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**GLOBAL
PARTNERSHIP FOR
SOCIAL
ACCOUNTABILITY**

How do you increase municipalities' legitimacy and effectiveness?

Municipalities are key actors in charge of public service delivery and local economic development in Madagascar. They retain mandates and rights for resources mobilization but are left disempowered. Why? Because they not only lack sufficient and predictable funding, but they also are subject to inefficient central procedures regarding, for example, procurement and planning. So, despite the investment block grants used by municipalities through the 'local decentralization fund', the sphere of their discretionary decision-making remains very limited.

Adding to this challenge, there is also an unclear institutional landscape with overlapping mandates of decentralized entities combined with a lack of articulation between decentralization and sectoral policies that do not help municipalities to fulfill their public service mission.

Keeping these challenges in mind, one might wonder: how can then municipalities be perceived as effective and legitimate actors in the eyes of local communities? How can they truly serve and be accountable to the local population?

Part of the answer can be found in the fact that some rights at the municipal level do create real powers and do not require funding. It is the combination of these powers that creates a space for municipalities to explore and exercise their rights and obligations at their discretion.

In Madagascar, the institutionalized **local concertation structure** (SLC – 2015 Decree) at municipal level gives all local actors (elected councils, deconcentrated administrations and services, chiefs, CBOs/NGOs, management committees, administrative and private bodies) the opportunity to engage meaningfully in that space, contributing to unlock the potential of municipalities as a catalyst for local development and facilitating the emergence of a culture of citizenship.

Although the SLC is not a decision-making body aimed at replacing the powers of elected councilors, it is expected to provide actionable ideas, suggestions or advice to the municipal decision-making bodies in the definition, orientation, implementation and monitoring of their policies. The SLC also has the potential to allow citizens to legitimately delegate representatives and hold them accountable.

The key question then is, how to ensure the SLC is **truly an effective laboratory where participation leads to improved accountability, governance, and effective local service delivery?** The Citizen Involvement in Municipal Service Improvement (**CIMSI**) project, supported by a GPSA grant, is aiming to help address this question.

Currently, there are about 200 municipalities out of more than 1600 that have an SLC that meets regularly (<12%). CIMSI is supporting an additional 46 municipalities to set up a functional and effective SLC. CIMSI also supports these municipalities' efforts to strengthen their accountability in a specific sector, whether it is health, education or land services.

Most of the 10 ‘pilot’ SLCs that have been supported so far have selected health as a sector, probably because of the inadequacy of community-based health services, which tend to lack transparency and good governance of resources.

The first year of this project’s implementation demonstrates that SLCs have been promoted successfully as a forum for dialogue. Municipalities have reported about their budget at SLC level, contributing to more transparency in the management of public finances. The project also identified concrete problems related to local service delivery that were solved after SLCs discussions. In one of the supported municipalities, for example, following a citizen evaluation more transparency in the health sector was observed through the public display of drug prices. In another commune, the SLC's core group was mobilized to raise awareness about the need to secure the farmers’ land. This resulted in a greater number of land certificates – previously, only one certificate per year was issued by the municipal land office.

Thus, citizen evaluations of public services allowed SLC members to get a gist of the community’s perception of the quality and access to selected public services, which allowed for improved identification of citizen’s needs. And mayors who were previously either suspicious or hesitant about the SLC, became more convinced about the usefulness of concertation ('mifampières').

To finalize, the SLC provided a forum to support the participatory elaboration of municipal plans and budgets - considering the priorities identified for the formulation of the 2019 Primitive Budget.

All these initial results show that SLC can work as a laboratory where participation leads to improved accountability and governance. The SLC has also the potential to open the space to the expression of various voices, increasing transparency, representation, inclusion for improved governance, and decision making on local policies. It can generate ownership of local political actions and increase public sector performance in the provision of public services and local economic development - which in turn could mobilize additional resources at the municipal level, improve fiscal dynamism as well as civic engagement for the co-provision and co-production of services.

The CIMSI project can also positively influence local perception of institutional legitimacy, based on increased knowledge and trust in the public sector.

Notwithstanding its potential, CIMSI also faces several challenges, particularly on whether it could also contribute **to local development and potentially inform central-level decision makers to shape a more adequate decentralization model and process. This remains an open question and the potential answers may surface in the coming years of implementation.**

Partnership with other organizations:

