



technology for transparency network

a project of Rising voices

tracking civic engagement technology worldwide



The role of technology and citizen media in promoting transparency, accountability and civic participation





The Technology for Transparency Network is a participatory research mapping to gain a better understanding of the current state of online technology projects that increase transparency, government accountability and civic engagement in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, South Asia, China and Central & Eastern Europe.

Technology for Transparency

Editor: David Sasaki

Renata Avila

Sopheap Chak

Jakub Górnicki

Rebekah Heacock

Victor Kaonga

Sylwia Presley

Manuella Maia Ribeiro

Namita Singh

Carrie Yang

transparency.globalvoicesonline.org

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<http://www.flickr.com/photos/nicokaiser/7603357/>

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Introduction

The birth of the World Wide Web as we know it today dates back to March 1989 when Tim Berners Lee, then a research fellow at European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, wrote a proposal for an Internet framework that would allow online documents to link to one another. Eight months later in neighboring Germany protesters brought down the Berlin Wall, and with it fell more than half a century of Communist rule in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus. The next decade would also see an end to the repressive era of military dictatorships in Latin America, the birth of multiparty democracy in much of Sub-Saharan Africa, and a financial crisis in Southeast Asia that led to calls for greater governance and improved accountability. The World Wide Web and the movement for transparency and accountability in government have grown up together over the past two decades, though often in parallel, and with little research evaluating the role and potential of online technologies to bring about greater transparency, accountability and civic engagement.

This report is the culmination of four months of research examining the objectives, challenges, successes and effects of online technology projects that aim to promote transparency, political accountability and civic engagement in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, South Asia, China and Central & Eastern Europe. A team of eight regional researchers documented a total of 37 case studies of relevant technology projects. Though this report contains only executive summaries of each case study, full interviews including audio podcasts and related documents, are available on our website.¹ In addition to the in-depth case studies, we have also documented over 30 project listings, which provide basic descriptive information and context about related projects.

This report is structured in three sections. The introduction examines the differing aspects between traditional watchdog journalism and online media that rely on raw data sources, often directly from government websites. The introduction also aims to contextualize the benefits of transparency, accountability and civic engagement from a grassroots, networked perspective. The second section of the report consists of regional overviews authored by each of our eight researchers. These overviews document the history of the good governance movement in each region, the role of technology in promoting transparency and accountability, and summaries of the case studies they documented. The concluding section groups case studies thematically in order draw out trends, conclusions and recommendations that apply across a number of projects.

What is transparency?

The very metaphor of transparency suggests a medium through which we view things and through which others can view us. This metaphor makes two important assumptions, as J.M. Balkin has noted.² First, it assumes that what is on one side of the transparent medium is conceptually separate from what is on the other side. Second, it assumes that the process of seeing through the medium does not substantially alter the nature of what is being viewed.

Both of these assumptions are demonstrably false. The Stasi, for example, had one agent for every 166 citizens of East Germany. When you add informants to the formula, John O. Koehler has

¹ Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org>.

² J. M. Balkin, "How Mass Media Simulate Political Transparency," 1998, <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/jbalkin/articles/media01.htm>.

estimated that there was one spy per every 6.5 citizens.³ Who was surveilled and who was surveilling? It is often more difficult to differentiate each side of the transparency window than we assume. The concrete division we make between the government and its citizens is, in fact, a thin and constantly shifting membrane.

The second assumption of the transparency metaphor - that the process of seeing through the medium does not substantially alter the nature of what is being viewed - has also been proved false. Beth Noveck, in a conversation with fellow open government advocate Tim O'Reilly, observed that a new directive requiring stricter documentation of government meetings led to an increase in "informal lunches" where public officials can discuss topics without making their discussions publicly accessible. Such behavior could lead many to believe that public officials are discussing secrets they wish to hide from public view, but Noveck points out that most government officials simply don't have time to discuss, document, and then implement.

The transparent society

The Stasi stored enormous amounts of data about the citizens of East Germany. It sifted through their garbage, collected "odor" samples of their sheets and underwear,⁴ and tapped phone lines to listen in on citizens' private conversations. The point was to spread fear as much as it was to collect information. But, as common as government surveillance of citizens was and continues to be,⁵ the fall of the Stasi in 1990 also illustrates another natural impulse that has been at the heart of investigative journalism and the transparency movement over the past few decades, and that is citizens demanding both information and accountability from their government.

On January 15, 1990 a large crowd formed outside of the Stasi headquarters and demanded access to the information the Stasi had collected over the previous 40 years.⁶ This process is still ongoing today and has been a painful part of German reunification,⁷ but it reveals to us a change that is taking place in many countries around the world as they transition from societies where only the government surveilled its citizens to what David Brin calls "The Transparent Society," where citizens and governments surveil each other.⁸

From the Fourth to the Fifth Estate?

The notion of the press as watchdog is more than 200 years old. Yet the idea of vigilant media monitoring government and exposing its excesses has gained new traction in many parts of the world, writes Sheila S. Coronel in "The Media as Watchdog."⁹ There are many examples¹⁰ and

³ John O. Koehler, *Stasi: The Untold Story of the East German Secret Police* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), <http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/k/koehler-stasi.html>.

⁴ Cory Doctorow, "Stasi smell museum," *Boing Boing*, July 3, 2007, <http://boingboing.net/2007/07/03/stasi-smell-museum.html>.

⁵ Wikipedia contributors, "Stasi 2.0," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stasi_2.0.

⁶ Stasi Museum Berlin, <http://www.stasimuseum.de/en/enindex.htm>.

⁷ Khuê Pham, "From East German Spooks to West German Victims," *Der Spiegel*, June 11, 2007, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,486390,00.html>.

⁸ David Brin, "The Transparent Society, and Other Articles About Transparency and Privacy," <http://www.davidbrin.com/transparent.htm>.

⁹ Sheila S. Coronel, "The Media as Watchdog" (paper presented at the Harvard-World Bank Workshop, Cambridge, Massachusetts, May 29-31, 2008), <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Conference/Conference%20papers/Coronel%20Watchdog.pdf>.

countless movies¹¹ based on stories that reveal how investigative journalism ensures justice, transparency, and accountability. The press monitors the day-to-day workings of government in order to help citizens assess the efficacy of its performance. Watchdog journalism exposes the corruption of a traffic policeman, the wrongdoings of a priest, or billion dollar financial scandals. The best investigative journalism doesn't just expose corrupt individuals, but entire systems that are flawed and in need of reform, writes Coronel.

As Thomas Jefferson famously remarked: "The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."¹²

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, when many countries moved from authoritarian to more democratic styles of governance, a new industry called media development was born.¹³ The assumption was that a healthy press would lead to healthy democracies. So donors like the Ford Foundation, the United States government and the World Bank began funding projects that would train reporters and editors in investigative journalism as well as the business side of the news industry. Many of these projects began in the former Soviet Union, then spread to the Balkans, and are now common in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America.

But there are criticisms of watchdog journalism too. Some observers argue that the adversarial nature of watchdog journalism erodes trust in governments and institutions and presents the government as more inefficient and wasteful than it really is.¹⁴ Others say that a constant barrage of reporting about scandals desensitizes people to actual instances of government corruption. There are even suggestions that in countries that are new democracies, watchdog reporting can lead to dissatisfaction with democracy itself and provoke riots and chaos. In Asia there are criticisms that Western style watchdog journalism doesn't lead to the type of social harmony that is valued in Asian societies.¹⁵

Watchdog journalists have come up against two major obstacles to their work: the state and the market. The state censors their work and threatens their safety. The market demands that they make their work entertaining enough to sell advertisements, newspapers, magazines, and website subscriptions. In many countries the media industry has been privatized to shield it from government control only to find that there is now no business model to sustain the time intensive work that goes into investigative journalism.

As traditional media companies are forced to cut their budgets due to falling advertising revenue, investigative journalism and international coverage are the two most common areas to disappear.

¹⁰ Wikipedia contributors, "Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Reporting," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pulitzer_Prize_for_Investigative_Reporting.

¹¹ http://psacot.typepad.com/ps_a_column_on_things/journalism-movies.html

¹² Jay Rosen, "That Jefferson Quote Newspaper Journalists Always Use and the Part They (Almost Always) Leave Out," *Quote and Comment*, April 23, 2009, <http://jayrosen.tumblr.com/post/99295974/that-jefferson-quote-newspaper-journalists-always-use>.

¹³ David Sasaki, "The New Era of Media Development, Part 1," *MediaShift Idea Lab*, October 7, 2009, <http://www.pbs.org/idealab/2009/10/the-new-era-of-media-development-part-1280.html>.

¹⁴ Allan Holmes, "Defining Transparency," *nextgov*, September 3, 2009, http://www.nextgov.com/nextgov/ng_20090903_7217.php.

¹⁵ Coronel, "Media as Watchdog."

David Simon, in his testimony before Congress about the death of the newspaper industry, remarked that with a vacuum of investigative journalism, “it is going to be one of the great times to be a corrupt politician.”¹⁶

This has led to a lot of concern about the decline of the fourth estate, but also to a lot of excitement and enthusiasm about the rise of the so-called fifth estate – networked citizen media platforms that rely on the volunteer contributions of citizens who are not necessarily trained journalists.¹⁷

One such platform is WikiLeaks, which earlier this year published a video of US soldiers firing on a van that was picking up an injured journalist in Iraq.¹⁸ WikiLeaks is a website where any citizen whistleblower can anonymously upload a leaked document that exposes wrongdoing.¹⁹ In an interview with Russia Today, WikiLeaks co-founder Julian Assange makes an important distinction between source information and the contextualization of that information which informs the public and shapes public opinion.²⁰ According to Assange, *Washington Post* reporter David Finkel apparently had access to the video, or at least the transcript, which helped inform his reporting.²¹ But increasingly reporters are not the sole custodians of source information. Rather than relying on journalists to procure and distribute information from the government to citizens, we now see a new approach where citizens demand information from their governments and use online tools and platforms to make sense of that information collectively, and use it to hold their leaders accountable.

For example, newspapers have traditionally employed a “crime beat” reporter to visit the local police department, publish selections from the crime report and help add context to crime-related statistics. Today websites like Oakland Crimespotting²² and EveryBlock²³ automatically take crime report data from police department websites and display it on a map interface that can be filtered by time, location and crime type. While such automated websites don’t replace the need for the contextualization of such information, they do open up that process to anyone willing to invest the time to understand the spread of crime across location and time.

¹⁶ Transcript of “Old and New Media Go to Washington,” *On the Media*, National Public Radio, May 8, 2009, <http://www.onthemedial.org/transcripts/2009/05/08/01>.

¹⁷ Wikipedia contributors, “Fifth Estate,” *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fifth_Estate.

¹⁸ Collateral Murder, <http://www.collateralmurder.com/>.

¹⁹ WikiLeaks, <http://wikileaks.org/>.

²⁰ RussiaToday, “WikiLeaks editor on Apache combat video: No excuse for US killing civilians,” April 6, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7QEdAykXxoM>.

²¹ David Finkel, “Video shows death of 2 Reuters employees in Baghdad attack,” *Washington Post*, April 6, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/discussion/2010/04/06/DI2010040600750.html>.

²² Oakland Crimespotting, <http://oakland.crimespotting.org/>.

²³ EveryBlock: A news feed for your block, <http://www.everyblock.com/>.

Why? What? How?

Why transparency?

For the purposes of this report, when we discuss transparency, we are generally referring to published information about government processes, budgets, and public officials. (There are also projects, such as CorpWatch²⁴, Publish What You Pay²⁵, and Sourcemap²⁶ that aim to publish more information about the private sector that is in the public's interest.) Sometimes this information is made available by governments themselves. For example, in June, 2002 then-President of Mexico Vicente Fox signed his country's first freedom of information law, which requires government agencies to publish in a routine and accessible manner all information concerning their daily functions, budgets, operations, staff, salaries, internal reports, and the awarding of contracts and concessions.²⁷ (A clear analysis of the law was published by Kate Doyle the day it was passed.²⁸ John Ackerman has published a three-year evaluation of Mexico's implementation of the law in comparison to similar freedom of information initiatives around the world.²⁹)

A number of studies and anecdotes show how increased transparency leads to increased performance and responsiveness in government and the private sector. Transparency initiatives have led to a 20 percent reduction in the number of people hospitalized for food-related illnesses,³⁰ the design of safer automobiles,³¹ greater flows of foreign direct investment,³² and more efficient financial markets.³³ In a cross-national study Michelle S. Mahoney and Paul Webley have found a positive relationship between transparency and trust in government. However, other studies have found that poorly designed transparency initiatives can also increase the risk of consumption of

²⁴ CordWatch, <http://www.corpwatch.org/>.

²⁵ Publish What You Pay, <http://www.publishwhatyoupay.org/>.

²⁶ Sourcemap, <http://www.sourcemap.org/>.

²⁷ Congress of the Union, *Federal Transparency and Access to Public Government Information Law*, trans. Carlota McAllister, June 10, 2002, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB68/laweng.pdf>.

²⁸ Kate Doyle, "Mexico's New Freedom of Information Law," *The National Security Archive*, June 10, 2002, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB68/>.

²⁹ John M. Ackerman, "Mexico's Freedom of Information Law in International Perspective," in *Mexico's Right-to-Know Reforms: Civil Society Perspectives*, ed. Jonathan Fox, Libby Haight, Helena Hofbauer and Tania Sánchez, (Mexico City: FUNDAR/Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2007), http://www.fundar.org.mx/secciones/publicaciones/pdf/right_to_know/SEC8%20John%20M.%20Ackerman.pdf.

³⁰ Russ Linden, "Transparency Breeds Self-Correcting Behavior," *Governing*, January 13, 2010, <http://www.governing.com/columns/mgmt-insights/Transparency-Breeds-Self-Correcting-Behavior.html>.

³¹ Archon Fung, Mary Graham and David Weil, *Full Disclosure: The Perils and Promise of Transparency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³² Z. Drabek and W. Payne, "The Impact of Transparency on Foreign Direct Investment," *World Trade Organization Economic Research and Analysis Division*, February 2009, <http://ideas.repec.org/p/fth/wtoera/99-02.html>.

³³ D. Andrew Austin and Jane G. Gravelle, "Does Price Transparency Improve Market Efficiency? Implications of Empirical Evidence in Other Markets for the Health Sector," CRS Report for Congress, July 24, 2007, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/secretary/RL34101.pdf>.

contaminated drinking water³⁴ and reduce the average quality of politicians recruited by political parties.³⁵

Governments don't publish information about their activities and budgets for a number of reasons, including lack of resources, lack of technical expertise, and the fear of inviting criticism and exposing corrupt behavior. In some countries citizens have begun publishing that information for themselves. Ory Okolloh, the co-founder of Mzalendo,³⁶ says that the project began in 2006 when Kenyan MPs demanded that the Parliament website be shut down to prevent public access to their CVs.³⁷ Concerned Kenyan citizens then began attending Parliament sessions in order to publish their observations and help build an online database of legislative information.³⁸ Similarly, Mumbai Votes collects and publishes information about the criminal records of public officials and election candidates.³⁹

Often times we find that governments do, in fact, publish information about their activities and spending, but they do so in ways that are not easily accessible or comprehensible. For example, the municipal government of Tel Aviv publishes their budget each year as a long, detailed PDF document. All of the relevant information is there, but it is published in a way so that citizens cannot easily understand, visualize, and analyze their government's spending decisions. The team behind "Our Budget" used a combination of optical character recognition (OCR) technology and human verification to convert the data to spreadsheet format and use online tools to visualize and analyze the city's spending.⁴⁰ In Argentina all political parties are required to publicly disclose the campaign contributions they received at least ten days prior to voting day. However, once again these parties publish the information in long PDF reports that obscure the relationships between money and politics in electoral campaigns. *Dinero y Política* is an attempt to present that same information using interactive visualizations that clearly compare and contrast campaign contributions by district, political party, and industry.⁴¹ In Kenya, Budget Tracking Tool takes the budgets of federally funded, local development projects, which are buried deep down in government web pages, and presents them in a single database where users can leave comments about the progress, impact, and efficiency of the projects.⁴² (So far, however, few have.)

Why civic participation?

Does transparency lead to accountability? If citizens have more information about the activities of their government, and more access to that information, then will public officials be compelled to

³⁴ Fung, Graham and Weil, *Full Disclosure*.

³⁵ Andrea Mattozzi and Antonio Merlo, "The Transparency of Politics and the Quality of Politicians," Penn Institute for Economic Research, January 2007, <http://economics.sas.upenn.edu/system/files/07-008.pdf>.

³⁶ Mzalendo: Eye on Kenya's Parliament, <http://www.mzalendo.com/>.

³⁷ David Sasaki, "Mzalendo," Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/mzalendo>.

³⁸ "Bills," Mzalendo: Eye on Kenya's Parliament, <http://www.mzalendo.com/Bills.List.php>.

³⁹ Mumbai Votes, <http://mumbaivotes.com/>.

⁴⁰ David Sasaki, "Our Budget," Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/our-budget>.

⁴¹ Renata Avila, "Dinero y Política [Money in Politics], Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/dinero-y-pol%C3%ADtica-money-politics>.

⁴² Rebekah Heacock, "Budget Tracking Tool," Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/budget-tracking-tool>.

perform their jobs more competently? Will citizens demand that their input be taken into consideration in the shaping and enforcement of policy decisions? Recently, some scholars and observers are casting doubt on that long-held assumption. “Transparency mobilizes the power of shame,” writes Jonathan Fox, “yet the shameless may not be vulnerable to public exposure. Truth often fails to lead to justice.”⁴³ In a podcast interview earlier this year with Fabiano Angelico of *Transparência Brasil*, he echoes Fox’s argument, claiming that Brazilian politicians who have been repeatedly outed as corrupt are still re-elected, often times because of their corruption.⁴⁴ In such cases Angelico advocates that special, appointed judges with proven track records should bar repeatedly corrupt politicians from running for office. This challenges classical notions of liberal democracy: that citizens should ultimately hold their leaders accountable by supporting or removing them from office on election day. But Guillermo O’Donnell supports Angelico’s proposal, noting that modern democracies require both “vertical accountability,” as in elections, and “horizontal accountability,” such as inter-governmental regulatory agencies that are empowered to sanction politicians that don’t follow the law.⁴⁵

Another example of transparency failing to lead to accountability can be found in Liberia, where President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2005, modeled after a similar post-Apartheid truth commission in South Africa. The TRC is very much an agent of horizontal accountability, tasked with investigating and publishing information related to more than 20 years of civil conflict in the country and sanctioning elected officials who were criminally involved. In June 2009 the TRC issued its final report, which named 50 individuals – including Johnson-Sirleaf – who should be barred from public office for 30 years because of their direct involvement in the country’s civil war. President Johnson-Sirleaf, however, remains in power, ignoring the recommendations of the TRC while implementing her own transparency and anti-corruption legislation. Despite her controversial past, Johnson-Sirleaf is still seen by many as a strong leader with a strong international profile who can help Liberia return to peace and democracy.

Most researchers and observers do agree that greater transparency will not lead to increased accountability unless proactive civic engagement is shaped around the information that is published. Several of the case studies we documented aim to use social networks to bring about this engagement. #InternetNecesario in Mexico, for example, used a combination of Twitter, blog posts, and media outreach to put pressure on Mexican legislators to eliminate a three percent tax on internet access that was passed without the media or civil society’s consultation.⁴⁶ It is a classic example of transparency combined with civic participation to increase accountability. Mexican Twitter user Alejandro Pisanty published information about the newly passed law that was not formerly available. A decentralized, online protest then took place using Twitter, blogs – which acted as filters and added context – and email petitions to Mexican senators. The Mexican Chamber of

⁴³ Jonathan A. Fox, “The uncertain relationship between transparency and accountability,” *Development in Practice* 17, no. 4 (2007), <http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/8c25c3z4>.

⁴⁴ David Sasaki, “[Podcast] Interview with Fabiano Angelico of *Transparência Brasil*,” *Global Voices Online*, February 9, 2010, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2010/02/09/podcast-interview-with-fabiano-angelico-of-transparncia-brasil/>.

⁴⁵ Guillermo O’Donnell, “Horizontal Accountability in New Democracies,” in *The Self-Restraining State: Power and Accountability in New Democracies*, ed. Andreas Schedler, Larry Jay Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999).

⁴⁶ Renata Avila, “#InternetNecesario,” Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/internetnecesario>.

Deputies soon realized the size and strength of the opposition to the tax and invited representatives of the online protest into the Chamber to make their arguments against the tax, which they had been rehearsing online over the previous few weeks. However, #InternetNecesario has also (so far) proved to be a temporary phenomenon that in no way builds systematic processes to continually promote transparency or to hold leaders accountable in the future.

Cuidemos El Voto offers an example of a more sustained project that aims to prevent electoral misconduct – and specifically the buying of voters – during federal and local elections.⁴⁷ By partnering with the Office of the Special Prosecutor, which was established in 2002 to document past human rights abuses, Cuidemos El Voto attracted official federal endorsement of the cases of vote irregularities they documented. It is difficult, however, to measure the impact of making more visible the buying of votes by politicians and political parties. We have yet to see an example of a candidate or party who was barred from office for electoral misconduct that was reported on a website like Cuidemos el Voto.

Other project leaders were skeptical that increased civic discussion will ultimately lead toward improved governance. Vivek Gilani of Mumbai Votes says that online discussions tend to be rooted in personal opinion and gossip whereas his project aims to provide readers with crisp, clear assessment based on facts.⁴⁸ He does not wish to provide users with a space to participate, but rather a resource to become better informed in order to vote for the most qualified candidates.

Despite such skepticism that increased participation will necessarily lead to greater accountability, we should not discount the importance of civic participation for civic participation's sake. Deliberative democracy is dependent on a culture of discussion, debate, and discourse about how resources and power are distributed in a community.⁴⁹ While new communications technologies remove obstacles to participation, they often also lend to echo chambers of like-minded political debate. (Though the extent of the echo chamber effect was recently questioned by a study focused on the US.⁵⁰) Technology for transparency platforms can play a key role in bringing together informed debate from voices that tend to operate in separate online communities.

How to bring about accountability?

A number of websites we reviewed function as portals where citizens can list their complaints – in general about their community, and specifically related to their government's administration of their community – to put pressure on the government to be more responsive to their needs. Examples include Ishki in Jordan,⁵¹ Kiirti in India,⁵² and Penang Watch in Malaysia.⁵³ The varying goals and

⁴⁷ Susannah Vila, "Cuidemos el Voto," Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/cuidemos-el-voto>.

⁴⁸ Namita Singh, "Mumbai Votes," Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/mumbai-votes>.

⁴⁹ Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁵⁰ Matthew Gentzkow and Jesse M. Shapiro, "Ideological Segregation Online and Offline," National Bureau of Economic Research, April 2010, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w15916>.

⁵¹ David Sasaki, "Ishki," Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/ishki>.

⁵² Namita Singh, "Kiirti," Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/kiirti>.

strategies of these projects point to a distinction that Andreas Schedler makes between two different dimensions of accountability: on the one hand, the capacity or the right to demand answers (“answerability”) and, on the other hand, the capacity to sanction.⁵⁴ Of course, as grassroots projects, none of the websites we reviewed are empowered with any official capacity to sanction. But several projects do seek answerability in a variety of ways.

Ishki was started by four Jordanian technologists who were tired of hearing the same complaints muttered over and over again without any action or plan for action. They created a website to collect citizen complaints against the public and private sector as a way to better understand and visualize the most common complaints in Jordanian society. Their strategy is then to work with mainstream media organizations – newspapers and radio stations – to create stories about recurring complaints with the hope that increased coverage in the media will put pressure on public officials to respond. In this sense, Ishki serves as a community filter between internet users at large and mainstream media looking for interesting watchdog stories to report on. So far we have no examples of public officials responding to complaints or petitions that originated on the website.

In India, Kiirti takes a slightly different approach from Ishki. Rather than relying on print and broadcast media as an instrument to put pressure on public officials, they send emails directly to the relevant agencies in major Indian cities to ask them to follow up on the complaints submitted to Kiirti. Founder Selvam Velmurugan says that a streetlight was repaired and a mud path was paved because of complaints submitted to Kiirti. It might seem strange that submitting a complaint to a website, which is then relayed to the proper agency, is more effective than submitting the complaint directly to the agency itself in the first place. It certainly isn’t more efficient. But perhaps the public visibility of such complaints – and the responses by officials – is an incentive for public officials to react. They are therefore able to show not only the demand for their work, but also their responsiveness.

In northwestern Malaysia, Penang Watch takes the accountability agenda one step further by following a protocol to communicate with – and then harass – city officials until citizen complaints are answered. Complaints submitted to PenangWatch.net are first verified by a team of volunteers, and then forwarded to the relevant authority and/or individual to answer or resolve the complaint. If there is no response within a week or two then a reminder is sent out. If the complaint is still not dealt with after two more weeks then a profile of the complaint is featured on the website and the negligent agency/individual is “named and shamed” via emails to all council departments and media organizations. Project coordinator Ong Boon Keong says that “roughly 300 complaints are submitted through Penang Watch per year,” and that so far they have “been able to settle 50 percent of submitted complaints.” Illegal shop houses in Penang’s UNESCO World Heritage site have been shut down because of complaints submitted to the website.

Accountability versus self-governance

The case studies we have collected so far illustrate both the potential and the extreme difficulty in bringing about accountability (either answerability or sanctions) by shaping civic engagement about public information. But, then again, accountability isn’t the only stated objective of several of the

⁵³ Sopheap Chak, “Penang Watch,” Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/penang-watch>.

⁵⁴ Andreas Schedler, “Conceptualizing Accountability,” in *The Self-Restraining State: Power and Accountability in New Democracies*, ed. Andreas Schedler, Larry Jay Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999).

projects we've reviewed. In addition to demanding better performance from government, platforms like Cidade Democrática can also facilitate better community self-governance that does not rely on public officials or understaffed agencies.⁵⁵ Like other complaint websites we have reviewed, Cidade Democrática enables Brazilian citizens to list problems related to their municipality. Other users are then encouraged to list potential solutions to the problems and draft strategies and action plans. So far successful solutions have depended on government involvement, but in the future one can envision that communal gardens, walking paths, and even recycling programs can all be coordinated by citizens without government involvement.

