Conceptualising accountability

An approach to measurement

BBC MEDIA ACTION

TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH MEDIA
AROUND THE WORLD

"We know we have the power but how do we get there?
How do you question?
Who do you question?
Who is the government?
How will you find them?
What will they think about you?
What will they do next?
Even those top guys in the government, they usually say, 'We want the government,
we ask the government, so who is the government?'
That is the question I fail to understand."

(Focus group participant, 18-24, Muranga, Kenya)

Contents

Definition of terms

The following list provides BBC Media Action's definitions of key terms in the specific context of this working paper and research project. These concepts are explained in more detail in the main text.

Accountability
The extent to which people, groups and institutions (principals) are able to hold government and other power holders (agents) responsible for their actions, and the extent to which government and other power holders provide a public account of their decisions and actions.

Horizontal accountability
The process of state institutions checking the decisions and actions of other agencies and branches of government, and of these agencies and branches providing an account of their decisions and actions to government colleagues.

Vertical accountability
The process of citizens, mass media or civil society questioning the decisions and actions of government and other power holders.

Agency
An individual's ability to make meaningful choices; that is, the individual is able to envisage options and take action to exercise their right to choose.

Agent/s
The actor in an accountability relationship who is to provide an account.

Answerability
The obligation of government and other power holders to provide information on, and explanations of, their decisions and actions.

Empowerment
The process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.

Enforcement
The process of individual citizens, mass media or civil society imposing sanctions on power holders who violate their public duties or fail to provide a satisfactory account of their decisions and actions.

Participation
The extent to which individuals and groups within society are actively involved in political processes, debates and decision making.

Principal
The actor in an accountability relationship who demands an account.

Structure
The formal and informal contexts within which actors operate — the presence and operation of laws, regulatory frameworks, customs and norms governing people's behaviour.

Executive summary

Improving state accountability is a central preoccupation of development efforts. How individuals and institutions can and do hold governments to account for their actions and decisions differs radically between societies. Furthermore, what accountability actually means can differ greatly from one context to another.

BBC Media Action is a charity supported by, but operationally independent of, the BBC. It has been supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) to work with the media in 10 countries across Africa, the Middle East and Asia to contribute to state-society accountable relations and to support the empowerment of individuals to hold their government to account.

This briefing introduces BBC Media Action's approach to accountability, with particular focus on empowering individuals to play a role in holding those in power to account. It also describes the development of a framework for understanding and measuring such individual empowerment. The paper then draws on qualitative research conducted in Kenya by BBC Media Action to illustrate the application of this framework and to validate an approach to measuring impact through qualitative and quantitative cross-cultural research. This approach will be used across evaluation of accountability-focused projects.

Introduction

There is near universal agreement across the international development sector on the importance of governments being properly accountable to citizens. The best ways of achieving such accountability, and how conditions can best be encouraged to make states more accountable, responsive and effective at meeting the needs of their people, especially the poor, is the subject of much less agreement. Recent years have witnessed an upsurge within development efforts to focus attention on, and generate more innovation in, this field. Some of these initiatives have involved directly working with power holders and formal structures, such as judiciaries and parliaments. Others have been more informal efforts, supporting: the capacity of civil society actors; access to information movement; budget monitoring and numerous transparency, anti-corruption and open government initiatives.

BBC Media Action's work aims to improve state governance by contributing to the increased quality, and sometimes quantity, of engagement between people and their elected power holders; helping populations to become more politically engaged and empowered and supporting media effectiveness in monitoring and checking government decisions and actions.

BBC Media Action is committed to measuring the impact of its interventions, both to be accountable to donors and to increase sector-wide understanding of the role the media can play in holding governments to account. While this paper focuses explicitly on the role of the media in accountability, the design of BBC Media Action research and programming aims to acknowledge other drivers of accountability, and where possible complement other initiatives in this field.

This paper presents a definition of accountability that underpins BBC Media Action's approach to the governance interventions that form part of its global work funded by DFID. It outlines the focus of BBC Media Action's work in this field, drawing on an example of work in Kenya during 2012, and introduces the challenge of measuring accountability outcomes in relation to one objective common to all of these BBC Media Action governance projects — empowering individuals to play a role in holding power holders to account. The paper then proposes a framework through which to explore the degree to which individuals are empowered in this area, and demonstrates the application of this framework in relation to Kenyan political accountability through qualitative research findings. Finally, this paper presents a tool to measure one aspect of such empowerment quantitatively, and discusses future challenges and next steps in effectively evaluating the impact of accountability-focused interventions.

Accountability — a concept, a process, a moral sentiment

Concern about how to restrain power, prevent its abuse and subject power holders to rules of conduct has been a focus of political thinkers since the time of the ancient philosophers (Schedler, 1999)[1]. Within the practices of development, multiple political uses and applications of the term 'accountability' exist (Newel & Bellour, 2002)[2]. For the prominent political scientist and economist Francis Fukuyama, political accountability can be a moral sentiment on the part of leaders who "believe that they are responsible to the people they govern and put the people's interests above their own". In the absence of formal laws that institutionalise this obligation, accountability is a form of benevolence rather than a right, and is a crucial component of the state-society contract.

Formal accountability, however, is procedural in that "the government submits itself to certain mechanisms that limit its power to do as it pleases" (Fukuyama, 2011)[3]. Such 'procedural' accountability underpins BBC Media Action's perspective on, and approach to, accountability. Procedural accountability refers to the extent to which people, groups and institutions (known as 'principals') are able to hold government and other power holders (known as 'agents') responsible for their actions, and the extent to which government and other power holders provide a public account of their decisions and actions.

Accountability in this sense can be 'vertical', in that it is demanded from below by citizens, mass media or civil society, or 'horizontal' in that institutions of the state check abuses by other public agencies and branches of government, and impose a requirement to report sideways (Schedler, 1999)[4].

Answerability and enforcement are central to the definition of accountability used by BBC Media Action. 'Answerability' relates to the obligation of governments to provide information on (and explain) what they are doing. 'Enforcement' refers to the capacity of a principal, either an individual citizen or a collective force such as mass media or civil society, to impose sanctions on power holders who have violated their public duties (Schedler, 2009)[5].

This two-dimensional definition of accountability implies forcing power holders to justify their decisions and actions and obliging them to exercise power in transparent ways (answerability), and subjecting power holders to the threat of sanctions (enforcement). In the absence of answerability, power holders are free to act as they choose, without any checks and balances. In the absence of enforcement, where there are no consequences for failing to provide a satisfactory account, the process of demanding and providing an account is undermined.

