RESPONSIVE AND MULTI-PRONGED STRATEGIES

This is the third note in a six-part series discussing whether the social accountability field is already primed with the knowledge and capabilities to design, implement, fund, and learn from strategic interventions. Because generating social accountability involves many actors and must overcome many evolving barriers, strategies must be responsive and multi-pronged. This note briefly analyzes whether and how GPSA applicants proposed such strategies by analyzing data from the first two rounds of GPSA applications.

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I. GPSA AND RESPONSIVE MULTI-PRONGED STRATEGIES

This note prompts us to consider whether our **broad**, overall plans of action designed to achieve particular social accountability goals (our strategies) are sufficiently savvy to face the complex problems we set out to tackle? To do so, we took advantage of the 600+ applications submitted by CSOs from across the world to the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (you can learn more about the GPSA here).

These applications facilitate us to kick-off a reflection about the state of the social accountability field and its future. The GPSA's application form purposely sought information from CSOs about how they are thinking about four dimensions of strategic social accountability.

Our approach to drawing lessons from GPSA Applicants:

- *Selection of a sample of 40 of 644 GPSA applications*
- *Scored each for their strategic political approach*
- *Extra attention to the best and worst applications*
- *4 Components of social accountability strategies coded as present, partial or absent*

Keep in mind that our analysis did not fully reassess the country context to determine whether an application responded precisely to local circumstances. Rather, we assessed to what extent the applicant discussed, analyzed and showed evidence of responsiveness to their own assessment of the local context.

Want to learn more about the GPSA's selection process and our methodology? Check out GPSA-Note 1.

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A. Strategies that harness the context

B. Strategies that are responsive and multi-pronged

C. Strategies that pick partners and allies that bolster social accountability efforts

D. Strategies that employ adaptive learning

This note focuses on the second of these components: responsive and multi-pronged strategies. Other notes in the "Are we Ready for Strategic Social Accountability?" series zero in on the other three components. Individually and collectively, these informal notes seek to provoke thinking about how funders and CSOs are going about social accountability work and how we could get better at it.

II. **HOW DO WE RECOGNIZE A STRATEGY THAT IS RESPONSIVE AND MULTI-PRONGED?**

We start with the presumption that **strategic social accountability is a promising, yet underutilized approach to deliver on the promises of civil society organizations' efforts promoting beneficiary engagement with policymakers and service providers to solve critical governance and development problems.** (see here and here).

Too many times, social accountability work seems to have failed to deliver results, in large part because **we have relied on *technical* tools at the expense of *political* tactics** that take into account the nature of accountability processes (as opposed to leveraging technical know-how in politically informed strategies).

This critique, of course, has been made in regards to the overall development agenda. In fact, for many years, a range of colleagues have been advocating for politically smarter approaches to development. (see here, here, here, here)

The first step towards politically savvier strategies has been to put together maps of stakeholders and institutional arrangements, but this is insufficient to trigger politically smart action. (see here)

Much of these efforts have aimed to change how funders go about their work. The GPSA thinks social accountability projects should involve a range of partners (funders, civil society organizations, government officials, etc.) who should also apply political thinking. **Strategic social accountability necessitates political economy analysis and for the GPSA this is more than Grantees checking a box.**

The idea is to link the political analysis carried out for a project to its choice of tactics and its goals. The reasoning is that effective problem-solving requires a set of formal (institutionalized) and informal (non-institutionalized) social accountability mechanisms that must be responsive to a specific political context.

But, what does this all mean in practical, less abstract terms? How do you identify a responsive multi-pronged strategy (or what does proposing a strategic social accountability project entail)? We spent some time delving into these questions. We checked grey and academic literature, we thought about our conversations with colleagues, as well as our own experiences in the social accountability field.

We also took into consideration GPSA documents, including the application templates and a small number of applications (Round 1 and Round 2). All this material informed us as **we came up with a series of more concrete questions to guide our analysis of responsive multi-pronged social accountability strategies in GPSA's submissions**. Table 1 lists the questions we have identified as relevant and important to be considered by CSOs that seek GPSA funding.

