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Digital tools for transparency and accountability in education

The role of civil society organizations

Muriel Poisson, Fernanda Odilla, and Eva Korn



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List of abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CSO	Civil society organization
EOL	Education Out Loud
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
ICT	Information and communication technology
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Executive summary

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are making increasing use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to strengthen transparency and accountability in the education sector. Examples of these tools range from basic social media engagement to more advanced solutions such as online data portals, monitoring platforms, whistleblower systems, and the emergent application of data analytics and machine learning. While ICTs are widely recognized as having strong potential to curb corruption, empirical evidence of their effectiveness in the education sector, particularly when led by CSOs, remains limited.

This publication by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), a Global Learning Partner in the Education Out Loud (EOL) initiative, addresses this gap through a mixed-methods approach. It combines a desk-based review of academic and grey literature, a survey of organizations within the EOL network, and seven mini case studies of CSO-led ICT initiatives identified through the survey, aimed at improving transparency and accountability in education.

Key findings

The findings of the literature review show that ICTs are already being applied across a wide range of anti-corruption actions, including prevention, detection, and corrective action. Examples include tracking education budgets, monitoring school infrastructure and feeding programmes, enabling anonymous reporting through whistleblower platforms, and informing citizens via interactive websites, chatbots, online games, and social media. However, the review also highlights a persistent lack of systematic data to measure the direct impact of these tools on reducing corruption, underscoring the need for more rigorous and comparative research.

Survey findings reveal that mobile technology plays a central role in ICT access, with mobile phones (86 per cent) and internet-enabled devices (62 per cent) serving as the primary entry points, reinforcing the importance of mobile-friendly designs. Respondents report moderate to strong internal capacity in terms of ICT equipment, skills, and human resources, but financial resources emerge as a major constraint. Externally, supportive policy environments, user security measures, and engagement strategies facilitate ICT use, while weak infrastructure and challenging political contexts remain barriers.

ICT tools are used most frequently to analyse corruption trends, followed by prevention, detection, and corrective action. End users are mainly students, teachers, and citizens, although user engagement remains a key challenge. Effectiveness is commonly measured through indicators such as data quality and user numbers, reflecting growing recognition of the need for stronger impact assessment frameworks. Funding for ICT initiatives relies heavily on outsourcing and donations, raising concerns about long-term sustainability.

Evidence from case studies

The seven case studies illustrate how CSOs deploy ICTs to address issues such as resource mismanagement, insufficient funding, and lack of transparency. Despite challenges including high costs, digital divides, skills gaps, and resistance from government actors, several initiatives have contributed to policy reforms, improved service delivery, and increased civic participation. These cases demonstrate that, when well-designed and supported, ICTs can play a meaningful role in strengthening accountability in education.

Executive summary

Recommendations

For CSOs, the report emphasizes the need to:

- design user-centred and inclusive digital platforms, particularly for marginalized groups;
- invest in capacity building for technical, analytical, and cybersecurity skills;
- ensure strong data protection and ethical safeguards;
- integrate ICT tools into broader organizational anti-corruption strategies;
- develop sustainable financing and maintenance plans; and
- implement robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to generate credible evidence of impact.

For education authorities, key recommendations include:

- strengthening legal frameworks that support digital transparency, including access to information, press freedom, and whistleblower protection;
- improving access to reliable and timely education data for CSOs and the general public;
- embedding citizen engagement and feedback mechanisms into education governance systems;
- providing dedicated funding, technical support, and training for CSO-led ICT initiatives; and
- fostering partnerships among governments, CSOs, and other stakeholders to enhance government buy-in and sustainability.

Overall, the report concludes that ICTs hold substantial promise for combating corruption in education. However realizing this potential requires stronger evidence, sustained investment, ethical safeguards, and closer collaboration between civil society and public authorities.

Introduction: Digital tools, anti-corruption, and civil society

Information and communication technologies (ICTs), broadly defined as 'a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share, or exchange information' (UIS, 2009: 120), have become valuable allies in the fight against corruption in the digital age. They encompass a wide range of tools and platforms, from simple mobile applications to sophisticated data analytics systems. These include hardware such as computers and fixed or mobile phones; 'conventional' internet technologies including websites, blogs, and email; and live or recorded broadcasting technologies (radio, television, webcasting, and audio or video players), as well as emerging solutions such as artificial intelligence (AI) and blockchain.

Because ICTs cover a broad spectrum of traditional and cutting-edge technologies, they can contribute to combating corruption and promoting integrity in multiple ways. Supporting both top-down and bottom-up approaches (Kukutschka, 2016), they offer ways to 'promote transparency, open government data to public scrutiny, and automate administrative processes, thereby reducing officials' discretion and limiting citizens' interactions with gatekeepers' (Chêne, 2016). As a tool in anti-corruption efforts, ICTs are commonly used to develop open databases and data-driven platforms that give citizens access to public information and policies (Fubini, 2023).

In recent years, ICTs have helped to expand collective action, lowering the costs of information diffusion and communication (Earl and Kimport, 2011). They have facilitated reform-oriented campaigns such as civil society initiatives advocating for enhancing anti-corruption laws or exerting pressure on governments to enact and implement new legal anti-corruption frameworks. They have also given rise to a novel form of citizenry, which is increasingly interconnected while simultaneously open to individual voices. In this new digital landscape, individuals can mobilize tools and platforms to express their thoughts without necessarily being part of a group or organization (Breuer and Farooq, 2012).

From a civil society perspective, ICTs now play a crucial role in grassroots anti-corruption efforts. Civil society organizations (CSOs) have long relied on phones, computers, email, and websites to support internal operations, external communication and advocacy. Recent advances in digital technologies have significantly expanded the arsenal of tools at their disposal. Digital applications, media, platforms and infrastructure can be mobilized to monitor public services, report corruption, promote citizen monitoring of public expenditures and service delivery, and strengthen interactions between government authorities and the general public (Adam and Fazekas, 2021; Ear-Dupuy and Serrat, 2014).

The use of ICTs has opened up new opportunities for 'low-effort civic engagement'. However, such engagement can be limited in terms of real-world impact, with actions reduced to signing e-petitions or liking online content (Breuer and Farooq, 2012). There is little consensus on the extent to which technology can genuinely enhance political engagement, public deliberation, or citizen empowerment (Rossini and Oliveira, 2016). Furthermore, experience shows that many anti-corruption technologies, despite initial enthusiasm and popular excitement, quickly fade or become inactive (Kukutschka, 2016). Such tools may even prove disruptive or dysfunctional, spreading misinformation, amplifying polarization, and favouring the political instrumentalization of corruption (Marchetti and Stranziano, 2024).

Introduction: Digital tools, anti-corruption, and civil society

This publication, developed as part of work undertaken by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) as a Global Learning Partner for Education Out Loud (EOL), critically examines the use of digital tools by civil society to enhance transparency and accountability in the education sector. It draws on three major sources of information:

- A review of approximately 70 bibliographic sources including academic and grey literature, as well as online sources and documentation related to anti-corruption ICTs in education.
- The results of a survey conducted among EOL grantees, which gathered 50 responses across 23 countries.
- Seven mini case studies of CSO-led ICT initiatives. These case studies were identified through the survey based on their relevance to the research objectives, the diversity of their sociopolitical and geographical contexts, and the complexity of the digital tools developed. Individual interviews were then conducted with project managers from each initiative.

The study maps technologies deployed for varying purposes in the fight against corruption, highlighting innovative initiatives developed by CSOs across different countries. It then presents valuable lessons drawn from civil society actors belonging to the EOL network. It also identifies significant gaps in understanding the development, use, and maintenance of these technologies.

The intersection of ICTs and anti-corruption in education is a dynamic and promising field – one in which technology can meaningfully advance transparency and integrity. However care is required to navigate the complex challenges, risks, and ethical considerations at stake.

As a Global Learning Partner of the GPE Education Out Lound fund from 2023-2025, IIEP supported grantees through research, knowledge sharing, and training activities to enhance the effectiveness and impact of civil society engagement in educational planning and management, and to ensure more inclusive, equitable, transparent, and accountable education systems.

As part of this programme, IIEP explored how CSOs are using new technologies in innovative ways to improve accountability and transparency in education. This included an international online survey, a literature review, and a series of mini-case studies, which have all contributed to the present report. An interactive map which allows users to explore different initiatives which use technology to improve transparency, is also available on IIEP's ETICO portal.

Part 1.
Digital tools, anti-corruption, and education

1.1. Digital technologies for anti-corruption

Anti-corruption efforts draw on a variety of types of digital technologies. Examples include transparency and open data portals, whistleblowing platforms, AI and other new technologies, mobile and tablets applications, and social media. These technologies are summarized briefly below accompanied by empirical evidence of their impact.

Transparency and open data portals

Ideally, transparency portals are designed and used to present information in open data formats. Such portals are increasingly created by governments (Poisson and Jorgoni, 2025) and CSOs to make public information simpler and more accessible. Research has found a correlation between people's use of the internet to seek information about government and community affairs, and increasing support for transparency and the right to access public records (Cuillier and Piotrowski, 2009). However, open data initiatives assume the presence of skilled intermediaries capable of interpreting technically oriented datasets (Davies and Fumega, 2014). As a consequence, the impact of transparency and open data portals on anti-corruption efforts remains limited and dependent largely on the involvement of those with the necessary technology, skills, and digital literacy.

