

PROMOTING RESPONSIVE POLITICS VIA ACCOUNTABILITY ACTIONS

LESSONS FROM NIGER, GUATEMALA AND KENYA

ACCOUNTABILITY & RESPONSIVE POLITICS

Derived from “accountable” with roots in the old French word “acontable”, meaning being held to account, accountability is about owning up or taking responsibility for one’s actions or omissions. It is considered as one of the important values of a healthy democracy, crucially because of its role in addressing impunity and promoting responsive politics.

This paper builds on NIMD’s conceptual framework that explores and unpacks the notion of responsive politics and articulates how NIMD and its partners integrate it into our programming. Per the framework, accountability and inclusion are central to responsive politics. In other words, politicians (and political actors more broadly) must put citizens at the centre of their work through inclusive and accountable politics, practices and policies.

The paper explores three case studies that show how NIMD (and partners) integrated accountability actions in their programming to encourage and promote more responsive politics in [Niger](#), [Guatemala](#), and [Kenya](#).

WHY THIS PUBLICATION?

These case studies offer lessons and recommendations, some of which are context specific and others transversal, on what to bear in mind when designing similar initiatives in other contexts.

One critical conclusion that applies across the case studies is that accountability is a dicey topic in politics. Everyone talks about it, but few live up to it in practice. And because reputations and career interests can be at stake, political actors who feel targeted will fight back by all means, which can adversely impact programming initiatives on this topic. Therefore, it is important to avoid adversarial or inquisitorial methods such as naming and shaming that antagonize them, resulting in backlash that undermines programming around this topic.

These case studies have been developed to aid democracy practitioners and assistance providers seeking to strengthen and enhance their programming on responsive politics through replication —or development— of similar initiatives. The three case studies examine the degree to which these initiatives failed or succeeded and the contributing factors. Click [here](#) for our lessons and recommendations.

READ THE FULL PUBLICATION [HERE](#).



PRESI-METRE

EXECUTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY IN NIGER

The Niger case study focuses on executive branch accountability. It looks at how NIMD and local partners designed and used the *Presi-metre* as a tool to monitor and evaluate the implementation by Niger's president of his campaign and manifesto promises in a context of democratic transition. Hence, the term *presi-* [for president] and *metre* [for measuring]. It highlights, amongst several key lessons, the importance of timing and opportunity as well as collaboration with government actors to ensure the success of such initiatives.

Inspired by similar initiatives in Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Senegal and other survey tools like Afrobarometer, the overall objective of the *Presi-metre* was to consolidate the democratic framework and strengthen the government's accountability obligations towards citizens. The design and implementation of the *Presi-metre* in Niger was driven by unique contextual dynamics. These include, for instance, the need to address a culture of political exclusion, especially of youth and women, and to improve governance. This was done by creating spaces where citizens can engage directly with leaders to scrutinize and hold them accountable for their policy promises and programmes.

HOW IT WORKS

The *Presi-metre* was rolled out in two phases—a research phase and an accountability platform phase. In the research phase, information is collected through online surveys and face-to-face interviews on citizens' perceptions of government implementation of its policy programmes or campaign promises. A questionnaire developed by a mixed working group of civic and government actors is the main tool used for the surveys and interviews.

In the accountability platform phase, citizen groups, CSOs, and government actors convene to discuss the findings of reports produced during the first phase. The platform has typically assembled about 100 participants from these different sectors.

With the advent of a hostile junta (military government) in July 2023, the project was adapted to focus on monitoring the implementation of the Junta's transition plan.

CLICK [HERE](#) TO READ THE NIGER CASE STUDY.



SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Strengthen young people and women's capacity to influence and lead for better social and political engagement.
- Contribute to improving the social accountability of political leaders and administrative officials so that citizens can claim and enjoy rights.
- Support young people and women to participate meaningfully and make their voices and opinions heard on policy issues.

