SOLVING PROBLEMS IN PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY:

Pathways to resolution when citizens identify problems in Kenya, Afghanistan and Palestine

Key takeaways

July 2021

Cover image: Community monitor engaging with the community to fix a problem in Palestine.

OVERVIEW

Social accountability interventions aim to boost citizen engagement in public service delivery, increase responsiveness of duty-bearers (service providers and relevant officials), and ultimately improve service quality in line with citizen demands. In many social accountability approaches, citizens identify problems with basic services and then seek solutions to these problems. However, too often, problems raised by citizens remain unsolved. So, what factors contribute to the successful resolution of problems?

This research* studied citizen monitoring programmes being implemented by Integrity Action and its partners in Kenya, Palestine and Afghanistan. The researchers focussed on 16 projects or services that had been monitored – predominantly infrastructure delivered at the community level, such as new classrooms, water supplies, and solar energy systems.

The researchers then looked at 32 problems that had been raised by citizens – half of which had been solved, and half of which hadn't. By interviewing citizens and duty-bearers involved in each case, and using Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), they identified the most important combinations of pathways and configurations that could influence problem resolution.

The two Integrity Action programmes included in the study were: (1) **SHINE**, which works with CSO partners to establish "Integrity Clubs" in secondary schools. These clubs perform monitoring of the school, and related infrastructure developments within or around the school. Problems were studied in Afghanistan and Palestine, and (2) **VOICE**, which works with CSO partners in Kwale county, coastal Kenya, and enables communities to monitor infrastructure and services where they live.

The factors used in the analysis are shown in the table below.

	Financial resources	Financial resources increase the ability to make significant changes to service delivery.
	Human capacity	Adequate human capacity increases likelihood that duty-bearers will respond to citizen voice.
	Governance	In a more centralised governance system, duty-bearers have less opportunity to respond to citizen voice.
	Mutual trust	Trust between citizens and duty-bearers will enable open discussions and the opportunity to engage in service delivery.
	Collaboration	Citizens and duty-bearers have a synergistic or cooperative relationship, moving beyond the state-society dichotomies.
	Social incentives	Social norms and values can function as an important motivation for duty-bearers to deliver effective public services.
	Political incentives	Political benefits as a result of resolving problems can drive duty-bearers to respond to problems.
	Financial incentives	Monetary or material incentives can increase likelihood of duty-bearers resolving problems.
	Informed citizen-led action	Information of specific entitlements, legislation and rights will bolster citizens' requests for problems to be solved.
	Intensity or frequency of action	The way in which citizens engage with duty-bearers (confrontational or collaborative) and the regularity of this engagement.
	Issues with subcontractor[1]	Subcontractors that have caused issues with the delivery of a project can become a barrier to problem resolution.

[1] This factor was not identified through the literature and therefore not originally included but was added as it became clear following interviews that many problems were caused by subcontractors involved in the project. In many cases, both monitors and duty-bearers reported that problems remained unresolved because of an error on the part of the subcontractor.

*The full research report was commissioned by Integrity Action and written by Daniel Silver, Enrica Lorusso, David Crane, Kay Lau and Chermaine Tay of Ecorys. The research was overseen by Daniel Burwood of Integrity Action.

KEY PATHWAYS

Two pathways were found to be the most relevant in leading to successful resolution. These were found to be the simplest causal solutions that led to the desired outcome.