Similarly, we are told by Map Kibera co-founder Mikel Maron that a World Bank study found that Kibera residents pay on average ten times more for water than the average person in a wealthy Nairobi neighborhood with municipally supplied, metered water service.⁵⁶ Voice of Kibera could be used as a platform to petition government and tribal leaders to enact measures that bring down the cost of water. However, it could also be used as a visualization of daily water costs as an incentive to bring new suppliers into the neighborhood that would increase competition and lower prices.⁵⁷ In other words, these platforms can be used by citizens to put pressure on their governments, but they can also be used by citizens to directly improve their communities without depending on public officials.

The first steps down a long road

A survey of the research and theory related to the relationship between increased transparency and improved accountability emphasizes the significant obstacles facing activists who aim to improve governance by making government information more easily accessible. Before moving on to the regional overviews, it is perhaps worthwhile to step back and recall that it took decades until the invention of the Gutenberg printing press led to the access to information and distribution of ideas that in turn enabled the Protestant Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, journalism, the Enlightenment, and, arguably, representative democracy. If 16th century activists like Martin Luther and Galileo Galilei had simply given up on the printing press because of the many obstacles standing between the printed page and social progress, society today would be much different.

⁵⁵ Manuella Maia Ribeiro, "Cidade Democrática," Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/cidade-democratica-0>.

⁵⁶ Robert Neuwirth, *Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters, A New Urban World* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 81-82.

⁵⁷ Rebekah Heacock, "Map Kibera," Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/map-kibera>.

Southeast Asia

by Sopheap Chak

A glance at the root and concept of “governance”

In Southeast Asia, a well-known term associated with transparency, accountability and civic engagement is simply “governance,” which became a highly and hotly discussed topic during the 1997 Financial Crisis that demanded the region put into place new governmental regulation.

It is evident, for example, in 1999 when Thailand officially adopted six elements of good governance: rule of law, integrity, transparency, participation, accountability and value for money.⁵⁸ Singapore has also endorsed the principles of governance based on an accountable and transparent government, long-term orientation and social justice. In Malaysia, the issue of good governance plays the role of a reformist discourse in challenging the ruling regime and the dominant political culture, as was illustrated in the case of Anwar Ibrahim’s arrest in the middle of the financial crisis. (Unfortunately, allegations of corruption by Ibrahim were overshadowed by sensationalist rumors of his homosexuality.) In Cambodia, good governance has become a cornerstone of the National “Rectangular Strategy” for Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency, which aims to combat corruption, reform the legal system and civil service, and decentralize key areas of government.⁵⁹

Why governance?

Governance is generally defined as the “mechanisms and processes for citizens and groups to articulate their interests, mediate their differences and exercise their legal rights and obligations.”⁶⁰ Notwithstanding the varying definitions of governance, transparency, accountability and participation are commonly attached as the key elements of governance. These elements function interdependently to ensure the sound development of a country.

Governance issues

While acknowledging the improvement of governance issues following the policy adoption of good governance after the financial crisis, the problems of corruption, human rights violations, and restrictive freedom of expression still remain in the region. Governments have shown their efforts to improve the legal frameworks and institutional structure to promote transparency, accountability, and civic participation. The anti-corruption effort, for example, can be witnessed through the creation of an Anti-Corruption Agency in Malaysia, the Anti-Corruption Commission in East Timor, the Office of the Ombudsman in the Philippines, the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau in Singapore, the Corruption Eradication Commission in Indonesia, the National Anti-Corruption Commission in Thailand and the Anti-Corruption Bureau in Brunei. It is also revealed in the recent development of the Anti-Corruption Law in Cambodia and the Whistle Blower Law in Indonesia. However, Southeast Asian countries are still ranked mostly at the top of Transparency

⁵⁸ Sueo Sudo, “Regional Governance and East and Southeast Asia: Towards the Regulatory State?,” *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 4, no. 2 (2003): 331-347.

⁵⁹ Samdech Hun Sen, “The ‘Rectangular Strategy’ for Growth, Employment, Equite and Efficiency,” (address to the First Cabinet Meeting of the Third Legislature of the National Assembly, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, July 16, 2004, <http://www.embassyofcambodia.org.nz/government.htm>).

⁶⁰ Mely Caballero-Anthony, “Bridging Development Gaps in Southeast Asia: Toward an ASEAN Community,” *UNISCI Journal* 11 (2006): 37-48.

International's corruption perception index, with the exception of Singapore. Furthermore, Cambodia, Malaysia, East Timor, Indonesia, and Vietnam have been recorded as countries at critical crossroads based on the Freedom House's 2010 quantitative analysis of government accountability, civil liberties, rule of law, and anticorruption and transparency efforts.

Corruption has been spectacularly and frequently demonstrated at high levels of government leadership. In 2001 alone, for instance, three Southeast Asia leaders faced major allegations of corruption: President Abdurrahman Wahid in Indonesia, President Joseph Estrada in the Philippines and Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in Thailand. Systematic corruption in most countries of the region has disrupted progress toward development and rule of law, and a culture of impunity has so far prevailed. In many case, rule of law has been corrupted, hindering civic demand for open government and public accountability.

Movement for better governance

The globalization and development of technology has brought about better access to information and the advancement of civic participation despite the fact that governance issues are still challenging. The growth of civil society organizations whose roles are to advocate for the respect of human rights and open government have empowered citizens and promoted greater civic participation. While non-government organizations are traditionally key advocacy players, technological advances have changed this trend, and a citizen journalism network is rising. However, the trend is still minimal and varies due to governance restriction in the region.

In the case of Cambodia, for example, the rise of citizen journalism is relatively low compared to other countries in the region. Though a notion of digital democracy is emerging, the participation from young bloggers in demanding their rights is far from the norm. The continuation of government restrictive measures via legal, judicial and police forces that usually target politicians, journalists, and activists who are critical of the government has hindered greater youth participation.⁶¹ Therefore, the governance advocacy movement is still mostly driven by civil society organizations such as Sithi, a Cambodian human rights portal that aims to crowdsource and curate reports of human rights violations,⁶² or Saatsam, a virtual library that stores corruption-related information aiming at encouraging public participation to alleviate corruption and promote transparency.⁶³ This trend is probably shared by emerging countries like Timor-Leste, where projects are run by NGOs such as Lalenok Ba Ema Hotu ("The Mirror for the People"), aiming at raising awareness and campaigning for transparency, accountability, good-governance, economic justice and anti-corruption,⁶⁴ and Centru Jornalista Investigativu Timor Leste, a daily online publication that describes itself as "the Last Hope, when the court system doesn't work."⁶⁵

⁶¹ Sopheap Chak, "Cambodia: Mixed Views on Freedom of Expression," *Global Voices Online*, February 11, 2010, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2010/02/11/cambodia-mixed-views-on-freedom-of-expression/>.

⁶² Sopheap Chak, "Sithi," Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/sithi>.

⁶³ Sopheap Chak, "Saatsaam," Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/listing/saatsaam>.

⁶⁴ Sopheap Chak, "Lalenok Ba Emu Hotu," Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/listing/lalenok-ba-ema-hotu>.

⁶⁵ Sopheap Chak, "Centru Jornalista Investigativu Timor Leste," Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/listing/centru-jornalista-investigativu-timor-leste>.

Countries where technological advancement and rising voices of citizens are more tolerated have greater civic participation and a more vibrant civil society. Examples include Penang Watch⁶⁶ and 15 Malaysia⁶⁷ in Malaysia; blogwatch⁶⁸ and VoteReportPH⁶⁹ in the Philippines, and TheOnlineCitizen in Singapore,⁷⁰ which are run by voluntary bloggers or citizen groups advocating for better governance.

Although there are differing degrees of grassroots initiatives, groups throughout the region face similar challenges in running their projects. Problems include a lack of volunteers who stay committed with the projects, a lack of advanced technological and reporting skills, and legal obstructions like the absence of freedom of information laws or the existence of oppressive publishing laws.

In Singapore, for example, there are reportedly three tiers of censorship:

The 1st tier are the legislations passed by Parliament which restricts freedom of expression. The 2nd tier of censorship are those imposed by government bodies which are authorized by law to draw up guidelines and policies pertaining to political expression. A key feature of this 2nd tier of censorship are the non-transparency and the nebulous nature of its implementation, which leads to a blurring of the line of what is acceptable and non-acceptable speech. This in turn creates a climate where writers, bloggers, artists and politicians self-censor their speech in order that they do not overstep boundaries. This climate of self-censorship forms the 3rd tier of censorship in Singapore.⁷¹

In the case of the Philippines, on the other hand, activism is a dangerous field. “During the stay of the current administration, more than 1000 activists were victims of extra judicial killings. Unless the pattern of impunity is addressed, activists (online and offline) will always find it difficult to work,” says Rick Bahague, VoteReportPH’s Project Leader.⁷²

In addition to slow and limited internet access in the region, internet censorship is apparently another challenges for technology initiatives, such as in the case of Cambodia. There are concerns that the government is implementing a state-run exchange point to control all local internet service providers under the claim of strengthening internet security against pornography, theft and cyber crime.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the persistent activism and engagement with relevant non-governmental and governmental agencies are a key approach to achieve their project goals. Among all the documented projects, Penang Watch is attempting to work closely with government agencies to hold them accountable in solving residents’ complaints. In addition to insistently reminding agencies and/or individuals to respond to citizen complaints, they also adopt the “name and shame”

⁶⁶ <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/penang-watch>

⁶⁷ Sopheap Chak, “15MALAYSIA,” Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/listing/15malaysia>.

⁶⁸ Sopheap Chak, “Blogwatch,” Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/blogwatch>.

⁶⁹ Sopheap Chak, “VoteReportPH,” Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/votereportph>.

⁷⁰ Sopheap Chak, “TheOnlineCitizen,” <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/theonlinecitizen>.

⁷¹ Martyn See Tong Ming, “The 3 tiers of censorship in Singapore,” *Singapore Rebel*, November 5, 2009, <http://sgblogs.com/entry/tiers-censorship-singapore/366849>.

⁷² Sopheap Chak, “VoteReportPH.”

approach as a last resort to push for complaint settlement. These approaches have proved successful in solving nearly half of all submitted complaints.

In a comment on the VoteReportPH case study David Sasaki notes that tying voter education to training workshops is a smart tactic.⁷³ Sasaki has observed many instances of Ushahidi installations meant to crowdsource reports of voting irregularities, but these projects mostly attract the participation of just a few dedicated volunteers or non-profit staff. In order for this project to truly bring about electoral accountability and a verified electoral process, it is suggested that VoteReportPH should meet with leaders from the COMELEC, the Philippines Commission on Elections, to develop a published framework for how COMELEC will respond to reports of voting irregularities. Learning from Penang Watch, VoteReportPH should engage closely with COMELEC in their investigation and resolution of reports of election fraud. Answerability to reported cases will be an incentive for greater participation from the public as well as to ensure that the elections are credible.

Key lesson: persistent activism and close engagement

The project listings and case studies from Southeast Asia reveal that persistent activism and close engagement with a variety of stakeholders – including government agencies with the power to sanction – will take these project from mere information to more accountability and increased civic participation. The more examples of concrete accountability that resulted from online information and participation that these projects can point to, the more successful they will be in generating interest and activism around their causes. However, this often requires broader changes political will and actual legislation to reduce the climate of fear that hinders broader participation in such projects.

⁷³ David Sasaki, “Establishing relationship with Commission on Elections Important,” comment on “VoteReportPH,” <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/votereportph#comment-54>.

SouthEast Asia Case Studies

Penang Watch

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/penang-watch>

Penang, known as "Pulau Pinang Pulau Mutiara" (Penang Island of Pearls), is a state in northern Malaysia. Acknowledging the inefficiency of the traditional methods of lodging complaints through letters, telephone calls or personal contact, where the complaint might not reach the right person, a group of Penang residents started Penang Watch to make sure that local complaints are effectively settled. Penang Watch encourages residents to submit their complaints, which are in progress with the local authorities or have been given up, through its online channel. The submitted complaints will be first forwarded to the right authorities or individuals; then the people in charge will be reminded of their responsibility to take action. In cases where the complaint is unsolved due to lack of accountability, a "name and shame" approach will be employed to push for complaint settlement. Even though Penang Watch provides several avenues for residents to settle their complaints, with nearly half of the submitted complaints proving successful, slow and limited internet access, together with the lack of public awareness on the need for citizen participation remain as great obstacles. However, Penang Watch's coordinator, Ong Boon Keong, believes that awareness-raising campaigns including public forums, training and successful complaint settlements will demonstrate the success of this method and will ultimately motivate people to become more engaged.

As with Sithi, Preetam Rai suggests Penang Watch link with active netizens who will be able to increase project visibility and to provide online publishing, computer skills, video and photography training to volunteers. Rai also recommends redesigning the complaints section to include a map-based view, which will help highlight the density of problems in different localities of Penang. This will offer the visitors more user-friendly navigation.

Sithi

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/sithi>

Sithi, which means 'rights' in Khmer, is the first Cambodian human rights portal that aims to create a single map-based database of reports of human rights violations with contributions from human rights activists, organizations, and regular citizens from across the country. Registered users can submit reports under a variety of sub-categories including judicial fairness, land tenure, and freedom of expression. The project was initiated by the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) with the aim of raising more awareness about human rights abuses through collaborative advocacy. The project faces a lack of web designers and internet penetration as well as difficulties building trust among NGO partners for the collaborative effort. Regional research reviewer Preetam Rai suggested the project team connect with local bloggers who can assist in the project and spread more awareness. Giving more visible attribution to the NGO partners that participate in collaborative effort can be an incentive for their cooperation. The team should also approach donors to have a strategic fund where NGOs, mostly having common donors, can link to each other on human rights advocacy effort.

The Online Citizen

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/theonlinecitizen>

TheOnlineCitizen (TOC) was founded in December, 2006 as a community aiming to tell stories about Singapore and Singaporeans that are not being told in the mainstream press. Their hope is to use advocacy journalism to stimulate more civic participation, open government, and free media through the use of online activist initiatives. TOC takes on a more critical role than mainstream media by challenging the mindset of policy makers and creating a space for average citizens whose concerns would not be echoed in mainstreamed media. TOC has faced difficulties in registering as a Limited Liability Partnership due to restrictive criteria. They are also still recruiting more committed, contributing writers who are persistent in their reporting. While acknowledging these challenges, Joint-Chief Editor Ravi Philemon optimistically believes that an expansion of civic participation through the use of online tools will allow TOC to continue its mission.

An example of how this site has contributed to offline change is the issue of foreign or migrant workers in Singapore. After a one-week campaign on TOC in 2009, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) took action, raiding various dormitory sites that house these workers in atrocious conditions. Also, the MOM has also been more answerable after these instances were first highlighted by TOC and later by the mainstream media. It is thus recommended that the team stay persistent in their advocacy work by staying engaged with responsible agencies to take action on issues that are raised by citizen reporting. The team is exploring the use of technology to crowdsource ideas from the citizens, modeled on initiatives like Open Austin⁷⁴ and Datagov,⁷⁵ where people are able to submit ideas, comment and build on ideas, and vote ideas up and down. This may help offer visitors more user-friendly navigation of key issues.

VoteReportPH

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/penang-watch>

On May 10, 2010 the Philippines held its 15th presidential election. Only this time it used automated voting machines for the first time ever in a national election. A December 2009 survey by PulseAsia of 1800 Filipino voters found that 61 percent of respondents had little or no knowledge at all about the automated election system (AES). VoteReportPH, a project of the Computer Professionals' Union, came about to inform and educate Filipino voters, mobilize them to advocate for meaningful reforms to ensure more transparency, and report any voting irregularities on election day. VoteReportPH uses an Ushahidi-based platform to urge voters to report electoral fraud and irregularities via SMS, email, Twitter and the website. The project has gained much online popularity and is attracting around 2500 unique hits per month, but it still lacks offline efforts to draw more participation from the grassroots and civil society organizations. A lack of manpower is also challenging for VoteReportPH, which currently relies heavily on volunteers. Political intimidation and a culture of impunity (more than 1000 political activists have been victims of extra judicial killings) may also hinder their efforts to attract broad participation. VoteReportPH, however, optimistically and persistently calls upon the public to stay vigilant on election day to ensure that the Philippines holds a credible election that leads to an accountable government. After the election, VoteReportPH will continue to function as a portal to monitor the performance of elected officials, and to advocate for more participatory governance.

⁷⁴ OpenAustin, <http://openaustin.ideascale.com/>.

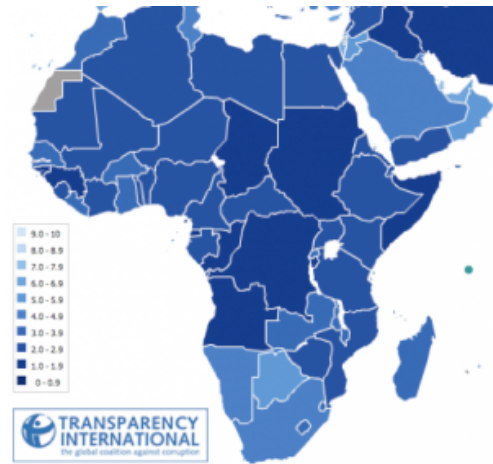
⁷⁵ Evolving Data.gov with You, <http://www.datagov.ideascale.com/>.

Sub-Saharan Africa

by Rebekah Heacock

With the exception of Botswana, Mauritius and Cape Verde, none of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa fall above the midway point of the 2009 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, which measures how citizens perceive the level of government corruption.⁷⁶ In its profile on the region, the organization writes that corruption can “undermin[e] political stability and well as the governments’ capacity to provide effective basic services.... In such a context, corruption levels can mean the difference between life and death.”⁷⁷

Civil society throughout the continent has been pushing for greater public sector transparency, and some governments are beginning to respond. Ghana’s Ministry of Information recently announced the “Ghana Policy Fair 2010,” a showcase of government projects and policies open to public comment.⁷⁸ In Cape Verde, the Núclea Operacional da Sociedade de Informação (NOSI), or Operational Nucleus of the Information Society, makes information on the government’s financial activities accessible to citizens while allowing them to apply for a variety of civil services – birth and marriage certificates, for example – online.⁷⁹ The Portal do Governo da República de Angola performs similar services in Angola.⁸⁰



Civil society has also begun to move its transparency and accountability efforts online. These efforts are supported by a growing tech community in sub-Saharan Africa, though a widespread lack of access to information and communications technology (ICT) and a consequent lack of understanding of and interest in these tools constitute a significant challenge to their success.

How Africans are using technology

Despite low rates of Internet and mobile phone penetration compared to the rest of the world, sub-Saharan Africa is home to a vibrant community of entrepreneurs, web companies and software developers who are responsible for mobile social networking applications, local blog aggregators and

⁷⁶ “Corruptions Perception Index 2009,” Transparency International, http://transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/cpi_2009_table.

⁷⁷ “Corruption Perceptions Index 2009 Regional Highlights: Sub-Saharan Africa,” Transparency International, http://transparency.org/content/download/47603/761859/CPI+2009+Regional+Highlights+Sub-Saharan+Africa+_en.pdf.

⁷⁸ Linda Annan, “Is Ghana’s first-ever Policy Fair a smart move?,” *Global Voices Online*, April 30, 2010, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2010/04/30/is-ghana-s-first-ever-policy-fair-a-smart-move/>.

⁷⁹ Núclea Operacional da Sociedade de Informação, <http://www.nosi.cv/>.

⁸⁰ Portal do Governo da República de Angola, <http://www.governo.gov.ao/>.

much more. Technology incubators like Appfrica Labs⁸¹ in Kampala and iHub⁸² in Nairobi are fostering new developments in this space.

ICT4D

Much of the attention on ICT in Africa has been focused on the use of these tools for economic development, or ICT4D. Mobile banking, which brings financial services to rural and extremely poor customers who lack access to traditional banks, is rapidly spreading throughout the continent. One of the better known examples is Kenya's M-PESA, which in just three years has grown from serving 50,000 customers to serving nearly 6.5 million.⁸³ Question Box, a mobile phone-based tool developed with support from the Grameen Foundation, allows Ugandans to call or message operators who have access to a database full of information on health, agriculture and education – somewhat resembling Google for people without Internet access.⁸⁴ Mobile phones are also being used to help rural health workers diagnose minor illnesses and counsel HIV/AIDS patients.

Ushahidi

It has become nearly impossible to discuss citizen technology efforts in Africa without mentioning Ushahidi, the crowdsourced reporting tool first developed to track post-election violence in Kenya in 2007.⁸⁵ Ushahidi has sparked a wave of election monitoring projects that utilize the tool, both in Africa and in other regions. Sudan Vote Monitor,⁸⁶ which tracked the country's presidential elections in April, is one example. The crowdsourced reporting tool has also been deployed in Togo, and a project is being planned in time for the 2011 elections in Liberia. In addition to election-related projects, Ushahidi has also been deployed to track medical supply shortages in eastern Africa, xenophobic attacks in South Africa, and conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Technical issues

Though Africa's tech community is growing, popular lack of access to ICT is still a major obstacle to the use of technology for government accountability projects. In all but a few African countries, less than ten percent of the population has Internet access.⁸⁷ Mobile phones – some with data services, but most with only simple texting abilities – have fared much better, with penetration rates reaching around 30 percent continent-wide.⁸⁸

This lack of access affects governments as well, which can often be less familiar with emerging technologies than their citizens. The Ghana Policy Fair mentioned above has its own Facebook page, indicating the government's desire to reach out through ICT, but some Ghanaians wish an even greater effort had been made to put information online. One blogger wrote:

⁸¹ Appfrica Blog, <http://appfrica.net/blog/>.

⁸² iHub, <http://www.ihub.co.ke/>.

⁸³ "M-PESA," Safaricom, <http://www.safaricom.co.ke/index.php?id=745>.

⁸⁴ Question Box, <http://questionbox.org/>.

⁸⁵ Ushahidi, <http://ushahidi.com/>.

⁸⁶ Rebekah Heacock, "Sudan Vote Monitor," Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/sudan-vote-monitor>.

⁸⁷ "Africa Internet Usage and Population Statistics Data," Internet World Stats, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm>.

⁸⁸ David Smith, "Africa calling: mobile phone usage sees record rise after huge investment," *The Guardian*, October 22, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2009/oct/22/africa-mobile-phones-usage-rise>.

So they can't simply put all this information onto a website for anyone who is interested to go and look it up? Instead people have to take time and spend lorry fair to attend a policy fair, for some information that will only be available temporarily? What a waste of time.⁸⁹

The lack of government capacity to effectively use ICT is one of the factors that prompted the founders of the Kenyan Budget Tracking Tool to work with various ministries to put budgetary data online in a way that would be useful for citizens.⁹⁰ Philip Thigo, one of the project's co-founders, says the government was more or less willing to make its data accessible – and in fact was attempting to put information online⁹¹ – but that the ministries lacked the necessary technical skills to make their databases easily navigable by average Kenyans. In addition to building a searchable web site, the Budget Tracking Tool also developed a script to handle simple SMS queries, so that anyone with a mobile phone can text in and find out how much money has been allocated for various projects in their area. The system currently gets between 4000 and 4500 queries per month.

Also in Kenya, the founders of community mapping project Map Kibera are attempting to combat low access to technology by moving part of their project offline so they can get community members who are not able to use the Internet involved.⁹² They have decided to print paper copies of the maps they've generated online and hand them out to the community, hoping to spark a discussion. "Paper's cool, so we are going to print posters, several hundred at least, and distribute those to every school, every church, every clinic, every sort of public institution in Kibera so that people can see for themselves what's collected and start to have a particular interest on there which would suggest where this is going," says co-founder Mikel Maron.

Resistance to technology for transparency projects

In some countries, access is also threatened by governments wary of citizens using new communications tools. According to an OpenNet Initiative report on Internet filtering in the region, while many governments are actively attempting to increase ICT penetration, some are blocking online content or monitoring citizens' Internet use.⁹³ The Sudanese government recently blocked election monitoring site Sudan Vote Monitor and YouTube during the country's presidential elections.⁹⁴ In a number of countries, including Ghana, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, Internet service providers and Internet cafés are required to hand over data on customers' online activities to the government if asked. This kind of government intervention may discourage those who might otherwise engage in transparency efforts online.

Resistance may also come from citizens who do not see value in new technologies. Goretta Amuriat, the ICT Program Manager for the Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET), says that when the organization was initially surveying women to see how best to develop ICT initiatives, many women in rural communities were uninterested in using technology, preferring to focus their time and

⁸⁹ Annan, "Ghana's first-ever Policy Fair."

⁹⁰ Heacock, "Budget Tracking Tool."

⁹¹ "Board Disbursements," Constituencies Development Fund, http://www.cdf.go.ke/index.php?option=com_content&task=category§ionid=32&id=106&Itemid=85.

⁹² Heacock, "Map Kibera."

⁹³ Rebekah Heacock, "Internet Filtering in Sub-Saharan Africa," OpenNet Initiative, <http://opennet.net/research/regions/ssafrika>.

⁹⁴ "Sudan reportedly blockes YouTube over electoral fraud video," *Sudan Tribune*, April 22, 2010, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article34836>.

energy on more widely available and accessible tools. Earlier this year, reports on an e-governance program in Southern Sudan revealed that a lack of enthusiasm for technology on the part of government officials led to the program's failure.⁹⁵

Philip Thigo of the Budget Tracking Tool cautions against spending too much time working on neat ICT tools that don't sufficiently engage the community: "I think a thing about technology is uptake. If there's no need then you'll just have a tool that will be wowed, wowed, and then just go dead." To make sure Kenyans would use the tool, Philip and his partner asked citizens and civil society organizations what they needed the most, then developed the tool to meet those needs.

Successes

Despite these challenges, tech for transparency projects in Africa are making an impact. Map Kibera is building partnerships with local organizations focused on water, health, education and safety to use mapping technology to monitor the provision of basic services. Also in Kenya, data mining made possible by the Budget Tracking Tool uncovered a major corruption scandal at the Ministry of Water that led to the firing of a number of public officials involved. WOUGNET has held the Ugandan government accountable to women, successfully working to insert gender-sensitive language into the country's national ICT and development policies. And during this month's presidential elections, Sudan Vote Monitor received hundreds of reports, despite having their site blocked in the country for several days.

One of the most important elements of these projects' success is the involvement of the communities in which they operate. All four have built partnerships with local organizations and consulted civil society groups. WOUGNET regularly conducts surveys of its members, shaping its own initiatives and its advocacy programs in response. Sudan Vote Monitor works with a large network of civil society organizations throughout Sudan. The founders of the Budget Tracking Tool spent time traveling throughout the country asking citizens what kinds of information would be useful to them before returning to Nairobi to develop the technical aspects of the project.

