Incubating change-makers

Youth-driven innovative approaches to accountability in Nepal

By Jenny Bentley and Saul Mullard

Through their innovative ideas, an empowered youth have the potential to hold governments accountable and work towards the reduction of corruption. Incubator-type programmes can turn these ideas into solutions for implementation as anti-corruption measures. However, assumptions about how such programmes should be funded need to be re-thought as improved funding structures can drive more successful accountability projects.

Main points

- Youth-driven, innovative projects with alternative definitions of outcomes and measurement are increasingly important for addressing intractable corruption and accountability challenges.

- Idea incubators empower and give youth the flexibility and space to fail and learn without the fear of losing funds.

- There is significant potential in incubator-type programmes to strengthen work aimed at increasing accountability and reducing corruption.

- The development of innovative ideas is not determined by the presence or lack of seed funding. The lack of such funding has led to a more diverse group of participants and a wider variety of innovative ideas.

- Assumptions about how programmes should be funded need to be re-thought when creating innovative approaches to corruption and accountability challenges.

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About the authors

Jenny Bentley

Jenny holds a PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology from the University of Zürich. She has been conducting ethnographic research in the Eastern Himalayas (Nepal, India) since 2005. In addition to academic work, she has had a long engagement in the development NGO sector in the Himalayas and beyond. She is currently the executive director of Tapriza, a Swiss NGO supporting a school project in Dolpo, Nepal.

Saul Mullard

Saul is senior adviser for people's engagement at the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre. His current research interests include the role of community movements in social and political change and community-based environmental activism. He holds a doctorate and master's in South and Inner Asian Studies from the University of Oxford, as well as a BA in Development Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London.

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

ADA – Austrian Development Agency
AIN – Association of International NGOs in Nepal
AL – Accountability Lab Nepal
CD-Mun – Capacity Development of New Municipalities
CSO – civil society organisation
DFID – Department for International Development (UK)
GIZ – Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
ICT – information communication technology
INGO – international non-governmental organisation
LGCDP – Local Government and Community Development Programme
NGO – non-governmental organisation
RTI – right to information
SDC – Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

Youth innovation as an anti-corruption tool

The Accountability Incubator programme, run by Accountability Lab Nepal (AL), aims to support youth innovation in the field of accountability and integrity. We are interested in how urban youth innovate and engage in holding government and other powerful agents accountable, and what lessons can be learned from their initiatives that might be relevant to donors.

In particular, our research focuses on a youth-centric anti-corruption programme in Nepal designed by AL that specifically taps into innovation as a means to strengthen civil society actors to hold governments accountable and work towards the reduction of corruption within the country. We discuss its potential, evaluate current limitations and risks, and suggest future avenues that could be explored to strengthen youth innovation in anti-corruption and accountability initiatives. We understand innovation as the process of generating creative ideas that are beyond the status quo, and turning them into implementable, resourceful solutions to corruption-related problems.

In October 2018 we interviewed five members of AL staff and ten participants of their programme. We conducted one focus group discussion with the staff and another with the participants. Additionally, we interviewed representatives of three youth organisations and four established non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with youth-centric programmes in Nepal, and interviewed a senior governance adviser of a European embassy in Kathmandu. The interviews, conducted in Kathmandu, were semi-structured with open-ended questions with regard to the interests of the participants. Follow-up interviews were done via email in May and August 2019.

Unless otherwise noted, all direct quotes come from these interviews in October 2018, May 2019, and August 2019. Additional data was gathered from the web pages and social media of the accountapreneurs, as well as reports made by the respective accountapreneurs' ventures and AL. We also conducted a targeted literature review and online media research to contextualise our findings.

Our study is also interesting beyond Nepal in contexts where corruption in civil society organisations (CSOs) is an issue. Our research shows that when AL offered innovative youth a space to test and validate their ideas, rather than offering financial rewards for their ideas, there was a noticeable change in the types of candidates applying for the programme.

The lack of funds available to youth participants made the programme less appealing to those who would ordinarily enter careers in the non-governmental (NGO) sector. For the youth who joined later programmes (after the availability of funds had been withdrawn), the space for creativity, idea testing, and learning proved incentive enough. It is still difficult to determine whether this change is sufficient to counter the selection bias for corruption in the NGO sector. Nevertheless, this research demonstrates that assumptions about how programmes should be funded need to be re-thought when attempting to create innovative approaches to corruption and accountability challenges. The current successes of the Accountability Incubator, together with our suggested potential improvements, give valuable insights for funders interested in introducing and supporting incubator-like programmes as anti-corruption measures.

What makes a case study in Nepal relevant?

Corruption in Nepal

Corruption is rampant and systemic in every sector of Nepalese society. While the public expects corruption and many participate in forms of corruption, it is not generally accepted, leaving people in normative dilemmas. Based on our previous research, a vibrant and educated youth is important in changing opinions on corruption and in protesting against large-scale government corruption, such as the cover-up of a rape and murder case, the corruption in an Airbus deal, or the lack of accountability in the medical sector.

A vibrant and educated youth can be a catalyst for changing opinions on corruption.

Government and media often describe CSOs as being corrupt, donor-driven, and merely interested in 'dollar farming' (*dallarkheti* in Nepali), or even promoting Christian or 'foreign' ideologies or interests. Additionally, people have concerns that the same privileged castes and groups that run CSOs also dominate politics.[1] All our interview partners agree that corruption is rampant in the CSO sector, despite many of them being involved in that sector for a living.

However, a survey shows that merely 32% of the Nepalese believe CSOs are corrupt, while over 80% view politicians and government employees as corrupt, and 61% perceive police to be so.[2] According to the chairperson of the Association of International NGOs in Nepal (AIN), Shibesh Chandra Regmi, international reports back this public opinion and estimate corruption in CSOs at 20%, compared to 77% in political parties. Whatever the precise figures may be, it seems that while the public view government as more corrupt than civil society, a sizeable minority of Nepal's population view CSOs as corrupt.

Public opinion is – to a certain extent – valid and needs to be taken seriously and addressed. For example, a considerable amount of CSOs lack internal structures for accountability, such as codes of conduct, whistleblowing procedures, transparent participatory budgeting, or downward accountability mechanisms. Additionally, party affiliations, and the dependency on political patronage to gain access to decision makers or get specific projects implemented, also influence CSOs. Politically aligned CSOs increase the respective parties' authority as facilitators of resource distribution.[3] At the same time, the interrelations between political parties and CSOs delegitimise positive contributions of CSOs and hinder their relations with the communities they serve, as well as with the government.[4] This has

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1. CSO Sustainability Index 2016: 35; CSO Sustainability Index 2017: 59.
2. CSO Sustainability Index 2016: 35.
3. Ismael 2014.
4. CSO Sustainability Index 2016: 28.

significant weight, as most Nepali people receive services from CSO programmes.[5]

Youth in Nepal as catalyst for change

Youth engagement is crucial for social change[6] – as the case of Nepal shows. Rights-based people's engagement has shaped the recent history of Nepal and led to significant political changes since the 1990s People's Movement (*Jana Andolan*). Under the leadership of the Nepali Congress party and allied communist parties, this movement forced the king to introduce a multi-party system and – along with political parties – also legalise CSOs, giving the right to public gathering and a free press. Following the re-establishment of the absolute monarchy and the subsequent second People's Movement (2006–2008), the monarchy was abolished and a constituent assembly founded. The role of youth activists is largely recognised in these processes.[7]