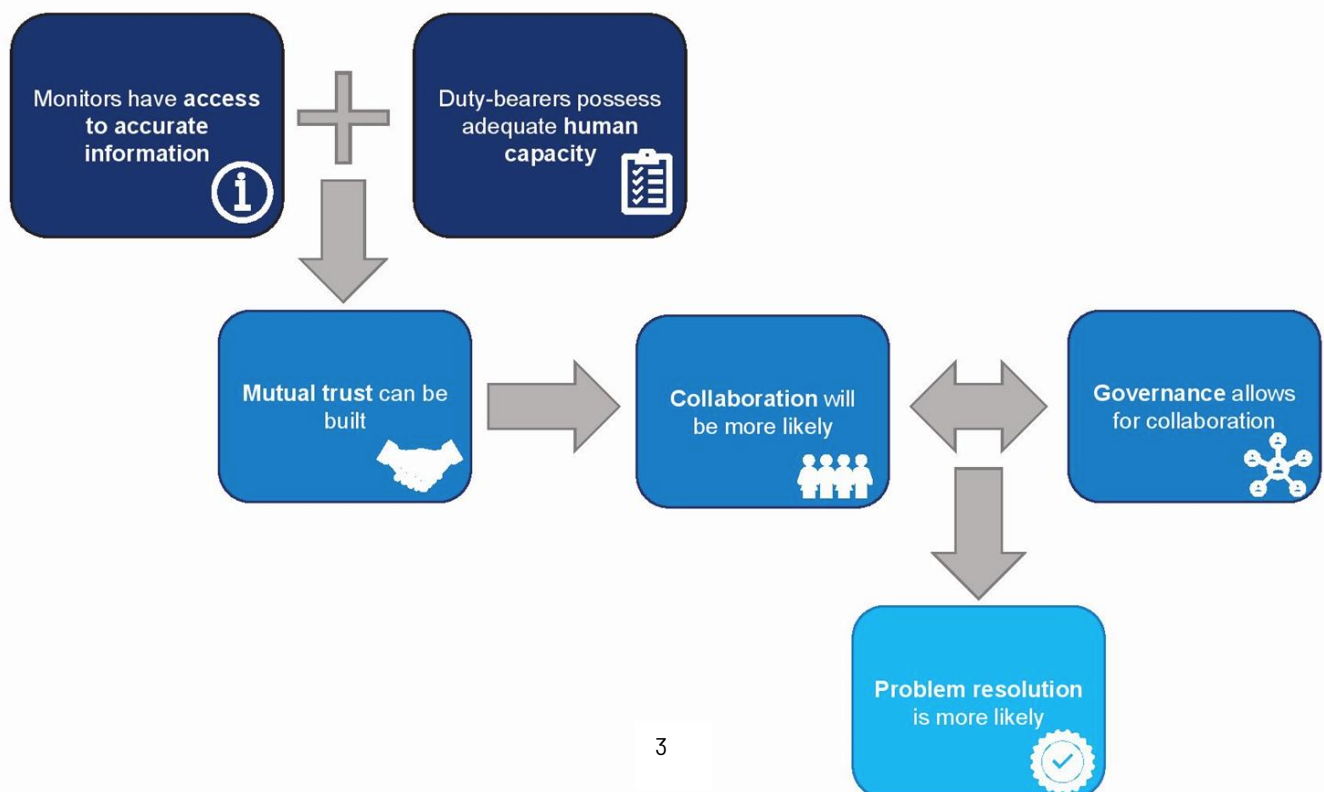## Pathway 1: Informed Citizen-led Action AND Human Capacity

The researchers found that when monitors have **access to adequate information** to identify and report the problem accurately, and when duty-bearers have the **human capacity** and competence to act upon that information, problem resolution is likely.

In all solved cases where the pathway is relevant, **collaboration** and **mutual trust** are also present and work with **informed citizen-led action** and **human capacity** to solve the problem. The case study below provides an example that highlights the relationship between both factors.

The findings of the study support Integrity Action's focus on information. The researchers have found that **information** is critical for monitors to understand problems regarding service delivery. Possessing **accurate information** increases the likelihood of problem resolution, as duty-bearers then gain a strong understanding of the issue and can work with the monitor to identify a solution. Accessing **information** is a critical first step in the trajectory of the problem resolution process and works closely alongside other factors to help increase accountability.