Another key aspect of many of these projects is their willingness to incorporate multiple forms of communication, using the Internet and mobile phones where possible but also extending their outreach to community meetings, radio and printed materials when necessary. WOUGNET circulates a print version of its e-mail newsletter for women who are not able to get online, and Map Kibera has reached out to community members via radio.

What's next?

Aid transparency

A substantial amount of donor money pours into sub-Saharan Africa each year – approximately \$50 billion, in fact – but the effects are difficult to discern, and a growing number of academics and activists are calling for a halt to the flow.⁹⁶ Zambian economist Dambisa Moyo has called foreign aid "an unmitigated political, economic and humanitarian disaster," and Ugandan journalist Andrew Mwenda delivered a talk at TEDGlobal 2007 in which he argued that aid is preventing Africa from

⁹⁵ Rebekah Heacock, "Sudan: Is ICT all it's cracked up to be?," *Global Voices Online*, March 4, 2010, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2010/03/04/sudan-is-ict-all-its-cracked-up-to-be/>.

⁹⁶ Dambisa Moyo, "Why Foreign Aid is Hurting Africa," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 21, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123758895999200083.html>.

developing.⁹⁷ Several aid transparency initiatives are using technology to open aid data to the public, including the International Aid Transparency Initiative, Aid Info, and the Ujima Project, which focuses specifically on Africa.⁹⁸ There may be room for greater partnership between these types of organizations and country-specific projects like Kenya’s Budget Tracking Tool that would help track aid flows from the international level all the way down to local project implementation.

Greater adoption by local populations

The tech for transparency community in sub-Saharan Africa is currently driven by a few strong visionaries, most of whom have outside support. While they have been able to encourage greater government accountability in some cases, their projects are still often underutilized. Earlier in this report, David Sasaki writes that the Budget Tracking Tool presents Kenyan budgetary data online, “where users can leave comments about the progress, impact, and efficiency of the projects. (So far, few have.)” Sudan Vote Monitor received a considerable amount of attention from both the international media and the Sudanese government during April’s elections, but only a few hundred reports (an estimated 16 million people were registered to vote). A large part of this lack of adoption is the technical difficulties noted above, but in many African countries transparency activists must work hard to convince citizens that pushing for government accountability is more important than other development issues. Mikel Maron says of Kibera: “It’s very much a day to day place, people are concerned with getting dinner tonight, and when you’re working on a project which requires a long term individual commitment without immediate rewards, well that’s understandably counter to the usual way of thinking.”⁹⁹ As both technology and economic development spread in Africa, this may change, but for now, it is still something transparency activists must consider.

Keep an eye on the tech community

Many of Africa’s tech for transparency projects so far have grown out of the tech side of things. Building technological skills in Africa is good in many ways: it helps the economy, fosters innovation, and ensures that when the need for an election monitoring project or the idea to track a country’s budget arises, there is a substantial group of developers who can support the project. If stronger connections between existing civil society groups and talented techies can be built, I believe we’ll see more widespread use of technology to advocate for better governance.

⁹⁷ Andrew Mwenda, “Andrew Mwenda takes a new look at Africa,” *TED.com*, June 2007, http://www.ted.com/talks/andrew_mwenda_takes_a_new_look_at_africa.html.

⁹⁸ <http://ujima-project.org/>

⁹⁹ Heacock, “Map Kibera.”

Sub-Saharan Africa

by Victor Kaonga

The advent of multiparty democracy in much of Sub Saharan Africa during the 1990s brought with it many developments, some of which have led to an opening for more civic participation in governance. Modeled on the basic tenets of democracy, there was a parallel growth in the number of civil society organizations calling for greater transparency and accountability from government officials. For the first time ever, citizens began to understand that they can make demands of their elected public servants. For instance, in Zambia, South Africa, Malawi, Kenya and other countries, people realized another measure of freedom by voting for officials into parliaments and municipal councils.

It appears, therefore, that the era of multiparty democracy ignited the people's desire to start demanding transparency and accountability from those they elect. The transparency movement in those years utilized several platforms at the national and local levels, including the traditional media. But with the coming of and growing access to ICT, they extended their use to such tools as the Internet and mobile phones.

It is interesting to note that generally most transparency projects stem from the civil society, as they traditionally assume the role of a watchdog. Some are global while others are localized. Transparency International, Amnesty International and advocacy and lobbying groups have tended to be in the lead in undertaking projects that call for government transparency and accountability. With new media tools on the rise, people in sub-Saharan Africa started turning to the web 2.0 tools in the early 2000s to put pressure on their government. For instance in 2001, Kubatana.net in Zimbabwe started in a humble manner to connect non-governmental organizations using their email directory and mailing list. In 2003, Malawi's Sustainable Development Networking Project (SDNP) began as an ISP that mostly provided services to the Malawian government of Malawi, but also ran a conversational forum for civil society organizations.

The use of portals and blogs, however, did not begin to take off in Sub-Saharan Africa until mid-2005.

Obstacles to the use of technology in the transparency movement

It should be understood that there are multiple challenges in the region facing technology for transparency projects. Among these are: poor Internet infrastructure,¹⁰⁰ technophobia, high connection and connectivity costs, the lack of ICT policy in some countries, inadequate knowledge and ICT personnel. These challenges characterize most of the new media situations in Sub Saharan Africa. A project called Ujima that attempts to bring transparency to the workings and spending of African governments, multinational non-governmental organizations and business enterprise in African countries says that "few African countries have freedom of information laws. Getting at this information from inside the countries can be difficult."¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Victor Kaonga, "The Internet as a Journalistic Tool: Analysing the Use of Internet in Malawi's Radio Stations," Örebro University, <http://www.magj.se/pdf/Victor%20Kaonga.pdf>.

¹⁰¹ Ujima Project, "About," <http://ujima-project.org/about/>.

The Africa i-Parliament Action Plan points out there is a lack of economic and technical resources across the continent. “Many parliaments have a weak IT department, and they do not have the capacity to design and manage the deployment of a complex parliamentary system. Most parliaments are using old systems that are the results of layers of development that are hard to maintain in isolation.”¹⁰²

In addition to the above, there is a lack of funding and well-trained personnel to creatively keep the transparency battle afloat. Policies and government structures are changing quickly and activists need to adjust accordingly with foresight in order to introduce more transparency and accountability into the system. A visit to several websites run by civil society organizations involved in transparency, civic engagement and election issues reveals frequent lapses in updating the content of the sites, which is linked to inadequate funds and the shortage of personnel.

Why transparency projects?

Transparency initiatives have borne fruit at various levels. For instance in Zimbabwe non-governmental organizations put pressure on the government to explain the use of the money that is collected at newly established toll booths. Bev Clark of Kubatana.net explains they put an activist message in one of “the newsletters and asked where the money is going. The conditions of the roads in Bulawayo, Mutare, and Harare are very poor. We put this note in the newsletter to get people to think about and we asked the people to write Transparency International Zimbabwe to do something about it. Our membership rallied, mobilized and Transparency International Zimbabwe investigated and did something about it.”¹⁰³ However, while a network of activists connected through a mailing list did mobilize to convince Transparency International Zimbabwe to investigate the use of the toll revenue, we have not been informed that the Zimbabwean government responded to the investigation, or if any instances of corruption were uncovered. Still, it is worth noting that the issue was made more visible through the use of networked communication. We recommend that future researchers follow up to measure the long-term efficacy of these efforts.

In South Africa, Kenya, Ghana and Mozambique, activists have used blogs and web portals to communicate and campaign for fair and free elections. One would imagine that their constant publishing of information related to the elections that would otherwise not have been made public put pressure on political parties, candidates and election officials to ensure credibility and transparency on voting day. Unfortunately, there are too many variables to measure in any scientific way the impact of such information portals on election credibility. We posit that to publish information about elections and electoral processes in developing democracies is better than to not publish that information, but we also recognize that such projects are limited by internet penetration, which still hovers around 5 percent in many sub-Saharan African countries, though that number is now increasing rapidly.

Following the successes and recognition of early projects, more sub-Saharan Africans are demanding information through modern technologies. Higher and increasing internet penetration along with mobile phone networks enable access to civic participation for citizens who would otherwise not have access to transparency platforms.

¹⁰² Africa i-Parliaments, <http://www.parliaments.info/>.

¹⁰³ Victor Kaonga, “Kubatana.net,” Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/kubatananet>.

Traditional media companies in Africa have not shown consistency in reporting on transparency issues. Being in business, there is a tendency for most media outlets to hit and run to another story, without following up on corruption-related stories. Technology for transparency projects tend to be more focused on reform and participation in governance, which over time is likely to lead to established credibility as a force against corruption and for improved governance. With specific reference to the projects I reviewed, it seems likely that they will still be around in the next three or more years. This is because they seem to have so far established a profile of success that makes them attractive for funding. However it is the creativity of their approach that might need adjustment in order to take a multi-pronged approach to effectively achieving transparency.

For instance elected officials easily attack or hit back at civil society organizations that seem to give them a tough time. In spite of claiming to be democratic societies, some governments even enact laws that would bar greater involvement of civil society in transparency initiatives and government reform.

It should be pointed out that the African Elections Project¹⁰⁴ and Bungeni¹⁰⁵ are unique in that both use creative tools to document and support the electoral and parliamentary systems. The projects have a continent-wide approach to level the playing field for the election stakeholders and the involvement and transparency of members of parliament.

Transparency projects and traditional anti-corruption organizations

There appears to be a fight for visibility to secure an organization's survival. NGOs are known to compete for visibility, and hence collaborative efforts are often superficial. If technology for transparency projects are to have a reaching impact in the region, then they need to introduce themselves to well-established networks of like-minded organizations and indicate what gaps they are able to fill in the larger fight against corruption, and for transparency, accountability and civic participation.

The needs

The reviewed projects have revealed a couple of needs in sub Saharan Africa. These include:

1. The need for a well-established ICT infrastructure.
2. The desire to see more freedom of expression for both citizens and the media. It is clear from the reviewed cases that that some projects do not yet have the ideal environment to operate for fear of government reprisal.
3. It is also clear that while a good number of NGOs are pushing for the use of technology in their advocacy for transparency, there are a good number of government departments and agencies – as well as individual officials – who do not yet appreciate the role of ICT in development, let alone in engaging citizens for the good of democracies in the region.
4. Finally, the projects I reviewed have also revealed that there is a potential for their greater impact. I see civil society organizations hungering for more knowledge and skills to utilize the tools. They are aware of the tremendous benefits of networked communications in civil society,

¹⁰⁴ African Elections Project, <http://www.africanelections.org/>.

¹⁰⁵ Bungeni, <http://www.bungeni.org/>.

but do not have access to the skills, funding, or infrastructure to take advantage of those benefits.

Recommendations to project leaders, funders and governments

Technology for transparency projects stand to benefit more Africans. However for this to be realized, it is necessary that the project leaders do more promotion of their projects and aggressively and collectively lobby their governments to provide a safe working environment. The project leaders also need to be more creative in reaching out to illiterate people in rural areas. For funders, they should consider more funding towards personnel, operating costs, and technical training. It is often the case that funders give less attention to operating costs that would enable the project to work toward sustainability. The biggest assignment for most countries lies with their governments. Elected officials should deliberately introduce policies friendly to the implementation of technology for transparency projects, especially the publication of open government data and the passage of freedom of information laws. This includes the creation of a safe working environment for watchdog groups that demand more transparency and accountability from governments than officials themselves may be comfortable with. Such organizations at least have the basic right to advocate for the policies they believe in.

Sub-Saharan Africa Case Studies

African Elections Project

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/african-elections-project>

The African Elections Project is a country-specific platform that aids the capacity of the media in ICT in order for them to use it as a tool for election coverage and the provision of elections information and knowledge. It first operated in 2008 in Ghana, followed later by Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea in 2009. By March 2010, it has run this project in ten countries including Malawi, Namibia, Botswana, Niger, Guinea, Mozambique, Mauritania and Togo.

It focuses on technology training for senior editors, journalists and reporters. They are also developing an election guide for journalists and civil society organizations and a mobile application to encourage citizens to engage in election monitoring.

A country-specific election portal aggregates election-related news articles, blog posts, photographs, events, and op-eds. Some of the countries, such as Ghana, also have detailed information about the candidates and political parties.

Budget Tracking Tool

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/budget-tracking-tool>

Despite extensive development assistance, the number of Kenyans who are classified as poor grew from 29 percent in the 1970s to almost 60 percent in 2000. Philip Thigo, who co-heads the Budget Tracking Tool, finds this unacceptable. "Democratic governance is important, but economic governance is really at the center of it," he believes. This conviction led Thigo and partner John Kipchumbah to create a system that enables Kenyan citizens to examine the national development budget in detail, holding their elected officials accountable for the development projects they've promised.

The Budget Tracking Tool focuses specifically on the Constituencies Development Fund, through which Kenyan Members of Parliament allocate money for various projects. Thigo explains, "that amount of money is supposed to be spent in a democratic manner, meaning that the constituents or the communities have to be consulted." The Budget Tracking Tool provides information on how much money has been allocated and for which projects, allowing Kenyans to see whether Members of Parliament are following through on their promises.

Bungeni Parliamentary and Legislative Information System

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/bungeni-parliamentary-and-legislative-information-system>

The Africa i-Parliament Action Plan is an Africa-wide project of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs implemented to empower African Parliaments to better fulfill their democratic functions by supporting their efforts to become open, participatory, knowledge-based and learning organizations. In fulfilling this mandate the project focuses on the following initiatives:

1. Bungeni is a Parliamentary and Legislative Information System that aims at making Parliaments more open and accessible to citizens, virtually allowing them "inside Parliament" ("bungeni" is the

Kiswahili word for “inside Parliament”). It is based on open standards and open source applications that aim to provide solutions for drafting, managing, consolidating and publishing legislative and other parliamentary documents.

2. Africa Parliamentary Knowledge Network (APKN) is based on the founding principles of the Pan African Parliament (PAP) and the African Union, which underline the need for better coordination and collaboration among African Parliaments to meet the multiple challenges posed by economic and social integration and the need to harmonize legislation in member countries.

3. Akoma Ntoso XML Schema develops and promotes the adoption of a specific data format for parliamentary, legislative and judiciary documents. Akoma Ntoso, “linked hearts” in the language of the Akan people of West Africa, is a set of common XML standards that allows users to exchange and reuse parliamentary, legislative and judiciary documents more efficiently. Akoma Ntoso is a set of simple, technology-neutral XML machine-readable descriptions of official documents such as legislation, debate records, minutes, etc. that permits the addition of descriptive structure (markup) to the content of parliamentary and legislative documents. Akoma Ntoso XML schema make accessible the structure and semantic components of digital documents supporting the creation of high value information services to deliver the power of ICT to support efficiency and accountability in the parliamentary, legislative and judiciary contexts.

Kubatana.net

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/kubatananet>

Kubatana.net was established in 2001 in Zimbabwe to aggregate and publish material coming from civil society to be shared widely. It was intended to be a one-stop shop for information about social change. Founders Bev Clark and Brenda Burell believed that electronic communication was the ideal mechanism to fill the information gaps within civil society and activism in Zimbabwe.

The website archives over 15,800 documents about Zimbabwean civil society. It has an electronic network of over 250 NGOs and civil society organizations. Each Kubatana partner has what they call a “fact sheet” in the online directory. The project has given many NGOs an Internet presence without them having to spend resources on a fully-fledged web site. Being involved lessens one’s feeling of despair while helping Kubatana to stay inspired.

Map Kibera

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/map-kibera>

Kibera, a slum in Nairobi, Kenya, has its roots in the first World War. As Kenyan soldiers returned from fighting on behalf of the British, the colonial government gave them land outside of the city center. After Kenya’s independence in 1963, new land policies made Kibera into an illegal settlement. Despite this, the area has continued to grow. It now houses as many as 1.2 million people and is widely considered to be one of Africa’s largest slums.

The community has received considerable attention from UN agencies, non-governmental organizations and even movie stars: the 2005 film *The Constant Gardener* was filmed on location in Kibera. Despite this attention, however, information about the area remains relatively difficult for local residents to access. Data collected by aid organizations is rarely shared with the community, and until recently, Kibera was largely a “blank spot on the Kenyan map.”

In the spring of 2009, while attending a barcamp in Nairobi, digital mapping expert Mikel Maron decided to train a group of volunteers in Kibera to map their own community. The goal of the resulting project, Map Kibera, is to "provide open-source data that will help illustrate the living conditions in Kibera." All of the data collected is free and publicly accessible as part of the OpenStreetMap, a map of the world that anyone can edit.

In addition to putting Kibera on the map, Maron and co-founder Erica Hagen want to surround this data with local stories. Map Kibera helps members of the community use video, blogs and other social media to "tell their stories and advocate for their positions in a strong way." Many of these stories are recorded at Voice of Kibera, a site based on crowdsourcing tool Ushahidi that allows local residents to share their thoughts on everything from the Kenyan system of government to the history of Kibera.

Mzalendo

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/mzalendo>

Mzalendo means "patriot" in Swahili. The project began at the end of 2005 with the mission to "keep an eye on the Kenyan Parliament." Co-founder Ory Okolloh explains that the idea for the project came about after the website for Kenya's Parliament was shut down following protests by some MPs who were embarrassed about their CVs being published online. The initial goal of Mzalendo, then, was to provide the basic information that otherwise would have been available on the official parliamentary website. Kenya's parliament website is now back online - and much improved since its former 2005 incarnation - but Ory and Mark feel that they still have an important role to play in using online tools to hold Kenyan MPs more accountable.

"Beyond providing some level of scrutiny of Kenyan MPs," Ory writes, "we built Mzalendo to demonstrate that there is only so much bemoaning you can do about your representation." Rather, Mzalendo hopes to convince Kenyans - especially young, tech-savvy Kenyans - to engage with their MPs and current legislation. Unlike the profile pages of the official parliamentary website, Mzalendo allows users to leave comments on the profile page of each MP. (Though Ory notes that moderating comments and safeguarding against impersonation can be a time-consuming task.)

There was a sense of optimism around Mzalendo's ability to provide voters with pertinent information about their MPs in the run-up to the 2007 Kenyan general election. Several political aspirants made themselves available for interviews and discussions on the website and some online discussions which took place on the constituency profile pages turned into offline meetings focused on better policy and governance. That optimism, however, quickly turned into frustration when the contested presidential election between Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga led to violence throughout much of the country. An estimated 800 – 1,500 Kenyans were killed and around 200,000 were displaced from their homes. It also led to a period of reduced activity on the website. Co-founders Ory and Mark each grew busy with other projects and Mzalendo remained essentially inactive throughout 2009. Now, with a small amount of seed funding from Omidyar Network, they are preparing to rebuild the website, enable mobile participation, and hire content producers to follow up on investigative stories related to corruption and the performance of MPs. Ory hopes that by the 2012 general election Mzalendo will have enough content to produce voter cheat sheets which rank incumbents by their participation and performance in parliament. "It's one thing to tell people to make informed decisions," she says, "but that's difficult when there is no information."

Women of Uganda Network

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/women-uganda-network>

WOUGNET's work focuses on three main programs: information sharing and networking, technical support, and gender and ICT policy advocacy. Through its web site, online discussion groups and workshops, WOUGNET works to help women who are already involved in sustainable development efforts and small businesses use technology to further their own goals. In 2009, the organization launched a Uganda branch of the international Take Back the Tech campaign, which encourages women to use ICT to raise awareness of violence against women. WOUGNET has also been involved in the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence program, using mobile phones to spread messages against gender-based violence (GBV). WOUGNET is also exploring greater use of ICT to combat violence against women, including mobile phone reporting of incidents of GBV.

"My greatest aspiration has been to see that women are living good lives and empowered to solve their own problems," says Amuriat. Through the initiatives above and several other programs, WOUGNET helps women use ICT to work on issues that matter to them while holding Uganda's government accountable to the country's female citizens.

Sudan Vote Monitor

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/sudan-vote-monitor>

Sudan held its first multiparty elections in over two decades on April 11-13, 2010. The run-up to the elections was been rocky: the elections, originally scheduled to be held in March and April 2009, have been delayed multiple times, and most opposition parties boycotting the elections, fearing possible vote rigging.

"There is a lot that's riding on this," says Fareed Zein, head of the citizen election monitoring project Sudan Vote Monitor. In addition to testing the country's democratic process, the election also serves as an indicator of how peacefully a referendum on independence for Southern Sudan, scheduled for January 2011, might run. April's election is "going to determine the future of the country as a single country," Zein believes.

Zein, head of the technology committee at the Sudan Institute for Research and Policy, began searching for ways to use technology to contribute to the country's development last fall. When he came across Ushahidi, he decided to use the tool to build a system where Sudanese citizens can report anomalies — violence, voter harassment, vote tampering, illegal campaigning — as well as what goes well in the elections.

South Asia

by Namita Singh

He's permitted to go into the antechamber. It has doors which lead on farther, barriers which can be passed, if one has the courage. For me even this antechamber is utterly inaccessible.

FRANZ KAFKA, THE CASTLE

South Asia is one of the world's most populated areas. It has faced several military coups, dictatorship, civil wars, monarchies, and has had a long colonial history. The whole of the South Asian region has had a tumultuous history, and the frustration of its citizens with the 'system' has only increased over the years. Its systems of governance have been shaped by its turbulent political past, and for many in the transparency movement, Kafka's statement is not far off. There has always been a hide-and-seek relationship between information sought and information provided, with citizens often left in the labyrinth of bureaucracy and outdated processes.

Several dimensions affect the current context. First, the region has seen strong people's movements, public protests and social campaigns taken up by citizens to hold their governments accountable. For instance, the Right to Information movement¹⁰⁶ in India led to the passage of the Right to Information Act in October 2005.¹⁰⁷ There have been efforts by some governments themselves to make information publicly accessible. The Bangladesh Government set up a series of websites in 2003 to enable a more consistent information flow from government agencies to citizens.¹⁰⁸ Civil society has also been active in facilitating citizen information and demanding that governments be held more accountable. For instance, the Democratic and Election Alliance Nepal is dedicated to spreading citizen awareness about democratic rights and monitoring elections with on-the-ground observers.¹⁰⁹

Rhetoric and reality

South Asia is experiencing major changes with several challenges, successes and, understandably, failures. There are the promises of a Digital Bangladesh,¹¹⁰ and then, there are the efforts to impose Internet censorship in Pakistan.¹¹¹

ICT has become a buzzword in South Asia in policy debates, newspaper op-eds and government circles. In India and Bangladesh, governments have placed special emphasis on ICT. In fact, Bangladesh's Vision 2021 envisages a "Digital Bangladesh" with a strong focus on participation,

¹⁰⁶ National Campaign for People's Right to Information, <http://www.righttoinformation.info/index.htm>.

¹⁰⁷ Right to Information, <http://righttoinformation.gov.in/>.

¹⁰⁸ Moshtag Ahmen, "Publishing Bangladesh Government Information via the Web," eTransparency Case Study, <http://www.egov4dev.org/transparency/case/banglaweb.shtml>.

¹⁰⁹ Democracy and Election Alliance Nepal, <http://www.deannepal.org/dean/>.

¹¹⁰ Delwar Hussain, "Digital Bangladesh: virtual dreams, real lives," *openDemocracy*, May 8, 2009, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/digital-bangladesh-virtual-dreams-real-lives>.

¹¹¹ Teeth Maestro, "World Day Against Cyber Censorship in Pakistan," *Teeth Maestro*, March 12, 2010, <http://teeth.com.pk/blog/2010/03/12/world-day-against-cyber-censorship>.

transparency and accountability.¹¹² The government of India came up with a national e-governance plan in 2003.¹¹³ Pakistan's government set up a National ICT R&D fund in 2007.¹¹⁴ Such initiatives reveal a trend among South Asian governments to place an emphasis on technology.

The other part of the Technology for Transparency movement is transparency, which is a highly contested sphere in South Asia. A quick glance at the political history of South Asia reveals that democracy has not been stable in most countries in the region.¹¹⁵ In fact, India and Sri Lanka happen to be the only countries with a stale track record of democracy since independence, and even India has resorted to emergency rule,¹¹⁶ while some Sri Lankan activists claim to live in a pseudo-democracy.¹¹⁷ The political history of South Asia has been peppered with coups, like those in Pakistan, Maldives and Bangladesh. Sri Lanka's past has been marred with conflict, and in Bhutan a ban on the Internet was lifted in 1999 and parliamentary elections took place for the first time in 2008.

The government is an abstract entity for most people, especially in the rural areas. This entity holds a power that most people find impossible to fathom and challenge. The ethos of self-governance or good governance has been missing. This feeling was expressed in almost all the case studies, especially with Kiirti.¹¹⁸

South Asia's long colonial history followed by a hotly contested political space has affected how the region's transparency movement has taken shape. The movement in South Asia started roughly at the turn of the century, when the use of the Internet increased significantly. Undoubtedly, the spread of technology not only provided the citizens with tools, but also the impetus to pressure their governments to become more transparent and accountable. The beginnings of the movement can be traced to blogs, which started as personal online diaries, but increasingly informed opinions and affected the news agenda. Today, there are several more methodical initiatives that are developing new tools, connecting citizens to government agencies, mobilizing communities, organizing action and more.

Successes

As the case studies will demonstrate, a strong technology for transparency movement has started in these countries in spite of – or because of – their political conditions. The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence in Sri Lanka is an illustrative example.¹¹⁹ In Pakistan, the Don't Block the Blog

¹¹² Bangladesh Vision 2021, http://www.cpd-bangladesh.org/Policy%20Brief/sub%20folders/downloads/Vision_2021_English.pdf.

¹¹³ Dhrupad Mathur, Piyush Gupta and A. Sridevi, "e-Governance approach in India – The National e-Governance Plan (NeGP)," in *Transforming Government: eGovernment Initiatives in India*, ed. R. K. Bagga and Piyush Gupta (Hyderabad: ICFAI University Press, 2009), http://www.nisg.org/knowledgecenter_docs/A01000001.pdf.

¹¹⁴ National ICT R&D Fund, <http://www.ictrdf.org.pk/>.

¹¹⁵ Democracy Asia, <http://www.democracy-asia.org/>.

