

Parliamentary transparency and accountability

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Question

What is known about the impact and effectiveness of transparency and accountability interventions which aim to make parliaments and the legislative processes more transparent [with a focus on DFID priority/developing countries]? What knowledge gaps exist for future research?

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1. Overview

This report presents and discusses what evidence exists about initiatives to promote transparency among legislators, members of parliament (MPs), and legislative processes and what impact this has had on legislative accountability. In this report we distinguish between two types of accountability: vertical (in which citizens play a direct role in holding the powerful to account) and horizontal (in which legislators hold the executive to account). With regard to vertical accountability, the effects of three policy initiatives are reviewed: i) increased information about MPs including through ICTs; ii) disclosure of MPs' assets; and iii) disclosure of MPs' election expenses and funders. Compared to more recent transparency initiatives, such as registers of beneficial ownership information, these initiatives have had a few years to generate some evidence about impact. In relation to horizontal accountability, the impact of transparency on the effectiveness of Public Accounts Committees is reviewed. The choice to focus on this Committee was also made on the basis of available research.

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Concerning transparency's role in inducing vertical accountability, evidence suggests that:

- Increased information about MPs and their conduct may lead to greater accountability by aligning the behaviour of MPs, who want to be elected, with the expectations of voters who will electorally punish misconduct. There is, however, mixed evidence for whether voters do punish MPs for misconducts at election times.
- Political contextual factors, such as clientelism, can produce vertical accountability that is personal in nature and not what we would label as 'good governance'. In such contexts, it is questionable to what degree transparency about MPs' legislative conduct would induce greater accountability.
- There is also a risk coupled with increased transparency about MPs. Evidence shows that increased information about MPs' misconduct and corrupt engagements can lead to voter disillusionment and citizens withdrawing from democratic participation.
- Dissemination of information about MPs and parliaments through ICTs has increased in recent years but it is unclear what impact this type of transparency has had on accountability and MP behaviour.
- The small evidence base concerning asset disclosure shows a potentially positive association between publicly disclosed information about MPs' assets and lower levels of corruption. More research is needed to cement these findings and provide further evidence on the causal mechanisms underpinning these results.
- While conventional wisdom predicts that more transparency in political finance, including public disclosure of MPs' expenditures and sources of funding, would have positive effects on accountability, there is very little empirical evidence supporting this claim. A number of potential risks are coupled with increased campaign finance transparency and more research is needed to see how the potential benefits and risks of such transparency play out in developing country contexts.

Concerning transparency's role in inducing horizontal accountability:

- Theory suggest that making oversight a salient political issue by disclosing and disseminating information about the work of Public Accounts Committees to the public, via media or engaged civil society, may induce a greater sense of urgency among Committee members and tilt their incentives towards being more effective in their oversight roles. This is supported by some evidence.
- More political economy-focused research on legislative oversight in different developing country contexts is needed to further our understanding of how transparency can be used to promote horizontal accountability.

2. Transparency for improved vertical accountability

This section focuses on the role transparency plays for citizens in holding their MPs to account, so-called vertical accountability. It looks at some of the kinds of transparency interventions that can help improve vertical accountability: information on MPs' behaviour, including in parliament; transparency about MPs' assets; and transparency provisions in political finance regulations.

Providing more information about MPs

Does increased transparency about MPs have an impact on their behaviour? Theory on vertical accountability suggests that transparency (reliable, accessible and timely information) is a key mechanism for achieving improved accountability. As voters will punish politicians when they have credible information about them shirking their responsibilities or acting corruptly or opportunistically, improved transparency should incentivise MPs, who want to get re-elected, to meet the expectations of voters. This is referred to as 'healthy political engagement' by a recent World Bank report, as opposed to 'unhealthy political engagement' whereby citizens vote for candidates based on promises of patronage or other personalised goods (World Bank, 2016).

The litmus test for whether transparency with regard to MPs produces accountability is whether information about the conduct of MPs ultimately affects citizens' voting behaviour. Do voters punish politicians for bad behaviour? Are there any risks associated with transparency?

