

ANNUAL IQA REPORT 2017

Results from the Municipal Partnerships

**A focus on accountability and the role
of local politicians**

JB Marks Local Municipality,
South Africa – Växjö Municipality, Sweden

Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality,
South Africa – Gävle Municipality, Sweden



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VOTING STATION ISITISHI SOKUVOTELA STEMLOKAAL



1. Show ID or voter card
2. Check hands
3. Mark hands
4. Get ballot paper
5. Make cross on ballot paper
6. Put ballot in box

1. Veza isazisi (ID) sakho okanye ikhadi lokuvota
2. Qwalasela izandla
3. Yenza uphawu ezandleni
4. Fumana amaphepha okuvota
5. Yenza u nxi (X) ephepheni lokuvota
6. Faka iphepha lakho lokuvota ebhokisini

1. Wys ID of kieserskaart
2. Ondersoek hande
3. Merk hande
4. Kry stembrief
5. Maak kruisie op stembrief
6. Plaas stembrief in stembus

A VEETU POSTER (VOTER EDUCATION AND ELECTIONS TRAINING UNIT)

VEETU is a project of ERIP and the University of the Western Cape, in partnership with Afesis (East London), CCLS (Durban), HAP-ODS (Johannesburg)

What is this Report About?

The ICLD enables international partnerships between local governments that seek to develop their democratic governance together. These are called “Municipal Partnerships”.

In 2017/2018, the ICLD followed up on two municipal partnerships to see how they were working with issues related to accountability in local government. The report aims to convey key findings from these partnerships that can be of interest to other local governments. The two partnerships chosen for this follow-up were two long term partnerships which have directly worked with local politicians and good governance:

**VÄXJÖ MUNICIPALITY, SWEDEN AND
JB MARKS LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, SOUTH AFRICA**

**GÄVLE MUNICIPALITY, SWEDEN AND
BUFFALO CITY, SOUTH AFRICA**

This is the last of four reports focusing on one of the ICLD’s core areas as part of the ICLD’s internal quality assessment (IQA). Previous reports focusing on participation, equity/inclusion and transparency in local government can be found on the ICLD website.

Key Findings

- Local elected politicians can only be held accountable for the actual power and resources they have been entrusted with. This must be understood by both the politicians and the citizens they have been elected to represent. This is required to build trust between the communities and their elected representatives. If misunderstood it can lead to high levels of misdirected frustration in both directions.
- The degree to which the local politicians were prepared to strengthen accountability mechanisms and incentives to do so, varied considerably between the local politicians. The politicians in power were less inclined to criticize and less willing to strengthen accountability, whereas oppositional politicians more readily supported initiatives to strengthen accountability. Arguments that match the incentives of both groups and especially the more critical group who incidentally holds more power, need to be developed.
- Local politicians are elected citizens who have different levels of experiences and knowledge. The support they receive from their political parties also varies immensely. Politicians' personal level of knowledge plays a stronger role when political party support is weak.
- Politicians' understanding of the concept of accountability is often personal and varies highly from one politician to another. Contextual factors also explain individual politicians' perceptions of their responsibilities related to accountability – in the South African context the issue of counterbalancing injustices caused by the apartheid era was central to some of the politicians.
- There is often an underlying assumption that politicians' motivations diverge from the public's and it is only through constant oversight and, a fear of sanction, that they will align their actions with citizens' interests. This assessment found that there is however a wide variation of how local leaders politicians perceive their positions and what motivates them to act.
- Municipal Partnerships seem to have contributed to an increase in the level of answerability that politicians involved in Steering Groups experience towards the partnership's target groups, for example certain marginalised groups, or towards the area of cooperation, for example waste management. It is key here however to distinguish between answerability and accountability - accountability only being ensured if mechanisms of sanction or reward are in place to hold someone accountable for their actions. Municipal Partnerships seem to mainly have had an impact on the level of politicians' answerability for someone or something.
- Finally, more than one interviewee noted that in the context of South African politics one cannot ignore one of the biggest impacts of the project: the partnership, which requires that politicians from both the majority and the opposition are involved, allowed politicians from all parties to travel, and spend time together. Study visits also generated cross party discussion on the issues. This impact should not be underestimated.