¹¹⁶ Wikipedia contributors, "The Emergency (India)," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Emergency_%28India%29.

¹¹⁷ Concerned Citizen, "A pseudo democracy in Sri Lanka," *groundviews*, April 10, 2010, <http://www.groundviews.org/2010/04/10/a-pseudo-democracy-in-sri-lanka/>.

¹¹⁸ Singh, "Kiirti."

¹¹⁹ Namita Singh, "Centre for Monitoring Election Violence," Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/centre-monitoring-election-violence>.

movement fights against government censorship to create an atmosphere where free speech and government reform activists can operate without fears of reprisal.¹²⁰ For Sanjana Hattotuwa of the Center for Policy Alternatives, election-related violence in Sri Lanka highlights the reason to work for greater transparency and accountability.¹²¹ The Center's maps of electoral fraud and violence spread more awareness about the need to ensure safer elections for democracy in Sri Lanka to remain credible.

South Asian technologists have developed new tools to facilitate interactions between citizens and their governments. Kiirti is one example of a layer between citizens with complaints and civil society organizations. "Though a first glance it appears to add another layer to the system already in place and may seem like a 'less than ideal' approach," writes Aparna Ray in her review of the case study, "citizens may actually welcome this buffer which facilitates engagement and gives visibility, weight to their complaints and issues/cause(s)."¹²²

Civil society organizations that have worked in similar areas before without using online technologies are now beginning to realize the potential of online tools. For instance, iJanaagraha was founded on the experiences and conclusions of the online campaign Jaago Re! by its more traditional parent organization Janaagraha.¹²³ The Center for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) in Sri Lanka began in 1997 but only went online two years back.¹²⁴

Early responses by governments in the region to these projects are encouraging. "We have received tremendous support from the Election Commission of India," says Velu Shankar of iJanaagraha, for example.¹²⁵ In fact, governments themselves have started several e-governance projects in India and Bangladesh to encourage civic participation and to make information available online.

A closer look: citizens and their participation

Technology has certainly provided an impetus to the transparency movement and a powerful tool to citizen participants. From the initial stages of blogging by just a few individuals about issues, it has matured to more concerted and organized efforts. These projects are now able to provide information that has never before been accessible to citizens. The effort by Mumbai Votes to provide a "Promise Vs Performance Analysis," for example, is the kind of information a voter would need to make an informed decision, but it was previously never available. CMEV mapped out election violence while naming and shaming the perpetrators openly so that citizens could discover the information in a clear, visual way. Praja provides information on Members of the Legislative Assembly, MPs, corporations, and complaints that have been filed in local wards on civic issues. It also has a forum to help citizens establish a dialogue with their local representatives and follow up.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ Don't Block the Blog, <http://dbtb.org/>.

¹²¹ Center for Policy Alternatives, <http://www.cpalanka.org/>.

¹²² Aparna Ray, "Facilitating citizen-authorities engagement: interesting effort," comment on "Kiirti," Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/kiirti#comment-71>.

¹²³ Namita Singh, "iJanaagraha," Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/ijanaagraha>.

¹²⁴ Singh, "Centre for Monitoring Election Violence."

¹²⁵ Singh, "iJanaagraha."

¹²⁶ Praja, <http://www.praja.org/>.

Vote Report India asked citizens to send reports on election through SMS, emails, photos and videos. The citizens did what conventional journalists do – report.¹²⁷ This was an instance of citizen journalism and for the first time citizens had the opportunity to collaborate in monitoring the election themselves. However, we also recognize that the first implementation of Vote Report India only attracted the participation of a core group of volunteers. Wider participation in future years will depend on forming more partnerships with civil society organizations – as Cuidemos el Voto has done in Puebla, Mexico¹²⁸ – and organizing voter education workshops, as VoteReportPH has done in the Philippines.¹²⁹

On the ground: the impacts

The question still remains whether these efforts are bringing about any substantial changes and if they are able to point to greater accountability and increased transparency as a result of their work. Gaurav Mishra of Vote Report India has noted that widespread voter registration campaigns and transparency initiatives did not increase the voter turnout in the previous election, though the project did manage to lay “a foundation in engaging India’s urban middle-class youth in serious civic issues.”¹³⁰ He also mentions that perhaps the project wasn’t able to reach out to the people who actually experienced problems while voting. He points out that technology has its limitations in monitoring elections. Sanjana Hattotuwa, from CMEV, has a similar view: “...these exercises alone, including my own, have little chance of really strengthening democracy. Technology alone then is no guarantee of cleaner elections. But technology can be part of the solution.”¹³¹

From Kiirti’s perspective, the project has in fact held the government more accountable. Civic issues that took months to get resolved or were never really expected to be, were suddenly resolved overnight in a few cases. According to Kiirti’s founder Selvam, “...it was a dramatic incident – it made a big difference in the mindset of the people – that there’s an easy way for them to report, and then to effect a change.”¹³²

As the initiatives experiment with technology and assess their own impact, they are also learning in the process. For instance, Jasmine Shah of the ‘Jaago Re!’ campaign said in an interview that they realized some people couldn’t follow the online process of voter registration very well, and they were therefore thinking about enabling voter registration via mobile phone.¹³³

Challenges

¹²⁷ Gaurav Mishra, posts tagged with Vote Report India, *Gauravonomics*, <http://www.gauravonomics.com/blog/tag/vote-report-india/>.

¹²⁸ Puebla, Cuidemos el Voto, <http://puebla.cuidemoselvoto.org/>.

¹²⁹ VoteReportPH, <http://votereportph.org/>.

¹³⁰ Gaurav Mishra, “Why Have Voter Registration Campaigns Not Increased Voter Turnout in the 2009 Indian Lok Sabha Elections?,” *Gauravonomics*, May 2, 2009, <http://www.gauravonomics.com/blog/why-have-voter-registration-campaigns-not-increased-voter-turnout-in-mumbai/>.

¹³¹ Sanjana Hattotuwa, “Mapping violence during elections and voter education,” *ICT for Peacebuilding*, April 25, 2009, <http://ict4peace.wordpress.com/2009/04/25/mapping-violence-during-elections-and-voter-education/>.

¹³² Singh, “Kiirti.”

¹³³ R. Aarathi, “Jaago Re! Voter registration programme has 3.94 lakh registered users,” *The Times of India*, March 4, 2009, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bangalore/Jaago-Re-Voter-registration-programme-has-394-lakh-registered-users/articleshow/4225263.cms>.

In most South Asian countries there are two major challenges to the use of technology for transparency. One is access to the Internet. In 2008 the World Bank estimated that only 5 percent of Indians were Internet users.¹³⁴ Internet use is heavily skewed toward urban centers, and is often not available in rural areas where there might not be electricity. Inaccessibility of the overwhelming majority of the population to technology poses a barrier to technology for transparency projects that rely on internet access.

In spite of this, the existing projects have managed to make a considerable amount of offline impact given the circumstances. In fact, most of them have focused on offline impact. Kiirti, for example, maintains that its measure of success depends on the number of issues reported by the citizens compared to those that actually get resolved. It also believes this offline impact will slowly increase their user base as people begin to realize their ability to effect real change.

Second is the political situation itself. The extreme conditions in many countries do not allow citizens to either use technology freely or to openly question the government. Hence, some citizens who want to initiate or participate in certain kinds of projects might be held back. “Electoral reforms... have not taken place in Sri Lanka (and is an obstacle in our work),” says Sanjana Hattotuwa of the Center for Policy Alternatives.

Direct communication with government agencies and officials varies widely from project to project. CMEV’s election violence monitoring reports are consulted seriously by the government and have even led to new elections. Velu from iJanaagraha said that they lobby local governments to create more representative urban, self-governance systems. During the Jaago Re! campaign, they were in constant touch with the Election Commission of India.

Kiirti decided to stay away from issues related to serious corruption, unless they find the right, experienced NGO that is already working on the issue to partner with. Vivek Gilani of Mumbai Votes mentions that the political establishment still sees the transparency movement as a threat instead of an opportunity to showcase their achievements.

Conclusions and recommendations

Mumbai Votes, Kiirti, the Center for Monitoring Election Violence and iJanaagraha are only a few case studies from the South Asia region. There are many more initiatives that are providing momentum to the technology for transparency movement. The number of bloggers is increasing, more people are raising civic and electoral issues through online platforms, and new online projects are developing to mobilize people to start taking collective action. It is apparent that the voice is getting louder and clearer.

There is a huge emphasis on voting and elections in most of the South Asian countries. All the South Asian countries are comparatively young democracies, and these efforts are clearly to help them evolve into mature ones, where there is increased civic participation, political representation, political accountability and transparency in the way that government functions.

The importance of maps in technology for transparency projects is also evident. Kiirti provides multiple instances of Ushahidi on a single platform. CMEV is looking at using tools like Ushahidi

¹³⁴ “Internet users: India,” Google Public Data, http://www.google.com/publicdata?ds=wb-wdi&met=it_net_user&idim=country:IND&dl=en&hl=en&q=internet+penetration+in+india.

and FrontlineSMS in the near future for better monitoring. iJanaagraha feels that interactive maps are effective ways to visualize information.

Most of the initiatives are by citizens themselves or by the civil society organizations. This shows an increased awareness and involvement by citizens in governance issues in South Asia. The technology for transparency movement in South Asia is only in its infancy, but there is a clear momentum to take it further. There will be a definitive increase in such initiatives as technology – and access to it – spreads. But to encourage more participation and to create a greater offline impact these initiatives should hold more offline events with citizens and government officials to agree on how government agencies should respond to online governance-related activities by the citizens they represent.

South Asia Case Studies

Centre for Monitoring Election Violence

<http://cmev.wordpress.com>

Sanjana Hattotuwa is a senior researcher at the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), an organization that was one of the founding members – along with Free Media Movement (FMM) and Coalition Against Political Violence (CAPV) – of the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) in Sri Lanka in 1997. CMEV has since become the country’s leading organization in reporting about election-related violence and voting irregularities Sri Lanka.

In Hattotuwa’s words, the organization’s approach has been to gather information from ground zero, cross-verify, and “name and shame” candidates and political parties involved in any kind of malpractice, including violence, by publishing detailed information to help voters make informed decisions. CMEV works around the clock during election time, constantly verifying and publishing reports as they are submitted. They use a combination of maps, audio podcasts and blog posts to stimulate debate and inspire public interest while archiving information for further use in research and review.

iJanaagraha

<http://www.ijanaagraha.org>

Velu Shankar is the coordinator of iJanaagraha, an online platform that promotes the “spirit of volunteerism” for citizen engagement through information, training workshops and the building of citizen-government relationships while keeping an eye on direct accountability.

Some of the notable endeavors of the organization are the three Janaagraha programs – the Community Leadership Programme, Bala Janaagraha and Yuva Janaagraha – that work to promote citizen participation in governance. It also has a public-private urban initiative to bring about regional initiatives such as JnNURM (Jawaharlal Nehru, Urban Renewal Mission) and Jaagore, an online voter information and registration system with over 600,000 registrants since its inception.

Kiirti

<http://www.kiirti.org/>

Kiirti is a platform where any individual or civil society organization can make a complaint or raise an issue by telephone or by using the website. That issue is then tracked, categorized, mapped and forwarded on to authorities. The issues can range from cleanliness to environment to sexual harassment. Kiirti enables aggregation of several issues in a single place so that they can be tracked and collaborated upon by anyone interested.

Kiirti uses the Ushahidi platform to aggregate and visualize submitted reports. Kiirti also maps and aggregates partner organizations that deal with civic complaints on the local level throughout India. It is a way to aggregate and integrate data from across platforms onto a single map that users can filter by location and topic.

The core philosophy of the platform is to enable awareness of all the processes and the data of what’s going on in government. That encourages people to ask questions and to demand

transparency and accountability. It serves as a bridge between citizens with complaints and questions and public officials who are responsible for addressing related issues. Each complaint is routed to the right department.

Mumbai Votes

<http://mumbaivotes.com/>

Democracies, no matter what their size, need to strive to be better and more successful. From India to anywhere else in the world, the philosophy and framework must aspire toward just that. Holding our elected representatives accountable is the only way to usher an era of good governance.

As Vivek Gilani, the founder of Mumbai Votes puts it: “When I was eligible to vote for the first time in my life, I became palpably aware of the fact that my nation, starting with my family and city, were riddled with this problem of blind voting! I saw people I respected around me, people I thought were intelligent, my role models – my parents, teachers, etc. – were casting their most important vote, their most fundamental right in engaging with democracy, in an atmosphere of blindness and lack of information. There was voting happening on the basis of perception, opinion, gossip and crude parameters, such as personal charisma! It became very clear that all the deficiencies and maladies that our democracy was encountering eventually stemmed from the very act of blind voting. I knew that had to change, and I vowed to myself that the next time I voted (in 2002), I will ensure that my vote is the most informed vote I have ever cast in my life.”

Mumbai Votes hopes to achieve authority status by declaring to political authorities and potential aspirants that there is a forum and archive where every transaction, vote and act in the public arena is recorded for posterity. The goal is to incentivize good politics and decent political behavior by creating a constant reminder of citizen-led supervision and accountability.

China

by Carrie Yang

In China, transparency, accountability and civic engagement are all politically sensitive issues. The root of the tension may date back to the Cultural Revolution, when people were told to say what the government, or more exactly, the Communist Party of China (CCP), expected to hear. Those who said what they really thought or questioned the CCP's acts were often jailed or worse.

After China's period of economic reform, beginning in 1978, political reform and freedom of speech were brought back to the agenda. In 1987, the 13th National People's Congress brought up the idea of "supervision by public opinion" and specified that "major situations should be known by the people; major questions should be discussed by people."¹³⁵ Emphasis on political transparency reached its historical peak in modern Chinese history.

The 1989 the Tiananmen incident was a turning point for China's policy making about the control of public discourse. The CCP used tanks to "clear up" Tiananmen Square, where hundreds of thousands of students demonstrated for political reform to eradicate government corruption and promote democracy and transparency. The international response was enormous, but in China any mention of the incident was banned. On the Internet, keywords such as "June 4th," "6.4," and others were all automatically filtered from websites. It is common that young people today in China have no clue about the incident at all.

Article 44 of the August 2007 Emergency Response Law offers a small opportunity for improvement because there is no explicit restriction on what the media must do in emergency incidents, compared to past warnings by officials that media should be "helpful, not troublesome."¹³⁶ Also, from a legal perspective, according to Article 41 of the Chinese Constitution, citizens are entitled to not only know what is actually happening, but also to "criticize and make suggestions to any state organ or functionary."¹³⁷ The constitution also specifies that citizens are entitled to demonstrate and protest. However, these civil rights were seldom practiced due to the strict political control enforced by the government. In short, the absence of an independent institution for the trial of laws that go against the constitution means that the articles themselves are not enforced.

Transparency and traditional media

The press was supposed supervise the state. However, since the Tiananmen incident, China's media system has been characterized by a low level of autonomy, high government intervention, strong institutional continuity, and no correlation with any clear pattern of democratization.¹³⁸ He Zhou has referred to the role of Chinese media as "Party Inc." In other words, the role of the media has changed from a propaganda machine in the age of the Cultural Revolution to the Chinese Communist Party's PR agent, whose major task is to maintain a positive image of the party. Though most journalists take pride in investigating watchdog stories that also reveal the negative side, they

¹³⁵ Wu Guoguang, *Zhao Ziyang and Political Reform* (Hong Kong: The Pacific Century Institute, 1997).

¹³⁶ Emergency Response Law of the People's Republic of China, August 30, 2007, http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Law/2009-02/20/content_1471589.htm.

¹³⁷ Constitution of the People's Republic of China, December 4, 1982, <http://english.people.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html>.

¹³⁸ Colin Sparks, "Media systems in transition: Poland, Russia, China" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, San Francisco, California, May 23, 2007).

generally choose less controversial topics like consumer culture or environmental protection. No core issue that involves political accountability or the election process can be touched.¹³⁹ The Party, through the Central Propaganda Department and its local branches at all levels, still control mass media content in great detail. It renders public distrust against the government, but there's still no mechanism for citizens to dissent. In a nutshell, the priority of the CCP is to "maintain a stable society." Any challenge from the citizens is basically "harmonized," or filtered from access. Since citizens cannot receive the real and timely information from mass media, new media have become increasingly important in China.

Transparency and new media

In recent years increased participation and communication, two basic aspects of transparency, have taken place on new media platforms.¹⁴⁰ The primary form of netizen participation is online protest and dissent, most commonly in the form of replying in comment and forum threads. There are times that online activities are accompanied by offline activities. Relying on the online community platform, these kinds of activities are spontaneous and loosely organized, but they can have influence not only on online discourse, but also on offline public discourse and government policies. Social problems such as the widening divide between the rich and the poor, corruption, environmental pollution, changes in cultural values, etc. are reflected in the online discussions.¹⁴¹ The rise of an urban middle class is particularly important in the new online activism. The urban middle class is more confident in the aspect of culture and has more confidence in both domestic and international media than the working class.¹⁴² This finding is also reflected in the case studies of technology for transparency projects I documented. Three of the four founders were educated abroad (including Hong Kong), and one is a senior manager at an IT firm.

On the other hand, new media also gives netizens new channels to break through the Chinese government's information censorship, empowering Chinese netizens to hear voices other than those of the "Party Inc."¹⁴³ Online it is hard to draw a fine line between the private and public sphere. Nevertheless, in China, a country with an under-developed public sphere, the Internet has had a major impact on unraveling the information monopoly and creating a space for other voices. No medium can change deeply rooted, non-democratic behaviors over night, but for many Chinese the Internet has brought political discourse into citizens' daily life, and in some instances it has changed citizens' perspective toward the control of information, freedom and creativity.

In response to the influence of the Internet, the government has updated its online censorship tactics. Search engines at home (Baidu) or abroad (Google) have conformed to filter out search results with personal information of national leaders and keywords related to politically sensitive

¹³⁹ Zhou He, "Chinese Communist Party Press in a Tug of War: A Political-Economy Analysis of the Shenzhen Special Zone Daily," in *Power, Money and Media: Communications Patterns and Bureaucratic Control in Cultural China* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000): 112-51.

¹⁴⁰ Yang Guobin, "Of Sympathy and Play: Emotional Mobilization in Online Collective Action," *The Chinese Journal of Communication and Society* 9 (2009): 39-66.

¹⁴¹ Guobin, "Of Sympathy and Play."

¹⁴² Du Junfei, "The Communication Characteristics of the Middle Class in China." See also Wen Yunchao, "Our Will is Optimistic: The opportunities of China's alternative communication are in a tight corner."

¹⁴³ Hu Yong, *The Rising Cacophony: Personal Expression and Public Discussion in the Internet Age* (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008).

issues. (Google.cn has since migrated to Hong Kong.¹⁴⁴) A project to install monitoring software to filter adult content and politically sensitive content, called Green Dam, Youth Escort, was proposed to be installed on every PC in China in 2009. The Great Firewall blocks numerous websites from Hong Kong, Taiwan and abroad that may contain politically sensitive content or that facilitates discourse of about such topic. This includes platforms like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter and news sites like Apple Daily. In the end of 2009, the government released a list of websites in China that do not have the “license” to run multi-media content. Countless websites did not survive this “policy adjustment,” and many activist blogs were shut down or erased from the blogging platform. The Wu Mao (50 cent) party has been observed actively leaving patriotic comments in forums, blogs and portal sites. It seems that China’s censorship is so powerful that it has managed to control what was thought of as the uncontrollable Internet.¹⁴⁵

Regulation of civil associations in China

For a project to promote transparency, accountability and civic engagement, forming civil society organizations or NGOs should be an effective way to start the operation. However, in China, such organizations are taboo. Between China’s Reform in 1978 and the student movement in 1989, there were neither legal policies nor official bureaus to regulate civil society organizations in China. Nonetheless, at the peak of the student movement in 1989, the government began considering the creation of a regulatory system to regulate civil society organizations. The Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) was appointed to be responsible for managing civil organizations and non-profit organizations. These organizations, or associations, were required to register, and they could not register with the MCA unless they were under the supervision of government or party agencies.

In 1996, Jiang Zemin strengthened the system by bringing in more detailed and comprehensive regulations. Nevertheless, many rules governing NGOs derived from the speeches of high officials or from unpublished speeches and documents that NGO leaders might not be aware of. In 1998, the CCP’s Central Bureau and the MCA even jointly issued a document that required every civil association that has three or more CCP members to establish a party branch to supervise its political behavior. As a result, most internet projects were loosely organized and can be easily labeled “illegal” by the government and shut down.

Transparency in Hong Kong

The case in Hong Kong reflects a shrinking of the public sphere after the region’s return to China. Hong Kong was the sanctuary for a great number of political refugees from mainland China, and the UK maintained a liberal media order when Hong Kong was a British colony. However, the transfer of sovereignty brought about two anti-democratic trends. First was transfer of media groups’ ownership and management. Many middle-class professionals moved overseas before returning. Pro-Beijing capitalists bought critical magazines and closed them. International capitalists and overseas Chinese capitalists who have major investments in mainland China also bought several major media groups. This led to the second anti-democratic trend: self-censorship and moral bankruptcy. Beijing controls news sources from the mainland and it can decide which media group it releases news to. Moreover, the chiefs of several Hong Kong media groups have close relationships with Beijing (some of them are even members of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative

¹⁴⁴ Oiwan Lam, “China: Google.cn migrated to Hong Kong,” *Global Voices Online*, March 23, 2010, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2010/03/23/china-google-cn-migrated-to-hong-kong/>.

¹⁴⁵ Oiwan Lam, “China: Various aspects of censorship,” *Global Voices Advocacy*, March 17, 2010, <http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/2010/03/17/china-various-aspects-of-censorship/>.

Conference) and request that their employees voluntarily self-censor their criticism against Beijing. In conclusion, transparency in Hong Kong has been undermined due to economic-political reasons, but it has a richer legacy of criticism and watchdog journalism than that of mainland China, and the media enjoys greater autonomy about local and international issues.

Conclusion and recommendations

The four cases that I selected represent different technologies that are currently widely adopted in China: forums, websites, blogs and micro-blogs. All of the projects in mainland China are vulnerable when facing powerful government censorship. All of the projects reflect the emerging power of the middle class and the democratic influence from outside of China. From the above observations, we should realize that democratization in China is a long process. Though China is going through a fundamental shift in how information spreads and is controlled, the power that China's social system has regulating networked communication and the adoption of technology should never be under-estimated.

China Case Studies

Free More News

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/free-more-news>

Free More News (FMN) was established in September 2007 and has since become one of the most trusted online media sources for Chinese Internet users (as opposed to the government-controlled media). Especially since March 2009, FMN's use of Twitter and other Web 2.0 platforms has enabled it to break through some of the barricades placed by Chinese government censors in order to report on big news that has happened in China, such as the Xinjiang riots, the Shishou mass protest, the Hong Kong 7.1 march, the Guangzhou protest against the waste incinerator construction, and so on. It represents the emerging civil power of the “sea turtles” (the term, which refers to those who have returned from abroad, shares the same pronunciation with “returning from the overseas” in Chinese) in modern China. Nonetheless, it depends heavily on volunteer work, which may result in inconsistency and could be an obstacle to sustainability. Working on a sustainability model will eventually allow them to focus more of their goals as an independent source of news and information.

Inmediahk

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/inmediahk>

Inmediahk has influenced many major political issues in Hong Kong by providing independently investigated information on its website. It aims to overcome the problem of Hong Kong's shrinking public sphere after the handover of sovereignty to mainland China. Its goal is to protect freedom of speech in Hong Kong. In the recent Hong Kong high-speed railway incident, it provided a series of insightful posts that attracted tens of thousands of affected people and advocated on behalf of the most affected community, Choi Yuen Village. Though the Choi Yuen Village is still scheduled to be dismantled, the villagers were better compensated. Moreover, it aroused public attention about the negative side of the project. About 10,000 people attended the protest to support the Choi Yuen Village and to protest the railway's construction. Inmediahk combines a mature and healthy model of online civic engagement with the ability to be self-sustained. It's a pity that the social system in mainland China has far not copied such a model.

Investigation into the Earthquake Student Casualties

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/investigation-earthquake-student-casualties>

The Sichuan Earthquake in 2008 took away thousands of lives of school children. While the public mourned the loss, Ai Weiwei, a renowned blogger in China, noticed that the government never released the exact names of the victim students. He made hundreds of phone calls to inquire at all levels of government, but none of them were able to offer him the list. As a result, he organized a team to conduct a citizen investigation to compile students' names behind the casualty numbers. But the investigation encountered impediments from all levels of government in Sichuan Province. The team was detained, interrogated and, at times, beaten. The names and reports that Ai Weiwei published on his blog were all deleted by the government. It was widely suspected that the government's corruption in the school construction projects was the leading reason why so many schools just collapsed. In the end, he managed to publish “Ai Weiwei's list” with basic information such as names, school, class, age, etc. However, the project is heavily reliant on the celebrity effect

of Ai Weiwei and his own safety has been severely threatened. This society needs more Ai Weiweis who are fearless to confront the government and who have profile to demand accountability. We cannot afford to lose citizens like Ai Weiwei any more.

Waste Incineration and Environmental Protection

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/waste-incineration-and-environmental-protection-6>

The case study features a community forum called Jiang-Wai-Jiang. It serves as a platform to bring together residents to protest against the construction of a waste incinerator in Guangzhou, China. The construction of waste incinerators was not only reported in Guangzhou, but also many other major cities in China. In the end, because of the communities' strong opposition, the government suspended the project. However, as soon as the threat of pollution was gone, most community members on the forum returned to silence. From a researcher's point of view, collaboration with other anti-waste-incinerator efforts would diminish the risk for Jiang-Wai-Jiang in the future.

Latin America

by Renata Avila

Corruption, systematic violations of human rights and widespread poverty¹⁴⁶ are closely connected.¹⁴⁷ The cycle of corruption facilitates, perpetuates and institutionalizes human rights violations. Powerful and corrupt political and military groups that have systematically committed acts of corruption have since covered-up or erased the evidence.¹⁴⁸ Such scenarios were even more harmful in countries where perpetrators and collaborators from local and international networks escaped unpunished. As a result, today criminal networks are seduced by the same game. Secrecy plays an important role too. By denying citizens access to public information and a say in accountability, impunity continues a culture of silence. It obstructs public debate about crimes that have been committed and their impact on development and wealth.