It should be noted that while some definitions of accountability incorporate 'responsiveness' (that is, improved access to, and quality of, services)[6], the definition presented above is narrower in that it conceptualises responsiveness as a possible and desirable outcome of accountable state-society relations (Lindberg, 2009)[7].

Within 'vertical accountability', where the citizen or civil society is the principal, accountability mechanisms take a diverse range of forms, from top-down processes of elections, hearings and consultations to bottom-up strategies such as citizen juries, popular protest or participatory budgeting (Newell & Bellour, 2002)[8]. In terms of individual citizens holding governments to account, voting is ultimately the mechanism that facilitates enforcement.

The media can be regarded as a principal in vertical accountability, directly demanding answerability from power holders and contributing to enforcement through reputational damage by exposing inadequacy or lack of information and explanation. The media also has the potential to create opportunities for, and facilitate more effective engagement with, accountability mechanisms for other actors, such as civil society. There is growing recognition amongst development practitioners, donors and political communication specialists of the multiple roles that the media can play. Current views on this, along with the BBC Media Action working model, are summarised in the next section.

This paper presents Kenya as a case example to illustrate the concept of accountability in a real-world setting. It outlines research findings on the perceived role of the media, along with detailed analysis of the extent to which individuals are empowered to play a role in holding government to account. Box 1 provides the context for this case example.

Box 1: Why aim to impact on accountability in Kenya?

Odhiambo-Mbai (2003)[9] argues that in Kenya the level of accountability among public officials in the management of public affairs has consistently declined since independence in 1963. The patronage politics established and sustained until the early 2000s by presidents Kenyatta and Moi has meant that corruption and poor ethical standards have flourished among public officials. Both Kenyatta and Moi used ethnicity and nepotism as the main criteria to appoint people into key positions. As Odhiambo-Mbai argues:

> "When one is appointed into position of authority in the public service on the basis of ethnicity and nepotism, it becomes impossible for such a person to see anything wrong in also using the same criteria to distribute public resources or dispense public services to the public."

Despite high expectations for new phases of politics at times such as the introduction of multi-party democracy in the early 1990s (Butler, 2011)[10] or the anticipated end of autocratic rule in 2002 with the election of a rainbow coalition (Githongo, 2007)[11], demands for accountability by the voting public, civil society and the media have progressed slowly in Kenya. Members of the public widely believe that the political elite and wealthy citizens abuse their power, are immune to prosecution and that justice is rarely served.

Although various commissions of inquiry have been set up since the late 1990s to investigate grand corruption, land and ethnic clashes and violations of human rights, few recommendations made by these commissions have been comprehensively carried out. According to Butler (2011):[12]

> "Ultimately, Kenyan politicians enjoy living in an environment that is lacking accountability as corruption scandals, political violence, and a lack of meaningful constitutional reform does not result in any significant consequences for anyone. Politicians have essentially been able to engage in politics as usual that rely on the use of political patronage and divisive ethnic tribalism to ensure the voting population is busy fighting each other over access to valuable resources, rather than unifying to demand accountability from their leaders."

Potential for media contribution

The important contribution of free, professional and plural media to good governance is rarely questioned. The relationship between a free media environment and government responsiveness has been demonstrated with regard to public spending on education and health[13], famine prevention and public food distribution[14] and relief spending[15]. Furthermore, politicians have been shown to be more responsive to citizens' needs if citizens have access to information on political decisions[16].

Taking a step back to consider the role of the media in accountability specifically, theoretical support for this is abundant, while the evidence base is moderate but growing (Reinikka & Svensson, 2004[17]; Franken et al, 2008[18]; Snyder & Stromberg, 2008[19]; Aker, Collier & Vicente, 2010[20]). Paul Collier, author of *The Bottom Billion,* compellingly argues that while elections can work to discipline governments, they only work if "life is breathed into those institutions, and the process of breathing life into those institutions is basically having an informed and organised society. A free and active media delivers both of these."[21] Evidence from both developed and less developed countries supports this claim, having shown that people exposed to, and engaging with, high-quality media that cover political issues are better informed, more civically engaged and more likely to vote (De Vreese & Boomgarden, 2006[22]; Aker, Collier & Vicente, 2010[23]; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996[24]; Hollander, 1996[25]; Hofstetter, 1998[26]; Pan et al, 2004[27], to name just a few).

Some academics and practitioners believe that by reducing the information asymmetries between citizens and governments, and mobilising citizens to defend their interests, mass media can play an important role in ensuring accountability (Moehler & Luyimbazi, 2008)[28]. In countries where institutional structures do not effectively monitor, expose or punish government wrongdoing or underperformance, the media has a particularly crucial role to play as an independent watchdog (Odugbemi & Norris, 2009)[29]. The media also has the potential to facilitate interaction between principals and agents, through providing an inclusive and critical platform for public dialogue and debate between citizens, service providers and decision makers (Snyder & Stromberg, 2004[30]; Leeson, 2008[31]; Olper & winnen, 2009[32]).

BBC Media Action's approach to accountability attempts to capture these multiple roles, by proposing that the media can have both a direct and indirect influence. As a principal in a vertical accountability relationship, the media has the potential to demand answerability directly from power holders and therefore influence enforcement. However, the media can also indirectly influence answerability and enforcement through empowering citizens and others to play an effective role in holding government to account. This could be through influencing the ability and confidence of individuals to take part in demanding answers from power holders and enforcing sanctions, by creating opportunities or structures for them to do this, or both. This broad approach is outlined in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: BBC Media Action organisational approach to media and accountability (simplified model)
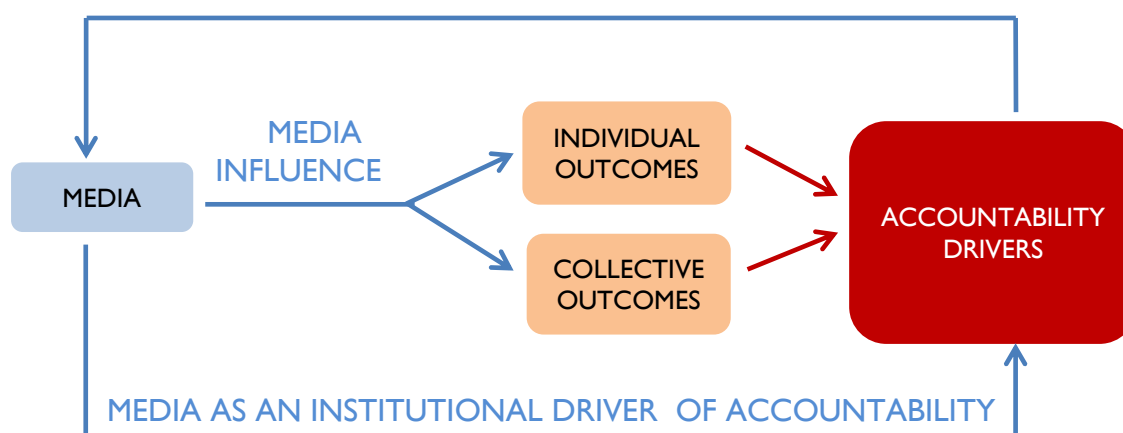
The accountability drivers considered in the BBC Media Action working model include:

- increased demand from citizens for accountable governance
- the existence of media regulation and access to information policies that support accountability
- politically empowered populations
- increased engagement between a state and its citizens
- citizen/civil society involvement in shaping and making decisions
- more effective local media functioning as an institutional driver of accountability[33].