After two devastating earthquakes with severe human loss and infrastructural destruction, a new constitution was finally approved in 2015, and Nepal embarked on a process of federalisation. Local constituencies were redesigned and assigned more powers, and local elections were held for the first time in nearly two decades in 2017.[8]

This political transformation went hand in hand with larger social transformations, a public discourse on human rights, and a vibrant (online) publishing industry (including social media).[9] Since the 1990s, media and CSOs have become intermediate institutions facilitating social and political change for the larger public, challenging more traditional intermediates such as family or caste.[10] Youth have been a driving force in these transformations – mobilised on the streets as activists or in the forest as combatants by political parties, and engaged with media or CSOs.[11]

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5. CSO Sustainability Index 2017: 59.
6. Jeffrey 2012a, b.
7. Snellinger 2013.
8. For a recent publication on the changes in federal Nepal, see Thapa 2019.
9. See Hutt and Onta 2017: 4 for a review of literature on social transformations.
10. Hutt and Onta 2017: 4–5.
11. See Snellinger 2018 for an ethnography on student politics in Nepal and for an insight in youth and party-politics in Nepal; see Shneiderman et al. 2016 for a review of the Maoist movement.

At the same time, according to a World Bank Report one third of Nepal's working population emigrates to India, the Gulf region, or other countries. Most of them are youth (between 20 and 44). Emigration often impacts local civil society, as more and more active and vibrant people are leaving the country. Additionally a significant section of the younger generation are increasingly focused on working abroad rather than changing the situation at home. On a positive note, a large and young diaspora community adds a global dimension with high potential for international crowdsourced funds, networks, and ideas.

Defining youth in Nepal: Their hopes and aspirations for the future

The emergence of youth as a category and a form of self-understanding in Nepal is linked to modern education and the development of a middle class (Bista 1991; Liechty 2009: 35). Literacy changes Nepali youth's agency with regard to choice in life-decisions (Ahearn 2001). Schooling and the exposure to modern media shape the future possibilities that young people envision. The promise of socio-economic mobility, beyond the historically grown boundaries of class, caste, ethnicity, or gender, strongly motivates young people. As a consequence, in Nepal the concept of an 'educated person' and ideas of development (*vikas*) are thus both closely associated with youth and its aspirations.* Building on this local understanding of youth, the government of Nepal includes all people between 16 and 40 as youth, which comprises around 40% of the population.** Consequently, due to its positioning in society and its demography, youth is an interesting force for funders considering anti-corruption initiatives.

When we conducted our field work in 2018, although youth seemed to be struggling to put their disillusion with the unstable democratic government aside and believe in a stable and democratic government, they still remained hopeful. In contrast to Europe, where youth have been less involved in traditional political engagement (such as voting) than the older generation and feel disconnected and unrepresented by political parties (Barret and Pachi 2019: 7–12), youth engagement in Nepal is complex and influenced by different factors from those in European countries.

In Nepal, democratic participation is something that more than one generation of youth have fought for and many experienced for the first

time in 2017. They are excited to exercise this right and build up trust in their elected representatives. Many of our young interview partners believe that federalisation brings a unique opportunity for change and specifically for an increase in accountability (Yubraj Nepal, Kabita Rai, Suresh Chand, Soni Khanal, Ashmita Sharma, Suvechchha Chapagain).

See Carney and Madsen 2009 and 2011; Levinson and Holland 1996: 14–5; Liechty 1997 and 2003; Skinner and Holland 1996; Snellinger 2010; Valentin 2011. Additionally, Snellinger (2013) gives an informative overview of youth studies in Nepal.

**No single definitions of youth or childhood exist in Nepal. Especially in the context of child soldiers, recent publications debate the definition of youth, sharing the conclusion that the definitions are contextual and fluid (Evans 2009; Ghimire 2002; Housden 2009; Kohrt and Maharjan 2009; Luger 2000; Pettigrew 2007; Sharrock 2011; Snellinger 2009).*

Youth and civil society

Historically youth have played a pivotal role in the Civil War and the democratisation process in Nepal. But, today, youth choose other forms of civic or non-conventional political engagement, usually around specific issues, channelled in CSOs, and over the internet and social media.[12]

CSOs offer career opportunities as an alternative to leaving the country in search of employment. Several donor-funded, national governance programme frameworks exist in Nepal, and address issues of accountability. They fund international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and also youth-led initiatives. One of their foci has been capacity building on the demand and supply side.[13] This includes training programmes for right to information (RTI) activists, for

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12. Barret and Pachi 2019: 7–12.
13. In 2019, the five-year Provincial and Local Governance Support Programme (PLGSP) funded by DFID, SDC, Norway, EU, and UN started with the goal to attain functional, sustainable, inclusive, and accountable provincial and local government. It is the follow-up programme to the Local Government and Community Development Programme (LGCDP). The SDC plans to contribute to the programme until 2030. GIZ just implemented the Capacity Development of New Municipalities (CD-Mun) programme targeting service delivery and access, while the ADA implemented a participatory budgeting programme through the NGO Care Austria called Sankalpa.

example in the activities of NGOs and INGOs such as Helvetas, Restless Development Nepal, or Search for Common Ground (SFCG).[14] Youth-led organisations have participated in such programmes and also conduct their own workshops on accountability (Youth Initiative Nepal) and anti-corruption measures (Association of Youth Organizations Nepal (AYON)). The latter is an umbrella organisation of 92 youth-led associations and an important player in youth engagement and networking.

A shift towards issue-based activism increases the potential for young people to engage in anti-corruption activities, such as campaigns, demonstrations, and other forms of civil action. New forms of youth movements are also present in Nepal. An example is the vocal Occupy Baluwatar campaign in 2012–13 which demanded that the state address and persecute those guilty of gender-based violence. While maintaining close ties to local CSO sector, the campaigners consciously avoided any associations with political parties and also steered clear of international funding.[15]

Another good example is the earthquake relief work. Informal youth networks efficiently used social media to coordinate volunteers, assess the damage, raise and distribute funds, and organise the relief work. As an example, interview partner and former accountapreneur Brabim Kumar managed one of the largest earthquake relief initiatives coordinated online: #act4quake. Data crowdsourcing and open data technologies were also used to track the funds pouring into the country and were established by young Nepali innovators.[16, 17]

It is specifically these networks and the power of youth mobilisation that AL attempts to channel into accountability projects, working to combine it with specific skill sets and project planning tools to increase sustainability.

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14. Helvetas trained young people in social accountability tools and worked with local communities in two recent projects in which they were involved: the CARTA project funded by the World Bank and conducted in collaboration with Partnership for Transparency (2011–15), and the current project on Active Citizens for Accountable Governments. Restless Development Nepal trained around 30,000 youth in advocacy and policy dialogue. SFCG has several projects in which they engage youth, such as the Pahunch project for building trust in police forces and strengthening access to justice.
15. Koyu and Pokharel 2014.
16. McMurren et al. 2017.
17. See Snellinger 2013 for additional examples of non-artisan political youth participation (Nepal Unites, 'Clean the Bagmati 2011').

Accountability Incubator: Change-makers and youth innovation

Our case study focuses on the Accountability Incubator ('the Incubator'), a one-year programme that aims to enable young civil society leaders, called accountapreneurs, to build tools for accountability, participation, and social impact.[18] According to the online description, the programme supports their ideas and offers mentorship, fundraising, and management support, as well as access to a global network of CSOs and funders. It is a capacity-building programme for young people already active in civil society, youth movements, and various initiatives in their respective countries. It gives designated youth leaders capacities and a network, and aims to direct youth movements towards a more accountability-driven agenda and practice.

