

Session 5.3.4 – Consumer Voice

Date of the session	Thursday 19th March
Time of the session	14:30 – 16:30 (2hours)
Topic	5.3 Pro-poor Financing Policies and Strategies
Main convening organizations	Water and Sanitation Program
Contact person(s)	Rosemary Rop (WSP), rrop@worldbank.org Cindy Suh (WSP), csuh@worldbank.org Nitin Jain (WSP), njain3@worldbank.org
Short description of what the session intends to discuss and the key questions that have been identified.	
<p>This session will explore both the barriers and solutions to voice in effecting pro-poor strategies. Practitioners at various levels of the supply side and beneficiaries on the demand side will share first hand some of the more innovative methodologies for canvassing consumer voice. At the national level the impact of policy, and legislation, adoption of Ombudsmen, the use by regulators of specific tools and contracts, beneficiary assessments and feedback mechanisms to serve the poor will be assessed. Support partners in the sector will demonstrate how through effective market research, and willingness to tailor products to meet their needs effective solutions to serve the needs of the poor have been found.</p> <p>Similarly, at the utility level an array of strategies and modern ICT approaches enhancing responsiveness to citizens and enabling their empowerment will be shared. Finally the experiences of citizen groups in improving their internal organization by forming associations and adopting creative accountability tools will capture the demand side best practice in enhancing accountability and strengthening citizen voice.</p>	
Wider context of issues : Why is the question important to improving water challenges in the world today ?And how does it relate to issues outside the water sectors?	
<p>Lessons from the sector in the 1970's and 1980's demonstrate that in addition to focusing on capacity building through institutional strengthening, strategic planning, increased budgetary allocations to the supply side of service provisioning, there is also need to build their capacity to engage with the citizens on the demand side. Abandoned water supplies and unserved populations show that users of services need to be informed on the stated direction of policy and be enabled to exercise their voice in determining aspects that affect them such as pricing and service levels. Ultimately citizens themselves should be at the centre of shaping desired service outcomes to improve appropriateness and sustainability of services.</p> <p>Consumer voice relates to a range of accountability mechanisms that enhance transparency, compliance and responsiveness to consumers, and enforce sanctions and rewards based on service providers' performance. Accountability tools are gaining worldwide recognition as critical to improving the performance of the water and sanitation sector. Not only do these mechanisms improve service delivery, they provide a means of improved governance and citizen empowerment which can have impact on the broader development process. The issues of consumer voice and accountability are a discipline beyond water and sanitation, with lessons and experiences applicable to sectors ranging from health and agriculture, to political systems of resource distribution. Ultimately learning lessons on how to both target and amplify consumer voices in different ways and at different levels will signal how to enhance the well being of society as a whole.</p>	

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Discuss the development of session questions and its role on the relevant topic	
<p>i. Identify common issues and priority problems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National policy and legislation may fail to enforce either horizontal or vertical accountability. To provide an enabling environment for voice, it is important to know which policies or legislative frameworks have helped to amplify, or have obscured consumer voice in the water and sanitation sector. - In a growing number of countries, regulators and ombudsmen operate in realm between the policy maker and the service provider. Practitioner's understanding of the effectiveness of these institutions in enforcing accountability in the water and sanitation sector is limited. Are these institutions increasing the impact of citizen voice? - Service providers are often trapped in a vicious cycle of deteriorating assets, low investment, non collection of revenues and low performance. Accountability initiatives may be viewed as costly and affect willingness by utilities to adopt accountability approaches. Which mechanisms and tools are both cost effective and appropriate to service provider capacity, especially in developing countries? - Citizen voice often causes alienated from service providers yet the goal of citizens is to motivate service providers to improve service delivery and be heard. Civil society will benefit from the lessons and best practice on how to amplify citizen voice in ways that build bridges rather than alienate, and in ways that realize desired development goals for the benefit of the most needy.
<p>ii. Discuss the future evolution of the topic, in the short-, medium-, to long-term based on changing political climates and other foreseen socio-economic /ecological factors</p>	<p>Short Term Evolution of the Topic (1 - 2 years) : Different regions are at different levels in appreciating the value of consumer voice in service delivery. In an information age, it is likely that in the short term, information on best practice tools for strengthening voice will be more widely documented, disseminated and understood. The topic should gain in recognition and understanding by practitioners, especially on the supply side.</p> <p>In the medium term (2 - 5 years) depending on the country policy environment and culture, developing countries will evolve from having information, towards willingness to practically explore voice mechanisms and exchange experiences with a wider body of sector practitioners. The topic will evolve from asking 'why consumer voice?', to 'how can voice most effectively be strengthened?'</p> <p>In the long term, the topic of consumer voice should evolve into a conversation on the discipline of forging partnership across sectors. The extent to which markets, governments, civil society and service providers are able to leverage knowledge, resources and amplify the frequency and volume of the voice of different players will determine their relevance and in turn, their success. For well developed and leading institutions the issue of voice will be the frequency of harmony, synergy and partnership.</p>

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Differing Perspectives : (Regional, Stakeholder, Others...)

Regional perspectives in this session will be given by panelists drawn from Latin America, Europe, South Asia and Africa. These regions vary in levels of democracy, freedom of speech, culturally and as influenced by the historical, political environment from which panelist experiences emerge. It will be expected that these differences are respected and understood in the session.

Stakeholders will be drawn from utilities, regulators, ombudsmen, development agencies and civil society. They will have different views on the value of consumer voice, with most resistance from service providers as regards the role played by civil society.

The perspectives will help to demonstrate the interconnectedness between the demand and supply side in amplifying the voice of citizens.

List of Speakers and Timing

Moderator: Jae So, WSP (10 minutes - context setting)

Participants:

Dr. Gopa Kumar Thampi, Public Affairs Foundation, 7 min

Neil Mc Leod, South Africa Ethikweni Municipality, 7 min

Richard Franceys, University of Cranfield, 7 min

Oswald Chanda, NWASCO, 7 min

Mr. Orlando Hernandez, USAID / HIP, 7 min

Plenary conversation on experiences: 20 minutes

(Ombudsman) Peru Water Sector, 7 min

Senegal SDE, 7 min

Jasper Tumuhimbise, ACCU, Uganda, 7 min

Phyllis Muema, Kenya Civil Society (CRC film 10 min)

Plenary discussion: 20 minutes

Moderator / Rapporteur: Wrap up, 10 minutes

Previous experiences to draw on expected challenges and past lessons

Policy makers, regulators, service providers and civil society can draw from the challenges faced by those in sectors and regions other than their own. Policies that have promoted responsiveness such as the 'free basic water policy' in South Africa have realized both success and challenges. Should governments adopt this policy that is responsive to the poor - what are the dangers? Regulators have encountered resistance from their own service providers, yet have been in the same place in time realized healthy competition introduced between providers; the session will examine the experiences from countries like Zambia, and discuss both what went well and what did not. In Singapore and in Senegal the utilities have introduced ICT through mechanisms like toll free lines, computerized citizen complaint data bases and citizen charters with varied levels of effectiveness, drawing important lessons for replication. The session will provide an opportunity to examine the extent these tools have served the poor. A wealth of experiences from civil society working in different contexts and regions will illustrate the challenges and present important lessons for civil society regarding partnership and replicating existing social accountability initiatives both within and outside of the water sector.