> **Informed Citizen-led Action AND Human Capacity: case study**
>
> Citizens in Kenya who were monitoring the construction of an early child development facility noted the use of faulty roofing materials. They did this by referring to the bill of quantities, which detailed the specifications of the construction work (**informed citizen-led action**). The monitors informed the Village Administrator (the duty-bearer) who visited the construction site with the monitors (**human capacity**). The monitors and Village Administrator reported there were high levels of **trust** which enabled them to work together to resolve the problem. Through this trust, **collaboration** was enabled; the duty-bearer hosted a collaborative meeting with all relevant stakeholders (this was a well-established **participatory mechanism**). Through this the duty-bearer pressured the subcontractor to replace the low-quality materials.
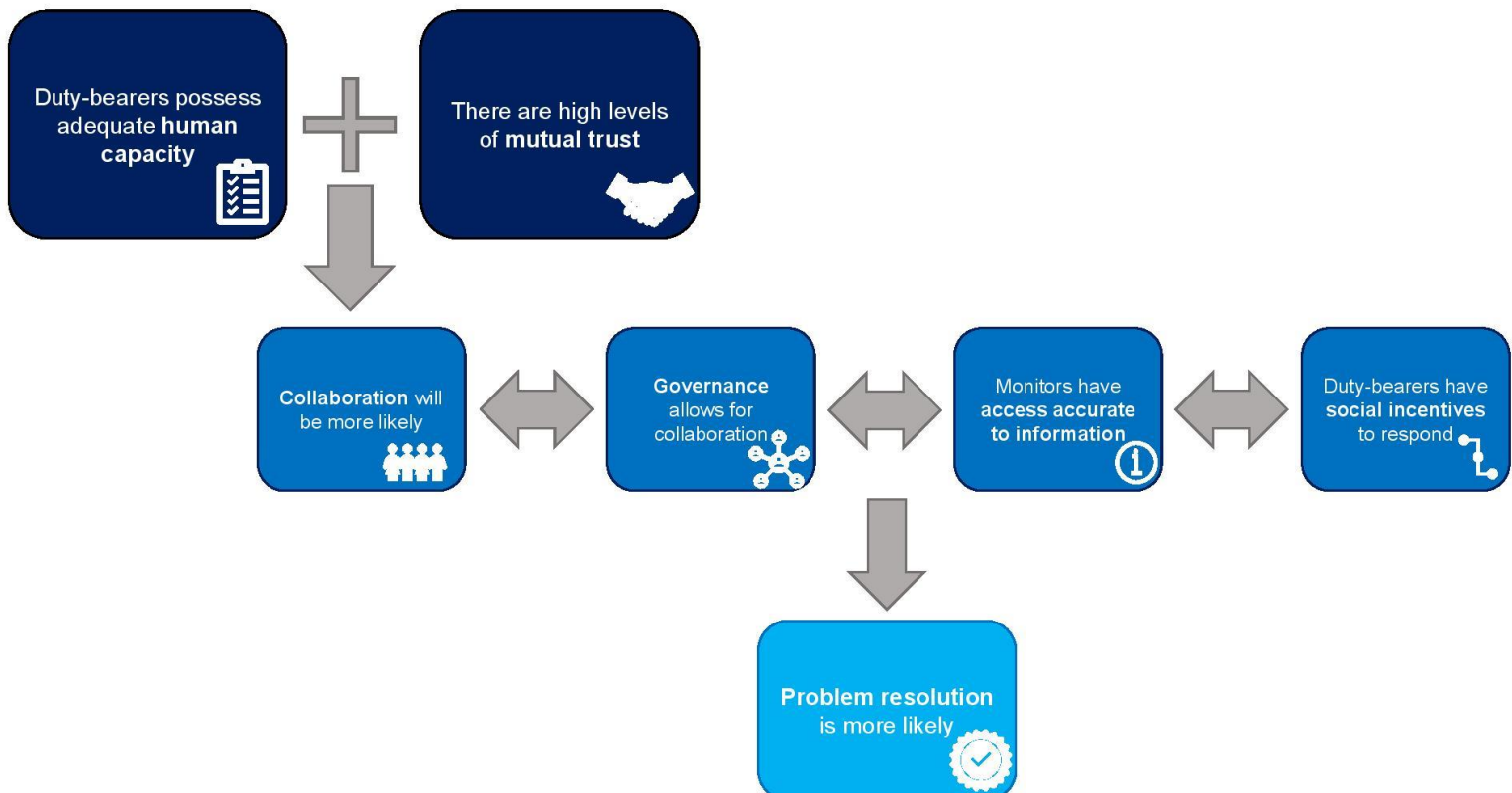
Pathway 2: Mutual Trust AND Human Capacity

The analysis found that Mutual Trust AND Human Capacity was a pathway that led to problem resolution. The cases highlight that when there is strong **mutual trust** present between duty-bearers and monitors, and the duty-bearer has the **human capacity** and expertise to engage with monitors and identify a solution, problem resolution is highly likely to occur.

Mutual trust between monitors and duty-bearers is a critical enabler for problem resolution and can also be a catalyst for other factors to play a central role in the process. The researchers found that Integrity Action's initiatives do help to build **mutual trust** between parties.

