

PRIMARY CONSTITUENT ACCOUNTABILITY IN SERVICE DELIVERY VERSUS ADVOCACY FOCUSED ORGANISATIONS

RESILIENT ROOTS CASE STUDY NO.2



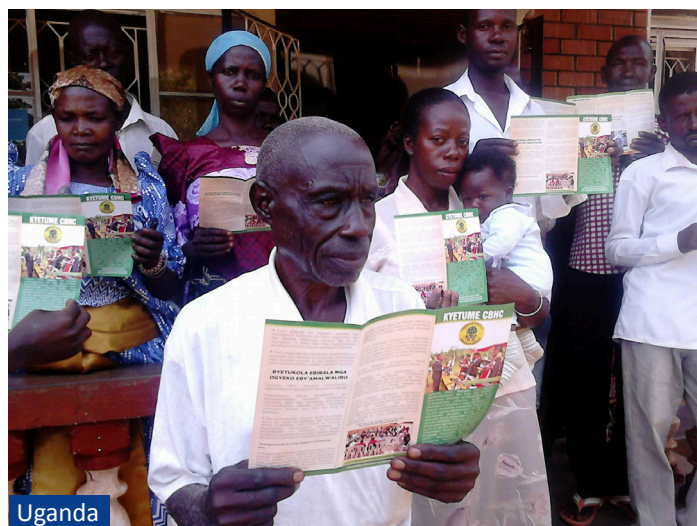
JVE-Benin

The [first case study](#) looked at three dimensions of accountability (*giving, taking, and holding to account*) and provided examples of how different Resilient Roots partners navigate and practice each dimension. While there are some common threads regarding both the design and implementation of different primary constituent accountability (PCA)¹ mechanisms, there are many factors that can influence how they operate. These range from an

organisation's mission to the context in which it operates, who its primary constituents are, and its capacity to respond to feedback received.

This case study focuses on the approach and activities of an organisation - distinguishing between organisations that are primarily service delivery focused and those who are more advocacy focused and examines some of the implications these different approaches may have on PCA and PCA mechanisms.

¹PCA refers to the accountability of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the ways in which an organisation is held responsible for its policies and actions by - (and is answerable to) - its primary constituents.



SERVICE DELIVERY VERSUS ADVOCACY APPROACHES

PCA is ultimately determined by the relationship between organisations and their constituents. PCA mechanisms often differ between organisations that are primarily service delivery or primarily advocacy focused.

- **Primarily service delivery focused organisations** provide a direct service to their primary constituents, such as healthcare or education services. Organisations providing a direct service are generally in close and continuous contact with their primary constituents, allowing for a more personal engagement with them and offering numerous engagement opportunities.
- **Primarily advocacy focused organisations** take a more systemic and strategic approach to influencing governmental and institutional policy and practice², which can include questioning government behaviour on an issue, as well as raising awareness of such issues on a wider scale. Advocacy can focus on various issues. These can be more specific things like energy or agriculture, or more cross-cutting issues like climate change or human rights. The primary constituents of advocacy organisations tend to be less well defined but generally bonded by being affected by a common issue. As such, advocacy organisations tend to work with institutions to change policies and practices, and often try to strengthen the capacity of activists and communities to engage with policy makers to influence power relations.³

While in reality, most organisations apply a combination of both approaches (like delivering some kind of direct service while also advocating for their work on a larger scale), for the purpose of this case study, we will be looking at the implications on PCA for either a service delivery or advocacy-weighted organisation.

For both, it is important to design PCA mechanisms that can utilise and build upon existing touch-points between organisations and their primary constituents. It is these touch-points that vary in frequency and scope between service delivery and advocacy organisations. The aim of any PCA mechanism is to *strengthen* the relationship between an organisation and its constituents, ultimately leading to an improvement in the organisation's ability to serve those it seeks to support.

