

**The Dynamics of Access: Implications of  
'Voice', 'Exit' and Accountability in the  
Provision of Public Goods**

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## Summary

Based on the *Aawaz*<sup>1</sup> programme study on service delivery, the paper explores the problems of access to welfare services in public sector institutions. In democratic-pluralistic societies, the state provides welfare services to its citizens through well-performing bureaucracies on the basis of equity and equality. This description cannot be applied in the context of Pakistan. Managerial inadequacies, resource constraints, various forms of corruption, weak accountability, and the inability of the state to respond to citizens' needs are critical problems in the provision of welfare services. With the help of a theoretical framework, the paper examines access structures and situations in relation to the conceptual categories of 'voice', 'exit' and accountability. Our intention is to assist policy makers, scholars and donors to understand the range of responses that may be adopted by citizens in access situations.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Aawaz* is a five-year voice and accountability initiative of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in Pakistan. The broad themes of the programme are: to achieve greater participation of women in politics, to resolve local disputes through non-conventional means, and to improve service delivery in collaboration with service users.

## Introduction

Public services are provided to citizens by the state, by which we here mean its institutions<sup>2</sup> and the corresponding bureaucracy (Besley and Ghatak, 2007). In advanced societies, citizens generally feel that welfare services such as education or health are provided without privilege and discrimination. In the delivery of public and collective services, public-sector organisations in developed countries are typically characterised by responsiveness to the issues and concerns of citizens. Such issues are debated and often addressed by taking prompt remedial measures. Interaction with community members and feedback mechanisms such as surveys and informal meetings are some of the strategies adopted to address public grievances. Moreover, citizens' active participation in the policy process builds up a symbiotic relationship rooted in complementary behaviour and reduces principal-agent problems.

This analysis cannot be assumed to hold in the context of Pakistan, however. Here, public service provision is characterised by budgetary constraints, skewed spending priorities, bureaucratic<sup>3</sup> indifference, ineffective accountability procedures, and corrupt practices; and rights and entitlements to even the most basic services are often not guaranteed. According to a World Bank report (2001) on Pakistan's social sector, the lack of capability of officials is undermining the delivery of public goods, an inefficient and indeed virtually non-existent public complaints system is leading to widespread frustration, and the construction of physical infrastructure such as roads and bridges is being given higher priority than human development. Moreover, successive military and civilian regimes have failed to increase social-sector spending. A cursory glance at the social sector statistics tells us that almost 50% of the population in the country has opted for private schools (World Bank Report 2012), while almost the same proportion prefers to rely on private health care and doctors instead of state services (*Aawaz Survey*, 2012). Furthermore, in excess of 85% of the population is not dependent on the state for the provision of clean drinking water and sanitation (*ibid.*) It is precisely for these reasons that Pakistan is so far from achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on social services, including health and education. This failure of service delivery directly contributes to the perpetuation of poverty, inequality and bad governance.

In view of the aforementioned challenges to improving the state of governance in Pakistan, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) initiated the *Aawaz Voice and Accountability (V&A) Programme*. The programme envisages that through understanding the notions of voice and accountability, the state would be better able to react and respond to the demands of citizens. With respect to service delivery, the *Aawaz* document makes particular reference to the patronage-based political system. The patronage system is seen as a major obstacle in getting access to social and collective services, especially when these services are primarily delivered by the state bureaucracy. The programme advocates a focus upon a 'compact' which goes beyond state bureaucracy. The 'compact' would enable

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<sup>2</sup> North (1990, p.3) defines *institutions* as "the rules of the game in a society, or more formally ... the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction".

<sup>3</sup> We use the term 'bureaucratic' as a particular type of institutional functioning that is not in line with official norms governing the practices of state officials, and it is not intended in any sense as a synonym for 'bureaucracy'.

excluded groups, including young people and women, to be able to enforce demands on the state for improved service delivery. There is a well-established and exhaustive literature on Pakistan's institutional performance, indicating problems of governance and their impact on service provision. The profusion of knowledge on Pakistan's public sector institutional performance adopts customary approaches, which are more formalistic and less exploratory. First, the existing approaches engage with normative discourse and generalised forms of explanations of dysfunctional public sector performance that are associated with the doctrine of good governance. Second, the existing literature archetypically evaluates, judges and examines public sector institutional performance with reference to the doctrine of good governance, and cites patron-client relations, culture of impunity and lack of accountability as key explanations of ineffective public sector performance. While the delivery of social services is an important function of the state, the existing corpus of literature has paid in-adequate attention to the experiences and responses of citizens concerning service provision in the everyday state. Moreover, the existing literature hardly explores concepts such as accountability and patron-client relationships from a non-normative perspective.

