Introduction

Strengthening the ability of citizens to hold governments accountable is a tall order. Citizens typically have few avenues to communicate directly and effectively with authorities. Government authorities and citizens respond to different incentives and operate on different timelines, and even basic information is often difficult to obtain and understand. When information is available, citizens may not know how to use it as the basis for effective engagement with public sector decision makers.

What Are The Facts?

- Access to education has significantly increased – more children than ever are going to school
- Despite increased access to school, many children are not learning at the expected level
- To improve children’s learning, ‘inputs’ (like learning materials and better equipped learning environments) need to be accompanied by structural changes (like pedagogy, quality of teaching, financing, school management and better learning environments, etc)
- Any changes to the underlying structural environment of education must be accompanied by effective systems of accountability.

What Do We Already Know?

- Information is thought to be a key building block in empowering parents and communities to make better and more informed decisions about their children’s learning, and to put pressure on school administrators and public officials to make changes to improve both learning, and learning environments.
- There is a complicated and nuanced relationship between information and accountability
- Even under the best of circumstances, information alone is rarely sufficient to activate collective action or impel response from service providers
- Certain ‘enabling conditions’ are required to facilitate the meaningful engagement of citizens including: their interest in, and capacity to access, understand and act on information that is available and easy to understand
- Information must be targeted in a way that users perceive as both useful and actionable
- PAL Network operates at the intersection of both the social accountability movements (information-based initiatives that empower citizen voice to hold decision-makers accountable from the bottom up) and open data movements (calling on more and better publicly-available data to make better informed policy decisions).
Questions To Discuss During Group Session

What Are Network Members Already Doing?

• How do network members understand the link between citizen-led assessments and equipping parents and communities with pathways or tools to use this information to achieve better and more responsive service delivery?
• How do network members identify target groups and communicate the findings from citizen-led assessments in a way that is useful and actionable for different audiences?
• What are network members current monitoring mechanisms to determine how effective these communication channels are and what the connections are between accessing information and taking action to improve learning?

What Is The Role Of The PAL Network?

• What is the role of PAL Network and PAL Network member countries in collecting, translating and communicating findings from citizen-led assessments to strengthen citizens’ participation in improving accountability?
• Is there something we can do at a network-level to learn more / share more about the links between providing information on learning levels to citizens and holding decision-makers accountable?

What Might The Future Look Like?

• What more can we do to better understand and document the different pathways to taking actions towards achieving greater accountability in education, with a strong focus on improving learning outcomes?
• How can we learn from lessons from other social accountability interventions to improve our impact?
• Are there potential new partnerships or opportunities that we have not yet explored at the intersection of the social accountability and open data space?