



Just and Democratic Local Governance

Accountability

Quality and Equity in Public Service Provision



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ELBAG Handbook Series

Accountability

– Quality and Equity in Public Service Provision

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This book has been produced by ActionAid's International Governance Team (IGT) and is part of the ELBAG Handbook Series. ELBAG is the brand name for ActionAid's work on Just and Democratic Governance and complements ActionAid's Handbook on Human Rights Based Approaches. ELBAG is an abbreviation for 'Economic Literacy & Budget Accountability in Governance'.

Acknowledgement of sources:

The content of this handbook has been inspired and informed by many other publications, papers and reports and numerous inputs, comments and suggestions from ActionAid staff and partners. A list of major sources appears at the end of the book.

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Human Rights form the basis for ActionAid's work

Human Rights form the basis for ActionAid's work. ActionAid believes that poverty violates human rights and that this happens because of unequal power relations which start in the family and extend up to the global level. Violations of human rights are often a result of failures in governance. Governance is about the relationship between citizens and the state and the way the state uses its power and authority to manage its political, economic and administrative affairs. ActionAid believes in democratic people-centred governance where governance processes and the exercise of power are guided by human rights principles and values.

Together these constitute the idea of rights-based, people-centred governance based on the rule of law and principled on democratic values of participation, equity, justice and fairness. ActionAid's approach to Human Rights is explained in ActionAid's Resource Book on Human Rights Based Approaches (HRBA) which also informs the ELBAG Handbook Series on Just and Democratic Local Governance

Towards a fairer distribution of resources
The 'ELBAG Just and Democratic Local Governance Handbook Series' is intended for civil society practitioners and activists working at the local level. The five books in the series can be read independently, but they complement each other and contribute to a more overall picture of key governance issues of central importance to ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach. The series focuses on the local level and will support practitioners in their efforts to achieve ActionAid's strategic promises of improving service delivery for poor people and achieving a fairer distribution of resources to finance public policies aimed at reducing poverty.

It is now generally acknowledged that strengthening accountability mechanisms and holding the state to account plays a crucial role in securing improvements in service delivery. Citizens can most easily influence the state at the local level. Decentralisation reforms in many countries have enabled citizens to form responsive local governments and hold these and other state institutions at the local level to account. Civil society action has demonstrated that considerable improvements can be achieved even without extra external resources by simply focusing on improving local accountability relationships and decentralised governance systems. This approach can achieve significant improvements in a short space of time for the most marginalised, many of whom only have limited access to any type of service.

Clearly many problems cannot be solved at the local level. National and international policies, global patterns of wealth generation and distribution are factors that impact on the local level and determine how much room there is to manoeuvre. The struggle for democracy and human rights at the local level must therefore necessarily be linked to national and international campaigns.

Focusing on the local level

The five books in the series cover issues from a general perspective and do not take specific national contexts into account. However, support will be given to developing national versions of these handbooks and translating them into national languages. The current series of five titles is focused at the local level and we hope that it will assist practitioners in improving services for the poor. Forthcoming titles over the next two years will focus how the local level can effectively link up with national struggles.

Good public services and welfare are essential for a dignified life

Public services such as education, health, water and sanitation are essential for people centred development. Good public services and welfare are essential for a dignified life. Without them people are marginalised and excluded, have limited opportunities and are exploited so that their health, dignity and self-respect are eroded. Basic public services play an important part in the realisation of poor people's human rights, especially women's rights. Women are the primary users of services and poor services contribute to maintaining unequal and unjust relations between men and women.

Services failing the poor

In many countries, the state is often not able or not willing to live up to its responsibility of providing basic services. Many basic essential services such as education, health, water and sanitation are often poor in quality, not what people need or want, and often completely absent for the majority of the most poor and marginalised. In many countries service delivery is under pressure. The State is often keen to give up its responsibility for providing services by insisting that private companies can do it better. However the evidence shows that this is not true for the poorest and most marginalised. In fact for the poorest, services tend to get worse when they are privatised.

ActionAid believes that the only way to ensure effective and just service provision for the poor and marginalised is when the state takes overall responsibility for service delivery. The increasing trend towards the privatisation of services places an extra burden on the state in terms of a regulatory role in

accrediting and overseeing non-state service provision and ensuring that the poor and marginalised are included. This is a role that many states are poorly equipped to play.

The reasons for services failing the poor are many, ranging from the failure of officials to ensure the delivery of services, not enough staff with the right qualifications and unaccountable politicians who see no political advantage in promoting service delivery for the poor. In addition, government policies and funding may be inadequate and unresponsive and programmes at the sub-national and national levels may be plagued by a lack of political will and commitment, corruption and distorted priorities. Many of these issues can only be dealt with at the national level and it is important that our work at the local level feeds into our longer term national level work. But in spite of this, civil society can play a significant role in helping to make local service delivery more effective already now with the staff and resources that are already available.

What is this handbook about?

This Handbook is for local level civil society practitioners who want to make services work better for the poor. The book builds on current good practices which focus on strengthening local accountability in service provision and governance. Experience shows that accountability is a key issue in promoting more responsive and just service delivery. This is what this handbook is about. It tells you step by step how civil society organisations and activists can help to improve local services now by focusing on accountability.



– For the last two weeks there has been no doctor at the clinic and the nurse is telling patients to buy medicines in the market. Why haven't our elected leaders done anything about this situation, I have spoken to them about it many times?



– It's like the health staff really don't care about us! Each time I complain, the local health officer just points his finger upwards and says it's not his fault, but someone at the District Office. We have to get staff and government officers to be accountable.

Local public services – how can we improve them?

Accountability is now widely accepted as a key issue in service delivery improvements. Accountability in service delivery at its simplest is about making sure that people who are responsible for delivering public services do their jobs as best they can and use resources in an efficient and equitable way.

If you are a teacher, a nurse, a doctor or the district water engineer, it is your responsibility to do your job as best you can. In this case doing the best you can means providing the best service you can with what you have available.

Accountability in the workplace
Government officials in management positions are supposed to hold employees to account – make sure that they do their jobs properly. In many cases this doesn't happen. Nobody is checking up on whether staff providing services are doing the best they can. Supervisors don't listen to their staff and help them with their problems.

If nobody checks up or takes an interest in how people do their jobs and give them positive feedback, then we know that they will often not do their best work. If you get paid anyway, why bother to work hard when the facilities are poor, your boss doesn't care and there's little money for improvements.

Instead, citizens and civil society organisations have to check up on how

service providers do their job and give them feedback. When the results of this are discussed with staff, made public or presented to senior government officials, then experience has shown that local service provision generally improves. These improvements may not be dramatic, but they can be significant for the most marginalised who may only have been receiving limited services or none at all. These are perhaps small changes, but they can make an enormous difference for service users – it can be a question of life or death.

Accountability and governance
Accountability is a cornerstone of people centred governance. With this in mind consider the following five characteristics of accountability.

Accountability involves relationships.

The kind of relationships between people in charge of something and the people they serve. For example, the relationship between a politician and the citizens in her constituency; or between a teacher and his pupils; or a doctor and her patients. Citizens, pupils and patients are often called RIGHTS HOLDERS as it is their right as a human being to receive basic services and social protection.



– In a well-functioning accountability system misconduct and poor performance set off alarm bells and steps are taken to correct the faults.



– In a poorly functioning accountability system no steps are taken to correct the faults.

Accountability involves taking responsibility. Leaders and people in authority have a mandate to serve the public good. For this reason we often call them DUTY BEARERS, as it is their duty to make sure that they serve the people as best they can. If their actions fall short of this mandate, they should be willing to explain what went wrong and accept the consequences. That is what is meant by “holding someone to account”.

Accountability is concerned with power. Power is present in all accountability relationships. When accountability is working properly, it provides checks and balances for monitoring and making sure that powerful people follow the rules. When there is no accountability, the powerful do what they like.

Accountability is closely linked to human rights and the rule of law.

Human Rights can only be fulfilled if those responsible for respecting and protecting them are held responsible for doing so. Accountability helps to build a system of governance based on the rule of law where there are clear consequences for misconduct and negligence.

Accountability is about gender equity.

Accountability mechanisms are often gender blind. Demands for accountability must be done in ways which ensure that improved accountability also results in greater gender equality between women and men and different groups of women and men and boys and girls. Accountability mechanisms must protect and promote women’s rights.





– From what I've seen government officials sometimes get promoted even when they've done very little



– Often bad reports and scandalous rumours just get swept under the carpet.

Accountability and Sanctions

Sanctions are a vital component of accountability. If there are no consequences for state actors when they don't meet commitments and standards, the entire accountability process fails. Even with the most comprehensive and insightful information on state performance, no-one can be held accountable unless there are sanctions for misconduct and non-achievement.

Sanctions must be a real threat. There are two key characteristics that make sanctions more effective:

Sanctions must be coupled with answerability. Those who have the obligation to deliver should also have a binding duty to answer questions and explain themselves when things go wrong.

Sanctions must be enforceable. It is insufficient for sanctions merely to exist, without being put into practice. When monitoring reveals that obligations have not been met, sanctions should be enforced as a matter of course, and not as an exception to the rule.

Making sanctions work – a role for civil society?

The most established sanction mechanisms lie within the state. Effective service delivery relies on these systems working well. The state must have both the capacity and political will to make sanctions work. Civil society can play a major role by monitoring how well the state's own accountability systems and sanctions are working and advocate for improvements.

Civil society has little power to enforce sanctions by itself. For this reason, it is important for CSOs to build linkages with state accountability actors. For example, when working at the local level you will also often need to involve and influence more senior state officers higher up at the district level to focus on problems and impose sanctions when necessary, otherwise there may be little impact in terms of local service improvements. Likewise, if your focus is the district level you may need to influence the national level in a similar way.

Accountability Work

This book explores the meaning of accountability as a key feature of democratic governance. But what then is 'accountability work'? In this book, we see it as all organised efforts on the part of citizens and CSOs to strengthen accountability mechanisms and use accountability tools to improve service delivery, governance and development outcomes.

Getting organised – becoming empowered

When citizens and civil society organisations (CSOs) decide to focus on accountability work, the very first thing to do is to get organised yourself. You need to be part of a movement, a CSO or a non-government organisation (NGO). One of the first things you need to do is to decide what service you will focus on. It is very important that gender outcomes are considered when deciding which service to focus on. You need to consider what impact improved accountability in a

particular service area will have on gender equity and make sure that what you choose will strengthen gender equity and women's rights. You should also make sure that what you choose has broad backing in your community and that it does include the most marginalised.

To be successful people must mobilise and be ready to participate. This is easier if you are working on something that most people are concerned about. Broad participation is a crucial element in civil


*Building awareness and empowering rights holders is a key ActionAid focus area. To learn more about these processes see: **Action on Rights** – Human Rights Based Approach Resource Book (ActionAid 2010)*



society accountability work. There is power in numbers and numbers also show the extent of people's concern. Getting people to participate is closely linked to people's awareness and empowerment – an understanding within the community about why they are poor and marginalised. People's empowerment is necessary before you start accountability work.

Which level to work on?

You also have to consider which location or area you will work in. Some CSOs choose to work at the community level focusing accountability work on the community health clinic or village school. Others focus on an administrative unit, for example the smallest unit like a Ward or Village Development Committee or even a whole district or urban municipality. It can be a good idea to focus on an administrative unit as normally service providers are legally supposed to provide equal services to everybody in the administrative area they have jurisdiction over. This can be a basis upon which marginalised groups can demand improved services.

Larger scale accountability work focusing on service provision generally focuses on bigger administrative areas, for example a whole district, but there are examples of campaigns that cover a number of districts or even the whole country. The wider the area you cover,

the larger the number of people you have behind you and the more difficult it is for officials to ignore you. As we said, there is power in numbers.

It is important to work with other organisations in order to increase effectiveness. You can form networks or alliances consisting of a number of civil society organisations that decide to work together. This enables organisations to increase the scope of their work and to share work and costs among themselves, but it requires good organisation and leadership. Once you know which stakeholders you want as partners, the next step is to map out who you already have contact with and who you will have to approach for the first time. Some of the stakeholders may already have contact with people that you know.

Guiding Points

Forming networks and alliances begins with identifying individuals and organisations you would like to team up with. There are many things to consider in this process and some of the following points can guide you.

- If you want to build a broad social movement, numbers and geographical spread are important. You might give priority to organisations with large membership bases and strong grassroots networks of their own.

