

REFLECTING ON THE IMPACT OF PRIMARY CONSTITUENT ACCOUNTABILITY

RESILIENT ROOTS CASE STUDY NO.4



The Resilient Roots (RR) [initiative](#) examines whether organisations who are accountable to their primary constituents, that is, the individuals and communities they support and serve, are better able to withstand external threats related to [closing civic space](#). The Resilient Roots team believes that there are several ways to [examine and measure changes in primary constituent accountability \(PCA\)](#) and, as a result, a cohort of 14 pilot partner NGOs were supported to design and implement accountability mechanisms suitable to their distinct contexts. Considering these diverse contexts and the various challenges each organisation faces, the accountability mechanisms used varied greatly. In an attempt to better understand the importance of accountability mechanisms in the work of the pilot partners, Resilient Roots will be presenting several case studies.

IMPACT OF PRIMARY CONSTITUENT ACCOUNTABILITY

The [first Resilient Roots case study](#) illustrated the three dimensions of primary constituent accountability (PCA) - *giving, taking, and holding to account*, through examples from

our national partners. The [second case study](#) distinguished between organisations that are primarily service delivery or advocacy focused, and examined the implications these differing approaches have on PCA mechanisms. The [third case study](#) explored the various common challenges that national partner organisations faced when implementing their PCA mechanisms. This final case study examines the broader impact of PCA approaches within national partner organisations, moving beyond their pilot projects to highlight their influence on wider *programmatic, operational and strategic* matters.

In addition to changing how their primary constituents think about and engage with their organisations, our partners' pilot projects have seen PCA become a driver for change in several other areas. These broader impacts can be illuminated by examining the different effects of PCA on wider organisational programming, operations, and strategy. One thing to point out is that PCA mechanisms impact these different areas of work in complex and interrelated ways, and that none of them happen in a vacuum.

1 PROGRAMMATIC IMPACT

For the purpose of this case study, we define programmatic impact as the ways in which *PCA mechanisms developed through the initiative have affected the outward-facing projects and related activities of our partner organisations*. This is irrespective of whether they focus more on delivering services or conducting advocacy. Here we have observed that the main programmatic areas of impact include: a) Creating a more deliberate *culture of dialogue* that helps *build relationships*; and b) *improving the organisation's performance and ability to achieve its objectives as a result of a more effective engagement with constituents*.

A CULTURE OF DIALOGUE THAT BUILDS RELATIONSHIPS

The introduction of PCA mechanisms has fostered a *new culture of information sharing, voice, and the value of listening and responding to feedback*. We found that continuing to collect and respond to feedback during interactions with constituents eventually cemented more systematic approaches to constituent engagement. This culture of considered and continuous dialogue then often extended to wider stakeholders, seeing the organisation better placed to build trust and forge stronger relationships with these actors too. Moreover, this has pushed partners to make their communications more frequent, relevant and direct, such as by adapting the channels and messages used for different audiences. The need to better articulate what they do and do not do as organisations (and how constituents can engage in these activities) has been a particularly important catalyst for improving programme-related outputs.

“UPON REALISING, DURING THE FEEDBACK CONVERSATIONS, THAT THERE EXISTED SOME KNOWLEDGE GAPS AMONG OUR PCS REGARDING THE ORGANISATION'S DIVERSE BUT INTERRELATED ARRAY OF INTERVENTIONS AND SERVICES, WE HAD TO CONSIDER SUSTAINED RE-ORIENTATION OF OUR PCS ON THE ORGANISATION'S MISSION, PROGRAMS, AND RANGE OF SERVICES. THIS HAS IN EFFECT IMPROVED OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PCS.” *Partner in Uganda*

IMPROVED PERFORMANCE THROUGH EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Nurturing a culture of dialogue ultimately results in higher



quality interactions. Once two-way communication becomes more systematic, organisations will usually then be able to kick on and use these touch points with constituents to enable them to more directly shape programmes and activities. Ultimately, it is this active involvement of constituents in the organisation's decision making which is one of the main differences between simply collecting feedback and a genuine PCA mechanism. More specifically, this can improve performance by:

- I. Unearthing *innovative solutions* that may otherwise not have been discovered or considered;
- II. Enabling constituents to *engage and take action* with the organisation, including shaping the support and opportunities they receive, thereby increasing their relevance and effectiveness; and
- III. More *efficient delivery of activities* and a *better allocation of resources*, thanks to *greater alignment and collaboration* between the organisation and its constituents.