As an institutional driver of accountability, the media can **directly** hold those in power to account in various ways, such as acting as a watchdog over the powerful — "bringing out facts that may be embarrassing to the government" (Sen, 1999)[34], or agenda setting and gatekeeping to ensure that a diverse and balanced range of political perspectives is incorporated in governance (Odugbemi & Norris, 2009)[35]. While the judiciary and punitive branches of the government can formally sanction government officials, a media programme can contribute to the sanctioning process by exposing wrongdoing and threatening the personal reputation of elected officials or institutions that play a role in horizontal accountability relationships. BBC Media Action accountability initiatives aim to influence in this way by creating spaces and platforms for public debate and discussion that effectively perform such sanctioning functions (sometimes reaching the majority of a country's population). Increasing the capacity of local media organisations to produce and broadcast outputs of this kind themselves is crucial to the sustainability of BBC Media Action's interventions.

By influencing change among individuals and populations, the media can **indirectly** hold those in power to account by increasing individuals' participation in accountability mechanisms and supporting their empowerment. BBC Media Action views 'participation' in this context as the extent to which individuals and groups within society are actively involved in the public sphere, political processes, debate and decision making. BBC Media Action defines 'empowerment' as the process through which individuals: become aware of the forces that have an impact on their situation; become more aware and trusting of their own abilities, knowledge and experience; and build on these to gain self-confidence and the self-belief required to be active in improving their life situations.[36] In relation to 'accountability', such action includes making informed decisions and overcoming barriers and

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constraints to questioning power holders, and demanding an account and enforcing sanctions where that account is not adequate.

By providing opportunities for ordinary citizens to ask questions of their leaders in fora that demand direct answers in front of a national audience, BBC Media Action provides a platform for citizens to engage with power holders. It also aims to influence a wider individual and collective sense of political efficacy, and citizens' engagement in existing accountability mechanisms.

Figure 1 presents a very simplified model of the BBC Media Action organisational approach, and this paper only discusses those components and pathways that relate to the media. However, the broader model also accounts for social, political and economic forces and structures that characterise the governance context, and which act as enablers and barriers to the media's influence in government accountability.

As Holland and Thirkell (2009) caution, while governance models are often underpinned by the assumption "that citizens as rights holders are willing and able to exercise their agency and that duty bearers as office holders are willing and able to respond effectively", the reality is not so simple and it is important to recognise that "these ideal type governance relationships are heavily mediated and constrained by political economy factors, including the way that institutions function, and the power and interests of the stakeholders involved".[37]

Box 2 presents findings from qualitative research in Kenya, illustrating the multiple roles that Kenyans believe the media plays in their country, and the extent to which they think there is a role for the media in holding the government to account. A brief outline of the design and objectives of *Sema Kenya*, BBC Media Action's governance programming in Kenya, is also provided.

Box 2: Media and accountability in Kenya — citizen perspectives and the Sema Kenya programme

Citizen perspectives on the role of the media

Qualitative research was conducted in Kenya to explore citizen perceptions of accountability and other governance issues. The research consisted of 30 focus group discussions with adults aged 18+, in urban and rural locations across all eight regions of Kenya.

The findings demonstrate that participants perceive the media to have multiple roles to play in relation to accountability. Some described the media's role as a whistleblower, reporting that they only found out about poor performance and negative actions within the ranks of leadership through the media. Focus group participants believed the media demands answers from leaders.

> *"The media can also play a role in advocating for issues by applying pressure. For example the issue with the nurses' strike — they pressured the minister to speak up on the way forward on the issue."*
>
> (25-34, Nairobi)

The media in Kenya also clearly plays an important informational role for individuals, particularly regarding government activities. Focus group participants cited numerous grand corruption scandals that Kenyans only learned about after the media had reported them, and which were unlikely to come to light without media exposure. The media was also credited with educating people beyond current affairs, with one participant mentioning programmes that teach people in rural areas about the justice system and the laws that protect them.

> *"There are dramas that are very educative. For example in* Inspector Mwala *and even* Nairobi Law*, you learn that there is a prosecutor and a judge. When you tell a person in the rural areas about the law they do not understand, but through these programmes they have learned."*
>
> (35-44, Muranga)

Although the informative role of the media was recognised by the majority of participants, very few participants felt this also provided them with the ability to question leaders and demand answers about issues that affect the general public. Participants did understand the value of such questioning, with many reporting that the media had a role to play in creating an environment where leaders and the public could discuss issues that affect citizens' day-to-day lives.

When prompted, participants expressed strong interest in the concept of a public debate programme that would give ordinary people the opportunity to come face-to-face with officials to question them on live TV or radio, and recognised a number of ways in which it could have value. Participants widely acknowledged the role that programmes could play in promoting answerability, with many highlighting the value of raising issues and putting pressure on politicians to respond.

> *"I think [a public debate programme] is a wonderful format. This kind of programme leaves no room for the politicians to lie because the citizens are present and can ask a follow-up question."*
>
> (25-34, Busia)

> *"I think[a public debate programme] would help people to speak out [about] their problems — like those who live in the slum areas… they can use a programme like this to point out problems like house demolitions by the city council and government bodies without notices. They can air their grievances, ask for help."*
>
> (45+, Kisumu)

A smaller number of participants also recognised the extent to which a media programme could help to enforce sanctions on power holders. By exposing incompetence, a programme may influence the voting public.

> *"But with this kind of a programme we are able to face the leader [to] ask him questions, and because everybody is listening, the leader must answer the questions carefully, or else lose the votes if he dodges some of the questions as it will be a sign of incompetence."*
>
> (18-24, Eldoret)

> *"In the programme they will be recorded and the constitution gives us right to recall the MP if he promised and never honoured what he said within [the] specified time. If he says he is going to construct a road or a hospital, because it was recorded, we can ask him to explain himself if he does not. Everything is on record."*
>
> (18-24, Eldoret)

Sema Kenya

In Kenya, BBC Media Action has designed a multimedia public debate programme in Swahili, to provide ordinary Kenyans with information and a voice in the lead up to the 2013 Kenya elections and beyond. A weekly programme broadcast on the BBC Swahili Service and local media partners is complemented by outreach and capacity-building activities and provides platforms (radio, television, social media and text messaging) for Kenyans across the country to address politicians and public officials directly.