This case study examines the effect these different approaches have at an organisation, with regards to the three dimensions of PCA (*giving, taking, and holding to account*). What (if any) are the differences between service delivery and advocacy organisations in the ways that they approach and implement PCA mechanisms?

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRIMARY CONSTITUENT ACCOUNTABILITY

There are various factors to consider for both service delivery and advocacy organisations that will affect how they engage with their primary constituents, and, as a result, which PCA mechanisms they might introduce. This section examines the three dimensions of accountability in light of whether an organisation is primarily service delivery or advocacy focused, providing examples from the Resilient Roots pilot partner organisations. Considering that many organisations tend to be a hybrid between a service delivery and advocacy organisations, the following examples are particular aspects of the partners' PCA mechanisms that have been isolated from other influences.



²Ross, J. (2013). Advocacy: A guide for small and diaspora NGOs. [INTRAC](#)

³Ibid.

GIVING ACCOUNT

The first dimension of accountability refers to the two-way dialogue and sharing of information between organisations and their constituents. What does the organisation do (and not do) and how does it communicate this? With whom does it work? What is the purpose or objective of the activities or services it delivers?

Both service delivery and advocacy organisations can give account in similar ways, such as sharing newsletters or engaging with constituents online through their websites and social media. However, there are methods that may be better suited to a service delivery organisation than to an advocacy organisation. For example, a **RR pilot partner organisation in Uganda**, engages with its constituents by handing out printed brochures during constituents clinic visits to share information more broadly about HIV/AIDS prevention and support, sex education, and medical care. Handing out brochures and discussing their content is a great opportunity for this organisation to reach out and share information with its constituents in the area, as well as offer them something tangible to take home. Moreover, considering that there is a high degree of illiteracy in the area, the Ugandan RR pilot partner is able to provide in-person explanations to those constituents who are otherwise unable to receive information about the organisation. Using this touch-point to transfer information and directly engage with constituents additionally allows the organisation to build trust, while also using the information gathered from these interactions to ensure more targeted and relevant services in the future.

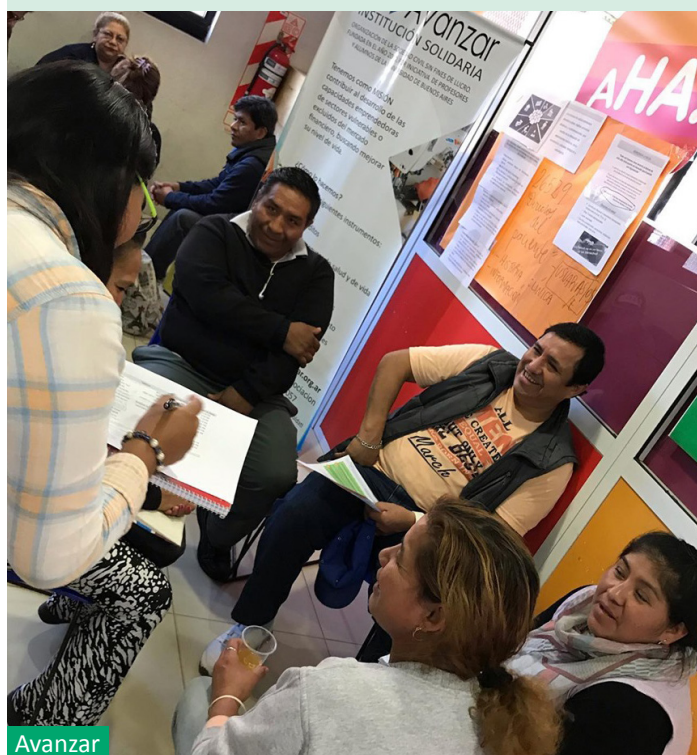
This method of *giving account* may be less valuable for an advocacy organisation such as **OVD-Info**, which monitors protestor detentions and shares information online about political repression in Russia. Due to the political sensitivity and nature of OVD-Info's work, most of its interactions with constituents and sharing of information occurs virtually or through phone calls (like the hotline for activists in direct need of legal support). Not only does this allow the organisation to be quick in responding to ad hoc changes in political situations that are happening in real-time, but it also provides security and anonymity, allowing OVD-Info to *give account* in a safe manner. While this method of giving account allows the organisation to have a wider reach, it does have the drawback of making it more difficult to build strong ties with its constituents in an environment often undermined by safety risks, fear and repression.

