

**Citizen Engagement and Social Accountability:
the changing face of subnational democracy in Brazil**

Case Studies carried out for the World Bank Group Trust Fund Program on “Procurement & Service Delivery: Establishing Effective Collaboration Between Government and Beneficiaries on Monitoring Procurement”

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Fundação Getulio Vargas

March 2009

Background

Over the past several years, the overly centralized governance structure found across South Asia has begun to change, with program and fiscal responsibility being moved to government authorities that are increasingly close to the people. This move to localize decision-making creates enormous opportunities for increasing the effectiveness of public spending since it creates the potential for establishing direct accountability of the government to the community.

Responding to this, the World Bank Group initiated a Trust Fund program entitled “Procurement & Service Delivery: Establishing Effective Collaboration Between Government and Beneficiaries on Monitoring Procurement” to support the shift in governance dynamics by assisting in creating effective oversight of procurement operations by communities for critical projects in rural infrastructure. The program is designed to build upon innovations that have already taken place in the region to support and create guidance materials on how governments and civil society organizations can best mobilize monitoring resources and apply them to greatest effect. The program has been strategically targeted to focus on the government practices that are the most important in the use of discretionary resources (procurement) and on the creation of assets that are most important for inclusive economic growth (rural infrastructure).

Among different activities, this program will assist the development of new knowledge and implementation of learning activities aligned with its goals. As part of this, case studies on how to strengthen social accountability at local level will be developed, drawing on experiences in a number of countries including Brazil, and disseminated through different learning instruments.

Social Accountability

If the second half of the twentieth century was marked by the increasing presence of democratic models of government and representative models of accountability in developing countries, the period of the millenium has been marked by the widespread recognition that basic “electoral” models of accountability, whilst key to the long term sustainability of democracy, are not enough to deal with the many questions that emerge between election periods and which also require urgent action. From country to country this has been expressed in different forms: increasing social control; greater transparency; deepening democracy; innovations in democratic governance; citizen engagement in service provision, amongst others. What has been referred to as social accountability is at the center of this process. As an agregating expression, social accountability refers to the broad range of mechanisms beyond voting that citizens can use to hold the state to account as well as the actions on the part of government, civil society, media and other societal actors that promote or facilitate these efforts¹.

¹ World Bank: *Social Accountability Sourcebook*. Washington D.C World Bank, 2006.

Social accountability mechanisms include a wide range of methods and strategies, some very simple and others dependent on information and communication technologies that help citizens, civil society organizations and the independent media to follow the use of public funds. “Social accountability mechanisms both complement and enhance conventional *internal* mechanisms of accountability, underscore citizen’s rights to expect the government to act in the best interests of the people and to ensure that it does so, and use a range of both formal and informal rewards and sanctions”².

Key here is the notion of social accountability as complementing and enhancing conventional internal mechanisms of accountability; that is as a process that builds on from and extends an existing concern with the use of public resources in the public interest and with reaffirming the basic expectations of a democracy. It is also a process that depends on and strengthens an ongoing dialogue between state and civil society: improving governance, policy and service provision and citizen voice.

Social accountability as an aggregating and mobilizing expression seems to have moved into part of the space that was previously occupied by the discussion and concern with representative democracy and citizen participation; adding to this debate the added dimension of the monitoring and control over everyday actions. Here it has stimulated not only by those citizen based associations, neighborhood groups and organizations who are concerned with guaranteeing that what is decided is done and done properly but also by those within the different institutions of the state who have similar concerns. Obviously there are tensions involved and conflicts, for neither community, civil society nor state are homogeneous organizational fields nor necessarily permeated by consensus. Important though is the starting premise: social accountability is possible because the underlying dialogue is possible.