There is some evidence that improved transparency is associated with better behaviour among MPs, suggesting that MPs feel incentivised to meet citizens' expectations. Besley et al (2006) found, using household survey data in India, that citizen access to information about politicians seems to be associated with greater political accountability. Specifically, they found that low quality politicians are more likely to be selected if information about politician quality is limited, and that improved information flows in the village reduces political opportunism and improve resource allocation. However, the same conclusion cannot be drawn from Banarjee et al's (2010) research on voting in rural India. Providing information about corruption allegations connected with political candidates did not result in these candidates losing votes. Only information about candidates having been charged with 'heinous crimes' (i.e., offenses carrying a sentence of more than 5 years), had an effect on their vote share.

Winters and Weitz-Shapiro (2013), using survey data in Brazil, found that the vast majority of voters are willing to punish corrupt politicians, regardless of how well they performed as politicians, suggesting that specific, credible, and accessible information about MPs will lead most voters to punish corrupt politicians at the poll. Ferraz and Finan's (2008) statistical research across local governments in Brazil similarly found evidence for the presence of such vertical accountability mechanism. They found that voters will punish corrupt politicians when information about corruption practices is publicised, and that the effect is particularly large when the disclosure of data about corruption is combined with an active media. The authors conclude that electoral accountability can act as a powerful mechanism to align politicians' actions with voters' preferences.

Finally, Humphreys and Weinstein's (2007) research on Uganda, although based on pilot research of a small sample, shows some promising effects of transparency on MP behaviour. The authors randomised which Ugandan MPs were assigned a scorecard of information recording their attendance, participation, legislative initiatives, and contact with their constituencies, and looked for association between scorecard holders and participation in parliamentary sessions. They found that the treatment groups of MPs that were subjected to the scorecards were 50% more likely to participate in subsequent parliamentary sessions, although the baseline data had shown no difference in prior participation between the treatment and control group of MPs.

The empirical literature has also highlighted a worrying side effect of transparency about MPs' misconducts; that information about politicians engaged in corruption can lead to voter

disillusionment and withdrawal from democratic participation. Akhrhede Olsson (2014) analysed survey data from across 33 countries and the results suggest that corruption perception among voters have a dampening effect on voter turnout. The author concludes that corruption makes citizens feel as if they have no influence on politics, when decisions are made corruptly, which in turn lowers the propensity to engage in political participation. Bauhr and Grimes' (2014) cross-country statistical analysis shows similar results, especially in countries where corruption is widespread. The authors conclude that, in settings in which corruption is the *modus operandi*, transparency may give rise to resignation and a withdrawal from political life. Some country focused research complement these cross-country findings. For example, Chong et al (2011), using experimental research on Mexican municipalities, found that information about candidate corruption leads to all candidates, corrupt or not, to lose votes, i.e., that information about corruption disengages voters from the political process. The findings of Chong et al (2011) have, however, been criticised (see Fox, 2014 footnote 40).

Context matters

There are indications that country context has a role to play in the transparency-accountability nexus with regard to legislators. Malesky et al (2012) provide compelling evidence that greater MP transparency does not necessarily lead to greater MP accountability in authoritarian states, and that donors should be wary in pushing the transparency agenda to these settings. Their argument is that vertical accountability, with citizens endorsing or punishing MPs based on their behaviour, does not work the same way in authoritarian states as it does in democratic countries. In the former contexts, MPs are primarily a forum for contained exchange between the authoritarian leadership and potential opposition, and not a forum for exchange between MPs and citizens. Transparency in such contexts, therefore, prompts different behaviour by MPs. In particular, transparency may make MPs more conformist due to fear that public knowledge of divisions among policy-makers could create instability.

The authors run an experiment in the single party state of Vietnam by which they increase the transparency (creating individual websites with relevant MP information) of a randomised sample of MPs ahead of a legislative session. They found that transparency of MPs was associated with curtailed activity in the query sessions, and that MPs with individualised websites avoided participating in legislative activities that could embarrass regime leaders. However, these findings were later questioned by Anderson (2013) who, using the same data, argues that the evidence of such negative effects in the Vietnamese context is either weak or non-existent, and that the results from the transparency treatment actually suggest a positive effect of transparency.