“AFTER THE WHOLE PROCESS, THIS GROUP OF YOUNG FEMINISTS ASSESSED THAT THEY FELT EMPOWERED, RESPECTED, APPRECIATED BY THE ORGANISATION, BECAUSE IT PROVIDED THEM SPACE TO ACT AND TRUSTED THEIR CHOICES. WE, ON THE OTHER HAND, LEARNED HOW TO BE MORE FLEXIBLE IN ORGANIZING ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG WOMEN, HOW TO GIVE MORE POWER AND CONTROL TO YOUNG WOMEN (E.G. WE LET THEM ADMINISTER OUR INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT FOR THE EXHIBITION), AND INCORPORATE THEIR NEEDS IN OUR PROGRAMS.” *FemPlatz*

However, the impact of PCA does not end at the programmatic level. Throughout the Resilient Roots initiative, national partners have seen their PCA activities and outputs also drive change in their operational frameworks.

2 OPERATIONAL IMPACT

For the purpose of this case study, we define **operational impact** as the ways in which PCA mechanisms have affected the governance and/or structure (i.e. teams) of an organisation. This includes impacts on the ways of working within the organisation, as well as broader resource allocation to PCA-related activities.

WAYS OF WORKING

While Resilient Roots focused primarily on external primary constituents, national partners also introduced various mechanisms to strengthen accountability to their own staff. In addition to the Resilient Roots baseline and endline surveys where partners assessed (with their staff) overall levels of accountability, some organisations used this opportunity to dig deeper and transform their internal ways of working. One of the most common improvements from this process was altering the internal communications system to allow for more honest and transparent exchanges, in particular with senior management. In many cases, this has led to improved collaboration, while also allowing organisations to “practice what they preach”.

“THE PROGRAM MOSTLY ALLOWED THE ORGANISATION TO IMPROVE ITS INTERNAL CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION AND EFFICIENCY AMONG FIELD AND MANAGEMENT STAFF, ALLOWING MANAGEMENT TO HAVE ACCESS TO INFORMATION THAT PREVIOUSLY REMAINED AT THE FIELD LEVEL.” **Solidarity Now**



Other partners decided to make changes to their internal capacities by training their staff not only about the concept of PCA and its implications, but also about how to use PCA mechanisms in their daily activities.

“WE NOTE IMPROVED STAFF CAPACITY IN TERMS OF SETTING UP AND MANAGING A PCA MECHANISM. HAVING EMBRACED THE NEW CONCEPT AND IMPLEMENTING IT WITH A RELATIVELY HIGH DEGREE OF SUCCESS IS OWED TO THE TREMENDOUS DEVELOPMENT OF STAFF CAPACITY AROUND ISSUES OF PCA.” **PRFT**

Pilot partners have also begun to *dedicate or reallocate other resources to PCA*, such as repurposing staff time, or creating new roles within their organisations to specifically manage and promote accountability.

“I THINK A GREAT PROJECT COULD BE TO TRAIN UP A FEW CONSULTANTS WHO ARE EXPERTS IN PCA, IN THE STYLE IT WAS DONE IN RESILIENT ROOTS (I.E., BOTTOM UP)... I THINK THAT NEEDING GUIDANCE ON PCA IS A HURDLE, AND ONE THAT WE COULD SOLVE BY FACILITATING TRAINERS WHO TRAIN ORGANIZATIONS TO DO THIS KIND OF WORK.” **Video Volunteers**

In addition to programmatic and operational issues, PCA has also had an impact on the strategic approaches of organisations.

3 STRATEGIC IMPACT

We define **strategic impact** as the *influence of PCA on the long-term goals, planning and/or strategic approaches* of our national partner organisations. This includes *embedding PCA into high level decision-making processes*, altering their approach to *fundraising and donors*, and *influencing the wider sector* as a champion for PCA.

EMBEDDING PCA IN STRATEGIC PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING

PCA, especially the value of working closely with primary constituents and hearing their voices, has become instrumental in driving the future direction of work at our partner organisations. As such, PCA practices have allowed partners to use inputs from their constituents to make more informed, evidence-based strategic decisions. In particular, partners have used PCA mechanisms to sense-check whether their mission resonates with the people who are meant to benefit from their work, collaboratively redesign their organisational strategy, and adjust their theories of change, for instance.

“INCORPORATING PRIMARY CONSTITUENT ACCOUNTABILITY CHANGED OUR ORGANISATION FROM THE VERY BOTTOM TO THE VERY TOP LEVELS. IT HAS BECOME INTERNALISED, AND WE NOW CONSISTENTLY ASK ‘WHAT ARE WE DOING TO BEST HELP STUDENTS AND THEIR SURROUNDING SUPPORT SYSTEMS?’” **Projet Jeune Leader**

Moreover, in addition to using the data collected through PCA mechanisms to inform decisions, partners are embedding PCA mechanisms into their organisational systems, introducing organisation-wide policies to outline how and where PCA practices can be applied, and delineate its role in current as well as future projects.