TAKING ACCOUNT

The second dimension of accountability refers to (1) the process of collecting feedback from constituents on the activities or services provided by the organisation, (2) actively listening to the needs and opinions of constituents, and (3) informing constituents about how the organisation is responding to their queries and feedback (**closing the loop**), thus involving a two-way flow of communication.

Both service delivery and advocacy organisations can *take account* in similar ways, such as through qualitative or quantitative surveys and interviews. However, once again, there may be methods that are better suited to a service delivery organisation than to an advocacy organisation. The ease or difficulty with which an organisation can collect feedback from its primary constituents is closely linked to the organisation's *access* to them. Access to primary constituents affects the data collection methods available, which in turn has implications on issues such as anonymity or existing power dynamics. This may result in constituents being more or less hesitant to criticise work and provide an organisation with honest and valuable feedback.

Service delivery organisations generally tend to interact more directly with their primary constituents, giving them more data collection options to choose from, such as when constituents visit their centres or directly engage with the services they provide. While there are of course exceptions, most organisations who provide direct services do so for a fairly well defined population – a target community or group



Avanzar

in a particular location, which can also make taking account a more straightforward process. While this direct – and often physical – relationship may ensure greater access and a higher response rate, it may also increase risks related to bias and make anonymity tough to achieve, thus potentially distorting an organisation’s ability to accurately take account.

One example of how a service delivery organisation *takes account*, is [Avanzar](#), an organisation working to improve the quality of life and strengthen the capacities of vulnerable communities in Buenos Aires, through micro-credits and micro-entrepreneurial training. Avanzar *takes account* in a very proactive and in-person manner, in which it conducts house visits to check-in with primary constituents. It uses these house visits to remind its constituents of its presence and the work it does, collect feedback on its micro-loan and training programmes, and assess the extent to which these services are being used. As such, Avanzar collects information, listens to feedback, and directly engages with constituents about the things they have shared with the organisation.

For advocacy organisations, the focus tends to rely less on the relationship and quality of how a service is delivered and more on the content of their advocacy work. Advocacy organisations tend to engage in a more remote manner, which can be cheaper, allow for anonymity, and help them reach a wider audience. However, due to the lack of direct and more personal relationships, this may also result in lower response rates. Because advocacy organisations are less able to revert back to primary constituents and engage in direct dialogue, some organisations tend to communicate on a small scale through things like key informant interviews, often taking one or two people from different buckets of constituents – academics, governments, UN agencies, regulatory bodies, and NGOs, for example.

An example of how an advocacy organisation can take account, is [Climate Watch Thailand](#) (CWT), which focuses on advocacy to trigger a change in attitudes towards climate change and ultimately achieve climate justice. CWT collects feedback and lived experiences from its constituents and then conducts workshops, focus group discussions, and convenings to map the feedback to the various climate issues it is working on. Discussing feedback through these workshops allows the organisation to close the loop and formulate their advocacy objectives and activities. This joint effort thus allows primary constituents to play an integral role in shaping the advocacy work the organisation undertakes and decides to focus on in the future.