The Incubator is run by the international non-profit organisation Accountability Lab, presently active in five African countries (Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and South Africa), two South Asian countries (Nepal, Pakistan), and one Latin American country (Mexico). The programme in Nepal was the first of the incubator programmes to be established in 2013 and thus has the deepest experience from which to learn.

As an organisation, Accountability Lab's theory of change aligns with the widespread assumption that youth are inherently change-makers. They understand young people as change-makers because they are mobile (in and outside the government system), better connected than ever before, marginalised through unequal and hierarchical decision-making structures, and a demographically important category. With the generational shift, the young generation will take over power positions in the future and foster change in the system. They are globally connected and Accountancy Lab attributes them with an innate creativity.[19] Youth is framed as the force to alter established structures.

Their primary aim is to support 'change-makers to develop and implement positive ideas for integrity in their communities, unleashing positive social and economic change.'[20] Their theory of change builds on individuals and envisions a creative push for accountability through 'positive deviants,

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18. Until 2018 it was a two-year programme.
19. AL 2017a: 10.
20. AL 2017a: 2.

building a shared identity among these individuals and supporting them to build the skills, communities and coalitions they need over time.'[21]

AL's organisational strategy 2017–2020 defines three objectives: 'to support a positive movement to build accountability; provide substantive, flexible and long-term support for those leaders who can collectively lead this movement within specific contexts; and support collaboration around accountability and open governance.'[22] In all their programmes and campaigns the NGO tries to foster an environment of adaptive learning. Their policy is about trying new things, finding out what works, and leaving their team members the freedom to experiment. However, in their theory of change, this freedom has reasoning, and it enables to understand what works, where, and why, and how it can 'be used to inform collective action.'[23]

Since it started in 2013 and until the time of research in 2018, 20 accountapreneurs participated in the project in Nepal. At that point, one woman and one man were classified as previous accountapreneurs, while the others, some of whom had joined in 2014, are still listed as active in the programme. Seventy-two per cent of the participants are men (13 men, five women).[24] In the beginning of 2019, four new accountapreneurs were selected, three men and one woman. The recent cohort is not included in the research. The majority of the accountapreneurs are based in the capital Kathmandu, with only two in eastern Nepal and one in western Nepal. The focus of the selection through the programme is urban educated youth, due to the AL's limited resources.

The ideas the accountapreneurs brought into the Incubator are very diverse. Six of the projects have a research component, two use theatre as a method, two use film, and six build on databases and online resources ranging from social media tools to apps. Most accountapreneurs focus on civic education, good governance, advocacy, and policy in some way. One project centres on understanding and influencing media coverage; one is about building up a training programme for lawyers and other interested youth on accountability and corruption; and another organises financial literacy programmes

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21. AL 2017a: 4.
22. AL 2017a: 11.
23. AL 2017a: 26.
24. At the time of publishing (2020), all the accountapreneurs had graduated except the current cohort.

combined with accountability tools. All include components of youth engagement.

Project example one: Technology for Acccountability

The accountapreneur Surendra Koirala[25] applied to AL with a technology-driven tool to increase transparency. He developed an approach that implements shared ownership and multi-levelled networking as main strategies to tackle the challenges that technology-driven accountability initiatives face.

Surendra Koirala works with his team at Sajilo Ventures, a social enterprise he co-founded with a friend just a few days before the earthquake in 2015. 'Sajilo' means 'easy' in Nepali language. After four years they now have 26 people, including seven interns. The team comprises young developers, engineers, designers, and social activists who want to use technology for good. They believe this approach can connect people and bring equity.

The company functions with a flat organisational structure. Everyone has an equal say in the decision-making process and the company accounts are maintained openly. Currently, they are drafting a new company policy in which all employees, after completing a certain amount of years, will get equity options. They share office space with another tech company and a youth organisation, and collaborate with others on several projects, including local NGOs and government bodies. Shared ownership and network building stand at the core of their business model.

It is as the founder of Sajilo Ventures that Surendra is engaged in AL. With his team, he developed a cloud-based mobile app, called Sajilo, that connects the public with their elected representatives. The idea is to empower citizens by enabling real-time direct communication. It creates transparency and a feedback loop between citizens and their representatives. His theory of change is that bridging the communication gap will reduce corruption and facilitate good governance.

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25. All information is based on an interview with Surendra Koirala in October 2018 and two email questionnaires in May and August 2019.

The app is a hybrid of a forum and chat and has two user interfaces, one for the public representatives and one for the citizens of the region. If you log in as a citizen from a specific area, the app will load the respective elected representatives. The user can then chat directly with a representative. There is a public forum section where a user can post text, videos, or pictures, and also comment on other people's posts. The user can reveal their identity or post anonymously.

Content-wise, the app focuses on sharing information about government infrastructure projects, such as the plans, budgets, and time frames, and the implementing agencies. The project sites are located on Google Maps. The app includes details about the tender and which contractor won the bid. Additionally, links to that contractor's other projects are provided. This initial information is provided by the app developers based on available government sources.

App users can interact and add information about the project, such as grievances, progress reports, or photos. The idea is to enable the public to give real-time updates about the projects to their public representatives. This can also become a rating mechanism for the contractors, with them being judged on the efficiency in which they implement the projects. A rating system for contractors and institutions within the area, similar to the one used on TripAdvisor, is planned in the future.

During the time of research, the app is being piloted in three municipalities in Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur. In this phase, 21 government infrastructure construction projects, such as roads, public buildings, water projects, and dams, are included for each municipality.In this initial phase, 1,100 devices are using the app, 100 of which belong to local representatives.

The project design addresses specific risks known from research on the use of technology as an accountability tool. One of the technological challenges is to deliver cyber security and risk management.[26] The developers take several technological precautions to safeguard their app from being misused to hide corrupt activities or tarnish the image of others. It cannot be accessed via a Facebook or Gmail login, where multiple fake accounts can easily be created.

26. Zinnbauer 2015.

To install the app, the user has to give a phone number and enter a code sent via text message. In Nepal, a person can have only a limited amount of phone numbers, which are acquired with some form of identity verification. Further, by checking the device's number, the designers can cross-check if the same device uninstalls and reinstalls the app. These systems are in place to prevent one person using several phone numbers to try to corrupt the information in the app.

In combination with this, the developers additionally review the data by crowdsourcing information and involving the media. Currently, a function that allows users to report any false information is in the trial phase. The media has a separate login to the app, with the idea of creating a media monitoring process. The analysis coming out of the system could be cross-checked with the information that is available to the media. The concept is to build a media watchdog function into the app and create multi-layered and networked information sharing and verification.

Currently, the social enterprise finances the app through its business model. Sajilo Ventures permanently invests 20% of its profit in development of social projects. Surendra Koirala is working on various options to make the app self-sustaining. When it comes to its sustainability, he is aware of the problems with donations from private or corporate entities, as certain interests are attached to them. He would prefer to make it sustainable by charging fees from the government for delivering services to them, eg which contractor has a good track record and which does not.

The strategy is to secure annual budgets from local governments to run the application in their vicinities. He plans to make the entire platform open source when the piloting phase is over and bring a community of developers together. The developers are also looking to include the project as a regular assignment in certain university and college courses. The objective is to build a broader network with colleges and universities in Nepal, so that students can add new features and build new tools for governments as part of their assignments. Lastly, the option of growing the app as an advertisement platform for local businesses is also being explored.

