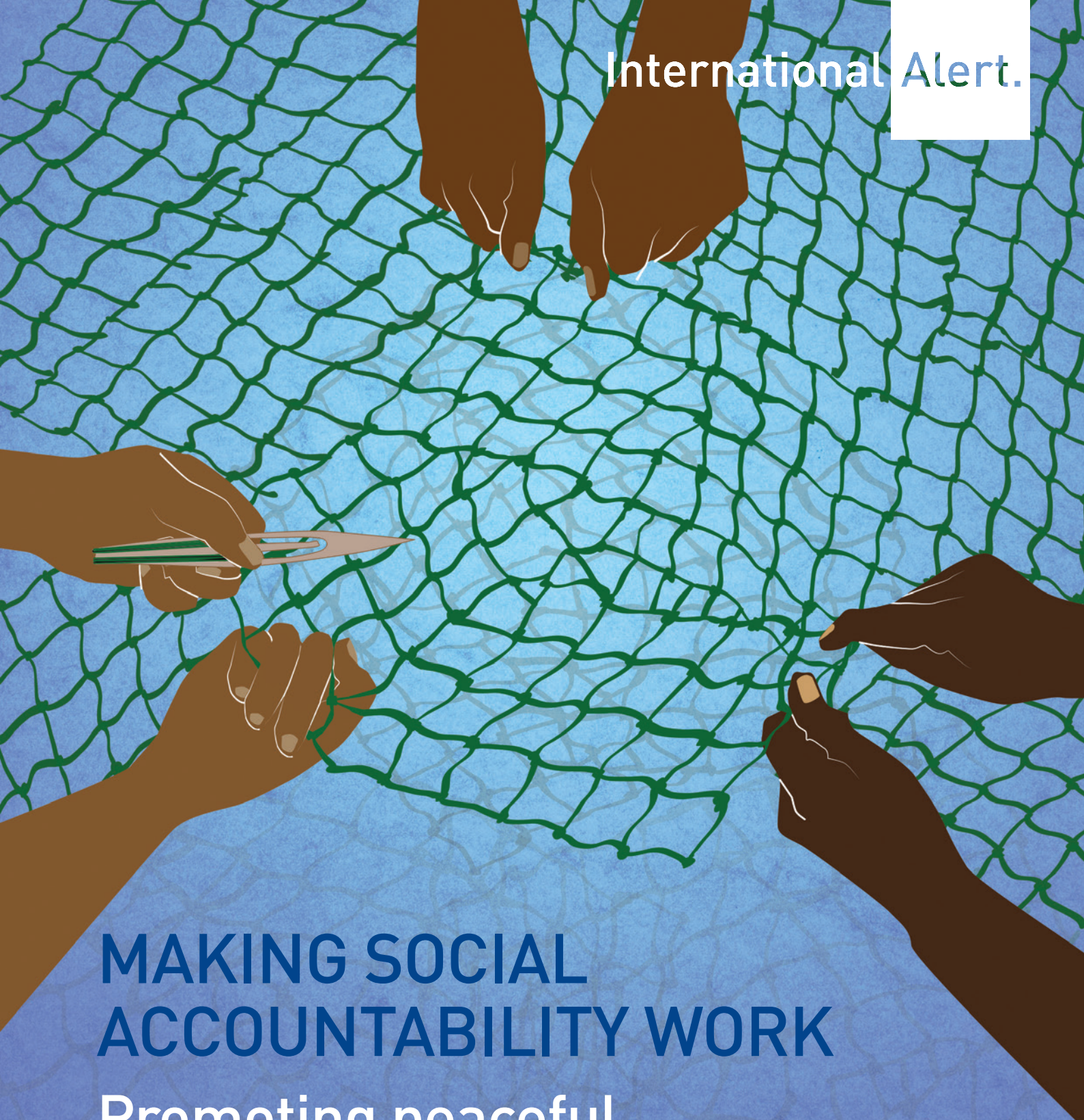

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MAKING SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY WORK

Promoting peaceful development in Uganda

Jo Robinson

March 2016

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the product of a research study on social accountability mechanisms in projects funded by multilateral development banks (MDBs). The research assessed how social accountability and conflict-sensitivity can be integrated into large-scale development projects, including through technology-based solutions. The aim is to ensure that such projects are better able to make positive contributions to peace in fragile and conflict-affected situations (FCAS).

The research focuses on two case study projects in Uganda: the Lakes Edward and Albert Fisheries Pilot Project (LEAF I), funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB); and the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund Project (NUSAF II), funded by the World Bank (WB). For each case study project, interviews were conducted with a number of district officials responsible for project implementation. Focus groups were also held with those involved in the accountability mechanisms at the community level. The interviews and focus groups were conducted across eight districts where the projects were being implemented.

This report seeks to unpack the meaning of social accountability in order to understand the processes and circumstances that influence the effectiveness of social accountability initiatives and to explore the connections between conflict-sensitivity and social accountability. Since multilateral institutions work extensively through central and regional government structures, greater accountability in these projects also provides the opportunity to improve citizen–state relations – a key dimension of peace and a further aspect of the projects considered by this research. The report also looks at the role that technology can play in improving accountability and governance processes, particularly in light of the limited focus so far on technological solutions to encourage responses from decision-makers. In addition, it considers the conflict-sensitivity dynamics of each project, their recognition of local conflict dynamics and their contribution to peaceful development.

In many respects, the findings reflect the different stages of the two projects. The NUSAF II project has learned from challenges relating to the misappropriation of resources experienced in its first phase and has integrated a transparency and accountability component into the project. These efforts have led to a real focus on social accountability, which appears in general to have strengthened the development outcomes of the project. In some instances, the social accountability focus has seen communities develop conflict-mitigation and -resolution capacities, applied even to issues outside the project. In some cases, it was also found to have enhanced women's empowerment. However, there is still more to be done to ensure that the project is truly inclusive in its approach. Moreover, further cognisance of local conflict dynamics, particularly around access to land, will be crucial in the rollout of NUSAF III to ensure that it continues to provide peace dividends to communities in northern Uganda.

The LEAF II project has yet to start and the findings are based on the pilot project, highlighting opportunities to enhance the approach to social accountability and conflict-sensitivity. The project faces significant challenges relating to the politicisation of fishery management and weak coordination within the fishing communities themselves. While it funded community-led bodies to manage the lake's resources and form participation and accountability mechanisms, in practice many of these have struggled with local elite capture and are not necessarily representative of the communities they are designed to serve. This challenge points to an opportunity to enhance the engagement of women, whose roles in the fishing sector are very different from those of men. The needs of women should also be adequately reflected by the community accountability groups, which are mostly male-led at present. LEAF II will need to sharpen incentives and sanctions

and to provide robust oversight of these groups to improve their inclusivity, transparency and responsiveness. It will also need to strengthen local community capacities to hold authorities to account.

This report also offers a series of recommendations to policy-makers and project teams at the WB and the AfDB, and to bilateral donors to these institutions. These recommendations are broadly applicable beyond the Uganda context to development projects with social accountability components in FCAS. The recommendations are as follows:

- Find entry points in the political economy to boost official responsiveness;
- Adapt project design to realise social outcomes – they are as important as economic outcomes;
- Ensure that project accountability mechanisms are community-based and contextualised;
- Ensure that accountability mechanisms consider and promote community cohesion – this affects a community's ability to mobilise and challenge decisions;
- Harness technology appropriately – it can amplify social accountability;
- Engage communities in ways that ensure they know what is planned and are able to influence the plans;
- Hold face-to-face meetings early, to lay the foundations for trust and improved citizen–state relations;
- Ensure that grievances are noted, responded to and, where possible, redressed, and that this process is systematically tracked and communicated;
- Ensure that social accountability implementers and watchdogs are properly informed;
- Design projects to prevent conflict, including addressing political challenges;
- Strengthen communities' capacities to resolve disputes; and
- Track and mitigate conflict impacts on development outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

There has been growing recognition from the international community in recent years that supporting economic development in FCAS must go hand-in-hand with efforts to improve accountability and promote good governance. Without positive citizen–state relations, development progress is extremely difficult to achieve. Often overlooked, however, are the ways in which development processes provide opportunities to increase citizen participation in decision-making and state accountability – crucial factors for positive peace.[1] An understanding that the inclusion of well-designed participation and accountability processes in economic development projects can help to promote good governance is part of a broader notion of conflict-sensitivity. It constitutes a vital approach, which development organisations should use in these situations to analyse the context in which they operate, to understand the interaction between their interventions and that context, and to act upon this understanding in order to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts on conflict.[2]

The acceptance of this interaction has led to various efforts to reform international approaches to development and poverty eradication, including through the *World development report 2011*, the *New deal for engagement in fragile states* and the inter-governmental platform known as the g7+. However, the most significant achievement in this context came only recently with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals. Among these goals are Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and Goal 10 on the reduction of inequality within and among countries through social, economic and political inclusion and enhancing representation and voice. The inclusion of these 'peace goals' marks a sea change for all actors involved in promoting sustainable development: it recognises the importance of political and governance factors in economic processes and commits states to address the causes of violent conflict.

