

Strengthening Accountability Institutions to Improve Service Delivery

Background: Governance, Accountability, Participation and Performance (GAPP) Activity is a seven year program designed to increase participation, accountability, and local governance for effective service delivery. The program, jointly funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and The United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), is premised on hypothesis that if local government systems are strengthened and non-government-led efforts are supported to improve accountability and democratic governance, then service delivery will be more equitable, effective and efficient.

The Collaboration: Through the GAPP program USAID/Uganda signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Office of the Auditor General (OAG). The signing of this MoU marked the formalization of the collaboration between USAID (the donor agency) and the OAG (the implementing partner). The document spelt out how the two organs would collaborate to improve accountability in Uganda through strengthening the audit functions.



John F.S. Muwanga the Auditor General (L) and Mark Meassick, USAID|Uganda's Deputy Mission Director sign the MoU

GAPP also signed MoUs with the Parliament of Uganda and the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority (PPDA) committing to work together to improve efficiencies in processing audit reports in Parliament and the conduct of procurement audits in the local governments respectively.

Working with the three institutions, GAPP further assisted an activity that involves all the three targeted three accountability oversight institutions – Parliament, OAG and PPDA – coming together on one activity. In this respect, the three came to be known as the Tripartite. They carry out field outreach tripartite activities to the selected local governments to dialogue around audit reports released by the OAG and PPDA.

The Tripartite Activities: In 2013 GAPP, initiated a tripartite outreach activity that brought together the Tripartite agencies on the one hand, and the district level accountability organs and stakeholders to discuss audit reports issued by the OAG and PPDA. The activity was motivated by GAPP initial assessment findings indicating high corruption concerns; weak mutual support mechanisms between the national and local government counterparts on matters of accountability; and rather lukewarm concern by key players over local government of public resources, thereby impeding service delivery.



Hon. Mawell Akora Vice Chairperson LGAC addresses participants in Kitgum, May 2014

The Tripartite agencies convened a maiden meeting on 22nd May 2013 in Lira district local government (DLG) to discuss district audit reports for FY2010/11-12, and PPDA audit reports for FY2010/11.

At the local government level, this meeting brought together various participants including the accounting officer and key staff, councilors, the local government public accounts committee, the resident district commissioner (who represents the president in every district), the police, the civic and private sector players and opinion leaders. Three members of the Parliamentary Local Governments Accounts Committee (LGAC) participated. At that time, GAPP was taking the lead in organizing the meetings, right from mobilization to providing logistics and moderating discussions. That initial meeting brought together 42 participants. The model so initiated in Lira DLG was rolled on to the subsequent outreaches to Pader and Oyam DLGs during the same week.

From these, GAPP learnt that most of the participants had never received or seen a copy of the audit reports issued annually by OAG and PPDA. In certain instances, such as in Oyam DLG, those responsible for circulating the report at district level would deliberately shelve it away rather than taking needed action or tabling the report. Judging from the level of engagement and demand for more regular such meetings, GAPP found that there was a genuine information gap and desire to implement audit recommendations whenever made available. GAPP also learnt that participants wanted more time than just the one day provided, to continue the engagement.

A number of recommendations were further made which were instrumental in transformation subsequent Tripartite outreach meetings. It was decided to include among future participants all Local Council III Chairpersons and Sub-County Chiefs and all members of the District Service Commission because they represented grassroots communities who would also benefit from being represented meetings, and they directly implement and supervise community service delivery projects commissioned by government. It was further agreed that time be set aside in the meeting agenda for the Chairperson of the Local Government Public Accounts Committee (LGAPAC) based at the district to make a statement during the meetings. This would increase the visibility of this office and empower them further to provide oversight at a local level.

The Transformation of the Tripartite Activities (Learning and Adaptation): After the first tripartite activity in Lira, Pader and Oyam DLGs, Tripartite meetings formatted differently. The main objective of the meetings remained the same: to bridge the gap between national level accountability institutions and their counterparts at the district level through meaningful deliberations on audit reports. However, participants increased, and the LGAPC Chairperson issued a key statement immediately after the LGAC Chairperson. LGAPCs took center stage as a local counterpart to the national LGAC.

Further, the GAPP program staff increasingly stepped to



the rear, as the Tripartite and LG organs increasingly took the lead in the tripartite meetings.

