

Review of Social Accountability (SAC) Concepts and Overview of Social Accountability

Tools and Approaches

Introduction/Overview of Social Accountability Tools and Approaches

What is Accountability and Social Accountability (SAc)?

Accountability can be defined as the obligation of power-holders to account for or take responsibility for their actions. "Power-holders" refers to those who hold political, financial or other forms of power and include officials in government, private corporations, international financial institutions and civil society organizations.

Social Accountability can be defined as an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e., in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability.¹⁰ Mechanisms of social accountability can be initiated and supported by the state, citizens or both, but very often they are demand-driven and operate from the bottom-up.

What are the 4 pillars of social accountability?

1. **Organized and capable citizen groups** that can gather and analyze information about government programs and then use this information judiciously to directly engage public officials, politicians, and service providers and demand that they serve the public interest justly, efficiently, and effectively.

Some of the organizational capacities that citizen groups need in order to facilitate a constructive civic engagement with the government are as follows:

- Capacity to setup systems and structures for organizing the constituents;
- Ability to build networks and negotiate among competing stakeholder interests; and
- Ability to articulate positions into effective messages that are able to create and expand public consensus on issues.

2. **A responsive government** that provides spaces, structures, and processes for a constructive civic engagement. Such government includes individuals or champions who believe in the value of constructive engagement and citizen participation in governance, and who support such processes.
3. **Access to and effective use of adequate and essential information.** The generation of high quality and reliable demand-side information is an important prerequisite to any social accountability program. Monitoring and evaluation of government's performance should be based on reliable evidences to make credible claims about whether the government is performing well or not. Hence, citizen groups must have the capacity to access and assess the quality of information presented to them as well as to anticipate some structural barriers that would prevent them in doing so such as the lack of legal and policy frameworks in accessing public documents, elite capture of governance processes, red tape or too bureaucratic process in disclosing public information, among others.

4. **Sensitivity and relevance to culture and context.** This requires a better understanding of contextual factors that can help facilitate or hinder the adoption of social accountability mechanism. Hindering factors may include values and beliefs system that sustain a culture of clientelism, corruption, and mismanagement in the government. The framing, application, and mainstreaming of social accountability cultural and contextual factors and build on those factors that support constructive engagement and citizen monitoring of the government.

What are the benefits of social accountability?

Figure 2: The Benefits of Social Accountability



Social Accountability has become an important approach, as shown on figure 1 above, to both the public and civil society sectors for improving governance processes, improved service delivery, resources allocation decision making and an effective community empowerment tool.

1. Improved Governance

Governance in simplified language is a process on how things happen, on how things are managed in an organization; be it a household, a manufacturing entity, a government, or an international body.

What are the indicators of good governance then? How do we see good governance is happening?

- Transparency at all levels in resource allocation
- Effectiveness of interventions-commitment, accountability
- Representation at all levels of the poor, minority in governing/managing.

Accountability of public officials is the basis of good government and a prerequisite for an effective democracy. The citizens' rights and responsibilities are evolving and expanding relations between citizens and their governments are characterized by what some have termed "a crisis of legitimacy" (Gaventa, 2002) or simply a "governance crisis" (Paul 2002).

2. Increased Development Effectiveness

Social Accountability also contributes to increased development effectiveness through **improved public service delivery** and **more informed policy design** as a result of direct participation of citizens. In some cases the government fails to deliver key essential services to its citizens due to problems of misallocation of resources, leakage of resources through corruption, weak incentives or a lack of articulated demand.

By the same token, governments often formulate policies in a discretionary and non-transparent manner that goes against the interests and actual priorities of the poor. These problems are perpetuated because the three key groups of actors in the **public policy and service delivery chain** which include **policy makers, service providers** and **citizens** have different (sometimes conflicting) goals and incentives, compounded by information asymmetries and lack of communication. By enhancing the availability of information, strengthening citizen voice, promoting dialogue and consultation across the three groups of actors and creating incentives for improved performance, social accountability mechanisms can go a long way toward improving the effectiveness of service delivery, rendering public decision-making more transparent, participatory and pro-poor. Since poor people are most reliant on government services and least equipped to hold government officials to account, they have the most to gain from social accountability initiatives.

Figure 3 shows the interaction among the key groups of actors in the public policy and service delivery chain.

