

Learning Alliance on Horizontal Accountability



Report of the Study Tour to Argentina

October 31st to November 7th 2016

CIPPEC 

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INTRODUCTION

All activities in the ELLA Programme emphasise its core objectives to share experiences, learn from each other, and build South-South networks that work together to improve, and, in the case of this theme, foster horizontal accountability between the executive and legislative branches of government.

This document is a report of the Study Tour on Horizontal Accountability to Buenos Aires, Argentina, held between October 31st and November 8th 2016.

The Study Tour was the culmination of the ELLA Learning Alliance on Horizontal Accountability. This Learning Alliance was in operation from May to August 2016, and provided a platform for learning and discussing actions directed at strengthening the capacity of legislative and executive bodies to make them more effective in exercising their horizontal accountability mandates . based on a comparison of Latin American and African experiences. The contents of both the Learning Alliance and the Study Tour were structured around collaborative research produced by [CIPPEC](#) and [OSSREA](#).

The key objective of the Study Tour was to offer participants the opportunity to learn first-hand about the performance of horizontal accountability mechanisms within the legislative and executive powers in Argentina. By observing local practices and comparing these with the experience in their home countries, participants generated useful lessons that can be translated into action in their own contexts.

The objectives were:

- To understand and compare how accountability mechanisms in Argentina and Kenya work
- To meet and exchange with civil servants responsible for horizontal accountability mechanisms in Argentina
- To exchange views about possible strategies and tools to improve these mechanisms in their own contexts
- To exchange ideas about South-South cooperation and strengthen the link between Africa and Latin America
- To reflect on the lessons learned during the tour (through meetings, presentations, field visits etc.) and develop a post-Study Tour Action Plan

(supported by peer review and technical assessment) to put the acquired knowledge into practice

Each participant came with a personal learning goal related to his/her work, and an intention to follow-up on the lessons learned on the Study Tour upon their return home. Throughout the course of the study tour, there was an on-going discussion about implementing changes in their own contexts as a result of the knowledge gained on the Learning Alliance and Study Tour.

We envisioned the Study Tour as an opportunity to generate durable lessons and strong links between participants in order to assist practitioners, researchers, government officials, and/or local institutions to improve the execution and deepen the study of horizontal accountability mechanisms.



PARTICIPANTS

The experience included the participation of ten African colleagues: six from Kenya, two from Tanzania, one from Zimbabwe and one from South Africa.

The Study Tour participants mainly came from the ELLA online Learning Alliance. They were selected in a competitive process, based on their participation in the online Learning Alliance (prioritising quality of contributions versus quantity) along with other qualifications and their ability to promote change in their own contexts.¹



The Monitoring and Evaluation staff from CIPPEC organised and coordinated the Study Tour and provided information about the Regional Evidence Paper. The following people were involved:

- Natalia Aquilino, Director of the Monitoring and Evaluation Programme, CIPPEC
- Agustina Suaya, Coordinator of the Monitoring and Evaluation Programme, CIPPEC

¹ A small number did not participate in the ELLA online Learning Alliance, but rather in offline workshops and events organised by OSSREA in Kenya to disseminate and discuss their research findings.

- Federico Frasccheri, Analyst of the Monitoring and Evaluation Programme, CIPPEC
- Sofía Picasso, Analyst of the Monitoring and Evaluation Programme, CIPPEC
- Daniela Álvarez Mosqueda, External Consultant, We Do It (events and PR consulting company)

Additionally, other members provided support and information about CIPPEC's mission, vision, objectives and programmes, communication strategies and completed the description of the Regional Evidence Paper. They were:

- Jorge Mandelbaum, CIPPEC President
- Julia Pomares, Executive Director
- Leif Moestue, Coordinator of the Institutional Development Programme
- Sebastián Zirpolo, Coordinator of the Communications Programme
- María Page, Coordinator of the Political Institutions Programme



OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY TOUR ACTIVITIES

Throughout the ten days of the Study Tour, participants had the opportunity to discuss and interact with high level civil servants from the executive and legislative branches and the National Audit Office, as well as with academics, media and civil society organisations working on transparency and accountability. These meetings allowed participants to learn about the performance and power dynamics of horizontal accountability institutions and mechanisms from those who have first-hand experience on the subject.

