



Information Access, Governance, and Service Delivery in Key Sectors: Themes and Lessons from Kenya and Ethiopia

Sahr Kpundeh and Gilbert M. Khadiagala¹

Introduction

What are the substantive links among information access, transparency, governance, and service delivery? Is information a lubricant to service delivery? These questions were posed and elaborated in field research conducted in Kenya and Ethiopia that focused on four key sectors: health, education, water and sanitation, and private sector development. As part of the World Bank–Netherlands Partnership Program on nurturing information access, transparency, and good governance in service delivery, local researchers sought empirical evidence and comparative experiences that will inform policy reform debates and future programming in these and other sectors.² Through interviews with key decision makers and focus-group discussions with recipients of services, this research probed how information about service delivery is generated in each sector and availed to the public. This Note highlights the institutional context of information flows and differences in sector performance in service provision on the basis of forms of information, its access and availability, and dissemination.

Although the role of information is a key element of service delivery governance in these countries, this research reveals that sector-specific obstacles, in addition to the persistence of institutional legacies of centralization and public mistrust of government roles in service delivery, continue to hamper improvements in channels of information access. Furthermore, while service delivery in some sectors confronts problems that are more structural than informational, enhancing channels of information

access is still a critical task in forging more transparent systems in service provision. This Note seeks to spark deeper interest by World Bank researchers and operational staff to better understand the impact of information access on program design and program outcomes in the social and infrastructure sectors.

The Context of Information Access and Service Delivery: Governance, Trust, and Technical Deficits

Information is the essential bridge between the governors and the governed, furnishing the links that deepen reciprocity, responsibility, and responsiveness. As the translation of fiscal resources into social outcomes, service delivery is the penultimate stage on the planning–implementation continuum. Current discussions in development recognize that the manner in which the public garners information about services and service delivery reveals a great deal about the sturdiness of mechanisms of transparency and accountability. Information is salient in gauging the public's ability to learn about government operations and decisions, and, has been seen to be essential in pro-poor development strategies (World Bank 2003).

Information for service delivery typically entails financial and budgetary data, service usage rates, qualitative ratings of services, and performance reviews. There are two ways of linking the accessibility of such information to service provision. First, private and public service providers need avenues that explain their

services and the modalities by which recipients can obtain access to them. The existence of such mechanisms often signals the commitment to transparency by the service providers. Second, the access of outsiders, notably the public and media, to service providers is a valuable tool in the informational chain, particularly because such access increases citizens' ability to monitor and enhance the accountability of agents involved in service delivery. Understanding impediments to information flows at these two levels is important in interventions that seek to broaden the responsiveness and efficacy of service providers. It is also important to note that information about service delivery is used differently by various stakeholders. While providers use it to inform citizens about services, efficient allocation of resources among service options, and legitimation (particularly in the case of governments), citizens usually use it to make choices between service options, measure performance, and to hold providers accountable. These contrasting uses are significant in efforts to prioritize improvements in information access.

The experiences in Kenya and Ethiopia reveal three constraints on information access for service delivery, depicted as institutional and technical impediments. They are: i) governance deficit, ii) trust deficit, and iii) technical deficit. The governance deficit denotes the deliberate efforts by such agents to hoard or deny information to service recipients in a bid to curtail their input in decision making. From a wider perspective, the governance deficit is largely a reflection of unresolved issues in the transition from centralized to participatory systems. Specifically, the rules of the public's engagement of authorities are still weak and rudimentary. The governance deficit also has implications for the quality and credibility of information. Specifically, because information about government policies, behavior, and performance is typically generated in political environments that are polarized and contested, guaranteeing that information is not for narrow legitimation and propagandist ends is a central puzzle in fostering democratic governance. While there are many similarities in the patterns of governance, the Ethiopian and Kenyan examples reveal sharp and distinctive modes of transitions to participatory, transparent, and responsive political systems. These transitions are central to the debates on decentralization, privatization, and public-private sector partnerships,

debates that have implications on the quality of service delivery (Cottrel and Ghai 2007, pp. 1–25; Harbeson 2005, pp. 144–58).

Second, service delivery is hampered by social capital constraints conceptualized as the trust deficit, where there is a wide attitudinal gulf between service providers and recipients. Lack of trust between the citizenry and governments is inextricably linked to the governance deficit, but it also reflects the legacy of state abdication of service delivery roles in the past. Because citizens have been accustomed to weak service delivery systems, there are obstacles to the current efforts to resuscitate these mechanisms even where information may be available. To recapture the public that remains skeptical of the management of the public purse and service delivery involves improvements in information about government performance, but also substantively repositioning government agencies to their core functions as agents of change. Information can restore trust in government capabilities, but ultimately, it is how governments re-create themselves as meaningful actors in people's lives that may matter more in building enduring trust and accountability systems.