With reference to the responses of welfare-service users, this paper sets out an analytical framework aimed at facilitating discussion of the dynamics of access. Within this framework, the notions of 'voice', 'exit' and accountability are considered as central categories for the state and donors in improving the delivery of public and collective services.

## The study design

A baseline study, involving users of public and collective services in Pakistan, was conducted in 2012. Carried out in the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) provinces, this study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to address two sets of questions. The first set of questions solicited the opinion of service users on education, health, and water and sanitation. For this purpose, a primary survey of 4,500 households was conducted in the districts, including Dera Ismail (DI) Khan, Jhang, Lodhran, Pakpattan, Lower Dir and Sialkot.<sup>4</sup> The second set of questions documented the responses and perceptions of service users concerning difficulties in accessing welfare services. The responses were gathered in order to learn more about the context of responses in relation to organisational impediments. The objective of the study was to understand the implicit factors impacting service delivery. The data-collection process was implemented across a diverse audience, which participated in the research. These included women, men, young people, civil society organisations, imams (clerics), local influential people and state officials. In selected districts, twenty-six focus group discussions were held with local community, civil society, and state officials. The focus group led to a lively discussion on topics such as the availability of education and health services, the ability of service users to hold government officials to account, and access to public and collective services. The interactive process added depth to data collected through key informant interviews. Simultaneously, forty-six key informant interviews, using a semi-structured questionnaire, were held with government officials, schoolteachers, local politicians, civil society representatives, and Imams. The interviews were held to gain a

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<sup>4</sup> The survey questionnaire, developed by SDPI, was originally conceived in English and translated into Urdu afterwards.

deeper understanding of social actors' perceptions and interpretations of their everyday experiences of service delivery. All key informant interviews and focus group discussions were tape-recorded and transcribed. Data analysis was guided by content analysis, a qualitative technique used to determine the presence of certain concepts in texts (Berg, 2001). The text was read line by line to determine recurring themes, checking them against the data collected from key informant interviews. The qualitative data revealed the centrality of the conceptual category Access and the accompanying constraining and enabling factors in securing access to public services.

## Theoretical perspectives on Access

This section sets up an analytical framework for analysing the research data, and engages with theoretical debates on the theory of access. During the 1970s, Bernard Schaffer and other authors developed a theory of access which they employed in order to study how beneficiaries gain access to services in administrative systems. 'Access' refers to the ways in which state policy and programmes define who gets what and in what ways. In developing countries, access to and distribution of state resources is problematic in ways that are intertwined with the specific nature of the difficulties people face when interacting with bureaucratic institutions (Schaffer and Wen-hsien, 1975). People with disposable income who seek to acquire things in a more or less perfect market can exit the relationship with the state at any time. So for them, there is no problem of access. Even rights and entitlement claims can be forgone in virtue of disposal income. But, we know that markets in developing countries are imperfect and, in addition to disposable income, rights and claims have to be established (*ibid.*). This means that an organisation has to ensure the eligibility of a person acquiring a service.<sup>5</sup> For beneficiaries, minimising organisational demands for establishing claims and getting the desired goods are important considerations. According to Schaffer and Wen-hsien, the nature of a distribution system is shaped by two principal considerations: First, that disposable income also requires the ability to establish connections with an organisation, where such connections can be secured either through influence, knowledge or status. The second relates to the experience of that distribution system. The problem of access is more severe in developing countries because of poorly managed administrative allocations of services. Uneven distribution of resources and less systematic organisational connections feature prominently in bureaucratic institutions (*ibid.*). In considering access problems in a bureaucratic system, Schaffer and Wen-hsien propose, we need to consider two types of scenarios. The first scenario relates to a situation in which an applicant cannot afford to leave or opt out in favour of an alternative choice. The second scenario relates to a situation in which an applicant can rely on an alternative choice.

