds legal citizenship of the places in which they live, and our usage of the term purposefully includes groups such as migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, victims of trafficking, foreign students and stateless people (amongst others) who may otherwise be viewed as 'non-citizens'.

- *Acting with integrity* is when there is consistency between a duty-bearer's words and actions, both in public and in private, and when these actions reflect the best interests of the citizens who rely upon them. It includes keeping promises that have been made to citizens, and responding positively to citizens' feedback – which may include changing or retracting a promise where citizen feedback suggests this is appropriate.

- *Demanding integrity* is our term for the range of processes through which citizens voice their concerns, participate in decisions, and hold duty-bearers to the promises they have made.

- *Services* encompass anything that is, or should be, provided to a citizen by a duty-bearer in order to meet a need or fulfil an entitlement. They may be delivered directly to a citizen or specific group of citizens (such as healthcare or education service), or may be delivered to a whole community in the form of public or common goods (e.g. roads or water infrastructure). Information on all the projects and services being monitored under VOICE can be found on [DevelopmentCheck](#).

- *Platforms* encompass any mediums or channels for interaction between citizens and duty-bearers. These might be face-to-face or digital.

Appendix 2: Responsible use, appropriate practices, and Integrity Action's ethical commitments

Integrity Action's *PICTURE* principles state that all data must be collected, analysed and used appropriately and responsibly.

Appropriate practices mean that:

Our data is collected and quality-assured
- o With the active and informed participation of affected communities, including those at risk of exclusion
- o By teams with appropriate skills and characteristics to capture the voices of different groups
- o Using justifiable methodologies, relevant to the purpose and context
- o Using reliable tools, neutrally worded, that produce consistent and meaningful results
- o In alignment with existing programme management and organisational needs, capacities and timelines

Our data is analysed and reviewed
- o Collectively, through ongoing dialogue with participants and other stakeholders to sense-check and validate conclusions
- o Sensitively, with understanding of the local power dynamics and their importance
- o Systematically, with clear logical links between data collected and conclusions reached
- o Transparently, so that methods are protected from intended or unintended bias
- o In comparison to other relevant data sources, such as through use of baselines to show whether a change has occurred

Responsible use means that:

Our evidence is presented and used
- o In accordance with what was communicated and agreed with participants
- o In accessible formats for all appropriate audiences, including consideration of language and literacy. One piece of evidence may need to be shared in multiple formats
- o With acknowledgment given to everyone who contributed significantly (unless anonymity was requested), and with references provided for all sources used
- o Without assumptions, especially regarding any unidentified changes or causal links between identified changes and the programme
- o With aggregation of people avoided wherever possible, and with real case studies presenting the real stories of real individuals

Communication of our evidence is open about
- o The tools and methodologies used to collect and analyse data, and any associated limitations
- o The questions and audiences that drove the collection and analysis activity, and how the evidence responds to these needs
- o The results and changes identified by the analysis, whether intended or unintended, negative or positive
- o The sources of quotes or judgements, with any conflicting perspectives clearly presented and explored[2]
- o The independence, or otherwise, of everyone involved in data collection, analysis and presentation; including explanation and justification of any potential bias

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[2] This should not breach anonymity, but a reader should be able to distinguish between (for example) the views of a community member and those of a government official

Integrity Action makes the further following commitments to ethical research practice:

- We will respect the dignity, privacy and agency of all who contribute to, or are affected by, our research. We will work within all international human rights conventions and covenants to which the UK is a signatory, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as all relevant local and national laws.

- We will recognise the burdens and costs for all stakeholders in participating in our research, and will only conduct such activities when the benefits can reasonably be expected to outweigh the risks. This includes aiming for evidence of a sufficiently high quality that it can be used for its intended purpose.

- We will pursue objectivity, while recognising that all stakeholders will bring their own agendas. We will not use tools or methods designed to produce misleading results or misrepresent findings, and our communication of evidence will be clear about the roles of authors and participants. We will encourage and enable all stakeholders to follow appropriate procedures if they feel under pressure to provide inaccurate results.

- We will take reasonable precautions to ensure our design and application of tools, methods and methodologies do not cause harm to participants; such as stress, loss of dignity or self-esteem. This includes consideration of the extent to which methods or questions are intrusive or sensitive, and applies to the wellbeing of the data collectors as well data providers and subjects.

  This requires consideration of local behaviours and norms, and the ways in which risk of harm may vary based on each individual's gender, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, marital status, social position, sexual orientation, level of education, physical and mental health, and more.

- We will maintain confidentiality of information, and store all records in line with our data protection policy. Identifiable data will not be shared or used without consent, but any publication of evidence will include publication of anonymised primary data alongside a description of the methodology to allow validation of findings.

- We will ensure voluntary participation in our research is based on informed consent, with each individual being accurately informed of the purpose and what the method involves – including their right to refuse or withdraw. Where feasible and appropriate, this information should be provided in advance (e.g. before potential participants have travelled to the venue). It also includes providing participants with contact details should they later wish to make a complaint, withdraw their consent, or simply find out more about the activity.

  In the case of children, informed consent should be obtained from both the child and their parent or guardian. In the case of vulnerable adults, a judgement should be made about their capacity to give consent; if it is deemed that such capacity does not exist then the individual's participation should be reconsidered, and only proceed if there is a justifiable purpose and with the informed consent of a guardian or next of kin.

Appendix 3: Our Theory of Change – a diagram

Learning & working in partnership

Gender equality & social inclusion

Provide citizens with knowledge and support to demand integrity

Informed citizens engage constructively with local projects and services

Provide citizens and institutions with inclusive platforms for constructive engagement

FEEDBACK & APPRAISAL

Mutual trust is built between citizens and institutions

Citizens are incentivised to demand integrity

Institutions are incentivised to act with integrity

Provide institutions with access to valuable information that supports their service delivery

Other actors use our evidence to influence policy change or enforce existing rules

Institutions are committed, permitted and have the capacity to respond to citizens' demands

Citizens are motivated, able and have the knowledge they need to demand integrity

GOAL: Societies in which all citizens can – and do – successfully demand integrity from the institutions they rely on

Trusted platforms are sustainably embedded and accessible to all citizens and institutions

Provide other actors with evidence from, and about, our approach

Other actors are inspired to change how they seek or stimulate feedback

Preconditions
1. Constructive collaboration is possible
2. Reasonable safety is assured