Table 1: Key Questions to identify responsive multi-pronged strategies

1	Do the project's proposed tactics align with the project objectives?
2	Is the Social Accountability approach developed inductively (based on actual policies and opportunities) rather than deductively (based on formulaic, generic approaches)?
3	Do the project's proposed actions target all the steps required to deliver results (is the strategy multi-pronged?)?
4	Does the project clearly specify all the steps in the causal chain between project interventions and outcomes?
5	Does the project leverage legal and institutional entry-points to focus and scale-up impact in areas where state capability can be harnessed and built (e.g. legal authorities and regulation, horizontal accountability agencies)?
6	Does the applicant identify key political/policy windows of opportunity (e.g. dates/stages in the policy or electoral cycles)?
7	Does the project justify why proposed instruments are the best tools to implement the project in comparison to other alternatives available?
8	Does the applicant identify and integrate specific types of tactics at the national and sub-national levels considering where decisions are actually made (especially when it expects to be working in partly decentralized service delivery systems)?
9	Does the plan of action spell out a sequence of actions (steps) that can be reasonably implemented within the time frame proposed?
10	Does the project explain the different types of information that will be generated through the deployment of the social accountability tool(s) and mechanism(s) and the specific channels that will be used to input the information into public management and decision-making processes?

If you want to quickly try out the kind of analysis we did for each question try our test in Box 1.
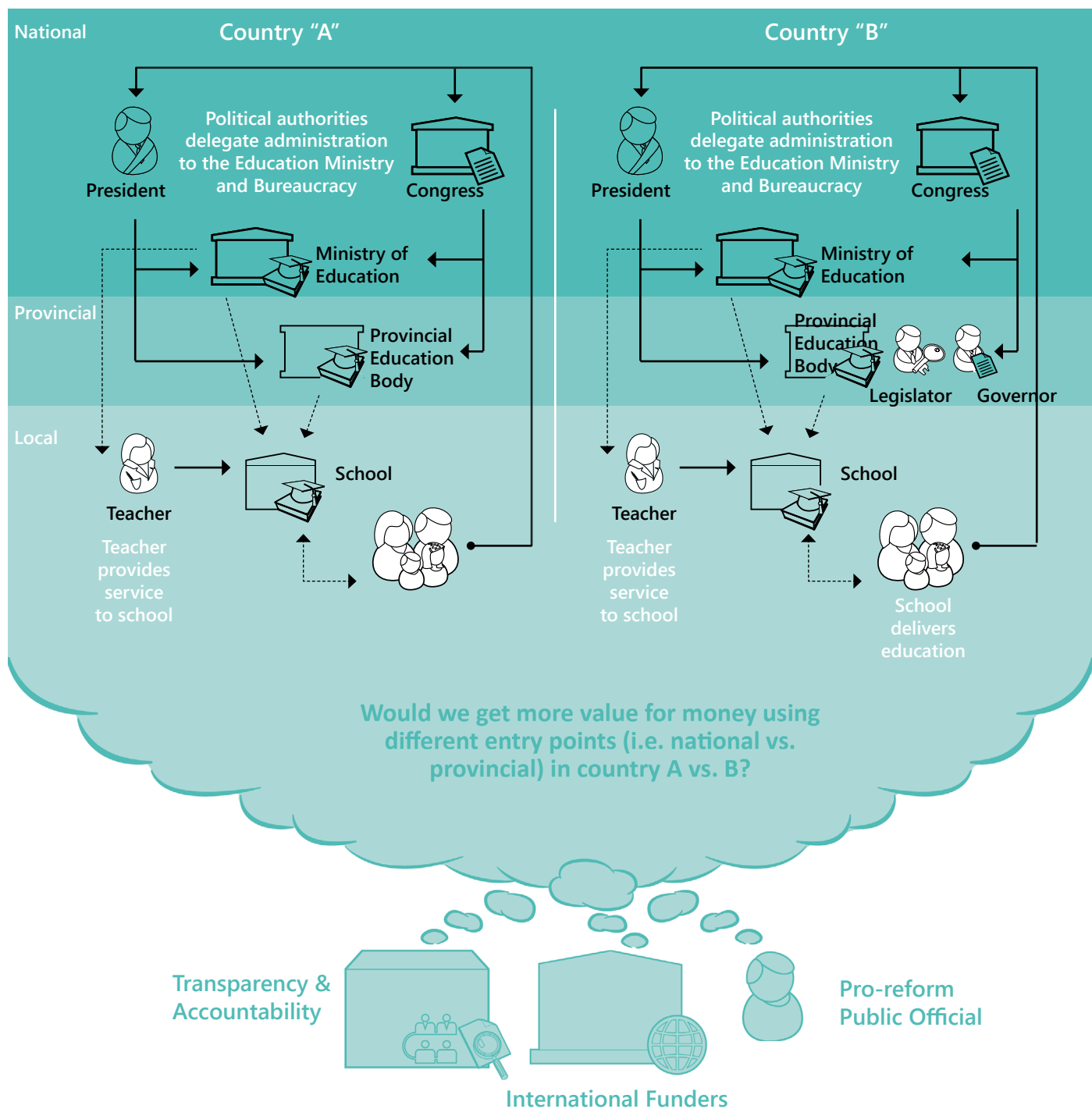
National | Country "A"