The Study Tour activities were structured as followed:

- 1) Introducing the guest speakers, the institutions they represent, their mission and vision
- 2) Presentations by the guest speakers about their specialist topic. Generally guest speakers were invited to describe how their organisation performs accountability or, if non-governmental, how it advocates for better implementation of accountability
- 3) Presentation of the three or four most important lessons to take into account (identified by the guest speakers)
- 4) Free exchange between guest speakers, study tour participants and CIPPEC and OSSREA representatives. This included questions from guest speakers to participants and from participants to guests speakers, including specifications by the participants about how the mechanisms work or the strategies used by similar actors in Africa.

The presentations, discussions and key lessons from these sessions are summarised in this document.

Session 1: The Legislative Branch (from the point of view of the President of the ruling party in the Chamber of Deputies)

Learning objectives

- To understand the Argentine political system and learn about the competencies and responsibilities of members of Congress
- To learn about the relationship between the executive and legislative branches

- To receive a brief introduction to Congress party distribution

Summary

The activity began with a meeting with the Nicolás Massot, the Chief of the ruling party in the Chamber of Deputies. He explained how the political dynamics unraveled with the new party distribution, and described his role linking the legislators from different parties with the executive. He was asked about how capacities could be developed and the importance of the report made by the Chief of Cabinet to Congress every month.

Two challenges appeared clearly from Massot's presentation on the effectiveness of legislative oversight. The first relates to the issues that stem from being a minority ruling party, which forces permanent coalition-making in order to guarantee effective governance. The second was identified as the electoral expectations of each party² which is the most permanent source of political power.

Finally, a comment was made regarding the visit of the Chief of Cabinet to Congress which was qualified as a mechanism that is of more value for the opposition rather than the incumbent party since it adds no new information to public debate.

Lessons learned

- Comprehending power dynamics and party distribution within the Chamber is crucial to understand political negotiations
- Legitimacy among members of Congress is very important, even amongst members of the incumbent party. Sometimes it is better not to do everything the executive says and instead act according to political views
- The report presented monthly by the Chief of Cabinet is not considered very useful nor is it the main source of information for the members of Congress, who are able to get the information through other channels.

Session 2: The Legislative Branch: How it oversees the executive (from a Deputy's point of view)

Learning objective

- Understand how horizontal accountability mechanisms work in Argentina, comprehend their usefulness and difficulties, as well as their strengths and

² In terms of the number votes that each party gains in relation to what public opinion says.

weaknesses, from the point of views of MPs who have put forward questions and received the report from the executive as members of the legislative branch

Summary

Deputy Carla Pitiot and former Deputy Manuel Garrido visited CIPPEC. Manuel Garrido explained the role of the legislative branch with regards to accountability, while the Carla Pitiot explained the procedures and competencies of the Mixed Committee of Public Accounts, a key agency for horizontal accountability in Argentina.

Garrido provided a complete explanation of the mechanisms in place for legislative oversight including Requests for Information, reports made by the executive power, the Intelligence Commission, the Commission for the Review of Executive Decrees, the Public Prosecutors Office, the National Ombudsman, the Commission Against Torture and Anticorruption organisms.

Pitiot reflected on the current role of the Mixed Committee of Public Accounts and described how it was designed, its functions and the laws that apply to this mechanism. She explained the relationship of the Mixed Committee of Public Accounts with the General Auditor, and also clarified the role of the Commission with regards to the national budget.



Lessons learned:

- The Mixed Committee of Public Accounts is balanced in terms of the party affiliations of its members. This can be considered a strength of the Argentinean system since it improves the effectiveness of the control function of this Committee.
- It is important to increase management audits in relation to financial ones. Both can produce important findings which support the role of Congress in terms of horizontal accountability and enforceability.