Literature on clientelism and neopatrimonialism in the context of sub-Saharan Africa also provide food for thought about the likely impact of improved transparency around MPs' behaviour in parliament. Lindberg's (2010) research on MPs' incentives in Ghana shows that their incentives are skewed away from producing the kind of vertical accountability whereby MPs are judged by their behaviour as legislators. As mentioned earlier, transparency should incentivise MPs to meet the expectations of voters. The question is, what are voters' expectations? Lindberg found that ranking first among expectations (both from voters and the party of the aspiring or incumbent MP), are demands for personalised, clientelistic goods, such as payment of bills and school fees for individual constituent. This is followed by less personalised but equally localised constituency development projects, such as roads and schools. Ranking third is constituency representation, such as being seen talking during parliament sessions. Ranking as low as fourth and fifth are what we typically see as an MP's job description: legislation and executive oversight. As this

research indicates, aligning with the expectations of voters in this context would not necessarily produce the kind of vertical accountability we symbolise with good governance.

Other research from across sub-Saharan Africa shows evidence of clientelist-based voting behaviour. Wantchekon (2003) applied an experimental method in the primary elections in Benin to test whether voters were more likely to cast their vote based on election promises related to the distribution of clientelist goods (such as patronage jobs for constituents or support to the local fishermen) or promises related to public goods (such as anti-corruption, poverty eradication or industrial policy). The research showed that people were more inclined to vote along clientelist lines. Another piece of research by Bratton et al (2012), based on survey data of more than 23,000 people from across 16 African countries, found that voters attempt to associate themselves with prospective winners because they wish to gain access to benefits and to avoid retribution after the election. In such contexts it is questionable to what degree more information about MPs' behaviour in parliament will have an impact on voters and MP behaviour alike.

Transparency through ICT

A number of studies have looked at transparency of parliaments and MPs through the use of ICT. Parliamentary websites can enhance government transparency and citizen awareness by allowing citizens to have access to government records, the work of elected representatives, the policy platforms of different parties and candidates, and the transcripts of parliamentary debates. This information can help citizens hold parliament and MPs to account. Transparency of actual MP characteristics (personal information) can likewise enhance the quality of governance by increasing public awareness, legitimacy and trust in both parliament and individual MPs as citizens tend to trust government officials who are accessible and transparent (Joshi and Rosenfield, 2013).

Almost every parliament in the world now has a functioning website. Joshi and Rosenfield (2013) provide a descriptive snapshot of MP transparency online. They found that there has been a considerable proliferation of parliamentary websites, especially in Asian and African countries, in the past decade with a total of 184 countries (out of 193 investigated) now having an active and functioning parliamentary website. These websites provide information about MPs although the type and extent of information vary widely. This finding is echoed by the latest World e-Parliament Report by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016), which, while pointing out that some countries are lagging behind due to limited capacity, resources and political will, states that parliaments in general have become more open and outward looking.

Joshi and Rosenfield (2013) also found that less than half of the websites provide contact information for individual MPs, which make citizen-MP contact more difficult in those countries. Also, only about one in five of these websites have social media links (Facebook, Twitter etc.). Social media links were usually found in relatively rich and democratic countries although some exceptions to this rule were found, for example from Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. The use of social media by parliaments appears to have increased since that research was undertaken, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016). However, Leston-Bandeira and Bender's (2013) study of parliaments' use of social media shows that parliaments are using social media mainly to report parliamentary business, interacting with citizens only on the margins. In terms of potential impact on accountability, the study concludes that, to a large extent, parliaments have joined social media because they have to; it is an unavoidable tool of communication in today's

society. This does not mean, however, that it has changed much about how parliaments operate or led to substantive engagement.

