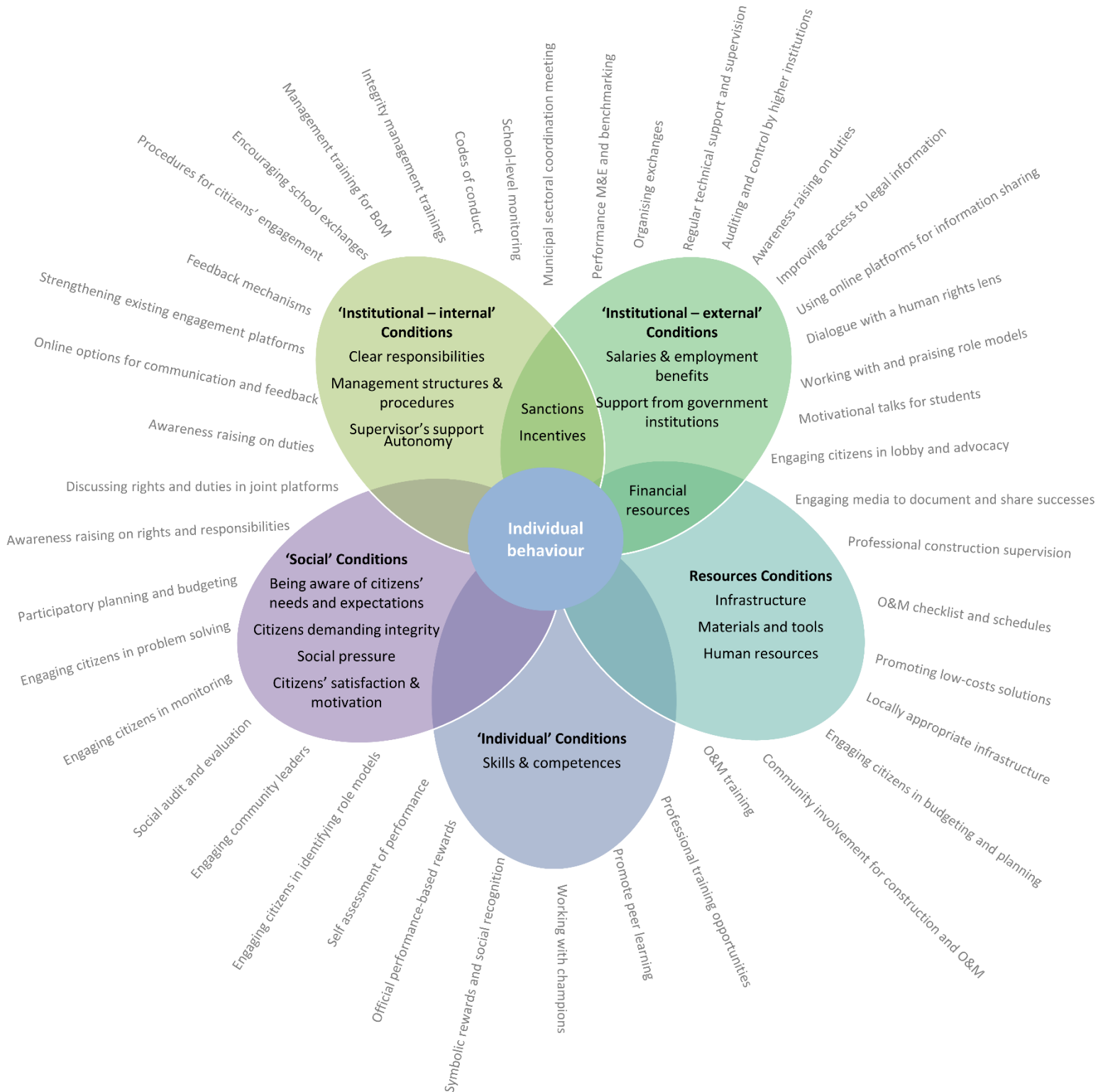


WHAT MAKES FRONTLINE DUTY-BEARERS ACT WITH INTEGRITY?