Accountability in Local Government

Accountability can be defined as an obligation to present an account of- and answer for the execution of responsibilities to those who entrusted those responsibilities. Accountability is a cornerstone in good governance and as such, a central theme in development cooperation that focus on institution building and democracy. Holding somebody to account for something is however not exclusive to democratic life – we rely on the possibility to hold businesses accountable for their products, and we do it in various ways in civil society and in personal relations.

A literature review provides many categorizations of accountability; so many and at times conflicting that the World Bank notes that “it can be difficult for scholars and practitioners alike to navigate the myriad of different types of accountability.”¹ In this report, we will discuss findings from the partnerships with regards to democratic accountability using two relevant distinctions of accountability.

The first, horizontal accountability, refers to different units of the same level of authority being accountable to each other, most often used for judicial institutions engaging in mutual scrutiny to prevent abuses of office but can also refer to different political parties in local government. The second, vertical accountability, refers to units on different levels of authority such as citizens demanding accountability from their local government.

In addition, a distinction should also be made between two main approaches to pursue strengthening accountability. Public accountability refers to constitutional checks and balances such as public elections as well as the concept of individual ministerial responsibility². Social accountability on the other hand refers to civic engagement that builds accountability through the collective efforts of citizens and civil society organizations to hold public officials, service providers and governments to account for their obligations with responsive efforts³.



¹ <https://siteresources.worldbank.org/PUBLICSECTORANDGOVERNANCE/Resources/AccountabilityGovernance.pdf>

² <https://siteresources.worldbank.org/PUBLICSECTORANDGOVERNANCE/Resources/AccountabilityGovernance.pdf>

³ http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/partners/civil_society/publications/2013_UNDP_Reflections-on-Social-Accountability_EN.pdf

The South African and Swedish Local Government Context

The contexts in which local governments in Sweden and in South Africa operate are of course in some ways similar and in some ways different. It is through learning from each other's different experiences and knowledge regarding challenges that are similar that municipal partnerships find opportunities to develop.

Apartheid was a system of institutionalised race segregation in South Africa from 1948 to the early 1990s. The local governments in South Africa were democratized after the election in 1994. The democratic system in South Africa is therefore just a few decades old, while Sweden has a long history of democracy and decentralized power, with 150 years of local self-governance and public suffrage

however it took until 1918 until women had acquired equal suffrage to men on the local level. Since the abolition of the apartheid regime, the African National Congress (ANC) has been the dominating party in South Africa, both in national and local governments. In the local elections in 2016, ANC lost a large part of their votes on the local level where the largest opposition party, Democratic Alliance (DA) took power in several municipalities, sometimes with support from a relatively new party called the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). In Sweden, the Social Democratic Party (S) – a labour party at its core – has been the largest political party in every national election the last century, if not always in power.



Since the 1990s the political majority has shifted more between right-wing and left-wing coalitions. Over the last two elections, the right-wing Sweden Democrats (SD) have become the third largest party on the national level and are advancing on the local level, although by and large excluded from cooperation and dialogue by the established parties. Many municipalities have been dominated by certain parties or coalitions for a long time. However, it has become more common for municipalities to have a change in ruling parties from one election to another. Ruling minority coalitions, with a fragmented opposition are also quite common.

In both countries, elections play a significant role vis-a-vis accountability that is who should be in power and form government or not. However, during the time between elections, the individual politicians play a different role in South Africa compared to Sweden. In South African municipalities, it is common that the citizens turn directly to their local (ward) politician with suggestions and complaints, which is less common in Sweden. This political set-up appears to have an impact on the ways citizens can demand accountability from their locally elected leaders between elections.

In Swedish municipalities, alliances and coalitions are common, which is not the case in South Africa. JB. Marks has started to look at advantages and disadvantages of the Swedish model with coalitions. While Buffalo City, the continued dominance of the ANC suggests that there has not been a need for this.