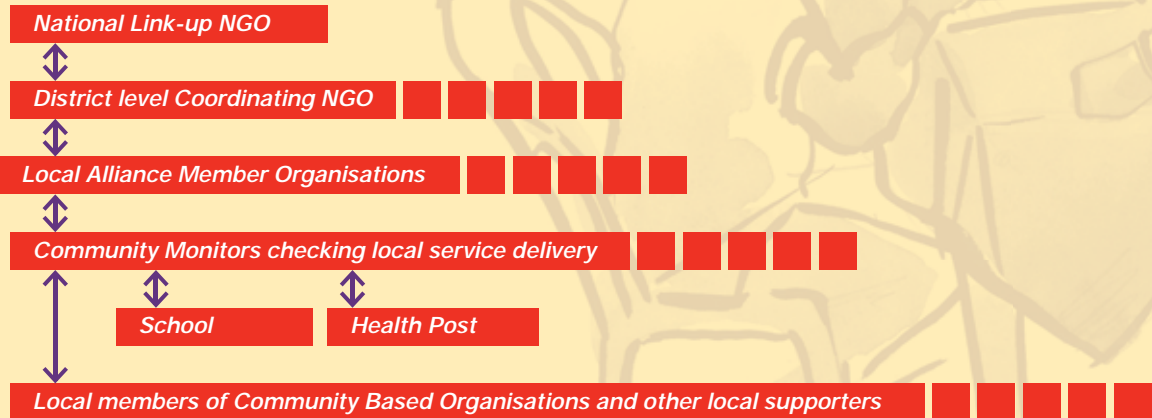


– Running a network in a participatory way means making sure everyone is informed, consulted and taken seriously.



– We learnt to always be open about all our decisions. It means no-one can hold on to all the power.

Civil Society Alliance Structure: From the local to the national level



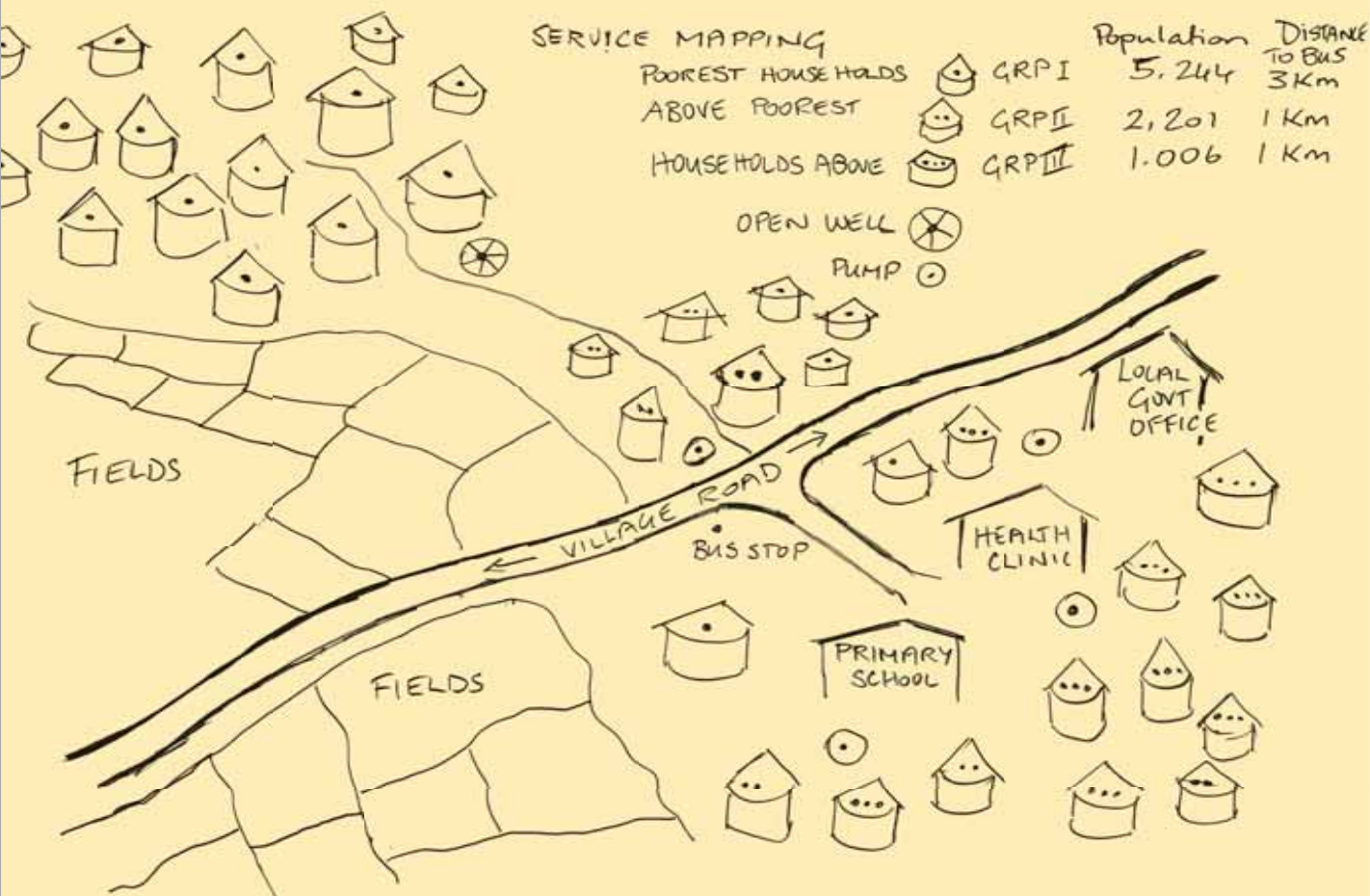
This is an example of a larger alliance of NGOs and CSOs which have joined together to monitor health clinics and schools throughout a district .

The district level NGO plays an important role in coordinating the local level members. It also makes sure that there is a link to a national level NGO in the capital which can provide support and use the findings from the district in national level campaigns.

Another important role is played by the Community Monitors who organise the monitoring of public services at the local level. They are the key link between the community and the local NGOs.

The findings of their monitoring work are collected together by the local organisations and then compiled by the district NGO in a report.

This report and any other findings from the monitoring work are used in a campaign for improving services.



Simple hand drawn maps can give you a lot of information about how services are provided to communities. They show you where people are concentrated and where the services are.

You can use symbols for schools and clinics and villages. Often the maps will reveal that the poorest people get the worst service provision.

Make sure that you make your map gender sensitive. Different services will have different significance for men and women, for example water points are very important for women who traditionally often have to collect water from great distances.

Collecting this information enables you to get in contact with people who use services. It helps you to establish dialogue, encourage participation and solidarity. You can use this mapping information to plan your accountability work.

- If you want to select partners to help you monitor and gather evidence, give careful consideration to the knowledge and skills you need in order to create a strong project team. Depending on the methods you use to gather evidence, you might prioritise CSOs with particular research, training and analytical skills.
- You may want to identify partners who have expertise in awareness raising, public communication and advocacy who will be able to help you disseminate evidence, present your findings and put out a compelling argument to convince decision-makers.
- Remember that those most affected by the problem you are tackling have valuable first-hand knowledge and experience. They should play a key role in your work and participate in all decision making.

Mapping service provision

When you have decided what service to focus on and have decided how you are going to organise and who you will partner with, you need to get a picture of how this service you are going to focus on is actually provided in the area you have chosen. This involves doing some basic mapping. If you are looking at the water supply sector, you can begin by asking the local water department for information. You want to get basic information about where the water points are, what type are they (pumps, wells, or springs), the quality of the water

at each source and what the functional status is (functioning, under repair or broken down). You need to be aware that the official information you get may not be up to date or accurate. Indeed the official information may be part of the problem you need to deal with.

The only way to really find out about how good or bad service provision is, is to go out and ask people. You can either collect information in a table or make maps. Maps have the advantage of showing where services are provided and where people live. Maps can be hand drawn and local people can help you draw them and give you the information you need.

Often you can clearly see from the map that the poorest and most marginalised get the worst services in terms of quality and access. It is a powerful tool for showing differences in service coverage.

Baselines

The information you get from mapping will also help you make a BASELINE. A baseline tells you the quality, quantity and coverage of a service that people receive now. Using the example from the water points, your mapping might have told you that there are 55 water points out of a total of 180 that are broken down in the district. This figure can now be your baseline. You can measure this again in 6 months and see if the result has improved. This kind of measuring is called monitoring and it is how we find out if our accountability work is leading to improvements in service delivery.



– The results of your mapping will give you a general idea about how the service is provided. It will tell where service provision is weakest and where it is strongest.



– We informed the water department that 55 water points were broken. We checked again six months later. They were still broken!



– In in our community it was easy for us to agree that services were bad. The clinic was nearly always closed and the schools had over 50 pupils in a class. But where do you start with accountability work?



– Thinking things over, we realised that we didn't know what quality of services we should receive. It seemed like the first thing we had to do was to find out what we have a right to receive. We began by brainstorming some key questions about our health clinic.

Service delivery – what are your rights?

If a job is organised well there will be instructions about how the job should be done and examples of what is good work and bad work. In its simplest form this is when a boss gives instructions to employees – this is how I want the work done. In complex jobs like providing education and health care which involve many people, there will be job descriptions, procedures or curricula, which tell staff what and how they should do the job. These documents are important for accountability work because you can use them to see if staff do their work in accordance with the instructions they have been given.

Public services also have standards. Standards tell you about the quality of the service. For example the Ministry of Education may have a standard that says there should not be more than 30 pupils in a class. The Ministry of Health may have a standard that says that the distance between a community and a health post should not be more than 3 km and that a health post should be manned by a nurse, have a doctor present 3 hours every day and be able to treat 20 illnesses with medicines that are stocked at the health post and provided free to patients. Knowing what the standards are for the service area you are working on is crucial

Service Quality: **What does it actually mean?**

How many doctors and nurses are meant to be on duty? ■ ■ ■

How many beds should there be in a clinic like this? ■ ■ ■

What medicines should be available and are they meant to be free of charge? ■ ■ ■

What treatments are supposed to be available at this clinic? ■ ■ ■

How are health care providers meant to behave towards the patients? ■ ■ ■

How far are people meant to travel to their nearest clinic? ■ ■ ■

What is meant to happen with emergencies? ■ ■ ■



– By asking questions, getting hold of documents and interviewing officials we got a lot of information about staff job descriptions, service standards and the service plans and goals for our district. Now we know what we are not getting!

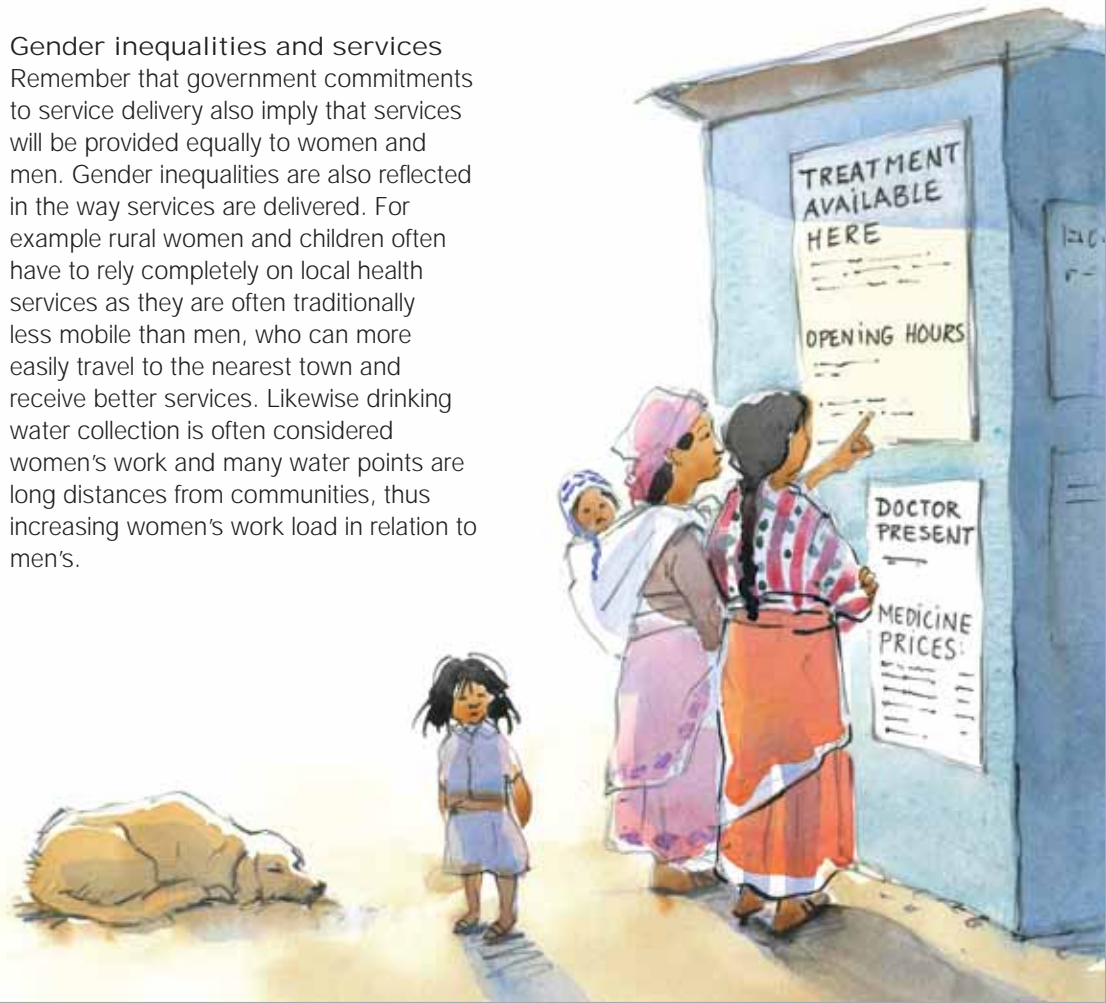
for accountability work as it allows you to check to see if work is done to standard.