There are several online databases that complement parliamentary websites and provide information about MPs and their behaviour. Based on the model offered by the [TheyWorkForYou](#) website in the UK – which was launched in 2004 and scrapes and repackages open data from official sources – other versions of MP information databases are now available and are being used across the world. [YourNextRepresentative](#) website by mySociety uses members of the public, through crowdsourcing, to obtain and display information about politicians. It was first used in the UK's 2015 election and has since been used in connection with elections in Argentina and Costa Rica. Another recent international database on political figures is the [EveryPolitician](#) website, also by mySociety. It collates data from multiple online sources into a single collection and has thus far collected information on almost 73,000 politicians from 233 countries and territories.

While the two latter websites are too recent to have prompted any impact analysis, the impact of [TheyWorkForYou](#) has recently been analysed as part of a series of impact studies on open data by the Open Data Institute. The findings from this case study, mainly based on interviews, suggest that the greatest impact of [TheyWorkForYou](#) concerns MPs' behaviour; that MPs have changed the way they go about their work in response to [TheyWorkForYou](#)'s vote monitoring and analysis tools, both by turning up for more votes and rebelling against their party more often (Hogge, 2016).

Knowledge gaps and suggestions for further research

The literature and arguments presented in this section show that the often implied transparency-accountability nexus is far from straight forward when it comes to legislators. More research is needed, in particular on the role context plays; its effects on the incentives facing MPs and voters alike, and how these incentives are in turn affected by transparency. Databases, such as [TheyWorkForYou](#), may also hold scope for more rigorous research on the impact of MP transparency.

Transparency and disclosure of MPs' assets

Asset disclosure – by which public officials (or categories thereof) declare their wealth and assets – have been put in place to prevent corruption in 161 countries around the world. Asset disclosure as a tool to combat corruption has found its way onto the political agenda of several inter-governmental platforms. It features in the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) from 2003 (Article 8 (5)) to which 140 countries are signatories, and which make these countries obliged to include provisions on asset disclosure in their national laws. The G20 agreed on a set of High-Level Principles on asset disclosure by public officials at the 2012 summit in Los Cabos, Mexico (G20, 2012). The Open Government Partnership (OGP) uses the availability of an asset disclosure regime as an eligibility criterion for joining the OGP. Four points are awarded to countries with a law requiring asset disclosure to be accessible to the public, two points are awarded to countries with a law requiring assets to be disclosed, and zero points are awarded to countries with no law on asset disclosure.

Since the launch of the OGP in 2011, a number of countries have made commitments in their National Action Plans to improve their asset disclosure systems. Several countries, including Armenia, Chile, Croatia, El Salvador, Mongolia, Ukraine, have committed to improving the

disclosure of asset information, including publishing asset data online for public consumption. That said, other policy inventions with similar purpose as asset disclosure, i.e., beneficial ownership registers and registers for buying property, seem to dominate the most recent policy discussion judging from the country commitments made at the London Anti-Corruption Summit in 2016 (Murphy and Raymond, 2016).

The role of asset disclosure in preventing and fighting corruption is threefold. First, the declarations generate baseline information against which later disclosure can be compared to identify which wealth is not attributable to licit income and raise the flag for potential illicit enrichment. Second, asset disclosure has an investigative function as detection of false and misleading declarations can be easier to prove than proving that bribery and other corruption has taken place. Third, asset disclosure regimes can also restore public confidence in the government by demonstrating that most public officials live within their means and, relatedly, protect officials' reputation from undue allegations of corruption (Chêne, 2008).

Despite the surge in policy with regard to asset disclosure, the evidence base for disclosure is very small. A few World Bank and OECD flagships on how to establish effective asset disclosure regimes, as opposed to providing evidence on impact from such regimes, seem to dominate this literature (OECD, 2011; World Bank, 2013; Rossi et al, 2017). As this report concerns transparency the rest of the section will focus on public disclosure of politician's asset and income information.