We follow the authors of a recent study of social accountability initiatives in Asia³ in their suggestion that social accountability initiatives broadly fall into five areas: budgets; policy-making and planning; public goods and services; expenditures; public oversight and monitoring, but like them recognize that in practice they are often linked. Advances can depend on interest, concern, openness, priorities on all sides, but also on organization, technology and legal institutions. They can be driven by concerns with value for money, by concerns with getting services to excluded groups, by overall lack of progress in relation to social and poverty indicators and also by concerns with malpractice and corruption. Advances also bring challenges, for often the evaluation of actions, monitoring of progress, analysis of expenditure amongst others, are seen as managerial and technical responsibilities and prerogatives and opening these up for collective discussion with the general can unbalance professional identities. Thus, internal audit agencies can be important levers for change but equally can find

² Public Affairs Foundation and Karen Sirker & Sladjana Cosic. *Case Studies of Social Accountability Initiatives in Asia*. Washington D.C World Bank Institute, 2007.

³ See above.

themselves resisting the call to build wider partnerships with civil society organizations and pass on their technical skills to community leaders.

Social accountability is, above all, a description rather than a proposal. It is not a best practice but a way of aggregating a variety of different actions that seem to have in common the deepening of practical democracy as public service and collective responsibility. From one institutional environment to another, from one organizational and cultural landscape to another, led by different community based activists, public servants, judges, politicians or business leaders in various combinations, changes are taking place. In Brazil, the focus of these case studies, a key mobilizing word has been that of transparency; in another country it could be social control. However in both cases similar processes will be taking place to open up what has for a long time been the black box of public action and public finance, bringing light to off-budget activities, procurement practices, accounting procedures and policy results.

Background to the Brazil cases

Federal countries around the world share many similarities as well as differences. In Brazil, the federal pact is taken to include municipal as well as state levels of government. Municipalities are territorial and contiguous but can vary in size considerably from the densely populated urban metropolitan areas – where 39% of the country's 180 million population is crammed into 1.9% of its territory – to those rural and semi rural municipalities of less than 50,000 inhabitants with another third of the population and forming 89% of the country's local level jurisdictions. Decentralization varies from policy area to area and in many areas of public policy the three tiers of government are charged with joint responsibility. How that works out in practice can vary considerably, but certainly will involve a mix of federal, state and municipal funding. Despite this potential for variety, the rules drawn up in the 1988 democratic Constitution plus a legal tradition of a formal and separately coded administrative law for the public sector (following the continental European approach of the Latin countries) have meant that, in terms of administrative procedures, whatever is designed for the federal level is automatically applied at state and municipal level and also to all public agencies, public firms and public foundations.

Brazil's political model has an elected executive (President, Governor or Mayor) and a separately elected legislative. In practice the executive tends to be stronger than the legislative and takes the initiative on budgets and laws. The formal system of institutional control follows that of France, Portugal and Spain (especially the Napoleonic Civil Code). Independent accounting tribunals with quasi-legal powers oversee public sector accounts, producing reports which have to be approved by the legislative. Administrative and Public Law is a very complex field and whilst this has the advantage of being very specific about what is required, it could also lead to a high degree of technical opacity and procedural difficulties which in turn stimulate either well intentioned attempts to "find a quick solution" – especially with the pressures of public office and the short term horizons of elections – or become a breeding ground of malpractice.

The 1988 democratic Constitution required the federal government to produce a legislative code for all purchasing and contracting agreements for the three levels of government as well as for public and semi public enterprises. This herculean effort resulted in federal law 8.666/93 which required all public sector purchases (apart from a few highly specific areas and cases of emergency) to be carried out through tendering procedures that would guarantee equal conditions to all competitors in a legal, impersonal, moral, public and efficient manner. Faithful to its Civil Code origins, the law tried valiantly to square the circle on desired administrative behavior in the procurement arena. It specified the modes of procurement that were to be allowed and set limits for each one. These included different versions of the tender model (open competitive tendering; invitations to tender; price surveys), open and multi-criteria competitions (for academic research, technical and artistic support) and auctions. In all cases, the 8666/93 specified the rules for prior qualification: legal, fiscal, technical and organizational. For example, civil engineering works of less than USD 70,000 (equivalent) and other services and purchases (including technical, professional, office supplies etc.) up to USD 40,000 (equivalent) could be procured on the basis of open invitations to three or more firms (with other joining in if they cared to show interest). Between USD 70,000 and USD 700,000 for civil engineering and USD 40,000 – USD 300,000 equivalent for other supplies, a price taking process would be required. This could emphasize price alone, price and technical content or just technical content. Either way, the details of the criteria for choice would have to be spelt out. Above these values, the rules of major contract competition were used with an open stepwise process of, firstly, legal and fiscal qualification, secondly technical and organizational qualification, thirdly examination of formal bids. A fourth procurement option was developed specifically for technical, scientific or artistic competitions or prizes and a fifth, the public auction, for the sale of property or goods taken in exchange for tax defaults and other criminal activities.