Government policy papers, service delivery plans and national targets for the country or a district as well as politicians' promises are all what are known as commitments. Commitments are promises that the state, government officials and politicians have made to citizens. Knowing what these commitments are is important for accountability work. It is another thing you can check up on. See if the promises have been delivered on.

Gender inequalities and services
Remember that government commitments to service delivery also imply that services will be provided equally to women and men. Gender inequalities are also reflected in the way services are delivered. For example rural women and children often have to rely completely on local health services as they are often traditionally less mobile than men, who can more easily travel to the nearest town and receive better services. Likewise drinking water collection is often considered women's work and many water points are long distances from communities, thus increasing women's work load in relation to men's.

What if there are no commitments and standards?

Sometimes there are no standards and commitments. They may also be unclear and not known by government staff or they may be of such a low quality that they do not fulfil people's needs. If this is the case civil society can begin by demanding voice and representation in the formulation of standards and fulfilment of people's rights. You could begin by asking who should be responsible for formulating





– We discovered that there were many government offices involved in service delivery. In order to understand how they are all linked we made a diagram like the one below. It was difficult to include all the offices, so we put the most important ones in first.

them. You can advocate that the provisions made in Human Rights Declarations or internationally recognised standards should be used. You can find these in Human Rights Covenants and documents from organisations like the World Health Organisation.

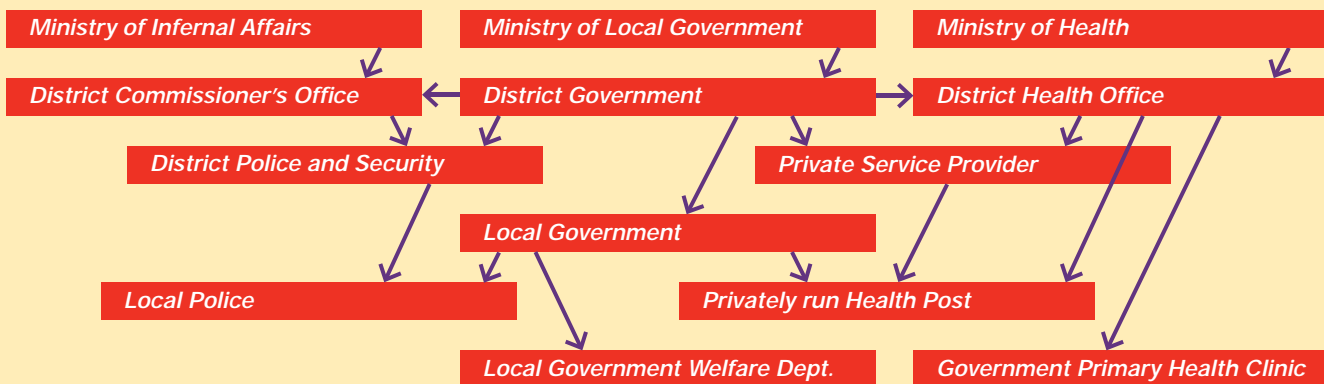
Finding out who is responsible for which services
 Many people are involved in delivering a service at many different levels. At the top there are politicians in government who decide what the service should be like and how much money will be earmarked for each service. Government civil servants in the various ministries then work out all the details and write them down in policy papers, directives and regulations which then tell officials at the district level how to implement the service in their district.

Accountants and finance managers are responsible for seeing that wages are paid and supplies for services bought and distributed. Likewise, there are more regulations and directives that tell front line service providers (teachers, nurses, doctors and extension workers etc.) how they should deliver the services. When you do accountability work, you need to know who is responsible for delivering each part of the service. To be effective you have to be able to focus your campaign on the right office or department and the right person.



– The way the state organises service delivery varies from one country to another. How does our diagram compare with your country?

Public Service Delivery: **Many offices on many levels**



Key relationships in accountability processes

Knowing which person to focus on also means knowing what the key accountability relationships are. We have outlined four important ones below:

Relationship 1

– between elected leaders and their constituents – the public.

Elected leaders are supposed to represent the needs and concerns of the people in their constituency. Elected leaders often play a role at national and local levels in deciding how much money is allocated for services and what standard of service will be provided.

They often make commitments about what they will do if they get elected. They have a responsibility to their constituents to make sure that the decisions they have

made are implemented fairly and the promises honoured.

What can civil society do: Monitor standards and commitments and call attention to out-dated, vague and inadequate standards. People have a right to question elected leaders about their decisions and elected leaders are obligated to listen to citizens and follow up on their concerns. Monitoring elected leaders' performance and engaging them in dialogue and holding them to account is therefore important for furthering accountability in service delivery.

Relationship 2

– between elected leaders and government officials.

Elected leaders make the laws about service delivery. These laws inform government officials



– After we had mapped out the institutions we realised that there are many levels in service delivery which involve different departments and offices. We also discovered that the accountability relationships between the different levels are very important for making the system function.

Government at the doorstep

Many countries have focused on decentralisation and local government. Local government is meant to ensure that citizens have more direct access to government. The more decisions and functions are managed at the local level, the more easily people should be able to participate.

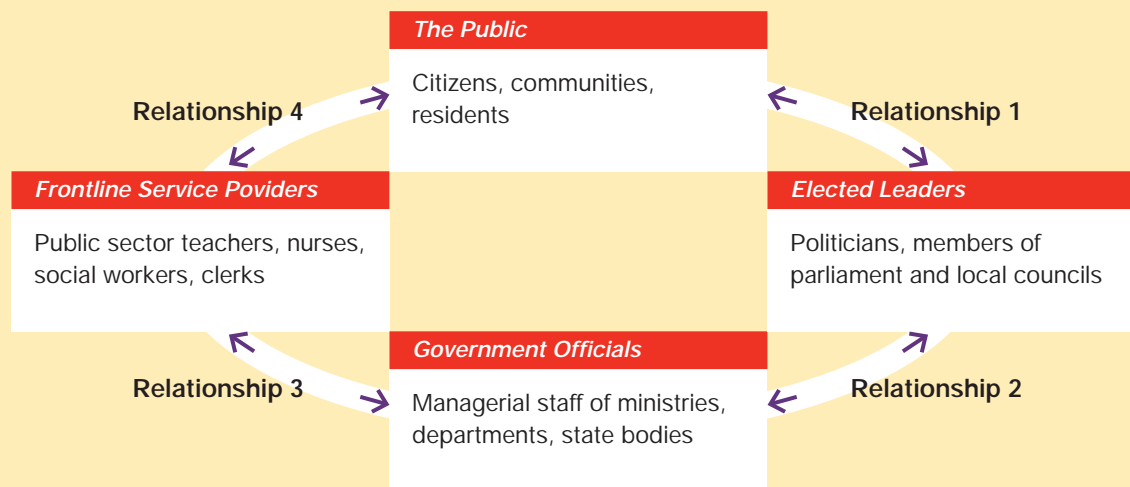
This is what you would think, but in order for that to happen local government needs to be strong and accountable and generally central government has been unwilling to provide the funds and staff necessary for making decentralisation effective.

In many countries local governments have actually only been given very minor roles in providing services. The line ministries (for example Ministry of Health or Education) often still control the lowest service levels.

Altogether, many countries have failed to develop strong institutions capable of managing and delivering public services. Is this the case in your country?



*For more information about decentralisation, see the accompanying handbook in this series titled: **Democracy** – Just Governance and Accountability at the Local Level*



Effective service delivery requires that these four accountability relationships function.

Experience shows that civil society can play an important role in making Relationship 4, between the public and frontline providers, function better.

Pressure here can also stimulate improved accountability in the other relationships.

about how they are supposed to deliver services. Elected leaders have an obligation to make sure that officials do the best they can in managing service delivery. If officials do not do their job properly, elected representatives should hold them to account.

What can Civil Society do:

Monitor whether elected leaders do carry out their oversight function. Gather evidence about how well departments and officials are managing services and put pressure on elected leaders to hold officials to account.

Relationship 3

– between government officials and front line service providers.

Frontline service providers are people like doctors, nurses and teachers who provide services directly to the public. Government officials are supposed to monitor and supervise frontline providers and make sure they do their jobs correctly.

What can Civil Society do:

Monitor how services are provided and how staff are managed. Track how materials are procured and contracts awarded. Call on officials to be transparent and accountable if poor performance or any irregularities are encountered.

Relationship 4

– between frontline service providers and the public.

Frontline service providers generally do not have power over the policies and standards they are expected to implement. They also often do not have much control over the facilities they work in. However, what frontline service providers are able to affect is the quality of the services they provide in terms of professional conduct, effort and commitment and how many people they provide services to. Frontline service providers are accountable both to their employers (usually government departments or agencies) and to the people they are meant to serve.

What can Civil Society do:

Monitor how services are delivered and report sub-standard delivery and performance. Call on government departments to take responsibility for poor facilities and bad management. Keep elected representatives and policy makers informed of inadequate service and demand that they hold officials to account.

Privatisation of services

It is increasingly common that states are privatising essential service delivery and running away from their responsibility to provide free basic services for citizens. Experience shows that when services are privatised, the most marginalised suffer the most. There are therefore two more important accountability relationships to consider: that between government officials and private providers and that between private providers and citizens. Private providers are usually a group consisting of frontline staff and their managers. These accountability relationships are often very unclear, even non-existent. When the state outsources services, they have a responsibility to ensure that the services live up to national standards. This requires the state to play an oversight role which it is often poorly equipped to do and often unwilling to fulfil.

What can civil society do:

Monitor how services are delivered and report sub-standard delivery and poor performance. Call on government departments to clarify their oversight role and implement sanctions for poor performance by private providers.



– There is a growing trend around the world for the state to contract out certain functions of service delivery to private companies in an attempt to get rid of large civil service bureaucracies.



– They say privatisation increases efficiency, but they forget that marginalised people often get excluded from access to services when things get privatised.



– So far we have looked at accountability from an ideal perspective, but the reality is often far from ideal



– There are many practical obstacles that can make accountability work difficult.



For more information about Access to Information see the accompanying hand-book in this series titled: **Budgets – Revenues and Financing Public Services**

Demanding accountability – what are the challenges?

There are a number of serious barriers which can make accountability work difficult. In many countries, the role of civil society as an accountability actor is often not recognised by the state. The quality of democracy varies from country to country and influences what you can do. Attempts by civil society to hold government accountable are often made difficult when basic freedoms – such as access to information, freedom of expression and of association – are absent or limited.

The same holds true in countries where criticism of government is treated as grounds for harassment or physical violence. In such contexts, political leaders may be able to do more or less as they please and ignore or break laws intended to enforce accountability.

The following sections outline some of the common problems that CSOs can run into when working for greater accountability.

Weak state institutions

One of the reasons why service delivery is poor is often because the state's own institutions which are supposed to manage and deliver services are weak and ineffective. Some common weaknesses are listed in the next column:

- The particular service sector may be underfunded and under prioritised
- Policies and standards are poorly formulated and planned, making them more difficult to implement and monitor and are very often gender blind.
- Government officials don't have the skills they need to follow financial and management procedures, or implement service delivery.
- It can be expensive and time-consuming to train enough people in key areas like accounting, project management and monitoring and levels of pay may be very low making it hard to keep staff.
- Elected leaders may not have the capacity or time to exercise oversight very well.
- State structures such as audit institutions and electoral commissions may not be truly independent.

These problems create difficulties for democratic accountability because solving them is a long term process which requires changes at the central level. Local officials may be sympathetic to improving local services but have limited opportunity to do very much.

Weak civil society.