Whistleblowing platforms

Reporting channels take many forms including online platforms such as websites, social media, or mobile apps, and dedicated email addresses and telephone hotlines for submitting corruption reports or grievances to government agencies, media outlets, or CSOs (Chêne, 2016). Whistleblowing platforms are ICT tools purpose-built for reporting corruption. They enable individuals to disclose misconduct securely and anonymously, often with options to upload supporting documents. These systems may be operated by government bodies, media organizations, or CSOs (Adam and Fazekas, 2021). In India, for example, the renowned initiative and web-based platform *I Paid a Bribe* allows individuals to anonymously, or openly, report experiences of paying or being asked for bribes, their refusal to pay, and encounters with honest officials. However, as of 2026, the website was no longer accessible. Another example is GlobalLeaks, an open source encrypted whistleblowing platform designed to facilitate the secure reporting of corruption and other forms of wrongdoing.

AI and other new technologies

AI is typically used in anti-corruption efforts for data analysis to detect patterns, flag anomalies, and generate automated alerts or recommendations that support further machine processing or human decision-making. Research in this field follows two main strands. One strand applies AI methods to identify corruption risks: for example, predicting corruption in Spanish public contracts (López-Iturriaga and Sanz, 2018), detecting fraud and collusion in development contracts (Grace et al., 2016), or self-reporting corruption on social media (Li et al., 2020). The second strand examines the broader potential, risks, and governance of AI-based anti-corruption tools (Gerli and Odilla, 2026; Odilla, 2024). Mapping efforts in Brazil identified more than 30 such tools developed by government and civil society, most of which focus on monitoring public spending, with others monitoring school infrastructure and meal programmes (Odilla, 2023).

Mobile and tablets applications

Digital devices, such as mobile phones, tablets, wearable cameras, and other portable recording devices, can support anti-corruption efforts by enabling people to quickly

1.1. Digital technologies for anti-corruption

capture and transmit evidence through photos, videos, or audio recordings. In 2014, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched the 'Mobile Phones Against Corruption' initiative in Papua New Guinea, providing a mobile platform for citizens to report corruption cases (Kanyam, Kostandini, and Ferreira, 2017). In North Macedonia, a similar initiative developed by Transparency International and the Center for International Relations (CIR) allows users to report alleged corruption through a dedicated mobile application. Transparency Watch North Macedonia uses an open source mobile software tool that collects and maps user-generated reports, helping to visualize patterns of corruption.

Social media

Social media can be used to expose, engage, and organize collective action – such as demonstrations, meetings, and trainings – by enabling users to easily connect, form communities, share information, and pursue common goals (Bertot, Jaeger, and Grimes, 2010). Research documenting their use for self-reporting corruption (Li et al., 2020) used unsupervised machine-learning techniques, analysing more than 22 million tweets containing corruption-related keywords. The study identified 2,383 tweets from 1,556 users that directly reported corruption, predominantly involving police bribery and healthcare. Mentions of corruption also appeared in education, professional sports, and the judicial sector.

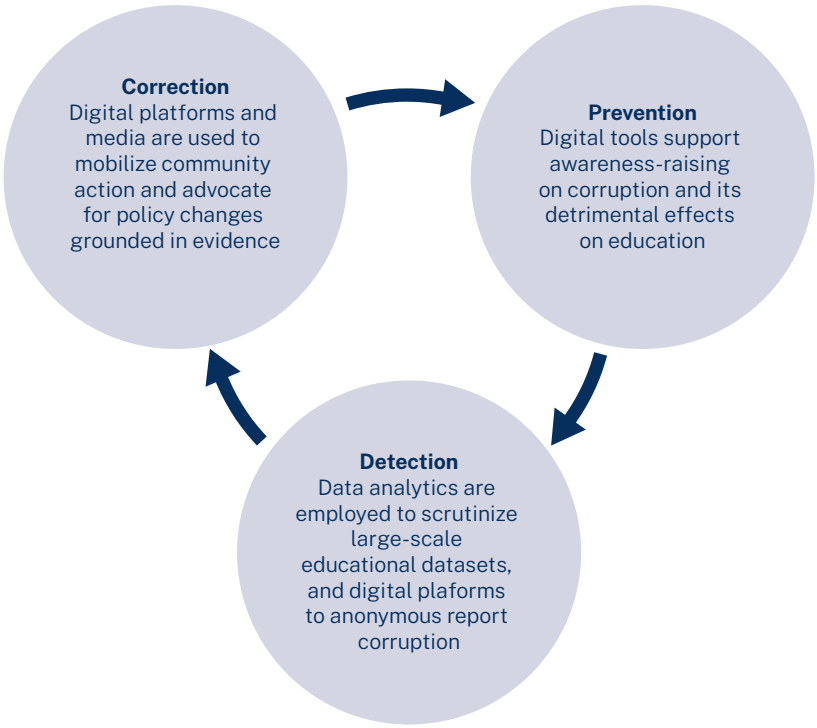
In conclusion, a wide range of ICT tools have been developed to support bottom-up anti-corruption efforts; however, many initiatives, despite being innovative, struggle to sustain operations due to short-term funding or low user engagement. This dynamic underscores the need for greater and more in-depth understanding of the specific functions these tools can serve in effectively supporting anti-corruption efforts.

1.2. Digital tools and anti-corruption: What do we know?

In an increasingly digitized and data-driven society, ICTs have transformed the way in which people live, work, and communicate, and they continue to play an increasingly important role in daily life. However, studies assessing the effectiveness of ICTs in reducing corruption remain limited. Adam and Fazekas (2021) conducted an extensive review of 30 studies examining the impact of both governmental and non-governmental ICTs on corruption. Their analysis shows that 'the introduction of ICT tools does not automatically translate into anti-corruption outcomes; rather, impact hinges on the matching between ICT tools and the local context, including support for and skills in using technology' (Adam and Fazekas, 2021).

Digital tools serve three primary functions in what Prado, Carson, and Correa (2015) term the accountability cycle, namely: correction, prevention, and detection (see *Figure 1*).

Figure 1. The Accountability Cycle



Source: Adapted from Prado, Carson, and Correa (2015).

The following sections explore the various types of tools used by civil society to combat corruption with a focus on their primary functions within the accountability cycle – prevention, detection, and corrective measures. Many existing ICT solutions offer multiple functionalities — often combining two or even all three of these functions.

1.2. Digital tools and anti-corruption: What do we know?

Using digital tools to prevent corruption

Prevention aims to minimize opportunities for corruption by raising awareness of its harmful effects, promoting transparency and access to essential public data, and engaging people in active monitoring, which helps discourage wrongdoing through continuous oversight. Preventive strategies may include educating people about corruption risks, reducing tolerance for corrupt activities, and opening up data to promote civic monitoring over financial transactions, procurement processes, exams, or the evaluation of educational programmes. Several initiatives leverage ICTs to foster transparency and involve citizens in advocacy, training, and monitoring activities (see *Table 1*).

Table 1. Prevention initiatives using ICTs

Type of initiative	Name	Country	Description
Data/transparency portal	Observatorio Educativo Ciudadano	Paraguay	The observatory provides accessible and reliable education data to engage citizens and influence public policy. Users can explore information on educational plans and commitments, access comprehensive data using infographics, and consult a glossary of terms.
App on public spending	BudgIT	Nigeria, followed by Ghana, Liberia, Senegal, and Sierra Leone	The app promotes active citizenship by simplifying government budgets. It offers easy access to budget allocations and expenditures, using infographics to inform and educate the population about public spending. The Tracka Mobile 2.0 app further strengthens participatory governance at the subnational level. They also developed Bimi, an AI-powered financial search engine that enables users to interact with financial data through a conversational chat interface.
Connected training/games	Aluno Auditor	Brazil (Macapá, Florianópolis and Belo Horizonte municipalities)	The project engages students in monitoring education spending by guiding them to consult transparency portals and assess the condition of their classrooms and school facilities. Using e-questionnaires, they compare available budgets against their own observations of state of their schools. They discuss solutions with their teachers and design measures involving the broader community.

Source: Authors.

Using digital tools to detect corruption

Detection refers to uncovering potential wrongdoing and its scope, often through analysing patterns or investigating allegations. Routine monitoring or incident-reporting channels can help flag suspicious activities, which can then be assessed further to determine whether corruption has occurred. Monitoring serves not only as a key mechanism for detecting

1.2. Digital tools and anti-corruption: What do we know?

corruption but also for deterring misconduct by increasing the likelihood of discovery. It can detect misallocation of school funds, poor resource distribution, or inefficiencies in school management. Technology can play a vital role in identifying and verifying irregularities, including through data gathering and analysis, ICT-enhanced investigative techniques, and automated cross-checks (see *Table 2*).

Table 2. Detection initiatives using ICTs

Type of initiative	Name	Country	Description
Transparency portal	DoZorro	Ukraine	In 2016, Ukrainian anti-corruption activists created DoZorro, a digital system enabling citizens to oversee public procurement. Led by Transparency International Ukraine, a coalition of CSOs partnered with government and business to build a fully online, open-source e-procurement platform ensuring transparent access to tenders. The initiative later expanded to city councils, state enterprises and law enforcement. In 2018, DoZorro introduced online procurement maps focused on education, helping parents to monitor secondary school purchases in six towns.
Crowdsourcing web platform	I Paid a Bribe	India	Users of this crowdsourcing platform can anonymously report cases of bribery, encounters with honest officials, and situations where they refused to pay a bribe. Submitted details include amounts requested/paid and the location of the incident. The initiative analyses these reports to identify corruption trends and hotspots, aiming to raise awareness among citizens and public officials of the impact of corruption, and to advocate for greater transparency.
AI applications	Tá de Pé Merenda	Brazil (Rio Grande do Sul and Pernambuco states)	This (now discontinued) initiative developed by Transparência Brasil used AI to facilitate civil society oversight of state and municipality allocation and spending on school meals. It helped identify above-average food prices by accounting for seasonal variations and the participation of local producers. The website featured unusual purchases and contracts that might require closer scrutiny. The organization planned the launch of a WhatsApp chatbot to engage students in assessing school meal quality and reporting problems, including via photo submissions.