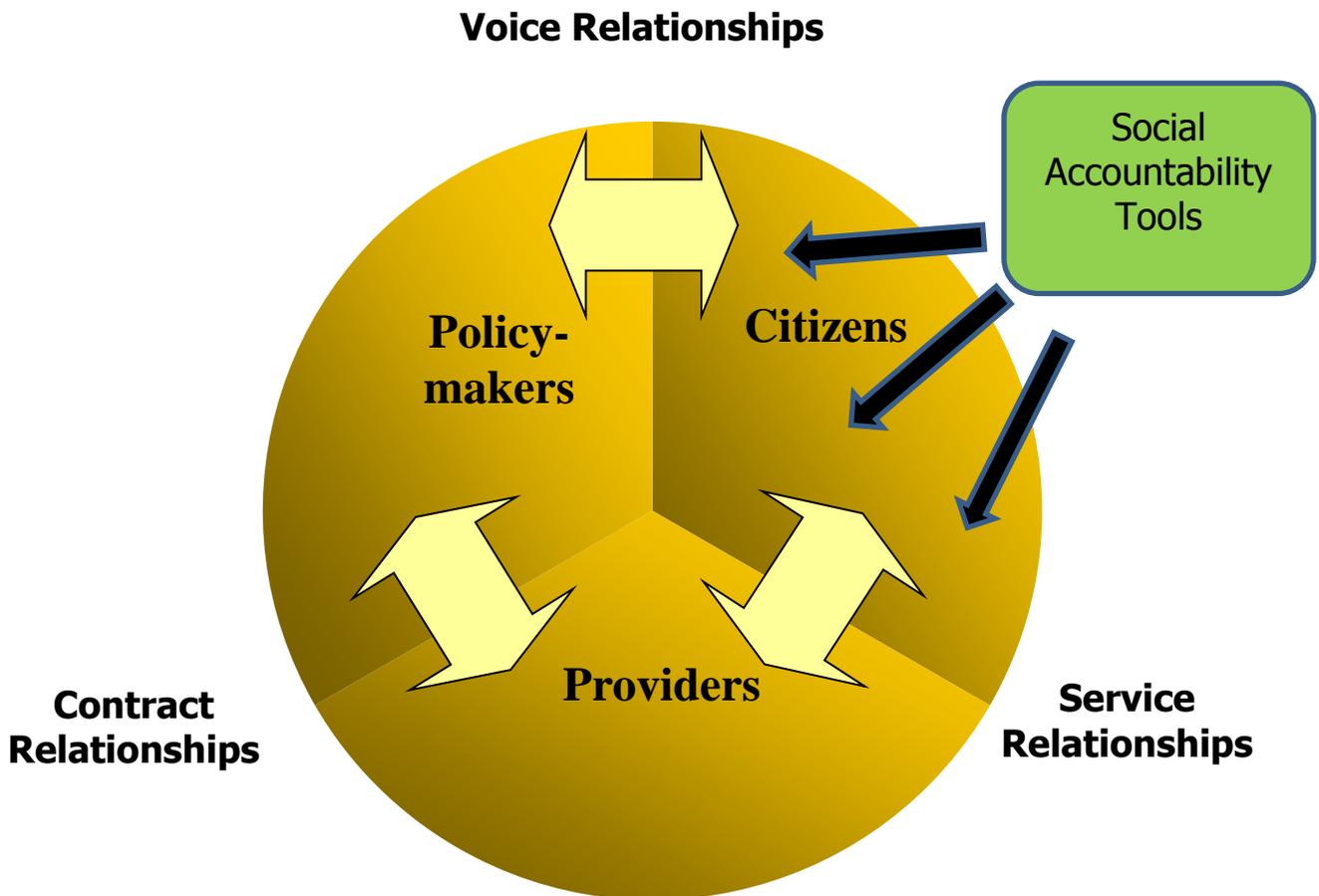
3. Empowerment

Social Accountability initiatives can lead to the **empowerment** of citizens, particularly the **poor**. While there is no single definition of empowerment, at its broadest, it can be understood as the expansion of freedom of choice and action. Civil Society Organizations should play a leading role in the efforts to **empower** and enable citizens to have a single but strong voice. In turn, the enhanced voice empowers the poor and increases the chance of greater responsiveness on the part of the state to their needs.