In the first situation, the applicant is dependent on a single organisation, which provides the service. Since the applicant cannot switch to another organisation, the applicant attempts to exert influence to register a complaint or improve the existing service (*ibid.*, p.16). This means that through the use of 'voice'<sup>6</sup> the applicant has acted politically, and in this process

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<sup>5</sup> These observations were made with reference to potential beneficiaries seeking access to goods and services.

<sup>6</sup> Albert O. Hirschman originally developed the theory of 'voice', 'exit' and 'loyalty'. 'Voice' is a mechanism through which disgruntled citizens register their complaints by changing the "practices, policies and outputs"

attention is drawn to an objectionable state of affairs. On the other hand, there are also unhappy citizens, who are not interested in participating in the system. The authors further argue that there are certain active applicants who use different strategies to pursue remedial actions. These include appeal to higher authorities to express dissatisfaction. This line of action is different from political action. Political action entails people acting in ways such as through alliances with other people or political parties. However, political action in such distribution systems may be weakly organised, and therefore administrative feedback may be considered a better corrective channel (ibid., p.17). In a nutshell, an applicant's strategy is determined by their relationship with the distributive system.

Let us now examine the effects of access. A distribution system can reinforce inequalities in a society, or it can improve access. Depending upon the social strategies adopted by citizens, access manifests discontinuities and there may be complex relationships between the institution, the applicants, and the rank and file. Negotiating access gives rise to politics, and the experiences of access and the distributive system can inform us of the nature of that politics. For instance, the language used by applicants to convey their dissatisfaction can imply seeking remedy through 'voice', which in some cases reinforces their dependency on the access institution in question.

Schaffer and Lamb (1974) also analyse the problem of access in a bureaucratic organisation by exploring concepts of voice and exit. When programmes and policies are translated into budgetary allocations intended for providing services to those who need them, an access problem is encountered. They cite the case of housing policy in Guyana, where eligibility conditions were set for applicants seeking access to low-cost housing and other benefits. In the case of rental apartments, the authors note, a politicised situation developed that involved certain citizens getting preferential treatment and others being treated in ways that were contrary to the official rules. This situation shows that in a non-perfect market the allocation of a public good invites 'voice' from those who attempt to identify imperfections in access structures. Hence, when public and collective services are provided by bureaucratic structures, this inevitably invites use of the 'voice' strategy, which means politics<sup>7</sup>. Schaffer and Lamb (1974, p.77) identify three problems in analysing the concepts of 'voice' and 'exit'. An 'exit' is an ongoing phenomena, while 'voice' is constantly deployed for inducing change in access structures and processes of service provision. Concerning 'exit', such access situations involve two different phenomena. The first relates to cases in which there is no exit (such as state monopolies, a single office, a total institution), and when there is a binary choice between state and the market or between a centralised or decentralised system (ibid., p.77). In considering cases in which there is no choice, there are very few studies, which analyse actual access experiences. People experience myriad

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and other services of an organisation (1970, p.30). When people are dissatisfied with a particular product or a service, they 'exit' from that firm to acquire it elsewhere (Hirschman, 1970, p.15). People generally remain loyal to an organisation simply because an 'exit' option is risky and perhaps irrevocable, and the 'voice' option as a mechanism of inventing new ways for taking corrective measures is too costly.

<sup>7</sup> Politics is defined as "the process by which values-things or relationships that people would like to enjoy are allocated to the society in an authoritative manner". If interests and expectations of the public are not met, people resort to "negotiation, argument, discussion, and persuasion etc by which an issues is agitated and settled" (Fisher 1980: 71).



problems such as exclusion from a service, accepting a degraded product and taking the chance of coping with an existing state of affairs. As Schaffer and Lamb argue, these are real-time experiences, which influence the nature of 'voice' expressed in terms of politics. The second phenomenon refers to the relationship between 'exit' and 'voice' in terms of choosing between market and state. As argued by Schaffer and Lamb, there are people who prefer the market; however, there are others who are forced into a degraded market because they are either unable to get access, or face difficulties in doing so. In access situations, there can be different types of voice, and it is through voice that institutional relationships are established.