CITIZENS TRANSPARENCY COMMISSIONS

VERTICAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN GUATEMALA

Through the network of Citizens Transparency Commissions (CTCs), a citizens' initiative targeting government officials at municipal and national levels, Guatemala offers examples of the limited possibilities of success when designing and implementing accountability actions in contexts of restricted civic space. The case study provides key lessons of what to do to achieve target objectives and pitfalls to avoid.

Despite being one of the largest economies in Central America, Guatemala has one of the lowest human development index rankings and the highest inequality in the region. 59% of the population lives below the poverty line and a quarter below extreme poverty, while the state struggles to meet service delivery needs, especially at municipality levels. Corruption and misuse of public funds, which is endemic, is partly a central cause of this reality. Against this background, an organic process started by discontented citizens in 2013 and aimed at organizing themselves to demand accountability from public officials emerged. The initiative later expanded into other cities and municipalities, starting in the capital.

HOW IT WORKS

A citizen commission identifies and selects relevant issues for auditing or oversight. Next, the commission petitions the relevant authority for information on the issue selected for control (relying on access to information rights enshrined in the constitutional and legal framework). Information received is analyzed with the help of expert analysts. Further triangulation through interviews with other sources may be done in some cases. In the fourth phase, a report of findings is then drafted. A dissemination phase might involve public press conferences with the media where the report is released. The report is also shared with Congress/legislature, which has often used it to enhance its oversight role over government (summoning authorities cited in the reports for further question/investigation).

CLICK [HERE](#) TO READ THE GUATEMALA CASE STUDY.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Organize citizen groups in so-called citizens transparency commissions to demand accountability from public officials.
- Address misuse of public funds by local government authorities at municipality levels.

STEP 1 SELECT RELEVANT ISSUE



STEP 2 COMMISSION REQUESTS INFORMATION



commission requests the relevant authorities for information on the issue selected by auditing



STEP 3 ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION BY COMMISSION

STEP 4 COMMISSION DRAFTS REPORT OF FINDINGS



STEP 5 SHARE REPORT IN PRESS RELEASE AND WITH PARLIAMENT



PARLIAMENTARY SCORECARDS

LEGISLATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY IN KENYA

Kenya offers lessons on how civil society draws on civic technology (CivTech) tools, in this case, scorecards, to hold members of parliament accountable. Scorecards are monitoring tools that measure the performance of members of parliament (MPs) to enhance transparency and accountability and contribute to responsiveness.

In 2010, Kenya adopted a new Constitution that put transparency and accountability at the core of its governance system. Simultaneously, the country witnessed advancements in information and communication technology, particularly the internet, presenting enormous potential to promote transparent and accountable governance. However, only after this period did its transformative potential gain recognition when Parliament began leveraging it to inform the public about its work through, for example, live broadcasts and the digitization of records.

Around this time, NIMD partner, Mzalendo Trust—a parliamentary monitoring organization—, armed with tech knowledge and an active citizenship spirit, developed a platform where citizens could find basic information on their MPs. This would eventually lead to the launch of the first scorecard report using information extracted from the digitized Hansard (Parliamentary minutes).