There were to be no other methods allowed, no space for innovation or being creative and in each case strict procedures were set down, guaranteeing public information and access. Thus, for example, as well as specifying the time and places during and in which information about procurement requests have to be displayed, the law also provides that any single citizen has the right to have access to the minutes of the procurement meetings and may formally protest if she or he considers that the purchasing process is not following the very strict guidelines of the law. The specific rules and procedures for each procurement activity have to be published and the Public Prosecutors Office⁴ can act to suspend the process if it considers that these are inadequate. All public sector organizations – and in some cases departments – are required to have a Permanent Procurement Commission composed of at least three members who are nominated for a year without extension, two of which have to be statutory public servants with technical competence in the specific area of the organization's or department's activity. Legally the members of the commission are considered collectively responsible for any costs arising

⁴ The Public Prosecutor's Office (*Ministerio Público*) is the state prosecutor for criminal and similar offences, but also has responsibilities to act across the public sector when suspicions of malpractice arise. Following the 1988 Constitution, the *Ministerio Público* also received the added responsibility of representing the "people" on issues of collective rights.

as a result of malpractice. Tenders can also be suspended retrospectively if interested parties claim that the proceedings did not obey the 8666/93 and the Constitutional principles: “legal, impersonal, moral, public and efficient”.

For all that the “8.666” (as it is referred to in public administration circles) brought in positive terms, it also created a bit of a nightmare for those seeking to use purchasing strategies to support sustainable development or to deal with the many different everyday requirements of public service consumption. The requirements for being a public supplier, for example, include guaranteeing that the firm is legally entitled to work in that area and that the legal registration of the enterprise, plus its tax and other public payments are up to date. On being asked why, in a small rural municipality of less than 5,000 inhabitants, the mayor was not able to make better use of local suppliers in procurement activities – thus contributing to local development – the reply came that there wasn’t a single local business with its paperwork in order and the cost for them to do that would be much higher than the eventual gains from the purchasing contract.

Despite the fact that the “8.666” introduced a highly technical process, requiring professional committees to specify precisely what was required and lawyers to see that the terms were properly drawn up, it was also not free from charges of corrupt practices. Advanced knowledge of rules, knowledge of bids, the technical “direction” in which a tender was pointed all could lead to active or passive malpractice. Equally it was not something that could be easily resolved just by wider public participation. All information was in fact available but the problem was in knowing how to interpret its specificity. Description and specifications of goods being procured have to be made in such a way as to avoid any prior association with a particular product made by a particular manufacturer. To understand the specifications behind the purchases of building materials requires having the technical knowledge to follow the engineers and the architects involved.

However leaving aside the technical difficulties or those who would try to bend the rules for the collective good, there was also a cultural relationship between the population and the public sector at the local level that also needed to be overcome. The sheer size of the country and a long tradition of seeing public office as the private domain of dominant groups had made the whole institutional tradition of control an extremely paper tiger. Brazil has also one of the world’s most unequal income distributions and a highly skewed economy, which at the local level stimulates political actions linked to favors rather than policies. Mayors who found people jobs in the local administration, who helped local firms, who could always find a food parcel or help with funeral costs were not likely to be contested; that was the way things were and clientelist practices could also provide opportunities for private enrichment.