10 key takeaways

July 2021



Cover image: Graphic representation of the most important conditions influencing duty-bearers' integrity (inside the flower) and the good practices/promising approaches that can help create or strengthen them (around the flower).

OVERVIEW

This research summary provides 10 key takeaways from [Integrity Action's](#) research into the conditions and approaches that influence teachers and health workers to deliver services with integrity.¹ Please refer to the full report for additional details.

Frontline duty-bearers, such as teachers and healthcare workers, provide essential services to citizens. But in too many places, those services fall below the standard to which citizens are entitled. Given the critical role played by these duty-bearers, Integrity Action commissioned this research to explore what enables and inspires them to act with integrity in their work.

How was it done? The research targeted teachers and healthcare workers, as well as their direct managers. It also received inputs from CSO staff that work closely with them, representatives of governmental institutions, and sectoral experts. It combined a literature review with surveys, interviews, and focus-country work in Kenya and Nepal. The research asked two questions:

1. What conditions are most important for enabling or inspiring duty-bearers to act with integrity?
2. What approaches have the most potential to create or strengthen these conditions?

What do we mean by integrity? The research defined integrity in line with Integrity Action's theory of change, by breaking it down into three key pillars:

- **Responsiveness** to citizens;
- **Equity** in service delivery; and
- **Transparency** about plans and performance.

Participation is another key pillar of integrity but is rather a mechanism to enact and strengthen the other three pillars.

THE 10 TAKEAWAYS

1

Plenty of conditions enable and inspire... and they all matter.

The research identified 16 conditions that can enable and inspire teachers and healthcare workers to act with integrity. They cover the resources needed to work, skills and knowledge, support from other institutions, interactions with citizens, sanctions and incentives. They can be classified into five categories as part of an adapted Flower Framework (see Figure 1 overleaf).

The research found that all the conditions are important to some extent, though some are more important than others. They form an interrelated matrix: some conditions influence one pillar of integrity more than others, and some are required to enable others. This suggests interventions seeking to improve the integrity of basic service delivery need to take a holistic approach, rather than focussing on a few conditions.

¹ The [full research report](#) was commissioned by Integrity Action and written by Lucie Leclert and Carmen Fernández Fernández of blueTAP consult. The research was overseen by Daniel Burwood of Integrity Action.

2

Resources and salary are basic requirements.

Some conditions were identified as basic requirements for any duty-bearer to be able to perform their duties, let alone with integrity. They include **salary and employment benefits, adequate physical infrastructure, materials and tools, financial resources** and **human resources**. Availability of financial resources was reported as a major limitation in most countries studied in this research.

These conditions are equally important regardless of the country or sector. What varies with the country context, and especially with socio-economic status and political factors, is the extent to which these conditions are in place.

“We need enough financial resources in schools so that teachers do not have to go into their pockets or ask parents to cater for the school’s needs.”