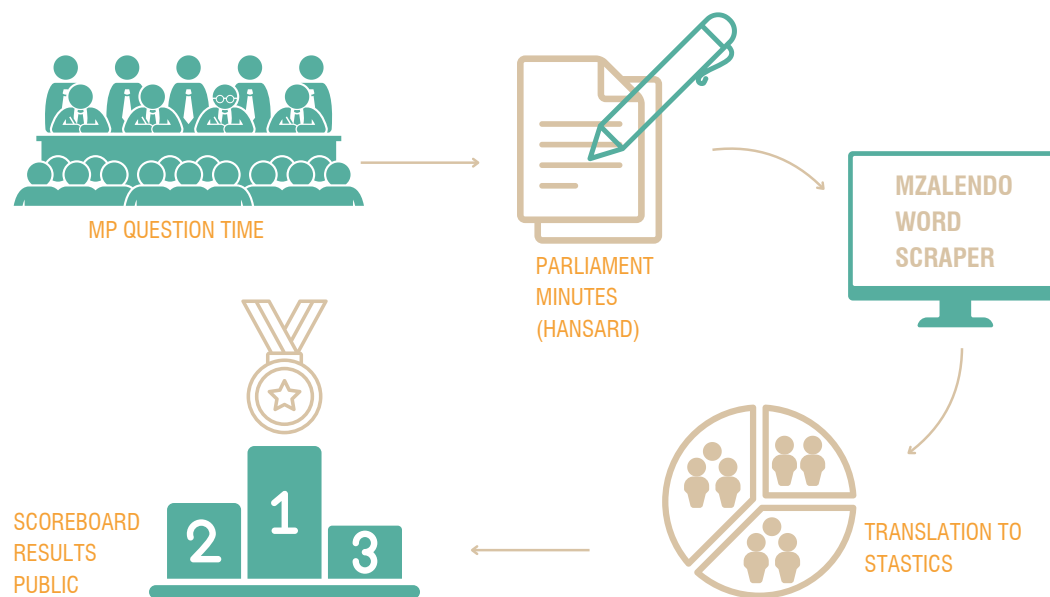
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Strengthen young people and women's capacity to influence and lead for better social and political engagement.
- Enable citizens' access to parliamentary activities by analyzing and summarizing information on parliamentary performance.
- Educate citizens on the role of MPs and the key functions of Parliament.
- Support meaningful citizen participation in lawmaking and public policy development.
- Contribute to the improvement of social accountability of political leaders.

HOW IT WORKS

Scorecards draw from all publicly available information on the activities of MPs. In the first step, data is gathered from multiple sources, including parliamentary questions, motions, statements, amendments, and private members' bills and from the Hansard in the National Assembly and the Senate. An open-source word scraper tool is then used to identify the number of times members contributed to the plenary sessions. Finally, the data is analyzed and translated into statistics that form the core content of the scorecards.

CLICK [HERE](#) TO READ THE KENYA CASE STUDY.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

IDENTIFY AND FORGE ALLIANCES WITH ACCOUNTABILITY CHAMPIONS

While most political actors, particularly those engaged in party politics, acknowledge accountability as crucial for responsive politics, many may disregard it in practice if they feel personally targeted. However, the Guatemala and Kenya case studies show that there are always champions within the system who can support your efforts. Identifying and allying with these champions and sympathetic voices within the system can be crucial for success.

SECURE POLITICAL BUY-IN AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS AND CO-CREATE

The case studies of Niger and Guatemala demonstrate very well how choices about this can result in two different outcomes. Failure to secure political buy-in and co-create with political authorities in Guatemala generated backlash from political authorities jeopardizing the success of the initiative in some municipalities. In contrast, in Niger, early engagement with authorities ensured support and buy-in for the roll-out the project. If the opportunity allows it, secure political buy-in at the highest levels and look for common interests to co-create and sell the initiative as a win-win.

HAVE A COMPREHENSIVE NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK

The success of accountability actions requires extensive access to information. Without a public right to access such information, these initiatives will fall flat especially in a context of state hostility. Having legal frameworks in place provide both the legal grounds and cover for citizen-driven social accountability initiatives.

AVOID NAMING AND SHAMING

The rhetoric of political actors tends to emphasize accountability as the bedrock of responsive politics and democratic governance. Yet, few politicians live up to his standards, nor do they want to be held accountable. The Guatemala case study shows how defensive and retaliatory they can become when they feel targeted. As mentioned earlier, it is crucial to use tact and avoid adversarial or inquisitorial methods such as naming and shaming that antagonizes actors, resulting in a backlash that undermines your project.

ADOPT AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Guatemala's Citizens Transparency Commissions was developed in the context of limited public trust and tension with government authorities, which led to a backlash in some municipalities. In contrast, Kenya's success with scorecards partly stemmed from prior collaboration with Parliament on related issues, which built trust and smoothed the scorecard rollout. Connecting various initiatives as part of a broader programme is often more effective than implementing them in isolation.

READ THE FULL PUBLICATION



(or click here)