Building the capacities of communities through their local groupings including community or faith based organizations should be the foremost responsibility of the civil society sector in African countries. In addition, communities need to develop the capacity to identify their own development needs and demands, to mobilize their own resources, and to claim their rights to additional resources and work to realize their goals. At the same time, the civil society

sector should help communities to identify and address the underlying causes of poverty and social injustice, including gender inequity and some of the causes that could be rooted deep in their own traditions and cultural norms.

Figure 3: Key Groups of Actors in the Public Policy and Service Delivery Chain



What are the social accountability mechanisms and applications?

Social accountability mechanisms allow ordinary citizens to access information, voice their needs, and demand accountability between elections. Emerging social accountability practices enhance the ability of citizens to move beyond mere protest toward engaging with bureaucrats and politicians in a more informed, organized, constructive and systematic manner, thus increasing the chances of effecting positive change.

Generally, social accountability mechanisms can be applied in four key functions of the government namely:

1. Policies and plans
2. Budgets and expenditures
3. Delivery of services and goods
4. Public oversight

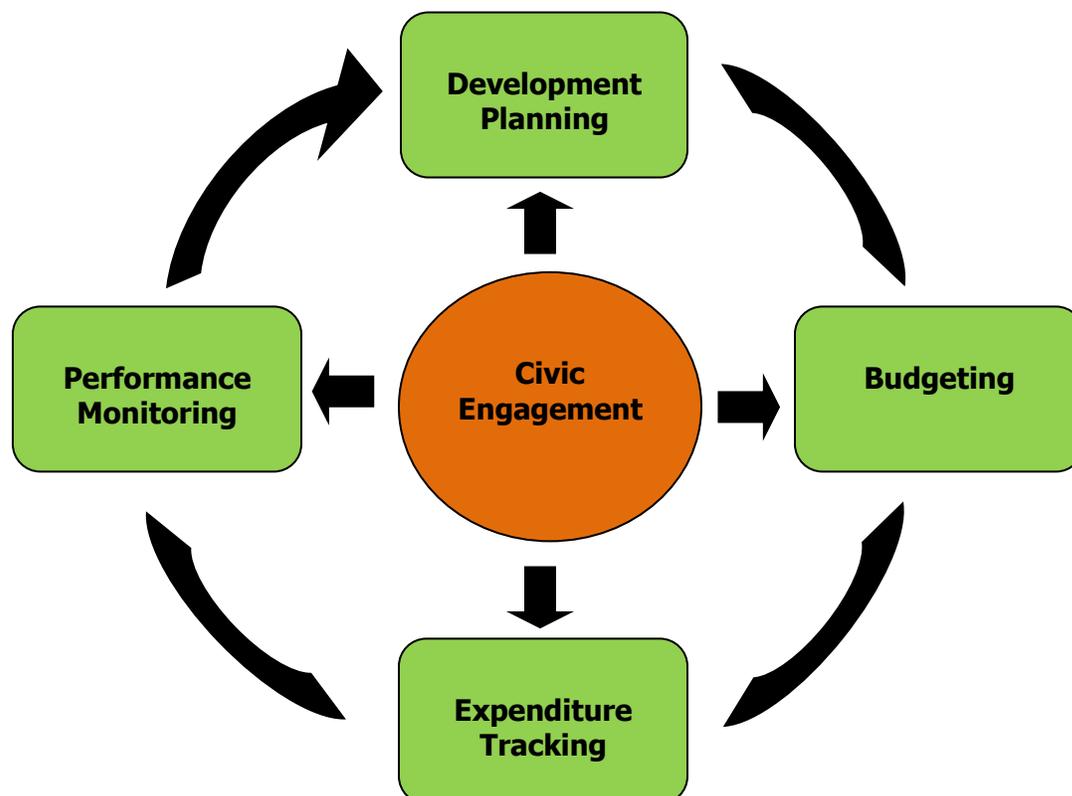
Among the four key functions of the government, it is the formulation of the budget and public spending where social accountability mechanisms have been proven most effective in holding public officials to account for their conduct and performance. This is because public funds are potential targets for corruption. And when corruption is rampant, public services delivery tend to be weak, resulting in poor development outcomes.

