



Doing Accountability Differently: A 'Vertically Integrated' Approach

Voice to the People (V2P) was a two-and-a-half year project promoting good governance in Anambra State, Nigeria through citizen-driven and oriented development and accountability.

The key aims of V2P are supporting communities and civil society to establish dialogue between citizens and the state, increase citizen voices and participation in governance, see communities and civil society organisations effectively holding their leaders to account, and improve government responsiveness and service delivery.

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Introduction

Enhancing accountable governance has long been a major concern of development programming, but matching this interest with change that is both sustainable and replicable at multiple levels has not been easily achieved. As part of efforts to tackle rising levels of poverty and inequality in Nigeria, the first phase of the Voice to the People (V2P) project, an offshoot of the UK aid funded Governance and Transparency Fund (GTF) was designed and implemented in Anambra State from 2013 to 2016. The project sought to tackle governance issues as the root cause of the lack of development in the state, working to develop and utilise strategies that can be replicated or adapted to other contexts within the country to create opportunities for improved local governance in Nigeria.

V2P has proved to be an effective and low-cost approach to strengthening local governance, while linking these successes upwards to people and processes at the state level. The project achieved remarkable changes not only in citizen engagement with budgeting and planning of community projects in Anambra, but also in state government responsiveness and public service delivery. Drawing on focus groups and interviews with key informants and a review of project documents, the V2P practice paper reflects on the lessons that can be learned from the first phase of V2P, a programme funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and implemented by Christian Aid in partnership with local organisations in Anambra State, Nigeria. This summary provides in the subsequent sections, highlights and insights to the key lessons contained in the full practice paper.



Forge Complementary Partnerships

Every V2P partner contributed a key element. Local Justice, Development and Peace Commissions of Awka, Nnewi and Onitsha; with their links to the Catholic Church, brought in the trust citizens needed to believe in the initiative and create a culture of demands. They also facilitated the selection of monitors or facilitators of priorities. Development in Practice (DiP) ensured a women's rights approach was embedded, while partners Civil Rights Concern (CRC), the Centre for Leadership, Strategy and Development (Centre LSD), and collaborations with the DFID-funded SAVI (State Accountability and Voice Initiative) programme, helped identify issues beyond local government capacity and ensured direct communication and buy-in from state authorities and the media.



Voice to the People (V2P) took a power-aware approach that enabled collaboration amongst community-level, local government and state-level actors and vertical integration of advances at each stage, **making it an instructive case study for replicating and scaling up effective accountability programming.**



V2P analysed power imbalances between marginalised people and the elites who benefit from inequality in order to overcome obstacles to progress and emphasise the need for coordinated, independent oversight of public sector actors at all levels.



V2P began by working in communities, and particularly amongst women and girls, to achieve greater participation, representation and effectiveness in demanding rights and accountability from government actors. The project then expanded horizontally, into alliances across and between local areas, and vertically to improve institutional dialogue and interaction up to and including the state level.



V2P achieved remarkable change not only in citizen engagement with budgeting and planning of community projects, but also in institutionalising processes for gains at local and state government levels in accountability, responsiveness and public service delivery.



Moving outward into horizontal alliance-building, V2P amplified the voices of citizens by forging links amongst communities and making use of emerging opportunities. At the local level, V2P built community networks through capacity-building and rights awareness events, opening up opportunities to integrate a wider variety of voices, help people—especially women and girls—to see themselves as agents of change, and encourage confident and concerted demands from citizens to their governments.

V2P's most important gains have been in vertical integration, leveraging community-level mobilisation and horizontal alliances to shift power in the interest of more accountable governance. Using power analysis to discover how unequal power relations cause accountability failures, V2P has made strides towards institutionalising the kind of transparent mechanisms that enable a shift in power from traditional leaders and other elites to communities



Tackle local bottlenecks and inefficiencies

Experiences from previous local governance projects showed that local isolated initiatives would not be enough. Many local governments and traditional rulers were either corrupt, ineffective or simply did not have the resources to respond to citizens' demands. On other occasions, patronage relationships saw government respond only to favoured communities. Community collaboration to overcome these bottlenecks was absent or ineffective; therefore, 'vertical' scale up to state level was critical. It was on this basis that V2P facilitated the establishment of Community-Based Monitors selected to mobilise people, and lead the community to ensure effective service delivery through monitoring roles of government services and budget implementation. They also ensured that community development priorities were included in the government budgets and plans; using a tool called the Community Charter of Demand (CCD). Gender and power analysis tools ensured priorities came from both women and men. Monitoring groups ensured that those with the right skills and knowledge were focused on specific sectors important to the community. For example, CBMs focused on the health sector within their community had some knowledge about health and standard operating procedures. Mobilisation expanded horizontally across individual communities and local government areas through a Community Empowerment Network. By developing horizontal links, communities were better positioned to monitor state-wide programmes and bypass local inefficiencies. Only when citizens were ready, did selected demands go up to the state authorities.