- A teacher in Kenya

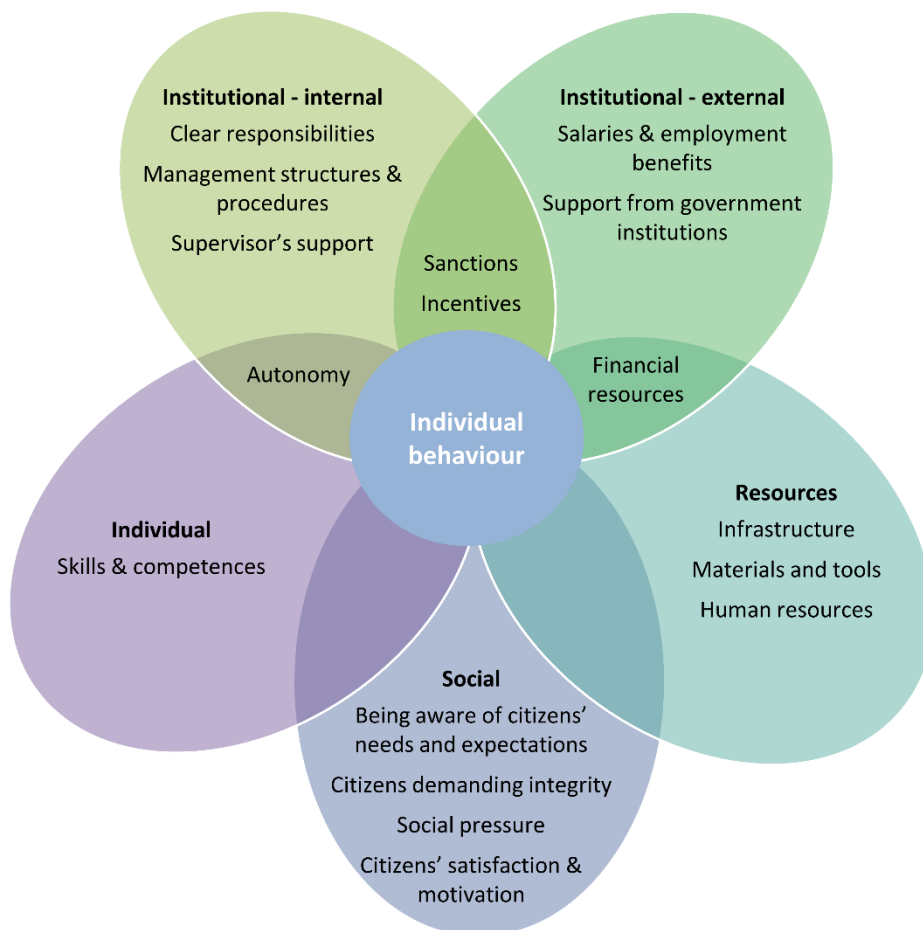


Figure 1. Five categories of conditions that can influence duty-bearers to act with integrity.

Note: ‘Incentives’, in Figure 1 refers to positive incentives (as opposed to sanctions). As incentives can take many different forms and can be both conditions or approaches, chapter 4 of the full report focuses on ‘salary and employment benefits’. Other incentives are described in chapter 5 of the full report.

3

“Improve our working environment”.

When asking duty-bearers “what can help or motivate you to act with integrity?”, the most common answer was “to improve our working environment”. “Working environment” is a broad term encompassing the basic requirements mentioned above and many other conditions.

It could be argued that every condition, in one way or another, contributes to a duty-bearer’s working environment. However it is the perspective that is most important. If duty-bearers are to be engaged in initiatives that promote integrity, such initiatives may be more successful if they address duty-bearers’ most pressing needs (as they see them) and integrate this within the approach.

“Better working environment will allow us to solely focus on our duty as teachers and act with more integrity.”

- A teacher in Afghanistan

4

Knowledge is key – for duty-bearers, as well as citizens.

There has been plenty of emphasis in recent years on ensuring citizens have information that they can use to demand and promote accountability. This research highlights the importance of duty-bearers knowing certain things as well. One key area is the importance of **understanding one’s role and responsibilities** – to duty-bearers themselves (let alone citizens) it is not always clear what falls within and outside their remit. Within the surveys conducted, teachers commonly cited ‘unclear responsibilities’ as an important condition limiting them from being responsive, while experts in transparency and accountability rarely did so.

A second key area is **knowledge of citizens’ needs and expectations**, which was often lacking. From the duty-bearers’ viewpoint, the fact that citizens do not regularly ask for information or take part in engagement platforms is one of the main conditions preventing duty-bearers from sharing information and being responsive. This was particularly important regarding equity, because duty-bearers were not aware of the needs of specific members of the community.

5

A clear role for citizen engagement.

The findings of all activities within this research came to the same conclusion: duty-bearers do place value on the engagement of citizens. Seeing that citizens care about the quality of services they are receiving is motivating for duty-bearers. Citizen engagement also provides important information about the community’s needs and gives duty-bearers the opportunity to increase citizens’ satisfaction and build trust.

Meanwhile the reality of citizen engagement often fell below what duty-bearers were hoping for. Teachers in Nepal said that the interest of parents to take part in engagement platforms was low. In Kenya, most teachers said parents were happy to be engaged, but that this engagement was not always meaningful.