Session 3: A Regional Latin American Perspective on Horizontal Accountability

Learning objectives

- To discuss how Africa and Latin America link and cooperate with each other, and how both regions deal with certain topics like foreign affairs, civil society and governance
- To understand governability and governance aspects in emerging democracies and developing countries, as explained by a Latin American analyst
- Learn about the exchange between African and Latin American citizens in sociological terms throughout the 20th century



Summary

Participants visited the [Argentine Council of International Affairs](#) (Consejo Argentino Para Las Relaciones Internacionales-CARI) and had the benefit of meeting Ambassador Lagorio, Dr Gladys Lechini and Marisa Pineau. Views were exchanged about the reach and possibilities of strengthening South-South cooperation between Africa and Latin America.

Lessons learned

- Despite some efforts from Brazil and West African countries, examples of South-South cooperation between Africa and Latin America are few and far between. Hence there is considerable scope for future South-South cooperation between the two regions.
- Organising and defending institutionalisation in order to promote stronger bonds between countries is of vital importance.
- Africa can learn from Latin America about the historical process of institutionalising economic and social blocks (e.g. Mercosur), their failures and accomplishments.
- Latin America can learn from Africa about innovative and increasing inter-country cooperation fostered through economic and social agreements during recent years.



Session 4: A Comparative Perspective on Horizontal Accountability: Argentina and Kenya

Learning objectives

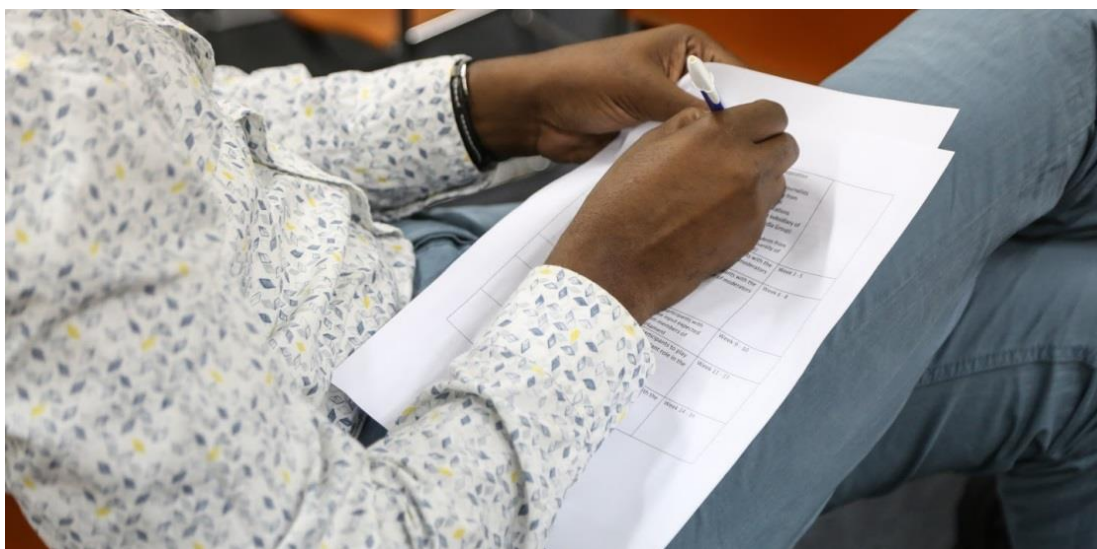
- Understand lessons from the Argentine and Kenyan Regional Evidence Papers on horizontal accountability³ and discuss any uncertainties
- Review basic and important concepts on horizontal accountability and set a common framework for analysing the Study Tour sessions

Summary

The Regional Evidence Papers on horizontal accountability produced by OSSREA and CIPPEC in the framework of the ELLA programme were introduced. The papers were presented by Dr Truphena Mukuna, who presented the Kenyan paper (OSSREA), and Agustina Suaya from the Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (CIPPEC) and Maria Page from the Political Institutions Programme (CIPPEC) who presented the CIPPEC paper. A very interesting exchange was developed after the presentation, in which participants mentioned how the mechanisms work at different levels in their own countries.

Lessons learned

- Besides known similarities among horizontal accountability institutions and mechanisms in Argentina and Kenya, institutional capacities for effective implementation prove to be different in both countries.