Third, profound obstacles to information access and service delivery accrue from the technical difficulties that ordinary citizens routinely confront in making demands on service providers. This problem is described as the technical deficit, characterizing the bulk of service delivery regimes. More frequently, sectors such as health, water and sanitation, and education are dominated by information that is not readily accessible to the lay public, posing challenges to information flows. But these cases also reveal that despite these difficulties, technological changes, notably the widespread adoption of information and communication technologies, (ICT) has boosted service delivery in many of the sectors. While the merits of technological change outweigh problems pertaining to the technical deficit, these cases prescribe the steady reduction of information asymmetries as a means to foster governance.

Comparative Experiences and Findings

The authors of these case studies reflect on how to manage the governance, trust, and technical deficits as well as pondering creative policies that may reduce informational disparities and promote efficient service delivery for poverty

reduction. In its narrow and comprehensive dimensions, the governance deficit undergirds all the sectors primarily because of unresolved problems of institutional change. Democratic transitions in Ethiopia and Kenya have opened up the spaces for societal contestation, but structural rigidities abound, particularly in institutions tasked with service delivery. Economic reforms that have attempted to reduce the public sector and inject market mechanisms in resource management have markedly advanced in both countries, but they have not obliterated the culture of centralized control. Similarly, while decentralization has been popularized as one way to guarantee the control of service recipients over services by making providers more responsive, decentralization in both countries has not always resulted in real devolution of power because of elite capture of institutions and the reluctance of government agencies to cede real power to the public (Steffensen and Trollegaard 2000).

The governance deficit pervades all these sectors, witnessed in the opaqueness in decision making in the Ministries of Health and Education and urban authorities in Addis Ababa and Nairobi. The study on "Information and Efficiency in the Supply of Drugs to Public Health Facilities" reviews the efficacy of the delivery of drugs by the Kenya Medical Supplies Agency (KEMSA). Created as part of the public sector liberalization reforms to expedite service delivery, KEMSA has been endowed with autonomy from the Ministry of Health (MOH) to manage the distribution of drugs in government hospitals. But its record so far shows that it is dodged by some of the institutional problems that existed previously, in particular, inadequate information about the availability of drugs, inefficiencies in distribution, and corruption.

Questions of institutional autonomy and inadequate information provision also characterize the Ethiopian health sector, elaborated in the study on "Access to Information and Service Delivery in the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria." To draw from the Global Fund, the Ethiopian MOH created an agency, the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Office (NHAPCO) and regional counterparts. Although nominally autonomous, NHAPCO is controlled by the MOH, limiting its responsiveness to beneficiaries. Internally, it has not evolved better mechanisms to provide information about its services to nongovern-

mental (NGOs), which are its major targets. Outside actors such as the media also cannot access information about its services and the agency's performance in general. Like many other public agencies in Ethiopia NHAPCO has no requirements for public reporting, leading to a slow follow-through in implementing client scorecards or other surveys. Consequently, despite enormous resources, information asymmetries' persistence has severely hampered the ability of NHAPCO to reach vulnerable HIV/AIDS victims. These information problems are compounded by poor management of the agency and its counterparts in the regions. Equally vital is the absence of any organized, issue-based, demand-side pressure, even in urban centers in Ethiopia.

Similarly, the study on "Access to Information, Transparency, and Service Delivery: The Case of the Educational Satellite Television Program, Addis Ababa" details the weak attempts by Ethiopian authorities to accord autonomy to the Educational Mass-Media Agency (EMA), the body that coordinates the provision of satellite TV education programs to schools. As a result, EMA neither effectively communicates its programs to school managers nor do the latter afford students input into the running of these programs. For example, a national study by EMA ascertained that 73 percent of the instructors had not received any training regarding the utilization of the satellite TV. The only training known to the teachers was training given to a limited number of teachers on the technical operations of the satellite TV. In short, the absence of consultations and training made teachers and students unhappy and reduced the effectiveness of the technology.