Fortunately, as the 1988 Constitution signaled, change was in the air. The democratic consolidation led to strengthening of more effective and autonomous civil society organizations and to complementary legislation that has made financial responsibility at the local level an increasingly serious matter. In 1998, a further step was made in strengthening the institutional framework when the federal government enacted the Fiscal Responsibility Law which placed further limits on the spending powers of the executive branch (president, governors and mayors) and led to the consolidation of minimum

percentage spending requirements in key areas such as education and health and maximum percentage spending limits in personnel. As a disincentive to malpractice it also introduced statutory punishments for mayors whose accounts and accounting procedures were not up-to-date that include loss of office, inability to run in future elections and jail sentences. Democracy was also bringing a number of statutory and consultative councils in different areas, with a significant proportion of civil society members and with remits to examine not only policy but also the actions taking place. The expression “transparency” began to be heard more and more in public debate and at electoral meetings. As we will see in the cases, information was being spread around in ways that had never happened before and doors were opening in the institutional environment such that it began to become possible to check – anonymously – whether certain behaviors were in fact legal.⁵

To take an example from a legal services website: a local elected councilor of a small municipality wrote in asking whether it was legal for the three members of the Permanent Procurement Commission to be all parents of the mayor, including the president who was the mayor’s wife! Equally, the councilor went on to write, none of them were career civil servants; all were occupying temporary posts. Various lawyers pointed out in reply that all municipalities were obliged to follow the general norms and practices set out in Federal Law. Municipalities could introduce separate legislation for minor operational details, but where they had no separate legislation they had to follow the entire Law which was explicit: a minimum of three members of which two have to be permanent career public servants, qualified for the task and drawn from the responsible department. As to the mayor’s wife and parents, whilst nobody approved of the practice, it wasn’t illegal; the problem was the absence of career civil servants. The question and the answers give a good feel for the day-to-day of the “transparency” discussion; slowly but surely, questions began to be asked. The 8666/93 had, despite its bureaucracy, legalism, its 126 articles and some 60 pages, at least served to provide civil society with a point of leverage, a moral high ground of correct practice and, key to any law, a growing interest in effective public administration amongst the accounting tribunals and public prosecutors offices.

One of the ways that mayors, governors and administrators had found to “get around” the strict requirements of the “8.666” was to claim that the purchase was urgent, thus evoking one of the articles of the law that permitted a simplification in procedures in such cases. In some respects they had good reason for the prices that resulted from the overly extensive and detailed tendering processes were not necessarily the best on the market. Firms would safeguard their own financial balance sheets by building in reserves for eventual challenges or delays. Equally administrators were under their own pressures to produce results, to build health posts, repair schools, pave roads and attend to the many other bits and pieces of daily municipal life. In the Brazilian system of fixed four-year terms in office with, recently, the possibility of a single reelection, Election Day would not wait for the procurement process to end.

⁵ Brazil does not have an Ombudsman as a fixed institutional office but there are a variety of equivalents around the public sector scene, developed by specific public sector organizations.

By 1999 it was estimated that of every R\$ 13,00 of expense, only R\$ 1,00 was being procured through the formal purchasing process and the rest through some form of “emergency” legal loophole. Loopholes however can work both ways, depending on whose hands guided the operation, and there was rising concern on all sides to provide a more adequate mechanism that would be coherent with the aim of transparency and visible legality whilst providing for the more rapid and cost-effective purchasing of the hundreds and thousands of items that go to make up government in action. The result was the electronic lowest bid auction (*pregão electronica*⁶) introduced by the law 10520 in 2002. All the previous options had required potential suppliers to first pre-qualify in terms of technical competence and documentation. This was not only time consuming, but also enabled bidders to identify each other and make it easier to form cartels or exert pressure. Under the electronic auction, the process is reversed and first phase is the analysis of the bids, with the lowest winning, followed by the analysis of the qualifications of the bidder. If the lowest price bidder is qualified and the technical specifications are met, then the bidder gains the contract; if not the next is called. Nobody can know who has entered a bid, or even from where they have come – as the process is usually carried out on the Internet. There are also allowances for a second round of bidding to lower the first price and special rules for small and medium firms.

