

ANSA-Africa

Strengthening accountability systems and institutions

Social accountability can be a useful tool for participative development in African countries, but it requires some conditions, both in civil society and among decision makers, and especially in the government. Public mobilisation is important to the success of social accountability actions within civil society. After all, it is the public community that stands to gain from social accountability.

On this note, here is a short summary of the various types of actions and qualities civil society can implement to get decision makers, mainly those in the government, to be accountable towards the populations they serve with public funds:

Good organisation: this involves appropriate co-ordination, planning and programming of activities to inform citizens of their rights and responsibilities in working with the government in social accountability activities.

Capacity building: civil society stakeholders must be informed and trained to increase their knowledge in the domains that produce government development policies and programmes. Carmen Malena and her team write in *Social Accountability: An Introduction to the Concept and Emerging Practice*, that "a functioning public administration that has some capacity to respond to citizen demands is, therefore, a prerequisite".

Committed leadership: leaders must have a strong commitment for social welfare and the respect of human rights to guarantee the basic needs of the people they serve and are accountable to.

Networking: this allows citizens and government officials to share information and create a wide basis to get an inclusive action.

Negotiating and advocacy skills: civil society leaders involved in social accountability must have the ability to negotiate, to advocate, to lobby, to network and to work in coalitions in order to create a strong movement.

Objectivity: civil society stakeholders must not be under the influence of any political party.

Independence: stakeholders need to create alliances and, at the same time, keep their independence from decision makers (such as government agencies, parliament members, partners, donors, religious leaders, community leaders). Their goal is to have the information they need to guide their actions, without falling under any inappropriate influence.

Resources: civil society needs appropriate human, material, technical and financial resources to allow them to do their work without being influenced by any power.

Communication: this is a strong means to build social accountability actions. It must be directed towards members of the civil society (such as organisations, networks and coalitions), the private sector, trade unions, universities, media, political parties and all components of the affected population. Clear, creditable information in a simple format can help draw the participation and contribution of these target audiences.

As Carman Malena and her team write: "The availability and reliability of public documents and data is essential to building social accountability. Such information is the basis for social accountability activities, and thus its quality and accessibility is a key determinant of the success of social accountability mechanisms. In many countries, independent media is a leading force in informing/educating citizens, monitoring government performance and exposing misdeeds. Local-level media (in particular, private and community radio) provide an important means whereby ordinary citizens can voice their opinions and discuss public issues."

This summary was prepared by Claire Quenum, a member of the ANSA-Africa Technical Advisory Group, based in Togo. Her areas of expertise include NGO management, gender issues, rural community organisation, networking, advocacy and civil society accountability issues. This summary also draws from "Social Accountability: An Introduction to the Concept and Emerging Practice", by Carmen Malena, with Reiner Forster and Janmejay Singh, published by The World Bank in its Social Development Papers series, December 2004. Detailed information on social accountability mechanisms is available in the growing collection of practical reports and articles compiled by ANSA-Africa. Please visit www.ansa-africa.net/index.php/toolkits_and_methodologies/.



About ANSA-Africa: The Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in Africa (ANSA-Africa) was established in December 2006 as a joint initiative between the World Bank and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) of South Africa, with the following goals:

- To develop collaboration across Africa on social accountability and demand-side governance initiatives;
- To provide technical assistance to greatly enhance the quality of social accountability initiatives in different countries;
- To deliver training programs on specific tools and techniques;
- To share country experiences and lessons from social accountability and demand-side governance initiatives, promote and build on Africans' expertise in this area; and
- To establish and strengthen a network of social accountability practitioners and the stakeholders drawn from government, research institutions and civil society.

Yours for the growth of social accountability,

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