Ribot and Peluso (2003, p.153) define access as the "ability to derive benefits from things."<sup>8</sup> Going beyond property relations, these authors explore the dynamic processes and "a wide range of social relationships" which either enable or constrain people in seeking to benefit from resources. In theorising access, Ribot and Peluso argue that access to a particular benefit by individuals or groups can be examined through the mechanisms<sup>9</sup> by which "access is gained, maintained and controlled" in a particular political and cultural milieu (2003, p.160). In developing a framework<sup>10</sup> for analysing access, the 'ability' element calls for an examination of several "structural and relational mechanisms" of access. In the following passages, the concept of accountability is explored.

The concept of accountability is defined in different contexts and has different connotations. From the perspective of human rights (Brown et al. 2008, p.3; Forest 2007, p.1; O'Neil et al. 2007, p.4), accountability is about the "relation between a bearer of a right or a legitimate claim and the agents or agencies responsible for fulfilling or respecting that right". Another way of describing accountability is to cite an accouter and accountee in terms of an accouter (as agent) demanding explanations and enforcing sanctions (O'Neil 2007). However, Mulgan (2000, p.555) notes that the meaning of accountability is ever-expanding, and that it is being extended beyond the core meaning of being called to account for one's actions. Viewing this differently, Day and Klein (1987) situate accountability in a face-to-face relationship between two parties. One, termed the 'agent', has been entrusted with responsibilities and is obligated to be held accountable for their actions. The other, termed the 'principal', is entrusting that responsibility, and their interests and benefits have to be protected by the agent (cited in Leung 2008). In the process of "account giving and receiving", accountability involves interactions between principals and agents. In the actual process, there is an underlying power relationship between the 'account giver' and the 'account receiver'. The embedded power relationship bears upon the ability of the principal to hold the agent to account for unsatisfactory justifications of decisions and for their failure to provide the promised goods and services. According to Barnes and Wistow, and Bowel (all cited in Leung 2008), this power

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<sup>8</sup> These natural resources are farm profit (from a particular crop), material objects (house, job etc.), and institutions.

<sup>9</sup> Ribot and Peluso identify different kinds of mechanisms which include 'rights based', 'illegal' and 'structural and relational'.

<sup>10</sup> The framework takes into account 1) mapping the process of a particular benefit; 2) through what mechanism different social actors "gain, control, and maintain the benefit flow and its distribution"; and 3) analysing the power relations underlying the mechanisms of access involved in instances where benefits are derived" (Ribot and Peluso 2003, p.160).

relationship is problematic in the context of social and collective services provided by bureaucratic organisations. In a political system of entrenched political patronage, citizens exchange votes for particular benefits, which hinder the realisation of formal accountability. For instance, formal accountability can be undermined as a consequence of extending benefits through patron–client relationships and extra-legal practices.

In order to explore the concepts of ‘voice’ and ‘exit’, this paper adopts Harry Blair’s (2010, p.3) framework, which describes different routes to accountability – a ‘long’ route and a ‘short’ route – in the delivery of public services to people. The routes to accountability<sup>11</sup> are as follows:

*I. Long route to accountability*

The long route to accountability pertains to how citizens develop linkages with political leaders in order to secure benefits and access to public and collective services across wider constituencies. In the long route, citizens acting as principals initiate their needs through elections of political leaders who, acting as agents, promise certain benefits mostly through public policies. Public policies are then implemented through ‘compacts’ with the bureaucracy.<sup>12</sup> This is the case in advanced countries where political leaders are elected and, if they fail to deliver, the citizens hold them accountable by voting them out of office (Blair 2010, p.3). Another dimension of the long route to accountability, according to Blair, is the lack of access to essential information on policy and the mechanism of utilisation of state resources.

*II. Short route to accountability*

The short route, which Blair also terms the ‘direct route’ to accountability, refers to cases in which citizens’ circumvent the long route by directly dealing with service providers. Blair (2010, p.4) further suggests that there are two short routes, characterised as ‘choice’ and ‘voice’. The ‘choice’ route is associated with the use of ‘client power’, which refers to citizens’ capacity to hold service providers directly accountable for their performance. The ‘voice’ route serves as a platform through which citizens become directly involved in state decision-making.