President

Political authorities delegate administration to the Education Ministry and Bureaucracy

Congress

Ministry of Education

Provincial

Provincial Education Body

Local

Teacher

Teacher provides service to school

School

National | Country "B"

President

Political authorities delegate administration to the Education Ministry and Bureaucracy

Congress

Ministry of Education

Provincial Education Body

Legislator   **Governor**

Teacher

Teacher provides service to school

School

School delivers education

Would we get more value for money using different entry points (i.e. national vs. provincial) in country A vs. B?

Transparency & Accountability

International Funders

Pro-reform Public Official

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III. ARE SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY STRATEGIES RESPONSIVE AND MULTI-PRONGED?

Once we had identified the information we were looking for in social accountability projects, we conducted in-depth qualitative analysis of a sample of 40 GPSA applications to gauge whether and how they justified their plans and requests for funding. We found that GPSA applications to date do tend to incorporate responsive multi-pronged strategies. They scored better on this component than on any other component of the four we analyzed in this series of GPSA notes. As Graph 1 summarizes, more than half of the proposals in our sample fully or partly answered the questions regarding the nature of proposed strategies we spelled out in Table 1 above. Less than half of the proposals did so regarding the strategies' ability to harness the context, pick partners, or learn adaptively with a political lens (if you want to learn more about our findings please check out other notes in this series).

Still, we have much work to do to put forward responsive and multi-pronged strategies. For instance, none of the proposals clearly specifies all the logical steps that would link the project's interventions to its ultimate outcomes (the theory of change).

Want to understand the difference between a proposal that tackles a full set of policy opportunities and one that does not? See Box2.

Graph 1: Do GPSA Applications Incorporate the 4 Components of Strategic Social Accountability?