1 A peace that is more than just the absence of violence. See International Alert, Strategic perspective 2015–2019, London, 2015, p.12
2 Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, How to guide to conflict sensitivity, London, 2012

Conflict-sensitivity and social accountability have generally been treated separately in the development discourse, with social accountability enjoying greater success and acceptance among MDBs. However, this trend is problematic as experience shows that, in FCAS, increasing citizens' demand for accountability without also supporting the state's capacity to respond can have the perverse effect of widening the gap between people and governments; it can also incentivise governments to clamp down on political space. This is one reason why the two approaches should be considered simultaneously. Conflict-sensitivity is key to ensuring that social accountability is promoted in ways that minimise harm and maximise contributions to peace. There is also a need for a more holistic assessment of the political economy dimensions of accountability supply and demand[3] and the implications for citizen–state relations.

It is in this context that Alert presents these research findings and recommendations on how, in FCAS, both social accountability and conflict-sensitivity can be effectively built into large-scale investment and development projects, including through technology-based solutions. The research looks in particular at two projects in Uganda – one financed by the AfDB and the other by the WB. It explores how they are integrating, and can further integrate, these approaches to development in a country characterised by fragility and still recovering from civil war. Conflict-sensitivity and social accountability are not new to either institution, although their application to date has been inconsistent. The research thus hopes to contribute to improving how the AfDB and the WB can promote sustainable peace alongside economic growth and to ensuring that MDBs support both governments and citizens, especially the most marginalised.

Unpacking social accountability

3 See J. Fox, Social accountability: What does the evidence really say?, GPSA Working Paper No. 1, 2014; A. Joshi, Reading the local context: A causal chain approach to social accountability, IDS Bulletin 45:5, 2014; and E. Schoemaker and N. Stremlau, Media and conflict: An assessment of the evidence, Progress in Development Studies, 14(2), 2014, pp.181–195

The research focuses primarily on social accountability, which Alert views as a vital part of conflict-sensitivity and which is crucial to efforts to improve the effectiveness of MDB-funded projects in FCAS. While no universal definition of social accountability exists, a useful understanding, and the one used for this report, is that it involves three main components: access to information, citizen action and state response.[4] The components cannot be considered as a linear process, but instead form a 'virtuous cycle'[5] where each reinforces the other.

To achieve effective social accountability, citizens must have information about policies and decisions that are of public interest. It is not sufficient for such information to be easily accessible. People also need to be made aware that this information exists and to understand where and how to access it. Following closely from this is direct engagement by citizens. In exercising their right to information, citizens must feel confident that it is feasible and worthwhile to challenge that information – in other words, that there is not an undue level of risk to them in voicing concerns and that doing so will elicit an appropriate response. Importantly, citizen action is also influenced by the strength of existing community cohesion and organisation. In FCAS, this cohesion and 'bridging social capital'[6] is often weak. As a result, a lack of coherent voice within civil society limits its capacity for mobilisation and collective action.[7] This means that communities can struggle to organise either for economic purposes or to challenge decision-makers when they have concerns or grievances. A lack of social capital therefore not only limits communities' access to long-term economic benefits; it also makes bottom-up accountability processes more difficult to achieve.

Arguably, however, the most challenging aspect of the model to realise is state or official response. Authorities should accept that they are accountable for the services they provide and the decisions they make. In other words, they need to acknowledge citizens' demands and respond appropriately. This includes, whenever necessary, amending policy decisions or providing remedies. In FCAS, where political space and government capacity can be limited, the ability of those in power to respond to community voice is often constrained. Authorities' actions are often determined by the political economy in which they operate, which can create a mix of incentives and sanctions both for response and non-response. Therefore, both positive incentives and negative sanctions need to be in place to maximise government responsiveness, developing a system of mutual empowerment between pro-accountability actors from the state and from society.[8]

Importantly, there is also the challenge of inclusivity in social accountability processes. The development community perennially refers to 'citizens' as one entity, whereas in reality there is a difference between people whose voices are heeded and those who are not heard. Community-driven development programmes can be vulnerable to local elite capture,[9] especially in FCAS. Only through creating an enabling environment for representation of those usually excluded – for instance, because of gender or economic status – will genuine and sustainable community participation be encouraged.[10] Exactly which citizens are voicing opinions and being heard is therefore a crucial consideration in development processes that seek to enhance citizen engagement and accountability.

4 A. Joshi, 2014, Op. cit.

5 J. Fox, 2014, Op. cit.

6 This type of social capital refers to social ties across typical societal divides such as gender, age, class or race rather than 'bonding social capital', which refers to social ties within natural kinship groups (see Harvard Kennedy School definitions, available at http://www.hks.harvard.edu/saguaro/glossary.htm). It is the former that is most commonly lacking in FCAS.

7 C. Schouten, Social accountability in situations of conflict and fragility, U4 Brief No. 19, Network for Integrity in Reconstruction, 2011

8 J. Fox, 2014, Op. cit.

9 G. Mansuri and V. Rao, Localising participation: Does participation work?, Washington DC: World Bank, 2013

10 J. Fox, 2014, Op. cit.

Finally, this research looks at the role technology[11] can play in promoting good governance. Uganda has been a particularly fertile ground for experimenting with technology-based solutions to governance challenges. As with many contexts, much of this work has focused on demand-side accountability – the access to information and citizen action components – often assuming that state response will follow.[12] This report attempts to analyse and suggest technology-based approaches that also incentivise and encourage responses from decision-makers, while being cognisant of the conflict risks associated with raising citizen expectations without generating appropriate pressure on, or incentives for, authorities to act.

11 For the purposes of this research, a broad definition of technology is used to refer to any digital form that facilitates the creation, storage, analysis and sharing of data and information. It does not necessarily refer to the most advanced technologies, but can also mean SMS or even radio.

12 G.-S. Gigler and S. Bailur, Closing the feedback loop: Can technology bridge the accountability gap?, Washington DC: World Bank, 2014

BACKGROUND

Governance and conflict in Uganda

After 20 years of civil war, Uganda is now experiencing relative stability. However, underlying political and economic divisions remain – that is, between the north and south of the country, although this is declining,[13] between different ethnic groups, and between those who identify as Ugandan and immigrants to the country, many of whom are from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan. Citizen–state relations have been historically weak, particularly in the north, the epicentre of the civil war. Considerable psychological trauma remains among communities who experienced the conflict and spent many years in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The conflict dynamics of each project area will be discussed in more detail below. Generally, however, perceptions of the government worsened in 2012 following a corruption scandal. A number of donors suspended development assistance to Uganda after reports that €10 million due to be spent on the recovery of the war-torn north were embezzled by Office of the Prime Minister staff. With the case still in court, and the then prime minister now one of the leading opposition candidates in the presidential election campaign, the run-up to the February elections saw an increase in levels of political tension across the country.

Social accountability in Uganda

There are many initiatives in Uganda that use social accountability as an approach to improve governance and service delivery across various sectors. These have been sponsored mostly by

13 See International Alert, Monitoring the impact of the peace, recovery and development plan on peace and conflict in northern Uganda, 2014, p.11

international and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs), but also by the government and, to some extent, the AfDB and the WB. Organisations such as the Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC) work to promote citizen access to information on issues of public interest, such as awarding government contracts. Some NGOs have focused on specific sectors: for example, Transparency International Uganda (TIU) supports bottom-up accountability in the delivery of healthcare in rural areas. Access to information in Uganda is guaranteed by the Access to Information (ATI) Act, which was passed in 2005 and is viewed as a relatively strong piece of legislation.[14] Ugandan civil society organisations (CSOs), on several occasions, have used the act to successfully compel government agencies to release information kept off the public record, notably about the awarding of procurement contracts.[15] While the existence of the act is encouraging, its effectiveness has been limited so far because there is a general lack of awareness of the act and the rights it affords among citizens and CSOs across the country.[16] Effectiveness has also been limited because of the government's role in hindering the law's implementation and frustrating attempts to obtain information.[17]

Many other CSOs are active in mobilising citizens and facilitating citizen–state dialogue, including International Alert, which has recently been holding consultations on the equitable management of natural resources around Lake Albert. Overall, most social accountability initiatives implemented to date in Uganda have been aimed at promoting access to information and citizen action. Seeking official redress has been attempted by only a small number of local NGOs and civil society activists[18] and their main successes have not been vis-à-vis the Ugandan government but the WB. One of the most notable cases is that of the National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE), which has submitted several formal complaints to the WB for irregularities concerning a hydropower project in the Bujagali Falls, a protected natural area.

Bujagali Hydropower Plant Project

In 2001, NAPE submitted an official complaint to the WB's Inspection Panel (IP) on behalf of project-affected communities in relation to three projects: the Bujagali Third and Fourth Power Projects and the Bujagali Hydropower Plant. NAPE complained that the WB's "failures in the design, appraisal and implementation of the projects had materially affected [local communities'] rights and interests and were likely to jeopardise their future social, cultural and environmental security".[19] The complaint also detailed the WB's poor assessment of the site's cultural significance, its relocation of affected families, the future tariff agreement between the government and the company building the plant, and the failure to publicly disclose relevant project information to affected communities. The IP concluded that the WB had indeed been non-compliant regarding several of its own policies. The WB agreed to take corrective measures, including the development of a plan to protect the project site and to support wider consultations. This case sheds light on the barriers to action that project-affected communities can face in spite of the WB's policies. According to these policies, it was in fact the responsibility of the WB and the Ugandan government to provide grievance and accountability mechanisms for the project; however, only through the intervention of NAPE were communities able to seek redress.