³CIPPEC, 2015. [The Deficits in Horizontal Accountability in Argentina: A Tale of Two Worlds](#)

OSSREA, 2015. [Horizontal Accountability of the Executive to the Legislature in Africa: A Case Study of Kenya](#)

Session 5: A Sub-national Perspective on Horizontal Accountability

Learning objectives

- To gain an overview of the accountability mechanisms in place in sub-national contexts
- To study achievements and areas for improvement

Summary

The group visited the Government of the City of Buenos Aires building. Participants were briefed about the issues that the sub-national government faces, its process and dynamics regarding horizontal accountability mechanisms.

David Groisman, General Director of Strategic Management introduced a tool they used called Government Commitments, which defines and monitors explicit government targets and timeframes. Groisman detailed the process of agreeing the targets, their implementation and the strategy for following up within one of the largest sub-national jurisdictions in Argentina. He also explained how the City Mayor uses these commitments and targets to report to the legislative power, thereby exercising horizontal accountability.

Ramiro Álvarez, General Director of Institutional Quality presented the Transparency and Institutional Innovation Agenda which shows how the Government of the City of Buenos Aires is implementing global standards such as open government, open data and active transparency.



Session 6: The Role of the Media in Horizontal Accountability

Learning objectives

- Understand media processes for communicating the Chief of Cabinet's report and the presidential State of the Nation report, as well as their dissemination and monitoring strategies and how they develop the messages to be transmitted
- Discover the work of journalists concerning access to information, transparency and accountability
- Generate a debate on the usefulness of the mechanism used by the media and how it can be improved

Summary

Following the presentation, the media meeting was held. The guests were Laura Zommer, Executive Director from Chequeado, Sebastian Zirpolo from the Communication Programme (CIPPEC) and Mariano Ure, from the Argentine Journalism Forum (FOPEA). They introduced the role of the media in relation to the annual State of the Nation report and some good practices of providing evidence, fact checking and responding to public speeches and government measures, to improve horizontal accountability on the public agenda. Some interesting questions emerged, such as queries about the way the organisations were funded and how they engage with politicians and civil servants. Participants noted the minute-by-minute fact checking that Chequeado performs during the State of the Nation speech in order to ascertain whether the statements made are accurate or not.



Session 7: The Role of the Executive Branch in Horizontal Accountability (from the point of view of the Chief of Cabinet)

Learning objectives

- Understand how the Chief of Cabinet's monthly report is submitted to the Chamber, how is it treated and how the informative session to introduce it is prepared
- Identify good practices for possible adaptation or replication

Summary

The Undersecretary of Parliamentary Relations of the Chief of Cabinet of the Nation, María Alejandra Svetaz was the guest speaker for this session. She holds a very important position as one of the links between the executive and legislative branches. Moreover, María Alejandra Svetaz has significant experience working within Legislative bureaucracy. She explained some of the strengths and weaknesses of the system, as well as some of the most significant challenges related to providing information to members of Congress . such as members not reading all the information provided and repetition of questions, among others. She also explained the main proposals for improving responsiveness over the next years, such as a system which directs questions directly to the ministries so that they can be answered more appropriately.

Exchange comparing the African experience and the Argentinean model was particularly valuable during this meeting. Given the length of the session, participants were able to explain what was happening in their own countries as well as gather Svetaz's views on that.



Lessons learned

- Reports and databases represent important sources of knowledge in the preparation of the monthly report from the Chief of Cabinet to Congress.
- One of the most important challenges is that legislators do not read the reports before the informative session and they repeat questions report after report.
- The Chief of Cabinet's internal processes are being developed to increase the effectiveness and speed of directing questions within the public administration. However, these innovations have still not been implemented.
- Lack of information or mistakes represent a considerable challenge regarding accountability in African countries. This is a delicate question when there is a change in government as sensitive information may be lost.

Session 8: The Role of the General Auditor

Learning objectives

- Learn about the role of the National Audit Office in terms of accountability
- Analyse the evolution of the concept of accountability from budget control to plan monitoring
- Identify strategic areas of action and achievements in relation to open government

Summary

During the afternoon, the group had a meeting at the National Audit Office. They were received by Oscar Lamberto, the President of the institution, and then Aníbal Kholhuber (also from the National Audit Office) who explained the composition, responsibilities and capacities of the organisation.