Around 60% of the technology-driven reporting mechanisms have no activity beyond initial installation.[27] In Nepal, as in other developing

27. Crowdglobe 2012.

countries, the challenge of collective action is increased because not all sections of local communities have access to this type of technology. To engage the community, interns of Sajilo Ventures interact directly with the population in the municipalities in which they are testing the app. They attend public gatherings, meetings, and events to encourage people to use the app and comment on the projects that have been logged on the system.

At the same time, they give training to people. Working on the sustainability of the app's usage, they reach out to people and explain the technology, in an attempt to include more marginalised sections of the community. As a result of the feedback received, certain features have been added to the app. For example, the local communities requested separate logins for various selforganised groups, such as women's groups, user groups, and school management committees, to increase their networking options.

As a Transparency International report shows, the public is sceptical about reporting corrupt activities to an independent organisation, and prefer to do so to the government or the media.[28] Trust is crucial for the reduction of corruption, as it is for anti-corruption measures built around accountability and transparency – another reason why technological reporting mechanisms often fail. The involvement of public representatives in the Sajilo app could crucially increase its sustainability, but further analysis is required. Sajilo Ventures is also interested in bringing in the local governments as partners, albeit this is driven more by the idea of financial sustainability. If they succeed, this would give the app a more official status that could be beneficial. It is also interesting that the app is not designed or promoted as a tool to report illegal activities, corruption, or bribes, but as a communication and information tool.

As the project is still in the pilot phase, more research is required to assess the outcome.

Innovation elements in pilot projects

Recognising a social problem

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28. Transparency International 2014.

- Problems in service delivery, especially in publicly funded infrastructure projects

Recognising the missing link

- Inefficient tools for the public to monitor the projects and pass on the information to the public representative or the government

Theory of change

- Increase accountability and reduce corruption by bridging the communication gap

Drafting as a creative solution

- Cloud-based mobile app that connects the public with their elected representatives
- Crowdsourcing of information on service delivery that brings information to people with the power to make changes

Assumed outcome

- Empowerment of citizens through real-time direct communication
- Rating of contractors to improve their performance (contractors with a poor track record will not win tenders)
- Better service delivery and reduction in corruption

Testing the solution

- App still in development phase

Future potential

- App still in development phase

Addressing challenges and sustainability

- Shared ownership and multi-level networking as main strategies to tackle the challenges and increase sustainability

- Three-tier strategy for trust building: direct interaction with users; government support or endorsement; civil society engagement through various crowdsourcing approaches
- 'Classical' technical mechanisms to prevent misuse, combined with a media watchdog function and crowdsourced checking of information
- Multi-faceted network-based approach to collective action challenge: active inclusion of different sections of the community (developers, locals, students, government, user groups, media) over various channels (face-to-face meetings, capacity building for users, mutual projects, advertisement partners)
- Exploration of potential avenues to tackle financial challenges (government funding, advertisement, or crowdsourcing through open-source and student projects)

Project example two: Understanding influencers and holding them accountable

The accountapreneur Prakash Bhattarai[29] proposed an idea to the Incubator that combined media monitoring with applied research, network building, accountability, and advocacy. He worked on this idea with his colleagues at the Centre for Social Change, a think-tank and a non-profit research and advocacy institute that he co-founded in 2015.

The team wanted to contribute to accountability in the foreign labour migration sector. Many institutions and middlemen are involved in this process, earning huge amounts of money for brokering jobs and sending people abroad. Consequently, there is a lack of accountability, and the exploitation of vulnerable labour migrants. The proposed project grew from the realisation that for anything to change, the public needs access to information that is well researched and links different crucial events together to form a sound analysis. According to Pawan Roy, Secretary General of the Centre for Social Change, the entire cycle of migration is not widely covered by local newspapers or online news sites, because no local media outlet has a separate desk for migration. As a consequence, isolated

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29. All information is based on an interview with Pawan Roy and Samiksha Neupaune, Researcher on Migrant Watch, in October 2018 and follow-up interview questions in August 2019.

events are not interconnected to each other or to larger political, economic, or social issues.

To contribute to a solution, the team suggested media monitoring called Migration Watch. The pilot project started in 2017 with the aim to check what type of issues and news the big media houses currently cover on labour migration. Every day, two people examine ten national daily newspapers and online portals for migration issues. The selection includes English and Nepali news coverage. They categorise the items under ten different headings – such as fraud, gender, human trafficking, recruitment agencies, and remittance – and analyse the amount of coverage. The team creates a knowledge database about what is broadcast and, therefore, influences public opinion.

At the same time, the coverage is embedded in the analysis of the larger context. The team records what events or aspects the media did not cover, and which interrelations between topics could offer vital information for the public. They note when certain topics have been side-tracked for a longer period, despite incidents occurring, eg if the media has not given any coverage to human trafficking. In this way, the primary data is contextualised and analysed.

The monitoring does not occur in isolation, but in exchange with the journalists in question. Quarterly and annually, a report gives recommendations to the respective media houses. An important addition to the written reports is the direct interactions with the journalists of the ten newspapers and online portals. After publication of the first annual report on the monitoring, the Centre for Social Change met with the media houses, showed them the findings, interacted with them, and gave recommendations (Samiksha Neupaune, Researcher on Migrant Watch). On this occasion, journalists identified the need to get more contextual information and training with regard to the topic of labour migration – an interaction which shows that applied and engaged research is required. This constructive interaction between a CSO and media houses also strengthens the positioning of the civil society as a whole, and increases their capacity to take on the watchdog function towards government policies and practices.

The project has potential to scale up in two ways. One future plan is to interact more closely with the media houses and be involved in training and exchange of information and knowledge. Additionally, the initiators see

strong potential in expanding the scope of the analysis to the most influential media outlets in the provinces, where the majority of labour migrants come from. However, scaling up to provide training and extend the scope to local-level media coverage requires more funding.

Innovation elements in the pilot project: Migration Watch

Recognising a social problem

- Accountability issues in an important economic and social sector (foreign labour migration)
- Impact: direct impact on one third of the population (labour migrants); indirect impact on nearly the entire population (relations, remittance)
- Significant public influencers with regard to basic information (crucial for holding agents in the sector accountable) and opinion (crucial for policy work): media

Recognising the missing link

- Lack of systematic knowledge on the information disseminated by the influencers with regard to topics and quality

Theory of change

- Increased quality of media coverage that disseminates crucial information about specific aspects of foreign labour migration enables the public to hold actors accountable and shapes public opinion on foreign labour migration

Drafting as a creative solution

- Media monitoring
- Usage of skills of educated youth (applied research)
- Network building and knowledge exchange: interact with journalists to share knowledge/requirements/recommendations

Assumed outcome

- Increased accountability of media houses
- Increased knowledge

- Media is influenced with regard to topics and quality of information broadcasted (long-term goal; currently not measureable due to short project duration)

Testing the solution

- Increased knowledge (database as basis for interventions, reports, analysis)
- Increased exchange (interactions with journalists)
- Assessment of interest from journalists (attending meetings, requesting more interaction, training) bears potential for the project to raise awareness among them and increase accountability of media houses
- Lack of local outreach (only national media)
- Inadequate knowledge exchange (journalists demand training and increased inputs from research)

Future potential

- Increased accountability (through regular interactions with journalists on the results of the monitoring that raise awareness)
- Larger outreach (regional media)
- Upscaling (training of journalists, regular interaction sessions)

Sustainability

- Funding issues

Developing youth and their ideas: Empowerment, improvement, and sustainability

By design, the primary focus of the Incubator is not the projects that the accountapreneurs plan to implement, but the accountapreneurs themselves. The programme builds on two main pillars: incubating, and then sustaining the impact. Incubating enhances the accountapreneurs' skills in project management and networking. The training additionally sensitises them on situations and issues of accountability. This is consistent with the short-term

outcome of the programme to 'develop and scale their ideas for strengthening social accountability' defined in Accountability Lab's 2016 theory of change.[30]

The second pillar is more complex. It is about sustaining the processes in the Incubator beyond the duration of the programme and, more ambitiously, scaling the momentum into a movement. This incorporates the short-term outcome to 'convene and support different youth movements to develop a common agenda in the push for accountability,' and the long-term outcome of empowering youth to hold governments accountable, and also participate in the political process.[31]

In the following sections, we scrutinise what has been done so far, highlight positive aspects, and provide suggestions as to where the programme could be enhanced to have more potential.