The study of Khan (2009) carried out in Pakistan looks at the gaps between policy and implementation within the context of long route to accountability. The study reveals bureaucratic capture of policy makers through patronage linkages and clientelistic relationships. The service providers capture political elites (through patronage linkages), which results in reversing roles by turning themselves into principals and the citizens into agents. The problem with the long route is that state structures are captured by state officials through politically-motivated exchange relationships such as securing allegiance to a party in power. As a consequence, political leaders become captives of service providers. The state bureaucracy takes advantage of the long route and provides bureaucrats with opportunities to exploit patronage-based relationship. In the long route, citizens often lack

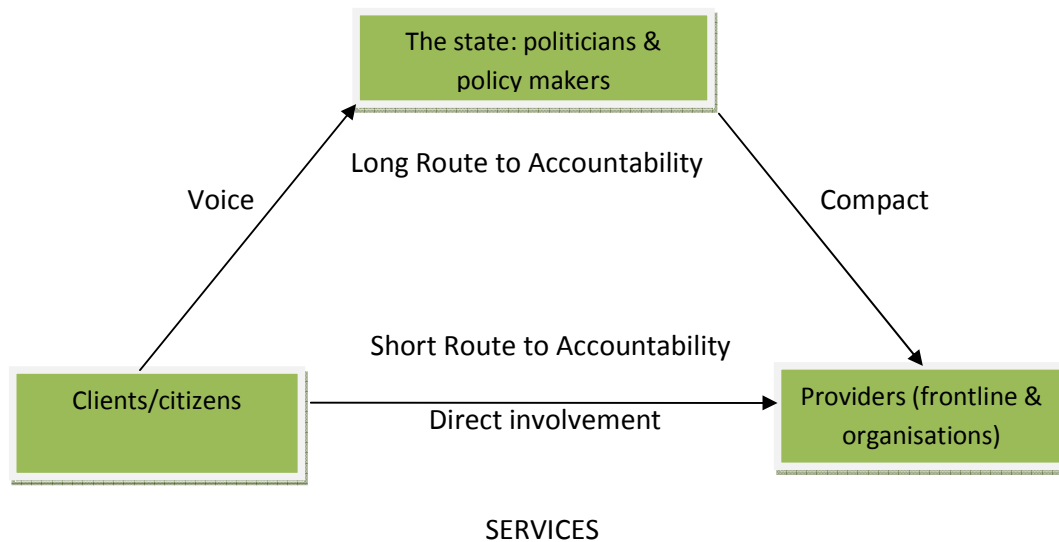
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<sup>11</sup> We are aware that routes to accountability are an abstract construction and not a reality. But for our purposes they provide a useful framework for analysing the responses of citizens relating to access, ‘voice’ and ‘exit’.

<sup>12</sup> A compact is defined by the World Bank as a “long-term relationship of accountability connecting policy makers to organisational providers” (World Bank Report 2004, p.48).

access to information about services being offered and there is a natural dependency on technical-bureaucratic knowledge of state officials. Therefore, citizens are not in a position to judge the quality and effectiveness of service provision. Concerning short-route to accountability, it is a quicker route to exacting real accountability from state providers. However, the short-route is less familiar route and requires more attention.

***The long and short routes to accountability for service delivery***



Adapted from: World Development Report, 2004, p.49

**Findings and discussion**

*a) The implications of 'exit' and 'voice' in accessing social services*

The responses gathered from diverse audiences on accessing public and collective services show the deployment of both 'voice' and 'exit' strategies in administrative and social contexts. Citizens employed 'voice' to convey their dissatisfaction by identifying reasons for their discontentment. Concerning access situations, a number of responses drew our attention to the need to analyse how people react when state institutions are unable to meet their expectations. Consider the following responses of both males and females on the state of education in a rural union council *Musa Zai Sharif*:

“There are some boys’ schools, but no girls’ school. Wealthy families send their children to schools in the city. The poor have no option in the area. In the boys school, there are problems of teacher absenteeism. The teacher is not serious; he just goes around having meals at other people’s homes, not teaching”.

Likewise, a male participant pointed out the inherent problems associated with teacher's absenteeism and avoidance of responsibility:

"I once went to an education officer and informed him that in our local school, there were only two [female] schoolteachers and they never came to the school. I requested that they either be fired or transferred... The education officer told me that I am "powerless". I know that both teachers do not go to the school. I cannot even block their salary without the permission from the local MPA. If you wish to complain, go complain to him. You would not believe it, but I have seen our MPA once in the last five years, and that was from afar".