Four other factors are consistently identified as interconnected to this pathway. Collaboration, governance, informed citizen-led action and social incentives also work together to enable problem resolution. This Afghanistan Secondary School case highlights how several factors interlink to achieve problem resolution.

Mutual Trust AND Human Capacity: case study

At one Secondary School in Afghanistan, the Integrity Club identified that the school toilets were not usable and the walls around the toilets were collapsing. The students reported the problem to the school management through a regular collaborative meeting. The school principal and the student monitors trusted each other to work together and pressure the Directorate of Education to fix the toilets. The regular interactions and proximity of the principal to the monitors (**governance**) helped to build **mutual trust**. The trust between both parties also enabled further **collaboration**. Additionally, both the principal and the students reported that **social incentives** further catalyse problem resolution as there are social benefits to working to solve problems and there would be negative consequences if the DoE did not work with the students and community to fix problems.

OTHER TAKEAWAYS

Human capacity… but not financial resources?

The importance of human capacity of duty-bearers makes sense alongside the other findings of this research. Mutual trust and collaboration emerged as important factors and collaborating with citizens to resolve a problem does require a certain level of time.

Availability of financial resources, on the other hand, was not found to be a resolving factor, even though it was reported by duty-bearers as important. For example in Kenya fixing problems did not require additional financial resources; furthermore, in some unsolved problems, the duty-bearer had access to adequate financial resources. This may be due to the predominance of infrastructure projects in the cases studied: in many cases the subcontractor had already been paid to deliver the construction, and problem resolution involved encouraging or pressuring them to fix the problem identified.

This may also be related to the size of the problems. Most of the solved problems were relatively small in scale and solutions were more straightforward. By contrast, financial resources were described as more important in the resolution of larger and more complex problems. Unsurprisingly, these problems were more likely to remain unsolved and successful solutions took more time to achieve.

Knowing who is responsible

Having access to relevant information, such as the construction specifications of "bill of quantities" document, was found to be a key factor leading to problem resolution. Integrity Action describes this as *knowing (precisely) what has been promised.* This research highlighted that it is also important for citizens to *know who is responsible* for solving a given problem. In cases where monitors did not know who is directly responsible for solving problems, and where governance systems do not enable clear lines of accountability and responsibility, problem resolution was not likely to occur.

This was particularly a problem in Afghanistan and Palestine, where student monitors highlighted more centralised duty-bearers such as example the Ministry of Education or the Municipality. Lacking this knowledge not only gets in the way of raising problems in the first place, it also prevents mutual trust from developing.

The value of locally based duty-bearers

The pathways leading to problem resolution highlighted that the proximity of the duty-bearer is an important enabler. Where governance systems enable duty-bearers to be integrated with communities – as was seen with Village Administrators in Kwale county, Kenya – mutual trust can be built, which catalyses collaboration. Without this, the environment for problem resolution to occur is constrained.

In contexts where duty-bearers are not localised, collaborative committees formed as part of Integrity Action's approach were found to be a viable and potentially sustainable alternative to help develop a collaborative relationship between citizens and duty-bearers. The researchers suggested this was also a useful strategy where mutual trust is lacking, or where there are barriers to building mutual trust.

"This problem is urgent": how were problems framed?

Monitors noted that duty-bearers would be more responsive to find a solution depending on how the problem was framed. If problems were communicated as urgent and it was clearly demonstrated to the duty-bearer why it was necessary for the problem to be solved in a short timeframe, then problem resolution was more likely. In Afghanistan, for example, students reported that the school toilets needed to be fixed, but highlighted the risk of disease if the problem remained outstanding. The Ministry of Education intervened and an external source provided the financial resources to fix the toilets.

Citizen monitoring was critical

The research showed how, in these cases, the existence of monitors both in schools and communities was fundamental for problem resolution to occur. Monitors can oversee service delivery, investigate problems (with the help of accurate information), and catalyse collaboration between citizens and duty-bearers. In most cases, their role was useful in overcoming confrontation between citizens and representatives of the authorities. In schools, through the identification of student monitors, students reported they feel represented, and that there is a strong connection between the student body and the school staff.

The role of monitors enables many important factors for problem resolution, including **mutual trust**, **collaboration**, **social incentives**, **informed citizen-led action**, **intensity and frequency of action**.

Please see the full report for further detail on the research findings.

Citizen monitoring was critical