Source: Authors.

Using digital tools to counter corruption

Corrective measures in anti-corruption efforts are essential for rectifying identified wrongdoings and preventing their recurrence. Such measures may involve leveraging mainstream or social media to expose misconduct or mobilize public pressure, with the expectation that reputational consequences will prompt perpetrators to amend their behaviour. Corrective measures can also take the form of advocacy campaigns

1.2. Digital tools and anti-corruption: What do we know?

that encourage institutional reforms and policy changes to address the root causes of corruption (see *Table 3*). However, few initiatives use ICTs exclusively to support corrective measures, as these actions largely remain the responsibility of oversight institutions and public justice.

Table 3. Corrective initiatives using ICTs

Type of initiative	Name	Country	Description
Mobile app to monitor service delivery	Monitoring for Financial Savings (M4FS)	Ghana (five northern districts)	Designed by Integrity Action, this initiative supports communities in monitoring the delivery of health and education infrastructure projects by comparing promises with actual delivery. It uses DevelopmentCheck, a mobile app to calculate public expenditure savings generated through community monitoring. The insights gathered are shared at district and national levels to inform policy and address issues.
Mobile app later converted into WhatsApp chatbot	Tá de Pé Obras	Brazil	Funded by Google's Social Impact Challenge, this initiative enabled the creation of an ICT platform with a geolocated database of school construction sites, timelines, financial data, SMS reporting, automated alerts to authorities, and a Twitter/X bot. Users share locations and upload photos or descriptions during site visits. Reports are reviewed by independent engineers, and Transparência Brasil notifies responsible officials about delays. If they fail to respond, cases are escalated to the Ministry of Education and the Comptroller General for corrective action.
Website and mobile app	Action for Transparency (A4T)	Kenya, Uganda, Zambia	This initiative combats mismanagement of school funds by enabling citizens to conduct social audits using budget information via a website and mobile app. First implemented in Uganda and Zambia, and later in Kenya (2015), the A4T app provides news on project activities, corruption cases, and users' rights. It enables anonymous reporting, whistleblowing, and tracking of submitted cases. Users can offer feedback to the project team and access informational videos, making the app a comprehensive tool for transparency and citizen engagement in the education sector.

Source: Authors.

Aligning corruption types with suitable digital tools

For an ICT initiative to be effective in the fight against corruption, it must clearly identify the type of corruption being targeted and select appropriate technologies accordingly. Some tools support large-scale data collection and analytics, helping to identify patterns and anomalies within extensive datasets. Others enable the anonymous reporting of corrupt practices, thereby reducing the fear of reprisals for whistleblowers. Yet other tools can be used to raise awareness about wrong-doing and help cultivate a culture of integrity. *Table 4* provides a typology of ICT tools based on the rationale for adopting these tools and the types of actions they support.

1.2. Digital tools and anti-corruption: What do we know?

Table 4. Mapping of ICT tools per type of anti-corruption action

Primary purpose	Desired outcome	Common types of technologies used
Prevention		
To foster transparency and open access to information	Reduce or eliminate situations in which individuals have the discretion to make subjective decisions or exercise personal judgement	• Transparency portals, interactive websites, dashboards, data visualization tools, infographics, interactive AI-based tools (chatbots) capable of generating easy-to-read content
To raise awareness about corruption and showcase successful efforts of fighting it	Equip the public with the knowledge of government rules, procedures, and corruption cases, so they can respond effectively	• Websites and mobile platforms • Transparency portals • Online games and quizzes • Online forums • Social media, mailing lists, and instant messages
To promote ethical attitudes and highlight success stories of integrity	Use 'name and fame' practices to motivate individuals, organizations, and communities to behave in just, fair, and responsible ways	• Social media platforms, websites, mailing lists, and text messages
Detection		
To report bribery and other forms of misconduct witnessed or experienced by citizens	Provide safe and easily accessible channels for citizens to report wrongdoing	• Web-based, secure reporting platforms • Other secure reporting channels, such as mobile applications, dedicated email addresses, hotlines, or phone landlines
To track and monitor public spending	Strengthen oversight, thereby discouraging misconduct among those who are aware they are being monitored	• Open, machine-readable data with visual dashboards and AI tools like chatbots • AI and other data science techniques to discover patterns and irregularities within large datasets • Online or digital tools that enable the collection and analysis of information from open sources, such as websites, social media, news articles, public records, and other publicly accessible data • AI applications for data analysis
To track and monitor the execution and quality of services on site	Identify irregularities and spot anomalies and suspicious patterns	• Mobile devices and apps for gathering field data

1.2. Digital tools and anti-corruption: What do we know?

Primary purpose	Desired outcome	Common types of technologies used
Correction		
To introduce corrective measures, including the pursuit of legal action	Ensure accountability and support formal follow-up	• Websites and mobile platforms • Social media (name and shame)
Multiple purposes		
Multiple purposes (prevention, detection, and corrections)	Monitor and flag irregularities, and simultaneously make findings public, raise awareness, and engage citizens	• Mobile applications • Dashboards • Automated posts • Social media • Automated data retrieval from a transparency portal • Chatbots

Note: The table does not refer to the digitalization and automation of procedures in areas such as financing, public procurement, human resources management, or admissions processes, even though these measures can serve as powerful deterrents to corruption. This is because the implementation and management of such tools typically fall under the responsibility of public administrations rather than CSOs.

Source: Authors.

Importantly, if the selected digital tool is not well suited to the specific corruption type being addressed, it may ultimately prove ineffective. In addition, many initiatives integrate prevention, detection, and corrective measures through multi-functional ICTs, creating an interconnected and continuous accountability framework.

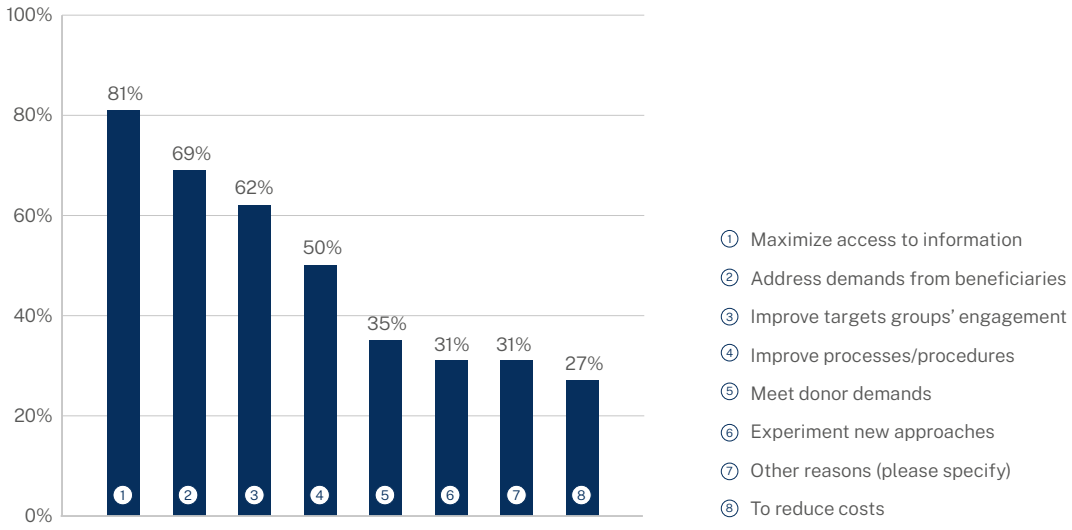
1.3. Using digital tools: What the experience of the Education Out Loud network tells us

In order to better understand how CSOs use ICTs to promote transparency and accountability in education, IIEP conducted a survey of EOL grantees. The main results of the survey are presented below. These findings are complemented by evidence from seven mini case studies selected on the basis of the survey results, and individual interviews with their main organizers. The mini case studies are described in greater detail in Part 2.

Motivation for introducing a digital tool

When asked about their motivation for using digital tools, 81% of survey respondents stated that maximizing access to information was a priority, indicating a strong focus on improving the availability and dissemination of critical data. Other priorities included responding to beneficiaries' demands (69%), reflecting a strong commitment to responsiveness and meeting stakeholder needs effectively. Enhancing engagement with target groups was also a key objective, with 62% of organizations aiming to foster interactive relationships. Half of the respondents were focused on improving processes and procedures through ICT tools, indicative of efforts to increase efficiency and operational performance. Additional objectives included meeting donor requirements (35%) and experimenting with new approaches (31%), while cost reduction (27%) remained a secondary consideration.

Figure 2. Primary reasons for introducing ICT tools (multiple choice)



Source: Results from the IIEP Survey of EOL grantees.

Main characteristics of the ICT tools developed

According to the survey results, a large majority of initiatives (79%) used ICT tools to analyse corruption: nearly two-thirds (63%) aimed to prevent corruption, while half focused on detecting corrupt practices, and 42% used digital tools to support corrective actions. Data portals served primarily analytical purposes by aggregating data to identify patterns and anomalies, whereas citizen evaluation platforms were also largely analytical but could contribute to corrective action where interactive features enabled dialogue between citizens and public officials.

