Local Governance
Topic Guide

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What are local governance assessments?

In the context of anti-corruption, we define local governance assessments as those tools which aim to (a) assess the institutional framework for promoting integrity and combating corruption at the sub-national level, or (b) diagnose corruption and/or corruption risks within local government systems. The scope of these tools encompasses all political or administrative units below the national government (regions, provinces and municipalities).

The focus of such assessments is broadly on corruption/anti-corruption in public administration. In this sense, approaches to local governance assessment have much in common with public integrity approaches[1]. However, given the proximity of local officials to citizens at sub-national level, more bottom-up assessment approaches, in particular social accountability[2] and sectoral[3] tools, are also of great relevance to the local level.

Purpose and context of the assessments

From an anti-corruption perspective, the purpose of many local governance assessments is to identify integrity, transparency, and accountability weaknesses in public institutions at the sub-national level which may present opportunities for corruption to arise, with a view to identifying areas for reform. Such assessments may be undertaken by local government actors themselves for self-evaluation purposes or by local civil society as a means of monitoring the performance of their local representatives and advocating for reform. In this sense, a key objective of local government assessments is to strengthen both the internal and public accountability of local government units.

A further objective may be to raise awareness among the public about governance challenges at the local level and to create space for dialogue between various local actors, as a means of both deterring corrupt activities and improving the responsiveness and effectiveness of local governments.

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[1] See Public Integrity Topic Guide
[2] See Social Accountability Topic Guide
[3] See Education, Health & Water Topic Guide

Assessment approaches

Approaches to local governance assessment fall broadly into the following four categories:

- Broad governance assessment approaches, with corruption/anti-corruption as one element, use a mix of perception-based and objective data to gain a holistic picture of governance challenges at the local level. These are often applied in the context of decentralisation reforms and focus on a broad range of governance issues (local political economy, local democracy, the rule of law), administrative issues (financial and operational management), as well as core governance principles (efficiency, effectiveness, citizen participation, transparency, accountability, equity etc.)[4]

- Local integrity/anti-corruption system approaches: These involve assessing the existence, effectiveness, and citizen access to procedures and mechanisms to promote integrity and fight corruption, adapting the system-wide approach used for many national-level public integrity assessments to the sub-national level. The approach involves looking at both the existence of laws and mechanisms for promoting integrity as well as their effectiveness in practice, including the degree of local government compliance with prevailing laws and regulations, and the extent to which citizens are able to access and question these mechanisms[5]. Within this approach a number of tools focus specifically on **risk assessment** to identify those areas of the local government system most vulnerable to abuse[6].

- Approaches which focus specifically on the transparency of local administration in particular with regards to those areas for which local governments tend to have the greatest responsibility and control (e.g. procurement, budgeting, land management, urban planning)[7]. Many of these assessments focus on **access to information** as a key indicator of corruption risk, by measuring, for example, the quality and accessibility of information on municipal websites and local e-governance portals, or by testing freedom of information provisions etc.[8]

- A smaller number of tools focus on diagnosing corruption at the micro level by eliciting perceptions of, and experiences with, corruption from rural community members or urban residents through the use of small-scale surveys and/or focus groups. These tools are designed to gather information on the incidence,

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[4] E.g. UN-HABITAT - Urban Governance Index, Impact Alliance – Local Governance Barometer, Kemitraan -Partnership Governance Index, WBI - Local Government Discretion and Accountability: A Diagnostic Framework for Local Governance

[5] E.g. Global Integrity - Local Governance Toolkit, Huberts et al. - Local Integrity Systems: Analysis and Assessment, UNDP - Assessment Toolkit for Promoting Integrity, Transparency, and Accountability in Palestinian Local Government Units

[6] E.g. TI Venezuela - Indicators of Municipal Transparency (Venezuela), ICAC – Development Assessment Internal Audit Tool, TI & UN-HABITAT - Municiple Checklist, UNDP - Methodology for Measuring the Index of Responsibility, Transparency and Accountability at Local Level

[7] E.g. TI Slovakia - Open Local Government 2010, TI Colombia - Municipal Transparency Index (Colombia), TI Spain - Index of Transparency of Local Councils (Spain), Grupo Faro - Municipal Budget Transparency Index (Ecuador), Heriberto Jaro et al - Citizens for Transparent Municipalities (Mexico)

[8] E.g. TI Slovakia - Open Local Government 2010, TI Colombia - Municipal Transparency Index (Colombia), TI Venezuela –Indicators of Municipal Transparency (Venezuela)

prevalence, and frequency of corrupt practices as well as the impact of corruption at the micro-level[9].

Data   sources

The types of data used for local governance assessments vary according to the approach taken. Integrity system approaches rely largely on legal- institutional analysis to assess the strength of procedures and mechanisms for promoting integrity, combined with primary data (key informant interviews or public officials' surveys) to evaluate how these operate in practice. Assessments which focus on transparency usually employ secondary data and requests for information sometimes combined with selected interviews to test compliance with transparency standards, whilst tools to diagnose corruption rely more heavily on primary data from public surveys or focus groups.