Youth agency and ownership

'I had an idea – civic schools – and the Incubator gave me the freedom to try and do it, because they did not ask for specific structures and parameters for impact assessment from the beginning, but gave me the space to shape, redefine, and calibrate my idea, also through failure. This was possible through trust. My idea I had then still lives on in the programmes I am doing now.' (Anita Thapa)

Youth agency is the crucial distinction between the approach chosen in the Incubator and the other anti-corruption initiatives that engage youth in Nepal. The Incubator places the young person, and their ideas, at the centre of the project. The young people are not trained in order to implement a pre-designed project efficiently; they bring in their own ideas and skill sets. They receive training and mentoring on how to mould their ideas into a project with potential for impact and sustainability. They sharpen their knowledge and awareness of how they can use their respective skills to achieve greater accountability. They are then coached in how to implement that project. The focus on youth agency is important because it encourages real ownership over the process, and to look beyond the status quo, find creative solutions, and implement them.

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30. AL 2016.
31. AL 2016.

Focus on youth agency is important because it encourages real ownership over the process, and to look beyond the status quo, find creative solutions, and implement them.

'So… our country belongs to us young people and, at least, I think all of us believe that we want our kids to be growing [up] in this country, not in any First World country or maybe the PRC [People's Republic of China] or something like that, so, I think especially my technology provides a platform, a power, or a kind of engagement, but direct actionable engagement, to young people.' (Surendra Koirala)

Fostering agency and ownership in the project's design is a departure from general top-down approaches to anti-corruption initiatives – especially with regard to youth involvement – and includes the Doing Development Differently agenda in anti-corruption programming. The programme is not about 'involving' a relatively unspecified 'grass-roots' level, but supporting and training urban youth to programme-design their own ideas for accountability by enhancing their own skill sets. As a consequence, highly motivated participants bring their local knowledge into programming. This contributes to developing a vibrant and young civil society, and empowers youth to try and test new ideas.

Based on the interviews and observations made in autumn 2018, in the following section we suggest some ways to sustain youth agency and enhance youth ownership within and beyond the Incubator. Besides programme adaptations, adaptations by donors at policy level are also required, and we address this in a later section.

Towards more impactful training

AL has compulsory quarterly training for the accountapreneurs. While a previous evaluation of the Incubator[32] showed that the accountapreneurs wanted more personalised training, the majority of the participants interviewed regarded the training as something that fostered their individual

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32. AL 2017b.

growth (Prabhat Chhetri, Nabin Bhatt, Apurba KC, Prakash Koirala, Surendra Koirala, Yubaraj Nepal, Kabita Rai, Anita Thapa). They most valued the support to streamline their ideas and mould them into a manageable and measurable project.

'I was partly aware about … how I want to proceed with different steps involved in the application and its applicability. However, many of the idea[s] took shape after I joined the incubator. […] Lab has encouraged me on designing [a] module of my activity based on the specific demand for [a] particular local level. Earlier my focus was on how to create a fixed framework usable by all governments. After joining the incubation program, I started to work on [a] flexible approach to the implementation of the project. With Lab's help, now it's quite easy to test ideas on the ground.'
(Surendra Koirala)

'[The training] changed my line of thinking and that changed my work pattern as well. So, it helps me to focus on one thing for the first time, then they encourage me replicate those kind of things in other places as well.'
(Prakash Koirala)

With regard to the training, the diversity of the programme's participants is a challenge, as the requirements of, for example, a documentary maker, a software developer, and a lawyer are all different. One participant clearly expressed an interest in training that gives insight into the individual accountapreneurs' work (Prakash Koirala). To restrict the types of ideas pitched and incubated in the programme would be counterproductive for fostering the best and most creative approaches to increase accountability. Therefore, we suggest enriching the training by introducing two additional 'satellite projects' to the Incubator. In this way, standardisation to cope with diversity is not required but, instead, the network of knowledge exchange is enhanced.

'Meet the expert'

The Incubator could – besides their own specific training programmes – facilitate one-to-one meetings between their accountapreneurs and experts in the fields in which the accountapreneurs are interested in gaining more experience and expertise.

Volunteer-driven mentoring programme

Adding a volunteer-driven mentoring programme to the Incubator could be beneficial – potentially involving previous accountapreneurs in the process. According to their respective interests and needs, the current accountapreneurs could be matched with previous ones or with other experts. The difference from a one-to-one meeting would be a longer process of direct communication and guidance between a mentor and a mentee. The mentoring would be an exchange of knowledge so that both the mentor and mentee have positive results from the exchange. AL has already successfully operated other mentoring processes in Nepal.

Enhancing innovative learning

In its theory of change, the Accountability Lab focuses on young change-makers. The accountapreneurs – as the future change-makers – and their learning experiences are central to the Incubator programmes and not their individual projects. Impact is measured by their progress. A former accountapreneur, Anita Thapa, who joined the programme in 2014 and is now executive director of an NGO that focuses on girls' empowerment, pinpoints the value of the Incubator as a space for testing ideas and improving them, and for accepting and learning from failures.

Incubators are a space for testing ideas and improving them, and accepting and learning from failures.

The accountapreneur programme is not about designing programmes along parameters set up by funding agencies and writing lengthy progress reports, but looks for other ways of reporting and learning. In their strategy, Accountability Lab defines their approach as adaptive learning. This means to first understand what works, where, and why, and then how it can be used in collective action.[33] In this process, the learnings are documented and inform the 'next round of experimentation'.[34] A part of the process is also to inform other actors in the fields of accountability and anti-corruption.

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33. AL 2017a: 26.
34. AL 2017a: 26.

'I have been refining my ideas every time I come to Accountability Lab. I come up with new ideas and procedures.' (Prabhat Chhetri)

With regard to the reporting process in the Incubator, AL staff introduced monthly call-ins with the current cohort of accountapreneurs to see how they are progressing, what their problems are, what they have learned, and whether they require assistance. AL staff advised that, with the previous cohorts, regular contact and feedback about the challenges, successes, and learning curves was lacking. In reaction to this, their strategy of monthly calls and regular WhatsApp communication provides a more direct and less formalised feedback mechanism and enables direct support (Thukten Lama, Project Officer, Accountability Lab).

Feedback loops on success and failure to strengthen innovative learning and upscaling

Unfortunately, very little about the learning experiences of the Incubator has been made public. The accountapreneurs are involved in exchanges among each other, and many mention important learning curves and professional growth as a result of the programme. Some of them pass on their knowledge in different capacities beyond the scope of the programme, such as in their respective jobs. Two accountapreneurs have conducted film and art schools in collaboration with AL, during which learnings and experience are passed on to a new generation.