14 The Global Right to Information Rating gives relatively high scores to Uganda's ATI Act in many key categories, including the right to information (see RTI Rating's website, available at http://www.rti-rating.org/view_country?country_name=Uganda).

15 Ugandan magistrate orders disclosure by government, freedominfo.org, 12 March 2015, http://www.freedominfo.org/2015/03/ugandan-magistrate-orders-disclosure-by-government

16 Interview with Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC), Kampala, 17 July 2015

17 AFIC, The struggle for access: An assessment of the capacity of public bodies to implement Uganda's Access to Information Act, 2005, March 2012, p.vi

18 Largely because of the aforementioned lack of awareness, but also because channels through which to do this are limited and require significant capacity.

19 IBRD, Accountability at the World Bank: The Inspection Panel 10 years on, 2003, p.82

In addition, a report on technology and governance by iHub Research found 12 agencies in Uganda with social accountability initiatives (implemented by NGOs, UN and government agencies) that integrated to various degrees technology-based solutions in their projects. The aim of such solutions was to encourage two-way communication between citizens and decision-makers – from radio programmes to mobile phones and internet-based platforms.[20] Despite this apparent dynamism, citizens continue to face major challenges in accessing information, mobilising for collective action and triggering official responses, which stem from the country's governance and conflict dynamics. The Ugandan government's own commitments to improving governance and promoting peace have been largely negated. Often, "mechanisms for citizen participation have been tokenistic, fail[ed] to tackle entrenched social hierarchies and decentralisation has created endless opportunities for patronage".[21] The Bujagali Power Plant case reflects this trend. Even where citizens' rights are guaranteed, they are not necessarily exercised or consistently met with a sense of obligation from duty-bearers. In other cases, the Ugandan government has taken proactive measures to restrict civic space. In August 2013, the Ugandan parliament passed the Public Order Management Bill, which limits the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.[22] In November 2015, it passed a controversial NGO Bill, which gives the government broad oversight powers over how CSOs operate.[23] These changes could severely hamper efforts to promote good governance and conflict-sensitivity in Uganda.

The AfDB, the WB and social accountability

In recent years, MDBs have made strong commitments to increase community participation and oversight in their projects, both of which are key for conflict-sensitivity. Systems exclusively focused on grievance redress mechanisms (GRMs) have evolved to incentivise participatory approaches to project design and implementation.[24] The WB has not only endorsed the use of social accountability in a number of key documents, such as the 2012 updated strategy and implementation plan for strengthening governance and tackling corruption; it has also established the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA), a platform that supports knowledge sharing among civil society and client governments.

The AfDB has also begun to focus on governance and fragility. Its *Strategy for addressing fragility and building resilience in Africa (2014–2019)* commits to "tailor[ing] its support for good governance in fragile situations and contribut[ing] to strengthening accountability and transparency, combating corruption and illicit economic activities, strengthening voice and demand-side accountability, supporting parliaments and creating an enabling environment for civil society to operate, including capacity to hold government to account".[25] This commitment is translating into efforts to promote greater citizen participation in its projects. However, strategy implementation is still at an early stage and improving staff capacity to effectively tackle governance challenges will require sustained effort and institutionalisation to yield results.

Each bank also has its own overarching GRMs. The WB's include the aforementioned IP and the Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (CAO). The latter addresses complaints only relating to projects supported by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), both part of the World Bank Group. The AfDB uses the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Both banks also have access to information policies, which define

20 V. Sika, N. Sambuli, A. Orwa and A. Salim, ICT and governance in East Africa: A landscape analysis in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania 2014, iHub Research, 2014

21 S. King, Increasing the power of the poor? NGO-led social accountability initiatives and political capabilities in rural Uganda, European Journal of Development Research (EJDR), January 2015

22 Uganda: Public Order Management Bill, Article 19, 13 August 2013, https://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/37201/en/uganda:-public-order-management-bill

23 NGO law monitor: Uganda, International Center for Non-for-Profit Law, 2 January 2016, http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/uganda.html

24 See, for example: M. Stephen, Fragile reforms: World Bank and Asian Development Bank financing in fragile and conflict-affected situations, London: International Alert, 2014

25 AfDB Group, Strategy for addressing fragility and building resilience in Africa, 2014–2019, 2014, p.23

the rights of affected communities to request information about bank-funded projects and those institutions' obligations to provide it. As the AfDB itself recognises: "the sharing of information on its operations nurtures openness and transparency that are crucial to […] contributing to the sustainable economic development and social progress of its regional members."[26] The banks also have safeguard policies, which define and guarantee social and environmental standards in the design and implementation of approved projects. These policies establish commitments to community engagement and to providing redress mechanisms.

Despite robust commitments, the main challenge for both MDBs to apply social accountability in projects remains the nature of their relationship with client governments. The policies of both banks are predicated on their apolitical mandates, meaning they are generally constrained from taking decisions or actions that would appear to intrude on a country's political processes, deferring instead to national authorities on governance issues. At the project level, this means that the responsibility for developing context-appropriate GRMs or other accountability measures lies with national authorities, and the AfDB and the WB have little oversight of or leverage over their implementation. In practice, this has significant implications for the promotion of social accountability in different project contexts, as the analysis will demonstrate.

26 AfDB, Disclosure and access to information: Developing Africa openly and transparently, AfDB General Secretariat, May 2012, p.1

PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

Lakes Edward and Albert Fisheries Pilot Project (LEAF I)

The LEAF I project is regional, targeting communities in both Uganda and DRC. LEAF I seeks to address the "crosscutting issues of poverty, gender and environment"[27] through a holistic approach to sustainable natural resource management in the communities around Uganda's Lakes Edward and Albert. The region includes several districts where poverty levels are higher than the national average and livelihoods remain overwhelmingly tied to the fishing sector. Illegal fishing methods are rife and controversial law enforcement practices have exacerbated tensions within communities and between communities and the government. There is also hostility between Congolese and Ugandan fishermen due to different legal frameworks in DRC and Uganda, which allow Ugandan fishermen to continue fishing in the lake while DRC imposes a holiday for stocks to replenish.

Over the last 20 years, lake resources have been under increasing pressure, a trend caused by over-fishing and exacerbated by a recent increase in population. The discovery of oil has also impacted the region. It offers the opportunity for greater wealth, while also posing threats to the fishing sector through environmental hazards and potential limits to fishermen's access to the lakes. The project's approach is thus to improve natural resource management systems. This includes the capacities of key institutions to monitor fish stocks and water quality as well as enforce conservation; to support vulnerable groups, chiefly women, providing opportunities for alternative livelihoods; and to promote cooperation between Ugandan and Congolese authorities on conservation and enforcement.

Fisheries in Uganda have been managed through a *co-management* approach since 2003, whereby "citizens and government share responsibility in fisheries management as active partners in fisheries planning and development".[28] The approach regulates rights and responsibilities between district fisheries officers (DFOs), appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industries and Fisheries, and Beach Management Units (BMUs), which represent fishing communities, including fishermen, boat-owners and fishmongers. DFOs are based in district capitals and are responsible for monitoring fishing activities and providing technical support to other district-level authorities. BMUs are membership-based bodies formed at the village level, operating through an elected committee. Their role is to facilitate community participation in planning and management processes. BMUs are supposed to work closely with DFOs, with the latter also responsible for reviewing BMU performance. The LEAF I project is designed to support the work of DFOs and BMUs, along with other officials and external contractors, for improved natural resource management.[29]

27 AfDB, LEAF I project information document, AfDB ONAR Department, August 2003, p.viii

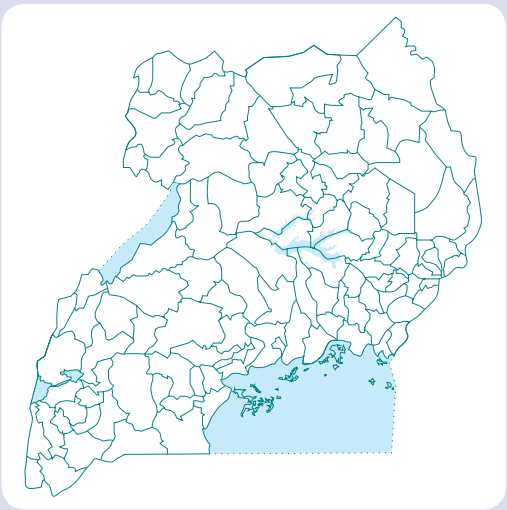
28 Guidelines for Beach Management Units in Uganda, Department of Fisheries Resources, p.6

29 It should be noted that at the time of publication the president has issued a decree banning all law enforcement agencies, including the Beach Management Units, the police, technical fisheries officials and other bodies, from carrying out their current functions – amidst accusations of corruption.