1.3. Using digital tools: What the experience of the Education Out Loud network tells us

In terms of domains of application, around half of respondents used ICT tools to monitor budget and allocation processes (56%), oversee the construction and maintenance of school facilities (52%), assess teacher conduct and performance (52%), and ensure legal compliance (48%). Additional uses included organizing advocacy campaigns through social media (44%), tracking textbooks and school equipment (32% each), and identifying different forms of misconduct (32%). Other applications, such as monitoring teacher and student attendance (28% and 24%), collecting online petitions and signatures (24%), and tracking food quality and exam integrity (20%), were less common but still notable.

Diversity of end-users

The end-users of ICT tools implemented by survey respondents were highly diverse, reflecting efforts to reach multiple stakeholder groups simultaneously. Students, teachers, and citizens were the primary beneficiaries, accounting for 62% of responses, followed closely by school managers and public administration staff at both local and central levels (57% each). Parents also played a significant role, with 48% using these tools to engage in educational processes. Respondents further identified other important end-users, including CSOs and coalition members, as well as technical and financial partners, researchers, education experts, and teacher trainers.

Most initiatives targeted mixed socio-economic groups (48%), while 24% focused specifically on low-income populations. A further 19% served primarily middle-income users, and 10% targeted lower middle-income groups, highlighting efforts to adapt ICT tools to a wide range of socio-economic contexts. The initiatives also exhibited a balanced geographical focus on urban and rural areas in 57% of cases. Specifically, 14% targeted either rural or urban areas exclusively, while 10% concentrated on selected areas, such as specific regions, towns, or neighbourhoods.

Type of technology used

The survey highlighted a wide range of technologies used across initiatives, with social media platforms being the most prevalent (81%), reflecting their central role in communication and information dissemination. Websites were also widely used (71%), serving as key information hubs, followed by mobile applications (57%). Despite their technical complexity, databases were used by 38% of initiatives. Most of these tools were developed within the last ten years.

Less commonly used technologies included online crowdsourcing, georeferencing, and chatbots (14% each). More advanced tools remained limited, with machine learning used by 10% of initiatives and biometric systems, and application programming interfaces (APIs) and anti-plagiarism software each used by 5%. Blockchain and AI were not yet in use, underscoring their emerging nature within CSO-led initiatives.

In terms of accessibility, most tools were designed for mobile phones (86%), reflecting their widespread adoption. Tools were also commonly accessible via internetconnected devices and tablets (62% each), while 57% required computer access. In contrast, access via cameras, fax machines, or landlines remained marginal (12% or less), indicating niche applications.

Data collected

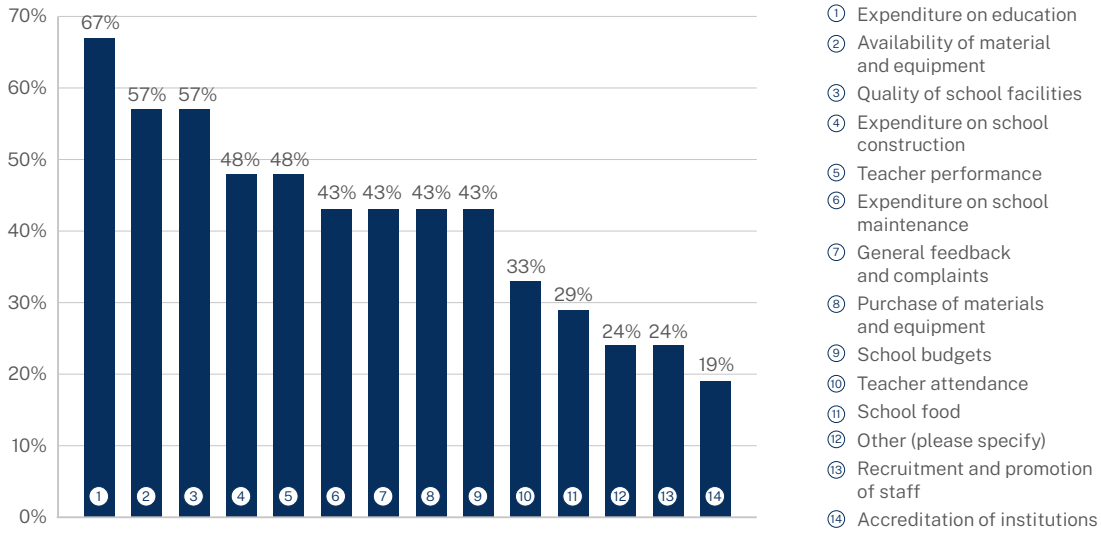
Data collected through ICT tools focused primarily on education expenditure, with 67% of initiatives monitoring this area. The availability of materials and equipment, as well as the quality of school facilities, were

1.3. Using digital tools: What the experience of the Education Out Loud network tells us

each tracked by 57% of respondents. Nearly half of initiatives collected data on school construction costs and teacher performance (48% each), along with school maintenance, feedback and complaints, procurement of materials and equipment, and school budgets (43% each). Less frequently monitored areas included teacher attendance, school meal programmes, staff recruitment and promotion, and institutional accreditation.

Respondents also reported collecting additional data, such as geolocation information on public-school infrastructure projects, sector-specific allocation and spending at national and subnational levels, and education-related research outputs, including policy briefs and position papers. Overall, the data revealed a strong emphasis on financial management, infrastructure, and material resources, reflecting the perceived vulnerability of these areas to corruption within the education sector.

Figure 3. Data collected via the ICT tool



Source: Results from the IIEP Survey of EOL grantees.

Financing and organizational structures

More than one-third of organizations (38%) outsourced the development of their digital tools. The remaining financing options were evenly distributed, with donations, in-house development, the purchase of ready-to-use solutions, and tools designed internally by volunteers each accounting for 14%.

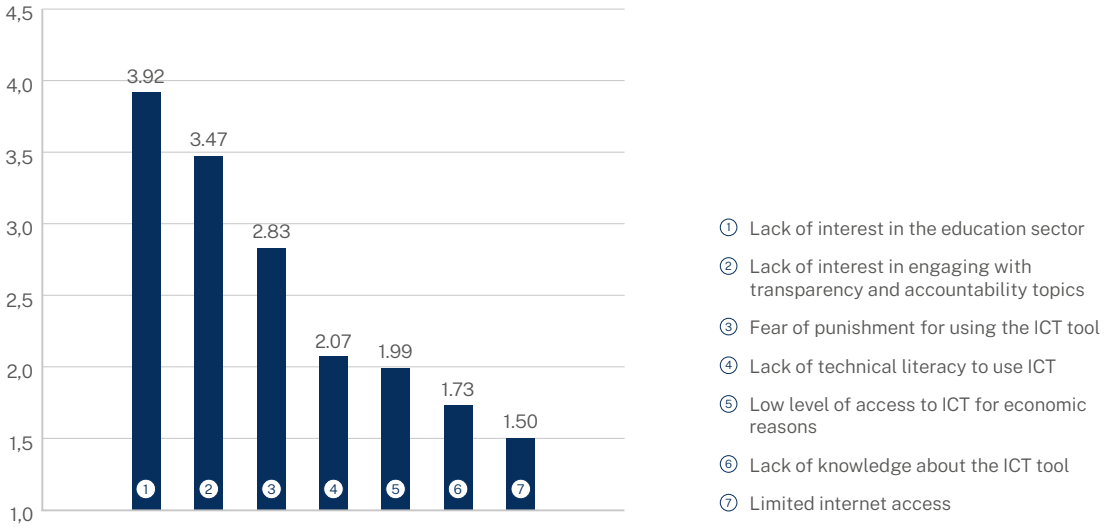
Responsibility for data collection lay primarily with respondents' own organizations (67%), followed by public administration staff at both central and local levels (33% each). Teachers were involved in data collection in 33% of initiatives, while school administrative staff and ordinary citizens participated in 29% of cases. Students acted as data collectors in 24% of initiatives, with school managers involved in 19%, parents in 14%, and other CSOs in 10%. All stakeholder groups were involved In 5% of cases. Overall, this distribution highlights the central role played by both public administration and implementing organizations in data collection processes.

1.3. Using digital tools: What the experience of the Education Out Loud network tells us

Conducive factors

EOL grantees reported relatively strong internal capacities for ICT use, including access to equipment (3.38),[1] skills proficiency (3.05), and human resource capacity (3.00), although limited financial resources remained a notable constraint (2.62). Externally, ICT utilization in educational governance was supported by robust user security measures (3.24), enabling policy environments (3.19), and effective engagement strategies (3.14). Mobile technology played a particularly important enabling role in developing contexts, with mobile phones (86%) and internet-enabled devices (62%) serving as the primary access points for ICT tools. The widespread reliance on mobile phones underscored the importance of mobile-friendly design to maximize reach and effectiveness.

Figure 4. Main difficulties faced by end-users



Note: 7 =most difficult, 1 = least difficult.
Source: Results from the IIEP Survey of EOL grantees.

Elements of impact

Despite persistent challenges, the digital tools examined have had a meaningful impact on transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement. By improving access to information and highlighting inefficiencies or mismanagement, these tools have supported advocacy efforts, enhanced service delivery, and contributed to policy reforms. As illustrated in Table 5, budget and procurement platforms such as Vulekamali and Budeshi have increased transparency by enabling stakeholders to track public spending and hold authorities to accounts.