Fourteen outreaches down the road, GAPP further agreed to Parliament's request to allow the meeting to incorporate a formal Parliamentary Committee hearing. And so, during the last 9 outreaches in FY 2015, Parliament included a formal hearing during the meetings. Parliament was given full responsibility of the activities. Parliament wrote and followed the invitations; it invoked its full powers of the high court in respect to summoning, production of documents and temporary detention of recalcitrant witnesses; it took record of proceeding through auto-recording and writing of minutes of the meetings by the Clerk's department as GAPP withdrew its rapporteurs; and allowed a plenary debate by the participants as if the entire meeting had turned into a parliamentary plenary. This shift greatly strengthened the ownership by the partner organisations of the process and laid the ground for further implementation of this activity even after the GAPP program closes.

A number of parameters changed:

- Ten Members of Parliament have to participate in order to achieve the required committee quorum. This number increased from the original three MPs who were then deemed sufficient for the activities to be held.
- Formal tools of Parliamentary functioning were invoked, including recording, administration of oaths, the Parliamentary prayer before the meeting and national anthem.
- Setting the room in a manner that clearly distinguishes the Parliament on one side, the respondents (CAO or Town Clerk) on the opposite side and Parliament's auditors (OAG & PPDA) at the adjacent sides. Previously the sitting arrangement did not require designation of spaces for entities.
- Plenary sessions became a key feature, replacing the previous hitherto traditional group work sessions. Plenaries have enabled more time and encouraged participants to express themselves more freely, thus promoting more voice as report back sessions from the group work sometimes did not capture community sentiments.
- Rather than having the central level officers of OAG and PPDA support Parliament to go for outreaches, the decentralized offices of OAG and PPDA work with the decentralized offices of GAPP to enable these Parliament-led outreaches.
- The Committee Clerk produced minutes of the meeting which become an official Parliamentary record of the meetings available to GAPP as well to utilize for preparing its program reports.
- The hearing involved a segment for direct question and answer session, between Parliamentarians and the accounting officer. A police detective is made on stand-by to delve into criminal leads arising from the engagement.



As all these adaptations were happening, the numbers of people invited for the tripartite activities steadily increased. By the time the last tripartite meeting was held in August 2015 in Gulu Municipal Council the number had risen to 123 (from the initial 56 in Lira DLG). This increase was largely attributed to the need to include other categories of people/offices that

have a bearing on accountability and service delivery, being the main theme of the outreach visits. Further, organization was improved, by empowering the Parliamentary Clerk to coordinate Parliamentary liaison, the activity budget was revised to cater for the additional participants and Staff were redirected to support the organization of this activity. This scale up also coincided with establishment of more robust regional offices that supported the increase in breadth of the intervention.

Results: The tripartite activities gave rise to some immediate actions. District Public Accounts Committees and District Service Commissions were established where they were non-existent, such as in Oyam and Pader DLGs; contractors found to have misused public funds were blacklisted by PPDA; and communities rose up to further demand local government official to report to the communities and be tasked on the issues that came to light during the outreach meetings, such as what happened in Kitgum DLG.

Further, enforcement agencies picked keen interest in ensuring accountability, as shown in Apac and Lira DLGs where culprits were retained to assist security agencies track the illegal actions associated with specific contracts. The districts have started to appreciate the need for transparency as part of good accountability. In Mukono, DLG, a noticeboard was immediately put in place to display all procurement process information; while in Kiboga, a process was commenced to procure a suggestion box to encourage suggestions and complaints from citizens to their LGs.

Key Lessons Learnt: As the tripartite activities/meetings were being conducted some lessons were learnt and include the following:

1. When an activity is being implemented by stakeholders who are engaged like Parliament and OAG and ready to explore alternative ways to arriving at a program result. Opportunities exist to improving interventions to make them even more effective.
2. The tools for improving accountability and governance in Uganda are already there. Fragmentation of actors disempowers the duty bearers and makes them ineffective in combating corruption and ensuring accountability. For example, with or without GAPP, the OAG and PPDA will produce the reports. And certainly, Parliament might discuss these reports at some future time. What GAPP has done is to provide the enabling environment for these reports to reach the key local government targets and be discussed soon after they are released, thereby making recommendations therefrom even more up to date and adaptable.

Conclusion: The tripartite activities of the GAPP program are a true demonstration of the Collaboration, Learning and Adaptation (CLA) model. They indeed build and promote collaborations between partners, as implementation is going on, lessons are learned which are then fed into the program design. This learning and adapting process has been a three year journey with changes made every year in after activity reviews as well as the annual review and program reflection processes that inform the implementation. As a direct result of learning from tripartite activities, the PPDA has crafted and is implementing their own model of outreaches named procurement barazas. The OAG as well, is drafting its engagement strategy to guide its future outreach and engagement activities with the wider public.