BOX 2
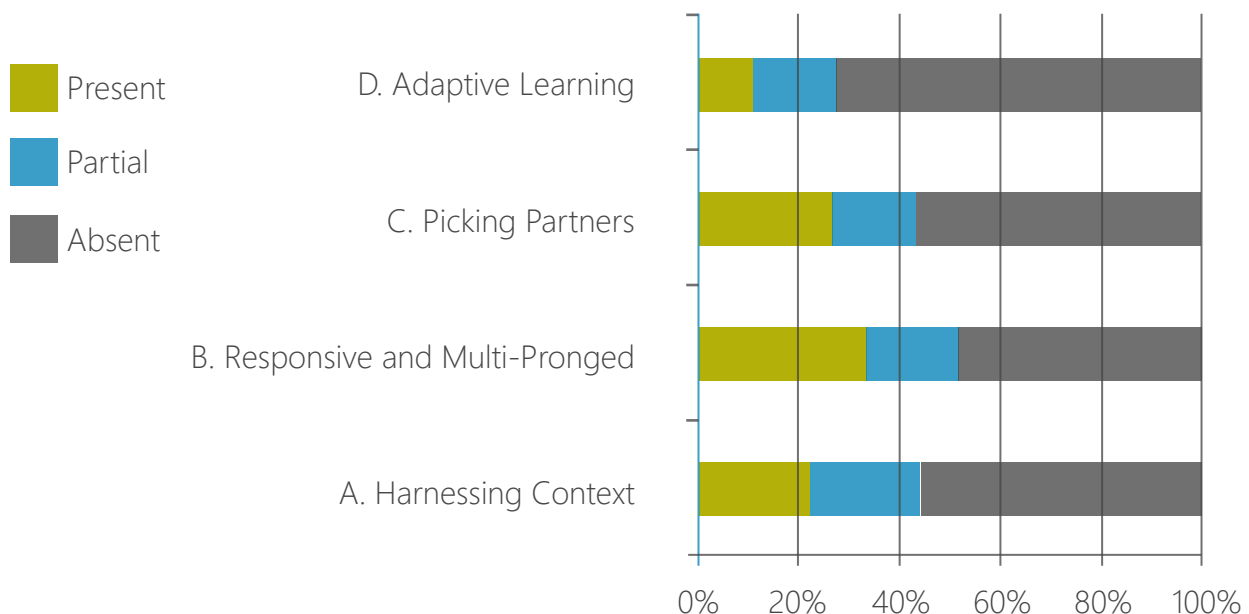
Is Your Strategy Responsive and Multi-Pronged Regarding the Policy Cycle?

Look at the theory of change and the intervention's entry point in the figure below – it reflects a typical social accountability theory of change.

These are the kinds of things we wanted to think about when we asked about responsive and multi-pronged strategies. Also, note that one of us presented this exercise during the first Workshop of GPSA Grantees.

Social Accountability Intervention: Community Score Cards

- Citizens and CSOs collect information
- Citizens and CSOs realize that public sector under-delivers
- Citizens and CSOs demand better service delivery
- Public Service providers respond to those demands
- Public Service providers disclosure information
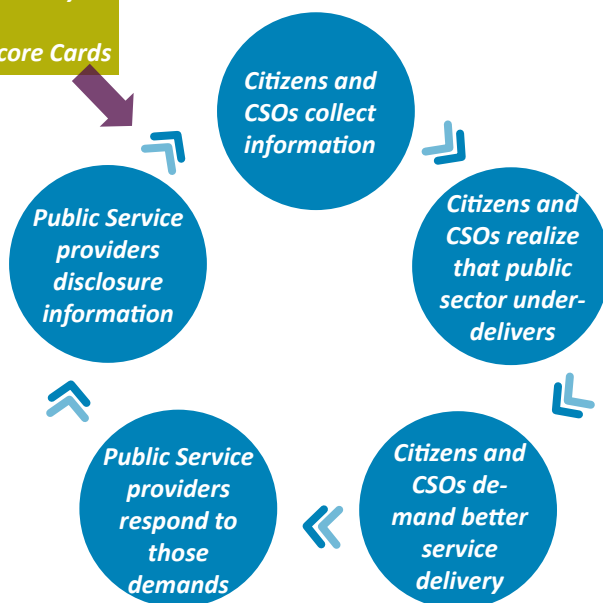
Figure based on the action cycle described by Archon Fung, Mary Graham, David Weil, 2007, Full Disclosure: The Perils and Promise of Transparency, Cambridge University Press.