The experiences of service delivery by city governments in Nairobi and Addis Ababa also underline the intersection between unrepresentative institutions and weak performance on service provision. Although public sector reform in Ethiopia gave priority to local governments, especially municipalities, these reforms have hardly generated meaningful changes in the way city governments and their agencies provide services. The studies on "Access to Information, Transparency, and Service Delivery: The Case of the Addis Ababa Sewage and Water Authority" (AAWSA), and "Information Flows and Service Delivery: The Case of the Addis Ababa Acts and Document Registration Office" (AAADRO) demonstrates that these agencies have top-down management systems

that prevent information from reaching the beneficiaries. These agencies are also characterized by government interference, weak legal standing, and lack of professionalism. In the case of Nairobi, city authorities' efforts to outsource street lighting services to a private actor, the Adopt-A-Light (AAL) program, have tremendously improved security on the streets and forged an innovative experiment in public-private partnerships. But the absence of a clear legal and regulatory framework has constrained this program. Moreover, vested political interests in the city government seem bent on undoing the work of AAL.

The governance deficit is also wider where there are lukewarm efforts toward decentralization and privatization. The study on "Transparency and the Quality of Services in the Financing of Higher Education in Kenya" suggests that the privatization of student loan services via the formation of the Higher Education Loan Board (HELB) has improved accountability and transparency while also promoting professionalism in service delivery. A key explanation for HELB's success has been its aggressive information campaign to publicize its role to recipients. Over the years, the media and public have also been accorded wider access to HELB's services, significantly deepening its channels of information. Similarly, the study on "Information Access and Efficiency in the Provision of Water and Sanitation Services: The Case of Nairobi Water and Sewage Company," shows that privatization has led to discernible changes in the quality of water and sanitation services to city residents. These two cases dovetail with studies that underscore the gains in responsiveness and efficiency that arise from private outsourcing. Where there are appropriate incentives to private providers, the latter are inclined to expand their services to benefit the poor and vulnerable groups (Tayler 2005, pp. 337–48; Tati 2005, pp. 316–24).

Privatization and decentralization may foster allocative efficiency, but the trust deficit permeates even the successful cases of service delivery in Kenya and Ethiopia. Citizens' mistrust and disengagement from government bids to reclaim their stature in service provision is attributable to the past legacies of erratic service delivery. Furthermore, most of these cases reveal that disengaged citizens frequently lack the organizational tools to contest their rights and demand information about services. Where private providers and NGOs have carved al-

ternative niches in service delivery such as in the health sector in Kenya, the government increasingly finds it difficult to dislodge these actors. Surveys conducted in Kenya indicate that the public prefers private health providers because of the perception of incompetent and corrupt government health institutions. The case of Kenya's HELB demonstrates another dimension to the trust deficit whereby some members of the public deliberately withhold information to beat the system despite the fact that the institution is relatively efficient in disbursing student loans.

Bridging the gap occasioned by technical knowledge depends on the specific characteristics and skills of the service sectors, posing greater difficulties in sectors such as health than education. But while the technical deficit partly influences how medical services are provided to vulnerable populations in Kenya and Ethiopia, these problems are not insurmountable. Technical deficiencies by the public cannot be overcome entirely, but the key lies in service providers' ability to reduce these discrepancies through improved communication channels and transparency. Most of these cases demonstrate that the bulk of the problems of service delivery lie with politics, not technology. The overarching theme seems to be that technology facilitates the availability of information and enhances service delivery by injecting impartiality and professionalism in service provision. In the Kenyan cases of student loans and the Nairobi Water and Sewerage Company, the introduction of new information technologies has fostered rapid improvements in access to these services. Yet technology is also mediated through political and social institutions. Thus the single-minded introduction of satellite TV technology in Ethiopia widened the divide between schools and EMA, the agency that provides this service. Teachers and students were alienated by a technology that nullified and marginalized their roles. The Ethiopian government has recently made efforts to revisit the method of introducing satellite TV services to put more emphasis on public participation and input from teachers and students.

Policy Implications

Ideas about information access are embedded in the governance context of citizens' claims and contests over the quality and performance of public institutions. For this reason, where it is readily available, information empowers;

and where it is absent, the citizens are bound to be disempowered. Although improving access to information in the absence of resources to actually deliver these services can create public disenchantment, there is no substitute for building institutions that promote the flow of information. Information on resource scarcity is just as important as information on budgetary allocations and service delivery. Viewed as a right, information affords citizens opportunities to make responsible decisions while at the same time enabling public institutions to be transparent and accountable about their priorities and objectives. In a nutshell, information access contributes to strengthening the reciprocal relationship between informed citizens and responsible public authorities, the reciprocity that is at the core of efforts to reconcile information access, transparency, and service delivery.