1 Weighted average using the scale 1–5, where 1 is a 'very challenging factor' and 5 is a 'very supportive factor'.

1.3. Using digital tools: What the experience of the Education Out Loud network tells us

Table 5. Types of impact observed across the seven initiatives under review

Country	Name of initiative	Type of impact
Benin	Citizen Evaluation Platform	Data from both quantitative and qualitative surveys, as well as the results of citizen assessments, are made accessible to the public and recommendations are transformed into action plans to correct discrepancies.
Mozambique	Olavula	The tool helps school and district-level sector managers address school management issues promptly. Likewise, school councils rely on the platform's information to set meeting agendas.
Nigeria	Budeshi	The Bureau of Public Procurement developed the National Open Contracting Portal, which proactively updates data from ministries, departments, and agencies. In 2024, the Nigerian government introduced a Citizens' Delivery Tracker.
Nigeria	Follow The Money	Follow The Money supports timely project completion. It also empowers communities to participate actively in education-related decision-making.
Pakistan	Pakistan Coalition for Education Data Portal	Policymakers and analysts use the datasets to track trends, identify gaps, and evaluate programmes. The data are widely used in research and advocacy at local, national, and international levels.
South Africa	Vulekamali	Vulekamali has been showcased as a leading model for strengthening public participation in the budget process through multi-stakeholder engagement.
The Gambia	Follow The Money	By exposing inefficiencies and mismanagement, the tool enables targeted service improvements and spurs grassroots support for policy reforms and anti-corruption efforts.

Source: Authors.

Moreover, other platforms, including Follow the Money and the Benin Citizen Evaluation Platform, have empowered citizens to participate more actively in governance processes. Features such as anonymous reporting have fostered civic engagement, even in restrictive environments with limited civic space, as demonstrated by the Benin case (see *Part 2*).

While overall government uptake remains uneven, some initiatives such as Vulekamali, co-developed by the CSO coalition Elímu Yetu and the South African Treasury, illustrate the potential of collaborative approaches and provide promising models for future initiatives.

1.3. Using digital tools: What the experience of the Education Out Loud network tells us

Key insights from the EOL grantees survey

The survey examined the **legal frameworks** governing ICT tools. Respondents cited a wide range of relevant legislation, including constitutions, public access to information acts, public finance management laws, ICT (education) policies, data protection and information security policies, as well as education, budgetary, and anti-corruption legislation.

Over half of the participants reported that ICT tools rely on existing legal frameworks (48%) or on some of them (10%). In contrast, 19% indicated that such legislation is absent in their context, while 10% stated that ICT development does not depend on such frameworks.

One respondent noted that 'We have anti-corruption and access to information legislation, but freedom of publishing information on corruption is limited in the current context of the country', underscoring the gap between formal legal provisions and the prevailing political environment.

Altogether, these initiatives advance transparency, accountability, and integrity in education. However, the critical factors underpinning their successful implementation merit closer examination.

1.4. Critical factors for the successful implementation of digital tools by CSOs

The ICT-led anti-corruption initiatives under review aim to strengthen transparency and accountability in the use of educational resources, yet their concrete impact remains poorly understood. Drawing on the literature and survey findings, the following analysis examines how their effectiveness can be assessed and identifies the main factors shaping their performance over time.

Key indicators of tool effectiveness

When asked about the indicators used for evaluating tool effectiveness, EOL grantees surveyed by IIEP identified a range of quantitative and qualitative measures:

— **Data quality** was frequently highlighted as a key indicator of effectiveness. Respondents referred not only to the quality of data collected and reported, but also to the methods used for data collection and analysis. This includes organizational evaluations, data verification mechanisms, and subsequent follow-up actions based on findings.

— **User engagement** emerged as another central dimension of effectiveness measurement. Grantees reported using a variety of user-related metrics, such as overall user statistics, platform reach, and number of active users. More specific indicators included data disaggregated by gender, age group, and disability status; item views and downloads; quality of analysis produced by CSOs; and user feedback.

— **Annual learning events** were cited as an important mechanism for assessing tool effectiveness, offering structured opportunities for collective reflection and review.

Key insights from the EOL grantees survey

Key success indicators: Respondents identified the quality of data collected and reported as the most important indicator of effective implementation (71%). This was followed by an increased number of users and the responsiveness of education authorities to detected issues (both 62%).

Lower-priority indicators: Fewer than half of respondents considered legislative or process changes, the number of wrongdoings identified, or the adoption by other NGOs, as significant indicators of success.

Government adoption: Only 38% of respondents viewed adoption of the ICT tool by government authorities as a key success indicator, suggesting that CSOs may prioritize independence from government.

Additional perspectives: Respondents underscored the importance of an increased focus on accountability, transparency, and anti-corruption interventions, alongside the importance of government users adopting the portal as their main source of information.

1.5. Selected challenges in using ICTs to fight corruption in education

For ICTs to reach their potential as powerful tools in the fight against corruption, several challenges need to be addressed:

— **Digital divide.** Despite technological advances, digital divides continue to limit access to ICT tools in marginalized, rural, and low-income contexts, where poor connectivity, unreliable electricity, and weak infrastructure remain prevalent (Marshall, Wilson and Dale, 2023). Low digital literacy, particularly among disadvantaged socio-economic and gender groups, further restricts effective use (Graves et al., 2021). In such settings, investing in established technologies such as radio or offline initiatives, which can later be digitized, may be more effective. Some organizations restrict access to ICT tools to specific stakeholder groups to prevent misuse and enhance impact.

— **Technical capacities.** CSOs need staff with the technical skills required to develop or use existing digital tools, advise users on how to provide useful evidence, and protect whistleblowers so that individuals can fully benefit from the available technologies. From the user's perspective, basic digital literacy is also essential to participate in monitoring activities and report corruption accurately. For instance, students tasked with reporting issues related to canteen provision may require clear guidance on how to use a mobile application effectively for documenting such incidents.

— **Funding.** Developing and implementing digital anti-corruption tools entails significant costs, including software development, hardware, licensing, and the need for specialized IT expertise — as well as ongoing maintenance and technical support. These financial demands can be particularly challenging for smaller or resource-constrained organizations, making it difficult to sustain and update tools over time. Securing consistent and long-term funding remains essential to ensure the functionality, reach, and effectiveness of ICT-based anti-corruption initiatives.

— **Cybersecurity and data privacy.** Technological tools can be vulnerable to hacking, data breaches, and other security threats, which can potentially expose whistleblowers to retaliation or harm. The collection and management of sensitive information require stringent data protection and privacy protocols. Even transparency portals and applications designed to provide access to budgetary or procurement data can raise privacy concerns. To address these risks, users must be clearly informed about the measures in place to protect sensitive information and assured that their personal data are securely protected from unauthorized access, exposure, or misuse.

— **Misinformation and false claims.** The anonymity provided by the internet can enable individuals to submit false reports or accusations. Social media platforms, in particular, may be used to spread misinformation and false allegations, which can damage the reputations of individuals, institutions, or governments. False claims of corruption or whitewashing of legitimate accusations can undermine public trust and create instability, making

1.5. Selected challenges in using ICTs to fight corruption in education

it more difficult to address genuine corruption concerns effectively.

— **Sustainability.** Ensuring the sustainability of ICTs poses a significant long-term challenge, as illustrated by the many anti-corruption platforms that 'disappeared shortly after their launch' (Kukutschka, 2016). To maintain sustainability, it is essential to actively promote these tools in order to attract users, maintain their engagement, and highlight the positive changes they help generate. Some organizations also establish partnerships with other NGOs or journalists, encouraging them to investigate systemic corruption and amplify the impact of the platform.

Key insights from the EOL grantees survey

The effectiveness of anti-corruption ICT initiatives depends on the adequacy of digital tools, financial and human resources, and users' skills and access to technology. Financial constraints were reported as the most significant barrier (73%), while skills shortages remained a concern for 36% of respondents. Externally, limited ICT infrastructure and challenging political climates further restricted uptake and impact. The strong reliance on external funding – mainly through outsourcing (38%) and donations (14%) – highlights the need for more sustainable financing models and targeted capacity-building to ensure long-term viability. Additionally, the presence of a committed champion within public administration can significantly enhance the visibility, sustainability, and institutional adoption of such tools.

1.6. Measuring the impact of digital tools

The evidence shows that ICTs can raise awareness and enhance transparency and accountability by expanding access to information, streamlining processes, and enabling public participation. However, the impact of these digital tools ultimately depends on several factors. These include robust governance frameworks, the availability and accessibility of digital infrastructure, the ability to meaningfully engage citizens, active stakeholder involvement across the system, capacities at both local and national levels, and the political will to respond to citizen feedback.

These relationships underline the importance of targeting: rather than focusing exclusively on broad citizen engagement, initiatives may also benefit from deliberately engaging with end-users who are in positions of power to bring about change, such as civil servants, local officials, lobbyists, or other elite actors. Freire, Galdino, and Mignozzetti (2020) note that 'politicians are unresponsive to individual requests', and argue that interventions targeting elite actors may yield better results than community-focused efforts alone. Their findings also suggest that although digital tools can be effective in disseminating information, they may be less effective than face-to-face communication in overcoming resistance from government entities and other stakeholders, who are often wary of external monitoring and transparency initiatives.

Ultimately, digital tools do not operate in isolation. They are embedded in broader, social, institutional, and political processes. The deliberate combination of digital approaches with analogue and human-centred methods, in order to reinforce their reach and impact, represents an important avenue for future research.

1.7. Lessons learned and key recommendations

A variety of anti-corruption technologies are used in the education sector worldwide. However, only limited documentation is available on successful, long-term initiatives and their impacts. The few documented cases offer useful insights into how ICTs can help address corruption in education. Key lessons from these initiatives are summarized below.

Lessons learned

— While ICTs cannot be considered a silver bullet for reducing corruption, they are increasingly being adopted by government agencies and a wide range of CSOs in their efforts to curb corrupt practices. However, a major gap persists in the form of limited regular assessments and insufficient documentation of the development and implementation of such initiatives, particularly those driven and utilized by CSOs.