Context and opportunities matter

The political context in Anambra was open to V2P's focus on soft policy issues where quick wins could be made—such as health, education, and agriculture—and citizen participation. The 2014 local elections gave V2P a valuable opening to mobilise citizens and reach out to candidates. There has been a marked increase in citizen voice and engagement in the planning and monitoring of government projects and services, as well as improvement to service delivery. Anambra State's Ministry of Economic Planning and Budgeting reported a rise in budget allocations to social development from 12% in 2014 to 21% in 2015. Insider opinions consider that this has reflected in part, the unprecedented government response to community Charters of Demands, a V2P-created tool. Through these charters, 23 communities made demands for spending on education and 29 on health, with 52 and 77 items approved respectively. The agriculture state budget also accepted requests from 22 communities and many of the 29 requests made on roads, water and sanitation also received positive official budget responses. Actual spending on social development also improved relative to funds budgeted.



Be Power Aware

The power-aware approach of the Voice to the People project enabled collaboration amongst community-level, local government and state-level actors, as well as vertical integration of advances at each stage, thus making the project an instructive case study for replicating and scaling up effective accountability programming. By analysing and addressing power imbalances between marginalised people and the elites who benefit from inequality, communities and vulnerable groups were able to overcome obstacles to progress and emphasis was made on the need for coordinated, independent oversight of public sector actors at all levels. Power dynamics operating within communities were also examined in addressing issues of participation and representation of women, girls, people with disabilities and other socially excluded groups and their capacities to demand rights and accountability from government. Top-down approaches of governance have been addressed, with the project creating horizontal linkages and alliances across and between local areas, and also vertically to improve institutional dialogue and interaction up to and including the state level. V2P has achieved remarkable change not only in citizen engagement with budgeting and planning of community projects, but also in state government responsiveness and public service delivery.

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Our women have been enlightened to seek for their rights, and widows have been liberated from wicked practices that they were subjected to after the burial of their husbands. Asking widows to stay indoors for a year, forcing them to go into the evil forests naked in the middle of the night have been totally abolished through the help of V2P project

FGD with women of Amaetiti Community, during V2P end-line survey

Conclusion

V2P's most important gains in Anambra have been in vertical integration, leveraging community-level mobilisation and horizontal alliances to shift power in the interest of more accountable governance. Using power analysis to discover how unequal power relations cause accountability failures, V2P made strides towards institutionalising the kind of transparent mechanisms that enable a shift in power from traditional leaders and other elites to communities. Here, COMEN has taken on a central role in supporting communities to formulate their CCDs, facilitating the monitoring of budgets and plans, enabling interaction between communities and progressively higher levels of government, and institutionalising and even spreading the V2P approach to communities not formally involved in the programme. Strategic engagement at the national and state levels have resulted in the brokering of high-level and strategic links for policy and budget analysis at these levels. V2P's symbiotic relationship with SAVI in Anambra proved vital to advancing both programme's successes to higher levels of governance, as V2P developed robust capacity and spaces for participation, while SAVI acted as a facilitator and intermediary for engaging citizens with state-level actors and processes.

As a result, V2P saw a marked increase in citizen voice and engagement in the planning and monitoring of government projects and services, as well as improvement to service delivery. Anambra State's Ministry of Economic Planning and Budgeting reports a rise in budget allocations to social development from 12% in 2014 to 21% in 2015. Insider opinions consider that this has reflected in part, the unprecedented government response to CCDs. Through their CCDs, 23 communities made demands for spending on education and 29 on health, with 52 and 77 items approved respectively. Actual spending on social development also improved relative to funds budgeted.



Recommendations for strengthening social accountability and engagement between government and communitiesⁱ

1. **Finding trusted and strategic partners:** A range of partners, like the JDPCs with their high level of trust amongst the local population, helped V2P make inroads. Many gains at state level were also due to V2P's relationship with SAVI, offering a mechanism to link citizens directly with state government.
2. **Conducting power analysis:** Assessing invisible power relations between individuals and groups helped V2P to locate important allies, choose smart priorities, work politically and seize opportunities.
3. **Supporting inclusion:** V2P encouraged communities to challenge restrictive gender norms and increase women's social, economic and political participation. The programme provided safe spaces for women to reflect on discrimination and develop agency, while it also shifted attitudes amongst traditional leaders and local elites. Increasing numbers of women now sit on community bodies like COMEN.
4. **Community Charters of Demand:** Institutionalising this tool has been critical to expanding potential for vertically integrated accountability. The unprecedented response of governance actors to the CCDs has led to increased budget allocations for health, education and infrastructure and wider space for citizen engagement in future public processes. The CCD is now recognised in Anambra as a practical conduit for government to engage in consultation quickly and easily.
5. **Finding and building political will:** The political context in Anambra was strongly supportive and, in particular, open to V2P's focus on soft policy issues and citizen participation. The 2014 local elections gave V2P a valuable opening to mobilise citizens and reach out to candidates.

The report suggests that the feedback loop on vertically integrating accountability in the region is starting to close, creating incipient capacity in Anambra for engaged citizens and communities, effective policy monitoring and prevention of corruption, and accountable governance at multiple levels—outcomes worth studying, scaling up and replicating in other States of Nigeria and beyond.

i. For more, see the section on Potential lessons and new questions in chapter 5 of the [full document](#)

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All mistakes are our own.

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