The programme creates a forum for citizens and the electorate to interact directly with their leaders and those seeking elective office. By taking the programme 'on the road' to the provinces, ordinary people are being given the opportunity to question their leaders and play a role in holding them to account. The project seeks audience opinions and perceptions and provides feedback on issues, ensuring that dialogue at the grassroots level has the opportunity to be brought to the attention of those in power.

> *"I haven't seen [a public debate programme] here in Kenya… politicians being questioned face-to-face by the public and responding… giving answers… It would help because it's a face-to-face political debate, and the politician doesn't have time for lying since he has to answer immediately."*
>
> (25-34, Mombassa)

Demonstrating evidence of impact

In evaluating the impact of BBC Media Action projects, future research will explore both direct and indirect influences on vertical accountability as discussed above. With regard to the direct influence of BBC Media Action interventions, research will investigate the extent to which project programming effectively demands answerability and enforces sanctions. It will also examine the extent to which capacity-building components of projects improve the ability of local media organisations to drive accountability by fulfilling the functions of watchdog, agenda setter and gatekeeper.

In terms of the indirect impact of media on accountability a primary objective of BBC Media Action governance programming funded through the DFID global grant is to support the empowerment of individuals to hold their government to account. The research design therefore consists of quantitative and qualitative approaches to observe the effect of people's exposure to media programming on individual factors believed to contribute to such empowerment. This includes nationally representative cross-sectional population surveys to understand relationships between exposure to programming and outcomes, experimental studies to attempt to establish causality, and qualitative audience research methods to provide richer insight into contextual, social and cultural factors which act as barriers or enablers to change[38].

The remainder of this paper discusses developing a framework for exploring the extent to which individuals are empowered to hold their government to account. Direct measures did not previously exist in this field, and so BBC Media Action has developed a measurement framework and associated research tools.

Empowerment and accountability — constructing measures

In order to explore the idea of empowerment in holding power holders to account, a framework for measurement needs to be based on clear definitions of the characteristics and scope of key concepts. Although the BBC Media Action definition breaks accountability down into two clear components of answerability and enforcement, there is still some space for concept stretching within these components. Therefore, for the purposes of developing research, BBC Media Action drew on a classic approach to accountability concept formation presented by Lindberg (2009)[39]. From the extensive literature on empowerment, researchers drew a definition of the concept that has choice at its core and accounts for the interplay between agency and structure (Alsop & Heinsohn, 2005)[40]. These approaches and the literature from which they are drawn are described below.
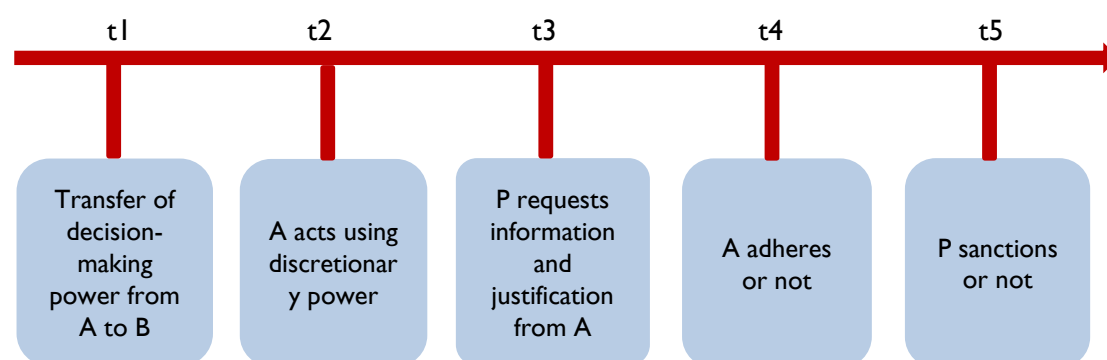
Conceptualising accountability

In his presentation of a classic conceptualisation of accountability, Lindberg (2009)[41] states that for an accountable relationship to exist, a number of conditions must be satisfied. These conditions can be clearly linked to the components of answerability and enforcement outlined in the BBC Media Action approach to accountability. With regard to answerability, a principal (such as a citizen) must have the right to require an explanation or justification from an agent (such as a government official) to whom they have entrusted decision making for a domain of responsibility. For enforcement to exist, the principal should have the right to sanction the agent for failing to inform, explain or justify their decisions and actions with

regard to that domain. Lindberg further highlights that those requiring the account must have a clear picture of what is acceptable and unacceptable in terms of the information, justification, decisions and performance that they can expect from an agent, in order to evaluate and sanction those in power where required. Figure 2 illustrates how these conditions translate into a timeline of accountability.

In operationalising this concept of accountability for research purposes, 'requiring' and 'sanctioning' must be defined. While other approaches may be possible, for the purposes of exploring citizen empowerment in this context, 'requiring an account' is defined as questioning and 'sanctioning' is defined as voting.

Figure 2: Timeline of accountability (Lindberg, 2009)

t1	t2	t3	t4	t5
Transfer of decision-making power from A to B	A acts using discretionary power	P requests information and justification from A	A adheres or not	P sanctions or not

Key: P= Principal; A=Agent

Conceptualising empowerment

'Empowerment' is a much-debated term with wide-ranging conceptualisations. In a review of measures of women's empowerment in 2001, Naila Kabeer[42] states that "not everyone accepts that empowerment can be clearly defined, let alone measured", and in their proposal for internationally comparable indicators for empowerment Ibrahim & Alkire (2007)[43] provide a list of some of the 32 definitions currently in use[44]. Alsop, Bertelsen & Holland (2006)[45] broadly define empowerment as

> "the process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacityto make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes".

This definition is also reflected in those articulated by Narayan (2002, 2005)[46], Alsop & Heinsohn (2005)[47] and Petesh, Smulovitz & Walton (2005)[48] (as highlighted in Sammon & Santos, 2009)[49], and is the one adopted here in relation to empowering individuals to play a role in holding government to account.