On a different occasion, female participants narrated problems in the delivery of health services:

"There are government hospitals, but the service is really poor. The doctors are unprofessional and do not speak properly to the patients. On top of this, the medical staff (nurses, orderlies etc.) are also very unprofessional and do not care for patients. Finally, medicines are never available in the hospitals. While, in the evening, the same doctors treat the same patients to whom they ignore at the government hospitals during the daytime. These people are all corrupt from top to bottom".

It is evident in the first females' response that they are encountering an access problem pertaining to girls' schools. The access problem informs us that rich people, who have disposable income, can afford to send their children to schools situated in the city. In the case of the poor, through the deployment of 'voice', the access situation informs us that the poor are entrapped in their own peculiar situation, which reveals their dissatisfaction with the provision of public schooling. In the absence of a viable 'exit' option or any room to manoeuvre, 'loyalty' is shown in the form of raising 'voice', which counters the 'exit' option. For the poor, an 'exit' option becomes less attractive because it would depend upon the cost and quality of an alternative service. In fact, it depends on evaluating conditions, which could provide the poor with an opportunity to choose between 'voice' and 'exit' options. The access problem presents a case where state policy has failed to cater for girls' education. Moreover, it also contributes to the reinforcement of inequalities between the rich and the poor. With no 'exit' option, the access problem also pertains to the inability of the poor to adopt administrative and political strategies as corrective measures in addressing their concerns. According to Schaffer and Wenhien (1974), people faced with no alternative require not just disposable income, but also political influence and status.

*b) The reaction of female participants to the informal behaviour of the teacher*

The schoolteacher's informal behaviour can be attributed to lack of accountability on one hand, and the inability of local citizens to monitor the performance of the teacher on the other. With respect to the short route to accountability, citizens are unable to hold officials to account for at least two reasons. The first relates to the

ineffectiveness of 'client power'. 'Client power', especially in the case of the poor, is undermined because of their lack of the information needed to monitor the performance of officials. Moreover, there is little or no interaction of principals with agents. Given the low engagement of citizens with bureaucrats and political leaders, there is an imperfect relationship between principals and agents (Batley and Larby, 2004; Fukuyama, 2004). The second reason relates to the weakness or absence of lines of accountability within the hierarchical administrative structures. The use of 'voice' is also fraught with problems. If the wealthy citizens encounter responsibility-avoidance and informal behaviour in schools, they can opt for an alternative, thereby exercising an 'exit' option. However, in the absence of an 'exit' option, 'voice' is chosen as a continuous mode of expression of dissatisfaction, but this produces limited or no immediate success. The deployment of 'voice' can only be effective when citizen's complaints are dealt with via administrative actions or sanctions. On the other hand, parents might be unwilling to register a complaint with higher authorities because of a fear that the teacher might react by stopping coming to school at all. In such a case the formal complaint would have had adverse consequences for the citizens.

The case of the female participants' comments on health facilities reveals a discrepancy between the formal tasks (i.e. of working according to official norms)<sup>13</sup> and the actual undertaking of tasks. Through the mechanism of 'voice', the disgruntled citizens have raised concerns, which point to moonlighting and corrupt practices. We understand, of course, that we cannot ascertain whether these accusations are real or defamatory; however, the personal experiences of citizens highlight areas of suspicion as to the administrative service, which undermines the sense of expectation and trust that is required for the satisfactory delivery of health services.

c) *The education officers' inability to sanction and the meaning of "powerlessness"*

In reality, the examination of 'voice' and accountability requires an understanding of the context, and the social and political culture. In the context of Pakistan, state institutions are politicised, people's behaviour is deeply rooted in the society's norms, and there is a heavy reliance on political personalities for personal favours (Wood 1999). The education officer's inability to sanction the absent teachers shows that state institutions in Pakistan have been captured by political elites. Within state institutions, officials are situated in a web of patron-client relations through which both patrons and clients accrue certain benefits and preferential treatments. In this case, the clients are the schoolteachers, who are not reporting for duty. Moreover, despite the existence of formal accountability laws in the country, they are captured

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<sup>13</sup> Official or professional norms are the official rules, regulations, codes, procedures, official decision-making processes, organisation charts and bureaucratic rationality in Weberian terms. These rules/regulations and institutional procedures are formalized by the state and used to determine state officials' performance, job descriptions and how organizational structures are developed. Performance, monitoring, training and evaluation of officials are guided by these norms. These norms set "rights, duties and responsibilities" of state employees (Oliver de Sardan 2008).

or circumscribed by political elites. This means that sanctioning and accountability is deeply affected by prevailing clientelistic relationships.