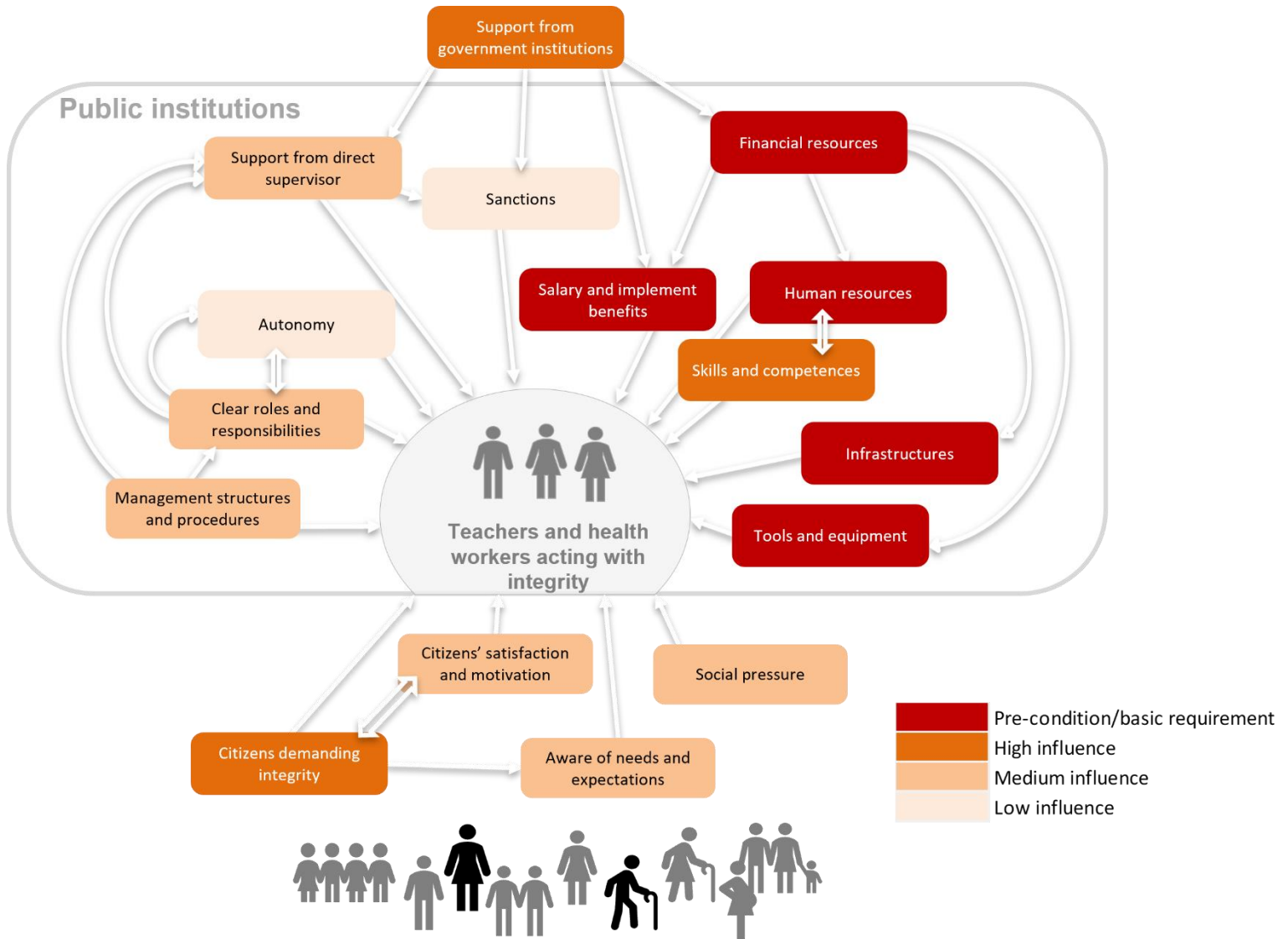


Figure 2. Conditions that influence duty-bearers' integrity and their relative importance.