The success of the electronic auction can be measured from data available from the Federal government where the volume of procurement through this method grew 297% in 2005 with estimates of 70% of purchases and approximately 50% of the total value procured. Savings have been considerable, up to 30% below market rates and purchasing processes are taking 17 days as opposed to between 90 -120 under the previous methods. In the case of the federal government, the electronic Internet auction has enabled suppliers to take part from all over the country and has greatly increased access by small and micro firms.⁷

The electronic auction signaled the serious introduction of information technology in procurement and it went hand in hand with the widespread use of information technology in accounting. Following the very positive public impact of the Fiscal Responsibility Law which was supported by serious politicians all the way across the political spectrum⁸ and led to a number of showcase events with mayors receiving jail sentences or being required to pay back large sums, the Federal and State governments increased their own concerns with reporting and with guaranteeing accurate accounting practices for transfers. With governments increasingly concerned with spending wisely and with a corresponding increase in public concern with government actions, including corruption and malpractice, the question of effective control has changed from writing more and more complex rules and procedures to that of “transparency”, “monitoring” and “results”.

⁶ The expression *pregão* refers to the public offer of goods for sale, in this case it is the state that is making public its proposal to purchase.

⁷ From a study by Garibaldi Cordeiro de Albuquerque and José Carlos de Freitas presented at the 2006 meeting of the Latin American Council for Development Administration (CLAD)

⁸ Under the previous rules, mayors would often leave huge debts to their successors who had no way of fulfilling electoral promises unless they got special handouts and favors from state or federal governments in exchange for loyalty; hardly a guarantee for independent elections or local democracy.

The result has been a gradual change in the environment of public finance, a chink of clarity in a previously opaque institutional field. What had previously been a dry and specialist subject for accountants, lawyers and economists – “too complicated for the public to understand, but leave it up to us” – was becoming an open topic of conversation with leaflets, guidelines, websites and civil society involvement.

In a small municipality in the state of São Paulo, a number of people who had left the area and moved to the capital got together to organise a social event with their families and local friends. The result was an association “Amarribo” (*Amigos Associados de Ribeirão Bonito* - the Associated Friends of Ribeirão Bonito) formed in 1999 to find ways of helping the development of the municipality which was in serious financial difficulties. Unfortunately Amarribo found itself facing a very different issue: a newly elected mayor whose family began to show all the external signs of sudden wealth (international travel, new cars and house refurbishing). For many in the municipality the response was – “what can you do, that’s the way it is” – but Amarribo decided to take on the challenge despite considerable hostility by the mayor. Learning by doing, its members found out how to track public spending and forced the municipal council to assume its legally required role of institutional oversight and impeachment. The result of their actions led to numerous contacts by other local citizen groups and to their book “Defeating Corruption in Brazilian Municipalities” which can be found all over Brazil.⁹

Slowly, because technical opacity takes time to undo, public financial information became much more widely available; the same electronic file that is sent to the state accounting tribunal can be placed on the municipality’s web site or published on the accounting tribunal’s web site after approval. From the Federal to the local, governments began to find that it was much easier to make information public, because the media and interest groups would get the information anyway from some part of the institutional control and oversight system. National and state assemblies have on-line links to data on the execution of principle government programs; anybody can check the Federal transfers to their municipality by walking into an Internet café or municipal library. In a recent visit to a group of very small municipalities, research workers in the area of poverty reduction had checked a variety of statistical information including the municipal income base, taxes and transfers. The local government officials were surprised at how well informed and up-to-date the team was, more so than themselves – the data had been pulled off various official websites the day before.

The presence of statutory and consultative councils in a number of key areas has also proved to be an important ingredient in increasing the pressures for transparency. With civil society members present, budgets have to be discussed and the costs of different policy options debated. Whilst it may still be difficult to penetrate the complex language of public procurement, councils have the power to ask for explanations and also to monitor actions and results.

Two examples drawn from the same federal program illustrate this well. The Federal School Meals Program transfers funds to all the 5,561 municipalities in the country to

⁹ Also available on the site of the Brazilian NGO Transparencia (www.transparencia.org.br)

complement resources from the states and the municipalities themselves that are used in pre-school and primary school activities (up to 15yrs of age). One of the conditions is that the municipality creates a Council to oversee the use of funds and guarantee the accounts. Recently the city of São Paulo School Meals Council, largely made up of volunteers drawn from parents and teachers, presented a report to the public prosecutors office detailing, through photographs and documents, malpractice in the use of public funds (municipal and federal) in the school meals service. This had been outsourced through an official “8666” tender process and the council carried out a number of site visits during the year to document the results. The contracts have been suspended pending further analysis and suspicion that there was fraud in the tendering process.