When the official was asked by the citizen to take action against absent teachers, the officer felt “powerless” because he was unable to bypass the political capture of administration. What this means is that the exercise of formal accountability depends upon the political structure and exchange relationship between political leaders and citizens. Differentiating between programmatic exchange relationships<sup>14</sup> and clientelistic linkage relationships, clientelistic exchanges are contingent upon a direct exchange relationship between the politician and specific members in a community. The distinctiveness of clientelistic exchanges is that the politicians identify target beneficiaries to secure mutually agreed services and ensure the provision of these services in return for their votes. In a direct exchange clientelistic system, the politicians (principals) provide benefits based on their perception and the crafting of a policy from which their own voters (citizens) would benefit (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, p.10). Policies are devised in a sense which benefits a particular group rather than others. These services may be economic, jobs, preferential treatments or “discretionary access to highly subsidised good...” (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, p.11). The authors further argue that democratic accountability in these countries is not contingent upon the politicians’ success in providing material benefits, since clientelistic accountability diffuses formal accountability and impartiality when voters are incorporated into the state structures. However, can we assert that the disgruntled citizen has a better chance of success by exercising ‘voice’ using the long route to accountability? In the case of primary education, there is a long route to accountability, one of elected leaders and state officials. The state bureaucracy takes advantage of the long route and provides bureaucrats with opportunities to develop different kinds of relationships with political leaders. Bureaucrats operate in a relationship framework based on patronage. So in the case of education, the long route to accountability implies greater policy distance between citizens and political leaders.

*d) Influencing decisions and policy making through the short route to accountability*

The responses of male participants in the district of Lahore suggest that the short route to accountability is more effective in terms of influencing decisions and policy making at the local level. These responses were made in the context of access to water and sanitation services. Pointing out the rapid depletion of groundwater and problems associated with the disposal of waste, two observations made by the participants merit attention. The first one relates to the poor’s inability to hold state officials to account. The second one relates to the local people’s ability to hold state officials to account through local influential figures such as councillors and *Nazims* (Mayors). The short-route mechanism can be an effective route to accountability because the citizens thereby have direct contact with the influential figure, and

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<sup>14</sup> Programmatic exchange relationships do not involve a direct, predictable and binding relationship between patrons and clients. These relationships operate on collective preference based on an ideological framework in countries that have established democratic party-based politics under democratic conditions (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007).

through them they can exert ‘voice’ and demand rights and entitlements. In the case of the water supply, there is a short route to accountability because citizens have direct dealings with a locally-elected person—the *Nazim*. The *Nazim* is known to the people in their community because of his position and personality. Moreover, increased social proximity to public officials enables citizens to raise their concerns over issues of access through ‘voice’. In case they are unable to use ‘client power’, the *Nazim* uses his political authority by mediating between citizens and service providers. The short route to accountability is more direct when citizens attempt to get access to urban services by approaching the *Nazim* and when these services have to be delivered effectively. Local citizens have extensive knowledge of the practices of local officials since they share the same social space, and their interactions with the *Nazim* are rooted in their own local customs and norms. Citizens also know that they can rely on the social position of the *Nazim* in case of dissatisfaction with the performance of officials.

The short route to accountability allows us to understand access. Moreover, a focus on the short route to accountability has a distinct advantage in enabling us to observe how an access situation produces different kinds of power relationships between a political leader and officials with respect to the administrative practices of local citizens in getting access to water.<sup>15</sup> Although the short route to accountability is less familiar, it can be an effective route for citizens’ direct engagement with service providers. In terms of influencing policy and decision-making, the short route to accountability depends upon the support of local politicians and state officials.

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<sup>15</sup> These comments and observations are based on ethnographic research carried out by Khan in Abbottabad district in 2009.