Key issues and challenges

Many of the challenges related to public integrity assessments also apply to local governance assessments (see public integrity guidance note). Beyond these, there are additional issues which relate more specifically to the local level:

- Political Sensitivity**:** Assessments of local governance have the advantage that they can include citizen perspectives more readily than national level tools. However, it is important to recognise that this approach can be particularly sensitive because local officials are much closer to citizens and therefore more likely to be under the spotlight. As such, it is crucial to build partnerships, trust and understanding at the outset of an assessment process. This can be a particular challenge in cases where there is a lack of capacity in local government for conducting assessments. Therefore, finding a champion to help mobilise support within local government is an important consideration[10]. Political sensitivity also means that using the terminology of corruption, particularly at the local level, can result in reluctance on the part of public officials to take part in and/or accept the results of the assessment. Instead, using the language of integrity or resistance to corruption can help to put a more positive slant on the assessment[11].

- Comparability: A number of local governance assessments are used to develop indices which compare across local government units[12]. Such assessments can help identify systemic weaknesses for the sub-national governance system as a whole and provide evidence to strengthen the legal framework. Comparative assessments can also enable benchmarking amongst sub-national units to generate peer pressure for reform. In order to ensure that there is buy-in across the board and that assessment results are acted upon, there needs to be a clear assessment framework which is agreed by all the relevant stakeholders. It is also important to emphasise the value of such assessments for exchanging experience and best practice amongst units to promote institutional change and not only to focus on the ranking[13].

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[9] E.g. TI PNG - Rural Peoples' Perceptions of Corruption in Papua New Guinea, WB - Particpatory Corruption Apppraisal - A Methodology for Assessing how Corruption Affects the Urban Poor, Urban Corruption Survey

[10] UNDP - A User's Guide to Measuring Local Governance

[11] E.g. UNDP - Methodology for Measuring the Index of Responsibility, Transparency and Accountability at Local Level

[12] E.g. TI Colombia - Municipal Transparency Index (Colombia), TI Spain - Index of Transparency of Local Councils (Spain), TI Venezuela - Indicators of Municipal Transparency (Venezuela)

[13] UNDP - A User's Guide to Measuring Local Governance, Local Governance Toolkit

- Data collection: Data collection, especially for comparative assessments can be time consuming and resource intensive. This is often compounded by weak statistical capacity at the local level as well as the lack of availability of disaggregated data[14]. A related issue is the question of whether assessments are best carried out by internal (local government) or external (civil society) stakeholders. There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches. Assessments which are carried out by actors who are external to the region/municipality under analysis may suffer from a limited knowledge and understanding of the local context and the inner workings of local government. Furthermore, self-assessments by local government may be more appropriate where the objective is to enable them to better understand their own situation. On the other hand, civil society monitoring provides greater objectivity and legitimacy and can serve to raise awareness about, and even influence, the activities of local government[15].

Promising practices

- Triangulation and participation**:** Given the highly contextual nature of local government activities and the range of actors involved (local, regional and national officials, local civil society organisations, citizens etc.), the most promising assessments in this area are those that: (a) include a broad representation of stakeholders, (b) use a combination of data sources, and (c) use both in law and in practice indicators to capture local realities. Global Integrity's Local Governance Toolkit, for example, uses primary research, secondary sources and key informant interviews to gather data on existing legal provisions at the local level and their implementation in practice[16]. Likewise UNDP's Assessment Toolkit for Promoting Integrity, Transparency, and Accountability in Palestinian Local Government Units is a compound toolkit for measuring the degree of transparency and integrity in local government through the use of questionnaires with municipal employees and local residents, focus groups, interviews and revision of official records in order to collect data on both procedures and actual practice[17]. A further example is Afesis-Corplan's Introduction Guide to Conducting Good Governance Surveys, which combines a survey of councillors, officials, ward committees, members of the general public and representatives of civil society organisations, with a focus group of selected individuals from each respondent group, and a factual verification exercise consisting of a checklist of policies, systems and structures existing within the municipality[18].

- Flexibility and context: UNDP's Methodology for Measuring the Index of Responsibility, Transparency and Accountability at Local Level is designed to be used in virtually any transitioning country, and offers guidelines for adapting the tool to local context, specifically with regards to defining corruption hot-spots and

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[14] UNDP - A User's Guide to Measuring Local Governance

[15] Proetica - Corruption Risk Maps (Peru), TI/UN-HABITAT - Municiple Checklist

[16] Global Integrity - Local Governance Toolkit

[17] UNDP - Assessment Toolkit for Promoting Integrity, Transparency, and Accountability in Palestinian Local Government Units

[18] Afesis Corplan - Introduction Guide to Conducting Good Governance Surveys

developing indicators for local anti-corruption mechanisms[19]. Likewise, the Local Governance Barometer model has two layers: a Core Model that consists of universal criteria, identified through literature review and experts' knowledge; and a Specific Model composed of local criteria and indicators through which to measure these universal criteria[20]. Other examples of flexibility include TI Colombia's set of tools to measure transparency at different levels from national to regional down to municipal as well as TI Spain's indices which assess transparency at the level of autonomous regions and municipalities. Both sets of tools adapt a universal methodology to develop tailored indicators for the different levels of analysis[21].

All tools referenced in this guide are accessible via the gateway tool database:
http://gateway.transparency.org/tools

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[19] UNDP - Methodology for Measuring the Index of Responsibility, Transparency and Accountability at Local Level

[20] Impact Alliance - Local Governance Barometer

[21] TI Colombia - Municipal Transparency Index (Colombia), Ti Colombia - Regional Transparency Index (Colombia), TI Spain -- Index of Transparency of Local Councils (Spain), TI Spain - Index of Transparency of Regional Governments (Spain)

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