The Public Finance Management Cycle (PFM) and Social Accountability Tools

The PFM cycle consists of four interrelated phases: development planning, budgeting, expenditure tracking, and performance monitoring and evaluation (Figure 4).

The main social accountability tools used in each stage are as follows: participatory planning, participatory budgeting, participatory expenditure tracking, and participatory performance monitoring.

Figure 4: Public Finance Management (PFM) Cycle



Development Planning

Development planning is the process where policies, strategies (programs, projects, and activities) and development outcomes are identified. It involves at least four stages: data collection, data analysis (generation of options), development of a draft plan, and finalizing the plan.

The presence and contribution of citizen groups to any development planning process is essential to ensure that the government will prioritize issues and problems that are considered relevant by the citizens. It also helps ensure that the limited resources of the government are properly allocated.

Citizen groups should have the capacity to participate in all stages of the development planning while the government should provide an enabling environment for the citizen groups to influence the decision-making process.

At this stage, the social accountability tool that can be employed is called participatory planning. Participatory planning recognizes the legitimacy and capacity of citizens to help the government craft better policies and development strategies. It makes use of various tools and techniques such as participatory workshops, surveys, public hearings, alternative development plans, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, among others.

Budgeting

Budgeting pertains to the provision of financial resources to government functions to accomplish project and program objectives. Budgeting encompasses the following:

1. formulation of fiscal policies;
2. determination of aggregate budget size;
3. allocation of budget resources to functions, programs, projects, activities of the government in accordance with priorities;
4. issuance of funds authority to government entities; and
5. reporting, review, and monitoring and control of financial transactions.

Citizens participate directly or through organized groups in the different stages of the budget cycle, namely budget formulation, decision-making, and monitoring of budget execution. The rationale for civic engagement in budgeting is summarized below:

1. demystifying the budget and the budget process;
2. responding to basic needs of citizens at grassroots;
3. improving budget allocation and facilitate fund distribution procedure; and
4. preventing financial corruption and enhance accountability.

Participatory Budgeting

The key social accountability tool in budgeting is participatory budgeting. It can be broadly defined as a mechanism (or process) through which the population decides on or contributes to decisions made on the allocation of all or part of available public resources. However, participatory budgeting does not stop and end with the allocation of funds. Rather, its

framework allows for direct citizen participation throughout all phases of the budget cycle (formulation, decision-making, and monitoring of budget execution) to ensure that decisions made earlier with the citizens are put into practice.

Budget Review and Analysis

Independent budget review and analysis is a process where a wide range of stakeholders research, unpack, monitor and disseminate information about public expenditure and investments.

Budget review and analysis is done to assess whether allocations match the government's announced social commitments. This may involve analyzing the impact and implications of budget allocations, demystifying the technical content of the budget, raising awareness about budget-related issues and undertaking public education campaigns to improve budget literacy.

Although no ready formula exists, in general the key phases of this process are:

- **Demystify:** Unpacking and making sense of the budget allows people to contest official figures and policies.
- **Advocacy:** Expressing the budget and any proposed alternate budget in lay persons terms allows a wide range of stakeholders to get involved in a dialogue process around the budget (which is usually in the control of a small number of technocrats).
- **Lobbying:** Organizing social coalitions and alliances harness the energies of various groups to support budget review and analysis.

Expenditure Tracking

Public expenditure tracking follows the flow of resources through several layers of the government, down to the frontline service providers which will actually spend the resources, to determine how much of the originally allocated resources reach each level (Dehn et al., 2003). Bureaucratic capture, leakage of funds, and problems in the deployment of other resources such as human and in-kind resources are easily determined with the help of public expenditure tracking tool.

Participatory expenditure tracking involves citizen groups monitoring the manner in which the government spends public funds. Actual users and beneficiaries of funds are usually tapped by citizen groups to provide the necessary information. These pieces of information are validated with the data from the government such as disbursement records as well as information generated from participatory approaches and tools such as citizen report cards.

One of the most commonly used social accountability tool used in public expenditure tracking is the World Bank's Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS). PETS was first conducted in Uganda in 1996 to track and assess public spending and development outcomes in the education sector. Since then, PETS have been adapted in 35 countries.