However, because of funding constraints, AL does not systematically inform the public or its funders about the learning experiences of the accountapreneurs and their projects. As an example, the online profiles of all accountapreneurs remain stagnant. They show their initial project ideas, but are not updated regarding their experiences, the lessons learned, or the future prospects of the idea. Subsequently, a vast potential is lost. There are no open-source reports on the learning experiences or recommendations on ideas incubated, which could be used by parties interested in pursuing a specific project idea, or by funders to acquire information about which ideas have worked in the past and have the potential to be scaled into a larger project.

We recommend that the online profiles of the accountapreneurs are updated (something that is currently underway), especially if they have completed their 'incubation period.' The online profiles could become a public space for highlighting adaptive-learning experiences, including failures and

successes. Here, potential arguments could be made as to which ideas should be supported and upscaled, which pitfalls could be avoided in future, and which collaborations were fruitful. It could be a space for interested parties, other implementing agents, and funders to source potential projects and ideas to fund and support, or to collaborate with. Further, it could be beneficial for the resumes and career building of former accountapreneurs. Through an online presence, they could be suggested as consultants or advisers to anyone interested in working on similar ideas or implementing the projects in different contexts or countries – thereby opening up potential funding and employment opportunities.

Feedback loop into civil society and engagement in policy work

AL's 2019 theory of change specifically mentions policy change[35] as one of their three activity clusters. Lessons learned in the Incubator, during the time of our research in 2018, have so far not been adapted into policymaking at the Nepalese government level or taken up by the international funding community. AL could engage in informing the decision makers, both in the country and in international NGOs, about successfully tested ideas and projects, as well as about the importance of space for youth to be involved in creative solution-finding.

Meeting the challenges of sustainability and funding

Funding, or the lack of funds, is a constant problem for the accountapreneurs and their projects, but also for AL. Many of the accountapreneurs struggle with the question of how to fund their projects and their life. For most, changing their society for the better is also a career path they have chosen. Therefore, they need to generate a source of income despite currently volunteering a lot of their time and energy. Some have sources of income in the for-profit sector – such as making commercial films, working as lawyers, and running an information and communication technology (ICT) company – and fund their other activities through this work. Others are more dependent on employment in the NGO sector.

During the Incubator, participants receive training on fundraising, and also attend networking events with CSOs and funders. The goal is to support

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35. AL 2019: 2.

them to build a network for future funding opportunities or employment. These activities focus on how to access funding from donors. In the Nepalese context, this generally means applying for grants with international funds.

AL gives the youth and their work significant credibility, as our interview partner Pawan Roy highlighted. This is important, as young people are often not trusted to get work done because they lack experience – especially in a society built on seniority, such as in Nepal. The programme enhances the position of youth in a hierarchical society. At the same time, the focus on access to international funds goes hand in hand with the lost opportunity of creating a space for crowdfunding.

Incubating not funding – facilitator not donor

The first few cohorts received seed funding of up to US$6,000 for the development and implementation of their project. The accountapreneurs signed a contract and received the money in three instalments. At the time of research, some of the accountapreneurs are still linked to the programme, because they are waiting for the last instalment of their seed funding to be transferred.

From the 2018 cohort onwards, seed funding was no longer provided, because AL could not secure any funds to be distributed to the participants. Due to this, AL changed the way they promoted the Incubator. Taking distance from the framing as a funding programme for creative youth, the 2018 call for applications highlighted the core incubating activities about learning and networking. While the majority of the earlier cohort gave the seed funding as one of their main motivations to apply for the Incubator in our interviews, the 2018 cohort was clearly motivated by the learning and networking experience. They did not perceive AL as just another funding agency, as there are many in Nepal, but as a space to sharpen their skills and enhance their project.

This is a positive development, as the change in personal motivations influenced the way the accountapreneurs participated in the programme. According to the previous assessment of the Incubator that included the first ten accountapreneurs, AL indicated that sometimes the attendance of the accountapreneurs was not what it could be. The team considered various strategies to improve attendance, such as communicating clearer expectations about attendance, responsiveness and commitment; increasing

advanced scheduling; coordinating calendars; and considering sanctions. These problems did not exist with the cohort of 2018. This indicates that a decision made out of necessity could prove to be beneficial for the programme as a whole, and enhance its potential to encourage youth agency and incubate innovative ideas.

Our research shows that it is crucial for incubator-type programmes to learn this lesson about seed funding. Instead of being a direct funding agent, such programmes should support youth by building up stronger partnerships and networks with funders. Similarly, non-profit organisations running incubator-type programmes could collaborate with potential funding agents and become an organisational link between young innovators and funders. As an example they could co-host contests for the best ideas together with funders interested in investing in innovation in anti-corruption.

Income generation through knowledge sharing

Two of the accountapreneurs have developed additional projects in collaboration with AL that increase creative outreach and generate income, and which have potential to be extended: the Accountability Film School and the Accountability Art School. In these workshop-based projects, they teach their respective skills to the next generation while upholding the focus on accountability and open government as an overarching topic. The film school has been running for several years (and one of the 2018 cohort found out about the Accountability Incubator through his participation in it), and the art school was launched in 2019. These projects bear potential, as they generate income for the accountapreneurs, extend the network of knowledge and learning, and sensitise youth with regard to accountability and corruption. We recommend drafting strategies on how to generate funds through such workshops and collaborations, and testing more options similar to the two schools. AL does make use of some of the initiatives in their other programmes, which gives them visibility and credibility.

Exploring crowdsourcing and other innovative funding options

In Nepal, there is a high potential for alternative funding sources other than the currently preferred international funders, and we suggest considering ways to build on networks within and beyond the country. Various crowdfunding options should be looked into and tested with regard to each accountapreneur's project.

After the 2015 earthquakes, the amount of successful online crowdfunding campaigns for emergency help in Nepal was unprecedented. Of course, a natural disaster of such magnitude is a different situation from small-scale projects, but an international group of Nepal enthusiasts, such as trekkers and mountaineers, as well as a large Nepalese diaspora enhance the potential for successful campaigns. Strengthening the ties to the diaspora organisations and communities could be beneficial for launching crowdfunded projects, but also for other forms of funding opportunities, such as visits abroad and sponsorships. Potentially, ties to the diaspora communities can enhance the learning experience and exchange of ideas, such as through online interaction and meeting sessions.

Crowdsourcing and open-source options are already becoming common in other sectors, particularly software development. Similarly, certain services could be crowdsourced, especially including the end user and the target group of the accountapreneurs' projects. As 33% of the Nepalese population contribute to charities, it makes sense to analyse the local base of each project and explore potential funding options, such as memberships, but also other crowdsourcing options, such as an exchange of knowledge. These funding strategies can enhance a public sense of ownership for the project.

As an example, the accountapreneur Surendra Koirala is thinking about various ways to fund his app. He could charge a minimal fee for the download, thereby funding it from the end user. Another – also complementary – option would be to crowdsource specific resources. People could contribute in various ways and then receive access to the app. One way could be a financial transaction, but another could be to offer services or expertise in exchange. As an example, the app could be provided for free to people who spread its popularity and initially provide it with information.

Another option would be to make the app open source. Open-source programmes allow individual programmers to build upon existing code to develop new software and allow greater access it. In this way, the technology of the app is made available not only for everyone to use, but also to work on, to improve, to fix bugs etc. This cuts down the production costs and extends the idea of collective ownership. Taking this principle further, it could be applied to the generation of new ideas and building youth engagement through the involvement of many people in the creation and rollout of an idea.