It stands to reason that when civil society is unorganised, ill-informed or disinterested, this has a negative impact on democratic accountability. There are different ways for citizens to help build accountability, but in all cases a degree of commitment and organisation is required. The following issues make it more difficult for civil society to participate in governance, which in turn undermines the potential for effective accountability:

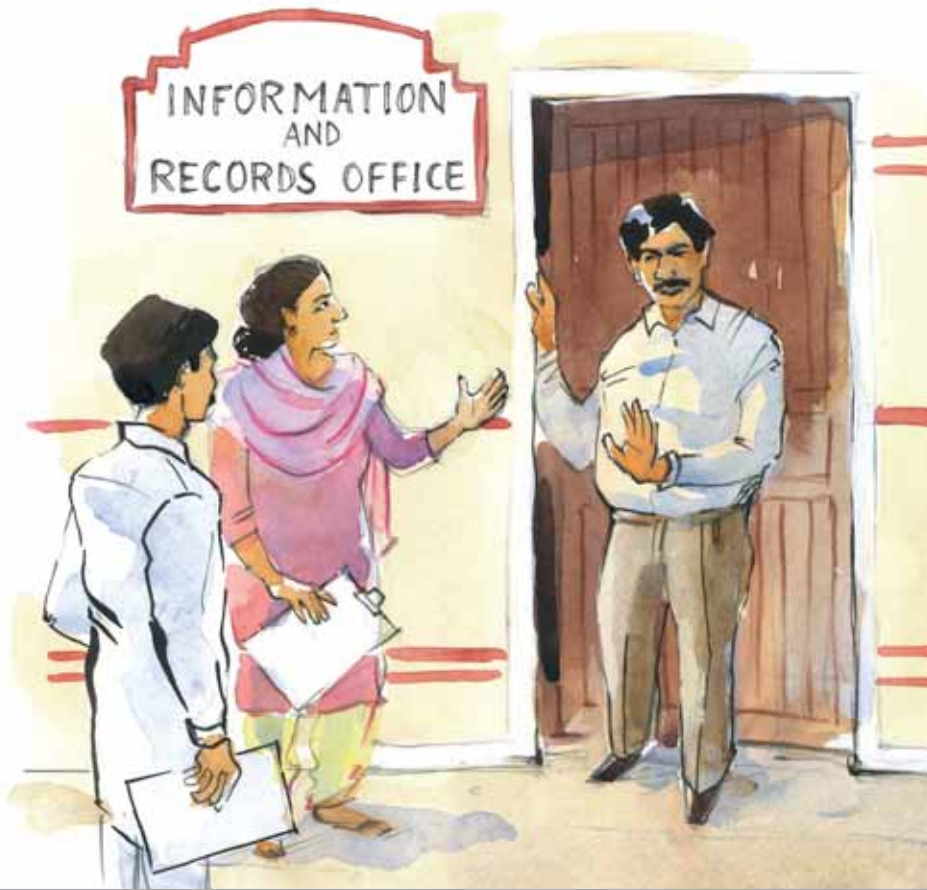
- A lack of knowledge or interest in pursuing political, civil and women's rights.
- A lack of knowledge or interest in promoting active citizenship, or following up on livelihood rights for men and women.
- No access to government information, with no campaign for freedom of information.
- Few civil society organizations able to mobilise people and lobby decision-makers.
- Deeply divided and fragmented society, in which significant segments are favoured by government, while others are marginalised or oppressed.
- Self-interested non-transparent NGOs where staff are more interested in their own working conditions than in the well-being of the people they claim to serve.

Getting access to information

In many cases, it may not be easy to access government information on the commitments and standards you have chosen to monitor. Your accountability work may be focused on a specific sector or issue – like health care, or women's rights or poverty. However, there is a certain accountability issue that underpins all these civil society efforts – and that is the obligation on states to promote transparency in governance. If getting information is a general problem in your county you may have to begin by focusing on the issue of access to information.



– We tried repeatedly to get into the Local Government Information and Records Office but were refused access every time.



You could consider:

- What commitments and standards exist in your country (or in your sector) relating to transparency in the provision of government information.
- Ways in which you could monitor government openness and transparency in your context.
- Transparency promotes accountability by providing citizens with access to information about government obligations, performance and conduct. Yet the call for transparency is not only about the quantity of information. It is also about the quality of it and whether it is correct, up to date and meaningful.

Competing allegiances

Democratic accountability is undermined when systems of informal accountability work against formal checks and balances. People may face the difficult choice of being loyal to their clan or cultural group on the one hand, and holding official leaders to account, on the other. When citizens lose trust in government, they are all the more inclined to retreat to ethnic enclaves. This makes for complex arrangements, where people constantly have to negotiate their way amongst competing expectations and allegiances.

It is not always the case that the formal and informal systems of governance are clearly separated. There may be overlaps and reciprocal arrangements between informal traditional authorities and formal political leaders. In some instances, access to government jobs, resources and

services may be manipulated along ethnic or religious lines, creating vast systems of patronage operating below the surface of formal government processes. When government officials also have clan or tribal status, it may be difficult for members of their own ethnic group to challenge their performance or conduct. When powerful actors use their (official or unofficial) status and resources to influence, intimidate or manipulate others, it can be said that they have 'captured' these people's allegiance. Capture happens when leaders:

- Invite bribes in exchange for access to resources, services or opportunities.
- Promise to protect or prioritise certain groups over others in exchange for support.
- Offer favours in exchange for people turning a blind eye to misconduct or poor performance.

Patronage and corruption

Unofficial systems of patronage can get institutionalised over time. For example, when one ethnic or religious group is favoured by government officials, their privileges can come to seem like a regular feature of everyday life. It may be that 'everyone knows' how decisions are made about winning service contracts and jobs in the civil service, or a place on a housing waiting list – even though these practices are not formally acknowledged. In some instances, an unwritten pact might exist between politicians and elite groups. As long as these groups do not call attention to government failures, their privileges are protected by the state.



– In our district, it is difficult for women to hold the Health Department to account for poor services. There is no use lodging a complaint at a local clinic – it just falls on deaf ears.



*For more information about hidden power see the accompanying handbook in this series titled: **Power – Elite Capture and Hidden Influence.***

Beliefs, cultural norms and traditions

People's beliefs, cultural norms and traditions influence accountability relationships in all settings. In many countries, social positions are decided on the basis of ethnic identity. And within ethnic or cultural groups, certain customs prescribe how women, men, children and elders are meant to behave.

There are traditions and rituals that exclude some people from decision-making, or prevent some people from questioning what others have done just because of their identity. For instance, the caste-based system in South Asia is used to exclude minority groups and hold them powerless. Traditional laws are often used instead of national laws to stop minorities from using municipal services such as public water facilities just because they are "other people."

In addition, many traditional norms and beliefs are biased against women who are regarded as socially inferior to men. This is social or cultural bias that undermines democratic accountability. It is a challenge for democratic accountability to preserve what is valuable in cultural traditions, and confront what reinforces exclusion and inequality

Assessing Risks

This chapter has looked at a number of general issues that can make working with accountability difficult. It is important that before you start accountability work you take time to consider the kind of problems you might run into and assess the risks that might be involved. A risk is something

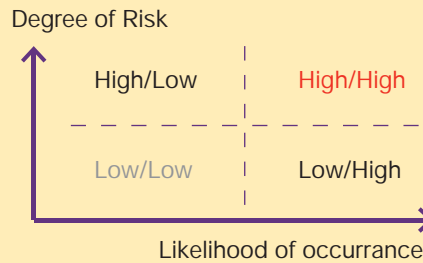
you do not have control over which can cause difficulties for your work. For bigger and more serious risks, particularly those involving threats or violence, you should consider what you would do if the risk happened – this means having a plan ready so you can act quickly.

Here is a simple tool for assessing risks

1. Brainstorm issues that you think may be a risk for your accountability work.
2. Ask yourself, what is the likelihood of this risk happening? (Grade it from Low to High in the table below).
3. Now ask yourself how serious is this risk if it happens? (Low to High).
4. If the risk is high on both degree of risk to your work and high likelihood of happening, then you have a potentially serious risk to deal with.
5. Make a plan for dealing with this risk if it happens or change your strategy to avoid the risk



Checking for Degrees of Risks



– Local leaders can also reinforce undemocratic customs, like sidelining women when it comes to big decisions. Remember, local participation does not always mean equal participation

Here are some things you can do to minimise risks

- Create a large alliance that includes various stakeholders (safety in numbers)
- Get legal support
- Maintain dialogue with politicians and power holders
- Keep good records of your work (documentation)
- Cooperate with the media.



– If you have facts and figures to prove that services are sub-standard, it's much more difficult for officials to brush you off

Gathering evidence – building solidarity

Gathering evidence to support calls for improvements in services has become part of best practice for CSOs. Officials can easily ignore civil society voices when they make demands that sound vague or unrealistic. Citizens' claims about poor service performance or misconduct are more likely to be taken seriously if they are backed up with sound facts and figures. Having clear evidence can provide a solid basis for civil society to engage with officials and hold those responsible to account. It can also establish a common starting point for citizens and frontline service providers to work together to find practical solutions to agreed problems.

Gathering the relevant evidence

The key question about monitoring services is: what exactly are the relevant state actors meant to be doing – and to what standard? You should of course also ask if the focus and the standards are relevant and acceptable.

Only by answering these questions will you know what to gather evidence about. It is essential to take the time to make sure your accountability work focuses on the right evidence. By the 'right evidence' we mean information that reveals whether the duty-bearers within the service area you are focusing on are providing relevant services and are fulfilling their obligations and performing to accepted standards. The

evidence you gather has to be pegged to recognised standards if it is to be of any use in holding leaders to account. With a list of questions like those about the clinic on page 14 you can begin to identify what commitments, obligations and standards may be important to check up on.

Monitoring tools

In recent years many participative methods have emerged from civil society for collecting and analysing information on service performance. This is often called monitoring – checking to see how things are being done. There are three types of tools which are very often used for monitoring service delivery. It is very common for CSOs to adapt these tools to their own needs and context, so you will likely come across many different variations of these tools.

The important thing is whether the tool you use or adapt asks the questions you want answered. All these tools can be used in participatory ways. Involving people is important because it helps build solidarity, support and understanding for your work which is a vital element when it comes to using the evidence you have collected to demand change.

When using these tools it is important to make sure that women's rights are included as separate issues. If you do not include them it is quite likely that the

evidence you gather will miss important gender inequalities between women and men which you would want to address when you present your findings. Here are the three tools:



Score cards: These are participatory tools used for gathering citizens' perceptions of public services and usually involve communities grading different parts of the service. The findings can be compiled and used to start a dialogue with the authorities and to launch a campaign.



Participatory Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS): This is a tool for tracking how public resources are actually used by following the money through the budget

distribution process to the final place where it is spent. It is a powerful tool for discovering mistakes and irregularities in the way public money is spent and can also be used to show whether budgets are sufficient to begin with.



Social Audits: This tool uses participatory methods to investigate whether larger government projects have been implemented as planned. One area they focus on is to see if there are gaps between the plan and what was actually delivered or constructed. They also look at who was involved in implementing a project and what they got paid for.



– We did an audit on the new school building and found a lot of things missing. They are saying there are 12 windows, but there are only 8. They are talking about 2 doors, but there is only one door. They are talking about a black board but this is only a wall and they painted it black.





– Doing the scorecards together helped unite our community about the problems with our water supply.



Example of a **Score card**

Scorecards

The Community Scorecard is a participatory, community-based approach for assessing government services or facilities by grading them according to a range of scores. The method draws different stakeholders into discussion with the aim of finding out:

- Whether inputs promised for a service or facility have actually reached the frontline;
- How community members grade the performance of that service or facility;
- How frontline service providers themselves grade their own performance or that of their facility; and
- What can be done to overcome problems at a facility and improve service delivery.

When are community scorecards most suitable?

Community scorecards are useful when you want to gather evidence about a specific facility, such as a school, hospital or police station. They work best when you use them on just one sector at a time, so if you were looking at two sectors, like education and health, it is best to do this separately. One set of cards for education and one for health.

Score cards are geared towards monitoring those government programs that involve frontline service providers. Scorecards work more easily in rural areas – but can be used anywhere where it is possible to identify a separate community. This is because the scorecard is created by the community itself, so it is difficult to implement in contexts where community

Community Scorecard: School Name:						
What to measure (Indicator)	Score X					Remarks
	1	2	3	4	5	
A Positive attitude of teachers						
B Management provided by Headmaster						
C Cleanliness of classrooms						
D Separate and adequate boys and girls toilets						
E Teachers' preparedness for class						
F Teachers' ability to maintain attention of learners						
G Disciplined behavior of learners						

1 = Very Bad 2 = Bad 3 = Fair 4 = Good 5 = Very Good

membership is fluid or unclear. For the scorecard process to succeed there needs to be willingness to participate from frontline service providers, local government politicians and community members.

Getting government staff to take part in the scorecard process may require support from the government department responsible for employing frontline staff.

How can community scorecards contribute to participation and transparency? The community scorecard method is very participative as it involves group discussions and the active participation of community members and service providers.

The community members discuss together and find the questions for the scorecard themselves and then use these to assess the service or facility themselves. It is important to make sure that women and men's questions are given equal consideration. This ensures that there is a high degree of community ownership of the process and outcomes.

One of the first steps in the scorecard process is to clarify what commitments and standards exist – and then to take these to the community and to service providers so that everyone knows exactly what rights and duties exist and have been agreed. This promotes transparency about what the department or facility is meant to deliver and what the users can expect to receive.