There are different conditions for both partnerships that could affect the possibility to demand accountability. In the partnership Region Kronoberg - JB. Marks, the Swedish partner is a region with a relatively stable political situation. Whereas in the partnership Gävle - Buffalo City, the Swedish partner had had a turbulent period with changes in the

municipal political leadership. After an intervention from the Sweden Democrats, the governing coalition consisting of the Social Democrats, the Left Party and the Environmental Party (MP) had to hand over the power to the opposition coalition consisting of the Conservative Party (M), the Centre Party (C), the Liberals (L) and the Christian Democrats (KD). Four parties are represented in JB. Marks municipal council with ANC being the largest and in power, with an active opposition including DA, EFF and Freedom Front Plus (FF+). In Buffalo City, ANC holds an unthreatened majority whereas DA is a minor oppositional party. At the time of the project's implementation in Region Kronoberg, the Social Democratic Party (S) was the single biggest party at the regional level and formed the political majority together with the Left Party (V) and the Environmental Party (MP). The Conservative Party (M) was the biggest party in opposition.

JB. Marks is a new municipality, created through an amalgamation of the larger municipality, Tlokwe and the smaller neighbor Ventersdorp. The merger has had its setbacks. The fact that the two municipalities have entirely different economic conditions raised criticism, where Tlokwe representatives consider that they need to take over large debts from Ventersdorp. The politicians that were interviewed in Tlokwe are concerned that they must be accountable for a situation they didn't have control over. In Sweden, municipal coalitions are discussed and a transition from county councils to regions will be implemented in all of Sweden as of 2019. This makes the question of accountability in organizations in transition vital both in Region Kronoberg and in Gävle.

As noted, the conditions and opportunities in the two countries differ. It is through these differences that knowledge transfer, mutual learning and new knowledge can be created.

Accountability According to Two Partnerships

The ICLD conducted interviews with both politicians and officials in each of the four local governments that constitute the two partnerships in late 2017 and early 2018. For each partnership, a project that showed potential progress relating to *possibilities to demand accountability* was chosen as a basis for the interviews.

Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality – Gävle Municipality

The interviews in Buffalo City and Gävle were conducted in January-February 2018. At this point, just over three years had passed since the project's completion.

Partnership Overview

The Municipality of Gävle and Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality have had a long running partnership since 2002, supported by the ICLD since 2009, during which more than 25 projects have been implemented.

Gävle and Buffalo City have over the years cooperated on several Good Governance projects with different themes. The objective of the project which this report focuses on, “Good Governance and Decision Making” was to increase the knowledge and capacity of elected representatives and civil servants in Multi-level governance, Steering and Management and Public Private Partnership work.

As the project coordinator in Buffalo City however puts it

When it comes to achieving results, it is not just the project that plays a role, but the partnership as a whole which is much more important.

Given the length of the partnership, and the wide scope of the good governance topics it has addressed

over the years, it is important to note that the partners have achieved a vast range of results which have contributed to strengthening democracy in their municipalities. This report however will focus on results within *Accountability*.

Findings within “Possibility to demand Accountability”

Due to their long-term commitment and their audacity to take on good governance issues, it appears the partners, by emphasizing the role of the Steering Group politicians, have, to certain extent, achieved results within *possibility to demand accountability* through their partnership and its projects, even though *Accountability* was not amongst the project's objectives.

Unlike many other partnerships, Gävle and Buffalo City chose to have one of their projects to be entirely made up of, and focus on, politicians as the partners thought it was key for the politicians involved in the partnership to have a clear role with clear objectives. Politicians were viewed as essential by the partners to achieve results within good governance. Although as mentioned by one interviewee from Buffalo City,

The good governance projects worked best with the other projects, with the operational work, which fed into the good governance and the politicians.

The project is, of course, only a very small part of the municipalities' work on these issues. The partnership has mainly allowed the partners to broaden their understanding of *possibility to demand accountability* and to see this concept, and the mechanism attached to it at a local governmental level, from different perspectives. This in turn has influenced, and increased knowledge of, the individuals, particularly the politicians involved in the project.



Foto: IDP

“ *We took a risk taking on these topics, says the project leader in Gävle, and by doing so we have increased knowledge amongst politicians.* ”

Strengthening downward accountability in Buffalo City

No results within *possibility to demand accountability* are clear cut or easy to detect. They may not be tangible, but they are significant. What the Municipality of Gävle and Buffalo City achieved, by involving the politicians so closely within the partnership, is impressive. All interviewees stressed however that these results were the result of a strong and long-lasting partnership – It takes time to get to know each other, and to dare to be critical of each other says the project coordinator in Buffalo City.

One way in which the partners addressed good governance within their project was particularly notable in terms of its contribution to increasing citizens' *possibility to demand accountability*.