6 Citizens have responsibilities...

In the field of social accountability, there is a tendency to see the shortcomings of service delivery as the sole responsibility of the duty-bearers. The fact that this research looked at integrity from the duty-bearers' lens (and not from the citizens' lens) helped to expand upon the dichotomy that "rights-holders have rights and duty-bearers have duties".

One new condition identified – which was not initially part of the analysis – was **citizens’ satisfaction and motivation**. From the teachers’ perspective, when students are motivated to learn, this makes teachers more motivated to perform their role with integrity. In the healthcare context we might see this as citizens being motivated to seek care and, to some extent, looking after their own health in the first place.

From the duty-bearers’ perspective, this could be viewed as citizens’ ‘responsibilities’ to engage with, use, and even value essential services. However this is clearly a two-way street, because citizens will be more motivated to make use of basic services if they have a positive experience of them.

7

...and duty-bearers have expectations.

This research also highlighted how issues related to the working environment, such as adequate infrastructure and resources, were important in enabling duty-bearers to act with integrity. These might be viewed as a form of expectations or even ‘rights’ in the workplace that duty-bearers expect from the institutions above them in the governance hierarchy – and too often do not receive. Thus, as well as fulfilling their duties towards citizens, frontline duty-bearers may also have the need to make demands of higher institutions. Citizens might be able to help them with those demands – or perhaps make those demands instead, where duty-bearers are wary of making demands themselves. This all points towards an approach where citizens and duty-bearers see each other as allies in improving the quality of basic services.

One recommendation for integrity and accountability interventions would be to not over-emphasize the ‘demand’ side, but rather to consider the entire system including citizens, duty-bearers, and higher institutions, and emphasise expectations, duties and responsibilities from all sides.

8

Duty-bearers highlighted incentives over sanctions.

While the literature and the global experts strongly highlighted the importance of sanctions in this study, especially referring to the harmful consequences of working in an environment of impunity, duty-bearers hardly selected a ‘lack of sanctions’ as a limiting condition to act with integrity. This is not surprising – we would not expect teachers or healthcare workers to strongly express a need for more sanctions in their work. However, this is another point to consider for interventions seeking to engage duty-bearers productively.

There is also a blurred distinction between sanctions and incentives. Fear of losing a certain benefit could be seen as a sanction. Overall, considering all the inputs gathered, this research concludes that both sanctions and incentives are important in creating a culture of integrity.

“When students have a high motivation to learn, teachers become more inspired to teach properly.”

– A teacher in Afghanistan

9

The role of NGOs is to empower stakeholders and facilitate processes.

NGOs or civil society organisations can play a variety of roles in promoting transparency and accountability, but the message received by the researchers in this study was that they should not interfere with existing accountability processes and responsibilities. Instead, they can empower the stakeholders in the system (for example, by ensuring people who are typically excluded can access spaces for dialogue) and they can facilitate dialogue (by bringing neutrality, legitimacy, and specific expertise). They can also facilitate lobbying and advocacy.

Similarly, interventions should focus on strengthening existing structures and systems before introducing new ones and should be fully embedded in the relevant institutional, legal and regulatory framework.

10

There is a vast range of approaches available to strengthen (all of) these conditions.

The research highlighted many approaches that have been, or could be, used to strengthen the conditions. Given the range of conditions identified in this research, the approaches go well beyond those most frequently found in the transparency and accountability repertoire. They include institutional exchanges, recognition of role models, awareness-raising of rights and duties, performance self-assessments, technical support and supervision, participatory planning, budgeting and monitoring, and many more. The cover image shows how different approaches can strengthen different conditions on the flower framework.

As we would expect, there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach, and in general an approach is effective when it is specifically designed to address the specific problems from a given context. We do suggest, however, that **an assessment like this one – understanding what the main limiting conditions are for duty-bearers, and potentially using the categories identified here – could be one valuable way of analysing the problems to be tackled, before an intervention is designed.**

“There should be joint monitoring, evaluation and reporting. Between the three parties: Government, community and health workers.”

- A health expert from Nigeria

Please see the [full report](#) for further detail on the research findings.