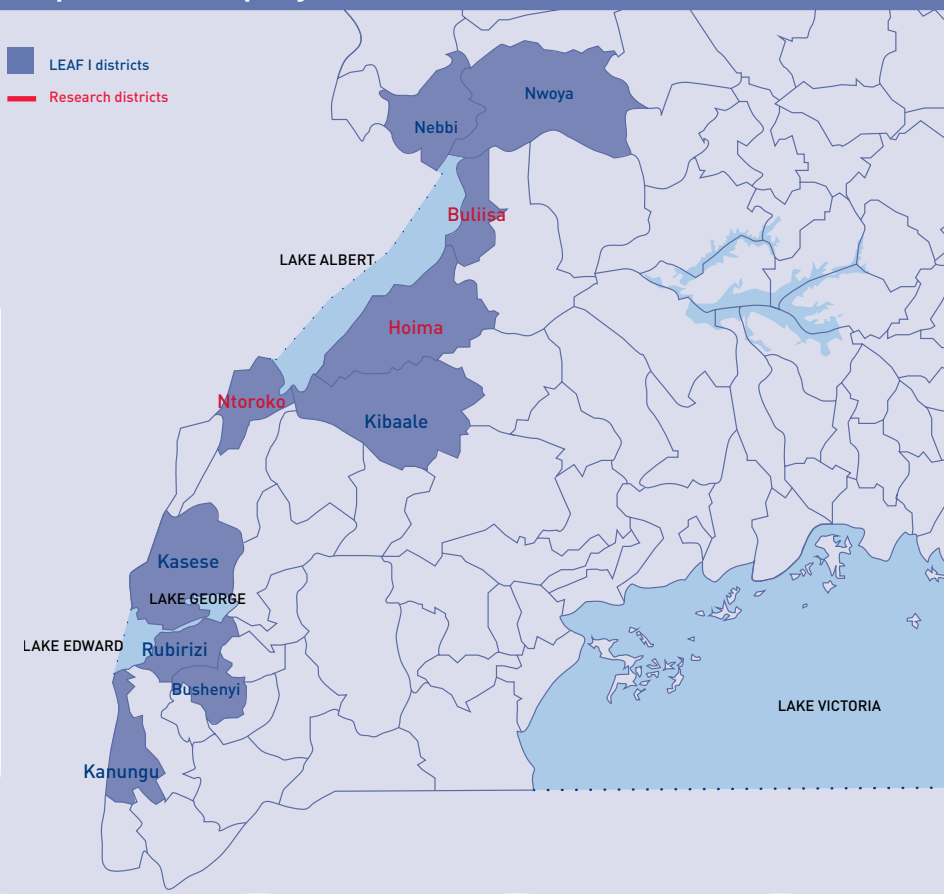
LEAF I AT A GLANCE

Objective

To develop a sustainable plan for the joint management of the water and fisheries resources of Lakes Edward and Albert



Map 1: LEAF I project area and research sites



Funder

African Development Bank

Total funding

US$2.6 million

Planned duration

2.5 years (2004–2006)

Implementers

Nile Basin Initiative (NBI)/ NELSAP

Ministry of Water and Environment (Government of Uganda)

Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (Government of DRC)

FISHERIES STUDIES AND LAKE MANAGEMENT PLAN PREPARATION

Fish biology and biodiversity conservation studies; catchments pollution survey/water quality management; comprehensive stock assessment survey; fish quality assurance/ improvement; socio-economic study of fisheries

PROJECT COORDINATION AND INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Updated and harmonised laws and regulations; improved fisheries statistics; establishment of Lakes Edward and Albert Authority; training of central and district fisheries officials and fishing communities

CO-MANAGEMENT OF FISHERIES RESOURCES

Sensitisation of communities; establishment of co-management structures; development of local management regulations; training and capacity-building for co-management structures

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Sensitisation of fishing communities; identification and implementation of priority investment community development activities

Northern Uganda Social Action Fund Project (NUSAF II)

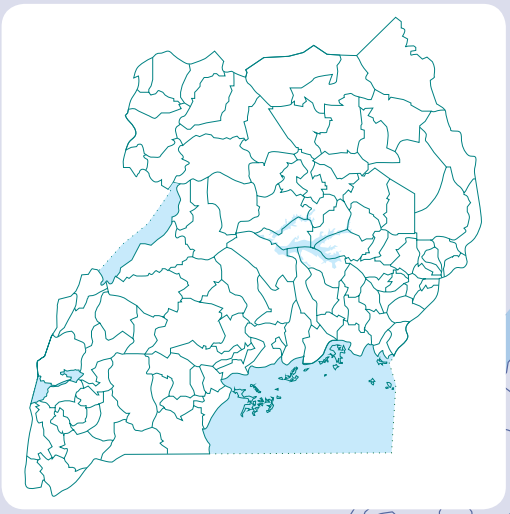
NUSAF II is the second phase of a large-scale social safety nets project designed to promote post-war recovery and to reduce vulnerability in northern Uganda. With large numbers of people having spent many years in IDP camps, levels of education in the north are very low and many young people have never had gainful employment. Land is scarce and livelihood opportunities are restricted by limited resources and skills. The project creates income-earning opportunities through livelihood investment. It provides funds for livestock or tools to develop a trade. It also funds public works, for which people are either paid or volunteer to create a community resource such as a road or school building. The project aims to target the poorest and most vulnerable in this region, such as widows, disarmed youth, IDP returnees and those with disabilities.

The project is designed to be participatory. Community groups propose livelihood or asset generation projects for grants. If successful, they form committees (including one focused on social accountability) to manage the resources, procure any assets and oversee any works. Beneficiaries take part in three-day trainings provided by staff from the Inspectorate of Government (IG) on transparency, accountability and anti-corruption. They are also oriented on ways to seek support if their own committees are unable to resolve issues. Trainings introduce beneficiaries to an SMS reporting system through which they can raise concerns via SMS directly to the IG. This training was introduced as a new component of NUSAF II after NUSAF I experienced significant challenges relating to misuse of grant money and assets. It is designed to reinforce community ownership and to create peer-to-peer oversight and accountability mechanisms, with clear responsibilities and government support structures in place.

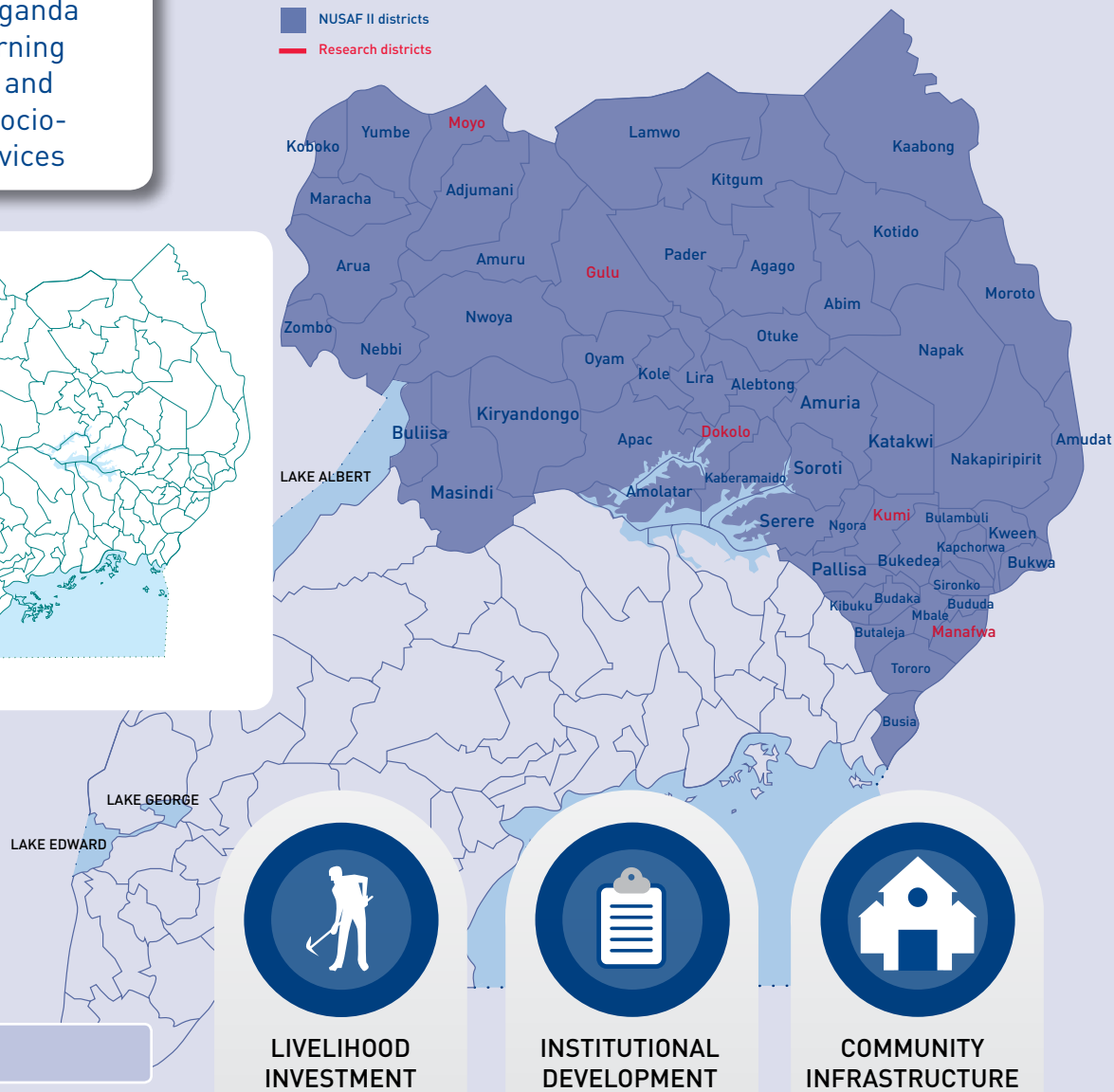
NUSAF II AT A GLANCE

Objective

To improve access of beneficiary households in northern Uganda to income-earning opportunities and better basic socio-economic services