Sadan (1997)[50] argues that "since the sources of powerlessness are rooted in social processes that disempower entire populations, the empowerment process aims to influence the oppressed human agency and the social structure within the limitations and possibilities in which this human agency exists and reacts". These dimensions of agency and structure are widely recognised across the literature. 'Agency' is generally defined as an individual's ability

to make meaningful choices; that is, the individual is able to envisage options and take action to exercise their right to choose. 'Structure' refers to the formal and informal contexts within which actors operate — the presence and operation of laws, regulatory frameworks, customs and norms governing people's behaviour can determine whether individuals and groups have access to, and can use, the assets they require to achieve desired outcomes.

Narayan (2005)[51] claims that empowerment is a latent phenomenon, and that "its presence can only be deduced through its action or its results". Access to accurate and reliable information, awareness of rights, knowledge of relevant issues and political efficacy can enhance an individual's personal agency, and all of these factors will be measured in future BBC Media Action population-level research as proxy indicators of agency. Evidence of structure in relation to vertical accountability includes the right to question decision makers, the right to sanction through voting, and a functioning system through which these rights can be exercised. Information on the presence of rights can be drawn from secondary sources (such as charters of political and civic rights), although an understanding of the extent to which these structures operate effectively requires self-reported data from members of the population.

Pettit (2012)[52] argues that empowerment is most effective when it draws on the full range of concepts and meanings of power and takes into account the intersection of agency and structure — both formal and informal structures, and positive and negative forms of agency. Numerous conceptual frameworks and tools have been proposed to investigate and measure the multiple dimensions of empowerment (Rowlands, 1997[53]; Gaventa, 2006[54]; Kabeer, 2001[55]; Mosedale, 2005[56]; Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007[57]). Alsop & Heinsohn (2005)[58] propose three degrees of empowerment, which account for the interplay between agency and opportunity structure that Pettit calls for. This framework proposes that direct measures of empowerment can be made by assessing:

1. whether an opportunity to make a choice exists (existence of choice)
2. whether a person actually uses the opportunity to choose (use of choice)
3. whether the choice resulted in the desired result (achievement of choice).

Towards a measurement framework

The Alsop & Heinsohn (2005) framework is a useful one with which to explore empowerment in relation to accountability, and the degrees of empowerment can easily be applied to the concepts of requiring and sanctioning as outlined below:.

- **Existence of choice** – does the individual have an opportunity to question or sanction power holders?
- **Use of choice** – does the individual act on that opportunity to question or sanction power holders?
- **Achievement of choice** – does acting on the choice to question or sanction power holders result in the desired outcome?

In the following section, this framework is used to analyse empowerment in relation to the requiring and sanctioning conditions of accountability amongst Kenyan citizens. The research highlights both the distinction and interdependencies between degrees of empowerment, and illustrates the need for in-depth understanding of context to produce meaningful quantitative and qualitative evaluation of impact in relation to empowerment.

Exploring degrees of empowerment — accountability in Kenya

The analysis reported here is from qualitative research conducted in Kenya to inform the development phase of a BBC Media Action governance and accountability project. The research consisted of 30 focus groups, each consisting of seven to eight males and females aged 18+. Participants were assigned to different groups according to their gender and age to ensure a peer-to-peer discussion environment. Research was conducted in rural and urban locations in each of the eight provinces of Kenya, between April and May 2012 (for more information on this research, see Box 2 on page 11).

As described above, BBC Media Action's analysis of the right to require an account from power holders, and the right to sanction them, is structured according to the three degrees of empowerment proposed by Alsop & Heinsohn (2005). That is, firstly how do individuals perceive the existence of the choice to require or sanction power holders. Secondly, if they believe such choices exist, how do they act to use that choice. And finally, what are their experiences, or expectations, of the outcome of questioning or sanctioning.

The right to require

BBC Media Action's research in Kenya explored the public's right to require through the proxy behaviour of questioning leaders and officials. The right to access information held by the Kenyan state and the obligation of the state to publicise and publish information affecting the nation is set out in *The Constitution of Kenya*[59].

This research sought to explore whether people:
- felt they had a right to require an account from power holders
- understood how to exercise such a right
- had exercised or intended to exercise that right
- felt exercising this right resulted in obtaining an account from power holders of their decisions and actions.

Existence of choice — the right to question

> *"Wananchi, we have the power but gaining access to these people in order to ask them is what is the problem."*
>
> (18-24, Machakos)

In exploring Kenyans' experience of the opportunity to question those in power, two key considerations emerged — people's awareness of the right to question and the way in which this right can be exercised in practice.

The research revealed that Kenyan people generally recognise that their taxes pay for the government, that the government works for them, and that their leaders are thus obligated to answer questions regarding their decisions and actions. When participants were asked who had the right to question the government, the response was most frequently *"the voter"*, *"us"*, *"everybody"* or, to use the Swahili phrase, *'the wananchi'*[60] (the common man). Kenyans were aware of, and accepted, the existence of their theoretical right to question power holders.

> Moderator: Who do you think has the power to question the government and
> the public authorities concerning these issues?
> Respondent: *"We, the wananchi"*
> Why?
> *"Because we are the ones who have the power to elect the leaders and they are the
> ones to represent us in parliament and thus deal with these issues."*
> *"To some extent we also furnish them with tax so we have a right to question what
> they are doing with that money."*
>
> <div align="right">(25-34, Kombewa)</div>

However, being empowered in relation to the existence of choice requires more than just awareness of rights — there must also be a structure through which to exercise those rights. Some participants highlighted that Kenyans are not always aware of how to question their leaders. Thus this choice exists in theory, but not in practice for such citizens.

> *"Yeah, the citizens may want to question the government but they may not know the
> proper channel to do that, they don't even know how to get to the MP or access them."*
>
> <div align="right">(18-24, Mombasa)</div>

> *"They need to know their rights and also… how to ask for services."*
>
> <div align="right">(18-24, Mombasa)</div>

Where people knew of potential channels through which to contact power holders, they still disputed the opportunity to question those power holders in practice. When asked how people would go about demanding accountability from their leaders, only a few respondents thought the available platforms for taking action were sufficient or effective. Many, especially those in rural areas, were acutely aware of the distance between citizens and those who represent them. Many reported that fora for questioning, such as community meetings, only take place around election time, and that their leaders also only appear in their community at these times, remaining far removed for the duration of the term.

> *"We have no access to our leaders. We cannot complain about the things that are
> going wrong in this place… we can't question them about the wrong things they have
> done. We feel powerless. They get elected and immediately move to Nairobi… when
> they come back in their big cars they don't even roll down their windows. We don't see
> them until it is time for elections and they come and flash money around."*
>
> <div align="right">(25-34, Mombasa)</div>

For people who only see leaders at election time, when those leaders do make an appearance they are often surrounded by their entourage or separate themselves from the people, making it impossible for ordinary citizens to make contact. However, inaccessibility of leaders was not just attributed to location or timing, but perceived by many focus group participants as a structural barrier.