Community members should also define what kind and quality they expect from the service provider – are the priorities and standards set by government relevant to the needs of the users? By involving both

community members and service providers in the assessment of facilities or services, the method encourages an open exchange of information and views which can then form a good basis for solving problems.

What are the challenges of using community scorecards? Scorecard methods do require someone to lead or facilitate the process. Group discussions need to stay on track and people need to feel comfortable in order to really say what they think.

The scorecard process does not normally tackle any power imbalances within communities and the consensus approach could hide significant differences amongst community members. Another challenge is that frontline service providers usually have very little authority to make changes in service delivery systems and facilities.

The process can therefore run into problems if the solutions people come up with at the interface meetings cannot be implemented – but this can also result in a common appeal to higher authorities which may be successful. The scorecard approach may raise expectations amongst communities and service providers and if this is not followed through with improvements it may end in frustration and disillusion.

What are the advantages of community scorecards? The method is relatively simple, inexpensive and can be conducted in a short period of time (for example 3 to 6 weeks with one community). It lends itself to being repeated and institutionalised as a



– When the Local Government Council realised that the dissatisfaction and frustration expressed through the scorecards came from the whole community, they suddenly began to take us seriously.

regular means for communities to provide feedback to government service providers. The group discussions often allow important issues and concerns to surface.

The scorecard process can directly inform planning for future service delivery. When successful, this method builds the confidence of community members and service providers to tackle problems constructively and generate their own solutions.



Tracking Budget programs of the **District Health Budget 2010**

Budget line items 2010	Budget allocated in 2010 (in millions)	Transferred from central government to Dept. of Health	Transferred from Dept. of Health to District level	Indicator	Confirmed expenditure at the clinics in the district
Doctors Salaries	1, 897,990	1,503,875	1,232,863	Amount spent on doctors' salaries	1,252,895
Construction of 4 new clinics	1, 022,320	1,020,320	1,018,320	Number of new clinics built	824,673 (2 new clinics built)
Incubators	58,456	52,983	25,837	Number of incubators received	15,786 (4 incubators received)
Total:	2,978,766	2,577,178	2,277,020	–	2,093,354

In Sierra Leone local governments have long had a reputation for poor performance. They have little incentive to improve because they often have a monopoly on the services provided. In addition, they dismiss complaints as being the problems of a small minority. To bring home to service providers the real levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their performance, ActionAid partners have conducted opinion surveys which generate 'report cards' on the perceived quality and appropriateness of a range of urban services. They are used to put pressure on service providers and elected councillors by demonstrating the extent of public dissatisfaction, in the hope that this will result in increased responsiveness on the part of public servants responsible for the services.



Participatory Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS)

The quality of a service is closely linked to how much money is available for it. Therefore knowing how much money is available and how it has been managed and spent is an important part of accountability work. Budgets are decided by local governments, by ministries or by the government itself. The money, in most cases, starts a journey from one level of government to the next until it finally reaches the local level. A common problem

is that some money tends to get lost along the way. Money may also be generated and allocated at the local government level and user fees may also play a role. Likewise, NGO support and involvement may be part of the equation. PETS are simple tools used for tracking the flow of public resources through different levels of government. Information is gathered from the central, local and service provider levels. This method traces the amounts originally allocated to each level to see what share of these funds actually reach where they



– Here's an example of some budget tracking that we did. In the column on the right you can see some of the things we found by looking at the figures.

Notes:

Our comparison of original, transferred and spent budget resources

- Transfers significantly less than budget allocated to the district level.
 - Slight overspending on doctors' salaries in comparison to transfer from department of health.
-
- Transfers almost the same as allocated to the district level.
 - Bad budget planning – clinics more expensive to build than planned? But still, was all the money spent on the clinics?
-
- Transfers to district level almost only half of what was budgeted
 - What does an incubator cost?
-
- In total 885,412 less than originally budgeted was spent on the three budget lines (2,978,766 - 2,093,354).
 - The amount transferred to the district level was 701,746 less than originally allocated to the three budget lines (2,978,766 - 2,277,020).
 - Across the three budget lines 2,093,354 was spent out of the 2,277,020 transferred to the district level. What happened to the difference of 183,666? Where did that go?



– You can see that some interesting things emerged when we compared the transfers with what was actually spent. We now have a few questions to ask the District Health Officer.



– The route along which you track the funds will depend on the budget system in your country. Some countries transfer funds from national to sub-national governments, who then split up the resources amongst different departments at the local level. How does it work in your country?

were supposed to. The aim is to identify any weak points in the system, in order to improve the quality of service delivery for users at the local level.

Budget Tracking – how to do it

Budgets reflect the commitments of the state about how it promises to use public funds. To find out whether these promises are being kept, you need to look at budgets and pick out particular budget items and follow the journey that the money has taken. You may have to look at different budgets and put the figures together yourself so that you can compare them. The example below shows you how you can do this.

Eight steps for conducting a PETS

With the participation of relevant stakeholders, you could track the flow of district health funds as follows:

- 1** Gather a team of people with knowledge about the budget for example, the health sector in your location.
- 2** Select the budget programs to track, and apply the next three steps to each program.
- 3** Determine what budget allocations were made to the program.
- 4** Establish how much was transferred from the department of health in the capital to the district level and local levels.
- 5** Establish any contributions from Local Government, user fees and/or NGOs.

- 6** Compare the budgets allocated to the programs for the year in question with what was transferred and what was actually spent in that year. See what the money was spent on and compare it with what it was planned to be spent on. Remember to check expenditure to see how it benefits women and men. Make notes of what you find.
- 7** Summarise your findings.
- 8** Decide what to do next, together with relevant stakeholders.

Budget Tracking

– what can you use it for?

Here are 5 different ways of using Budget Tracking

1 Is the budget sufficient for the needs of the people in the community?

Most countries have a unit cost for a particular service. For example, for health services this could be how much it costs to provide basic health for one person for a year. This cost is then multiplied by the number of people in a district to decide how much the district gets for its health budget. If you know the unit cost you can compare it with what is actually allocated.

Alternatively, you can see how much money is allocated for buying medicine in your district and divide it by the number of people in the district and see if the figure seems reasonable. For example, how much medicine could you actually buy for one person with that sum? There are many calculations that you can do like this which enable you to ask questions about how a service is funded in your district.



– Finding the actual expenditure figures is often a lot more tricky than you would think.



– ActionAid's ELBAG approach can be used by communities to learn how to do expenditure tracking together.

2 Has the budget been fully spent or has it been overspent?

Very often an allocated budget is not fully used up which results in the money being sent back, and possibly next year's budget being reduced. Likewise a budget may be overspent. There may be good reasons for this, but it enables you to ask questions about why this has happened. Under spending may occur when local officials feel unsure about how to spend the money and likewise overspending usually means that other budgets get reduced to fill the hole in the overspent one.

3 Has the money been well spent – was it used for the right things?

Here you are looking to see how the money was actually used. When looking at a budget, try and find out what the largest budget line item is and consider whether this is reasonable. Very often staff salaries may turn out to be the biggest item in the budget with little money for anything else, or a lot of money may have been used on expensive equipment that only benefits a few people.

4 Has the money been spent fairly?

Here you are looking to see where the money was spent. Which schools, which health posts? Often larger amounts are allocated to particular schools and clinics because that is where the supporters of the locally elected representatives live. This can have very negative effects for the poor and marginalised. Following money in this way enables you to demand more for marginalised groups.

5 Is the budget gendered?

Gender budgeting is concerned with examining budgets in order to find out if they contribute to gender equality or undermine it. It is important to recognise that gender budgeting is not about 'women's budgets' or 'gender-sensitive budgets', but rather attempts to investigate or break down mainstream budgets according to the impact they have on women and men, and different groups of women and men. Budgets can have hidden consequences in terms of either strengthening or weakening gender equality which are important to discover.

When are PETS most suitable?

PETS can be used to gather evidence about different public services, such as tracking resources going to schools, hospitals or water pumps.

This method is most suitable when the problem you are tackling appears to be linked to obstacles in the flow of funds from one level of government to another. If resources intended for the frontline regularly do not reach their intended beneficiaries, a PETS is geared to investigate where the problem occurs.

This method may form a component of a larger civil society accountability project and it can be built into a social audit or community scorecard process (in the latter case, this is often called an "input scorecard").

How can PETS contribute to participation and transparency?

PETS can increase people's access to information on how public resources are



– Whatever tools you use for gathering evidence, it's really important that you make sure that the facts are correct, well documented and presented so that they can easily be understood.

spent. With more knowledge about public expenditure, people are better equipped to participate meaningfully in decision-making about public resources.

When multiple stakeholders participate in a PETS process, this is likely to enhance shared ownership of the results. PETS can contribute to reforming the public finance management system in a country or district, so that the flow of resources becomes more transparent.

What are the challenges of using PETS?

In countries where the right to information is not recognised, state actors may refuse to cooperate with your survey. Finding reliable figures on actual transfers and expenditures can be time consuming.

Some of the information needed to conduct a PETS may be hard to access and contained in a number of different documents which you have to track down. Sometimes the information may not be documented on paper, but exist only in people's heads.

Conducting PETS in a participatory way means building budget literacy and budget research skills, which requires dedicated resources and time. This method calls for relatively high levels of technical assistance in a number of areas, including budget systems and budget analysis, surveys and interviewing techniques.

Good working relationships with government officials can prove vital to the success of a PETS. Such relationships may be difficult to establish and maintain.

What are the advantages of PETS?

People participating in PETS gain knowledge about budget processes, how to make sense of budget documents and how to monitor budget execution. When people are informed about budgets and how they work, they are more likely to participate in budget debates and try to influence budget decision-making. Findings emerging from PETS can be used to reform the public finance management system, and enhance budget transparency. If PETS are conducted regularly, the flow of funds through the system can be compared over time, to see if and where improvements have been achieved.

Social Audits

The term 'Social Audit' is understood in many different ways. It is sometimes used as a general umbrella term for all the ways in which civil society stakeholders assess their government's performance.

In this section we see a social audit as a specific kind of monitoring process – one inspired by the pioneering work of the Indian grassroots organisation Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS). We see a social audit as a participatory method for investigating whether government projects have been implemented as planned. The original process has since been adapted by CSOs in many countries.

A social audit process focuses on what was planned in a project and what was actually delivered. The approach generates detailed evidence to show where problems occurred or what standards were not met. The social audit process culminates in a public hearing, where the responsible

For more information about budgets see the accompanying handbook in this series titled: **Budgets – Revenues and Financing Public Services.**



politicians and government officials are expected to answer questions based on evidence presented by community members.

How do you conduct a social audit?

Government projects have their own bureaucracy and documentation processes about how a project is implemented. These cover all aspects of the project from the procurement of materials, use of labour to quality checks and sign-offs for completed work.

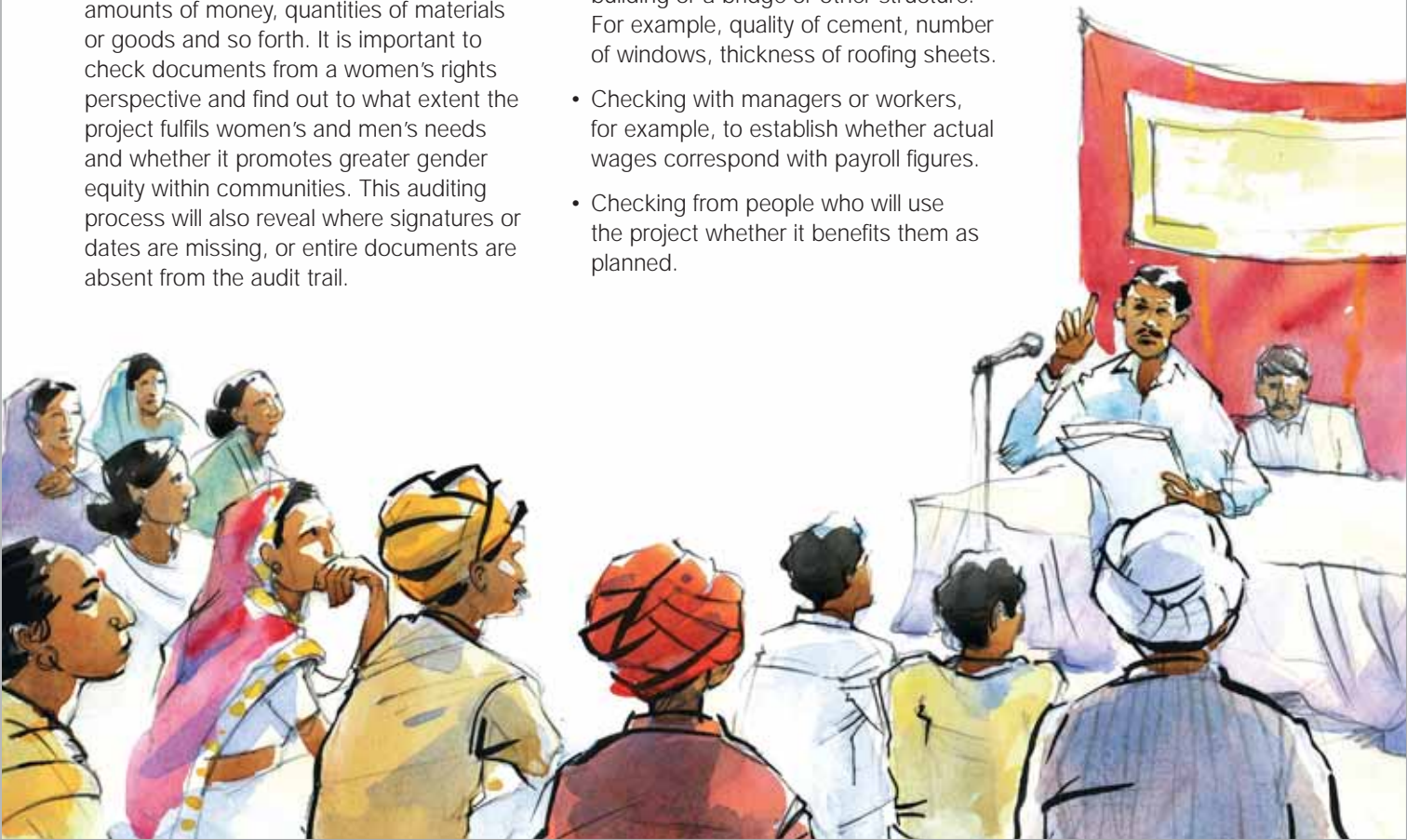
Civil society social audit teams usually start by collecting and analysing project documents and identifying errors in dates, amounts of money, quantities of materials or goods and so forth. It is important to check documents from a women's rights perspective and find out to what extent the project fulfils women's and men's needs and whether it promotes greater gender equity within communities. This auditing process will also reveal where signatures or dates are missing, or entire documents are absent from the audit trail.