In year 2, the project addressed challenges related to multi-level governance and the role of the ward politicians in clarifying multi-level (particularly between regional and provincial in South Africa) governance and decision-making processes to their ward inhabitants.

- The ordinary ward inhabitant does not know who (what level of government) is responsible for what says the project leader in Buffalo City.
- They would go to the ward council for an issue that was under provincial responsibility, this was particularly apparent in relation to the municipality's Integrated Development Planning.

Local municipalities in South Africa have to use Integrated Development Planning (IDP) as a method to plan future development in their areas. IDP is an approach to planning that involves the entire municipality and its citizens in finding the best solutions to achieve good long-term development. It aims to co-ordinate the work of local and other spheres of government in a coherent plan to improve the quality of life for all the people living in an area. The IDP has a lifespan of 5 years that is linked directly to the term of office for local councillors.

The project leader in Buffalo City describes challenges that arose when ward councillors would try to involve their citizens in the plan.

When the IDP went to all the communities they raised issues for example of education, or health, which are not issues addressed within the IDP or fully under Buffalo City's responsibility. Ward politicians were ill equipped to meet the community on these issues and did not know how to advice citizens or how to bring up their issues raised to the provincial or even national level.

During their visits to Gävle, Buffalo City ward politicians could see the different levels of government in Sweden and how they interact.

- They began to understand through tutorials the value of having a working active forum for discussions with the provincial level. That became a catalyst for us, says the project leader in Buffalo City, we always had a framework, but not a forum for discussions with higher levels of government.

The project leader went on to describe how Buffalo City now has functional Intergovernmental relations framework forum.

An opposition councillor in Buffalo City describes how the project contributed to improve knowledge with how to deal with provincial and national government amongst the politicians. It has improved communication by helping to connect the local politicians with the right people at the different national and provincial levels.

“ Local governance can then act like a middle person he describes and can support the citizen to understand at what stage their claim is at and at what level.

Increasing local politicians level of perceived answerability

Almost all interviewees highlighted that through the “Good Governance and Decision Making” project, the politicians involved increased their awareness of certain vulnerable groups, particularly women, youth, immigrants/refugees, thanks to the various onsite visits conducted during study visits. As a result, other projects emerged within the partnership to better meet the needs of these different groups.

“ The visits increased the will of the politicians to take on the youth issue, explains one interviewee from Buffalo City. They and we realised we had not been including them.

- Politicians need to see what is happening says an opposition politician in Gävle.

- It is not so often we are invited to see things. Once we know of the issue, we can then take responsibility.

- It is about admitting when you have a lack of knowledge said another interviewee from Gävle, it is hard to admit when you are lacking knowledge. It was hard to admit that our municipality had no knowledge, no plan, no strategy for the inclusion of youth for example.

This increased awareness resulted in the partners submitting a new project on youth inclusion with the ICLD.

The “Youth Engagement” project, has tackled the issue of the challenge of including youth in the local democratic processes. Within the project application the partners described the main challenge within their organizations as being that the strategic and political decisions in the municipalities concerning youth are not always knowledge-based. According to both Gävle and Buffalo city representatives, the municipalities’ knowledge on the situation of youth, their opinions and how they lead their lives, was inadequate.

The partners also submitted a second project. The “Non-Discrimination in Local Governance” project aimed to reduce intolerance amongst local communities especially related to vulnerable groups and strengthen integration of these communities for a more united society and non-discriminating community. Unfortunately, the project was cancelled before it started.

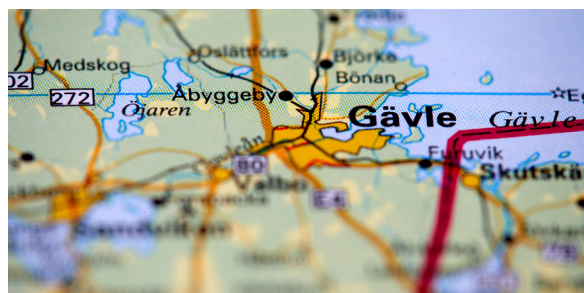
– Migration has been a highly discussed topic in Gävle, we have not had the same problem here, but we have problems with xenophobia in the country explains a former councillor in Buffalo City who was part of the good governance project during which study visits and workshops were organized on the topic of immigration, we therefore decided to take it up within the partnership.