Performance Monitoring

Performance monitoring involves keeping track and evaluating the impacts of government projects on intended beneficiaries. It includes assessing the efficiency, quality, and

responsiveness of public service delivery using participatory performance monitoring tools such as the citizen report cards. Outputs of these tools will be used to influence policy at various scales, from the national to sub national levels. The commonly cited examples of this were the Citizen Report Card projects in Bangalore, India and in the Philippines.

What are the social accountability practices in public office?

Table 3 summarizes key government functional areas in relationship with the application of social accountability mechanisms and tools.

Table 3: Social Accountability Practices in a Public Office

LEVEL OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION	SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY APPLICATIONS	SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS AND TOOLS
Policies and Plans	Participatory Policy Making and Planning	Citizens' Participation in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local forums • study circles • deliberative polling • consensus conferences • public hearings • citizens' juries
Budgets and Expenditures	Budget-Related Social Accountability Work	Citizens' Participation in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • budget formulation • budget analysis • performance-based budgeting • public education to improve budget literacy • public expenditure tracking surveys • social audits
Delivery of Services and Goods	Social Accountability in the Monitoring and Evaluation of Public Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public hearings • citizens' report cards • community scorecards • public opinion polls • citizen's charters
Public Oversight	Social Accountability and Public Oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSO oversight committees • local oversight committees • ombudsman (investigators on public complaints)

What are the critical success factors to consider in choosing/testing the "fit" of a social accountability tool?

The "Critical 8" framework can help in making a judgment whether a tool is applicable in a particular context. Stakeholders are asked to rate the local context based on the "Critical 8" and explain how they determined scores. Also, a demand assessment is required to find out whether the tool can be effectively applied to a context.

The "Critical 8" are as follows:

- 1. Political Context** – How would the political institutions in the country support or hinder methodologies like SAc?
- 2. Decentralization** – Do local bodies have reasonably high degree of financial & policymaking power?
- 3. Ability to Seek Feedback from Citizens** – Would organizations feel safe conducting SAc interventions?
- 4. Citizens Ability to Voice Experience** – Do citizens feel free to give honest feedback about government services?
- 5. Presence & Activism of Civil Society Organizations** – Are there active CSOs in the country? Are they independent & non-partisan?
- 6. Survey & Analysis Competency** – Are there demonstrated local skills for survey and analysis?
- 7. Quality of media** – Is the media independent? Do they cover issues related to public services? Will they cover PROJECT findings and present them in an unbiased manner?
- 8. Responsiveness of Service Providers** – Do service providers seek consumer/user feedback? How open would they be to independent assessments of their performance?

What is the link between social accountability and good governance?

As evidenced, the existence of mechanisms of social accountability can lead to significant changes in both the decisiveness and accountability of governments. In terms of decisiveness, or fulfilling expectations, vertical mechanisms enable civil society and government to work towards:

- Improving public expenditure targeting of social programs through improved knowledge of citizen needs.
- Enhancing the quality of services delivered through the issuing of citizens' report cards.
- Improving the allocation of budget resources through the incorporation of citizen feedback on budget proposals.
- Enhancing public expenditure effectiveness through participatory tracking and monitoring systems.

These mechanisms also lead to a better management of expectations. They provide civil society with a more realistic understanding of budgetary constraints and the difficult choices inherent in deciding where best to allocate scarce resources and how best to meet the needs of a diverse population.

In conclusion, social accountability can play an important role in the creation of more transparent and representative governments and aid public institutions in meeting the expectations of the population.

Part 2 of this module will introduce possible social accountability tools that could address the following concerns:

Table 4: Social Accountability Issues and Possible Fixes

Focus Areas	Issues/Concerns	Tools/Approaches
Monitoring/ Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weak institutional (formal) monitoring processes - Weak incentives for service delivery - Corruption & leakages 	1. Citizen Report Cards 2. Community Score Cards <i>Social Audit</i>
Budget Allocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spending on wrong goods - Wrong inclusion/exclusion of target groups 	3. Budget Analysis & Advocacy
Expenditure Tracking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resources fail to reach intended beneficiaries 	4. Participatory Expenditure Tracking Studies (PETS)

A short discussion on the importance of communication and advocacy in social accountability will be provided. Cross country sharing of experiences on the use of other potential social accountability tools (e.g. RTI) will also be presented.

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