In the municipality of Olímpia in the State of São Paulo, with 30,000 inhabitants and 32 crèches and schools, the decision was made to extend the power of the Council to include supervision not just of the accounts, but also of the management of the school meals system as a whole. The municipal law that created the council includes supervision of the menus and ingredients which must be drawn up by nutritionists and respect local habits and agricultural traditions; supervision of the purchasing agreements which should give priority to local producers both of raw materials and of processed food products as well as supervision of the use of federal and municipal funds. In the case of Olímpia, one third of the USD 500,000 equivalent budget spent on the school meals comes from the federal program and two thirds from the municipality. The council is made up of seven members who are elected for a two year term with only one re-election: one representative nominated by the mayor, one by the municipal legislative, two representatives of the school teachers, two representatives of the parents associations and one representative of the local civil society organizations. In conversation with the authors, the current president of the Council commented that the supervision and control begins with the purchasing process, goes on through the quality control of the produce received and finishes with the control of the meals themselves and their nutritional and cultural standards. As well as guaranteeing the proper use of public funds, the Council has been fundamental in increasing the quality of the local education given that the students are well fed and now attend classes regularly. Grades have risen and the school meals service is able to make a significant contribution to local small and family based farmers and agricultural product producers. The council members are all volunteers but have taken the opportunity to attend courses offered by the federal accounting bureau in public purchasing and public accounts so that they can “know what to ask and know what to expect”.

What this, and other experiences suggest is that whilst forcing open the black box of purchasing processes is important, in and of itself, it is equally important and certainly easier for citizens to learn how to look at results in a different way. Spotting a fraudulent practice in a tightly monitored public tender requires a lot of investigative skills, but a sausage cut into three to be divided between three children, restrictions on pieces of fruit, meat that was minced and not served in chunks and financial “incentives” for cooks to reduce the amount of ingredients in the meals something that most of us can spot, or at least question. Equally as we will see in some examples from the participative budget, local representatives of communities with serious infrastructure often have access either through themselves or neighbors to knowledge of construction work and practices which

when used in monitoring results can also lead to the awareness of false practice further back in the process.

General Lessons from Brazil

As this introduction has shown, those looking for innovation in the procurement process itself will – with the exception of the so far successful electronic auction – not find it. What they will find are standardized procedures that are supported by law and which are supposed to be followed. On the other hand they will find considerable innovation taking place around this central core largely in terms of increased social accountability. Both go together, the legal framework offers the leverage that is necessary for the social mobilization to have effect. Large parts of Brazil’s nearly 200 million inhabitants have for a long time been placed on the margins of political and policy activity and have been brought up with the slogan “you can’t expect anything else because that’s what politicians are like”. The social and political movements that surrounded the 1988 constitution may have over exaggerated in the size of the text and many of its clauses and articles might exist in theory rather than practice but at least they changed significantly the climate of public action.

One of the more subtle changes in the Constitution, as well as the creation of statutory and advisory councils in a number of key areas, was to require the public prosecutors office (*Ministerio Publico*) to assume additional responsibility for action in relation to collective and diffuse rights. Thus a community or neighborhood group mobilizing to reduce crime by pressurizing the municipality to improve living conditions, might suddenly find itself with a powerful ally in the Public Prosecutors Office on the grounds of the collective right to live with dignity and safety. Equally, community groups, councils and others concerned about public sector behavior will increasingly turn to the public prosecutors office for help, given its image as an impartial and serious ally on public affairs.

The result has been the gradual coming together of several institutional bits and pieces that are forming a new landscape of opportunity for social accountability in relation to the procurement and provision of goods, services and the implementation of policies. Firstly there was the administrative purchasing law (8666/93) that both provided a structure and also showed that there are always limits to what laws can do. Secondly there was the growing cultural climate change brought about by a new, more open, and in some cases participatory democracy and the introduction of widespread advisory and statutory council in a number of public policy areas. Thirdly there was the across the board approval of the Fiscal Responsibility Law signaling the beginning of a shift to a more results based electoral model as opposed to the “loyalty and subservience” of previous practice. Fourthly there was the presence of new institutional actors – such as the Public Prosecutor’s Office – who could theoretically be drawn into the arena. Fifthly there was the widespread use of the expression “transparency” as a reference to the moral high ground of required public behavior in relation to widespread corruption.