Map 2: NUSAF II project area and research sites



Funder

World Bank

Total funding

US$130 million

Planned duration

7 years (2009–2016)

Implementers

Office of the Prime Minister (Government of Uganda) with support from the Inspectorate of Government

LIVELIHOOD INVESTMENT SUPPORT

Community-based public works programme; income-generating activities; provision of skills for creation of self-employment and productive assets for targeted poor community households

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Activities at the national, district, sub-county and community levels to support project implementation; activities aimed at improving accountability and transparency in the use of project resources

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE REHABILITATION

Rehabilitation of schools, community water points, community access roads, health centres, teachers' houses, sanitation facilities and basic solar lighting systems through provision of grants

ANALYSIS OF ACCOUNTABILITY EXPERIENCES

Access to information

Around Lake Albert, the way that communities and individuals currently access information appears to be mostly informal. In general, they know how and to whom they need to address requests for information. For issues relating to fishing, for example, it would be BMU committee members; for security-related issues, they would go directly to the police, local councils (LCs) or even the resident district commissioner's (RDC) office. However, the process depends mostly on the level of trust people have for a specific agency or official. At Kanara, in Ntoroko district, for instance, women focus group participants said they would not approach their BMU to raise an issue because they would not expect an adequate response. Instead, they said they would go directly to the LC III chairperson because she is a woman and understands their situation much better.

In the case of LEAF, communities' access to information is inhibited on several fronts. Although the project has only been piloted so far, community members in each focus group stated that they have had very little interaction with the local government about how the project is being planned or have not been involved in any consultations in the design and appraisal phases. Despite expressing their need and wish to understand the project, the vast majority of those interviewed have no information about what the project will mean for them, no awareness of the government's responsibility to disseminate this information, and many demonstrated little knowledge of their rights to access it. In Ntoroko, for instance, there was consensus in the women's focus group that they did not know of a single office in charge of the project that they could go to and that, other than the BMU, they would not know whom to approach. Nevertheless, there was some disparity between communities as the women's focus group in Butiaba stated that their BMU organised meetings to share information. It appears that the responsibility for disseminating project information was placed solely on the BMUs and that the disparity between districts was

a result of both the BMU capacity and effectiveness, and the knowledge of the relevant district officials.

District government officials also had limited information about the project. With a high staff turnover, many had not been in their posts during the pilot, meaning they had limited knowledge of its successes and challenges. While the district fisheries officer in Hoima had good knowledge of the pilot and the plan for the new phase, most other DFOs interviewed had basic information about LEAF II and no knowledge of lessons learned from the pilot. The district security officer in Ntoroko stated that, while he thought the AfDB did have a responsibility to provide information to communities about the project funding and components, he also recognised that central government needed to ensure that local district officials had much better awareness of the project.

The inability of people in affected locations to access information about LEAF II has potentially far-reaching consequences. The project foresees several opportunities for local communities to participate more meaningfully in the management of fisheries and to pursue alternative livelihoods. Without information, these opportunities will be distributed without transparency, which could reinforce existing power inequalities and patterns of corruption. There may also continue to be a cycle of mistrust between communities and local government, and among communities themselves. In this regard, LEAF is emblematic of broader access to information challenges across Uganda. Even if the legal framework is strong, low awareness of the right to information by rural communities creates barriers to access. As the project begins, there is a pressing need for the AfDB and the relevant central government departments to ensure that local government is providing this information to communities.

Having refined its accountability approaches in the second phase, the benefits of such an approach can be seen in NUSAF II's initial community engagement processes. Teams of local and district government representatives spend time meeting the community as a whole to tell them about the project. Locally appointed 'extended participatory rural appraisal facilitators' support everyone attending these meetings to identify the most vulnerable members of the community, who will go on to be the project beneficiaries. This participatory methodology helps beneficiary selection to be transparent and legitimate. It also orients people on project aims and implementation, as well as exposing communities to government officials with whom they may have had limited or no interaction. For example, focus group participants in Kumi district explained that, while they already had good relationships with their local councillors, they had limited contact with any district officials before NUSAF began. However, after the initial meeting, they understood the project and had the opportunity to ask administrators questions face-to-face. This initial interaction is extremely important to begin building community ownership of their initiatives and a culture of trust and transparency between citizens and state. However, not all informational needs were addressed through these initial community meetings. Some focus group participants remained unsure about the choice of particular projects and beneficiaries over others and were uncertain of the overall volume of resources available to finance projects. There was also a common misconception that, once you have benefited from NUSAF, you are not eligible to benefit from other development projects. Additionally, there were some disparities between community expectations and project realities. Some of those interviewed in Gulu town, for instance, explained that they were expecting to be paid for overseeing the construction of a community health centre and were frustrated when they found out that this was not the case.

Access to information and technology

Communications technology can play an important role in increasing access to information. By most standards, the media landscape in Uganda is free and dynamic, with radio being the most prominent type of media: "The interaction between radio stations and their listeners, the breadth of topics discussed and the seemingly fearless language of the independent press all paint a picture of freedom and vitality."[30] Radio also overcomes socio-economic barriers, with sets and batteries being relatively cheap to buy and illiteracy irrelevant. Internet use has also grown dramatically in Uganda since 2000, although it remains concentrated in urban areas.[31] Media freedom is critical to ensure that citizens can get the information they need and also to provide opportunities for innovation and experimentation. Interestingly, the current contrast between media freedom and shrinking NGO operational space in Uganda means that the media may become an even more vital channel to drive social accountability processes.

Aside from traditional media initiatives (such as the radio programmes supported by the NGO Panos Eastern Africa), Ugandan citizens can also access online platforms such as Parliament Watch,[32] which reports on proceedings within the Ugandan parliament, and the government-supported DevTrac,[33] which monitors the status of various services (including health, education, water) and development initiatives across the country. Another particularly innovative initiative, supported by Google and the Grameen Foundation, allowed Ugandans to obtain information about sexual and reproductive health through SMS messaging on basic mobile phones.[34] However, the effectiveness of these efforts is still difficult to gauge: for example, online tools are still not easily accessible in rural areas; and the mobile phone-based service, while advertised in target locations through radio, was more successful in villages that were physically visited by marketers.

Despite considerable experimentation with technology-enabled social accountability in Uganda, when it comes to accessing information, low-technology initiatives are the most appropriate option in poorer, rural contexts. Even with the proliferation of mobile phone ownership (most people interviewed owned their own mobile phone or had access to one within their household) and the increase in SMS-based accountability mechanisms, Alert's research from both project sites and from its own conflict-monitoring project demonstrates that, in rural areas, SMS is not how people communicate with each other – mostly due to illiteracy. The majority of those interviewed were clear that they only used their phones to call one another.[35] In the most remote communities in LEAF districts, many did cite local radio stations that they regularly listen to, but some did not have access even to these, relying instead on the village PA system and announcer, known as Radio Mamba. In contrast, many of the NUSAF beneficiary communities identified radio announcements as the principal channel through which they first heard about the project.

The success of the access to information component in social accountability processes seems to be not just about the dissemination of information, but also about how this is done. Information becomes more meaningful when it is shared with communities in a participatory way – that is, when there is face-to-face interaction between communities and authorities responsible for the project. In this way, communities can ask questions and understand how queries and complaints can be made.[36] This process also boosts citizen–state trust. Including technology-enabled communication complements this process, particularly radio in this context, as it provides an additional and ongoing channel for communities to hear about and seek out further project information.

30 BBC Media Action, Country case study: Uganda, BBC, 2012, p.6

31 Estimated internet users have increased from 40,000 in 2000 to 8.5 million in 2014, but the majority of these are using mobile internet subscriptions that are more accessible in major cities where 3G infrastructure has been in place since 2008 (UN International Telecommunication Union, 2015).

32 For more information, see Parliament Watch Uganda website, http://parliamentwatch.ug

33 For more information, see DevTrac website, http://www.devtrac.ug

34 Innovation for Poverty Action, Providing sexual and reproductive health advice via SMS in Uganda, http://www.poverty-action.org/study/providing-sexual-and-reproductive-health-advice-sms-uganda

35 It should be noted that SMS does have the potential to reach key people in these contexts, which is very important for certain types of programming, but has limited utility in social accountability processes.

36 J. Fox, 2014, Op. cit.

Community mobilisation and citizen action

Citizen expectations and trust in authorities

The iHub Research report identifies an important trend affecting all the social accountability initiatives it reviewed – namely, that citizen action is often disincentivised because "citizens are not optimistic about action taken on the issues they raise".[37] Low expectations were certainly a significant reason for the behaviour of fishing communities around Lake Albert, as confirmed by interviews with the Executive Director of Uganda Fisheries and Fish Conservation Association (UFFCA) and various community members, and they appeared to be largely a result of the low levels of trust in decision-makers. This lack of trust varied between the different communities interviewed in the LEAF project area. For some, there was very little trust in the district-level government, while for others this extended down to the BMUs. In Butiaba, one community member said of the district government that "they make promises of support, but we have not seen anything"; in Ntoroko, several women interviewed stated that they "did not even bother" to submit complaints to BMUs anymore. This disparity seems to be explained by variations in BMU capacity and by levels of perceived corruption.