The “Non-Discrimination in Local Governance” project’s objective was to strengthen municipal knowledge, understanding and capacities on issues of discrimination in order to improve policies and platforms for integration in the municipality. The aim was also to create improved platforms for communication and dialogue on discrimination in the municipality.

– It is about human rights, says a majority politician in Gävle. Our challenges are the same, we may have

different starting points, but we are trying to achieve the same things. Democracy needs to be continuously fought for.

The partnership, and related study visits in both local governments, not only helped raise certain issues and topics such as youth inclusion and xenophobia, and attract political attention that it may not have had previously, it also helps “keep certain issues on the political agenda” explains the project coordinator in Gävle, “that may otherwise more quickly lose priority”. The international visits raised awareness for certain issues, and kept politicians involved. The politicians “were more willing to take responsibility”, adds one interviewee.



It is with regret however that all the participants involved in the interviews describe how in 2018 the partnership will come to an end. This is mainly due to a shift in the political majority within the Municipality in Gävle, no longer guaranteeing the long-term support for the partnership.

A politician in Gävle sums up however one the greatest side contributions of the 18-yearlong partnership “When you want a new answer, you should always talk to someone different than yourself – the partnership gave us this opportunity. And we got new answers”.

The ICLD strongly hopes that both Gävle and Buffalo City will rejoin the Municipal Partnership Programme in near the future, together or with new partners.

Reflections

The Municipality of Gävle and Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality did not set out to strengthen their citizens' *possibility to demand accountability* from their municipalities through their projects. Their “Good Governance and Decision Making” project focused on the exchange of knowledge and know-how in relation to multi-level governance, Steering and Management and Public Private Partnership work.

However, by strengthening politicians' knowledge and know-how on the topic of multi-level governance, one clear and significant result within *possibility to demand accountability* seems to have emerged in Buffalo City. Through establishing new fora for communication between the local and provincial levels, and through better information to citizens about

which of these levels are responsible for what, the partnership increased the potential for citizens to demand accountability. The use of improving vertical accountability in this way became clear in the example when citizens wanted to discuss and complaint on services (education) but reached out to the municipality even if it was the province who was in charge.

An indirect result within *possibility to demand accountability* of the project, but no less significant, was the exposure of the politicians to vulnerable groups through the study visits both in Sweden and South Africa. This in turn led the politicians involved to feel a greater responsibility for these groups, and in their own words, *to feel a greater need to be accountable towards them*.



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JB Marks Municipality – Växjö Municipality

The municipal partnership has been running since 2006, although under different and configurations since both partners have undergone organizational changes along the way. Together, the parties have addressed a wide range of challenges covering most of the municipal responsibilities, rendering many tangible and soft results through more than 35 projects.

Project overview

The ICLD focused on how the partners have worked on issues relating to accountability in a three-year project called *Politician Project: Leadership, coalitions & voters*. The project objective was to establish a new platform for cooperation between local and regional politicians connected to three focus areas; Political leadership, Political work through coalitions, and Political methods to promote citizens to vote. An important characteristic of the project was that the implementers were themselves local politicians, thereby overlapping with the direct target group as well as the decision-makers in the partnership. This set-up is unique in the programme and seems to have facilitated anchoring and implementation of the partnership's project.

Findings within “Possibility to demand Accountability”

When asked how they regarded the possibilities to demand accountability in JB Marks Municipality, the answers differed quite clearly along party lines. The politicians not in power were highly critical of the way that the mechanisms for demanding accountability work, on the local- as well as the national level. The politicians representing the majority party ANC, were on the other hand less critical of the possibilities to demand accountability, also framing the term more towards a personal responsibility, taking ownership and being responsible for one's actions including voting. Moreover, and in a longer perspective, the ANC-affiliated politicians

we met made it clear that accountability for them also means taking responsibility for compensating for centuries of racial discrimination and oppression, which includes affirmative actions in favour of the black population.

Accountability to me starts with responsibility - initiate and take ownership and to be responsible. Not seeing it as single things but taking responsibility for everything. I have a responsibility as a voter to my family, ward and country. To take ownership of voting.

I believe that the politician who gets things done can be held accountable, the one who does nothing cannot be held accountable because there is nothing to see.