Social Accountability Intervention: Community Score Cards

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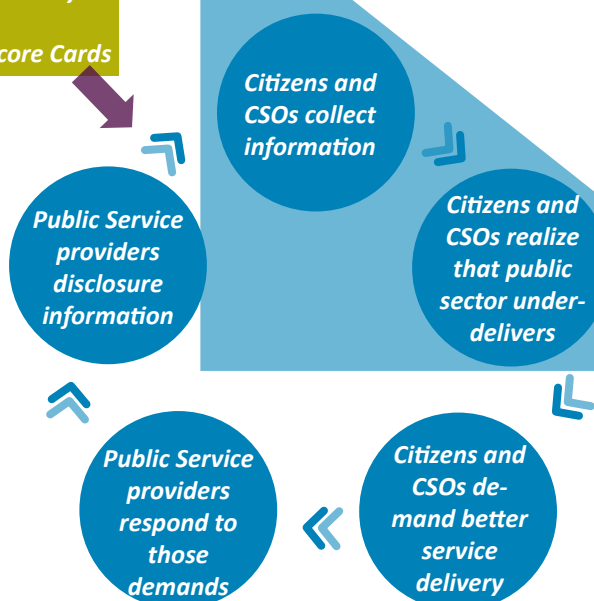
Well, actually most social accountability theories of change focus on the triangle shaded in the next figure. They presume that the rest of the chain will follow automatically.

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Social Accountability Intervention: Community Score Cards

Citizens and CSOs collect information

Will intervention capture meaningful information? Or do we need to do something else?

Public sector providers have the capacities to implement changes, right?

Public Service providers disclose information

Citizens and CSOs realize that public sector under-delivers

Are citizens willing and able to organize and work together towards better service delivery?

Public Service providers respond to those demands

Citizens and CSOs demand better service delivery

Are citizens using the right channels and means to target decision-makers?

Now, reflect on all the things that actually need to happen for this theory of change to work in practice. Are we making heroic assumptions? Could our projects be improved if we spelled out and acted on these assumptions?

So how did GPSA proposals fare in terms of tackling all the logical steps that would link the project's interventions to its ultimate outcomes?

Only 10 proposals in the sample addressed all the policy components that would be required to deliver results. For example, looking at the eligible applications, 64% planned to work on the public budget. Despite the strong relationship in practice between public budgets and the contracting process, only half as many applicants (32%) planned to work on monitoring procurement **processes**.

To-do:

Learn about open contracting and following the money beyond the budget

http://www.open-contracting.org/
http://followthemoney.net/

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While not all social accountability projects working on budgets need to look into contracting, researchers and proponents of follow- the-money strategies increasingly argue that these steps are needed to be able to improve many of the outcomes GPSA applicants care about, such as service delivery (on this approach see e.g. here, here, and here).

As you can tell, there is a broad range of possible political tactics that can be applied individually or collectively in social accountability interventions. The GPSA's Round 1 application template identified the tactics and tools reproduced in Table 2, but there are other ways to categorize how social accountability change-makers go about their work. (see our earlier attempt in page 45 here)

Table 2: Social accountability Tactics and tools, GPSA Round 1 Applications

Social Accountability Tools and Mechanisms	% of Applications
Transparency and Access to Information	
Develop policy proposals to advance new, modify or reform existing transparency and access to information legislation or regulations (national, state/provincial, municipal, sector)	70%
Develop information and communications materials to make public information accessible to targeted audiences	80%
Submission of requests for access to public information	70%
Develop online database to display public information in accessible, understandable formats	10%
Independent budget analysis (national, state/provincial, municipal, sector)	30%
Use of Supreme Audit Institution reports/other Oversight Agencies' reports & data	25%
Other(s) Please specify:	
Voice and Representation	
Develop civic application to display public information and engage citizens or targeted audiences through the use of ICT tools (e.g. crowd-sourcing, SMS)	70%
Capacity-building of CSOs, CSO networks and/or targeted citizen groups	80%
Setting-up or strengthening state-civil society councils or committees	55%
Use of formal public petition process or organization of informal collective petition process (e.g. using web-based petition tools)	50%
Use of formal citizen participation mechanisms (e.g., public hearings, participatory rulemaking processes, etc)	85%
Other(s) Please specify:	
Accountability	
Develop online civic application to monitor government's enforcement of transparency/ATI policies	30%
Develop web-based civic application to monitor (national, state, municipal, sector) public programs and institutions	35%
Independent budget monitoring (including budget expenditures tracking, budget process monitoring)	75%
Design and implement community scorecards to assess service delivery (availability of inputs, service quality)	60%