The role of transparency

There are a number of arguments as to why public official's asset and financial information should be made public. As with other transparency initiatives, public availability of officials' asset declarations can reinforce scrutiny by adding an endless number of eyes, including media and civil society organisations that can double-check the information and signal any discrepancy between disclosed information and what can be directly observed. Increasing the number of eyes watching can be an additional deterrent to wrongdoing as it increases the likelihood of being caught. Finally, public scrutiny can also raise the stakes for the disclosure agency.

There are also arguments against public disclosure of asset declarations. One such argument is that otherwise apt people will refrain from entering into public office due to the invasion of privacy that is coupled with publicly available asset declarations. The other argument against public disclosure concerns the safety of public officials and their families as the wealth information may be used to inform ransom demands in areas where kidnappings are common (Rossi et al, 2017).

Three high quality empirical studies, all based on cross-country statistical analysis, constitute the evidence base for asset disclosure. Two of these papers focuses on MPs while the third does not distinguish between MPs and other public officials. Moreover, only one of the papers touches specifically on the transparency of asset declarations.

Djanokov et al (2010), using information about rules and practices of disclosure by MPs in 175 countries, found that public disclosure of MPs' asset declarations, but not internal and confidential disclosure, is positively associated with government quality and lower levels of corruption. This finding points to the importance of external control of MPs for good governance. The authors conclude that, while the privacy of politicians may have benefits, those may come at the cost of lower accountability. Another study by Vargas and Schlutz (2016) measures the association between the introduction of substantial financial disclosure systems and corruption

levels for 91 countries between 1996 and 2012. Their findings indicate that the introduction of officials' financial disclosure have a positive but lagged impact on countries' ability to control corruption, i.e., the result from the intervention comes only after a few years. These are, however, small effects and the authors conclude that policy makers will struggle to register success in their fight against corruption if they rely solely on introducing an asset disclosure regime. However, this study does not look specifically at the impact of public disclosure of asset declarations. Lastly, research by van Aaken and Voigt (2011) looks closer at the counterarguments for opening up asset disclosure to the public; that it would act as a disincentive for businesspersons and members of other professions to run for parliament. They found that the introduction of substantial disclosure rules did not lead to a lower percentage of people from business or the law profession in 79 of the included parliaments. Only in four parliaments was such a reduction observed.

Knowledge gaps and suggestions for further research

This research, while limited, points to positive impact from improving the transparency of the assets and income of MPs and other public officials. However, the evidence base could greatly benefit from deeper insights about causal mechanisms between transparency of MPs' asset information and accountability (reduced corruption), which could be ascertained through more qualitative and case study based research. One case that has the potential to inform about impact of asset disclosure transparency is the extensive online database of public officials' asset declaration that has been set up in Georgia, and which was the 2013 winner of the UN Public Service Awards for its excellence in preventing corruption.

Transparency provisions in political finance regulations

Transparent funding of parties and candidates is part of political finance (or campaign finance) regulations in the majority of countries across the world and is called for in international law under UNCAC (article 7(3)). Recently assembled indicators on campaign finance from 54 countries across the world confirm that the vast majority of political finance regulations do include transparency provisions in terms of public disclosure of information about candidate and party contributions and campaign expenditure (exceptions to this rule are found mainly in Africa and Asia).

What the evidence shows, however, is a gap between what is instituted in law and how effective these regulations are in practice. It shows that citizens are, despite regulation in place, regularly denied easy access to credible, timely information on the financial activities of relevant political actors, limiting the extent to which the public, the media, and civil society are able to enforce norms of accountability. In fact, the effective implementation of disclosure requirements is quite rare: in practice, of the 54 countries in the sample, only Australia and the United States make all relevant financial information freely available online in machine readable formats. Of the rest, 22 countries meaningfully disclose at least some information, though disclosure is marred by long waiting periods, lack of machine-readable formats, or incompleteness of the publicly available data. Thirty countries make little or no information available to the public (Global Integrity, 2014).

In addition to a gap between regulation and implementation, recent research by Westminster Foundation for Democracy shows that campaign finance regulations capture only a small part of the political costs associated with being an MP in many developing countries. This suggests that

information about donations and spending across the entire election cycle is needed to get a holistic picture of MPs' incentives and behaviour (Wardle, 2016).