These remarks are in stark contrast to one of the politicians in opposition:

Of course, we need to hold local decision-makers responsible. But, we turn things around so that the citizens are held accountable towards us. Due to corruption, we silent people who try to raise their voices. Nothing is done about the municipalities' problems – decisions are made but not implemented.

It is expected and follows from the interviews that politicians who are not in power are more likely to pursue strengthened institutional accountability, and it is understood that they could promote accountability initiatives to win the public's support for upcoming elections. The key would then be to find incentives for the ruling party to do the same. Or indeed to promote initiatives that entail small steps towards increased accountability and which are desirable for the ruling parties. An example could be increased public participation where citizens on the one hand can provide valuable input to the local governments so that they can adjust their services closer to the citizens' needs and thereby increase their likelihood of being re-elected. On the other hand, establishing platforms for the citizens to demand answers and an obligation for the local government representatives to account for their decisions and deliverables.

One interviewee reported of a practice devised to tamper with the possibility to demand accountability: In any neighbourhood you will have more and less influential people. By hiring the most influential people, the local government could tie that person to the local government, making the act of demanding accountability from the local government an act directed against this influential person. The risks involved could thereby deter citizens from demanding accountability from the local authority. Existence of hidden mechanisms adds to the complexity of accountability.

Some of the interviewed politicians were ward councillors which means that they have a special responsibility for a certain ward. These politicians had regular contact with the citizens of their wards and felt a strong need to answer to them. The politicians could also forward complaints to their respective caucuses (party meetings) as well as trying to hold other politicians accountable for how they

are carrying out their responsibilities. This is an interesting example of how social accountability initiatives can result in political accountability initiatives, as well as how vertical accountability can produce a horizontal accountability effect. It also differs from the accounts given in Växjö municipality where local politicians described fewer interactions with their constituency.

The politicians in Växjö considered that they would have the most to learn within the focus area Political methods to promote citizens to vote. However, they noted that the project lost momentum due to several changes of participants in JB Marks and could not point out institutionally sustainable results for Växjö.

They did concur that the politicians from JB Marks were most impressed by their readiness to discuss and cooperate across political party lines. This seems to have made a profound impact on the South African participants.



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A Community Development Worker and inhabitants in Ikageng township discusses employment, education and other forms of support from JB Marks municipality. From the partnership's project "New Coordination Structure to Support Vulnerable Families".

Photo: Daniel Folkesson, ID

Reflections

The observation from JB Marks municipality that the majority party does not point out flaws in the possibilities to demand accountability in the way that the parties in opposition do might not be surprising. Nevertheless, it leads us to a dilemma for the MPP and the way that the ICLD can work with the core area *accountability*. In a local government setting, it is primarily the councillors of the ruling party or coalition of parties who come into question since they are responsible for the deliverables of that local council. In this way, it is no surprise that politicians from oppositional parties were so critical and could more easily argue for increased accountability. It also presents the dilemma that municipal partnerships require support from the very political parties that are most likely to be increasingly scrutinized as possibilities to demand accountability are strengthened. It could then be concluded that a partnership project aiming at strengthened accountability needs to include other benefits for the political majority, or if not, settling for lighter forms of accountability for example strengthening "answerability" but not "sanctions". It also suggests that it is valuable for the ICLD to understand what these other benefits for the

political majority could be in order to inspire partnerships to gain support for accountability-strengthening efforts.

One can finally reflect on the unanimous praise of coalitions. All interviewed politicians in JB Marks municipality considered *Political work through coalitions* to be the most successful of the three focus areas. The reason being an ongoing change in the political landscape where the ANC dominance is declining. Therefore the smaller opposition parties saw their chance to challenge ANC through coalitions whereas ANC saw coalitions as a necessary competence to remain in power in a changing political landscape. The politicians linked *Political work through coalitions* to accountability by an increased level of taking responsibility of local government affairs when collaborating in coalitions, instead of fighting each other in opposition. This illustrates how complex the workings of accountability can be. Citizens exercising their vertical accountability through elections change the political landscape, resulting in new mechanisms among political parties for horizontal accountability that in turn reinforces their vertical accountability back to the citizens.

**A Big Thank You to Everyone who
Participated in the Interviews!**



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