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[1] For instance the International Budget Partnership has focused their attention on the following five: Litigation, Use of the media, presenting evidence to the executive, building the capacity of the legislature, Mobilizing citizens and CSOs (here).

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Design and implement social audits of public policy/public program implementation, community-based monitoring of public works' execution	45%
Independent monitoring of procurement and contracting processes	30%
Design and implementation of complaints handling or grievance redress mechanism	25%
Collaboration with accountability institutions (e.g. Ombudsman Office, Supreme Audit Institution)	15%
Use of international standards and monitoring mechanisms to monitor (national, state/provincial, municipal, sector) country's compliance, enforcement and implementation of policies and programs	30%
Other(s) Please specify:	

In theory, one could argue that an ideal social accountability strategy should deploy the full range of tactics. In other words:, the more the merrier. We take a different approach consistent with political economy insights: in the real world we have limited resources and we should strive to pick the group of tactics that are more likely to pay -off for our intended, strategic goals. By so doing, the hypothesis is that it improves the likelihood of the effectiveness of its projects (Maria Poli, Agustina Giraudy, and Florencia Guerzovich. 2010. Societal Accountability: A tactical toolkit. Washington DC and Buenos Aires).

Thus, the GPSA's ambitions require understanding and gauging whether proposals make this kind of politically savvy call. Yet, 29 proposals out of 40 fail to justify why the proposed approaches and tools are the best compared to other alternatives. This makes it unclear how applicants decided on their approach and adapted it to their context. As the take- up of political analysis is weak, the impact of the social accountability approach is threatened. Proposed approaches often seem more of an intuitive hunch or replicate what CSOs are already doing or what they've done in the past (as in other cases), rather than drawing from a realistic, politically-savvy analysis.

Furthermore, it is not always clear that the applications propose a set of methods that make sense given the state of affairs.

Too many applications identify a series of mechanisms that they intuitively believe should work without providing an understanding of how the project would fit and respond to the political context:

• Only two entries in our sample link the project timeline to key dates in the political and policy cycles they are working with, even though seizing specific entry points greatly influences the impact of social accountability initiatives. They also fail to explain why a given set of tactics could be relevant to targeting different types of stakeholders (e.g. in the executive, legislative, or outside the state). This is not surprising when we lack systematic insights about when and where particular mechanisms of change may make most sense (see here). One sampled application went further than many others, asking public bodies what information would be of value to them;

"Representatives from CRCS [Regional Coordination and Monitoring Committees] explained that the project data would help them create a stronger links between the Integrated Regional Development Plan (PRDI) and the Regional Education Development Plan (PRDE). Currently, they argued, these two plans are loosely connected and do not respond to regional education priorities."and loosely connected and do not respond to regional education priorities."
(Quote from application)

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• As we mentioned in Box 1, most applications (and GPSA projects) work across multiple levels of government (national, regional, local). Yet, less than half of our sample explains how and why actions at different levels are targeted to maximize value for money or how the relationships among these levels could affect the scale-up of often proposed "pilots" or "tests."

IV. TO RECAP

In this GPSA note we aimed to give you a range of short examples of responsive and multi-pronged social accountability strategies to think about. We know there are many other examples and ways to think about the data and social accountability that merit the field's attention. We hope that this provides a start to the conversation. We also share some big-picture insights and discuss steps forward in the series' final note.