The BMUs around Lakes Edward and Albert were created in an early attempt to promote social accountability in the management of fisheries around Uganda's lakes. The original LEAF pilot project, which started immediately after the law creating BMUs, was adopted in May 2003 and provided direct support to their development. This was aligned to the adoption of the co-management approach to fisheries. The original project documents and the BMU law do not mention social accountability specifically, but the provisions in them clearly support community engagement and oversight. It is the whole community that elects BMU committee members, who then have a monitoring and enforcement mandate as well as the authority to engage DFOs and other government representatives. Interviews conducted for this research suggest that the initial experience with BMUs was positive: "at first, BMU members were very well trained, but as new ones were elected, the trainings were not repeated," a current BMU member in Kanara confirmed.[38] While communities initially benefited from the new bodies and relied on them to address complaints, since the end of the LEAF pilot project BMUs have received little support and few resources. Some BMUs continue to perform well: community members in Butiaba stated that they still trusted BMU members to solve problems, such as the loss or theft of equipment. More generally, however, community perceptions of BMUs appear to have grown more negative with time.

It also appears that BMUs have become politicised and several interviewees described how they thought that corruption affects most decisions that BMUs make today. For example, during a group discussion in Butiaba, a participant mentioned a case where illegal nets had been confiscated by BMUs but returned to their owners once someone from the district council complained about the impounding. Although this was just one anecdote, all participants in the group where it was discussed agreed with the description of the situation. Similarly, several stakeholders referred to the fact that most BMUs are nowadays only superficially representative of communities and that some elected members are not linked to the fishing sector.

In contrast, the communities involved in the NUSAF project had far higher expectations of timely and satisfactory responses from authorities when things went wrong. This sense appears to have been fostered by interaction with local government officials through the project, positive experiences in these instances, and a consequent strengthening of trust in local government – good examples of Fox's aforementioned 'virtuous cycle' of accountability.[39]

37 V. Sika et al, 2014, Op. cit., p.16
38 Focus group discussion with BMU members, Ntoroko village, 19 July 2015
39 J. Fox, 2014, Op. cit.

Incentives versus impartiality

There are other interesting parallels and contrasts between BMUs and the committees formed as part of NUSAF. While both have a certain level of responsibility at the community level, BMUs hold significant powers to enforce fishing laws on and around the lake. In Ntoroko, BMU members stated that they felt the government should be responsible for this enforcement, while in Buliisa communities said that BMU membership has become more 'valuable' because of the power the position brings. Providing the BMUs with legal powers may have ultimately made them less effective social accountability mechanisms. This brings to light an interesting parallel with the NUSAF II committees: the dilemma of selecting those inherently involved in the project to monitor and report, versus choosing people who are outside the project and therefore considered neutral. On the one hand, those involved understand the local dynamics and want the project to succeed, but they also have a conflict of interest for that same reason; for example, BMU members in Buhuka admitted during the focus group discussion that their proximity to the community compromises their impartiality in addressing people's concerns. Conversely, incentivising those outside the project to fully engage in effective monitoring will be much more difficult, although it appears that this is the approach being sought in the next phase of NUSAF.

Influence of government behaviour

Government behaviour can also hinder citizen participation in decision-making or the freedom to press for accountability. Government-imposed barriers can be overt and structural, such as the previously mentioned adoption of the 2013 Public Order Management Bill. It can also be violent at times, as seen for example in the Save Mabira Crusade. This case involved the government's decision to give part of a protected forest to a developer for use as a sugarcane plantation in 2007. Civil society mobilised quickly and forcefully. During a demonstration, clashes occurred between protesters and the police, which led to injuries, arrests and at least one fatality.[40] However, blocking grassroots engagement generally takes more subtle forms. Attempts are often cloaked in economic or public safety arguments: "The government is opposed to these types of interventions, saying that they delay development," noted one national civil society leader.[41] In this sense, national authorities appear to be primarily interested in safeguarding the status quo: citizen engagement will be tolerated insofar as it does not undermine the interests of the political elite, but beyond that the state, perceiving a threat to its authority, might intervene with force. This is in contrast to the aforementioned media freedom in the country, where radio talk shows featuring politicians are commonplace and provide a public sphere for dialogue and debate, including the chance for communities to challenge government decision-making.[42]

Social inclusion and community cohesion

Cultural factors negatively impact on the status of women in Uganda, and particularly on their participation in civic and political life. This is also true for other marginalised groups, including sexual minorities and people with HIV/AIDS. As a consequence, any social accountability initiative needs to be designed based on a strong gender and social inclusion analysis. The LEAF project does face some challenges relating to gender bias. BMUs, which are supposed to reflect the composition of fishing communities, are male-dominated: women comprise just 27% of all BMU members and there is not a single woman occupying the role of BMU chairperson.[43] Women's roles in the local economy tend to be as fishmongers rather than fishers, who are typically male. As a result, both groups face different types of challenges. The gender composition of BMUs means that they often fail to discuss or address socio-economic challenges faced by women. For instance, women in Kanara highlighted challenges such as limited access to credit, the lack of a nearby market, which forces them to travel significant distances to sell their fish, and a lack of

40 Ugandans save the Mabira Forest from sugarcane plantation, 2007, Global Nonviolent Action Database, http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/ugandans-save-mabira-forest-sugarcane-plantation-2007

41 Interview with Frank Muramuzi, Kampala, 14 July 2015

42 P. Mwesige, The democratic functions and dysfunctions of political talk radio: The case of Uganda, Journal of African Media Studies, Vol.1(2), 2009

43 K. Odongkara, Beach Management Units: Uganda's experience, East Africa Sustainability Watch, 2009, p.8

processing equipment in the area, which prevents them from drying or smoking the fish. Despite these challenges, the women explained that none of them was discussed by the BMUs.

In contrast, NUSAF projects and the social accountability committees were positively biased towards women, since it was discovered during the course of NUSAF I that projects with women in charge tended to be more successful. There did not seem to be any negative feeling from men interviewed in the focus groups about this, as often the benefits accrued to the household as a whole. Although no doubt unintended, this has been an important element of conflict-sensitivity within the project. In some cases, the involvement of women has had a positive impact on their empowerment. In Manafwa, members of the women's focus group said they felt they have more responsibility and ownership over their livelihood. One woman stated that she has since been elected as chairperson of the local women's league, which she attributed to the empowerment she experienced through NUSAF. Others said they are now even encouraged by their husbands to take part in discussions with district officials about broader issues. LEAF II could benefit from this approach. Targeting women as primary beneficiaries and including them in management and social accountability structures can have beneficial impacts on gender equality as well as on the community as a whole.

One commonality among women from both project contexts is their access to basic communications technologies. There was no gender disparity in mobile phone ownership and most women could access radio. This suggests that simple technological solutions to social accountability challenges, if designed correctly, could overcome some of the difficulties faced by women in LEAF communities, learning lessons from the positive experiences of NUSAF.

The research also yielded insights regarding the impact of community organisation on citizen mobilisation and citizen–state relations. A NUSAF project beneficiary in Kumi believed that the government found it easier to maintain regular contact with them because they were organised in a group. Some of the NUSAF beneficiary groups working together on community asset development had also evolved from existing savings and credit groups, making them more cohesive. Such cohesive groups demonstrate the benefits of social 'infrastructure', whereby they constitute a ready interlocutor, provide a voice for the community and often have representational legitimacy. In the case of LEAF, the 'group' interacting with the district government on behalf of the community is the local BMU. Although these exist at the village level, the politicised nature of membership undermines their legitimacy. In addition, a number of discussion participants noted that Lake Albert fishing communities found it difficult to mobilise as a group because of low levels of formal education and consequently low awareness of their rights, as well as the high proportion of transient workers in the fishing industry.

While tapping into existing community structures is helpful for the citizen action element of social accountability projects, our research demonstrates that the most successful models come from projects that create an intermediate mechanism for stakeholder engagement. Enhancing the capabilities of those community groups to form such a mechanism is therefore key to improving citizen action[44] and is usually more straightforward in contexts where there is strong social cohesion. In other words, fora that allow communities and authorities to engage with each other through such intermediate structures, which are outside of existing governance channels, may represent the best opportunity to bring about truly transformative outcomes. This could be why the initial creation of BMUs under the LEAF pilot project was a relative success. New fora for stakeholder engagement might also be ideal to manage potential instances of conflict and to avoid violent confrontations, as occurred with the Save Mabira Crusade. This idea also correlates with the NUSAF experience. More successful accountability and citizen–state relations were fostered in the second phase on the basis that greater responsibility was devolved to communities and that this was achieved through an intermediate forum, which brought local government and communities closer together.

44 S. King, 2015, Op. cit., p.13

Citizen action and technology

The iHub Research report on technology and governance notes that "overall, citizen participation is the most dominant use of ICT tools" among organisations and stakeholders sampled.[45] This is not surprising as technology is generally seen as having the potential to bypass many of the challenges inherent in mobilisation – such as the high costs of physically gathering people's opinions or the preference to remain anonymous when being critical, in particular of authorities.