> *"To some extent we do [have the right to question] but these are the guys who you
> cannot even get access to, like you cannot just go to the DC [district councillor] and tell
> him that you have this and this problem, there are certain protocols that you have to
> follow. But for the MPs, just as had been said, we have employed them so we can task
> them."*
>
> <div align="right">(35-44, Muranga)</div>

In addition to face-to-face contact, participants also mentioned media programmes and demonstrations as ways in which they could question leaders.

<div align="right">18</div>

This analysis suggests that in measuring the existence of choice, both the perception of having a right in theory, and awareness of a practical means by which to exercise that right, must be observed.

Use of choice — taking action to question

> *"We cannot, we are scared… there was someone in Nairobi who felt frustrated but he could not stand and go to parliament and ask the leaders, 'Guys you are getting paid, what are you doing with your money? Why can't you pay tax yet I pay tax?'. You cannot ask them… you cannot just leave your house and go to the police station and ask why the leaders are not doing certain things."*
>
> (18-24, Muranga)

While practical barriers to accessing those in power call into question the existence of choice for many Kenyans, even having opportunities for citizens to demand answers from leaders does not necessarily translate into the use of that choice. Many discussion participants reported that while they were aware of their right to question, they rarely or never exercised that right. The practice of, or intention to, question those in government was heavily influenced by other factors.

Many discussion participants feared that being critical of leaders in public could result in intimidation or retaliation, and this prevented them from speaking their mind and questioning their leaders.

> Moderator: So you feel that you have the power but you do not have the access to [people in power]?
> *"Yes… we are scared."*
> Because?
> *"You will go and say, then the next time you will see people visiting you and they are not just common people, they have been sent to come and look for you. So that is why we are scared."*
> (18-24, Machakos)

> *"If you say something that does not please them then you will just be silenced."*
> (18-24, Machakos)

The type of retaliation reported by participants ranged from arrests and questioning to silencing through beatings and even, according to some participants, execution (although it should be noted that this was not reported by all respondents, and many felt that Kenya was a free country in that respect).

Where public events bringing political opponents together, or political demonstrations were discussed as channels through which to question government representatives, fear of violence was also reported as a barrier.

> *"Another thing about demonstrations is that it is an opportunity for the police to exercise their beatings on people… if you [ask] someone to help in demonstrations they say that since they were thoroughly beaten the last time they are not willing to participate."*
> (35-44, Kibera)

Language barriers, apathy towards political programmes and mistrust in politicians were also cited as reasons why citizens would not exercise their right to question those in power. Additionally, people's motivation to question government appeared to be largely influenced by previous experience of unsatisfactory outcomes. Many Kenyans are cynical about politics and politicians in general, and many don't bother to attend town hall meetings, political rallies or watch/listen to political programmes because they believe nothing will change. These high levels of cynicism are an obstacle to citizens questioning government. People's generally low expectation of the outcomes of questioning is an issue covered in the next section.

This analysis suggests that although citizens may be fully aware of their right to question government representatives and the ways in which they can do so, acting on this choice does not always follow. In addition to measuring people's use of choice, in terms of their previous questioning behaviour or propensity to hold government to account in the future, research should explore barriers to exercising this right in order to fully understand how and why governance interventions may or may not influence empowerment.

Achievement of choice — the outcome of questioning

> *"Yes, because integrity means accountability, and if a leader is not accountable for his activities then the citizens will question his integrity, therefore it is very crucial."*
>
> (25-34, Nairobi)

When Kenyans act on their right to question government decisions and actions, the outcomes are often unsatisfactory. Most participants reported negative views of politicians and leaders, frequently characterising them as thieves, liars and self-serving. Many participants regarded the accounts they receive from politicians to be populist or inaccurate reflections of what they do in practice. Some felt that on the rare occasions when leaders make themselves available to be questioned by the public on their policies, such as during election campaigns, they promise much but deliver little in reality.

> *"For me, I am sorry to say but I find them to be very selfish and liars because they don't really display what they speak. So that is how I take them — whenever they are talking there is always a question mark over what the real point is behind their talk."*
>
> (25-34, Nairobi)

Many research participants also pointed out that they frequently suspect their leaders to be playing a double game when they address the public, pursuing a specific agenda rather than providing an honest account of their activities. Some participants reported further that questioning has no real influence on government. While leaders may 'respond' verbally, this does not in fact lead to responsiveness in terms of action or performance.

"In fact what I know here, these people, even if you will call them, they will respond. Once they have come, you chat [with them] and [when] they go that thing will be forgotten. They won't take any action or do anything. You will start asking yourself, 'We talked to these people, what have they done?' Nothing."

(18-24, Muranga)

It would appear that few Kenyans want to exercise, or have used, their right to question government fully, because they simply don't think that it is worthwhile. The outcome of demanding an account from leaders should therefore be explored in understanding how and why people exercise choice in this way.

The right to sanction

In vertical accountability relationships, the electoral process is the ultimate mechanism available to citizens to sanction those in power, although other mechanisms may exist depending on the country context. In Kenya for example, under Article 104 of *The Constitution of Kenya*, the electorate has the right to recall the member of parliament representing their constituency before the end of the term of the relevant house of parliament, if they do not perform their duties as required by the constitution. However, it is not yet clear to the public exactly how this can be implemented. Citizens may also contribute to the reputational damage of officials or politicians, by expressing dissatisfaction with the adequacy of their accounts, in fora such as televised debates or town hall meetings. The following analysis explores the extent to which Kenyans felt empowered to use their right to vote to sanction power holders who had not satisfactorily accounted for their actions and decisions.

Existence of choice — the right to sanction

Awareness of the right to vote does not require much investigation in the Kenyan context, although people's knowledge of how and where to do this can vary depending on their location and education levels. There was a strong sense amongst focus group participants that the government should work for them, and people were acutely aware of their role in empowering leaders through elections. However, it was less clear whether respondents recognised how they could, or should, use elections to sanction leaders if they did not perform to the standard expected or adequately account for their actions.

Use of choice — taking action to sanction

In exploring voting as a way of sanctioning government, both voter turnout and the way in which votes are used must be considered.

In terms of voter turnout, research participants generally expressed the intention to vote in a future election. However, it was clear that the 2007 election violence in Kenya had had quite an impact on some people's attitudes to voting. Some participants reported that fear of violence would make them stay away from the polling booth, and there was some reluctance to vote amongst displaced people who were not registered to vote in their new place of residence:

> *"Another thing to expect is that many people won't turn out to vote. I have heard people vow not to vote."*
>
> (25-34, Eldoret)

> *"Why should I vote when the place that am living is not my own? I was displaced from my own [area]. Before the election, there should be civic education and justice [should] be served to post-election violence victims. Do you think someone from IDP [internally displaced people] camps can go out and vote?"*
>
> (45+, Eldoret)

People also expressed fears that voting may not be anonymous, and may thus attract retaliation for being critical in public, in a similar way to those described above.