Crowdsourcing resources can also occur through alternative business models that are based on sharing certain costly factors, such as office spaces. With regard to alternative business models, we recommend looking into collective working models, and also traditional systems of reciprocity existent in the Nepalese society, to enhance options of collaboration and potentially crowdsourced access to funding and other resources.

The benefit of crowdsourcing resources – be it funds, labour, or knowledge – is that the dependency on singular sources is broken down. The pressures and alternative interests involved in funding streams should be essential parts of the training. Also when implementing crowdsourcing methods, the accountapreneurs should be trained in analysing the power relations in funding and resource exchange as well as ownership. Additionally, accountapreneurs should receive training on accountable use of crowdsourced funds.

Encouraging collaboration and networking

Sustainability is about networks and innovation, just as much as it is about money. While collaboration, networking, and sharing are crucial, it is important to create an environment that protects the intellectual rights of young innovators and is mutually beneficial.

One of the programme's challenges is how to network the individuals among each other and also support them to network their ideas beyond the Incubator. This is crucial to create an impact through innovative solutions to corruption. A network is required to implement and test the project ideas, as well as to progress the project – if it is successful – beyond the Incubator period. This has not been the case in the past. Innovative solutions have not progressed due to the unavailability of the accountapreneur, for example in the case of Nalibeli – a wiki to help people navigate the complicated government services in Nepal. While the project was active, the online tool was combined with ground events and a Facebook page. Despite its massive success in 2014, at the time of the research the site is no longer active. This is primarily because the idea was tied to a single individual, rather than shared and networked. Similarly, while Anita Thapa implemented many programmatic aspects of her civic school project in her next job, the project itself ceased to continue. This was because she could not prioritise it over

her paying job and the project did not build on a network beyond the accountapreneur.

In the 2018 cohort, AL has introduced an informal get-together between the current accountapreneurs that is called Accountability Collective. It takes place every two months – usually only with accountapreneurs that live in the Kathmandu valley – and a summary of the session is sent out to all the current accountapreneurs. The idea is for them to catch up, share their challenges and progress, and work out areas of collaboration (Suresh Chand, Program Manager, Accountability Incubator; Thukten Lama, Project Officer, Accountability Incubator).

In our interviews, about half of the accountapreneurs mentioned an increased network as a benefit of the Incubator – significantly, the interaction with the other accountapreneurs. As Brabim Kumar, an accountapreneur also sceptical about the programme's impact, puts it, the Incubator offers the opportunity to meet like-minded people and have a platform for discussion. Surendra Koirala points out that AL is also a safe space to discuss situations with peers in which corruption and questions of integrity and accountability impact, or even impede, their work. Here they can find creative ways of avoiding participating in corrupt activities while working in a systemically corrupt environment. This counteracts the sense of isolation that individuals experience, so the Incubator is a space of encouragement and hope.

'Every time we have a Collective or a training, that helps me to realize that all of us are kind of a similar journey. We want to do something on transparency, accountability, integrity, or something.' (Surendra Koirala)

Most are not in touch with all the accountapreneurs to the same extent. Usually, the accountapreneurs of one cohort are more connected to each other rather than to the other cohorts, since they go through the programme together. They are connected through their social media channels. Some have become friends and others interact on a professional level. Collaborations on projects have also occurred to differing degrees. The participants of the Incubator invite each other to their respective events. Some also exchange professional services – sometimes by hiring each other, but also by exchanging knowledge and know-how that can help each of them business-wise.

'There is a sense of network because every time the accountapreneurs would need support from different sectors, we would always say, "I am doing this, I need help on this sector." We would jump in to help each other. It was the network of the accountapreneurs back then who would want to support.'
(Anita Thapa)

A slight distortion of this data must be added here: all our interview partners from the older cohorts of accountapreneurs knew members of the AL staff from their previous activities in the CSO sector, often through participating in various youth organisations. The accountapreneurs also knew each other personally or through their extended networks before joining the Incubator. It was different with the 2018 cohort; while some heard about the programme from previous accountapreneurs they knew through their work and interests, they did not know the staff or each other. Similarly half of the 2019 cohort have ties to previous accountapreneurs.

Beyond networks of reciprocity to mutual ideas and projects

Until now, the youth participate in the programme individually and concentrate on their own problems and solutions. Many of our interview partners mention solidarity between the accountapreneurs and the willingness to help each other with their respective skills. The Incubator has the potential to be a space for open collaboration. However, until now, AL has not encouraged joint projects or the mutual incubating of ideas among the individual accountapreneurs. The Incubator has the opportunity to bring creative minds with different skill sets together and join their ideas and potentials.

Accountability Alumni: Ending the programme but keeping the connection

At the time of research two of the previous accountapreneurs are listed as 'former' on the homepage, while the others are all still marked as 'active.' This was even though some had finished the programme, had moved abroad, or were waiting for the last part of their seed funding to be released. Two were merely waiting for their funding to be issued. At the time of writing, AL had taken the important step to clarify the status of the accountapreneurs in the Incubator programme. The ten people who joined before 2017 were then classified as 'previous.'

One overlooked potential is the creation of a strong alumni group of accountapreneurs. Former participants of the programme could be linked together through various alumni activities, and events and meetings could be scheduled. The alumni could be included in the current programme for workshops but, also more sustainably, as mentors to younger accountapreneurs or as co-creators to test and work on ideas similar to their own. The alumni could also be a source of future local funding for the programme.

Strategic overhead networking and collaborative spaces

The management team at AL is networked on a personal level. Individuals have been active in the CSO sector for several years and are well connected. Systematic networking with CSOs engaged in accountability, as well as other actors, could benefit the programme. Establishing more institutionalised channels to funding agents, for example through an innovation challenge with prize money for the participants of the Incubator or other funding application modalities for the accountapreneurs, could be beneficial. However, this requires core funding for AL to invest in stabilising existing network structures and developing new ones.

Currently, AL offers a co-working space facility in their office premises, the Kathmandu OpenGov Hub, that any present or past participant of the Incubator can use to work on their ideas or host events. The Hub was initiated in 2014 together with Local Interventions Group and other partners. The idea behind the Hub is to create a physical space for organisations and individuals to share resources and be more efficient. At the same time, it is a space for collaboration, learning, and innovation on open government and accountability practice building. It aims to bring together actors from different fields, such as film-makers, activists, ICT experts, or government officers. The plan is to foster a place for collaboration, eco-system development, and accountability practice building. AL wants to enhance exposure and cross-organisational learning, as well as help young initiatives save costs and function more sustainably.[36]

Until now the Hub has not been used efficiently in the Incubator programme, with the exception of recent film events. AL moved to a new office, and several of our interview partners mentioned being here for the first time. The accountapreneurs did not frequent the space or use the Hub at

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36. AL 2017a: 17–8.

the time of research. Many accountapreneurs are engaged in other CSOs and have other obligations. A challenge remains to determine which factors could raise the interest of the accountapreneurs in joining the collaborative working space, and be included as criteria in the open call for applications. Binding the accountapreneurs closer together would provide potential for collaboration in the programme and also boost the Hub as a space. The autumn 2018 call for applications seemed to be a step in the right direction.

