

Sustaining social accountability mechanisms in frontline public service delivery: Findings from four Indonesian districts

Anna Wetterberg, Jana C. Hertz, and Derick W. Brinkerhoff - RTI International

Frontline public services are the point at which service providers and citizens interact. Social accountability (SA) tools, e.g., citizen report cards and user committees, engage citizens in identifying shortcomings in service delivery. While popular, the conditions under which these approaches support provider accountability for meeting citizen needs require further study (Molyneux et al. 2012).

We examine the *Kinerja* program's SA tools to identify factors underlying continued commitment to SA for improving services, drawing on over fifty interviews with providers, clients, and local officials at fifteen clinics in four provinces. *Kinerja* works in twenty Indonesian districts to improve services through a Complaints Survey (CS), a multi-stakeholder forum (MSF), and a Service Charter (SC) negotiated between citizens and providers at public health clinics.

Using Fox's (2007) transparency-accountability spectrum, results show that citizens' and providers' commitments to SA diverge. Almost all MSFs reported feeling empowered to monitor service delivery and report problems. Most providers, however, saw MSFs improving services by channeling information to the community or local government, not alerting providers to community needs or concerns. This discrepancy undermines the sustainability of SA efforts; if providers fail to see monitoring as citizens' right, they are unlikely to respond to complaints after *Kinerja* concludes.

At five sites, however, providers perceived that MSFs should monitor service delivery and channel complaints to clinics. Such attitudes were associated with higher-capacity MSFs, but also with confrontational CS experiences, collaboration on shared problems, and local governments' rewards/sanctions for providers' SA responses.

Other research has suggested that Indonesian villagers will complain, when they are safe from repercussions (Olken 2007), and that ownership of public goods increases when complaints are responded to (Gaduh 2010). Our findings demonstrate that externally introduced SA mechanisms can lead to self-sustaining efforts to improve services, if providers see citizens as legitimate monitors of service quality.

References

- Fox, J. 2007. "The uncertain relationship between transparency and accountability." *Development in Practice* 17(4-5): 663-671.
- Gaduh, A. 2010. "Village capacity in maintaining infrastructure: evidence from rural Indonesia." Jakarta: World Bank.
- Molyneux, S., Atela, M., Angwenyi, V., and Goodman, C. 2012. "Community accountability at peripheral health facilities: a review of the empirical literature and development of a conceptual framework." *Health Policy and Planning* 27(7): 541-554.

Olken, B. A. 2007. "Monitoring corruption: Evidence from a field experiment in Indonesia."
Journal of Political Economy 115(2): 200-249.