This allows the social auditors to draw up checklists of issues and details which they will then check through field visits. The list below gives examples of the kind of things a social audit team might check up on during a field visit.

- Check to see that a planned building, road or water supply point has actually been built and that it has been built to specifications.
- Check a building site to monitor work-in-progress and check how far it is from completion.
- Measuring, counting or quality-testing a building or a bridge or other structure. For example, quality of cement, number of windows, thickness of roofing sheets.
- Checking with managers or workers, for example, to establish whether actual wages correspond with payroll figures.
- Checking from people who will use the project whether it benefits them as planned.



– Social Audit Teams fine-comb project documents – checking dates, reference numbers, names amounts of money and other details.





– When you visit a site some people may be reluctant to speak. It's important to respect people's right to confidentiality.

What issues come out of doing a social audit?

When the audit team has completed their site visits, all the evidence is recorded and then usually presented at large public hearings which often include senior government officials. Usually, the hearings reveal corruption and mismanagement in the way the project was implemented.

A few examples are given in the next column of typical issues that are raised where:

- Project workers were given meals instead of wages, even though the payroll recorded that wages were paid.
- User fees were being charged for access to a water pump, even though project plans indicated that it would be freely available to community members.
- Wages or social grants were being paid to fictitious (or deceased) people.
- Project-related bills were paid to local companies which, on inspection, did not exist.

A public hearing generally ends with government officials committing themselves to dealing with the problems and working closely with civil society in a follow up phase. This can eventually lead to sanctions or legal action for serious offences. It is very important that CSOs follow up and make sure that the promises and commitments made at public hearings are carried out.

When are social audits most suitable?

Social audits, as defined here, are geared towards strengthening accountability between local leaders and the men and women in their constituencies. This method works well when the government service or project being monitored can be linked very clearly to a particular elected leader or to ring-fenced public funds. For example, social audits have been used effectively to monitor projects financed under the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in Kenya, which are managed by a member of Parliament (MP).




The Government of Guatemala granted permission to an international mining company to carry out open cast mining in a municipality. When local people heard about this they reacted. With support from ActionAid local NGOs trained local people to carry out a social audit that questioned the government's mining concession policy. The government had not consulted local people or even informed them of the potential social, environmental and cultural impacts that mining would have. This local initiative generated a national debate about the government's mining concessions for the first time, and succeeded in establishing greater transparency and accountability on the part of both the government and the mining company.

Social audits are only feasible in contexts where it is possible for CSOs and community members to gain access (even if it is not easy) to primary government documents and records. The public hearing plays an essential role in the social audit process and this may be alien to the political culture in some countries. This method is more likely to succeed where networks of community activists already exist, who can mobilise broad-based public interest in the accountability failures discovered through the process.

How can social audits contribute to participation and transparency?

The social audit approach is designed to make government documents and processes more transparent by facilitating public access to government information, and assisting communities to engage with the material. Social audits show that ordinary citizens are more than capable of analysing project budgets and records. Men and women build the capacity and confidence to participate more effectively in civic oversight.

Social audits provide a window on what really matters to people. Official financial audit reports, which are produced in most countries, usually only ask whether the money was spent correctly. Social audits make a valuable addition by investigating whether the money has made a difference to people's lives.



In Kenya, civil society networks carried out a social audit. A week after starting, they realised that there was something missing – the dam project! This dam had been allocated funds from the CDF but its construction had not started even after a year. They found out that the area chief had colluded with some of the committee members to swindle the dam fund. With support from ActionAid Kenya and national NGOs the Social Audit Team made great achievements in the district as a whole as the swindled funds were returned immediately after pressure and measures for accountability were enacted. The decentralised fund managers and the government line ministries are now much more careful and play by the rules when it comes to allocating and implementing budgets

What are the challenges of conducting social audits?

It may be very difficult to get copies of primary project documents and government records. If the decision-makers involved have anything to hide, they are unlikely to cooperate freely. In countries with freedom of information laws, formal channels can be used to gain access to such documents.

Where no right of access to public information is recognised, CSOs will need to rely on their networks and relationships with those in government who may be prepared to help them.

Although social audits are conducted and steered by community members, the process requires relatively high levels of



– Everyone who provides information to the social audit team should be encouraged to attend the public hearing and speak out if they want to.



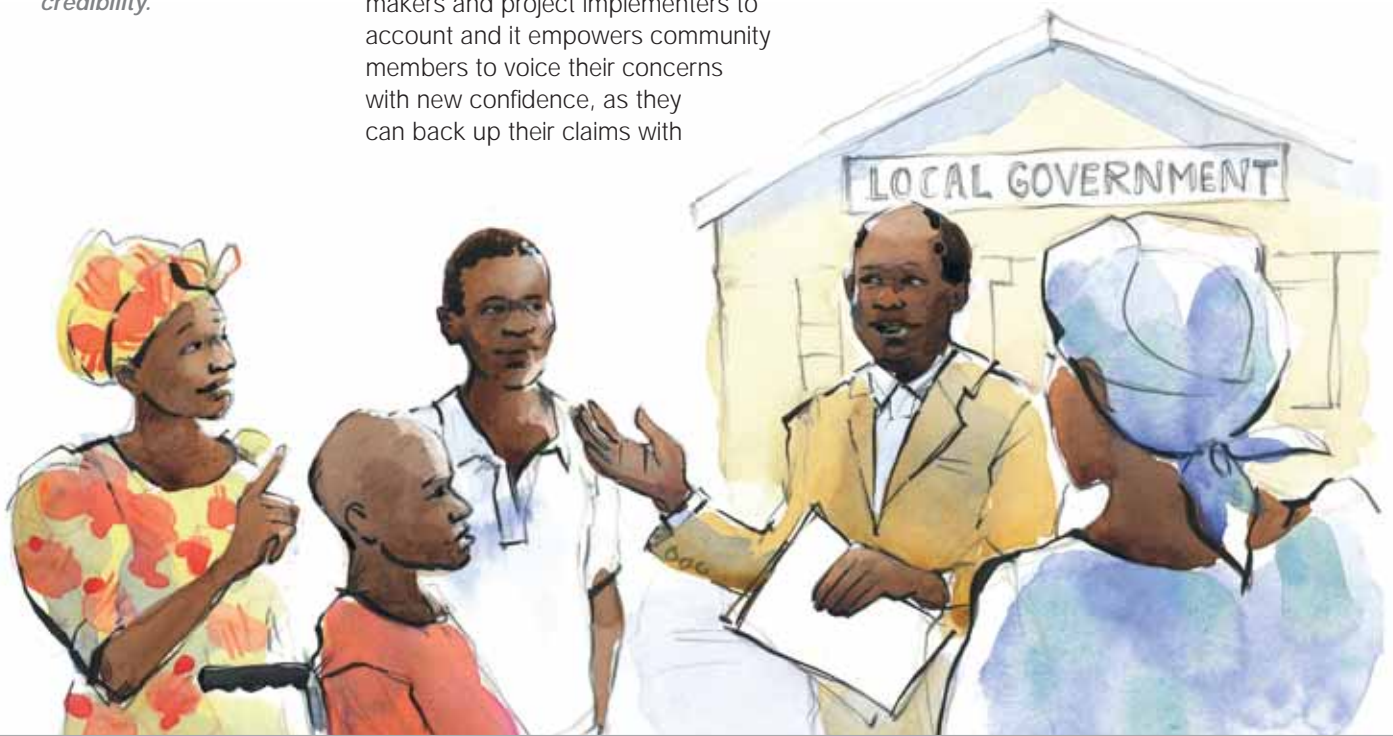
– You can be sure that officials will try and find holes in your facts and figures. If there are mistakes in the data and your findings cannot be backed up with facts, your campaign will lose credibility.

technical assistance and facilitation. It is important to ensure that social auditing skills are successfully transferred to communities. Social audit processes can also run the risk of “getting personal” especially if a well-known politician or official is exposed through the process. It is often wise to focus on the conduct and performance, rather than the personality, of those involved.

What are the advantages of social audits?

The social audit process builds capacity within communities to hold decision-makers and project implementers to account and it empowers community members to voice their concerns with new confidence, as they can back up their claims with

solid evidence. Social audits can also often create demand for greater access to public records. If social audits are repeated at regular intervals, transparency and public participation can become permanent features of local governance. The findings flowing from social audits help to alert policy-makers and government officials to specific problems when carrying out projects. If government stakeholders in the process are receptive, social audits can contribute to positive change in the management and performance of the agencies that are implementing projects.



Stating your case

– campaigning for public services

The final phase in evidence based accountability work is actually using the evidence you have built up to seek improvements in service delivery.

The assumption is that if your evidence is correct and well presented, and if sufficient pressure is applied, you should be able to get authorities to ultimately listen and take action, if you keep trying hard enough. However in planning how to communicate your findings, it is important to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of different strategies.

Strategy and risk assessment
For example, there may be risks involved in exposing powerful stakeholders and shining the public spotlight on corruption or poor performance. In some contexts it may be essential to do so; in others it could be very risky and more subtle methods should be used to publicise your findings or create alliances with more powerful stakeholders.

This is an ideal time to review risk assessment and clarify who may be directly and indirectly threatened by your findings. The idea is not to back down if powerful interests are involved, but rather to proceed as strategically as possible.

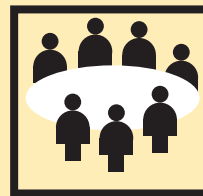
Always give priority to protecting whistle blowers and other vulnerable participants. Identify your allies and those who can help ensure that your evidence makes a constructive impact.

Experience shows that the best results are obtained if you apply the 'right' mixture of dialogue (lobbying) and campaigning (exerting public pressure and demand).

The idea of 'Accountability Spaces'
One tool that can help you with this is the idea of SPACES – Space for participation. It refers to the various opportunities that exist for civil society to express an opinion and present evidence.

Closed Spaces

Accountability is exercised behind closed doors. The meeting is for a select group of people.



Civil society is excluded from closed spaces and simply not invited to participate. In many places important decisions that affect the local community are made like this by a few powerful people. Some closed spaces may be closed for good reason (for example, court cases involving child witnesses). Others may be closed due to tradition or lack of transparency, and opening them up would be good for democratic governance. The challenge for civil society is to open these spaces up.



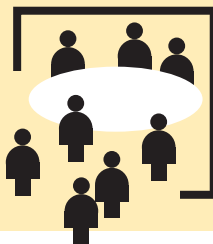
– When you have your evidence, you have to decide how you will use it and who you will engage with. In other words you have to have a strategy for using evidence



– The Local Government Act in our country gives citizens the right to sit on School Management Committees. In spite of this we had to fight long and hard with district officials before they would allow us to take our places on the committee.

Invited Spaces

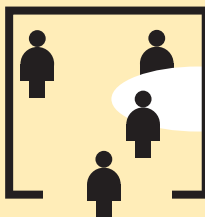
Citizens can participate in accountability mechanisms that have been set up by the government.