Solidarity Now

HOLDING TO ACCOUNT

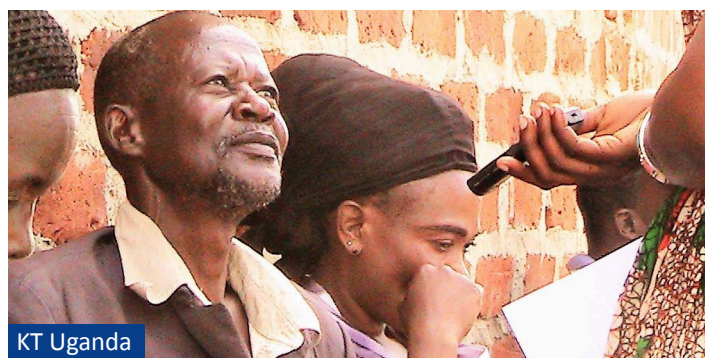
The third and final dimension of accountability refers to the ability of constituents to influence and effect change at an organisation. This must be via processes which enable constituents to assess – and potentially question – the organisation’s actions. At this point, it should be noted that especially in the Resilient Roots initiative, only a few organisations have such a procedure in place, which can most likely be attributed to them having only worked on accountability for a relatively short time. As organisations continue to examine and experiment with various PCA mechanisms around giving and *taking account*, they are only now starting to enter the stage where they can begin implementing procedures that allow their constituents to fully hold them to account.

Both service delivery and advocacy organisations can be held to account in similar ways, such as through a complaint’s procedure on their website. However, there are some processes which may differ, once again depending on the access to constituents and the way the organisation engages with them.

[Solidarity Now](#), an organisation working to support migrant populations in Greece affected by economic and humanitarian crises, began its Resilient Roots journey by developing a *Concern Response and Feedback Mechanisms* (CRFM). The CRFM includes various complaint mechanisms, allowing its constituents to hold

it and its implementing partners to account. As part of the CRFM, constituents are given the opportunity to provide critical feedback through a complaints box, which is then investigated and discussed. The organisation then proposes a solution which it communicates back to the constituents, which then ideally leads to corrective action addressing the initial complaint. The complainant is given the opportunity to appeal any actions or decisions throughout the process. Over time, however, Solidarity Now realised that the complaint's box did not have the uptake it expected. While this procedure was put in place to allow constituents to *hold* Solidarity Now to account, most resorted to directly engaging with trusted intermediaries or voicing their concerns or complaints in another manner. As such, the organisation is re-thinking and pursuing other ways to ensure that it can be *held to account* by its constituents.

Advocacy organisations may use similar mechanisms to service delivery organisations, however this is not always possible, due to the differing nature of engagement with their constituents. One example is [MarViva](#), which promotes the conservation and sustainable use of coastal resources, goods, and services, through advocacy work at the national and regional level. MarViva aims to strengthen and systematise accountability mechanisms in the network *La Red del Golfo*, composed of local food producers and grassroots organisations. One way in which it enables constituents to hold it to account, is through assemblies in which the community organisations discuss the extent to which network representatives are accountable to them, as well as debate how MarViva is accountable to the network as a whole. This open dialogue with the primary constituents is structured around assessing the activities and support that has been provided by MarViva. Moreover, the network is based on common principles or network goals, implying a certain level of implicit responsibility and accountability within *La Red del Golfo*.



KT Uganda

CONCLUSION

This case study has shown that there are certain differences apparent in the way a service delivery or advocacy organisation may approach PCA and develop corresponding mechanisms. However, when designing a PCA mechanism, it is vital for an organisation to be aware of its own context and the implications thereof on the various dimensions of accountability. This will help sign-post an organisation towards a PCA approach which will have the best chance of achieving its objectives.

In addition to contextual awareness, an organisation should consider its PCA from the perspective of its primary constituents: How aware are primary constituents of its PCA mechanisms? How accessible are the mechanisms, and how able are constituents to engage with them? Are your primary constituents comfortable using your PCA mechanisms?

Subsequent case studies will move beyond how the various mechanisms implemented by the RR pilot partner organisations relate to their organisational approaches and the different dimensions of PCA, to dig deeper into the challenges that they have faced when using PCA mechanisms and better understand the value they bring. Together, these case studies will provide insights that other organisations can use to develop their own PCA mechanisms and strengthen their relationship with their primary constituents, ultimately improving their relevance, legitimacy and effectiveness.

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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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