

The preface of the sourcebook for Information and Accountability workshops states that the workshops are designed to 'stimulate demand by the public for information from their governments through an open ended discussion process: the object is not to promote a particular solution but provide a framework for discussion'. The workbook and sourcebook have emerged from pilot workshops in Ghana and Tanzania. In reviewing the workbook and sourcebook I have also had the proceedings of the Tanzania workshop available to me.

During this review I have considered how useful the two books would be to the organisation for which I work if it wished to conduct a similar workshop in Zambia and with particular emphasis as to how Information for Accountability can be used as a tool for corruption prevention in service delivery.

As a practical methodology in the logistics of organising an international or national workshop the workbook is excellent. The components of the many tasks that need to be attended to in making a workshop successful have been broken down in detail. For example the comments about drawing up a memorandum of understanding concerning the responsibilities and inputs of the various partners is exactly the kind of practical advice that is needed and should help avoid the misunderstandings that can mar events when different partners have conflicting expectations of each others roles.

From the text boxes highlighting practical tips, to the checklists for different tasks, preparation of information packs and the models of Press releases, attitude surveys and evaluation forms, most organisations could feel confident that if they followed carefully the guidance given, they would be able to run a successful workshop given co-operation of partners, facilitators and participants. However the advice about financial commitment and managing expenditure is very brief. This section of the book would have benefited from the inclusion of advice on how to present a budget to a sponsor or donor when seeking financial support, and how to present the final income and expenditure account to sponsors. Transparency and accountability in financial matters is key to building successful relationships with partners and sponsors.

The workbook could have included more detail in the sections looking at focus, defining objectives and developing the sessions within the programme. Workshop planners looking to refine the focus event or set priority objectives are presented with long lists of key questions and key issues. It is not possible to touch upon all of the questions and issues in two days and more guidance on what issues might fit neatly together given the focus of the workshop would have been useful. E.g. Model 1: issues of public service delivery, anti-corruption initiatives, citizens' complaints bureaux, codes of practice, or Model 2: legislation, official secrets, freedom of the Press. This detailed guidance on focus and workshop session planning was clearly omitted by the authors because of their wish not to lay down solutions or promote a particular viewpoint. However more detailed examples or models of focus, objectives and session planning would have helped less experienced organisers who may be trying to run a workshop without the technical backstopping of the Rights and Records Institute.

In the section on creating a coherent programme, more emphasis on the concluding sessions is advisable in order that the workshop does not become just another talking shop. I suggest placing more emphasis on follow up actions rather than merely 'making recommendations' and obtaining the commitment of other organisations identified as competent to take certain issues forward, will help achieve a more lasting impact (e.g. Law societies can commit themselves to lobby for legislative change, civil service departmental heads can make a

commitment to review practices and procedures within their own department, journalists can commit themselves to writing a special feature on information and citizens rights).

It is also important to emphasise that there must be adequate civil society representation if the workshops are to be credible as vehicles for stimulating demand among citizens for more information from government. A weakness of the Tanzania workshop was the dominance of civil service participants at the expense of civil society representatives. More participants from the media and NGOs such as (Tanzania Media Women's Association, (TAMWA) Tanzania Women Lawyers Association, (TAWLA), and community based organisations which document the abuse of citizens rights through their lack of access to essential information, would have given the civil servants a deeper understanding of the problems citizens face, stimulated dialogue, and ensured that the workshop findings were widely disseminated in the public domain.

The Sourcebook draws together the background information gathered during the running of the Ghana and Tanzania workshops. The list of websites and bibliography is a comprehensive reference point for studying current issues and best practice as regards citizens rights to information which all professionals interested in governance issues will find an essential tool for improving their own technical knowledge on information and accountability issues.

The papers from the Tanzania and Ghana workshops included in the sourcebook varied considerably in quality and some would have benefited from editing. The most inspiring was the one delivered by the Director of the Kenya Archives, who showed how an initiative by his department to directly investigate complaints about missing files could support the fight against corruption and make citizens be more aware of their rights. It also showed how the commitment of one person could make a difference!

This paper gave me several ideas for developing similar programmes with different institutions in Zambia.

The case studies from different parts of the world, the summary of essential mechanisms for freedom of information and the summary of the global discussion on information as a tool for accountability were all useful sources of information which would enhance understanding of the key issues and provide useful reference materials for presenters and speakers.

Both the sourcebook and the workbook are attractively and clearly laid out and easy to read. The attention to detail in drawing together the methodology and the sources into these two complementary handbooks is impressive.

On its own, the workbook stands as a blueprint for organising almost any workshop or conference. The sourcebook used independently of the workbook provides an excellent reference point to anyone seeking to be informed on issues of information and accountability. Used together as designed, the handbooks provide a superb resource for both national and international NGOs and groups of citizens intending to lobby for greater freedom of information as a means of making government institutions accountable and responsive to the citizens they are supposed to serve.

However if the handbooks are to achieve the stated objective of stimulating demand by the public for information from their governments, the workbook would benefit from giving more attention to the issue of how a broad range of civil society representatives including the media can be drawn into active participation in the workshops to ensure the widest possible

dissemination of the issues.

Armed with these two valuable tools, I would now have no hesitation in planning and running an information for accountability workshop in Zambia!

Linda Fox

Project Co-ordinator, Zambia