TIU and UNICEF run initiatives promoting citizen action. TIU ran a social accountability project that allowed people to call a toll-free number and report poor performance related to the public health system in two rural districts. Radio was also used to raise awareness of the service, which in the end received an average of 20 calls per week. Each case reported was verified by TIU staff and eventually led to engagement with the relevant authorities.[46]

UNICEF Uganda has set up perhaps one of the most prominent services for promoting citizen participation, particularly among young people. U-Report is a free mobile phone-based platform, where more than 298,000 registered users (so-called 'U-Reporters') can participate through text messages in regular surveys on social issues such as child marriage and conflict.[47] UNICEF then takes the survey results and shares them with relevant stakeholders, including members of the Ugandan parliament. These initiatives illustrate the potential that technology has to increase the participation and voice of citizens, but important challenges persist. For instance, U-Reporters do not receive direct feedback on how their information is used and there is a disparity in access to these services; moreover, the vast majority of U-Reporters are from urban areas and only 30% of all U-Reporters are female, probably as a result of their lower literacy levels.[48]

In a practical sense, technology can overcome a number of barriers – distance, language and literacy – but it is apparent that, for uptake to be considerable and sustainable, it has to work through existing systems rather than creating something new. It seems that, for this reason, not one person in any of the NUSAF focus groups had even heard about the project's SMS reporting system or actually used it. In the communities around Lake Albert and those in northern and eastern Uganda, community mobilisation still occurs mostly by word-of-mouth, face-to-face interactions, sometimes through mobile phone calls and through public announcement speakers in villages where radio coverage is particularly limited, or elsewhere through local radio. Thus, the research findings from across the eight districts seem to concur with the iHub conclusions that "the cases in which ICTs are successful in promoting citizen participation possess two characteristics: [they involve] low cost and non-internet based ICTs, and physical meet-up of citizens".[49]

45 V. Sika et al, 2014, Op. cit., p.16
46 CIPESA, ICT4Democracy in East Africa, Activity report for January–June 2014, Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa (CIPESA), 2014, p.10
47 For more information, see U-Report in Uganda, http://www.ureport.ug
48 Interview with UNICEF U-Report Manager, Kampala, 14 July 2015
49 V. Sika et al, 2014, Op. cit., p.29

Official responses and remedial action

In both projects, while structures for raising grievances were generally known about, although not necessarily used, a lack of recorded information posed difficulties. For example, the NUSAF Desk Officer for Gulu district explained that, when communities decided to raise an issue with the IG, no record of the complaint was kept or shared with the district. As a result, district officials who could have taken action were unaware of the problem. This lack of record keeping is problematic: without an agreed mechanism to record when complaints are submitted and handled, or whether officials tackle them directly, do nothing or refer the matter to their superiors, accountability processes, positive or negative, are nearly impossible to trace. This also makes it difficult to understand who has responsibility for handling complaints and generates confusion about GRM outcomes.

In the context of LEAF, since BMUs can be considered a social accountability mechanism, they are equivalent to the establishment of a project-level GRM. BMUs were indeed set up with the objective of empowering community members involved in the management of fisheries. By statute, they have a mandate to both monitor the work of fishermen and fishmongers and to enforce compliance with existing laws and general good practices. However, it is clear that BMUs cannot be considered, in their present form at least, effective structures to manage grievances. Thus, the need to create a local GRM within the LEAF II project remains unaddressed.

Disseminating knowledge about official responses and the steps being taken to remedy complaints is in itself crucial for ensuring that social accountability mechanisms generate trust and motivate communities to continue to participate – that 'virtuous cycle'. In both cases, recording this information would also more easily facilitate learning between districts on dealing with challenges, potentially help to reveal how and why some projects had been less successful than others, and potentially motivate action from those in government who are currently less willing to engage.

Official responses and technology

The literature and available resources on social accountability efforts in Uganda show very few cases where technology was used to improve or facilitate responses or redress by the government (or other service providers). The closest example might be TIU's social accountability project for the health sector, which led to various remedial actions aimed at addressing complaints made by callers. However, these actions did not rely on technology-based solutions. Rather, it was TIU staff who visited affected locations, engaging relevant stakeholders from health clinics and affected communities and facilitating the identification of practical solutions to solve the problems identified. Moreover, TIU did not generally communicate the results from those actions back to citizens, by radio or any other means.[50]

It cannot be claimed that using technology to raise the profile of people's grievances encourages action from authorities; there have to be incentives on the side of government as well. Some interviewees suggested that incentives could be based on generating political support. This is itself predicated on a political culture where leaders need legitimacy to be conferred by citizens. Where this exists, government concern for its reputation can motivate responses. In Manafwa, for instance, the NUSAF Desk Officer described an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in parts of the district near the border with Kenya. At the time, the NUSAF team were supposed to be buying cows for beneficiaries but could not because of the quarantine rules in place. Communities were unaware of these rules and rumours were spreading that the district government was hindering the situation and not providing cattle. In an effort to counter this negative perception, the NUSAF officials used the local radio station to explain the situation and dispel the rumours, which restored confidence in the government's actions.

50 Ibid., p.22

Generating responses such as this where there is a weaker sense of downward accountability will clearly be more challenging. In the context of multi-district projects such as NUSAF and LEAF, however, where there are incentives for projects to perform well, responses from certain district officials that are publicised through media accessible by most communities can exert pressure on those who are less responsive to community grievances, and in turn potentially incentivise action.

Conflict-sensitivity

Both projects' cognisance of local conflict dynamics and adaptation to these is crucial to their success. The projects need to ensure that they do not exacerbate existing conflict dynamics, but also go beyond this to make positive contributions to peace. In the case of NUSAF II, the most significant conflict challenge, repeatedly discussed in focus groups and with district officials, was access to land. The LC 5 chairperson of Dokolo district explained that most of the communal grazing land in his district was gone and that residing trauma from the war continues to lead people to resolve conflicts violently; fighting over land is common. Focus group participants highlighted challenges over access to grazing land for the cattle they had received through NUSAF. One participant explained that there was some resentment within the community from those who had not benefited from the project and that locals prevented her from tying her animal on their land to graze. To avoid exacerbating such conflicts, the next phase of NUSAF should look carefully at the livelihoods it funds and attempt to move away from land-intensive strategies. In some places, community conflicts outside of the project that have escalated during its implementation have negatively impacted it, highlighting the need for closer project monitoring. In Moyo district, for instance, inter-ethnic conflict forced many Kuku people back across the border into South Sudan, leaving some project committees with very few members and others with few customers to serve through their project – a women's grinding mill cooperative and women's catering school both cited this as a serious issue. As this challenge was identified, discussions between the community and project staff could have provided a participatory forum through which to decide on a solution.

In terms of positive contributions to peace, most research participants agreed that the project had improved community–government relations. The LC 5 chairperson of Dokolo district said that relationships had improved "quite tremendously" as a result of the project, explaining that there was previously a feeling of bitterness towards the government in the north. People had felt neglected and humiliated by the government, but now people feel that the government is taking care of them. In addition, there were examples of where the project had contributed to building communities' own conflict-resolution capacity. In Manafwa district, for instance, social accountability committee members explained how they had initially struggled to resolve differences over the choice of contractor in a NUSAF-funded public works project. However, after seeking mediation support from the district NUSAF officer, they were able to resolve the dispute. They noted that the experience taught them that arguing merely delays progress and that it was in their interests to agree more quickly in the future. The members also explained that, because they learned conflict-management skills through NUSAF, they were now approached to resolve local disputes between neighbours and even within families. One man recounted how that morning he had been asked to resolve a dispute between a father and son.

These insights could be useful for the LEAF II project. While local conflict dynamics are explicitly referenced in the project documents, it is clear that support for the BMUs will need to mitigate their politicisation and boost inclusivity if they are to be able to resolve disputes effectively. Training BMU and community members on conflict-resolution techniques would also mitigate disputes and may improve social cohesion.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Among the variety of experiences in promoting social accountability in Uganda, a number of lessons learned can be identified. These are based on commonly identified strengths and challenges, and can be used to guide future efforts to improve good governance in a way that minimises conflict and maximises sustainable peace.

- **More work is needed to understand the political economy, which defines government responses to community grievances:** While the case study projects demonstrate that increasing transparency may exert pressure on under-performing officials, and that technology can play a role in facilitating this, more needs to be understood about what motivates and prevents action from decision-makers in different contexts to find entry points for boosting responsiveness.

- **Community-led projects can improve economic, governance and social outcomes:** NUSAF II and the initial phase of LEAF point to the success of community-driven development, both in terms of economic dividends and social empowerment and accountability gains. Giving communities ownership over and responsibility for resources, along with sufficient training and accompaniment, promotes effective locally embedded decision-making and monitoring of projects. However, care must be taken to ensure that community ownership is inclusive and representative in order to inject democracy and legitimacy into projects. Legal powers should not be bestowed on community accountability mechanisms, as a separation of powers is important to maintain a check and balance and to reduce the risk of corruption or perceptions of illegitimacy. For example, in the LEAF project, the power that BMU members have to enforce the law is seen as illegitimate. It leads to local elite capture of the BMU structure and creates community resentment and conflict with BMUs. Similarly, some NUSAF oversight committees had members who were project beneficiaries, which at times undermined their

impartiality. However, others struggled where committee members were not gaining directly from the project and therefore not motivated to oversee matters effectively. While the community meetings in NUSAF do demonstrate good participation practice, they do not usually provide a forum where the most marginalised and disempowered would self-identify in the selection process. These variances need to be understood and addressed by the project.