— ICTs have the potential to be powerful tools in the fight against corruption in education, with applications ranging from monitoring school facilities, meals, and construction sites, to informing citizens about budget allocation issues through interactive websites, chatbots, online games, and social media posts. ICTS also underpin anonymous and secure online spaces such as whistleblower platforms for reporting cases of misconduct.

— Digital technologies empower civil society by providing tools to monitor government actions, report and investigate corruption, and raise awareness. However, challenges remain related to access to quality data, user adoption of ICTs, and funding for grassroots innovation.

— A number of critical issues related to ICTs require further attention and exploration. Specific challenges include long-term sustainability, the need for skilled staff and users, and ethical concerns related to the risk of ICTs producing biased outputs and false claims, and spreading misinformation.

— Although numerous ICT tools have been developed to support bottom-up anti-corruption efforts, evidence of their long-term impact remains limited. Many tools have short lifespans due to funding constraints and declining user engagement, underscoring the need for rigorous evaluation and sustainable models that encourage continued use. Prioritizing assessments can help organizations identify needed improvements, and enable others to better understand the costs, benefits, and risks of investing in digital solutions, reducing the likelihood that ICTs become costly, inefficient, or unsustainable over time.

— ICTs introduce new risks of corruption. A Transparency International (2022) report documented cases where AI algorithms were used as tools for collusion, including instances in which they autonomously coordinated price-fixing or spread disinformation to artificially inflate a company's value.

Key recommendations

— **Combine digital tools for greater efficiency.** CSOs should endeavour to match the right digital tools to the specific type of corruption targeted. However, experience shows that effective initiatives rarely rely on a single ICT solution. Many

1.7. Lessons learned and key recommendations

CSOs therefore adopt a multimedia presence, creating synergies between mobile-friendly apps, websites and social media. While not all organizations can build complex infrastructure, even simple integration expands reach, supports dynamic communication, and improves accessibility. Such interconnected approaches offer a more engaging, cost-effective way to involve wider audiences in anti-corruption efforts.

— **Select tools that best serve user needs.** The selection of digital tools should be informed by a clear understanding of objectives and target audiences. Initiatives must research which media and devices users rely on most, recognizing trade-offs between popularity and organizational efficiency. For instance, platforms like Discord are excellent for coordinating collective action but less widely used than WhatsApp or Telegram. Social media choices also vary by country and can shift with changing terms of service. Some applications work better on desktops than mobile devices, influencing accessibility and user engagement, and so on.

— **Integrate ICTs into a broader anti-corruption strategy.** Digital tools rarely work effectively in isolation; they need to be embedded within a comprehensive approach that includes training, stakeholder engagement, and collaboration with journalists, CSOs and local authorities. Meaningful anti-corruption efforts combine technology with human participation in monitoring, advocacy and policymaking. Relying too heavily on ICTs risks ignoring the essential role of human judgement and reinforcing the misconception that digital systems are neutral. A balanced strategy that integrates both technological and non-technological measures can also help reduce resistance or backlash.

— **Strong commitment to ethical practices.** ICT solutions must be developed and deployed with full transparency and careful assessment of potential risks, including bias or unfairness in their design, implementation and use. Regular maintenance and timely updates are essential to address technical issues and stay ahead of evolving corruption tactics. These tools must also prioritize data security and privacy, ensuring that sensitive information is safeguarded from misuse or unauthorized access. Finally, continuous user feedback is crucial to refine the tools and keep them effective, user-friendly, and responsive to real-world needs.

— **Assessment of impact and outcomes.** Publicly available information on anti-corruption ICTs remains limited, particularly in the education sector. Little is known about their technical features, user numbers, outcomes, or even whether some tools have been discontinued. To address this gap, organizations should prioritize transparent evaluation systems, open discussions of risks and benefits, and regular assessments of both expected and unexpected results. Improved documentation would strengthen access and effectiveness, while helping others evaluate the costs, benefits, and risks of adopting similar solutions.

Based on the analysis presented above, *Table 6* outlines recommendations targeted at CSOs and education authorities.

1.7. Lessons learned and key recommendations

Table 6. Targeted recommendations for CSOs and education authorities

For CSOs	For education authorities
Adopt **standardized digital platforms** for citizen engagement across sectors, ensuring interoperability, scalability, and ease of integration with existing government systems. Prioritize inclusive **outreach initiatives** to actively engage with marginalized and underrepresented communities in digital participation efforts. Establish **robust cybersecurity and data protection frameworks** to safeguard citizen data collected through digital platforms, ensuring full compliance with international standards and national regulations. Invest in **capacity-building programmes** to strengthen technical expertise in the effective management of digital tools, including data collection, analysis, and cybersecurity. Develop **sustainability plans** for digital platforms, incorporating sustainable funding mechanisms, ongoing technical support, and institutional capacity maintenance beyond project lifecycles to ensure continuity and lasting impact. Implement **robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks** to assess the effectiveness of digital platforms in enhancing transparency, accountability, and public service delivery, generating evidence-based insights to inform future initiatives. Integrate ICT tools into comprehensive **anti-corruption strategies**, mitigating risks associated with overreliance on digital solutions by addressing human factors, ethical considerations, and the need for adaptability. Advocate for the integration of **citizen feedback mechanisms** into national and local policy frameworks to promote sustained transparency and accountability in public service delivery. Foster **partnerships** with CSOs, government agencies, and international organizations to streamline data sharing, improve responsiveness to citizen feedback, and strengthen accountability mechanisms.	Establish appropriate **legal frameworks** to support the effective implementation of digital tools. This includes legislation that guarantees the right of access to information in machine readable formats, upholds media freedom, and provides protection for whistleblowers. Embed citizen engagement and feedback mechanisms within education **policy frameworks** by working closely with CSOs to integrate their digital tools into national and local education governance and accountability processes. Improve **access to educational data and information repositories** for CSOs, ensuring that data are accurate, timely, disaggregated, and available in accessible and interoperable formats to support evidence-based advocacy, monitoring, and informed decision-making. Provide dedicated **financial and technical support** for CSO-led digital initiatives, including earmarked funding or grant mechanisms for the development and use of digital tools. This should be complemented by capacity-building support, particularly in areas such as data management, data analysis, and cybersecurity. Promote **multi-stakeholder partnerships** among government agencies, CSOs, and private sector entities to co-design and co-implement digital solutions that enhance transparency, responsiveness, and accountability in education systems.

Source: Authors.

Part 2.
Compendium of CSO-led ICT initiatives

Benin: Citizen Evaluation Platform

Main characteristics

Benin's Citizen Evaluation Platform strengthens dialogue between public authorities and education service beneficiaries. It empowers CSOs to monitor education policies, financing, and gender equality, and to collect and analyse strategic data for evidence-based advocacy. Part of the PRO-RePEM[2] project and led by DEDRAS-ONG[3] and Social Watch Benin with EOL support, the platform uses a Django/SQL Lite web application. It hosts the Citizen Evaluation of Service Provision (ECPS), whose survey data can be viewed or downloaded by municipality or nationally. Citizen-reported issues submitted through evaluations or an online form are processed and forwarded to the relevant authorities for follow-up. The platform also enables direct exchanges with government bodies to identify and resolve bottlenecks in education service delivery.

Impact on transparency or accountability

The project mobilizes CSOs through the Education Observatory, a national mechanism with departmental and municipal branches, which monitor the realization of the right to education. Members of these *Observatoires Départementaux et Communaux de l'Éducation* (ODE/OCE) receive support to conduct citizen oversight by tracking budgets and collecting and analysing education data. With the assistance of statistical consultants, the project gathers quantitative and qualitative data, which inform policy dialogue at departmental and national



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2 Projet de Renforcement des OSC pour la Redevabilité des Politiques Educatives et leur Mise en œuvre.

3 Organisation pour le Développement Durable, le Renforcement et l'Autopromotion des Structures communautaires.

Benin: Citizen Evaluation Platform

levels, including through the National Education Council (CNE).[4] The project also commissions budget analyses from education ministries, assessing allocations for women, girls, persons with disabilities, and ethnic minorities. Monitoring reports on policy implementation are produced and shared with all stakeholders.

Challenges

- Citizens were initially reluctant to speak openly due to fear of reprisals.
- The platform has not reached the expected number of users, due partly to low internet access, high illiteracy rates, and limited language accessibility.
- Government responses to citizen alerts are slow.
- Long-term sustainability is a challenge, as keeping the platform online requires continuous funding to cover hosting, domain, and cybersecurity costs.

Digital risks

Digital risks exist, but mitigation measures are in place. These include a statistical visa for quantitative and qualitative data collection, compliance with statistical standards, data encryption, and hosting supported by high-level cybersecurity systems.

Impact

While the platform is not at the desired scope, the initial results are positive. It provides a place where people can express themselves without risk of repression or threats. Through the platform, data from both quantitative and qualitative surveys, as well as the results of citizen assessments, are disseminated and made accessible to the public, and recommendations are transformed into action plans to correct discrepancies. The platform is also externally validated by the national statistics institute.

Government uptake

The platform includes a tutorial to promote usage among citizens and authorities. It has enjoyed a positive reception, helped by the consortium's compliance with Benin's statistical visa process, which lends credibility to the data and strengthens institutional trust. INSTaD validated all methodologies and tools, and relevant ministries authorized the participation of their decentralized services, giving full legitimacy to the results. Reports are publicly accessible on the platform and shared with key stakeholders, including ministries and the CNE. The main challenge is the slow pace of government responses and citizen feedback.