Kusi Warma

“PRIMARY CONSTITUENTS USED TO BE ASKED ABOUT THEIR OPINIONS, BUT THEY DIDN'T BELIEVE THAT PCCDS WOULD TAKE IT INTO CONSIDERATION. NOW, THEY KNOW THAT PCCDS HAS A FORMAL ORGANISATIONAL POLICY TO ALWAYS COLLECT, ANALYZE, AND REFLECT UPON THEIR FEEDBACK, WHICH MAKES THEM MORE SATISFIED AND TRUSTING WITH PCCDS.” (PCCDS) SO OVERALL, THE RR PROJECT MEANT THE PCS, THE PCCDS, ITS ADMINISTRATION, AND STAFF HAD A UNIQUE NEW OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE THEIR JOBS, AND THE SERVICES THEY PROVIDE AND GET” **PCCDS**

FUNDRAISING

In order to integrate PCA activities into future work, Resilient Roots national partners have started looking into how they can approach donors to both sustain and scale these efforts. To secure funding for new kinds of work, donors often request organisations to prove their value or impact. To address such requests, national partner organisations are showcasing the changes they have experienced from participating in Resilient Roots. This includes using story-telling about their PCA journeys, testimonials from primary constituents, and data from the accountability baseline and endline surveys.

Kusi Warma's donors saw the positive influence of PCA and the improvement of relationships with stakeholders, and were interested to include PCA practices with some of their other grantees. As a result, they asked Kusi Warma to share a blog post about the formalisation of PCA policies so that they can be applied to other grantees and projects.

“IT HAS POSITIVELY INFLUENCED KUSI WARMA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS DONORS, ESPECIALLY FROM EUROPE, AS THEY ARE VERY INTERESTED IN THEIR GRANTEE'S DEVELOPING ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESSES TOO. EVEN ONE OF THEM HAS ASKED US TO SHARE OUR EXPERIENCE WITH THEIR OTHER GRANTEE'S FROM PERU AND WRITE A BLOG FOR THEIR WEBSITE” **KusiWarma**

INFLUENCING THE SECTOR

Throughout the Resilient Roots initiative, national partners were given the opportunity to learn from one another by discussing their experiences, as well as share *lessons learned with the wider civil society sector*. In doing so, national partners have been encouraging other organisations to join the PCA movement and help shift more power to those directly affected by their work.

Projet Jeune Leader for instance, have been posting blogs about PCA as well as sharing their experiences at conferences, which focus on creating a culturally-relevant, simple feedback mechanisms that engage young people in informing the sex education programmes that are meant to serve them. Others have been engaging with their networks in the development sector to advocate for the PCA practices in various contexts.

“OUR IMMEDIATE INTENTION IN REGARD TO CONTRIBUTING TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THIS GOAL WILL BE ADVOCACY FOR PCA PRACTICES AMONG OUR NETWORKS. IN PRACTICE WE SHALL BE ORIENTING OTHER MEMBERS ON THE NOTION AND VALUE OF PCA AND ALSO SUPPORT THOSE WHO ARE READY TO PILOT SIMILAR INITIATIVES BY OFFERING THEM ASSISTANCE BASED ON OUR ENLISTED COMPETENCE AND EXPERIENCE.”

Ugandan partner

Sharing learnings with other organisations in the sector has also enabled our national partners to *expand their areas of work or identify new ways to conduct their activities*, for example by establishing new partnerships and alliances.

“OUR OBJECTIVE IS TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STRONG WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND THE LEARNINGS FROM THE RESILIENT ROOTS PROJECT ARE AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THIS. IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THREE OTHER WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS, WE ARE DEVELOPING A PLAN FOR A WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS HUB THAT WILL SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MOVEMENT. ACCOUNTABILITY IS A KEY ASPECT OF ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE WORKING CULTURE IDENTIFIED IN THIS PLAN.” **FemPlatz**

By continuing to share their experiences from this two-year initiative and beyond, we hope that Resilient Roots national partners can become key reference points on the topic for other global constituent accountability initiatives.



FemPlatz

CONCLUSION

The Resilient Roots initiative has primarily introduced PCA to our national partners at the programmatic level, however we have seen its impact extend beyond this area to influence operational and strategic matters in a number of ways. Given the relatively short amount of time that the national partners have been practicing PCA for so far, the significant

results of these programmatic changes suggests that further operational and strategic level impacts are likely to follow, should the partners be able to maintain these efforts. And while much of this will depend on how successful they are at accessing further resources for this work, an ongoing commitment to vocally championing PCA is a clear avenue for leveraging new alliances and opportunities for doing so.

Contact resilientroots@civicus.org for more info.



This case study was written by Laurence Prinz (Keystone Accountability), with support from the other Resilient Roots coordinating partners (CIVICUS, Accountable Now, and Instituto de Comunicación y Desarrollo).



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