- **Community cohesion impacts accountability processes:** The extent to which bridging social capital exists within a community is hugely important for how well that community is able to organise and mobilise to challenge decisions and policies. At the same time, it can positively influence communities' conflict-resolution capacity.

- **Access to information is an opportunity for trust-building:** The process of information dissemination is both a way to inform citizens about the project and a medium through which to begin interaction between communities and local government, so they can play a role in improving citizen–state relationships. Sharing project information in a forum that provides opportunities for discussion also ensures that there is a two-way process of understanding, whereby communities have the chance to ask questions of decision-makers. While this is always intended in projects, it is not systematically realised. Citizens' experience of receiving direct responses to their questions from government officials can propel a 'virtuous cycle' of communication and trust. Furthermore, this approach provides opportunities to clearly explain channels through which citizens can raise concerns and grievances, making the lines of accountability as clear as possible. As the two case study projects demonstrate, where this clarity is provided, the chances of such channels being used are increased. NUSAF II community meetings are a good example of this, but they could go further in terms of sensitisation. In particular, they could communicate clearly how and why the money is allocated to specific projects and ensure that community expectations are in line with the project reality.

- **Technology-enabled communication offers comparatively open platforms for exchange and critique:** Basic communications technology, such as radio, can facilitate dialogue among and between communities and local governments through informing, questioning, critiquing, airing grievances and sharing positive experiences.

- **Technology presents an opportunity to overcome some of the challenges of exclusion:** Despite the general exclusion of women in the LEAF project and the most vulnerable in the NUSAF project from social accountability fora, both of these groups did usually have access to a radio and a basic mobile phone. Using these technologies can therefore help to include marginalised groups in citizen consultation and action and enable them to challenge information, democratising access to the project. For instance, the use of radio in NUSAF II boosted the number of people engaged in the project and enabled exchange about the project.

- **Citizens are incentivised to act when they trust there is likely to be a response:** A sense of mistrust from communities towards government representatives, at any level, will make communities far less likely to raise grievances. Mistrust can arise due to a perception that government is corrupt, that it will react negatively or even violently to communities voicing concerns, or that it will not respond to concerns. This can create a vicious cycle. Without channels for redress that are perceived as legitimate, a growing sense of frustration and lack of social justice may increase the risk of conflict.

- **Technology offers a channel through which to enhance government transparency and responsiveness:** By highlighting where decision-makers have not responded adequately to community concerns through a medium to which most citizens have access, government inaction is amplified. This in turn creates some level of pressure for action from officials.

- **The 'right' kind of capacity support to those involved in accountability mechanisms can have transformative impacts:** Providing early capacity support in the form of comprehensive training on governance and transparency for those involved in BMUs in LEAF and in social accountability committees in NUSAF clearly had positive impacts in both projects. However, BMUs struggled to sustain this capacity in the absence of ongoing and regular accompaniment. In NUSAF, on the other hand, regular interaction with project staff helped to maintain the effectiveness of social accountability committees over the longer term, including on how to resolve disputes.

- **Closer linkages between identified conflict drivers and project design can ensure more effective conflict-sensitivity:** While both projects make detailed reference to the conflict drivers in their respective areas of operation, the project components remain focused on technical solutions to these challenges. Natural resource management is a key conflict driver in eastern and northern Uganda; land conflict is rising, exacerbated by the impacts of climate change on grasslands and lakes. Since LEAF deals with managing overfishing and NUSAF with land and pasture management, both projects need strategies to reduce the strain on natural resources. The potential for conflict prevention, while challenging to achieve, could be greater where these solutions attempt to also address the political dimensions of these challenges. In both cases, close monitoring of projects along the vectors of conflict risk identified in each project is insubstantial, leading to negative impacts in some areas of each project.

Recommendations

- **Find entry points in the political economy to boost official responsiveness:** The prevailing political economy in a given context is the key determinant of citizen action and government responsiveness. An analysis of this, and identification of incentives that can be deployed to make citizens more open to action and officials more willing to listen and respond constructively, are therefore essential to find the right entry points for social accountability mechanisms.

- **Adapt project design to realise social outcomes – they are as important as economic outcomes:** Design of projects funded by the AfDB and the WB (including LEAF II and NUSAF III) should reframe success in poverty reduction programmes to include reducing inequality. This means setting clear social inclusion outcomes and targeting marginalised people or groups. Providing designated resources for extra accompaniment of marginalised groups, who may need more support, helps to lower barriers to their engagement. The LEAF II project needs to take account of the differing effects of the project on the livelihoods of women and men. It also needs to better address the barriers to access faced by women. The NUSAF project needs to ensure that it is accessible to the poorest people and those with the least social capital. This should also include a consideration of sensitive ways to identify and engage marginalised people.

- **Ensure that project accountability mechanisms are community-based and contextualised:** Banks and the lead government department must ensure that project social accountability mechanisms are locally legitimate and inclusive, and do not duplicate existing government structures and bestow disproportionate levels of responsibility on those involved. This requires understanding and adaptation to local political economies.

- **Engage communities in ways that ensure they know what is planned and are able to influence the plans:** Information about the project should be provided comprehensively to all communities in affected areas and should be disseminated using locally appropriate communications mechanisms. Assessing what media local people have access to and how they habitually communicate should be a routine process to inform the project community engagement strategies. This should include both face-to-face communication and the use of accessible technology where this adds value.

- **Hold face-to-face meetings early to lay the foundations for trust and improved citizen–state relations:** Sensitisation should systematically incorporate face-to-face meetings between central and local government officials and communities, particularly at the beginning of projects. This would help to improve relationships, bring government closer to communities and improve accountability chains from the grassroots all the way to central government.

- **Design initiatives using technology on the basis of communities' existing communication patterns:** In particular, there should be due consideration of the most vulnerable. This means favouring low-technology options in rural Uganda, such as radio, which remains the best means for communicating information to large audiences with substantial illiteracy, as well as systems based around mobile phone voice calls. This can overcome some of the challenges of exclusion in these contexts, such as those related to gender and socio-economic status, while harnessing the benefits of technology for greater reach.

- **Use technology to help log and share complaints in order to compel and monitor responsiveness:** For instance, voice-recording technology could be appropriate in a context like Uganda, where people tend to communicate via phone calls. Alert's conflict-monitoring tool in Uganda could also be adapted to share learning between different districts with both government officials and beneficiaries.

- **Ensure that accountability mechanisms consider community cohesion:** A community's ability to mobilise and take action to challenge decisions is affected by the strength of pre-existing community cohesion. Projects must recognise situations where social capital and/or cohesion are more limited and take steps to promote them. Such steps could include the participatory formation of representative groups to engage authorities. Supporting communities' conflict-resolution capacity can help to boost social cohesion.

- **Ensure that social accountability implementers and watchdogs are properly informed:** Banks must ensure that government implementing agencies share information about GRMs and opportunities to submit requests or complaints with local government representatives, local council members, relevant civil society organisations and beneficiaries in project areas. Seminars to show how GRMs can be accessed, and to explain chains of accountability, should be provided to these stakeholders. This needs to be monitored, for example, by an independent CSO reporting to the communities and the banks. Given the high staff turnover at district government level in some instances, a briefing pack for key district officials and periodic orientation sessions would also be useful.

- **Strengthen communities' capacities to resolve disputes:** Projects should be designed so they intentionally build the conflict-management capacities and dispute-resolution skills of community accountability structures, such as NUSAF committees or LEAF BMUs, through training and accompaniment. Where community conflict-resolution capacity is being applied in practice, these processes should be learned from to inform wider programming.

- **Ensure that grievances are noted, responded to and, where possible, redressed, and that this process is systematically tracked and communicated:** To promote transparency and reinforce lines of accountability as well as avoid alienation and conflict, requests for information, grievances and challenges raised should be recorded. This needs to be done in a way that allows information to be shared with both communities and authorities. There must be oversight and monitoring of government systems of grievance redress. At the same time, there must be clear channels through which decision-makers are able to communicate and demonstrate action that has been taken in response to community grievances. This should include a system of checking beneficiary satisfaction with how complaints are dealt with. The results of this can then be shared with communities and government officials across different districts.

- **Design projects to prevent conflict:** Economic development projects need to be designed based on a good understanding of local conflict risk to ensure that they reduce conflict rather than exacerbate it. This means moving beyond purely technical solutions to addressing what can be political challenges. For instance, critical factors include identifying entry points in the political economy of social accountability 'groups' to boost their inclusivity, transparency and responsiveness, and applying strong oversight.

- **Mitigate conflict impacts on development outcomes:** Projects need to track the impact of conflict on their interventions and take steps to mitigate negative effects. This would flag the challenges experienced in Moyo district, where many Kuku people involved in NUSAF projects fled to South Sudan after tensions heightened between them and the Madi people, draining projects of valued participants and customers.

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