Inclusivity: Incorporating the team around the individual

In the accountapreneurs' feedback, an inherent weakness in the design of the Incubator becomes visible. The support is extended to an individual. However, many accountapreneurs are not developing their projects alone or in collaboration with AL; they are networked in teams. Both Surendra Koirala and Prakash Bhattarai run their own companies and rely on their teams to realise the project they pitched to the Incubator. The same can be said for the majority of the other accountapreneurs (Basanta Adhikari, Nabin Bhatt, Prabhat Chhettri, Yubraj Nepal, Prakash Koirala, Kabita Rai, Medha Sharma, Govinda Siwakoti, and Anita Thapa).

Currently, AL encourages the accountapreneurs to register their own legal entities, ie as an NGO or a social enterprise. Many of the older groups have already gone through this process; for some, capacity building in how to register and run an NGO is important. This focus on the legal aspect of registering an organisation conflicts with the expressed support for the individual's achievements, as the accountapreneur Brabim Kumar points out. He felt that the pressure to start his own NGO – which he did not want to do – especially in order to receive the seed funding was disconcerting. The restrictive legal situation in Nepal, which prevents international donors from giving development funds to individuals and non-registered entities, potentially influences AL's emphasis on founding an NGO. Registration as an NGO enables access to funding streams. This could be overcome by more flexible funding arrangements, whereby larger donors fund AL or other CSOs engaging in accountability innovations, or through the linkage of the Incubator accountapreneurs to other funding opportunities that focus on the individual, such as prizes or scholarship schemes.

Beyond the legal aspect of registration, there are no strategies in place to incorporate the team around the individual in the incubating process. Consequently, other accountapreneurs struggle to find their own space as an accountapreneur while representing their NGO and its internal dynamics.

Apurba KC exemplifies the problem of the programme supporting an individual rather than a team structure. She first pitched her project while in an executive position in Yuwa, a youth-led organisation. After the project was not selected the first year, she resubmitted it in the next one. However, two significant criteria had changed in the meantime. Apurba KC was only a general member and AL did not give seed funding anymore. Apurba's plan was to make her idea sustainable by integrating it into Yuwa's network of volunteers. But with the lack of funding, it is hard for her to motivate the other members of Yuwa to continue with the project.

Some accountapreneurs have included members of their team in the programme, without explicit structures for this being in place. Prakash Bhattarai sent members of his team to the AL training; Nabin Bhatt also attended the training with a former accountapreneur, before he became part of the programme.

These incidents show that – beyond legalities – a need prevails among the accountapreneurs to bring in their teams and share not only opportunities but also the burden of the work. Procedural adjustments could be tested to see the potential of a more strategic inclusion of the supporting team. Further, these NGOs and supporting teams comprise a potential network for crowdsourcing and future collaborations.

Assessments and recommendations

Innovative projects with alternative definitions of outcome and measurement, such as the Incubator, are increasingly important for addressing intractable corruption and accountability challenges, because they are designed to increase youth ownership and agency in the process. In this way, they have the potential to harness youth's historical role as change-makers, while building their capacity through intergenerational and international expertise and networks. Such programmes empower youth to engage with accountability challenges in their country through idea creation and adaptive learning, giving them space to trial, fail, learn, and re-design innovative solutions. They provide possibilities to interact with like-minded people and network with more established actors in the field. They also protect young innovators from the traditional reporting requirements of development funding.

Innovative projects have the potential to harness youth's historical role as change-makers, while building capacity through intergenerational and international expertise and networks.

The most significant and surprising conclusions we have taken from this research have emerged from a comparison between cohorts that either received or did not receive seed funding. Our research has shown that earlier cohorts who received such funding confirmed that it was the main motivation for applying for the programme. This contrasted dramatically with later cohorts who saw the unique space to innovate and tests ideas as a key motivation. There was also a difference in the type of person who applied. The earlier cohort was mainly composed of individuals already on a career trajectory leading to work in the development and civil society sectors. Whereas in later cohorts, participants came from a wider variety of backgrounds such as the private sector, education, technology, and finance.

We cannot conclude that these two significant findings are indicative of countering the selection bias for corruption in the CSO sector. Neither can we make any evaluation on the morality of the different types of motivation found during research nor the career choices of individuals. We can, however, conclude that the development of innovative ideas is not determined by the presence or lack of seed funding. This was surprising, as our assumption was that AL would struggle to attract participants without individual funding. These findings are indicative of the need to rethink funding structures for innovation projects.

We conclude that there is significant potential in incubator-type programmes to strengthen work aimed at increasing accountability and reducing corruption. Although, there is some room for improving upon the model we have studied. For example, a strategic shift in the programming towards binding the individuals into specific networks structures and allowing spaces to create crowdsourcing options would benefit incubator-type programmes, and support an increased and sustained outcome.

To harness the potentials of these types of innovative initiatives, a more conducive environment should be created. Donors and CSOs have a crucial role to play in this.

Recommendations for donors

Donors interested in funding incubator-type programmes need to be resourceful in how they fund these projects. In addition to funding traditional youth CSOs, donors should consider funding umbrella projects that train and aid youth in innovative thinking and adaptive learning. Therefore, incubators should be funded properly for the specific purpose of generating and testing ideas and allowing failures, rather than for implementation of successful ideas.

Funding should be for the specific purpose of generating and testing ideas and allowing failures, rather than for implementation of successful ideas.

Additionally, the importance of building up strategic networks, among others to include funding agents, that can then be shared with the respective participants of the incubator-type programmes as part of the training should be recognised and funded.

Donors need to be aware that offering seed funding may create negative incentives which prevent innovative idea development. Nevertheless, the process of adaptive learning, trial, and error etc. will need to be budgeted for. Similarly, while many ideas may survive via alternative funding (such as crowdfunding), some ideas will need more established funding beyond the trial phase. This will require flexible funding options being made available by donors. One way to achieve this would be to separate the funding given to incubators and that given to innovators to trial their ideas. Establishing innovation banks that fund idea piloting, but not incubators, may be a way forward.

Donors wishing to support incubator-type programmes should ensure that reporting is based on the learning experience and progression of innovators,

rather than the 'success' or 'failure' of the ideas they create. This will give youth innovators the space to make mistakes, learn, adapt, and prototype without fear. Similarly, this enables the implementing partner to focus on the process of creating innovative ideas rather than creating a list of 'successful' ideas.

Recommendations for organisations hosting incubator-type projects

Funding

NGOs or other organisations running incubator programmes should not be a source of start-up funding for successful ideas developed in the incubator. Instead they should be funded to develop strategic networks with funding entities to form a bridge between incubating ideas and funding further development and piloting. They should also facilitate the connection of innovators to funding agencies, the private sector, and other funding sources.

We recommend that seed funding should not be given to individual innovators, as we have seen that when such funding was removed, the people who applied to be accountapreneurs had motivation more suited to idea creation.

Sharing the learning

Incubators should ensure that the learning experiences of innovators and their projects are reported. This creates feedback loops on success and failure, and enhances innovative learning and potentials for upscaling. This can be achieved by creating dynamic and updated web presences for individual innovators that highlight their adaptive learning, and what worked and what did not.

Organisations that host incubator-type programmes should create feedback loops into wider civil society and use their learning to inform policy dialogue at government level and with international donors.

Training and supporting youth innovators

There should be a diversity of training on how to fund idea piloting and rollout. This training should go beyond grant-proposal writing to traditional

grant-making bodies and include alternative funding options, such as crowdfunding.

To further improve the potentials for incubator programmes, individual support should be offered to young innovators. This could be achieved through a mentoring element that connects new innovators with previous cohorts, or with other experts.

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