

BRIEFING NOTE: Social Audits

Projeto Controladoria na Escola, Brazil | TransGov, Ghana | CPEC, Connecticut, USA

Method

Social Auditing

Participatory Task

Ideas, Actions

Owner:

1. Brazil's Comptroller General
2. TransGov Ghana
3. Connecticut Policy and Economic Council (CPEC)

Location: Brazil, Ghana, Connecticut, USA

Years in Operation: 2000 - present

Implementation Level: National, Local

Platforms:

1. The Promise Tracker Tool - <https://monitor.promisetracker.org/>
2. TransGov - <https://www.transgovgh.org/>
3. Casio Pocket PCs, Digital Cameras

How Does It Work?

The Internet creates the opportunity for asking the public how to measure impact of laws and policies, what data to use for that purpose and enlisting people in the process of evidence gathering to support better evaluation and oversight. Such participation has the potential to enhance accountability and improve results. Although only one of these social auditing projects involves the legislative branch of government, the success of these initiatives, coupled with the absence of many legislative examples (UK Evidence Checks and Chile's Evaluación de Leyes are two notable exceptions), leads us to include them as worthy exemplars for legislatures looking to engage the public in oversight and evaluation.

Projeto Controladoria na Escola - this project involved asking students to collect data about their local school environments, report the major issues they faced, identify the root causes of those issues and propose ideas to fix them, initially by hand, and then using the Promise Tracker tool. In the pilot phase students from 10 schools identified over 600 issues such as burnt out light bulbs, missing fire extinguishers and broken chairs. The Comptroller General visited each school later that year to monitor the results of the project and to oversee the resolution of the issues.

TransGov - Created in 2014, TransGov is a platform to help Ghanaian citizens monitor the progress of local development projects. The creators of TransGov (Jerry Akanyi-King, Kennedy Anyinatore, Kwame Yeboah and Prince Anim) found that citizens were unaware of whom to hold accountable for faulty or incomplete infrastructure projects (such as the construction of public schools and flyovers) and service delivery in their localities. The solution they developed was “to curate a list of development projects in local communities and give people the ability to comment, give feedback and let their voices be heard.” The platform also allows people to report issues such as burst pipelines or potholes and track the status of their complaint.

CPEC - In 2000, the Connecticut Policy and Economic Council (CPEC) conducted a pilot project to engage local residents in collecting data to evaluate public projects in order to hold the local government accountable for its commitments to clean up derelict land use sites and advocate for change. The project, called CityScan, began in Hartford, Connecticut, and was later extended to half a dozen other cities in the state. It provided ordinary citizens with what was, at the time, state-of-the-art technology, including handheld computers, wireless modems and first generation digital cameras. Citizens were also trained in how to collect data to assess the performance of government agencies and hold them accountable. This “social auditing” effort was part of a broader initiative by the Council to introduce citizen-based performance assessment (CBPA) in local neighborhoods and eventually statewide, making CityScan one of the earliest examples of technology-enabled social auditing anywhere in the world.

What are the outcomes?

Projeto Controladoria na Escola - In one school alone, the students identified

115 issues and within just 3 months, 45% of the issues were fixed either by the department of education or, where possible, by the students and school management themselves. More recently, 4,000 students from 104 public schools participated in the campaign and helped evaluate the state of classrooms, availability of Wi-Fi and computer labs, toilet paper in bathrooms and other issues by collecting evidence in response to a questionnaire administered through Promise Tracker. Now the project is expanding to 200 schools.

TransGov - Today, TransGov has 600,000 registered users who provide feedback through the TransGov website, mobile app, by SMS or by phone. By posting complaints received on TransGov to social media sites, the time taken to resolve complaints reduced by nearly 60% since public officials were subjected to the heightened scrutiny. On average it takes 3 days to fix a pothole and 48 hours to fix a burst pipe reported via TransGov compared with nearly a week to fix a pothole and more than 3 days to fix a pipe before TransGov's social auditing process.

CPEC - In Hartford, CityScan played an important role in enabling other organizations to improve their own work. The most prominent example of such an organization was "Hartford Proud & Beautiful," a private-public partnership which worked towards clearing graffiti from public sites. They used data about graffiti in public spaces in 90 sites in Hartford collected by CityScan volunteers to clean the graffiti. Following the success of the two pilots in Parkville, CityScan expanded to eighteen more neighborhoods in Hartford and eventually, to seven more cities in Connecticut.

What are the benefits?

- Whether in the US, Ghana or Brazil, using a distributed community network made it possible for government and civil society to get a clearer picture of on-the-ground conditions.
- Using digital cameras, smartphones and other tools, they often created an actual picture or even video of conditions that could be used to hold institutions to account.
- Cooperation between the network of volunteers and government institutions is crucial for impact. CPEC got local governments to commit to the clean-up of derelict land-use sites and volunteers, using hand-held devices, were able to take the pictures needed to

hold them to account.

What are the risks?

- Social auditing needs to be tied to measurable outcomes, such as increasing the number of problems fixed in schools or derelict land use sites to be cleaned up. Without clear outcomes, the project will fail.
 - The “crowd” volunteering to participate in social auditing needs to understand clearly what is being asked of it.
 - Without an institutional actor ready to respond, the efforts of the social auditing community will not lead to outcomes.
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For more information, please contact: crowdlaw@thegovlab.org