4 Conseil National de l'Education.

Mozambique: Olavula

Main characteristics

Created in 2011, Olavula is a platform designed to improve access to and the quality of public services – including education, health, justice, infrastructure, and water and sanitation – by fostering dialogue between citizens and service providers through digital tools. In the education sector, it enables parents, students, and community members to report issues directly to school principals or district technicians, strengthening planning, management, and monitoring of services. The platform also allows providers to track incidents in real time and build a database of issues across districts, improving inspection and management. Through this two-way feedback system, Olavula supports more responsive and accountable public service delivery.

Impact on transparency and accountability

While school councils provide a valid channel for communities to participate in school planning and management, certain issues are too sensitive to be raised there. The Olavula platform serves as an alternative channel to voice community concerns. For instance, community members use the platform to report absenteeism of teachers and school managers, so that the district service management team can take administrative accountability measures. Community members and school councils have also used Olavula to denounce a lack of transparency in the management of school funds, resulting in corrective action by higher authorities.



© Olavula

Mozambique: Olavula

Challenges

— Low digital literacy in rural communities and the cost and sharing of mobile phones – often controlled by men – limit the ability to use the platform.
— Limited ICT access in schools restricts platform use, although this issue is partly addressed by printing and sharing reports.
— Reports frequently lack key details (location, problem description, stakeholders), and slow responses from authorities reduce trust.
— Political pressures discourage institutions from using platform data for planning, although meetings and monitoring visits help mitigate this issue.

Digital risks

The Olavula platform ensures anonymity, protecting users and reducing the risk of reprisals. However, citizens still face intimidation from some government institutions, especially when cases involve identifiable victims. There is also a risk of fake messages. To address this possibility, the organization triages reports, handles sensitive or suspicious cases in separate forums, and verifies the accuracy of information before taking action.

Impact

The platform enables community members to anonymously report concerns to school management, helping managers to address issues promptly. With limited resources for field monitoring, district-level sector managers also use the platform to track school conditions based on reports from parents, guardians, and teachers. School councils likewise rely on the platform's information to set their meeting agendas.

Government uptake

There is greater acceptance of the platform at school, local, and district levels than at provincial and national levels. According to the District Education Service, Olavula has become essential for monitoring schools at a time when their supervision activities have been reduced to a minimum. Despite limited financial resources that prevent technicians from regularly visiting schools, the platform provides real-time information on concerns and complaints. It has also strengthened teacher attendance monitoring, as staff know that parents can raise questions on the platform.

At the national level, however, some negative misconceptions persist, with the platform sometimes viewed as a tool for denunciation rather than for citizen participation and service improvement. To address this perception, the CSO makes regular presentations about the platform, how it functions and its benefits, and continues to raise awareness among decision-makers of its value for improving service delivery.

Nigeria: Budeshi

Main characteristics

Budeshi is an initiative of the Public and Private Development Centre (PPDC) in partnership with the School of Media and Communication (SMC) and the Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism. It consists of a platform that links budget and procurement data to various public services using Open Contracting Data Standards (OCDS). The platform demonstrates to public institutions the value of publishing procurement information in a standard, structured format. It provides access to data – such as budgets, contract amounts, contractor details, and project locations — from more than 90 federal ministries, departments, and agencies. The information is gathered through about 300 annual Freedom of Information requests, in line with Nigeria's 2011 Freedom of Information Act. Budeshi is currently expanding its scope to the state level, uploading procurement data from Nigeria's 36 states.

Impact on transparency or accountability

The PPDC publishes procurement information received from the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) on the Budeshi platform and works with civil society groups and community monitors to track school construction and the use of public funds, especially in underserved communities. Field visits across Nigeria verify the progress and use of education facilities and identify project-specific challenges. Communities are trained to engage with elected representatives, while community monitors contact contractors to request project completion, clarify delays, or prevent abandonment. PPDC compiles feedback from CSOs and communities into reports shared with UBEC, investigative journalists, and other relevant authorities.



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Nigeria: Budeshi

Challenges

— At the outset, the project faced challenges due to the lack of an adequate platform that meet its requirements. To build a coalition of like-minded civil society organizations, it partnered with BudgIT and Media Rights Agenda, which led to the creation of the Open Alliance, an initiative dedicated to promoting open government and transparency.
— Collecting reports on project monitoring activities also proved difficult. In response, a well-structured management reporting system was established, involving zonal leads, state leads, and local government champions who coordinate efforts.
— Initially, the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) showed no interest in the tool. However, Budeshi later gained significant acceptance, partly due to its new visualization platform, which demonstrated the practical value of the OCDS.
— Lack of linkages between budget and procurement data and actual public services remains a persistent challenge. Information is recorded in different formats at various stages of the contracting process, making it difficult to reliably connect specific budget lines to specific projects.

Digital risks

The potential risks are minimal, as the data involved consist of publicly accessible procurement and contract information. The organization continues to refine its analytical tools and remains committed to complying with data privacy regulations to protect its beneficiaries.

Impact

The PPDC conducted advocacy campaigns targeting implementing agencies and government bodies, using evidence from Budeshi's datasets to highlight issues such as poor project implementation and limited data availability, especially in the education sector. The Centre also reviews trends connected to uncompleted or abandoned projects, agency responsiveness to information requests, states' adoption of public procurement portals, and citizens' engagement in procurement. In response to these identified issues, the Bureau of Public Procurement developed the National Open Contracting Portal (NOCOPO), which proactively updates data from ministries, departments, and agencies. In 2024, the Nigerian government also introduced a Citizens' Delivery Tracker.

Government uptake

The adoption of NOCOPO by the Bureau of Public Procurement has sparked discussion on stronger transparency measures, including beneficial ownership disclosure. However, challenges remain, particularly difficulty in securing compliance with Freedom of Information requests and negative reactions from ministries, departments, and agencies concerned about reputational damage arising from Budeshi's scrutiny. These issues continue to hinder government buy-in and access to information.

Nigeria: Follow The Money

Main characteristics

'Follow The Money' is an initiative designed to empower stakeholders to monitor education funding, advocate for equitable resource allocation, and hold governments accountable for the effective use of public funds. By giving citizens access to information and advocacy tools, it supports efforts to improve the quality and equity of education. Founded in Nigeria in 2012 by Hamzat Lawal, the initiative has expanded to more than 10 African countries. Its core work involves collecting and analysing data on education budgets, spending, and outcomes, and using data visualization to make this information accessible to government and community stakeholders. It relies heavily on social media platforms – including Facebook, X, YouTube, and Instagram – as well as data visualization and advocacy campaigns to raise awareness and pressure governments to strengthen accountability across sectors such as education, health, gender, and water and sanitation.

Impact on transparency or accountability

By using open real-time data platforms, mobile apps, and community workshops, the public can access current education budget information and hold officials accountable. Citizen advocacy is strengthened through social media campaigns, grassroots organizing, and public forums that promote transparency and amplify community voices.

Challenges

- National data systems lacked transparency and interoperability, reducing the accuracy of budget and implementation data.
- Limited connectivity, poor transport, and security constraints hindered work in remote areas and required innovative data collection methods.



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Nigeria: Follow The Money

- Meeting privacy, security, and ethical standards, and ensuring system compatibility and scalability across multiple platforms, required substantial investment in modern, secure technologies.
- Securing donor and partner funding for technology, capacity building, and operations proved a challenge.
- Training, technical support, and ongoing mentorship demanded significant resources and long-term commitment.
- Integrating the tool into existing systems required strong stakeholder engagement, but differing priorities made alignment difficult, requiring trust-building and diplomacy.

Digital risks

Potential risks include unauthorized access, data breaches, and misuse of sensitive information. These are mitigated through full data encryption, strong security protocols, and strict access controls such as multi-factor authentication and role-based permissions. Regular security audits and vulnerability assessments help detect and address system weaknesses, while data-minimization practices further reduce exposure. Stakeholders receive training on privacy, security procedures, and the responsible handling of sensitive data.

Impact

The impact of Follow The Money in the education sector is reflected in higher enrolment, better learning outcomes, improved infrastructure, and increased public trust. Its focus on service delivery supports timely project completion and expands access to quality education. The approach also empowers communities to participate actively in education-related decision-making.

Government uptake

Some government agencies are cautious about being perceived as inefficient or mismanaging resources, and navigating bureaucratic structures can hinder cooperation. Many agencies also prioritize their own internal systems over external tools. Nevertheless, the tool's ability to expose budget and spending irregularities has prompted officials to strengthen accountability. Several agencies have recognized the value of partnering with Follow The Money, improving data sharing, capacity building, and policy dialogue on education governance. Ongoing advocacy, dialogue, and evidence of impact remain essential for broader government adoption and use.

Pakistan: Pakistan Coalition for Education Data Portal

Main characteristics

The Pakistan Coalition for Education (PCE) Data Portal, launched in 2019, provides citizens and policymakers with easy access to reliable, up-to-date education data. By consolidating information from government, civil society, and development partners into one user-friendly platform, it helps close data gaps and enables timely, evidence-based decision-making. The portal aims not only to share data but also to transform how stakeholders use the information to drive informed action and meaningful education reforms.

Impact on transparency and accountability

By offering real-time data, the portal strengthens the monitoring and evaluation of education initiatives and policies. Its open access approach promotes transparency by allowing stakeholders to review key indicators that reflect the health of the education sector. Through the *Let's Talk Education* podcast, PCE deepens engagement with policymakers, experts, academics, and youth on the metrics featured in the portal, helping to connect data to policy dialogue and action.