Declassified documents¹⁴⁹ released in the last decade shed a light on secret impunity agreements between governments and political leaders from Argentina¹⁵⁰, Brazil,¹⁵¹ Chile,¹⁵² El Salvador,¹⁵³ Honduras,¹⁵⁴ Guatemala¹⁵⁵ and other countries in the region during the seventies and eighties. From Operation Condor¹⁵⁶ to the dirty wars in Central America, many covert actions affected the future of the region, undermining their rule of law, dividing societies, silencing dissenting voices and facilitating the creation of corrupt networks and a culture of secrecy and impunity. The region, in fact, is an example of how secrecy and the discretionary use of force can harm an entire society to the benefit of only a few.

¹⁴⁶ “Poverty and Corruption: Working Paper No. 8,” *Transparency International Working Papers and Policy Position Series*, <http://www.civicus.org/new/media/Poverty-Corruption-March-2008.pdf>.

¹⁴⁷ “Corruption and Human Rights: Making the Connection,” *International Council on Human Rights Policy*, http://www.ichrp.org/files/reports/40/131_web.pdf.

¹⁴⁸ Kate Doyle, “Drugs and the Guatemalan Military A Report from the Texas Observer,” *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 169*, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB169/index.htm>.

¹⁴⁹ Center for Latin American Studies, “Plan Condor,” *Human Rights in Latin America Research Resources*, http://clashumanrights.sdsu.edu/Latin_America/PLA.html.

¹⁵⁰ Carlos Osorio. “Operation Mexico: Secret Argentine Rendition Program Illuminated by Declassified Documents” *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 300* <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB300/index2.htm>

¹⁵¹ Peter Kornbluh, “Brazil Marks 40th Anniversary of military coup: Declassified documents shed light on U.S. role,” The National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB118/>.

¹⁵² Peter Kornbluh, “Chile and the United States: Declassified Documents Relating to the Military Coup, September 11, 1973,” *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 8*, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB8/nsaebb8i.htm>.

¹⁵³ Edgardo Ayala, “Declassified Docs Shed Light on Jesuits' Murders,” *IPS*, <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=49447>.

¹⁵⁴ “Honduras: Battalion 316: Torture & Forced Disappearance,” *Center for Justice and Accountability*, <http://www.cja.org/article.php?list=type&type=254>.

¹⁵⁵ Kate Doyle, “The Atrocity Files: Deciphering the Archives of Guatemala's Dirty War,” *Harper's* 315 (2007).

¹⁵⁶ Daniel J. Wakin, “Tracing the shadows of Operation Condor,” *New York Times*, May 28, 2010, <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/28/showcase-167/>.

As Joseph Stiglitz once wrote: “Life is never black and white. Just as there is no ‘one size fits all’ policy for economic development, there is no such policy for fighting corruption.”¹⁵⁷ That is why different approaches to fighting corruption, improving governance and incentivizing citizens to become active actors of change can show us different ways to tackle corruption, with the help of our new interconnected environment.

The power of documents: projects promoting access to public information

Transparency and access to information empower individuals to make more informed decisions. Without access to public information and transparent practices from the private sector, civil society lacks objective input to monitor government effectiveness, spending and public procurement. While access to information is important for everyone, it is particularly relevant for those working toward transparency and accountability. Without such access corruption flourishes. When a citizen needs to access information that is in the hands of the government, and it refuses to grant access, corrupt alternatives such as buying it or leaking it after contact with clandestine networks can replace clear institutional channels. Access to information laws are important for a country. However, we must question premature celebration on the passage of access to information laws if such a tool is not used by citizens or is not effective in its objectives, as has been alleged in Guatemala.¹⁵⁸ Laws and mechanisms, if not used and enforced, are useless.

The ProAcceso Coalition¹⁵⁹ in Venezuela aims to encourage public demand for government information, since greater transparency is one of the most effective antidotes against corruption. ProAcceso Foundation¹⁶⁰ in Chile combines its online portal with offline legal clinics and workshops. There you can find information about access to information rights and the mechanisms to enforce them. There is also information about relevant legal cases in the local and Interamerican system and the organization’s contribution¹⁶¹ to the landmark case Marcel Claude Reyes et al. v. Chile,¹⁶² which is important and relevant for all the Latin American states seeking a right to access public information. In Brazil, there is the Information is a right!¹⁶³ movement. More information, More Rights in Colombia¹⁶⁴ follows the regional trend, educating citizens about the important role they play by requesting public information. Mexico Informate!¹⁶⁵ and the Peruvian Working Group Against Corruption¹⁶⁶ coordinated online campaigns and developed tools to make it easier to request public information. Both projects also forged alliances with print media and are working closely with

¹⁵⁷ Joseph Stiglitz. “Corrupting the fight against corruption,” *Project Syndicate*, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/stiglitz75/English>.

¹⁵⁸ Gillian Horne, “Freedom of Information Law finally receives approval,” Guatemala Solidarity Network, <http://www.guatemal-solidarity.org.uk/?q=content/freedom-information-law-finally-receives-approval>.

¹⁵⁹ Pro Access Coalition, <http://www.proacceso.org.ve>.

¹⁶⁰ Pro Access Foundation, <http://www.proacceso.cl>.

¹⁶¹ The Open Society Justice Initiative, Amicus brief on behalf of Marcel Claude Reyes et. al., http://www.proacceso.cl/documentos/amicus_brief_claude_reyes_vs_banco_central.

¹⁶² Interamerican Court of Human Rights, “Case of Claude-Reyes et al. v. Chile. Merits, Reparations and Cost,” Judgment of September 19, 2006. Series C No. 151, http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_151_ing.pdf.

¹⁶³ Artigo 19 Foundation, “A informação é um direito seu (Information is a Right),” <http://artigo19.org/infodireitoseu/>.

¹⁶⁴ Colombian Access to Public Information Alliance, More Information More Rights, <http://masinformacionmasderechos.net>.

¹⁶⁵ México informate!, <http://mexicoinformate.org/>.

¹⁶⁶ Peruvian Working Group against Corruption, http://www.corrupcionenlamira.org/portal/?page_id=2.

journalists to provide them with the tools to inform citizens about their rights. Journalism and Access to Information¹⁶⁷ also works with journalists to explain how to use legal mechanisms to improve their investigative reporting.

Freedom of information laws must be tied to issues that people care about in order to be effective. The Mexican initiatives Rural Agricultural Subsidies¹⁶⁸ and the Environmental Frontier Project¹⁶⁹ in Tijuana are examples of efforts to pressure local governments to be more transparent about their spending in particular sectors. The Local Integrity initiative in Ecuador, Peru and Argentina provides a comprehensive database and peer reviewed research. CIMTRA (“citizens for transparent municipalities”)¹⁷⁰ is a group of 20 NGOs working together to promote a culture of accountability among local governments.

Access to information, transparency and security issues are not incompatible, as demonstrated by Just the Facts,¹⁷¹ which provides data, analysis and links to better understand the role and motivations of US assistance to the region, including military and economic aid, military and police training, arms sales and troop deployments. It is an example of transparency in security issues.

Projects that use technology to open debate around political processes

According to the Inter American Democratic Charter,¹⁷² transparency in government activities, morals, responsible public administration on the part of governments, respect for social rights and freedom of expression and of the press are essential components of democracy. It is not only credible and independent elections that matter.

Systemic corruption of political processes is far more dangerous and complex than fraudulent elections. It covers public policies, public management and procurement systems, and political and administrative structures. Only a consistent effort to watch each actor and understand the weak points of each stage in such processes, and then to combine different data to offer a clear picture on how the influence of lobbyist groups, criminal networks, and entrenched interests negatively affect democracy, can counteract this corruption. Various projects by the Poder Ciudadano Foundation¹⁷³ (“Citizen Power Foundation”) are helping citizens from Argentina understand the interests behind their politics and beyond elections.¹⁷⁴ The organization also created a tool to monitor media and its role in politics. Since 90 percent of political campaign expenses are spent on media, it is crucial for the political process to understand the relationships between media and politicians in a given

¹⁶⁷ Journalism and Access to Information, <http://www.periodismo-aip.org>.

¹⁶⁸ Fundar, Center for Analysis and Research, “Rural Agriculture Subsidies Website (Mexico),” <http://www.subsidiosalcampo.org.mx/>.

¹⁶⁹ Environmental Frontier Project (PFEA), <http://proyectofronterizo.org.mx>.

¹⁷⁰ Citizens for Transparent Municipalities, <http://cimtra.org.mx>.

¹⁷¹ “Just the Facts,” Latin America Working Group Education Fund in cooperation with the Center for International Policy and the Washington Office on Latin America, <http://justf.org/>.

¹⁷² Organization of American States, “Inter American Democratic Charter (Adopted by the General Assembly at its special session held in Lima, Peru, on September 11, 2001),” *OAS Documents*, http://www.oas.org/OASpage/eng/Documents/Democratic_Charter.htm.

¹⁷³ Citizen Power Foundation, <http://www.poderciudadano.org/>.

¹⁷⁴ Renata Avila, “Dinero y Política,” Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/dinero-y-pol%C3%ADtica-money-politics>.

country. The investigation, Mapping the Media in the Americas,¹⁷⁵ provides such information and helps citizens understand the media's role in a democracy.

Civic monitoring of political processes is key to protecting them from institutional corruption. Without such engagement it is almost impossible to fix a failed system. Elección Visible¹⁷⁶ in Colombia and Guatemala Visible¹⁷⁷ are putting the spotlight on the selection process of six key public office nominees and appointments. The objective is to keep corruption out of all political processes, including political appointments. There are several efforts to preserve the integrity, transparency and legitimacy of the day of elections. Cuidemos el Voto provides tools to monitor and map misconduct in federal and municipal elections in Mexico. Vote Bien takes a similar approach in Colombia. In Chile, Vota Inteligente created an important tool to better inform voters during the last presidential elections, and the group is keeping an eye on the performance of the elected president by following up on his campaign compromises.

The activities of Congress and its members is yet another important component of the democratic process. Various efforts like 500/500 and Legislativo a tu alcance in Mexico, Democratic Reflection in Peru, Congreso Visible in Colombia and Congresso Aberto in Brazil are helping citizens understand the importance of taking an active role in monitoring those who approve laws and the dynamics behind their decisions. The project Parlio, which monitors the Basque Parliament in Spain, might be an interesting model to follow because it takes the activity inside Congress to another level by providing information on why every topic is discussed at parliament.

Emerging forms of civic participation and the evolving role of interconnected citizens

Movements are taking action simultaneously on several fronts, combining global and local issues in Latin America and influencing local politics, such as #InternetNecesario did in Mexico, or global politics, such as the Open ACTA movement to demand transparency in the negotiation of international binding treaties. Other examples include “I am not a criminal” in Peru and a sister project in Chile. Environmental activists are integrating their efforts online more and more to promote transparency and accountability related to extractive industries, such as mining.

Citizens are also organizing efforts to map criminal activities in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador and, in the case of Mexico, specific maps to report drug dealing.

What should be done?

1. Multilateral anti-corruption efforts and global standards: A global effort to foster transparency and accountability must design a system to hold wrongdoers accountable and investors aware of the consequences their investments on others' lives. New technologies allow citizens in any country to compare the behavior and monitor the statements by companies in different countries. Most of the countries with funders that are financing efforts to contribute to transparency, accountability and good governance are not doing enough to regulate foreign corrupt practices in the region by the companies and nationals of their own countries. That is why it is important to encourage donors to respect a global, uniform standard against

¹⁷⁵ “Mapping the Media in the Americas Project,” *Canadian Foundation for the Americas*, <http://www.mediamap.info/MMA/web-content/homepageEN.html>.

¹⁷⁶ Visible Election, <http://www.eleccionvisible.com/>.

¹⁷⁷ Guatemala Visible, <http://www.guatemalavisible.org/>.

corruption. Legal instruments such as the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act should lead to a rise in anti-corruption prosecutions. As an example the World Bank has listed ineligible firms to be awarded a World Bank-financed contract for a period of time because they were found to have violated the fraud and corruption provisions of the Procurement Guidelines.

2. Transparency for Technology Commons: Following the model of Open Educational Resources, donors and NGOs should create guidelines to incentivize shared practices and to encourage the sharing of information, databases, software and models to inspire citizens across the continent to start their own efforts. Tools need to be localized and adapted for particular, local needs. Donors should incentivize the use of free software, open formats and open content to allow others build upon the tools, contents and data that have already been gathered in other contexts and places. Shared practices and information will lead to greater transparency of projects, more efficient expenditure and better understanding of the regional context. They may even allow researchers to detect patterns and follow corruption across national boundaries and areas of interests.
3. Protecting the rights of those investigating and denouncing corruption: Journalists, human rights defenders, lawyers and witnesses of serious corruption acts are under constant threat in Latin America. It is important to consider that the 1999 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders¹⁷⁸ includes anti-corruption activists within the list of individuals that the UN must protect. With the increased use of the Internet and new technologies to spread information about corruption, digital surveillance and control of the Internet will likely increase too, and projects should be prepare to face new challenges. Violence against those promoting transparency and accountability is also a threat. All projects promoting transparency and accountability should consider training and strategic plans to provide participants with tools to circumvent censorship, and protect their collaborators and sources.
4. Congruency: Donors should encourage projects aiming to map wrongdoers, to combat secrecy in investments involving development projects and funding for development and to encourage prosecution and cross-country investigations of companies, no matter how necessary for local economies they are.
5. Accountability and visibility: Only by bringing the corrupt to court can one reestablish the rule of law, restore trust in political institutions and rebuild a common sense about ethical values among the citizens. Only by equality before the law can the perception of corrupted networks as untouchable be challenged. And we can use the power of ideas and the possibilities on the Internet to spread a powerful integrity message. The Internet has become a game-changing tool in the growth of anti-corruption awareness and accessibility to information, especially via social networking tools. It is important to support accountability efforts and tools to make such efforts visible. Latin America has prosecuted many former presidents and high-ranking officials, but only the Fujimori Trial provides such open information on the trial for citizens. Tracking Impunity also offers an interesting example of what can be done in the region with corrupt networks and legal procedures related to access to information and accountability.

¹⁷⁸ General Assembly resolution 53/144 Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, *United Nations*, <http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/%28symbol%29/a.res.53.144.en>.

6. E-Learning of complex topics: Sophisticated economic crimes and complex white collar crimes require high levels of expertise in order to detect, investigate and prosecute. Paradoxically, countries in which such crimes occur are often those most affected by corruption. Technology offers a unique opportunity to share knowledge and practices and to train people. Many of the people I spoke to lack the tools to analyze such phenomena, gather the evidence and build a strategy to prosecute the corrupt.
7. Divides: Internet access remains unaffordable for many countries in the region, while others are still struggling with literacy rates. Elders and many workers lack the expertise to connect or the time to search for a website. It is important to consider a combination of online and offline tools – and multilingual materials – to reach those who are offline and invite them to take an active role in these projects. For example, a project using technology can connect with offline participants by printing and translating reports to broadcast via community radio. Or a local newspaper might use an article or data provided by an elections monitor. A couple of months ago I was at a conference taking place in a five star hotel in Guatemala City: the speakers were discussing corruption and corrupted networks. Instead of a book they distributed digital copies of the work. Most of the attendees were members of NGOs living in urban areas; they owned a computer and are literate in their mother language, Spanish. It is important to remember that the most corrupt practices in the region are taking place out of sight of the public eye, offline. How relevant is technology for transparency and civic engagement if such tools are out of reach of the people who are affected the most by corruption? How effective is civic engagement if most are excluded by default? How legitimate is an effort to promote accountability and transparency where donors are largely unaccountable for bad decisions made inside their institutions, which go against its mandate? Are cool technology projects just a placebo, an illusion to create the perception that we are actually game-changers creating a global culture of anti-corruption?
8. Integral approach against corruption without exceptions: The ability of criminal networks to protect themselves from prosecution produces a continuous loss of trust in the justice system and in institutions in general. Without accountability there is no possible way to restore the credibility of political and legal institutions. Without transparency and access to information, accountability might be hard to achieve. The region needs an active network of citizens to fight against corruption in all its forms, including embezzlement, trading in influence, abuse of position, illicit enrichment and obstruction of justice. It is necessary to involve broad coalitions of actors in making law, influencing foreign affairs and making international law effective.

The Latin American projects I reviewed on the Technology for Transparency Network show actions by ordinary people, many of them working on their own time and dime, organized into various and ever-changing groups and networks. They reveal how technology is a tool to ensure rights of those affected by corruption, obscurity and impunity. And in the future, such networks of ordinary citizens, using any tool available, again and again, until it is not necessary anymore, will demand justice, transparency and accountability. To make change depends on citizens; technology is just a tool whose impact will only increase if practices and skills are shared across the region, taking advantage of the possibilities and potential of networks and including the voices of those offline, the ones who are most affected by corruption and invisible to the public eye.

Latin America Case Studies

Cuidemos el Voto

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/cuidemos-el-voto>

Mexico officially transitioned to democracy in 2000, when the long ruling PRI party lost to the PAN's Vicente Fox. The role of Mexican NGOs, as well as the independent commission called the IFE, was essential to this transition. Ten years later, civil society continues to play an essential role in the Mexican political landscape. But how clean are Mexican elections today? In advance of the 2009 contest, Oscar Salazar and Andres Lajous set out to answer this question for themselves.

Their implementation of Ushahidi, which was originally created to track post-election violence in Kenya, highlights the importance of both adapting this open source platform to the local context and partnering with established NGOs. By doing this, the project has not only empowered citizens to document the misconduct of politicians and parties; it has also provided official election monitoring agencies with actionable evidence that they can use in the courtroom.

Dinero y Política

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/dinero-y-pol%C3%ADtica-money-politics>

“Dinero y Política,” an initiative of Poder Ciudadano Foundation (“Citizen Power Foundation”), is an interactive database and wiki that aggregate political finance data in real time from 23 different provincial databases and track 713 recognized political parties (414 of which participate as members of 97 different coalitions).

The funding of political parties in Argentina follows a mixed model, with public funding provided to political parties for ongoing and electoral operations as well as private funds from individual and corporate donors. Political parties must disclose the origin and destination of their funds, including a list of private donors, on an annual basis. The information must be published in a national newspaper and on a website. Ten days before the election, political groups must present a report with the public and private donations and details of their campaign expenses to the Electoral Body.¹⁷⁹ When they do so, each province uploads a PDF document of the information on their individual website. Before Dinero y Política one would have to download 23 different documents and hand-check each one to understand the relationship between money and politics. The system did not allow for comparisons, data sorting, or any type of analysis. What formerly would take over a week to analyze can now be done immediately.

Dinero y Política developed new modes of visualizing numbers and categories to provide more effective tools to analyze the financial panorama of politics in Argentina. Its platform has made it accessible for the average citizen, who can quickly visualize and understand which corporations fund which candidates. Even more, she can compare different districts and different parties with informative graphics (graphs, bars).

¹⁷⁹ Electoral National Chamber in Argentina: <http://www.pjn.gov.ar/>

GuatemalaVisible

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/guatemala-visible>

Guatemala is taking important steps to end corruption and impunity inside its institutions. Organized crime and clandestine groups are responsible for the increase in crime rates, accumulating vast influence over the most important governmental institutions: the courts, the general prosecutor's office, the Government Accountability Office and the Office of the Public Defender. Last year Guatemalan society, united as never before, joined efforts to stamp out the influence of criminal networks deeply penetrated within government structures. The first step was to elect honest and capable people to lead the institutions, and that could not happen without the active participation of informed citizens.

Inspired by Carlos Castresana, the Spanish prosecutor appointed by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to head the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), and following the model of Elección Visible in Colombia, a group of young entrepreneurs founded Guatemala Visible, an informative platform aggregating updates on the selection processes of the courts, the General Prosecutor, the Accountant General, the Public Defender and the Guatemalan Ombudsman.

If deals are made behind closed doors, it is impossible to assess those processes. That's why Guatemala Visible campaigned to get citizens to open their eyes, watch the processes and denounce corrupt officials. It made visible a secretive process that had been held behind closed doors, where only politicians had access to the information and positions were granted without public scrutiny, determined by political relationships rather than merit.

Certainly it was not the first time that people sent suggestions to electoral powers, but it was the first time the authorities really listened to the people and reduced the gap between citizens and decision makers. In the past, money and political influence were the only way to secure the election of public offices such as the justice of the Supreme Court or General Prosecutor. Guatemala Visible aims to increase the accountability of key officials by encouraging more public oversight of the nomination and selection processes.

#InternetNecesario

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/internetnecesario>

At noon on October 19, 2009 Alejandro Pisanty, director of the Internet Society of Mexico,¹⁸⁰ posted a message on Twitter linking to an article he wrote expressing concerns about the impact of a new three percent tax on internet access that had just been approved by Mexico's Chamber of Deputies.¹⁸¹ Pisanty's message quickly spread around Mexico's digerati like wildfire. The following day "#InternetNecesario" ("Internet [is a] necessity") was included on Twitter's list of trending topics, meaning it was one of the most discussed topics on Twitter worldwide.

In a matter of hours, the conversation on Twitter transformed into a decentralized advocacy campaign involving thousands of Twitter users in different locations across Mexico and the diaspora

¹⁸⁰ Internet Society Mexican Chapter, <http://www.isocmex.org.mx/>.

¹⁸¹ Issa Villareal, "The internet as a necessity, not a luxury," *Global Voices Online*, October 22, 2009, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2009/10/22/mexico-the-internet-as-a-necessity-not-a-luxury/>.

who used Flickr,¹⁸² podcasts, blog posts, YouTube, photo blogs and traditional offline demonstrations to protest against the proposed tax. The Mexican Chamber of Deputies soon realized the size and strength of the opposition to the tax and reversed their decision.

While the protest campaign was diverse and decentralized, two main platforms emerged to aggregate relevant information and share it across platforms. The first site, InternetNecesario.org, asked its users to “tell the politicians why the Internet is a necessity.” Each day the InternetNecesario.org team compiled a thorough list of Twitter messages using the “#internetnecesario” tag and sent them via email to all 628 members of Mexico’s Congress.

The second major site, InternetNecesario.info, was concerned that Mexico’s mainstream media were reporting more about the use of Twitter in the protests than the content of the actual Twitter messages and the reason for the protest in the first place. In addition to aggregating the latest Twitter posting with the hashtag “#InternetNecesario,” the website also used blog posts to provide its readers with more context about the history of the tax debate, how senators voted along party lines, how Mexico’s broadband access and rates compare to other countries, and how Mexican senators reacted to the bombardment of emails, Twitter messages and personal meetings about the tax. The website also developed a section called “Meta | TXT” to pull out key concepts and trends from the tens of thousands of messages posted to Twitter using the “#internetnecesario” tag. They classified the information into four main areas: why internet is a necessity for technology and education, legal and political aspects, economy and development, and what the citizens were saying on Twitter. Their purpose was to go beyond the message and start an informed, critical analysis of the situation, but also to leave a footprint, a record, with the voices of every citizen who took part of it.

¹⁸² Internet is a Necessity Group Pool, Flickr, <http://www.flickr.com/groups/1231146@N24/>.

Brazil

by Manuella Maia Ribeiro

Brazil's 1988 constitution presents possibilities for citizen control and government transparency. In the last two decades, Brazilians have seen several experiences of the use of this power to demand better governance, such as the calls for impeachment of President Fernando Collor de Mello in the early 1990s, which forced his early resignation.¹⁸³ In 2010, the Ficha Limpa movement was created to guarantee that politicians with court convictions cannot hold public positions.¹⁸⁴ At the same time, the Mensalao and corporate card scandals have caused a greater lack of confidence among citizens, especially toward the Congress.¹⁸⁵

Despite – or perhaps due to – the lack of credibility of the Brazilian government, the past two years have seen the creation of a number of grassroots projects that use the Internet to promote accountability, transparency and civic engagement. The founders of these projects report that a number of problems face Brazil in its search for greater social control, transparency and civic engagement. These include a culture of passive engagement, a difficulty in understanding the technical jargon used by governments, the lack of access to government data and limited civic participation outside of the election cycle. To overcome these problems, Brazilian citizens have created online tools that encourage citizens to demand greater government transparency and citizen participation.

The Brazilian experience in the technology for transparency movement is recent; most projects began less than a year ago. The oldest is the Adote um Vereador, which was released on January 8, 2009.¹⁸⁶ One challenge in this research is to analyze the impact of these experiences given the short time of their existence. It is also important to note that none of the projects we reviewed represent all regions and municipalities of Brazil. The map¹⁸⁷ of Adote um Vereador, for example, has 32 municipalities with bloggers who have adopted a councilman in a country of 5564 municipalities. Vote na Web and Cidade Democrática have, respectively, approximately 3000 and 1233 registered users.

The four projects we reviewed use various Internet tools such as Twitter, Facebook, wikis, email and others. Typically they use more than one tool simultaneously. They all have Twitter and email accounts. The Projects Adote um Vereador (Adopt a Politician) and Congresso Aberto (Open Congress) are supported only by volunteers. Vote na Web and Cidade Democrática have elements of institutional support, by Webcitizen and the Seva Institute respectively.

¹⁸³ Wikipedia contributors, “Fernando Collor de Mello,” *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernando_Collor_de_Mello (accessed June 01, 2010).

¹⁸⁴ Paula Goes, “Brazil: Blogosphere in support of anti-corruption bill,” *Global Voices Online*, April 7, 2010, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2010/04/07/brazil-blogosphere-in-support-of-anti-corruption-bill/>.

¹⁸⁵ Gibby Zobel “Brazil in crisis over corruption claims,” *The Guardian*, July 11, 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/jul/11/brazil>.

¹⁸⁶ Manuella Maia Ribeiro, “Adote um Vereador,” Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/adote-um-vereador>.

¹⁸⁷ Adote um vereador, “Map of Cities in Brazil which adopted a politician,” http://vereadores.wikia.com/wiki/Cidades_do_Brasil.

Three of the four projects highlighted the lack of a freedom of information law in Brazil. This presents an obstacle to ensuring information on their respective websites. In early April the Chamber of Deputies approved bill n.5228, known as the Freedom of Information Law, which will regulate access to government information as required by Brazil's Constitution. Although the bill is subject to approval in the Senate for its passage, Brazil will soon become part of a group of countries adopting laws to ensure transparency and access to public information. Cesar Zucco, professor of political science at Princeton and a founder of Congresso Aberto, hopes that the freedom of information law will facilitate access to data on the behavior of Brazilian deputies, which will save the team from time-consuming research so that they can focus on more analysis on the policies in Congress.¹⁸⁸

All projects have identified as next steps: financing (especially for the volunteer projects), increasing the number of participants (especially during the 2010 election year), and attracting more technologists to help improve the functionality of their websites.

