



# Global mapping of technology for transparency and accountability

*New technologies*

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# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1. Methodology and scope</b>	<b>9</b>
Selection criteria	10
Taxonomy	10
<b>2. Technology for transparency and accountability: An Overview</b>	<b>11</b>
Actors targeted by transparency and accountability efforts	12
Functions targeted by transparency and accountability efforts	15
<b>3. Conclusions and research recommendations</b>	<b>17</b>
A framework for considering the potential for technology for transparency and accountability Initiatives	18
Cross-project findings and trends	19
Findings and trends 1.	19
Findings and trends 2.	20
Findings and trends 3.	21
Findings and trends 4.	22
Findings and trends 5.	23
<b>Annexes</b>	<b>24</b>
Annex I. Case studies	25
Annex II: Commonly used tools	33
Annex III: Team members	37
<b>About the authors</b>	<b>39</b>

## Executive summary

This report contains the key findings from having reviewed more than 100 projects and having interviewed dozens of practitioners in Central and Eastern Europe, East Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, the former Soviet Union, and Sub-Saharan Africa who use new technologies as a means to increase transparency and accountability. This summary helps to 'take the pulse' of the Technology for Transparency and Accountability movement and suggests both exciting possibilities for scaling impact as well as important caveats and challenges.

For practitioners in the transparency and accountability space, it is useful to frame the potential for leveraging technology towards transparency and accountability initiatives in at least four ways:

- Bringing projects and interventions to scale.
- Bringing citizens closer to the policymaking process through new and improved channels of participation as well as citizen monitoring of government.
- Identifying policy priorities and service delivery challenges through 'data mashing' and other visualisation and data manipulation techniques of both government and private datasets.
- Improving the efficiency of civil society organisations working in the transparency and accountability space through adoption of best practice technology platforms.

## Key findings

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1. Online and mobile technology tools are beginning to change the transparency and accountability field despite the lack of a dedicated source of technical or financial support.

Many efforts are just starting, and some are better designed than others, but selected initial efforts appear to be moving ahead of traditional transparency and accountability organisations and their models, most of which continue to think that using 'tech' tools refers to tweeting and having a website. These traditional organisations often fail to take advantage of powerful online and mobile tools that could magnify their impact.

2. A key element of successful technology for transparency and accountability efforts is their speed, both in execution and in stimulating change.

Well-designed efforts are capable of producing relevant information that can be used to exercise or demand accountability quickly, whether by the creators and managers of the project, by third-party change agents or organisations, or by more collective public stakeholders. This is typically achieved by: 1) collecting and presenting new (or previously hidden) information that can be used to support the exercise of accountability; and/or 2) republishing or repackaging existing information in a way that makes it more usable.

3. Technology for transparency and accountability projects have a better chance of effectively producing change when they take a collaborative approach, sometimes involving government and/or service providers.

Projects that establish some sort of feedback mechanism between information generators – whether the public (e.g., crowd-sourcing) or information-generating organisations (e.g., NGOs) – and those whose performance they seek to influence (government, service providers) tend to show more results. Although this study did not aim to analyse these projects' ultimate impact, it is clear that projects whose strategies include the participation of different stakeholders are producing above average results.

4. Despite early successes, many efforts still lack credibility and could create distortions.

Some projects have been launched without sufficient knowledge or expertise to design an effective methodology or conceive of and execute a feasible strategy. Terms and labels such as 'demanding accountability' or 'exposing corruption' tend to be very loosely thrown about. Combined with a significant amount of unverified data in some projects, particularly crowdsourced efforts, these conditions have the dangerous potential to diminish technology for transparency and accountability as an approach without greater rigor. The projects listed in this study were chosen because they were considered to have a reasonable chance of success; however, some of these cases could benefit from methodological improvements.

### 5. Technology for transparency and accountability tools do not have to be sophisticated, but they need to be designed intelligently and with an eye towards local context.

While many of the projects we studied have attempted to match their tools to their target populations, for example by making data available via SMS as well as online, some still struggle to find the best tools for the contexts in which they operate. Launching a web-based effort in a locality that lacks reliable high-speed internet is one example of an effort that would lack a context-focused approach.

### 6. Overall, current technology for transparency and accountability efforts can often be classified as 'pull' or 'push' efforts. In some cases, they are both at the same time or could be perceived to outgrow the basic assumptions of this categorisation.

Push efforts aim to use technology to amplify the voices of 'the public' (in practice, usually a small set of the general public, for example voters or particular neighborhoods and communities) in ways that would not be achievable were those voices to individually share their concerns and preferences about the way in which government operates. Pull projects operate in the opposite direction. The theory of change driving pull projects is that 'the public' would demand better performance from government and service providers if only they understood the true extent and details of the governance deficits facing them. To raise that awareness on the part of the public, technology solutions in pull projects aim to provide an accessible information pool from which the public can pull relevant information to better inform their demand for improved governance and service delivery. Some of the projects profiled here are outgrowing that basic dichotomy in their desire to directly execute that which they advocate to solve, as is the case with efforts to collect and organise data that governments themselves need to better fulfil their mandates.

## 7. Trends

The majority of projects focus on the executive or legislative branches of government. A smaller number of projects focus on the judicial branch, the media, the private sector, and donors.

Nearly half of the projects studied focus on monitoring elections. While many of these use the free platform Ushahidi, some have developed their own approaches, including aggregating election news from multiple sources on a single site and tracking official election monitors' reports on Google Maps.

Projects in multiple regions focus on transparency in the legislature, often tracking legislative bills and posting profiles for each representative that include biographies and voting records. Some also include profiles of political parties or records of legislative spending.

Projects that collect citizen complaints and deliver them to the relevant authorities or private companies are also popular. Some of these partner with traditional media

organisations to put additional pressure on authorities and businesses to respond to these complaints.

Data visualisation and navigation tools are a key feature in more than half of the projects we documented, as are diverse forms of data collection from citizens. Approximately one third of the projects use mobile phones in some way, most commonly by allowing citizens to submit or receive information via text message.

Many of the projects are founded by technology-savvy activists who have experience blogging, developing web applications, and/or using social media extensively. Others have sprung out of established organisations working in the transparency field or from the efforts and experience of investigative journalists.