The Kenya and Ethiopian cases raise profound questions about overcoming information logjams in the short-to-medium terms as these countries gradually build long-term institutions to undercut the three deficits. Although in some sectors, institutional factors—rather than information access—have led to improvements or impediments in service quality, questions of access are invariably tied to wider reforms in governance, the fundamental puzzle that links citizens as service recipients and public/private service providers. Short-term strategies hinge on crafting internal information systems in government agencies that deepen transparency and accountability. If information for service provision is treated as a fundamental right, then service providers are beholden to provide it routinely alongside performance and accountability reports. Furthermore, opening service providers to external media scrutiny and reviews has been instrumental in improving trust and accountability, but more critically, has allowed the public more latitude in decisions about how these institutions operate.

The growing popularity of Citizen Charters seems to be one innovative institutional framework that seeks to bind a wide array of service providers to their consumers in a chain of reciprocities and expectations (Smith and Vawda 2003, pp. 26–52). Although the Charters in themselves cannot enhance information flows, they are a fundamental building block for improving the context in which information access flourishes. Since 2003, the Kenya government has introduced and implemented

performance agreements as management tools to create accountability to the public. From a pilot group of 16 commercial enterprises in 2004, the agreements expanded to cover the entire public service, including local authorities. A central component of these agreements is the introduction of the Citizen Service Delivery Charter that requires every public institution to outline the nature, quality, and quantity of services that citizens can expect. In addition, all public institutions are expected to conduct annual customer satisfaction surveys (Muthaura 2004). In Ethiopia, a Citizen Charter that was launched after the civil war never got off the ground in part because of absence of strong political support and the legacy of mistrust.

Both Kenya and Ethiopia have also had mixed records in the enactment of Freedom of Information legislation, instruments that may potentially improve the ability of the public, particularly the media and civil society organizations, to obtain information from government agencies. While most Freedom of Information laws worldwide are not directly geared toward boosting service delivery, they have an additional impact in fostering the climate for wide-ranging reforms that contribute to quality service delivery. Kenya made efforts to draft such legislation in the early phase of the Mwai Kibaki administration, but the slackening of the political reforms reversed the Freedom of Information campaign. Ethiopia has hardly begun to contemplate such legislation, even though there is a growing recognition of its importance. Freedom of Information laws alone cannot eliminate the constraints identified in this Note, but they are essential to increasing public trust in government institutions.

A broader menu of governance reforms accruing from Citizens Charters or Freedom of Information legislation needs to be complemented by sector-specific measures that link information access to service delivery. One of the overriding themes in Ethiopia and Kenya is the absence of sectoral public information offices that serve to educate the public about services, but also promote routine interaction between service providers and recipients. There is a tradition of public relations officers in the public and private sectors of both countries, but it may be important, as in the case of Kenya's performance management agreements, that all private and public service providers be required to have well-staffed and competent public information offices. Universalizing of

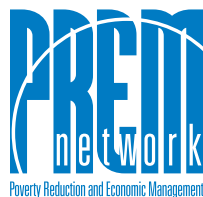
these offices would entail training in information management by service providers, but it would also boost information flows across the board. An equally related issue is the weak and tenuous links between government information offices and the wider media in Kenya and Ethiopia. The historical and cultural dominance by executive branches (particularly ministries of information and the president's/prime minister's offices) of most information channels continues to impede the evolution of transparent mechanisms of information access. In the era of competitive politics, information is too important to be centralized in these institutions; instead, there should be discussions about transforming most of the ministerial/parastatal public relations offices into more professional and sector-specific information agencies that furnish credible information that is useful for improving service delivery. Alongside reforms in the information arena, there is need for improvements in the technological base of service delivery sectors, particularly through information technology instruments that promote impartiality and efficiency.

Further Readings

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Endnotes

1. Sahr Kpundeh is Senior Public Sector Specialist in the Africa Region's Public Sector Group, and TTL for this project. Gilbert M. Khadiagala is Jan Smuts Professor of International Relations, the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
2. The researchers—Jane Kiringai, James Njeru, Melaku Sibhat, Mulat Demeke, and Tegene Gebre Egziabher—disseminated the research findings at a workshop in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in June 2007, affording stakeholders from these sectors and expert participants the opportunity to deliberate on institutional and other challenges to information flows. We wish to acknowledge the critical contribution of workshop participants to this Note. We would also like to thank Roumeen Islam, Navin Girishanker, and Anupama Dokeniya for providing comments on an earlier draft of this Note.



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Prepared for World Bank staff