In addition to enhancing functionality of the Cidade Democrática website, Luna and his team will also launch another website to discuss how the internet is being used in relation to Brazil's public sphere. Called Webcidadania ("Webcitizenship"), the site will also examine the projects in Brazil that promote accountability, transparency and civic engagement, such as Vote na Web, Adote um Verador and others.¹⁸⁹

In this, Cidade Democrática came to create this channel so that governments know what citizens really need. The movement Webcidadania is a space that is being created for a number of organizations that work with on strengthening citizenship on the web. With this insight we start talking on Twitter. Those who use Twitter can find follow @webcidadania and find several issues and proposed actions that are being planned.

Project leaders agree that it is neither technology nor financing that pose the biggest challenge, but rather cultural obstacles in Brazil to transparency, participation, and accountability. The issues raised here – and in the four case studies – are not only a technological problem, but political. The Internet, like any other technology, cannot be considered disconnected from the social and political processes in which it operates.

¹⁸⁸ Cesar Zucco, Fellow, Yale Program on Democracy (Spring 2010), <http://www.princeton.edu/~zucco/>.

¹⁸⁹ Citizen Web, <http://www.webcidadania.org.br/>.

Brazil Case Studies

Adote um Vereador

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/adote-um-vereador>

Adote um Vereador (“Adopt a Politician”) encourages Brazilian citizens to blog about the work of their local elected officials in order to hold them accountable. They suggest that each citizen adopt a local politician and write about his/her activities on a blog so that politicians know that they are being watched – and also to create a bridge between their work and online users who may ask questions or leave complaints as blog comments. Zanella, the founder of the wiki, believes that the main obstacles to its success are both cultural and technical: “Brazilian people are not used to the democratic process. For most Brazilians, governance is a synonym of elections, which happens only every four years. In the meantime Brazilians have little participation in the political agenda, even if they have a very local problem that involves the government. Usually, when some public problem happens people think it is a problem of the politicians, not them. So, Brazilian citizens don’t see a way to construct and solve local public problems policies for themselves.”

He also stresses that most Brazilians still do not know how to use the tools of the internet – such as blogs and wikis – to publish information about their politicians. A wiki was created to group and coordinate participants who adopt politicians. They also plan workshops to teach citizens how to use Internet tools to become involved in the project.

Cidade Democrática

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/cidade-democratica-0>

Another project is Cidade Democrática (“Democratic City”), which enables Brazilians to document and discuss municipal problems and come up with solutions. The main problem for founder Rodrigo Luna is culture: “Brazilians wait for someone else to solve their problems. This passivity cannot help us build the country where we want to live.” The content published on Cidade Democrática is organized by category, user-defined tags, city and neighborhood. Registered users can: 1) document problems and propose solutions; 2) support proposals created by other users; 3) comment, question, and discuss problems and proposals; 4) publicize a proposal and/or problem by email; and 5) create a profile to follow particular topics and places of interest. Despite its short time in existence, the site already has already yielded some results. A discussion about the city of Jundiaí, which revealed that there was no public hearing to discuss the municipality’s Master Plan, led officials to schedule a public audience later this year.

Congresso Aberto

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/congresso-aberto>

Other project leaders interviewed in our research emphasized the difficulty in accessing and understanding government data in Brazil. The website Congresso Aberto (“Open Congress”) tracks, visualizes and analyzes official data from Brazil’s Congress. The objective is to provide official data in a more accessible way in order to promote more transparency in Brazil’s Congress. It also includes academic research and basic statistics about the behavior of politicians, such as their voting records. But the founders have had problems in sustaining the site’s content because they cannot access the necessary data not centralized on the congressional website. Cesar Zucco, one of the founders of the initiative, says, “We have to search the information from all the government’s sites.

We hope that when Brazil has a freedom of information law, we can more easily access the data that we need. Our idea is that the basic activities of the site will be automated, and that nobody will need to update it. Our effort would be in favor of increasing the amount of information and to improve our analysis of it in Congresso Aberto.”

Vote na Web

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/votenaweb>

Another website that promotes more transparency in Congress is called Vote na Web (“Vote on the Web”). In this site the bills are translated in a simple and objective way to encourage citizens to participate in the daily life of the Brazil’s Congress. Besides simply monitoring the bills, users can interact with the political landscape by symbolically voting for or against each bill. The result of their votes is displayed in simple and easy to understand graphics. Furthermore, it is possible for users to compare their votes among themselves, and also with politicians. Project coordinator Priscila Marcenes says, “Only people who are already politicized can use government data as it is currently shown: visually unattractive, and in a very complicated and bureaucratic language. We created the site to work with data to promote a form of transparency that is accessible to all citizens without exclusion.” The project leaders struggle to keep up with the time-consuming task of translating bills into a simple and accessible language, and also to simply keep up with the volume of legislation that appears weekly in Congress.

Central and Eastern Europe

by Sylwia Presley

Central and Eastern Europe is rich in examples of citizen participation projects related to governmental transparency, most of which work in partnership with major institutions that provide financial and methodological support like Open Society Institute, MySociety and Transparency International. Many also work with local organizations and media. I have talked to people involved in such projects in Poland and in Hungary, but they also mentioned innovative work coming from the Czech Republic and Slovakia, like KohoVolit.¹⁹⁰

Before we look more closely at example projects from the area let me share my overall insights with you after having studied a few major transparency projects in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The actual type of transparency projects in each country depends on the profiles of people involved in the initial action and their relationship with the government, as well as on the nature of citizen participation in the country. All of those projects acknowledge the need to disclose information related to governance in a smoothly presented, easily digestible way. Whether it is with the support of many volunteers or with a smaller core group of dedicated activists, they all invest a lot of time in their projects and yet still struggle in procuring precise government information that should be made publicly available. Most of them flag issues regarding governmental accountability. In many cases, their cooperation with mainstream media seems to play an important role in their ability to put pressure on MPs and other public officials. Some transparency projects also aim to address the frequently passive attitude of citizens in the region regarding corruption, which as mentioned in a chat with Képmutatás in Hungary, originates from lack of understanding of existing official procedures for citizens to flag government misconduct. It quickly becomes apparent that in Central and Eastern Europe, raising awareness among citizens about transparency and the methods to fight corruption is just as important as putting pressure on government representatives to become more transparent about their actions and expenses.

From the Czech Republic and Slovakia we have seen a conversation with KohoVolit, a project of two dedicated people who spend their time raising awareness about representatives from parliaments in both countries, as well as representatives from the European Parliament.¹⁹¹ As mentioned in the interview, the main challenges are related to a lack of citizen participation in politics and the lack of structured, official information from the parliament websites. Slovakia hosts another interesting transparency project, the Fair Play Alliance, where politicians are asked to actively participate in the project.¹⁹² If they fail to do so, they are faced with related media coverage at the most sensitive time leading up to elections. Again, it reveals the strategy of combining research and open data with mainstream media partnerships to put pressure on politicians to be more transparent and more accountable during their time in office.

In Hungary, the project Képmutatás is responding to the challenge of poorly presented public information by building a visually friendly tool to estimate unreported campaign expenses by major political parties on a simple graph with links to additional details. Despite media support and a clear

¹⁹⁰ Jakub Górnicki, “KohoVolit.eu,” Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/kohovoliteu>.

¹⁹¹ Koho Volit, <http://kohovolit.eu/>.

¹⁹² Jakub Górnicki, “Fair Play Alliance,” Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/fair-play-alliance>.

call to action, there is still a lack of political will to reform campaign finance laws. Political parties are not required to disclose their campaign spending so volunteers and project coordinators work to calculate estimated sums. The project is promoted via traditional media, but also through social media channels like Facebook.

In Poland there are a few projects worth mentioning. Sejmometr.pl is a portal that feeds official information about currently introduced laws and the legislators involved in their creation.¹⁹³ It also offers legal advice, encourages bloggers to co-operate on stories and requests more data from the parliament website administrators. Stowarzyszenie Art. 61 (the name refers to article 61 of Polish Constitution, which declares access to public, governance-related information public) is the organization behind a few transparency projects in the country.¹⁹⁴ Their Kandydaci2009 initiative is the second edition (following a similar version in 2005) of a portal to help citizens to choose representatives to European Parliament by presenting profiles and platforms of the candidates as well as reports on no-cooperative representatives.¹⁹⁵ Its twin project, Mam Prawo Wiedzieć (“I have the right to know”) is a similar compass of candidates to Polish parliament with a dedicated to “Citizen’s Guide” that offers concise explanations of laws related citizen’s rights regarding transparency and accountability.¹⁹⁶ Watchdog.pl is an NGO working closely with other organizations to educate, advocate and support developments in the area of transparency and accountability.¹⁹⁷ Their website is a good knowledge pool of campaigns, issues and solutions. All three Polish organizations use a strong network of like-minded people to promote their work offline, as well as through social media channels.

When reading case studies from the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as well as during conversations with Polish and Hungarian activists, I could not help but realize another challenge: cooperation at the regional level. We see Fair Play Alliance sharing their tools abroad, we hear about Képmutatók staying in touch with Czech campaigners, but the information flow between those teams seems to be limited. I personally see great potential in transparency and social media events in the region. Social Innovation Camp in Bratislava provided many NGOs with an occasion to share knowledge and skills.¹⁹⁸ The fifth annual Confidence Conference, which is planned for the end of May in Warsaw, brings together specialists from different organizations and sectors to share skills and network.¹⁹⁹ Wikimania, planned for July in Gdansk, aims to bring professionals from the entire region, which can give opportunities to network as well.²⁰⁰ And, last but not least, Watchdog aims to end the summer season with a barcamp-style event dedicated strictly to transparency. I hope that the Technology for Transparency Network will push for more cooperation across geographic and language barriers to encourage the sharing of skills and ideas.

¹⁹³ Sejmometr, <http://sejmometr.pl/demokracja2.0>.

¹⁹⁴ Stowarzyszenie, 61, <http://www.art61.pl/>.

¹⁹⁵ Kandydaci (Candidates) 2009, http://www2.kandydaci2009.pl/?zakladka=about_us.

¹⁹⁶ Mam Prawowię Dziec (I have the right to know), <http://mamprawowiedziec.pl/>.

¹⁹⁷ Watchdog Portal, <http://watchdog.org.pl/english.php>.

¹⁹⁸ Social Innovation Camp in Central Europe, <http://www.sicamp.org/?p=359>.

¹⁹⁹ Confidence Conference, <http://2010.confidence.org.pl/>.

²⁰⁰ Wikimania Conference 2010 Official Website: http://wikimania2010.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page.

Central and Eastern Europe Case Studies

Fair Play Alliance

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/fair-play-alliance>

A lack of necessary laws, a lack of access to information, the lack of political will and a lack of access given to journalists all pushed Slovakian journalist Zuzana Wienk in 2002 to become a watchdog journalist. For the past eight years, Zuzana and her team have been constantly pushing Slovakian politicians to become more transparent and have advocated for legal changes that bring about more openness and create the potential for public awareness. In 2009 she was nominated for the US Secretary of State's International Woman of Courage Award.

Discovering this project was a great lesson in how simple tools connected with proper promotion can fill in gaps in law. One of the first projects by the Fair Play Alliance was a special database for politicians to submit their full financial reports. In Slovakia, only a small amount of publicly disclosed information is legally required, but more should be made available – this is where the work of the Fair Play Alliance comes in.

Képmutatás

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/képmutatás>

Képmutatás is a joint initiative by Freedom House Europe and Transparency International Hungary to bring more transparency and accountability to party and campaign financing in Hungary.

The word “képmutatás” means “hypocrisy” in Hungarian and, indeed, the current state of party and campaign financing in Hungary and the position of all parliamentary parties on the issue today is nothing if not hypocritical. While parties profess their desire to clean up the current system and eliminate the corrupt practices surrounding it, they continue to spend as much as ten times the legal limit on their campaigns, abuse state and municipal resources for their campaigns, raise funds through illegal channels and spend money in ways that are incompatible with the word, as well as the spirit, of the law.

This joint initiative seeks to estimate the true amount that parties spend on campaigns by analyzing and estimating their likely expenses. It also incorporates the analysis and policy recommendations developed by the Eötvös Károly Institute²⁰¹ and the lessons learned from their own earlier attempts to exert pressure on parliamentary parties to arrive at a consensus on campaign finance reform.

KohoVolit

<http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/kohovoliteu>

Just over twenty years ago the Czech Republic and Slovakia were a single country – Czechoslovakia – and its residents didn't expect to have much of a say in how politicians ran their country. When the two countries transitioned to democracy there was a lot of excitement about getting information from Parliament out to the public, but soon it became more difficult to access and harder to understand the parliamentary websites in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia. KohoVolit aims to take that information, organize it more clearly, and present it in a way that informs rather than overwhelms readers.

²⁰¹ Eötvös Károly Institute, http://www.ekint.org/ekint/ekint_angol.head.page?nodeid=27.

The website has also developed a quiz so that prospective voters can compare how they would vote on key issues and which politicians are most closely aligned with those decisions. KohoVolit asks political parties key questions about their future plans and then takes that information to create a quiz for voters to see which party most represents their own views.

Categories, Conclusions, Recommendations

Throughout our mapping and analysis of the case studies on the Technology for Transparency Network we have grouped projects by their geographic region. This is in large part because our team of researchers and research reviewers were hired explicitly to map and evaluate technology projects that promote transparency and accountability in the regions where they are based. However, when one steps back to take in all of the projects from a global perspective, it becomes readily apparent that there are thematic and strategic categories which apply across regions. This week's posts aim to tease out some of those trends and offer constructive criticism and concrete recommendations to funders, project leads, and researchers as to how such projects can become more effective, efficient, and sustainable.

On the Technology for Transparency Network platform we have organized case studies and project listings into ten different categories: budget monitoring, civic complaints, election monitoring, parliament informatics, extractive industries, private sector transparency, advocacy, crime, local government, and aid transparency. You can sort through each of the ten categories by clicking on the filters beneath our map interface.

Budget Monitoring

Monitoring the budgets of local and national governments is a key instrument in the toolkit of any accountability activist. Active budget monitoring can both prevent and expose corruption. As an example, despite protests from privacy activists, the Mexican government decided to publish the salaries of elected officials²⁰². (At the time, Mexican governors were among the highest paid in the world.) The reasoning is that any elected official who is clearly spending more than his/her salary permits should be scrutinized closely to determine where that money is coming from, and whether it is linked to political misbehavior.

Budget monitoring can also lead to improved public services and infrastructure. For example, in the United States the government recently passed the largest economic stimulus program in the country's history. To track how that money was spent the government created Recovery.gov while ProPublica created Eye on the Stimulus²⁰³, which also tracks how the money is spent. Kenya had its own stimulus program, called the Constituency Development Fund, which started in 2003 as a way to fund local governments to improve their infrastructure and services. Budget Tracking Tool is a way to see how that money is being spent and to leave comments to report on the progress of those projects. However, so far few people seem to use the tool, and even fewer comment on the progress of the development projects in their constituency.

In order to effectively monitor and evaluate any budget, the data must be available in a format that allows for analysis in a spreadsheet or database program. The information should be both granular, in order to evaluate as many variables as possible, and timely, in order to expose corruption and inefficiencies before it is too late. Unfortunately, most governments that do publicly release their budget information do so using Adobe's PDF format, which doesn't allow for data analysis. As

²⁰² “¿Sabe cuánto ganan los Diputados?” *El Semanario*, http://www.elsemanario.com.mx/news/news_display.php?story_id=5148.

²⁰³ ProPublica, “Eye on the Stimulus,” <http://www.propublica.org/ion/stimulus>.

Noam Hoffstater and Alon Padan of Our Budget pointed out in our interview, the accounting offices of governments obviously have their budget information in spreadsheet format, but they purposely publish it as a PDF document in order to discourage closer scrutiny.

Our Budget uses OCR technology to create an Excel spreadsheet version of the Tel Aviv municipal budget. Volunteers go over and check every entry, and then they make visualizations and graphs of how the municipality is spending taxpayers' money. Importantly, while they have done this for two years running, in the end they decided that litigation (demanding that the municipality release the budget in spreadsheet format) was a better strategy than time-consuming, technological solutions.

Dinero y Política uses a similar strategy to create more information about campaign financing in Argentinean elections so that voters can make fully informed choices. In Argentina, political parties must disclose all of the campaign contributions they received at least ten days before the election. But, once again, they only have to disclose those numbers in a PDF report, which, doesn't allow citizens analyze the data to see relationships between political interests and politicians. So the Dinero y Política team has created an interactive database that maps donations and creates visualizations of which parties receive donations from which groups, unions, and companies.

Recommendations

Both Our Budget and Dinero y Política use Many Eyes to visualize the data they collect. We recommend that other budget monitoring activists learn how to use Many Eyes and Many Eyes Wikified in order to dynamically visualize budget information. Google's Fusion Tables is another powerful online tool to both store and visualize complex information related to public budgets.

The information collected and analyzed from all three projects does not seem to be exploited well by civil society organizations, journalists, or bloggers in the countries where they are based. We recommend to project leaders that they do more outreach to train journalists, activists, and bloggers how to use the tools they have developed. A sample gallery of effective ways their information has been used could help inspire others to build on that work.

A number of traditional civil society organizations have been working in the realm of budget monitoring and open budgets for quite some time. The International Budget Partnership has a very useful world map which links to country profiles with related information and organizations working on budget monitoring.²⁰⁴ We recommend to donors that they support an international event that brings together technologists and budget monitoring activists to share best practices and strategies regarding the use of modern technology and information management systems to improve the efficiency of budget monitoring. This event should be followed by a three-day intense "book sprint" which leads to a open licensed, freely accessible book that explains the technical steps in order to: 1) extract financial information from PDF documents using OCR technology, 2) store budget information in structured, public databases, 3) verify and cross-reference information, 4) analyze and evaluate data using Many Eyes and Google Fusion Tables, and 5) use resulting findings and conclusions to partner with media, bloggers, civil society and government to seek greater accountability.²⁰⁵

Following the publication of such a book – and its translation into relevant languages – we recommend that donors support barcamp-style events at the national level that bring together

²⁰⁴ International Budget, "World Map," <http://www.internationalbudget.org/worldmap/>.

²⁰⁵ Booksprint, <http://www.booksprint.info/>

technologists, civil society organizations, government officials, investigative journalists, and bloggers to focus specifically on budget monitoring.²⁰⁶

Finally, we recommend that budget monitoring platforms partner with accounting, statistics, and computer science professors at local universities so that the students of their classes can help improve the governance of their country while learning new skills and techniques.

Election Monitoring

Like budget monitoring, election observation is an activity of government accountability and transparency with a long history. According to Wikipedia, it dates back to at least to the 1866 plebiscite of Moldavia and Wallachia, which led to modern Romania.²⁰⁷ In more recent times, election monitoring has tended to focus on countries with weak democracies or democracies in transition, and has been organized by international organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Union, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Council of Europe and the African Union. Major international NGOs like the Carter Center, the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, the National Democratic Institute, and the European Network for Election Monitoring have also become increasingly active, and often partner with local NGOs to take advantage of established national networks.

As if all of those many players weren't enough, a new generation of election monitoring websites now ask ordinary citizens to also become election observers by using their cell phones to report any voting irregularities they may encounter. If all goes to plan, such reports are then verified, categorized, and placed on a publicly accessible map.

One such project that we did not document because we felt that it has been discussed sufficiently in both mainstream and citizen media is Vote Report India. In fact, co-founder Gaurav Mishra has joked that perhaps there were more articles about the project than reports submitted to the platform. Mishra has also written an excellent and candid evaluation of the project, which lists successes, failures, and – most importantly – lessons learned for the next incarnation of the platform for the 2014 Indian elections.²⁰⁸

Sudan Vote Monitor is one of many Ushahidi-based websites we reviewed that allow voters to report irregularities by submitting text messages that are then verified by a partner NGO and placed on a map. Most of the attention given to the initiative during the election itself focused on the fact that the site was temporarily blocked by the government. Less reported was the website's impact on ensuring credible elections. According to the website itself, 257 reports of voting irregularities were received. In a follow-up interview with Heacock, project coordinator Fareed Zein says that number is probably somewhere between 300–500 if you count all SMS reports, which have yet to be added

²⁰⁶ David Sasaki, "BarCamps Without Borders: The Unconference Spreads Globally," *MediaShift Idea Lab*, February 17, 2008, <http://www.pbs.org/idealab/2008/02/barcamps-without-borders-the-unconference-spreads-globally005.html>.

²⁰⁷ Wikipedia contributors, "Election monitoring," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Election_monitoring.

²⁰⁸ <http://www.digiactive.org/2009/05/15/case-study-the-report-card-on-vote-report-india-version-10/>.

to the system.²⁰⁹ But few, if any, of these reports have been verified, and there has been no official response to any of the reports. Still, Zein suggests that the objective of this first implementation was simply to create more information, rather than necessarily holding anyone accountable:

In previous elections it was all a closed door affair — nobody knew exactly what went on on the ground. The intention of this was to be able to get the information out to the public, internally and externally, about what’s going on. Just being able to get the word out was enough for us. We didn’t set out to try to urge anybody to take any specific action. Our mission was to get the information out and then let people judge and act for themselves.

Zein says it is likely that Sudan Vote Monitor will be used again during the January 2011 Southern Sudanese independence referendum.

Like Vote Report India and Sudan Vote Monitor, Cuidemos el Voto is another national election monitoring platform that uses Ushahidi. Co-founder Oscar Salazar notes that, while Mexico transitioned to multiparty democracy in 2000 with the election of Vicente Fox, vote buying and conditional cash transfer programs are still corrupting the democratic process. Cuidemos el Voto managed to achieve something important that other, similar projects lacked: support and endorsement from an official government body, in this case, Mexico’s Special Prosecutor’s Office. Still, that endorsement did not apparently lead to any sort of accountability. For example, on July 5, 2009 someone reported that in Puebla they were offering 500 pesos to vote for the PAN party. But this report wasn’t verified and we don’t see any kind of follow-up. For such election monitoring projects to make an impact in terms of accountability, they need the staff and resources to verify all reports and ensure that the proper government body responds. Or, perhaps more appropriately, they must partner with other organizations that can invest in the long haul of follow-up work. It could even be the perfect semester-length project for a political science graduate-level class.

The African Elections Project differs slightly from other election monitoring projects we reviewed in that 1) it doesn’t use Ushahidi and 2) it focuses on multiple countries throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. The project, funded by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa, uses new media tools to produce and disseminate more information about elections in ten African countries including Malawi, Namibia, Botswana, Niger, Guinea, Mozambique, Mauritania and Togo. Their hope is that more watchful eyes reporting on the electoral process will help prevent and expose vote fraud, and encourage clean elections. However, most of the countries where they work have broadband penetration levels between five and ten percent. Until there is greater connectivity, the impact of an online project like African Elections Project is inherently circumscribed, despite its relatively large budget.

VoteReportPH is the last Ushahidi-based election monitoring initiative we reviewed. Most of these projects were only attract the participation of very few users because there was not broad awareness that the websites exist at all. VoteReportPH is different in that its team spent six months prior to the election going around the country and giving voter education classes about how to use automated voting machines (which were used for the first time), and simultaneously, how to submit reports to VoteReportPH by sending text messages. Such on-the-ground outreach work is necessary in order to create more awareness about citizen election monitoring platforms. In all, 654 reports of voting

²⁰⁹ Rebekah Heacock, “Sudan: Checking in with Sudan Vote Monitor,” *Global Voices Online*, April 29, 2010, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2010/04/29/sudan-checking-in-with-sudan-vote-monitor/>.

irregularities were submitted. For example, at 1 p.m. on May 10 “massive vote buying” was reported by an anonymous contributor via text message. We are told that the report was verified, but there is no further detail on what constitutes verification, or if anything was done to follow up on the report. One very useful strategy by the VoteReportPH team was to write a separate blog post highlighting the most urgent reports of vote fraud. They also published a helpful blog post summarizing some of their early experiences and conclusions.²¹⁰

Though Ushahidi was created to map reports of violence that occurred after Kenya’s 2007 election, it was quickly adapted to monitor elections themselves. In addition to the above-mentioned case studies, Ushahidi was also used to map voting irregularities in Afghanistan and Lebanon.

Ushahidi implementations have already been set up for Colombia’s presidential election later this month, the Puebla municipal elections in July, and Brazil’s general election in October.

Recommendations

We recommend to project implementers that they plan at least one year ahead of the elections they will monitor. In addition to the technical challenges of implementing and localizing the Ushahidi platform, they must also concentrate on outreach efforts to 1) establish an SMS shortcode; 2) hold on-the-ground training workshops; 3) partner with relevant civil society organizations; and 4) partner with media organizations to spread awareness. Such projects should also seek funding to cover the expenses of marketing the project via billboards, radio commercials, posters, and leaflets. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, election monitoring platforms should establish strong relationships with the governing electoral commission in order to agree upon a protocol for verifying and acting on reports of vote fraud. Without a signed agreement in place, the project is unlikely to make a concrete impact toward greater accountability and credibility of elections.

We recommend that online election monitoring projects partner with students at universities to verify and follow up on all submitted reports, similar to how Tufts University students worked to verify reports submitted to the Ushahidi implementation for the Haiti earthquake.

We recommend to funders that they fund specific election-related plugins that make Ushahidi a more functional platform for election monitoring. Oscar Salazar of Cuidemos el Voto has noted that Ushahidi lacks certain features for election monitoring:

Ushahidi’s main design was to provide a common pool of reports. So if I started giving administrative access to everyone, everyone will see the same pools. What happens if two NGOs that are associated with two different political parties get access to the same pool and start approving or disapproving the reports? I don’t want everyone to have access to the same pool. I want to give special accounts to different NGOs, where they see only their own reports plus the citizen reports. Ushahidi wasn’t designed for a lot of NGOs working together. So we are tweaking it for these local elections to make it work in this way.

The tweaks by the Cuidemos el Voto team should be packaged into a plugin that can be shared with other election monitoring initiatives.