Kholhuber described the topics that the National Audit Office analyses now and how the institution evolved from doing mere financial analysis to analysis of environmental issues, international cooperation and infrastructure, among others. Kholhuber also described the type of products or audits the Office performs, such as financial statements, comprehensive audits, financial audits, special studies, performance audits and results-oriented audits, as well as the challenges they face when overseeing the executive branch.

As in the previous meeting, significant exchange happened during the meeting. Participants asked who audits the auditor and how the recommendations were implemented, which led to further explanations and exchanges about the participants experiences in their own countries. Many similarities and differences emerged which enriched learning by the participants and the hosts.



Lessons learned

- Balance of political parties within the governance board of the National Audit Office gives power and institutional strength to the Office, increasing its legitimacy and softening potential conflicts in reporting⁴. This design prevents the Office from failing and ensures consensus when submitting audits to the public domain.
- The focus of the National Audit Office has changed recently from financial to management control. The objective of the Office is not merely to identify errors but also to identify ways of making improvements.
- The scope of topics analysed by the National Audit Office is large and varied. The staff needs to prepare to be able to understand all the different fields of the audits in order to make strong recommendations.
- Greater capacity is needed from the legislative side in order to improve analysis and proper use of the information provided by the National General Audit reports.
- A question to be solved relates to who is responsible for auditing the auditor.

⁴ Discussions of the reports happen within the Office and not in Congress sessions.

Session 9: A Civil Society Vision of Horizontal Accountability

Learning objectives

- Share visions of horizontal accountability with members of CSOs specialised on the topic.
- Identify and discuss the reach of accountability mechanisms and possible solutions to the gaps (between what is said and what happens), as recognised in the Regional Evidence Paper and by specialists
- Study the impact of national audits and how and if they improve public policy

Summary

This session benefitted from the presence of three representatives of civil society organisations: María Baron from Directorio Legislativo (Legislative Directory), Iñaki Albisu from Poder Ciudadano (Citizen Power) and Marcos Mendiburu, an independent Argentinean consultant with vast experience in Africa.

The guest speakers explained some successful cases regarding transparency and accountability. Questions emerged about which strategies had been effective for getting CSO voices heard on sensitive issues, ranging from political advocacy to litigation. The guest speakers asserted that the Argentine accountability system is so fragmented that reports are not used or are implemented too late. A lack of expertise, in both the executive and in the legislative branches was found, either in relation to requesting information or providing appropriate answers within a reasonable timeframe. International experience and participants' experiences enabled further networks to be built between Africa and Latin America.

Lessons learned

- The horizontal accountability system in Argentina is fragmented. Reports are either not used or used too late.
- The strategies used by the non-governmental sector when they are dealing with sensitive issues are advocacy, lobbying, information requests and litigation.

Session 10: Academics Perspectives on Horizontal Accountability

Learning objective

- Understand how National Committees work
- Understand party politics in Argentina
- Identify additional horizontal accountability mechanisms

The last meeting involved Ana María Mustapic, senior lecturer and researcher from the Di Tella University. She was able to provide further analysis of horizontal accountability mechanisms, how National Committees work and the composition of the party system inside Congress, the last two being of big interest to the African participants.



CONCLUSIONS

All in all, the study tour fulfilled participants' expectations. African and Latin American participants were able to attend meetings with highly recognised and qualified experts in the field. Moreover, the core objective of achieving a broad diversity of perspectives, with people from different areas and institutions, was also reached. Participants were very interested during the meetings and made concise, acute questions about checks and balances, responsibilities, competencies and financial support of the institutions. During some of the exchanges they were able to provide information about the situation in their own countries, which encouraged further networking and cooperation among researchers.

What we concluded from the exchange is that there is an important gap between training and qualifications and capabilities for enforcement of horizontal accountability. It is possible that the executive branch is better prepared to fulfill its task than the legislative, although most of the time the executive works under a lot of pressure given the amount of activities required to achieve responsiveness. In the legislative branch, delays in the delivery of reports and limited margin of action plus committee composition are factors that compromise adequate achievement of horizontal accountability. The importance of providing quick and concise information to legislators so that it is easily understood emerged as a vital factor for accountability.