Civil society engages in invited spaces by invitation from state actors. Invited spaces are often controlled by formal rules about what can be discussed and how much influence civil society is allowed to have. Examples of this are school and health clinic management committees where places are reserved for citizens. There are often opportunities for citizens to influence outcomes in these spaces, but there is a risk that civil society can get caught up in what powerful people want. The challenge for CSOs is to use these spaces as effectively as possible and strengthen the role of civil society in them and make sure that men and women are equally represented.

Under-utilized Spaces

Citizens are entitled to participate, but rarely make use of the option for a variety of reasons.

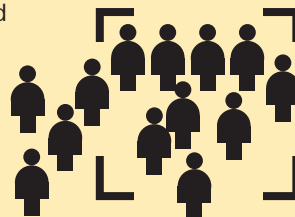


Citizens lack of participation in under-utilized spaces may often be because citizens and officials may not know

about them. It may also be because it is expensive to use them (for example the courts) and there may be powerful people who try to stop civil society from using these spaces. The challenge for CSOs is to activate these spaces.

Claimed Spaces

Created and demanded by civil society.



Claimed spaces include forums initiated by citizen groups where government officials are called to account. Claimed spaces may range from public information meetings organized by civil society using street theatre, to visits to government facilities to demand information as well as mass meetings calling for greater participation in public affairs. The challenge for CSOs is to identify new and effective ways of communicating with people about accountability issues.



– At our school, the principal had formal visible power by virtue of the law and the education policy. But she also exercised hidden power, with all her hand-outs and gifts to members of the school management committee.



– The Water Department simply refused to listen to us. They told us it was a matter for experts.



For more information about hidden power see the accompanying handbook in this series titled: **Power – Elite Capture and Hidden Influence.**

The question of power – recognising its various forms? The power dynamics of different accountability spaces are a key feature to keep in mind when you engage with state actors and other stakeholders. Those who create an accountability space usually also determine the rules that apply there. Such rules may favour certain groups or interests and affect what you can achieve. In any accountability space, there is usually more than one kind of power at work. Below are three different ways for thinking about power dynamics.

Visible Power

Visible Power is exercised through formal rules, structures and procedures. In committee meetings the chairperson usually has the power to set the agenda for the meeting and make the members follow the formal rules for the way the meeting is conducted. In planning processes there may be a set of rules and procedures for how the planning process should be managed. Likewise, with complaints, there are often formal rules for how a complaint is registered and who deals with it. Most civil society accountability work appeals to formal rules, honourable behaviour and the rule of law. If you make a promise, you should keep it. If you have obligations, you should honour them and where standards apply they should be maintained.

Hidden Power

Hidden Power is exercised from behind the scenes. For example, some powerful stakeholders may be able to influence what gets placed on the agenda of a meeting,

or who gets invited to the decision-making table. Hidden power is often exercised by more powerful people over less powerful people. Less powerful people do what the more powerful tell them, perhaps because they are afraid of them or perhaps because they know they will be rewarded later. Hidden power tends to undermine visible power and gender equality as most hidden power wielders are males, often with more traditional views. Hidden power can be a serious threat to fulfilling women's rights. When state institutions are weak, powerful individuals can develop considerable influence which they use to overrule or side-step problem solving and rule based approaches which characterise visible power.

Conditioned Power

Conditioned Power is exercised through deeply ingrained beliefs and traditions in society which very often support gender inequality and discrimination against women. For example, an older experienced male politician may feel very confident and comfortable speaking to a crowd of powerful decision makers, while other citizens may not. Women may find it hard to stand up in front of men and criticise the health care services, because there are traditions and beliefs that women should not do this. This kind of power influences whose voices are heard most often and whose voice is taken most seriously. This kind of power can make it difficult for the voice of the most poor and marginalised to be heard, especially for women and girls.



– Of course I was nervous when we met the District Commissioner, but the fact that we could present our evidence in an organised and logical manner and we knew our facts by heart gave me great confidence. It also impressed the Commissioner.

Presenting your Evidence

– Campaigning for change
Successful accountability work involves making the state and influential private actors listen and act on the evidence presented. Civil society organisations usually do not have the legal authority to get the state to improve services or impose sanctions – this is the job of the state.

The role of civil society is therefore to present evidence in ways which will force the state to take note and act. You should organise your work in a campaign, which may have to last over a longer period of time. It is important to make sure that gender equity issues are clearly formulated in your campaign and that women's rights are promoted. There are many different ways of using evidence in campaigns to get services improved. They can be grouped into three main categories.

These are using evidence:

- 1** for dialogue and negotiation,
- 2** for information and awareness raising,
- 3** to advocate for sanctions.

Often all three categories are used at different times in a campaign depending on what you are focusing on. In the following sections, we will look at these three categories in more detail.

Using evidence for dialogue and negotiation

In many instances accountability work can be carried out in dialogue with authorities. If relations are good between local government officers and civil society activists and goals are common – that is to say both parties are interested in seeing if things can be improved; then there may be considerable openness and even cooperation. Sometimes national level NGOs and CSOs may be able to persuade government ministries and departments to take an interest in local level accountability work. National level government officers can in this situation sometimes function as champions for accountability work by encouraging or demanding that local level officials participate.

Often there is much informal dialogue and negotiation between civil society activists and officials which is effective on a day to day basis, but when evidence is going to be presented it is useful to have more formal approaches which have decision making elements built into them.

In the next section we will look at two of these methods.

In Vietnam, in connection with a project on Public Administration, ActionAid supported local people to voice their opinions on public services and request greater accountability for improvement. Participatory tools, such as Report Cards were used during group discussions to collect information and to analyse people's satisfaction with selected services. The findings of the assessment were quite critical. For the healthcare service, people reported a poor quality of services. Many hidden costs were detected. All of these findings were presented to relevant authorities at the review workshop and local authorities were surprised by the findings about poor service performance and low satisfaction. They promised to improve the quality of services. The findings were thereafter officially documented and publicized at information kiosks for people to monitor the commitments made by service providers.



Interface meetings

At Interface Meetings community members and service providers get together to consider evidence that has been collected previously. They discuss the evidence, identify problems and decide how to overcome them. Community-level interface meetings can be followed up by a district-level forum, where community representatives and service providers meet with district officials and politicians to discuss higher level systemic problems and solutions. The evidence presented at interface meetings may embarrass officials. It is important to consider the risks and consequences of this beforehand. Community members might plan in advance how they will respond if officials become defensive or threatening. The aim is not to back down but to focus on achieving the desired change through the process.

Things to do before an interface meeting

- Select a neutral, quiet venue for the meeting.
- Arrange the seating so that participants face one another around a table or U-shape.
- Meet with all the groups in advance to explain the purpose of the meeting.
- It may be necessary to coach some participants in advance, so that they will be confident enough to speak out in the meeting.
- Choose a moderator for the meeting who could be seen as independent or neutral.

Facilitating an interface meeting

- Encourage everyone to speak and ensure that no-one dominates the discussion.
- Clarify the agenda and purpose of the meeting and re-state these when necessary.
- Be aware of hidden power in the room.
- Don't allow powerful factions to hijack the agenda.
- Focus on the evidence; avoid finger-pointing and accusations.
- Help the groups to exchange information and generate practical solutions.
- Record the way forward.

Typical agenda for an interface meeting

1. Introductions
2. Ground rules and purpose of the meeting
3. Role of the moderator
4. All parties present their evidence
5. Discussion and identification of agreed problems
6. Draft practical recommendations for improvement
7. Agree on roles, responsibilities, deadlines and follow-up



– Interface meetings can help to create new accountability spaces.

Public hearings

A public hearing is typically a full-day event, conducted in a large accessible public area with as many people attending as possible. A great deal of publicity and fanfare builds up to the event, often with music, street theatre and a public procession to the venue.

The agenda for the hearing is carefully planned in advance, with prominent community members chairing the proceedings.

Local media are usually invited, as well as the specific government officials and political leaders responsible for the audited projects.

Community members are invited to give testimonies, revealing the evidence gathered through the process.

Those responsible are given an opportunity to respond, and firm facilitation is sometimes needed to keep the meeting from becoming volatile. All the inputs and responses are carefully recorded.

Follow-up is essential after a public hearing. There is nothing that will undermine people's trust in the accountability process more than seeing powerful figures get away with corruption or poor performance. Depending on the record of the hearing, formal and informal accountability mechanisms need to be set in motion and monitored until all sanctions have been enforced.

Using evidence to raise awareness about accountability issues

There are literally dozens of methods and tools for communicating with the public. Before you choose your means, be sure you know exactly what you want people to realise about government conduct or performance. Take time to clarify and fine-tune your message and make sure that it reflects the concerns of women and men. The box below lists some of the media and performance tools you could use to get your message across.



Media and Performance Tools

- Community notice boards. Also known as transparency boards or social accountability notice boards. Ideal for displaying evidence flowing from civil society accountability work.
- You can ask to have an article or editorial placed in print media like newspapers, magazines or journals – as well as their online sites.
- You could issue a press release to the media and/or host a press conference.
- You can write and print your own brochure, pamphlet, report, comic or newsletter.
- Request coverage or rent regular airtime on local radio or television.
- Team up with community radio or video producers to record a dedicated program.
- Spread your findings via digital media, such as e-mail, SMS or social networking sites on the Internet.
- Use street theatre or puppet shows to dramatize your findings.
- In more urban settings, attention grabbing tactics can give you a lot of publicity at little cost – for example, flash mobs, rallies, performance art and eye-catching messages in public places.



– It's important that the community decides where to put the transparency board. A common participatory decision will mean everybody is informed about it.

Using evidence to advocate for sanctions

Accountability is only achieved if and when appropriate sanctions are imposed for misconduct or poor performance. Sometimes it is possible for CSOs to work together with government officials to tackle problems identified through the monitoring process. However, when the state's own accountability mechanisms are weak or manipulated, instances of misconduct and poor service delivery may simply be ignored or swept under the carpet. It is then up to the people in a country, including CSOs, to take the initiative in calling for sanctions to be imposed. The most feasible routes for doing so usually include:

- **Lodging complaints**

Citizens can approach a public protector, ombudsperson or independent complaints directorate. Doing so in large numbers may be part of a larger strategy of peaceful protest. Even if nothing comes from lodging such complaints, it strengthens citizens' case to show that all available formal channels have been used.

- **The power of numbers**

When CSOs have evidence to show that under-performing or corrupt public officials are free from sanction, they can use it to raise public awareness and channel public outrage into peaceful protest action. This may range from boycotting elections or refusing services from certain providers, to pickets and marches, sit-ins, mass meetings, public hearings, and so forth.

- **The court system**

In some cases, it is possible to take the government as a whole or a specific department to court. In such instances, it would be necessary to prove that state misconduct or poor performance has infringed on the rights of those affected, in terms of the constitution or other binding legislation.

- **Naming and shaming**

A powerful way to put pressure on specific political leaders or government officials is to draw media attention to their misconduct or poor performance. Using this route calls for close co-operation with the media, who may or may not have the same goals in mind as CSOs. It is difficult to contain a scandalous story once it has gone public, but this form of sanction very often results in the implicated persons resigning or losing respect and popularity.

- **Piggy-backing formal sanctions**

Another possibility is to instigate, motivate or provide information to state actors so that formal sanctions can be more effectively applied. For example, civil society may have gathered or analysed information that can be used by state actors to set disciplinary procedures or other sanctions in motion.



In a remote district in Nepal local women suffered greatly from the absence of a local health clinic. With support from ActionAid and local NGOs the women started a campaign to get a clinic with facilities for women to give birth. They presented their demand to the Village Development Committee, political parties, health organizations and several other agencies and never let up in their demand for health services. Finally, during the participatory VDC planning process, it was decided to establish a clinic.



– The fact that we had access to community radio greatly helped our cause. We were able to reach people in the whole district and keep them informed about how our negotiations with officials were proceeding – it put a certain pressure on officials that they knew so many people were following what was happening.



– As a final word: be ethical, strategic and fair in the way you use your evidence. Protect the vulnerable and outwit the corrupt!

Using advocacy methods

Advocacy means putting pressure on decision-makers to bring about a desired change. In the context of accountability work, a well-planned advocacy campaign may be needed before those responsible for accountability failures are brought to book. You could consider:

- Lobbying a particular decision-maker or powerful stakeholder by communicating directly with him or her via telephone, email, letter or a formal meeting.
- Gathering signatures for a petition and delivering it to the relevant decision maker(s).
- Boycotting a service or facility until your findings are given due attention.
- Holding a peaceful protest march or mass rally with banners, songs and slogans calling on decision-makers to address the problems you have highlighted.
- Organising a non-violent sit-in, lie-down or vigil at the offices of relevant decision makers, or at the facilities or service sites where accountability is needed.
- Creating a picket line with people holding placards outside a government building or facility.
- Symbolic acts, for example when hundreds of people all wear black in protest, or lay down flowers or other symbolic objects in a public square.

São Paulo, Brazil, is the largest city in the western hemisphere and a financial and industrial headquarters.