²¹⁰ “Vote Report PH: The Gist So Far in Mapping the 2010 Philippine Elections,” May 10, 2010, <http://votereportph.org/blog/vote-report-ph-gist-so-far-mapping-2010-philippine-elections>.

We recommend to the Ushahidi team and to their funders that increased emphasis be placed on documentation, especially in regard to best practices regarding election monitoring. Patrick Meier has written an introductory primer and Erik Hersman has made a forum posting to compare common election-related categories, but there is still a lack of needed documentation for any activist wanting to use Ushahidi to monitor elections. We suggest that Ushahidi aspire to a documentation resource as thorough and easily accessible as the WordPress Codex.

We recommend that researchers do both more longitudinal and comparative research in order to better understand the impact and methodology of online, citizen election monitoring websites. How does verification compare across projects? What strategies bring about accountability? How do you increase the signal to noise ratio for submitted reports? How do you best visualize reports to inspire action? What are obstacles to collaboration with traditional election monitoring organizations? What are the pros and cons of anonymity in citizen election reporting? These are just a few open-ended questions that require more research.

Finally, we recommend that multilateral and civil society organizations focused on election monitoring organize an international event to bring together the coordinators and technologists behind the various online election monitoring websites we have listed above to share experiences and prepare improved documentation for future implementations. This has already happened at the regional level in East Africa, which led to calls for a “Tech Election Monitoring Toolbox”, but it should also happen at the international level to share skills, techniques, resources, and future plans across distinct tech communities.

Aid Transparency

Let’s say, hypothetically speaking, that you’re the newly elected leader of one of the least developed countries in the world and you are trying to prioritize your government’s spending on development projects and social issues. In fact, let’s say that you are the incoming president of Guinea-Bissau, a West African country just south of Senegal with a population of 1.6 million and an estimated GDP per capita of somewhere between \$500–1000. Your entire country’s GDP is just \$1.72 billion and, as of 2002, an estimated 40% of that money comes directly from foreign aid agencies. The United Nations has given US \$18.3 million to supplement government salaries; Portugal has pledged 42 million Euros in aid over the next three years. Japan has granted US\$9.6 million in financial aid to help achieve a literacy program. And that’s all small change compared to the substantial funding that comes from USAID, DFID, the European Commission, and the World Bank.

As the incoming president you are aware of the issues facing your country. The agricultural sector needs to be industrialized to boost productivity. Greater security must be put into place for infrastructural projects to continue unimpeded. Technical and scientific education must improve to raise a generation of engineers who can exploit the country’s offshore oil reserves. The country’s health system must improve to raise life expectancy above 50 years, and to contribute to a more productive work force. What you are not aware of – what, in fact, there is no way for you to track – is exactly how much money is pouring into your country from donors, where it goes, and how effective its impact has been. This information is unavailable because donors are notoriously opaque about their funding even while they push for greater transparency in the countries where they work.

In an excellent three-page policy briefing titled “Greater aid transparency: crucial for aid effectiveness,” Sam Moon and Tim Williamson show how a lack of aid transparency can reduce the

ability of taxpayers to hold their governments accountable because it is unclear which projects are government-funded and which are donor-funded.²¹¹ A lack of aid transparency also leads to a lack of government budget transparency, the authors argue. “Without transparency, discrepancies between aid received and aid spent is hard to measure, and corruption is harder to track and eliminate.” It was this basic fact that led Peter Eigen to leave his position as the director of the World Bank Office for East Africa and found Transparency International.²¹²

A lack of aid transparency also impedes collaboration among grantee projects. In our mapping of “technology for transparency” case studies we came across several projects that were funded by the same donor, but were unaware of the existence of each other until we made the introduction. A simple list of grantee projects by region and topic would go a long way toward encouraging collaboration and preventing duplication.

Lastly, there is a moral argument behind the idea that funders aiming to promote more accountability through transparency should also encourage greater accountability of their own work by publishing more information about their spending and activities.

Lack of information leads to misinformation

The inability of national governments to take stock of the incoming flow of aid money into their countries is just one of the negative consequences that arise from the lack of aid transparency; it also leads to misinformation about the amount and effectiveness of philanthropy and aid development. According to a survey by the Borgen Project, Americans guess, on average, that 24% of our federal budget goes to development assistance. In fact, it is less than one percent. That is about 25 cents per day for each American. Furthermore, less than half of aid from the United States goes to the poorest countries; the largest recipients are strategic allies such as Egypt, Israel, Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Such misinformation about how – and how much – development assistance is used has contributed to a popular backlash, led in the mainstream media by Dambisa Moyo and Bill Easterly. At the first – and regrettably only – TED Africa conference in 2007, the “Cheetah Generation” of young African leaders called for “trade not aid” to increase Africa’s development. Popular rhetoric says that billions of dollars in development assistance have not accomplished a thing, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. But such hyperbole depends on the fact that we simply don’t know where aid money goes, how it is spent, and what the results are. Such information tends to stay in the filing cabinets of each individual funder. We simply can’t measure aid effectiveness without aid transparency.

Working toward aid transparency

The good news: we have reached the point where there is clear agreement that we need to work toward greater aid transparency. The challenge and disagreement now lie in how. For example, what is the ideal level of granularity for financial information regarding grants? Does publishing the salaries of individual employees violate their privacy? How timely should information be made available? What format should it be published in? How is information across various funders easily accessed, aggregated, and understood? What are the most efficient processes to integrate the publication of information with accounting from the funder’s side and budgeting from the recipient

²¹¹ Sam Moon and Tim Williamson, “Greater aid transparency: crucial for aid effectiveness,” <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/4673.pdf>.

²¹² Peter Eigen, “Grand Corruption and Petty Corruption: Fighting Them Through Civil Society,” TEDxBerlin, YouTube video, January 15, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajnWQD7H3Bg>.

country's side? Should future budget information be made available in addition to past investments and current spending?

These are difficult questions and their difficulty probably lies more in how each institution manages their record keeping than ideological differences related to privacy and power. Fortunately, a number of new initiatives are underway to help develop standards around aid transparency. Foremost among them is the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), a “temporary coalition of donor governments, governments of developing countries and NGOs” that was formed at the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action, which grew out of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. According to its website, “IATI’s role is to develop consistent and coherent international standards for the way donors report information about aid spending.”²¹³ They publish a bi-monthly newsletter, which unfortunately is only available in the proprietary Microsoft Word format. Hopefully this does not reflect their thinking on how aid-related information should be published.

In November 2008 the steering committee of the International Aid Transparency Initiative began what was meant to be an 18-month process to define:

- A common, standard format and set of definitions for the publication of aid information
- A code of conduct for signatories of the initiative

According to their latest newsletter, they now aim to reach an agreement on what data should be published by July, with implementation and the agreed-upon code of conduct beginning in December.

Publish What You Fund aims to spread awareness about the importance of aid transparency, and to put pressure on the United States, the European Union, and the World Bank to meet specific transparency targets.

If all goes well the internet should be flooded with information from donors about their spending and activities by early next year. But how to manage the torrent of information? How to make sense of it? How to create mechanisms so that greater aid transparency actually leads to more accountability of grantee projects, government recipients, and the funders themselves?

The role of technology in aid transparency

Some innovative projects have already been developed to help visualize development assistance. The Ujima Project takes data from USAspending.gov, the United States Department of Justice, the US Department of State, the Global Fund to fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, and UK’s Department for International Development to visualize aid flows, weapon sales, and lobbying expenses at the country level throughout Africa. It is managed by the Great Lakes Media Institute in Rwanda and the website was developed by Appfrica, a Uganda-based web development firm.

Aidinfo.org is a project of Development Initiatives to research the current supply of and demand for information related to aid. A recent blog post admits that several of the team’s assumptions at the outset of the project have been challenged during their subsequent research, “most notably the idea that if more aid information is made available, people will use it.” They have also found that “donors publish a lot more information than some of us thought, it’s just not in a format that’s useful for most users. In particular it’s often not timely or comparable.” Most importantly, they stress that

²¹³ Aid Transparency, “About,” <http://www.aidtransparency.net/about>.

information related to “aid and other resources flowing from donor countries” needs to be linked to “the wider accountability movement in recipient countries where most stakeholders are interested in transparency of the whole budget.” In other words, from the perspective of an accountability activist in Kenya, the aid-related statistics from the Ujima Project are just one piece of a much larger puzzle. Other pieces include oversight of the Constituency Development Fund, extractive industries, and an audit of the Ministry of Finance.

That doesn’t make aid transparency any less important, only more complicated. Fortunately, a burgeoning community of researchers, programmers, and activists are working together online – and offline at informal barcamps – to develop tools and techniques to overcome the many obstacles standing in the way of effective aid transparency. March and April were especially busy months for the aid transparency community. It all began on March 8 when students from the College of William & Mary, Georgetown University and George Washington University were given a preview of the AidData Portal, which launched publicly later that month. A week later the first Aid Information Challenge brought programmers and aid agencies together to think strategically about how to use open data to make aid more effective. They have linked to related projects that are already in development, and listed a set of recommendations. On March 22nd the Aid Transparency and Development Finance conference got started in Oxford, bringing together academics, think tanks, and development agencies to discuss aid transparency with a focus on data.²¹⁴ The final day included the public launch of the AidData.org portal, the most comprehensive of its kind, and a hands-on workshop on how to use it. Two weeks later and the first UK-based Aid Information Challenge took place at the Guardian newspaper offices in London. They have listed a number of project ideas and prototypes. The Aid Information Challenge website promises future events in other countries. Last month the United Arab Emirates’ Office for the Coordination of Foreign Aid held its own training workshop on aid transparency and accountability. Around the same time the World Bank announced that it had made publicly available all of its global development and finance indicators. Other initiatives aiming to bring transparency to philanthropy and development assistance include the Latin America Donor Index, Glasspockets, and Grantsfire.

The momentum of the aid transparency movement is palpable, but without greater coordination and aggregation, so much transparency will lead to more confusion than clarity. Raw data must be presented in ways that are easy to understand, and that tie directly to accountability initiatives at the local and national level in each country. Before we overwhelm the internet with information we need to facilitate the lines of communication to make use of it.

Civic Complaints

Throughout our interviews with project leaders a sentiment we heard over and over again is that they are trying to transform a culture of complaining into a culture of solutions, actions, and accountability. Ory Okolloh, a longtime Kenyan blogger and the co-founder of Mzalendo, remarked in our interview:

I spent a lot of my early blogging career sort of highlighting all the ills of the government in Kenya and all the corruption and problems. One day I asked myself, well you’re sitting here with this voice and this platform and all your complaining is not really doing anything to make a difference then how can you – within this space

²¹⁴ AidData, “Agenda,” <http://www.aiddata.org/oxford/agenda>.

– try to have a little bit of an impact? And I think that’s what drives me. “Look, it’s time to stop complaining and start acting.”²¹⁵

In order to act on complaints, however, it is first necessary to organize and make sense of them. Several projects set out to do exactly that.

In September 2008 four Jordanian technologists developed Ishki to collect and organize complaints from local citizens about the public and private sector. Their goal is to eventually expand the mission of the project so that the complaints lead to conversations, solutions, and, finally, to better policies and responsiveness by companies and government officials. Though dormant for most of last year, the site has since relaunched with new features and remains active today. So far, however, we are not aware of any examples in which a complaints listed on Ishki has been resolved, or even responded to by public officials.

Similar to Ishki, Kiirti serves as a single platform to collect complaints from residents of major cities around India. Unlike Ishki, which is built on Drupal, Kiirti uses Ushahidi to accept complaints via SMS and then visualizes them on a map interface. Project founder Selvam Velmurugan of eMoksha says that the platform has led to the repair of a streetlight in Chennai and also the paving of a dirt road. In an earlier review of the project I pointed out the seeming inefficiency of submitting a complaint to a platform which then forwards it to a government agency, but, in her review of the case study, Aparna Ray suggests that “citizens may actually welcome this buffer which facilitates engagement and gives visibility and weight to their complaints and issues.”²¹⁶ Still, she encourages Kiirti to become more transparent about its process in verifying, forwarding, and resolving complaints.

Penang Watch goes one step further than Ishki and Kiirti. In addition to collecting and categorizing complaints from citizens, the volunteers behind the site harass city council officials until the complaints are at least answered, if not resolved. Their persistence has, for example, led to the shutting down of illegal shops in Georgetown’s UNESCO world heritage neighborhood. Complaints submitted to PenangWatch.net are first verified by a team of volunteers, and then forwarded to the relevant authority and/or individual to answer or resolve the complaint. If there is no response within a week or two then a reminder is sent out. If the complaint is still not dealt with after two more weeks then a profile of the complaint is featured on the website and the negligent agency/individual is “named and shamed” via emails to all council departments and media organizations. Project coordinator Ong Boon Keong says that “roughly 300 complaints are submitted through Penang Watch per year” and that so far they have “been able to settle 50 percent of submitted complaints.”

Unlike Penang Watch, which serves as a bridge between citizen complaints and city officials, Cidade Democrática aims to motivate citizens to come up with their own solutions to civic problems. It’s important to note that online, social platforms don’t only offer new ways for citizens to interact with elected and appointed officials; they can also create new frameworks to think about how citizens govern their own communities without relying on traditional government structures. Cidade Democrática is a Brazilian platform – with most activity taking place in São Paulo – where users can submit both problems and solutions to those problems. There have been some policy decisions – such as the creation of bicycle paths in Jundiaí – which resulted from discussions and proposals

²¹⁵ Sasaki, “Mzalendo.”

²¹⁶ Ray, “Facilitating citizen-authorities engagement.”

originating on Cidade Democrática. So far successful solutions have depended on government involvement, but in the future one can envision that communal gardens, walking paths, and even recycling programs can all be coordinated by citizens without government involvement.

Recommendations

Of all the civic complaint websites we documented, Penang Watch has been the most successful in terms of bringing about government action and response. We recommend to all projects that they implement and document well-defined processes for how to deal with submitted complaints. This includes verification, categorization, prioritization and effective communication with relevant government agencies, ensuring response, working toward resolution, and publicly recognizing the work of responsive public officials. These processes can be seen as chronological stages and platforms can identify the stage of each complaint, similar to software issue tracking systems.

We recommend that, as much as possible, civic complaints websites work with and not against government. Penang Watch coordinator Ong Boon Keong is eager to point out that the website aims to improve the local government's performance by "providing it with both positive and negative feedback." Some observers, such as Archon Fung, worry that the adversarial nature of many transparency and accountability websites erodes trust in governments and institutions, and presents the government as more inefficient and wasteful than it really is.²¹⁷ Indeed, we have found many websites that strive to highlight the worst actions of corrupt officials, but few if any that reward effective performance and clean track records. In the future it is recommended that transparency and accountability websites strike a balance between criticizing poor government performance and celebrating, that which is worth duplicating.

We recommend that civic complaint websites investigate whether an anti-corruption hotline service exists in their country. A working paper by Transparency International offers several suggestions as to how civil society can work more closely with such anti-corruption hotlines. Elaine Byrne, Anne-Katrin Arnold and Fumiko Nagano of the World Bank's CommGAP initiative have published an excellent paper advocating for improved communication between government anti-corruption agencies and traditional media. Their findings, case studies, and suggestions are equally applicable to anyone developing or managing a civic complaints website.

It seems likely that the future of civic complaint websites will be increasingly mobile as internet-capable mobile phones become more common in developing countries. We believe that citizens are more likely to file a complaint if they are able to do so immediately from their mobile phone, rather than waiting to return to their computer. Platforms like FixMyStreet in the UK and SeeClickFix in the United States reveal the potential of marrying mobile applications with web-based map interfaces. The SeeClickFix complaint platform has even been adopted by some politicians, such as Bronx city councilmember Fernando Cabrera, who has put SeeClickFix right on the front page of his website.²¹⁸ Other municipal governments including Boston in the United States²¹⁹ and Eindhoven

²¹⁷ Holmes, "Defining Transparency."

²¹⁸ Nancy Scola, "Pot Hole Spotting in the Bronx," *TechPresident*, <http://techpresident.com/blog-entry/pot-hole-spotting-bronx>.

²¹⁹ Boston Government, "Citizens Connect iPhone App," <http://www.cityofboston.gov/mis/apps/iphone.asp>.

in the Netherlands²²⁰ have developed their own mobile applications to collect and act on citizen complaints.

However, the creation of so many disparate platforms to collect civic complaints also presents a problem. The most basic objective of civic complaint websites is to provide the most efficient line of communication possible between the citizen who has observed a problem and the public official who is responsible for resolving that problem. If there are multiple platforms, or multiple channels, through which citizens can make their complaints then public officials will have to spend more time searching, reviewing, and prioritizing complaints on each platform and less time responding to and resolving the complaints. We recommend to developers, activists, and governments that whenever possible they avoid the proliferation of multiple platforms so as to decrease the transaction costs of resolving complaints. If this is not possible, it may be necessary to develop aggregators of complaints filed across multiple platforms.

The city of San Francisco has shown one possible model toward open, distributed complaint tracking by partnering with CoTweet²²¹ to track citizen complaints via Twitter.²²² The San Francisco city government should be lauded for taking advantage of a channel of information where citizens are already leaving complaints about dirty streets, graffiti, and potholes, but the use of Twitter as a platform for complaint tracking reveals a tension between openness and organized prioritization. It is important to communicate to citizens that while a broken streetlight may be their own personal priority, it is likely not the first priority of an entire municipal government. Twitter is not currently well equipped to organize messages by their priority and status toward resolution, but there is reason to believe that San Francisco's Twitter-based complaint tracker will improve its organization and prioritization of messages over time.

While San Francisco's residents may be eager to send their local government a photograph of a pothole via Twitter, the same program might not be as effective in other communities where expectations of political representation and responsiveness are lower. Stuti Khemani notes that in very poor countries, people may not link events in their personal lives with wider policies.²²³ He gives the example of a child dying – something outsiders may blame on a lack of immunization or poor health policies, perhaps due to government corruption that prevents funding from reaching target areas. He argues that local community members may see this death as a fact of daily life rather than as something that could possibly have been prevented by better governance.

This likely helps explain why a SMS-based civic complaint service launched by the municipal government of Pimpri-Chinchwad in India has so far attracted only three to four complaints per day, some of which, officials say, are personal issues rather than civic problems:

Though [Municipal Commissioner] Sharma claims that three-four complaints in a day are not bad, the harsh truth is that every gulli, chawl, building or society in Pimpri-Chinchwad has dime a dozen complaints. Every day, you will bump into groups of citizens discussing a bad road or cooperative society residents grieving

²²⁰ Buiten Beter Mobile Application, <http://www.buitenbeter.nl/>.

²²¹ Co Tweet Platform, <http://cotweet.com/>.

²²² <http://springwise.com/government/sf311/>

²²³ Stuti Khemani, "Can information campaigns Overcome Political Obstacles to Serving the Poor?" World Bank, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DEC/Resources/Khemani_CanInformationCampaignsOvercome.pdf.

about piling garbage. Stinking public toilets is another major problem. And residents, especially those, living in chawls, have a strong grouse against the state of public toilets where either doors are missing or broken, commodes have been smashed, water is not available or the toilet blocks have not been cleaned for days.²²⁴

Journalist Manoj More writes that he spoke to a “cross-section of citizens” from Pimpri-Chinchwad and found that “hardly anybody knows that such a system does exist.” Simply building a platform to collect complaints is clearly not enough; such initiatives must organize workshops to educate citizens that they are able to make demands of their elected officials, and that there are concrete processes in place to do so. At the same time, it is crucial that coordinators of civic complaint websites partner with government agencies so that citizens feel they are heard when they participate. We recommend to project managers that they partner with teachers at local high schools and universities to take their classes on “civic complaint finding field trips” so that young people are able to see their community from the perspective of an engaged citizen and prioritize which issues must be dealt with first.

Before donors support the development and outreach of civic complaint platforms, we recommend that they first support more research of how such initiatives can most effectively attract, organize, communicate, and resolve citizens’ complaints by working in partnership with government agencies. We do see evidence that there is utility and rationale for a middle layer of civil society to serve as the broker between citizens demanding better government service and government agencies prioritizing their time and budgets, but there is so far a lack of evidence and inquiry as to how that middle layer can most effectively operate. What incentivizes citizens to participate? How do various government agencies organize and prioritize incoming streams of complaints? How much overlap is there between the priorities of citizens and government agencies? Are complaint services run by civil society organizations more effective than those run by local governments? What are the most effective strategies to inspire response and resolution of civic complaints? What types of complaints must be resolved by government agencies, and what are examples of complaints that have been resolved by citizens themselves? These are just a few of the questions that require more research, ideally from long-term studies that focus on a single municipality over a year.

Finally, while we recognize that software platforms must be adapted and appropriated to function effectively in each distinct environment, we recommend to all activists who are considering the implementation of a civic complaint website in their community to closely examine existing, open source platforms such as FixMyStreet²²⁵ and its sister version written in GeoDjango²²⁶, which is used by FixMyStreet Canada.²²⁷ Both projects have invested heavily in writing the code to the platforms, which can be used freely by other projects so that they can focus their time and efforts on partnering with relevant government agencies and organizing educational workshops to ensure that the platform is used.

Parliamentary Informatics

If “hanging chads” and faulty computer chips are causes for concern in today’s elections, just imagine the likely fraud that took place in Classical Athens when residents often used small pebbles

²²⁴ Manoj Moor, “Zopa Kadha : Pimpri residents hate to make civic complaint,” *The Indian Express*, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/zopa-kadha-pimpri-residents-hate-to-make-civic-complaint/490845/>.

²²⁵ Software Code to Report, view, or discuss local problems, <http://www.fixmystreet.com>.

²²⁶ GeoDjango, <http://github.com/visiblegovernment/django-fixmystreet>.

²²⁷ Visible Government Canada, “Fix My Street Canada,” <http://www.fixmystreet.ca/>.

to cast (literally) their votes. The study of those pebbles, or the votes they represent, developed into an entire academic discipline, Psephology. (Psephos, or **ψῆφος**, is literally “pebble” in Greek).

But then, Classical Athens in the 5th Century BC was made up of only around 30,000 eligible voters. (The vast majority of Athenian society was comprised of slaves without civil rights; women also could not vote or own property.) With just 30,000 participants, Athens could be governed by direct democracy. Adult Athenian men did not elect representatives to vote on their behalf, but voted on legislation and executive bills in their own right. Today’s average national democracy, in comparison, attempts to govern over 30 million individuals. The federal government of India, the world’s most populous democracy, governs over one billion citizens. It is simply neither practical nor possible for each of those billion voters to take part in every legislative decision.²²⁸

As a result, we almost all live in representative democracies where we elect public officials to create and vote on legislation on our behalf. This layer of representation, while necessary, takes citizens away from the decision making process. For decades broadcast media provided just about the only link between citizens and their elected representatives, but coverage tended to focus more on the lives of the politicians and less on the issues they vote on. Over the past five years a new generation of websites have sprouted up which combine information from parliamentary websites with social media tools in order to give citizens more information and clarity about the profile and activities of their representatives, and to become more active in the legislative process.

The first such website we reviewed is Vota Inteligente, a project of the Smart Citizen Foundation in Santiago, Chile. Like most of the parliamentary informatics websites we documented, Vota Inteligente “scrapes data” from the websites of Chile’s Senate and House of Deputies in order to more effectively gather and present information about representatives, political parties, and legislative bills. Using the information gathered by the Vota Inteligente team, you are able to compare congressional terms by party, gender, age, and incumbency. There is also a section called “Informed Citizen” which provides contextualization and analysis of the large flow of information that is added to the website every week. The website’s archive presents access to all collected data and documents. It includes a glossary, source list, document library, multimedia library, and collection of legal and legislative documents.

Vota Inteligente depends on Facebook and Twitter to sustain interaction with its users. The team has also started a “webinar” series where invited guests use streaming video to present a particular topic to anyone who shows interest. All of this information and interaction comes at the cost of a serious time investment. I had the opportunity to visit the Vota Inteligente headquarters, a comfortable two-story house in residential Santiago, which was buzzing with eager volunteers who were adding information to the database and discussing how to improve the functionality of the website. While their enthusiasm and hard work was infectious, one must wonder if it is sustainable.

Unlike the dozens of volunteers that Vota Inteligente has managed to attract, KohoVolit relies on the dedicated work of just two individuals who have managed to create a directory of profiles about every representative in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia. It even includes fairly extensive information about the activities of representatives (MEPs) of the European Union. In our interview, project founder Michal Skop emphasized that the sustainability of parliamentary informatics websites depends on their level of automation. Any such website that depends heavily on human

²²⁸ Wikipedia contributors, “Classical Athens,” *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_Athens.

labor to input and organize information, Skop says, is likely to run out of steam. By taking government data and automating its presentation and distribution in new ways, the participants of such projects can spend more time on adding much-needed contextualization and analysis to the stream of information.

Automation, however, depends on the availability of properly structured, open government data that programmers can easily import and manipulate. Brazilian political scientist and co-founder of Congresso Aberto, César Zucco, says that the current transaction costs of seeking out congressional data across multiple websites in Brazil is so high that he and his colleague Eduardo Leoni have not been able to analyze any of the data they have collected.²²⁹ They are now waiting for the Brazilian government to implement the proposed Government Information Law, which should mandate government agencies to make official data available in structured formats that can be put to use by platforms like Congresso Aberto. Congresso Aberto was modeled on two other, similar websites: Open Congress (United States) and Vote Watch (European Union). It contains: 1) data and analysis about Brazilian Congress such as voting records and attendance; 2) profiles and information about representatives; 3) information about Brazilian political parties; and 4) proposed bills and legislation. The information comes from the official websites of Brazil's Congress, but it is not yet as timely and granular as Zucco and Leoni would like.

In fact, in terms of sustaining the movement of open parliamentary data, a strong argument could be made that activists should first work on implementing satisfactory government information laws – along the lines of the Open Government Directive in the United States – before working on information management systems to help bring that information to more citizens.²³⁰ Of course, it doesn't have to be one or the other, but analyzing and communicating the information does depend on having access to it.