The role of transparency

Public disclosure of campaign finance information has two main purposes: to prevent corruption, vote buying and undue influence by political donors, and to gain and maintain citizens' trust in politics. In terms of corruption prevention, the fear of scandals and of losing public support can serve as a better defence against misbehaviour than any legal sanctions. Reporting requirements also makes it easier for those responsible for enforcing campaign finance regulations to oversee whether these rules are being followed. While violators cannot be expected to admit to infringements in their reports, requiring them to provide financial accounts provides a paper trail that can assist further investigations (IDEA, 2014). Johnston (2005) offers another observation on the effectiveness of disclosure, arguing that the notion that citizens will fold finance data into their own voting and contribution decisions assumes a level of trust and sophistication that may not hold true in practice. Instead, the disclosure of data will likely lead to more accountability only if civil society groups and the press can put the data to use. Investigative journalists have an important role to play in using and making sense of such data. A recent World Bank report on transparency and citizen engagement concludes in a similar way, that information by itself will not lead to improving accountability. Instead, the information provided through transparency must be specific about both policy actions and the resulting outcomes, so that citizens can use this information to select and sanction leaders (World Bank, 2016).

Whereas political finance disclosure enjoys widespread acceptance as an anticorruption measure – “sunlight is the best disinfectant” – there is an evident gap in the literature in terms of empirical evidence concerning the impact of such disclosure, both in terms of comparative, cross-country research and country case studies or other more qualitative approaches. The little evidence that exists come from the United States (seeing that strict disclosure rules have been instituted in that country), and this literature does not paint a coherent picture of the impact of political finance transparency.

A number of risks concerning public disclosure of political finance information have been acknowledged in the literature. La Raja (2014), using statistical analysis based on data from the United States has found that disclosure of information about political donations has the unintended consequence of discouraging smaller donors from donating money to political candidates. People either donate less than the limit for disclosure or refrain from donating at all, especially if they hold a political minority view within their social context.

A recent case study, also from the United States, shows how disclosed information can be abused with potential risk to political donors. In 2008, voters in California were presented with a choice regarding the legal right of same-sex couples to marry: Proposition 8, which passed and made same-sex marriage illegal in the state. In 2009, Eightmaps.com was anonymously launched, providing detailed information on supporters of Proposition 8. The site collected information made public through state campaign finance disclosure laws and overlaid that information onto a Google map of the state. Through Eightmaps, users could find the names, approximate locations, amount donated, and, where available, employers of individuals who donated money to support Proposition 8. This abuse of political finance data seriously infringed

on donors' privacy and many donors experienced threats, vandalism, intimidation and property destruction as a consequence (Graft et al, 2016).

It is easy to imagine how the unintended consequences of disclosure could play out in less democratic countries. For example, in countries based on clientelism, where MPs distribute personalised goods to their followers, it could be detrimental for people and businesses to openly admit support for opposition candidates and parties (Debrah, 2015).

Knowledge gaps and suggestions for further research

The combination of a weak evidence base in favour of transparency and disclosure of political finance information and the acknowledgement of a number of risks associated with such disclosure prompts a request for more research on this subject; with room for both cross-country comparative research and country-based research on the impact of disclosure. In particular, more research is needed to get a better picture of whether the benefits of public disclosure of political finance information outweigh the potential risks in different developing country contexts.

3. Transparency for improved horizontal accountability

This section focuses on the role transparency plays for MPs in holding the executive branch to account, so-called horizontal accountability. The horizontal accountability mechanism emphasises the separation of power in a state, and typical institutions of horizontal accountability include legislative committees that question governments about their actions, and have the power to hold them accountable by initiating a vote of no-confidence (Lindberg et al, 2017). This section looks at one such legislative committee, Public Accounts Committees (PACs), and the impact transparency and accountability interventions can have for enhancing legislative financial accountability. It zeros in on how transparency can shape the effectiveness of oversight conducted by members of PACs, and as such, comes back to the assumptions presented in the previous section: that disclosure of information combined with the uptake of this information shape the incentives of MPs in favour of greater accountability.