Challenges

- Developing a data portal is a long-term commitment that requires continuous back-end maintenance and regular updates to ensure relevance. It also demands technical staff with diverse skills, including database management, software development, data analysis, and visual design.
- Limited financial resources remain a major obstacle. For this reason, PCE has opted for a simple, basic interface for the portal rather than a more sophisticated solution.
- Promoting the portal and encouraging stakeholder adoption are ongoing



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Pakistan: Pakistan Coalition for Education Data Portal

challenges. Tailoring content to audiences with varying levels of digital and subject-matter literacy also remains a key difficulty.

Digital risks

The portal faces several potential security risks, notably data breaches and cyber-attacks. PCE has already experienced both firsthand when an earlier version of the portal was hacked and all data were lost, forcing a complete rebuild. As a result, data security remains a major concern. Integrating datasets from multiple sources also demands strict accuracy and integrity, while regular updates require constant validation and auditing to maintain credibility. Rapid technological change further threatens the portal's compatibility as standards evolve. Additionally, maintaining, securing, and upgrading the portal requires substantial financial and technical resources. Addressing these risks calls for a comprehensive cybersecurity approach including regular risk assessments, continuous updates, and close monitoring of emerging threats and innovations.

Impact

Thanks to the portal's reliability and timely statistics, PCE now receives a high volume of national and international data requests. The platform attracts diverse audiences and has helped create a more informed citizenry at the grassroots level, enabling users to monitor progress, assess policy impact, and hold institutions accountable. Researchers, students, and experts consistently praise the PCE Data Portal as a highly reliable and valuable resource. Policymakers and analysts use the datasets to track trends, identify gaps, and evaluate programmes. The data are also widely used in research and advocacy at local, national, and international levels. Since its launch, PCE has been approached by numerous organizations seeking to publish additional datasets. In response, PCE has built partnerships with credible government agencies, non-profit organizations, and academic institutions, expanding the portal's content and fostering knowledge exchange and collaboration.

Government uptake

PCE has received positive feedback from government officials using the portal. A key ongoing challenge, however, is navigating Pakistan's sensitive and shifting political landscape. Frequent changes in government and bureaucracy make sustained support difficult, as incoming political parties often bring new priorities. Furthermore, recent crises such as the pandemic, floods, and economic instability have further diverted attention from the education agenda. In spite of this, PCE remains agile – developing responsive plans and maintaining effective communication with both government and opposition representatives to keep data-driven decision-making at the forefront of political agendas.

South Africa: Vulekamali

Main characteristics

Vulekamali is an online budget portal that helps citizens easily understand South Africa's public finances. It provides activists, oversight actors, learners, teachers and parents with clear, credible information on planning, spending, and performance in the delivery of education and other public services. The portal includes spatial data showing budget information at national, provincial, public entity, and municipal levels, across sectors and by economic classification. Developed as a collaborative project by CSOs, the National Treasury, and digital developers, initial work focused on creating an API and ensuring raw data was accessible and user-friendly. The team designed mock-ups, built the portal, and connected it with local and international data sources. Early communication efforts centred on awareness-raising and social media outreach. Today, newsletters, civic information products, and a nationwide civic education campaign help strengthen public engagement.

Impact on transparency and accountability

Vulekamali is the outcome of sustained collaboration between CSOs and the National Treasury to advance constitutional rights and Open Government Partnership commitments on budget transparency. Thanks to strong community outreach, the portal is now used regularly by journalists, researchers, and the public to access budget information. It also serves as a key training resource, including for CSOs and budget justice coalitions, who use the portal to build budget literacy.



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South Africa: Vulekamali

Challenges

— Although the portal was developed collaboratively by CSOs and government, it did not always receive broad recognition or support beyond the core project team. This became especially apparent during the second phase of development, which required approval from multiple units within the National Treasury.
— The handover from the service provider to the National Treasury team proved challenging due to capacity constraints within the Treasury, which is the project's primary owner.
— Financial constraints continue to limit the project's growth. Additional technical staff are needed to ensure proper maintenance and ongoing iterative development based on user feedback. Resources are also required to enhance key features and expand civic education efforts, including delivering workshops using the portal's learning materials.

Impact

The tool has gained global recognition as a strong example of effective collaboration between government and civil society. In 2019, the project won the Innovations Harnessing 4IR Solutions award at the 17th Public Sector Innovation (PSI) Awards. Vulekamali has since been showcased internationally as a leading model for strengthening public participation in the budget process through multi-stakeholder engagement. The visibility provided by the Open Government Partnership (OGP) CEO's profile of Vulekamali ahead of the 2021 OGP Summit has further reinforced its influence and promise.

Digital risks

Mitigation plans need to be strengthened to address key digital risks, particularly those related to ongoing maintenance and the credibility of large volumes of data. Limited knowledge of the technologies used can lead to inefficiencies, errors, or development delays. Similarly, insufficient understanding of cross-functional areas such as DevOps, deployment pipelines, and infrastructure can result in deployment challenges and operational issues. Finally, existing mechanisms to anticipate emerging data security risks are inadequate and require significant improvement.

Government uptake

The portal is a joint initiative of the National Treasury and the Imali Yethu Coalition. While civil society engagement – especially in the project's early phases – has been strong, public sector participation has been uneven. Awareness of the tool within government departments remains limited, despite its value for decision makers. Strengthening the team's ability to engage directly with users, particularly government officials, would help close this gap. Engagement from some regulators has been promising but could also be significantly expanded. Finally, sustained leadership engagement within the custodian department is essential to ensure continued political and administrative support.

The Gambia: Follow The Money

Main characteristics

The 'Follow The Money' platform, originally developed by Connected Development (CODE) in Nigeria and later adopted by Gambia Participates, is a powerful mechanism for tracking government spending at regional and national levels, and promoting accountability. The platform follows funds earmarked for community development projects and alerts authorities when implementation delays occur so that corrective action can be taken. By tracing budget allocations and expenditures, it enables citizens to monitor project delivery, identify discrepancies, and hold duty-bearers to account. Its user-friendly interface and data visualization features make it accessible to a wide range of communities. When government responsiveness remains limited, Gambia Participates also leverages social media to increase public pressure and demand accountability.

Impact on transparency and accountability

Through community engagement activities such as town hall meetings, workshops, and social media campaigns, stakeholders including parents, teachers and students are empowered to demand accountability from government officials and service providers. The platform can also raise awareness of issues such as teacher shortages, inadequate infrastructure, and corruption in education by sharing information through reports and media campaigns, which helps to mobilize public support for policy reforms and improved service delivery. Finally, it collaborates with government agencies, CSOs, and other partners to advocate for policy change, strengthen oversight mechanisms, and build capacity for effective monitoring and evaluation of education programmes.



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The Gambia: Follow The Money

Challenges

— Building a robust, user-friendly platform required strong technical expertise, including ensuring compatibility with existing systems and databases.
— Poor internet connectivity, power outages and weak infrastructure limited smooth deployment and use of the platform in some regions.
— Securing stable funding remained a major challenge, affecting the ability to upgrade technology, train staff, and conduct outreach.
— Stakeholder buy-in was often difficult to obtain. Resistance to change, bureaucratic delays, opaque processes, unclear data ownership, and inter-agency rivalries frequently hindered cooperation and data-sharing.
— Some findings were politically sensitive, potentially implicating senior officials or eroding public trust, leading at times to pushback or attempts to restrict dissemination.

Digital risks

The storage and transmission of sensitive data expose the platform to risks such as hacking, unauthorized access, and breaches of confidentiality. Gambia Participates mitigates these risks through a data protection policy that restricts access to authorized staff who have signed confidentiality agreements. To prevent data misuse or manipulation, all data transmission and storage are encrypted, and staff receive training in data security best practices. In addition, user awareness campaigns promote responsible handling of sensitive information. The platform also stores only essential data to reduce exposure in the event of a breach, and strict access controls and authentication protocols further safeguard sensitive information.

Impact

The platform strengthened citizen participation in education governance, leading to increased public scrutiny, advocacy, and community mobilization around key issues. It also enabled greater citizen engagement in education policymaking and implementation. By highlighting inefficiencies and mismanagement, the platform supported targeted interventions to improve the quality and accessibility of education services. It further helped catalyse grassroots movements by raising awareness of budget and accountability issues, allowing CSOs and advocacy groups to use its findings to push for policy reforms, demand transparency, and mobilize public support for anti-corruption initiatives.

Government uptake

Government and public-sector responses to the Follow the Money platform have been mixed, and engaging effectively with authorities requires diplomacy, persistence, and a commitment to constructive dialogue. Despite these challenges, some agencies do acknowledge the value of partnering with CSOs and watchdog groups to strengthen transparency and accountability in public governance.

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About this publication

Across the world, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are turning to digital technologies, transparency portals, monitoring platforms, and whistleblower systems, to increase transparency and accountability in education. This study evaluates their efforts to shed a light on the financing and management of education systems.

Drawing on a comprehensive desk review, survey data, and seven mini case studies, it explores how CSOs are using information and communication technologies (ICTs) to prevent, detect, and address corruption in education. Building on the experience of Education Out Loud grantees, it examines their successes and setbacks – from the use of innovative citizen-engagement tools to challenges caused by digital divides, funding constraints, and political resistance.

The study outlines pathways forward, emphasizing inclusive, user-centred digital design, investment in technical and cybersecurity skills, strong data and ethical safeguards, and the integration of ICTs into broader anti-corruption strategies. It calls on education authorities to strengthen enabling legal frameworks, expand access to education data, support sustainable financing, and foster partnerships – offering evidence-based insights to harness digital innovation in support of more transparent and accountable education systems.

About the authors

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