In Kenya, Mzalendo is another platform that came into existence precisely because of the lack of official data from parliament. Ory Okolloh and her colleague Marc launched the project at the end of 2005 after the website for Kenya's Parliament was shut down following protests by some MPs who were embarrassed about having their CVs published online. Kenya's parliament website is now back online – and much improved since its former 2005 incarnation – but Ory and Mark feel that they still have an important role to play in using online tools to hold Kenyan MPs more accountable. According to Mzalendo, the MP profile pages of the official Parliament website “are not working and the Hansards are still in pdf and not xml format, which makes them hard to repurpose.” The new (though not yet launched) version of Mzalendo, on the other hand, promises much more information and interaction. The Mzalendo blog has launched a new section called “Mzalendo Vox Pop” where guest contributors “discuss issues affecting their constituency in more detail.” Okolloh hopes that by the 2012 general election Mzalendo will have enough content to produce voter cheat sheets that rank incumbents by their participation and performance in parliament. The idea is to hand them out to voters without internet access who otherwise wouldn't be able to take advantage of the content from Mzalendo to make a more informed vote. “It's one thing to tell people to make informed decisions, but that's difficult when there is no information.” Still, like most of these sites, there are concerns about Mzalendo's sustainability. “We thought we could be sustained by

²²⁹ Manuella Maia Ribeiro, “Congresso Aberto.”

²³⁰ Daniel Schuman, “A Study in Transparency: The Open Government Directive, the Department of Labor, and the Open Data Principles: Making Government Transparent and Accountable,” Sunlight Foundation Blog, April 12, 2010, <http://blog.sunlightfoundation.com/2010/04/12/a-study-in-transparency-the-open-government-directive-the-department-of-labor-and-the-open-data-principles/>.

volunteers, but that clearly is not working,” says Okolloh. “We think we are onto something good and potentially powerful, but how to build on it without becoming an NGO is a challenge.”

A hybrid model, which depends on volunteer students, but is able to count on the institutional support of the University of the Andes, is Congreso Visible in Colombia.²³¹ As the websites of both Colombia’s Senate and House of Representatives are hopelessly out of date, Congreso Visible depends entirely on students of the political science department of the University of the Andes to manually input the data about representatives, political parties, and legislative activity. There is also a useful section called the “Agora” that provides context, investigative reporting, and opinion pieces. Each quarter they publish a printed review of activity that took place on the website in order to distribute it to offline readers. As of today the website includes 1858 profiles of members of the Congress and aspiring candidates, 5614 legislative documents and almost 1144 voting records. Of all the parliamentary informatics websites we reviewed, Congreso Visible has the cleanest presentation, and might also have the most thorough inventory of information. It takes advantage of Flickr, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter to encourage interaction with the content published on the site. Colombia’s Congress has contacted the Congreso Visible team to learn how to develop a similar website for the official Senate and House of Representatives domains. While the Colombian Congress should be applauded for seeking out expertise on how to modernize its information systems, this does beg the question, what will be the use of Congreso Visible if the Congress itself uses the exact same platform?

Most of the parliamentary informatics websites we reviewed seek to provide readers with more information about their representatives and how they vote. Others are more pro-active in encouraging citizens to think about issues rather than individuals. Vote na Web (“Vote on the Web”) is a tool developed by WebCitizen, which was launched in November 2009 at TEDx São Paulo. Using a clear interface, congressional bills are translated into simple language with clearly defined context and consequences. Beyond just explaining legislative bills in everyday language that most citizens can understand, the interface also encourages users to vote on the bills themselves, and then compare their votes with other users and with the politicians. So far most bills have only attracted between 10 – 500 votes, but if the number of users scales up, Vote na Web will provide an excellent visualization of just how representative Brazilian politicians are in their voting histories. KohoVolit has also developed a number of online and offline applications to compare citizens’ votes with those of elected officials.

500 sobre 500 (“500 for 500”) also encourages more pro-active interaction by creating profiles of all 500 representatives of Mexico’s House of Deputies, and then asking users to adopt each candidate and follow a list of updated “challenges.” The project ended at the end of May 2010.

Recommendations

What stood out as most surprising throughout our documentation of all of these projects is that each one wrote an extensive amount of code to develop distinct platforms even though nearly all of the platforms follow the same basic structure: 1) profiles of representatives with voting records, 2) legislative bills, 3) profiles of political parties, 4) a section for context and analysis. We recommend that donors convene a meeting of technologists working on parliamentary informatics websites to agree on a single platform that can be used in all representative democracies. They should collectively develop and release the Ushahidi-equivalent for parliamentary informatics. The

²³¹ Renata Avila, “Congreso Visible.”

Participatory Politics Foundation (developers of OpenCongress.org) are currently developing OpenGovernment.org, a new project that will make the open-source OpenCongress code base more modular and will be used to reveal state-, city-, and local-level government data. Its current code is hosted on GitHub.²³² MySociety's TheyWorkForYou platform, written mostly in PHP, is another strong contender, especially for Commonwealth parliamentary systems that use a Hansard.²³³ The Congreso Visible platform, which was developed by Monoku and written in Django and jQuery, is also worth further exploration, as is the Vota Inteligente platform, which is written in PHP.

There is a lack of research comparing the practices and effects of parliamentary informatics websites. Arthur Edwards' 2006 paper "Facilitating the monitorial voter: retrospective voter information websites in the United States, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands" is one of the few such studies, but it is by now outdated and limited in scope. Of specific value would be a quantified, comparative study of web analytics from each website. Where do visitors come from? What type of information are they seeking? Where do they spend most of their time? What parts of the website are frequently ignored? All of these questions can be answered with closer research into the web analytics of each website.

The majority of the projects we reviewed took advantage of social media services and relationships with their national blogospheres to distribute information and analysis from the website. We saw less evidence of collaboration, however, with civil society organizations and mainstream media institutions. A notable exception is Vota Inteligente, which has established an impressive network of like-minded national, regional, and international civil society organizations. They have also collaborated closely with mainstream media, such as CNN en Español to spread awareness and put pressure on politicians.

We recommend to project leaders that they thoroughly study search engine optimization and apply its strategies to their website development. Most users will likely arrive to their websites by searching Google for information related to a particular politician or keywords related to a legislative bill. It is crucial that the relevant page is among the first ten search results.

We recommend to project leaders that they work with local newspapers, radio stations, TV stations, and mobile phone service providers to distribute information and analysis from their websites to offline readers. Other strategies for offline distribution include Congreso Visible's model of quarterly reports and Mzalendo's plans for non-partisan voter pamphlets to be distributed before elections. We recommend that project leaders work in partnership with high school teachers to develop lesson plans that integrate these platforms into school curricula so that students understand the workings of their government from an information perspective. We also recommend to project leaders that in addition to scraping data from official parliamentary websites, they also take advantage of the wealth of contextual information found on sites like Open CRS, Parlio, and the National Congress Library of Chile in order to give a more thorough overview of how congress works.

We recommend to the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament that they reach out to technologists and administrators of parliamentary informatics websites to involve them in discussions and agreements

²³² Open Government, <http://opengovernment.org/>.

²³³ They Work For You, <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/>.

related to XML and open standards in parliament. The 14-17 September 2010 Internet Governance Forum in Vilnius, Lithuania could be one potential venue to convene such a discussion.²³⁴

We recommend to project leaders that they follow the strategy of Congreso Visible and partner with local universities to take advantage of eager students who can help input data into the system, and then analyze and distribute that information. We recommend to donors and universities that they facilitate more conversation between researchers of open government data and technologists working on parliamentary informatics websites.

We recommend to governments that they seek out the opinion of open government activists and technologists when deciding how to publish information online, and what information should be made available.

Crime Mapping

A number of websites have cropped up over the past few years in the United States and United Kingdom to add transparency and accessibility to crime reports from municipal police departments. CrimeMapping.com, Oakland Crimespotting, CrimeMapper, LAPD Crime Maps, CrimeReports, SpotCrime, Crimedat, and EveryBlock (which began in 2005 as ChicagoCrime.org) are just a few such examples. Outside of the United States and United Kingdom the majority of crime mapping projects seem to be based in Latin America, which claims 8% of the world's population, 40% of world's homicides, and 66% of kidnappings.²³⁵

WikiCrimes.org is a collaborative, global, multilingual mapping of crimes around the world that is built with WikiMapps software. It was conceived by Vasco Furtado, Professor at the University of Fortaleza, Brazil, where he coordinates a research group in "Knowledge Engineering." All data can both be imported and exported in the open standard KML format. WikiCrimes currently has 13,117 reports of crime, almost all of which are based in Brazil. Reports can be filtered by category, time, and credibility. Users can sign up for notifications of crime reports based on their customized filters, and there is a beta mobile application available in Portuguese. All crime reports are ranked by their number of views, comments, and confirmations, and are re-distributed via Twitter. Users can confirm crime reports by linking to relevant news items or video and photographic evidence of the actual crime. So far the most commented crime is a homicide that took place on March 29, 2008 at 11 in the evening in Sao Paulo. It has received 22 positive confirmations, one negative confirmation, and four comments.

Delitos Ecuador is a project of Fundapi that uses Ushahidi to collect and aggregate crime reports in Ecuador.²³⁶ Reports can also be submitted via Twitter using the hashtag #delitosEC. The Illegal Drug Trade Map in Argentina combines a blog with a Google map. It was created by the Argentinean Association Against Drugs and enables citizens to learn more about the illegal drug trade in Argentina, and to submit locations where they have seen drug dealing take place. Panamá Transparente uses Ushahidi to aggregate and map reports about crime in Panama. Iluminemos Mexico is a citizen network against violence in Mexico that maps crimes and invites users to discuss

²³⁴ Internet Governance Forum, "Preparing the IFG 2010 Meeting,"

<http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/index.php/component/content/article/89-preparatory-process/475-preparing-the-igf-2010-meeting->

²³⁵ Joshua String, <http://www.joshuafrens-string.com/2010/05/citizen-security-democracy-economy.html>.

²³⁶ Crime Map in Ecuador, <http://www.delitosecuador.com/>.

and implement solutions to internal security problems. Outside of Latin America, Sithi is a Cambodian human rights portal that aims to crowdsource and curate reports of human rights violations across multiple human rights organizations.

Recommendations

While most crime mapping websites in the United States visualize official crime data from municipal police departments, which can then be confirmed and commented on by users, all of the crime mapping projects we documented depend on individual citizens to provide the information. This is likely due to the fact that police departments in most of the world still do not publish their crime reports, much less in a structured format that can be automatically mapped and re-purposed. We recommend to crime mapping project coordinators that they work in collaboration with local police departments in order to automate the publishing of official crime data. If a project has successfully convinced a police department to publish its crime reports, we suggest that they publish their experience to help provide like-minded projects with an advocacy strategy.

While mapping crime helps us better understand both where it occurs and how crime spreads over time, it does not necessarily lead toward pro-active solutions. In fact, it can even lead to paranoia and social exclusion if residents react by merely investing in higher walls and more expensive alarm systems. Crime mapping platforms should focus on prevention as much as after-the-fact reporting. We recommend that they integrate their content with social groups that are working in neighborhoods where crime is prevalent and youth are at risk.

We believe that crime mapping platforms should collaborate with local bloggers, journalists, and activists to host monthly discussions about how to deal with a crime problem that has been particularly troublesome over the past four weeks. We suggest that it is useful to think of crime through the lens of epidemiology, with a focus on curing the disease.

Extractive Industries

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill illustrates and justifies the public's interest in the activities of extractive industries. The Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative aims to bring about greater disclosure of payments from companies to governments, contracts and information on how revenues are spent by the oil, mining, and gas sectors.²³⁷ We believe that the movement for greater extractive industry transparency would benefit from the use of technology to bring about greater awareness of the activities of the extractive industries, but so far we have been able to find few examples of existing projects.

Publish What You Pay is a global civil society coalition that helps citizens of resource-rich developing countries hold their governments accountable for the management of revenues from the oil, gas and mining industries.²³⁸ It has supported a number of capacity building workshops worldwide. Landman Report Card is a project of the ExtrAct group at MIT²³⁹ that aims to provide information and tools to residents whose land is coveted by oil and gas companies. While its focus is

²³⁷ Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative, <http://eiti.org/>.

²³⁸ Publish What You Pay, <http://www.publishwhatyoupay.org/en/activities>.

²³⁹ MIT MediaLab, "extrACT," <http://civic.mit.edu/projects/c4fcm/extract>.

almost entirely on the United States, the platform and resources can also be used by people worldwide.²⁴⁰

Nomad Green is a multilingual platform for Mongolian environmental citizen journalists to document environmental threats and climate change in their country.²⁴¹ Much of their reporting and documentation has focused on the environmental and social impact of open-pit mining. They use SeeClickFix to map examples of harmful and illegal mining, and to encourage direct action. The Observatory of Mining Conflicts in Latin America²⁴² has a rudimentary map which links to information about mining-related community conflicts that have taken place throughout Latin America. So far it links to information about 136 different conflicts.

Recommendations

We recommend that Publish What You Pay, Revenue Watch Institute, and the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative all attend and host barcamps that invite technologists and bloggers to strategically discuss how online tools can be used to bring about more transparency in the extractive industries – both in terms of environmental/social impact and also financial corruption. The World Wildlife Federation’s Amazon Map and the Louisiana Bucket Brigade Oil Spill Crisis Map are two models for mapping impact, whereas Sourcemap illustrates a potential platform to map the flow of money related to extractive industries.

Local Government

In our podcast interview, Fabiano Angelico observed that while most technology for transparency projects focus on federal government transparency, their potential for impact is in fact much stronger at the local level where users are likely to be more invested in policy decisions that directly affect their daily lives. Compared to national level projects we were able to find relatively few technology for transparency projects at the local level, however it is also likely that there is less awareness and available information about those projects.

Local Accountability Portals in Atitlan provides easy-to-use and cheap tools to help local municipalities of four different villages in the department of Sololá to publish all the information required by law on their local government websites. Concejo Visible Bucaramanga is an initiative coordinated by Universidad Industrial de Santander in Colombia to make more transparent the activities of the Bucaramanga Municipal Council Administration. It also opened a collaborative space to share ideas and discuss policies that matter to them. Concejo Visible Bucaramanga is, in fact, one of a number of similar citizen-led transparency initiatives that make up the Colombian Network of Citizen Observers.

Adote um Vereador encourages Brazilian citizens to blog about the work of their local elected officials in order to hold them accountable. Fabiano Angelico, our research reviewer who is also based in Sao Paulo, suggests that participating bloggers should pick a monthly topic and try to raise awareness and advocate for more government data related to that one topic. It is worth noting that a similar “adopt a politician” campaign began in Peru in 2008 when the well-known journalist Rosa

²⁴⁰ Landman Report Card Website, <http://www.landmanreportcard.com/>.

²⁴¹ Nomad Green – Mongolian Environmental News, <http://nomadgreen.org>.

²⁴² Observatory of Mining Conflicts in Latin America, <http://www.olca.cl/ocmal/>.

María Palacios asked²⁴³ citizens to mount pressure in order to get information about the operational expenses of national congressmen. Juan Arellano wrote an in-depth review of the project²⁴⁴, which is no longer active following the overwhelming resistance by most congressmen.

Recommendations

We recommend to all developers and coordinators of local technology for transparency projects that they read Georg Neumann's post "Developing Hyper-Local Integrity Systems to fight and prevent corruption," which encourages such projects to use the National Integrity System Assessment²⁴⁵ as a holistic framework to analyze both the extent and causes of corruption in a given country.²⁴⁶

We also support and encourage the replication of "adopt a politician" projects in all municipalities worldwide to create more awareness and accountability at the local level.

Private Sector

We specifically set out to document projects that aim to increase government transparency and political accountability, but throughout the course of our research it became clear that several private sector transparency projects are explicitly in the public's interest, including those related to consumer rights and the environmental/social impact of corporate behavior.

Quien Paga Manda ("Who Pays is in Charge") is a Costa Rican blog by former journalist (and Technology for Transparency Network advisor) Hazel Feigenblatt. It serves as an information resource about the responsiveness of businesses to customers who have received poor service. It is also meant to amplify the voices of citizens who otherwise have no recourse to hold private businesses accountable. Issues are categorized by electronics, banks, restaurants, public services and vehicles. Reclamos.cl²⁴⁷ is a similar consumer rights platform based in Chile, which has a strong focus on working with broadcast media to distribute and amplify stories about companies that are unresponsive to consumer complaints. So far they have managed to facilitate 1,869 mainstream media stories, which are broken down by media outlet on their front page. In addition to filing complaints, users can also list recommendations for positive service experiences. A business directory lists complaints by business, and select complaints are featured on the "emphasized complaints" page. Every complaint lists the number of comments it has received and the number of times it has been read.

Sourcemap is an open source, global platform for researching, optimizing and sharing the supply chains behind a number of everyday products. "We believe that people have the right to know where things come from and what they are made of," declares the website. Sample sourcemaps

²⁴³ Rosa María Palacios, "Tenemos derecho a saberlo (We have the right to know)," *Perú 21*, <http://peru21.pe/impresa/noticia/tenemos-derecho-saberlo/2008-09-06/223853>.

²⁴⁴ Juan Arellano, "Peru adopting congressional representatives," *Global Voices Online*, October 3, 2008, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/10/03/peru-bloggers-adopting-congressional-representatives/>.

²⁴⁵ Transparency International, "National Integrity System (NIS) assessment," http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/nis.

²⁴⁶ Georg Neumann, "Developing Hyper-Local Integrity Systems to fight and prevent corruption" *Accountability 2.0*, March 11, 2010, <http://socialtransparency.wordpress.com/2010/03/11/developing-hyper-local-integrity-systems-to-fight-and-prevent-corruption/>.

²⁴⁷ Reclamos Chile (Complaints in Chile), http://www.reclamos.cl/directorio_de_empresas.

include a Giant TCR '04 Bicycle²⁴⁸, iPod²⁴⁹, Tesla Roadster, and IKEA Sultan Alsarj bed. Sourcemaps are organized by user-submitted tags, and also by “most favorited,” “most commented” and “most complex.”

CorpWatch²⁵⁰ is a San Francisco-based aggregator and platform of articles, blog posts, investigative reports, statistics, and multimedia related to the corporate accountability worldwide. It categorizes its content by industry and issue.

Recommendations

In most developing countries the past two decades have seen the privatization of many industries that were once run by the government. As privatization continues, citizens must develop new tools to hold those new private corporations accountable. Archon Fung rightly points out that the transparency movement should focus on private companies at least as much as government agencies.²⁵¹ We recommend to all technology for transparency activists that they invest more of their time on projects that hold corporations accountable.

All of the above-mentioned projects publish content related to multinational corporations. Most of them categorize that content per corporation to create site-wide business directories. But we do not yet have an aggregator of all of this related content across multiple platforms to provide a more comprehensive look at the responsiveness, behavior, and social/environmental impact of major corporations. We recommend that private sector transparency projects convene a conference to agree on semantic standards that can easily be aggregated and re-purposed across their platforms.

As one of the ultimate goals of such projects is to improve the behavior and responsiveness of corporations, we recommend that private sector transparency projects partner with business schools to systematically study what advocacy strategies are most effective in convincing corporations to voluntarily become more accountable. For example, is it possible to organize a competition on Sourcemap²⁵² where major clothing companies voluntarily submit the supply chains of their products to compete for the lowest carbon footprint?

Advocacy

Admittedly, the most nebulous category of projects on the Technology for Transparency Network is “advocacy.” At worst it can be seen as something of a miscellaneous dumping ground of all projects that don’t belong elsewhere. On the other hand, advocacy projects can also be seen as the glue which holds together all of the above-mentioned categories, and tries to fill the gaps in the transparency and accountability ecosystem. Unless awareness is spread in government, the media, and civil society about the need for such projects, they will never scale up to a level where their impact can be measured over time.

²⁴⁸ Source Map, “Giant TCR '04 Bicycle Made in Taiwan,” <http://www.sourcemap.org/object/giant-tcr-04-bicycle>.

²⁴⁹ Source Map, “Ipod Production,” <http://www.sourcemap.org/object/ipod-production>.

²⁵⁰ CorpWatch: Holding Corporations Accountable, <http://www.corpwatch.org/>.

²⁵¹ Allan Holmes, “Defining Transparency,” *NextGov*, http://www.nextgov.com/nextgov/ng_20090903_7217.php.

²⁵² Source Map, “Open Supply Chains,” <http://www.sourcemap.org/>.

More information More Rights (Más Información Más Derechos) promotes public debate on access to public information in Colombia. In addition to its blog, it also promotes discussion and distributes information via Twitter, Facebook, Slideshare, and Scribd. Képmutatás, which means “hypocrisy” in Hungarian, advocates for more transparency in campaign financing in Hungary by estimating the unreleased expenses made by political parties during election campaigns and distributing their findings through traditional and social media. Kubatana.net has built a network of over 200 civil society organizations in Zimbabwe, an archive of over 15,800 documents, and an SMS subscriber list of over 9,000 individuals. It promotes collective action, such as a campaign to determine how tollbooth revenue is being used by the government. Saatsam²⁵³, which means ‘clean’ in Khmer, aims to encourage public participation in promoting transparency by raising awareness about the impact of corruption, and making related documents freely available. ProAcceso²⁵⁴, founded by Mercedes de Freitas of the Venezuelan chapter of Transparency International, is a coalition of organizations in Venezuela that advocate for timely, relevant government data related to public health, education, politics, law enforcement, the use of public resources, and salaries of public officials.

Recommendations

Most advocacy projects we documented target either governments or the general public in their efforts to increase awareness about the importance of transparency and accountability, and the role that open data plays in bringing about both. We recognize that each audience is distinct and requires different strategies.

For groups advocating to governments, we recommend that they frame their advocacy in terms of cooperation rather than hostility. Transparency and accountability should be framed as pathways toward political credibility. We specifically recommend that advocacy groups seek out like-minded supporters who work in high government positions and depend on them to help promote and amplify the importance of transparent governance and open data from within.

For groups advocating to the general public, we recommend that they work closely with both mainstream and social media. The World Bank²⁵⁵ and Transparency International have published a number of guides and white papers on how to design effective anti-corruption campaigns. People, Spaces, Deliberation²⁵⁶, a blog of the World Bank’s CommGAP initiative, also frequently publishes recommendations and case studies related to advocacy campaigns for transparency and accountability.

As much as possible, avoid acronyms and unnecessarily technical language. Creativity always helps draw attention to your cause. For example, Fifth Pillar²⁵⁷, an NGO headquartered in Chennai, India, printed “Zero Rupees” bills with the image of Gandhi to be given to any official asking for a bribe.²⁵⁸ The initiative was covered by CNN,²⁵⁹ the Economist,²⁶⁰ the Telegraph, Boing Boing and

²⁵³ Sopheap Chak, “Saatsam.”

²⁵⁴ Benett Gordon, “ProAcceso,” Technology for Transparency Network, <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/proaccesso>.

²⁵⁵ The World Bank, “Governance and Anticorruption Deliberation,” <http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance>.

²⁵⁶ People Spaces Deliberation, <http://blogs.worldbank.org/publicsphere/>.

²⁵⁷ Fifth Pillar, <http://www.5thpillar.org/>.

²⁵⁸ Zero Currency to fight corruption, <http://zerocurrency.org/>.

many other international media outlets. Fifth Pillar received calls from interested groups in Nepal, Argentina, Mexico, France and Germany who wanted to implement their own zero currency projects.

The Zero Rupees initiative was a creative response to spread awareness about the problem of bribery in India. Similar creativity should be applied to initiatives and campaigns that advocate for open government data.

²⁵⁹ Sita Wadhvani, "Fifth Pillar – Beating corruption with 0 rupee notes," *CNN*, <http://www.cnn.com/mumbai/none/zero-rupee-833044>.

²⁶⁰ "Fighting corruption in India: A zero contribution," *The Economist*, January 28, 2010.

Conclusion

The power and danger of information

With German Reunification in October, 1990 came an intense debate about what to do with the stacks of files the Stasi kept about the lives of East German citizens.²⁶¹ While many argued that the files should be opened, others insisted that the information remain closed. Prime Minister Lothar de Maizière even predicted murders of revenge against former Stasi employees if the files were made accessible. There was a fear that East Germans were not ready to see the information collected about themselves. This argument – that the general public is not fit to handle information about their community and themselves – is often used by governments and institutions as an excuse to hold private that which should be publicly disclosed.

In Kibera, the unrecognized settlement outside of Nairobi, resident Douglas Namale says that the local planning department has historically not had adequate geographic information about Kibera that has resulted in poor sanitation services.

In fact, much of the information collected by development groups and the Kenyan government is not shared with Kibera residents. Robert Neuwirth explains in his book “Shadow Cities”²⁶² how a study commissioned by the United Nation and World Bank found that, on average, Kibera residents pay ten times as much for water than the average person in a wealthy neighborhood with municipally supplied, metered water service. The study was distributed widely at development conferences, but was never shared with Kibera’s own residents for fears that it would lead to rioting.

“Perhaps it’s true that people in Kibera could riot over water,” Neuwirth allows. “After all, Kibera has been the scenes of riots in the past ... Still, Kibera’s people deserve to know the facts about their lives. What’s the point of studying the water kiosks of Kibera if, when the study is done, the information is not shared with the people who are most at stake?”

If projects like Map Kibera succeed, then such information does not need to be shared with the people ... they will share it among themselves.

Next steps

This report concludes the first phase of our research into the role of technology in the transparency and accountability movement. Our platform, however, remains open to new submissions of relevant, innovative projects, and we anticipate a second phase of research with a greater focus on evaluation for impact.

One of the most difficult challenges throughout our research was simply developing a taxonomy to categorize and describe the projects we documented. We recognize that technology for transparency projects might choose to describe themselves and their objectives in language that differs from traditional anti-corruption organizations and the donors that fund them. We believe that categories on the website will always be dynamic and will shift as new projects come online and maturing projects evolve their objectives and strategies.

²⁶¹ Khu Pham, “Support Group for Spies.”

²⁶² Ethan Zuckermann, “Robert Neuwirth’s Shadow Cities,” *Worldchanging*, <http://www.worldchanging.com/archives/002029.html>.

We emphasize that the distribution of reports is not as significant as the distribution of new ideas that turn into concrete projects and partnerships. As such, the objective of the Technology for Transparency Network will always be to facilitate the sharing and learning of skills and strategies across projects, sectors, and communities. We will aim to translate our findings into as many languages as possible. (Already our findings have been translated into Portuguese, French, Chinese, Spanish and Bahasa.) In the future we hope to host live chats with developers, bloggers, and activists focused on similar works of engagement in order to spread the best ideas and come up with new ones.

We encourage interaction, new ideas, and challenges to everything we have published. Please do get involved to help push the discourse and the movement forward.