> *"Okay, people are reflecting on what happened and they don't want to go back, but what we have to restore in people is… the confidence to vote because they fear that their vote will come back and harm them. So that's why the civil society has to restore confidence and explain that what happened was just a misfortune."*
>
> (35-44, Kibera)

However, with regard to how a vote can be used to sanction government, many participants recognised that Kenyans did not often make best use of their choice at the ballot box. Some reported that people attend rallies and promise their votes to politicians without ever really questioning those who they elect. Participants cited a variety of reasons for this, including populist promises, tribal affiliation and lack of information.

> *"… poor representation is whereby the leader who is in power… is not doing anything, you find with the ignorance of wananchi then they elect the same person."*
>
> (25-34, Kombewa)

> *"I think as long as we are not tribal then all will be well [in elections], but if we are still tribal then there might be a problem."*
>
> (35-44, Kibera)

> *"If there is no civic education, we will still go to the same place where we were before the constitution. If you ask people 'what is the work of a senator?', they do not know. You will be just there because you are supposed to vote and it is done. But if you do civic education, it will change what we vote for."*
>
> (18-24, Muranga)

Therefore, in the Kenyan context, whilst citizens may physically turn out to vote in elections, in many cases they do not necessarily exercise their right to sanction leaders. In assessing the use of choice in relation to sanctioning, both aspects of voting behaviour should be explored. Past and future voting behaviour can easily be explored through quantitative research, however the way in which people use their votes is a much more complex and sensitive topic and may be more appropriate to research through qualitative methods in some contexts.

Achievement of choice — the outcome of sanctioning

The extent to which participants perceived there to be a positive outcome to exercising their choice to vote was influenced by two factors: the legitimacy of the electoral process itself; and the subsequent behaviour of those elected to power. There were general doubts

about the past legitimacy of the voting process, but many participants expressed hope for improvement resulting from the introduction of the new constitution.

> "… in the previous elections people could go out of their way to steal votes, some would even stash votes in a coffin. But now with the transparent ballot boxes and electronic voting, it will be efficient."

(35-44, Kibera)

Summary of findings

The Kenyan qualitative research generated some interesting insights into empowerment and accountability. With regard to the right to require an account, people are aware of their rights but do not always use them fully, for a variety of different reasons including lack of access and channels through which to question leaders, political apathy and cynicism, and fear of retaliation for being openly critical of leaders. While people were generally positive about exercising their right to vote (despite some fears around violence), it was less clear whether participants had a strong understanding of how to use their vote to sanction their leaders and thus play a role in holding them to account. A lack of information and the existence of tribal affiliations often mean that Kenyans do not use their vote to choose better leaders over those who do not perform. The outcome of exercising the right to question was considered equally unsatisfying, in that the accounts leaders give for their actions and decisions are often inadequate or non-existent.

Defining indicators of empowerment

The qualitative research in Kenya demonstrates that the empowerment framework proposed by Alsop & Heinsohn (2005) resonates with the lived experience of requiring an account from governments and the mechanisms for sanctioning them. BBC Media Action's research shows that having an awareness of the right to act does not necessarily result in taking action, and that expectations of the outcome can negatively influence people's intention to take action. The analysis also suggests that, at least in relation to requiring an account, both the perception of having a right in theory, and awareness of a practical way to exercise that right, must be observed to measure the existence of choice. Therefore, these different degrees of empowerment must be explored in order to understand whether and how BBC Media Action programming contributes to empowering individuals to play a role in holding power holders to account.

Focusing on questioning power holders as the primary way in which citizens can require an account from government, and on voting as a means to sanction for unsatisfactory responses, BBC Media Action proposes four population-level indicators. These are outlined in Table 1, alongside a battery of standard survey items to capture a quantitative measure of each indicator, across multiple country contexts.

To test the construct validity[61] of these survey items, cognitive testing was conducted with Kenyan respondents. The testing process resulted in refining the English language version of the scale, and is described in Box 3 below. Further testing of these items will be required in each country context in which they are to be used, to ensure that the root indicator is effectively communicated and understood when translated into local languages. Also, these measures provide only a very high-level measure of the indicators, and qualitative research

should be conducted to understand the distinct barriers and enablers that influence these factors in each country context.

Constructing standard quantitative measures of citizens' degrees of empowerment in relation to sanctioning was found to be more challenging. While awareness of entitlement, and intention, to vote can easily be captured quantitatively, more complex questioning and analysis is required to understand the extent to which individuals actually perceive voting to be a way to sanction leaders, and if so how they use such a right. BBC Media Action therefore recommends exploring empowerment in relation to sanctioning through qualitative research.

Table 1: Empowerment indicators and measures of requiring an account

Indicators	Survey measures: requiring an account
Awareness of right to take action	People like me are entitled to question government officials about their decisions and actions.
Understanding of how to take action	There are ways for people like me to question government officials about their decisions and actions.
Intention to take action	If there was a way for people like me to question government officials, I would raise an issue that mattered to me.
Achievement of outcome	I am satisfied with the account that government officials currently give of their decisions and actions.

Box 3: Asking the right question — validating measures

Cognitive testing was conducted by the BBC Media Action team in Kenya to help refine the measures of individual empowerment in relation to 'requiring an account'.

Cognitive testing is a method for pre-testing and evaluating self-report survey items, and has recently been extended to help facilitate and compare cross-cultural surveys (Willis & Miller, 2011)[62]. Primarily, it contributes to ensuring that a survey item successfully captures the scientific intent of a question — that is, does the item have construct validity? Construct validity is important, as without some confirmation of this, researchers cannot be confident that ideas or theories have been operationalised appropriately as actual measures.

 The aim for the cognitive testing exercise carried out in Kenya was to capture people's thought processes whilst responding to questions. Although people's responses are important, BBC Media Action was more interested in the process of how respondents understand, interpret and generate a response than the response itself. In order to achieve this aim, researchers used cognitive testing based on a four-stage cognitive model put forward by Tourangeau (1984)[63]:

Comprehension (understanding and interpretation of questions); highlights unknown terms, ambiguous concepts, long and over-complex questions.

