Bottom-up collective action: Citizens against corruption

The starting point

“The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you” (Arnstein 1969, 216)
Working with the grain

- The key is to tailor the collective action scheme to fit the local norms, values, and experiences of citizens.
It is (partly) a question of trust.

- Trust in institutions (or lack thereof.....)
- Trust in other members of the community (or lack thereof.....)

- Importance of third parties in overcoming the challenges of collective action

- Importance of education/ information

- AND..... Importance of engaging with state actors and institutions
Trust in institutions

Tanzania
Mexico
Philippines
Serbia

National government
Local government
Religious authorities
Health centers
NGOs
Local associations
Media

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Philippines: The “high trust” success story

- Successful collective action initiative
- Sector: agriculture
- Collective action strategy: Organization of citizens to monitor delivery of agricultural subsidies

- High trust in government authorities and state officials
- High levels of social trust
- Information and education campaigns organized by NGO
Tanzania: social capital at work

• Promising collective action initiative
• Sector: health
• Collective action strategy: training of citizen monitors on patients’ rights and entitlements.

• Low trust in government authorities and state officials
• High trust in local associations, NGOS and media
• Notable results at the grassroots level with NGOs and media playing enabling role
• Challenges: developing sustainable institutional links to the state
Mexico: active communities, unresponsive state

- (Relatively) successful collective action initiative
- Sector: health/cross-cutting
- Collective action strategy: community assembly calls local service providers into account denouncing corrupt doctors

- Low trust in government authorities and state officials
- High trust in “own” institutions: community assembly, church
- Challenges: Mexican state lacks formal institutional mechanisms to respond to this type of collective action
Serbia: low trust and extreme individualism

- Initiative just launched, results to be seen.....
- Sector: health
- Collective action strategy: SMS service for denouncing corrupt acts advertised at health centres

- Low trust across all institutions probed
- High individualistic behavior permeated by suspicion of others
- Low participation in local associations of any form
- Support from Ministry of Health remains to translate into concrete actions
Points for discussion

Impact: empowerment of citizens and increased responsiveness of local government and providers of public services.

Uniqueness: tailoring the collective action mechanism to the values and customs of the target populations.

Sustainability: very high, precisely because each collective action model needs to fit well with prevailing attitudes and practices of citizens.

Efficiency: This is a potential game changer to eradicate corruption in the most difficult to reach areas where monitoring of public service provision by central governments is extremely difficult and costly.
References and acknowledgements

References:

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