Despite the city's great wealth, it has millions of poor residents who live in poverty in slums like Heliópolis, one of the largest shanty towns in Brazil housing 120,000 people. The federal government announced the largest slum upgrade project in the history of Brazil in Heliópolis as part of the national growth acceleration program - PAC. The residents' initial enthusiasm quickly faded when the Mayor announced the immediate eviction of 12,000 people.

UNAS, a local residents' association responded by doing a door to door survey of all residents. Based on the results of the survey, they set up a stage on one of the main streets and held a public audience with the Mayor during which, in front of a crowd of 5000 people, they presented a list of 13 demands. As a result, the Mayor's Office canceled the original project plans and started over from scratch. Not all demands were met and some compromises were suggested instead. However, the story of how UNAS was able to use two community organizing tools, the door to door survey and the public assembly, to cause the mayor to cancel the original plans for a USD 112 million mega-project and reformulate it according to local demands, shows that when a population unites and fights for their rights government officials may start to listen.

In Summary

When you work for greater accountability in service delivery there are three crucial phases to focus on.

Empowerment

First of all people have to be empowered about services. This means that people are aware of their rights and entitlements to services and aware that the state and other providers have obligations and commitments to deliver quality services of a set standard. For CSOs and activists this is a period of informing people, building support among them and organising yourself. It is very important that your accountability work springs from your community's own understanding and concerns which reflect women's and men's views equally.

Solidarity

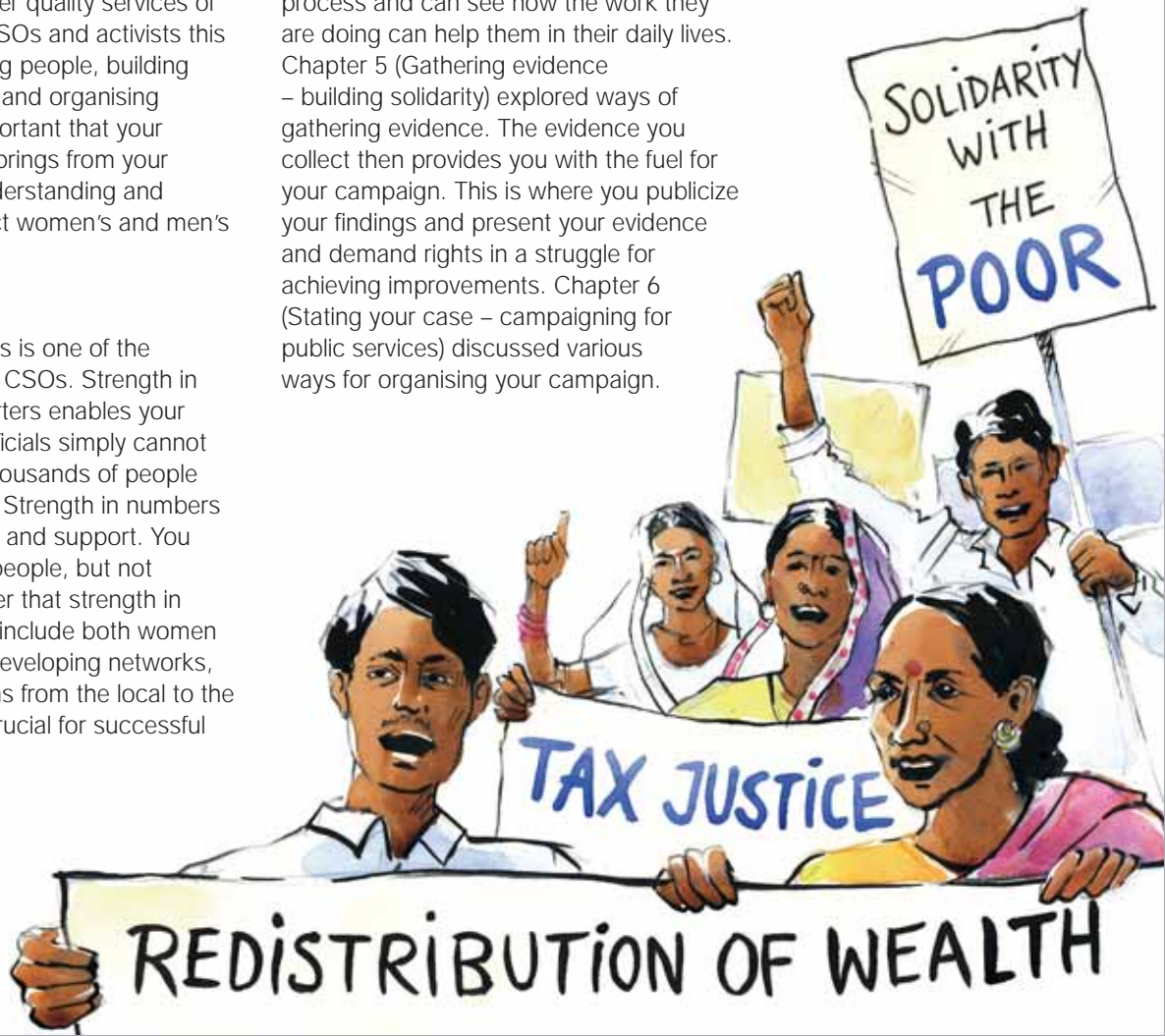
The power of numbers is one of the greatest strengths for CSOs. Strength in the number of supporters enables your voice to be heard. Officials simply cannot ignore hundreds or thousands of people demanding attention. Strength in numbers also provides security and support. You can intimidate a few people, but not thousands. Remember that strength in numbers should also include both women and men. Therefore developing networks, alliances and coalitions from the local to the international level is crucial for successful

accountability work. Chapter 2 (Local public services – how can we improve them?) in this handbook has focused on some of the issues that are important for empowering people and building solidarity.

Campaigns

Collecting evidence in participative ways about the quality of service delivery also helps build solidarity. The more people are involved, the more they get drawn into the process and can see how the work they are doing can help them in their daily lives. Chapter 5 (Gathering evidence – building solidarity) explored ways of gathering evidence. The evidence you collect then provides you with the fuel for your campaign. This is where you publicize your findings and present your evidence and demand rights in a struggle for achieving improvements. Chapter 6 (Stating your case – campaigning for public services) discussed various ways for organising your campaign.

You can read more about Empowerment, Solidarity and Campaigning in **Action on Rights – Human Rights Based Approach Resource Book** (ActionAid 2010)



Acknowledgement of sources

General

This handbook has been inspired and adapted from a previous publication on this theme produced by ActionAid Denmark (2009) titled: Peoples Action for Just and Democratic Governance – Using Evidence to Establish Accountability. Authors: Anna Schnell and Erika Coetzee. Editor: Robin Griggs

In addition ActionAid's publication: Action on Rights – Human Rights Based Approach Resource Book (ActionAid 2010) has provided inspiration on human rights approaches and human rights programming.

Getting Organised

– becoming empowered

Mapping Service provision has been inspired by Neela Mukherjee (1992) Villages' perceptions of rural poverty through the mapping methods of PRA. PLA Notes (1992), Issue 15, pp.21–26, IIED London

Monitoring Services, gathering evidence – building solidarity

The section on scorecards has been informed by The Community Scorecard Approach for performance assessment, by Emmanuel Addai, Emma Kpenu & Martin Dery (2004) The Community Scorecard Approach for performance assessment: ProNet North's experience. A WaterAid Ghana Briefing Paper 2004 (No. 4).

The section on Expenditure Tracking

has been inspired by Ramkumar, Vuvek (2008) Our Money, Our Responsibility – A Citizens' Guide to Monitoring Government Expenditures. International Budget Partnership. Available at www.internationalbudget.org/resources/expenditure/index.htm

This section on Social Audits has been informed by the second social audit facilitated by Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI) in Kilifi, Kenya in 2009. Report by Garza, Manuela & Sowmya Kidambi (2009) Notes on a Kenyan Awakening: A Public Hearing in Kilifi. Mazdoor Kishan Shakti Sangatan (MKSS) & International Budget Partnership (IBP). See www.internationalbudget.org/Bahari_Social_Audit.doc.

Using Evidence to improve services

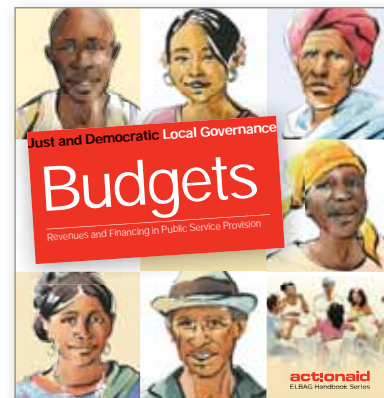
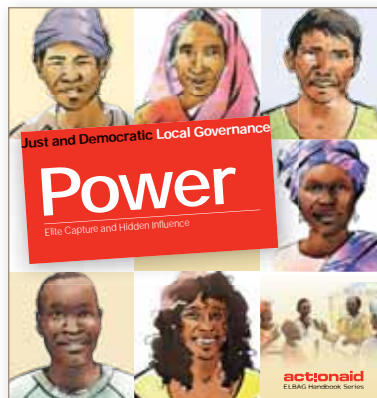
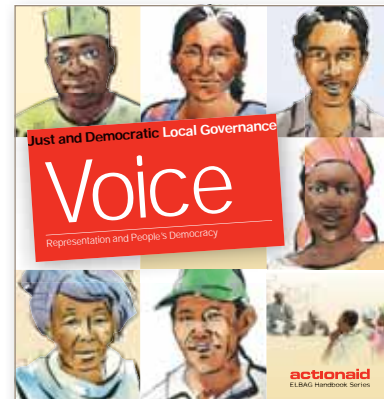
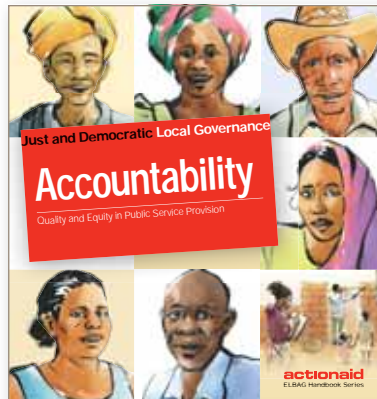
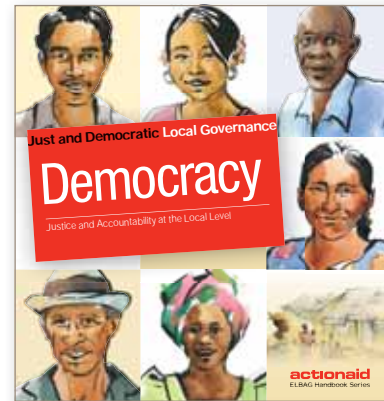
– Campaigning

The section on Interface Meetings has been adapted from "Moderating the Interface Meeting" by the Ethiopian Social Accountability Project. See www.ethiosap.org

The Space and Power tools are inspired and adapted from A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The action guide for advocacy and citizen participation (2002) by Lisa VeneKlasen & Valerie Miller. In addition Space and Power tools have been inspired by John Gaventa (2005). Reflections on the uses of the 'Power Cube' approach for analyzing the spaces, places and dynamics of civil society participation and engagement. CFP Evaluation Series 2003-2006:No 4. Learning by Design publication, Cod aid/Hivos/Icco/Novib/Plan Netherland.

The ELBAG Handbook Series

The ELBAG Handbook Series consists of a series of handbooks which aim to support the work of civil society activists in their struggle for Just and Democratic Local Governance. The series focuses on key challenge areas identified in ActionAid's governance work. Under the common title: Just and Democratic Local Governance, the series at present consists of the following titles.



Just and Democratic Governance

Throughout the world, people's demands for democracy are growing louder as many have suffered under oppressive regimes and unaccountable leaders. Without meaningful democracy, elites capture decision-making processes and resources.

For many of the poorest and most excluded groups, there is a strong connection between a lack of political space or influence and the perpetuation of poverty and injustice.

Seeking alternatives, women, men and youth around the world are taking to the streets; using the internet or joining local meetings to demand proper political representation and accountability from the State for delivering on basic rights.

ActionAid works through a Human Rights Based Approach and is committed to holding governments and corporates to account and improving the quality, equity and gender responsiveness of public services for five million people living in poverty as well as supporting people and their movements to gain significant victories in achieving a fairer redistribution of resources for financing poverty reducing public policies by 2017.

This book is part of the ELBAG Handbook Series. ELBAG is the brand name for ActionAid's work on Just and Democratic Governance and compliments ActionAid's Handbook on Human Rights Based Approaches.

Originally ELBAG was an abbreviation for 'Economic Literacy & Budget Accountability in Governance'. ELBAG in ActionAid has now been expanded to also include political and social aspects of governance.

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Democracy – Justice and Accountability at the Local Level

Accountability – Quality and Equity in Public Service Provision

Voice – Representation and Peoples' Democracy

Power – Elite Capture and Hidden Influence

Budgets – Revenues and Financing in Public Service Provision