- **Retrieval/recall** (participant searches memory for relevant information); highlights recall difficulty, where there is no experience to draw on or where a topic is perceived to be irrelevant.
- **Judgement** (participant evaluates question and/or estimates response in answering); highlights biased or sensitive questions, estimation difficulty, impact of social desirability and judgement.
- **Response** (to the question); highlights incomplete response options, response options that do not fit with understanding of questions or unwillingness to answer.

A purposive sample of eight respondents was drawn upon, which was stratified by age, education and gender. All respondents were from Nairobi, so the sample did not include any rural respondents. Scripted verbal probes were developed to explore each of the four stages outlined above. In addition to the scripted probes, researchers also recorded their interviewer observations. These recorded whether the respondent: asked for any part of the question to be repeated; had difficulty using the response option; asked for clarification or qualified their answer; hesitated or looked uncomfortable.

The interviews took place in two phases, with interviewers reviewing the findings after the first four interviews and rewording statements accordingly for testing with the remaining four respondents. The following table illustrates the original draft accountability scale and the revised version after the cognitive testing.

	Original	Revised
1	People like me are entitled to question government officials about their decisions and actions.	No change.
2	People like me have opportunities to question government officials on their actions on an issue that mattered to them.	There are ways for people like me to question government officials about their decisions and actions.
3	I would consider taking action to question a government official's decisions and actions on an issue that mattered to me.	If there was a way for people like me to question government officials, I would raise an issue that mattered to me.
4	I am satisfied with the account that government officials give for their decision and actions.	I am satisfied with the account that government officials currently give of their decisions and actions.

The findings from the testing process and resulting revisions made to each statement are summarised below.

Statement 1: Awareness of right to take action

Respondents displayed a strong understanding of the original statement drafted to capture this information. None of the respondents asked for the question to be repeated or for clarification, and none hesitated or looked uncomfortable. When asked to paraphrase the statement to test their comprehension, participants' responses aligned well with the purpose of the question, with many paraphrasing the statement as their 'right' to question: *"people like me have the right to ask government officials questions on things that affect our lives"*. Respondents also showed comprehension of the obligation of officials to provide an account: *"we are the taxpayers and as citizens we need to know and they have to be accountable to us citizens"*.

Statement 2: Understanding of how to take action

Respondents did not display a good level of comprehension of the original statement wording. Interviewees were asked to repeat the question in their own words, clarify what was meant by 'opportunity' and distinguish this statement from Statement 1. When probed on what 'opportunities to question' brought to mind, respondents reported access to individuals, rather than structures and channels through which to exercise their right to question: *"maybe phone numbers, email, when you go to their offices they leave via an escape route"*. When probed on hesitations, respondents explained that they were contemplating what 'opportunities' referred to.

After changing the wording to 'There are ways for people like me to question', there was an increase in understanding; respondents did not ask for clarification and explanation. When probed on what they understood as 'ways for people like me to question', their responses aligned with the intended measure: "*channels, avenues of communication — systems where there are people who you can directly question, channel my questions through. We have medium like print and electronic media where we can channel our concerns through*".

Statement 3: Intention to take action

Comprehension of the original statement was low. Respondents asked for the statement to be repeated and often hesitantly qualified their response with "*if there was an opportunity I would*". Although explanations were similar to the intention of the questions when participants were asked how they would explain the statement to a friend, the wording was changed in order to be less ambiguous and more direct.

Once the wording was changed to 'if there was a way for people like me to question', there was less hesitation and no need to repeat the statement. When asked how they would explain this statement to a friend, participants demonstrated a greater level of understanding. Suggested explanations included "*If you had the opportunity of leaders in a panel would you ask them a question that you think is [important]?*".

However, one respondent did include the account in their paraphrasing of the statement: "*Would you question the government on issues that matter to you then expect an answer?*". This illustrates that for some respondents, separating the intention to exercise the right to question and the outcome of having exercised that right may be difficult. This should be taken into account during analysis.

Statement 4: Achievement of choice

This statement had a high level of comprehension with none of the respondents asking for the questions to be repeated or clarified and no hesitations when answering. After responding, respondents were asked to elaborate on their answer. All of the respondents referred to the quality of the account that was given: "*I am not happy with the responses they give for their actions. There are very few times they give good explanations, but in most cases they don't*"; and "*I was just thinking generally about how our leaders behave and always they give explanations to impress us and make us happy, but not the truth*".

Overall, the cognitive testing did not highlight any difficulty with three of the four cognitive stages. Respondents did not have any difficulty with retrieval, judgement or response. The largest area of concern was comprehension, and revisions were made accordingly to ensure that these problems were addressed.

Conclusions

> *"I think had it not been for the media, perhaps we could be extinct… we would have no one because most of the problems that we face here it is the media that lets the world know… and it is because of this media that some of our problems have been tackled."*
>
> (35-44, Kibera)

The implementation of multi-country governance projects focusing on accountability has required BBC Media Action to review and develop an organisational approach to this concept. This paper has outlined a definition of accountability that underpins BBC Media Action's work in this area. In approaching accountability, the components of both answerability and enforceability are considered, as well as the direct and indirect ways in which the media can influence these components and their drivers.

Audiences are always at the heart of BBC Media Action's work, and so the impact of initiatives at the population level is central to monitoring and evaluating the impact of the organisation's projects. Where improved state-society accountability is the overarching objective of a project, empowering individuals to play a role in holding power holders to account themselves is a crucial outcome for all BBC Media Action projects.

This paper has drawn on current theory and empirical research in Kenya to propose a direct measure of individual empowerment in relation to the answerability and enforcement components of accountability. These are operationalised in this research as requiring an account through questioning, and sanctioning through voting, respectively (although it is recognised that other mechanisms to sanction exist). A framework for measuring degrees of empowerment was found to resonate with individual experiences of accountability in Kenya.

The findings of the research provide support for four indicators of empowerment in relation to the requiring an account and sanctioning aspects of this concept. These aspects should be measured qualitatively across all projects, and quantitatively where possible. A number of items have been developed at this early stage to capture a high level measure of empowerment in relation to requiring an account, while empowerment in relation to sanctioning has been found to require further qualitative exploration in each country context before quantitative measures can be developed (if at all). BBC Media Action recommends that these measures are tested in each country where they are to be used in research, to ensure that they make sense for the country context, that translation of items into local languages maintains the core sense of the indicators, and that richer understanding of barriers, enablers and other drivers of accountability is established for each unique political and social setting.

Over the coming years, BBC Media Action will use opportunities to conduct standard, cross-cultural measurement of the outcomes and impacts of accountability-focused projects, to further develop, refine and validate measurement frameworks and tools. Future BBC Media Action research briefings will document this process, alongside additional approaches to measuring and contributing to the evidence base for the role of media in accountability.

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