## Conclusion

In the provision of social services, understanding the access situations requires an understanding of the dynamics of access in relation to the concepts 'voice' and 'exit'. People resort to 'voice' to show their concern, provide feedback, and identify discrepancies in the administrative provision of welfare services. Citizens also chose to 'exit' from an existing service where they can afford to acquire services such as education and health elsewhere. However, when an 'exit' option is not chosen, people employ 'voice' continuously since they cannot opt for an alternative service due to lack of capital and opportunities. Thus, disposable income, choosing between market and state, and the lack of resources, are some of the parameters on the basis of which people's preferences are shaped. From the responses of citizens, it is argued that 'voice' and 'exit' are not opposite and unrelated phenomenon. The type of language people use, the context of their responses, and their experiences demonstrate that 'voice' and 'exit' occur simultaneously. Thus, 'voice' is about a service system, political motivations, and the gap between ideology and an outcome. Moreover, it highlights gaps between the conceptions of a policy and the actual experiences of individuals. The 'exit' concerns an individual or a group decision to opt out from an existing service in favour of an alternative service. People 'exit' when the 'voice' option fails to address their concerns and expectations. The continuous reliance on 'voice' as a recourse strategy fails because the service provision is bureaucratic. We can infer from the responses of citizens that in bureaucratic organisations, administrative behaviour is rooted in the deep structures of society. In bureaucratic dealings and encounters with citizens, bureaucrats often use non-official norms, which are at odds with their expected official behaviour. As a result, the actual practices of state officials become inconsistent and indeed incommensurate with their expected official behaviour. This means that in access situations, people encounter inadequacies in service provision, a dysfunctional bureaucratic system, and a lack of concern for public grievances.

With reference to the ability of service users to hold service providers accountable for their actions, the two routes to accountability have advantages and disadvantages. Owing to inadequate client power, the long route does not allow citizens to hold service providers to account, and this is for two particular reasons: firstly, the administrative laws are seldom disclosed to the public; secondly, the superior bureaucratic knowledge of state officials coupled with their weak accountability to the public gives rise to illicit practices. The question of accountability, therefore, depends upon disclosure of information and the active involvement of citizens in development planning. The success of the long route to accountability in Weberian terms also depends on anonymity, rationality and impersonality in public dealings and interactions.<sup>16</sup> In theoretical terms, the short route to accountability presupposes effective 'client power'. This is primarily due to the direct engagement of service users with service providers. In reality, the functional utility of 'client power' is problematic because service providers are not answerable to citizens. The state officials strictly perform functions within hierarchical structures, and their reporting mechanisms do not encourage their accountability by the users of the state. With reference to user committees in India, James Manor (2004, p.195) argues that "low-level bureaucrats feel threatened" when voluntary organisations attempt to impinge on their authority. To restrict

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<sup>16</sup> These Weberian attributes are also a pre-requisite in the case of short route to accountability.



the influence of user committees, the lower officials co-opt these committees to perpetuate their control over development processes. The short route can be effective when citizens exercise accountability through elected leaders such as the *Nazim*. However, the qualitative data collected on accountability does not allow us to explore this proposition.

As regards access structures and situations, three crucial points need to be mentioned. The first is that more research is required on actual access situations at the level of programme planning, with greater emphasis on the institutional processes and understanding different modes of 'voice'. For instance, people with no 'exit' option are forced to rely on an existing service that is available to them. The research can assist in learning from an individual or a particular group experience to analyse the effectiveness of 'voice' in the context of the short route to accountability. As argued in this paper, the intention is to explore the effectiveness of the short route to accountability. The second point pertains to the implementation of the framework proposed by Ribot and Peluso (2003) in the context of political and economic constraints in accessing state services. This means that access to a particular service can be analysed by exploring social conditions, personal relations, knowledge and resources. The third relates to the question of exploring the politics of access in the case of water supply or in the provision of credit to small farmers. The politics of access can be useful for understanding the real intentions behind a policy and its impact on the final or targeted beneficiaries. The politics of access can highlight discontinuities, exclusion from a service, referral and appeal, and the determination of reasons for a badly conceived service. According to Shaffer (1974), the important consideration in access situations is to determine the potential for political redress to access inequalities, as opposed to institutional and administrative means of redress.

In closing, civil society and non-state organisations can play an instrumental role in promoting access and accountability through research and advocacy for influencing policy in some form. The main advantage of non-state entities is their ability to mediate between the state and society. Moreover, civil society organisations goals and services are seldom influenced by political agendas of political leaders and parties.

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