Transparency in legislative financial oversight

Public Accounts Committees examine the effectiveness of policy implementation, results, and value for money. Through examining the work undertaken by the Supreme Audit Institutions PACs can also find discrepancies and evidence of wrongdoing and corruption for which they can initiate disciplinary and legal action. By doing so, PACs can make a significant contribution to ensuring the proper use of resources and reduce corruption (Pelizzo, 2017).

However, research has shown that PACs do not necessarily provide effective enough oversight to contribute to enhanced accountability. Members of PACs can be persuaded to turn a blind eye to malfeasance. Lindberg (2010), for example, describes how, in the case of Ghana, MPs who show loyalty to the president are rewarded by lucrative seats on procurement and tender boards and with cabinet positions. Disloyalty, on the other hand, is punished. Similarly, in Uganda, Golooba-Mutebi (2016) found that MPs often ask the president for financial assistance, which compromises their role of holding the executive to account.

Pelizzo and Kinyondo (2014) found in their research on 11 Eastern and Southern African countries that the executive branch often undermines the PAC by choosing to ignore

recommendations and opinions expressed by the Committee. The frustration is added to by the fact that culprits identified by PACs in the region are rarely prosecuted. PACs' work can be undermined in other ways too. Whereas legislative scrutiny and oversight throughout the budget cycle require comprehensive, accurate, appropriate and timely information to be supplied by the executive (Wehner, 2007); in some cases, PACs do not have access to information about expenditure because it has been classified by government. In other cases, there are such large discrepancies between approved and actual budgets that the official budgets that PACs work with are meaningless (APPG, 2008).

The role of transparency

Where PACs have been compromised in their oversight role; what can be done, and does improved transparency feature in the solution? According to Pelizzo and Stapenhurst (2014), it is all about inducing the right incentives to PAC members. Inefficient PACs is a sign that MPs believe that the costs associated with being effective overseers greatly outweigh the benefits, and no matter how much capacity training or resources they receive they will refrain from using their existent tools to exercise effective oversight. Instead, when legislators believe they might derive a benefit from effectively performing an oversight activity, they have the political will to become effective overseers. There needs to be a popular demand for oversight with voters electorally rewarding MPs who perform this role effectively and which, in turn, leads self-interested members of PACs to perform more effective oversight.

If this proposition is correct, transparency initiatives can do a lot in spurring demand for oversight and thereby changing the incentives felt by members of PACs. Evidence from Ghana by Betley et al (2012) suggests that opening up PAC hearings by various means, including televised broadcasts, forms an important part of the accountability cycle. The authors noted that the televised hearings had, in particular, created pressure on the PAC to increase its functional capabilities and improve the quality and timeliness of its scrutiny of audit reports. Similarly, Wang and Rakner (2005) suggest that in Uganda opening PAC sessions to the press and other public officials has improved the PAC's ability to hold the executive to account. Finally, Norad's (2011) anti-corruption evaluation of Tanzania suggests that parliamentary oversight was improved by institutionalising public hearings during committee sessions, and by PAC reports being made available to the public and debated in parliament.

Knowledge gaps and suggestions for further research

The literature on PACs and legislative oversight provides us with an inkling that transparency initiatives can have an impact on PACs and their ability to perform effective horizontal accountability. More in-depth and contextualised political economy studies with a focus on the political factors around the effectiveness of legislative oversight would help cement these insights. To inquire into whether the capacity building programmes conducted by international donors actually improve PACs' ability to effectively oversee the executive it would be beneficial to conduct studies with material from donor interventions that have been undertaken to support PACs. As argued by Pelizzo and Stapenhurst (2014, p. 260): "The issue that practitioners and international organisations need to tackle is not how many oversight tools a legislature has or how many more oversight tools a legislature should be given, but is instead how to make sure that legislatures use the tools that are placed at their disposal and use them effectively."

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