Investigating corruption and malpractice in settings where often highly sophisticated techniques and practices are being used and where legal frameworks can be equally complex is not an easy task. Situations range from direct siphoning off of public funds, cronyism, though to promises of future help. It is interesting to note that one of the areas where the 8666/93 strictly prohibited the use of “emergency” contracting was publicity campaigns; a known strategy for feeding public money though to various back office slush funds.

Prevention at the very basic level has to do with resolutivity: the degree to which those involved realize that if they do something wrong they will be caught and if caught will be adequately punished. For this to happen there has to be competent investigators, effective and timely legal procedures and laws. But there also has to be information that can point to what might be taking place and also put pressure on those with the responsibility to act and it is in this linked but broader arena that a second aspect of prevention emerges; one that is more accessible to the population as a whole in their ongoing tasks and in their daily life.

This second aspect of prevention refers to (a) raising the overall visibility about public decisions, about budgets, policies, funds, accounting to such an extent that the probability of any malpractice, be it directly or indirectly corrupt or just chronically inefficient, leaving some kind of trace is increased and (b) guaranteeing that the mechanisms are available for community groups, advisory councils and watchdog bodies to activate and, if necessary, pressure the relevant institutional actors for results (such as the legislative, the executive, the internal auditory agencies, legal system amongst others).

This is perhaps the big lesson from the Brazilian cases. It is not enough to have laws and procedures, nor institutional agents; these are necessary but not sufficient. What is also needed are the interests, concerns and mechanisms through which people as citizens, either locally with a few neighbors or in their own associations and organizations, can engage in and exercise the collective wish for transparency and greater social accountability in relation to public affairs. “Open and democratic governance” as we pointed out earlier, requires a disposition for dialogue and the determination to see it through; doors have to be opened, bridges built and information provided if people are to be able to effectively engage in debate and monitor public action.

It is here, we suggest, where the Brazil cases have most to contribute, but they do not do so as a model or best practice. They are quite different between each other, each representing a piece of a possible jigsaw puzzle that still has no picture. Broadly they point to the importance of the different parts of the wider chain of events within which purchasing and procurement takes place: setting priorities, monitoring the implementation of public works and services, evaluating end results, reviewing the use of public funds, changing the public’s view on taxes, discussing financial management amongst others. Seen collectively they all point in the direction raised at the beginning of this introduction: raising considerably the transparency and visibility of the processes, decisions and flow of funds in different policy arenas and in doing so making it increasingly more difficult for those who seek to use the procurement framework for malpractice or tolerate its inefficiencies to do so. From case to case, the underlying theme of building confidence and joint working will emerge in different ways. Just as

progressive government build bridges out to civil society, so do civil society watchdog bodies build bridges to public institutions with concern for transparency and legality. Virtuous circles are the products of a broad process of deepening democracy which can root itself in a variety of ways, it is both material and social, connecting the unconnected and widening the horizon of everyday possibilities, reducing and even inverting power hierarchies. If there is a clue to be gained from these and other innovations it is perhaps in a simple phrase: don't worry about the big picture, pick up a bit and begin.

The first case, **Building bridges: the Pernambuco State Accounting Tribunal**, highlights the way in which institutions are important in community control of public spending, providing that staff of these institutions are prepared to use their potential. The second, **Community Managed Water and Sanitation for Rural Villages**, shows how learning by doing and transparent accounting created a basis for community empowerment and ownership of a key survival resource. The third, **Building a Formal Economy with transparency and community supervision**, shows how a community was able to make a major cultural change in relation to the use and contribution to public funds, through collectively assuming the responsibility for "changing the frame" of local development. The fourth, **Participatory Budgets: from setting priorities to social control**, shows how some of a second generation of participatory budgets have moved onwards to create citizen based mechanisms for overseeing program, project and public works procurement processes that directly confront the problems of day to day cronyism and corruption and, also, to discuss and approve decisions on fiscal policy.