

## ANSA-Africa

### Strengthening accountability systems and institutions

Welcome back to another year of building social accountability through the ANSA-Africa network. This year opens with a question that has probably been on many of our minds over the recent festive season:

#### **What does the current crisis in Kenya bode for Social Accountability?**

**By Geci Karuri-Sebina and Eric Aligula\***

At the end of 2007, Kenya descended literally overnight into an all-too-familiar sight on the continent: civil unrest, ethnic clashes, and - as always - the heightened dispossession of the most vulnerable: the poor, women and children. The crisis followed the hotly contested outcome of the presidential election conducted on December 27 and results announced on December 30. The level of violence was as unexpected as it was unprecedented in this country previously hailed as an island of peace in what has been a troubled East Africa. The economic consequences are only beginning to manifest themselves.

Far from being mere mindless hooliganism, opportunism or ethnocentrism as some think, the outburst of anger and raw frustration being demonstrated by Kenyans on either side of the dispute has to do with notions of democracy, truth and justice. The warring parties are stalemated. International mediation efforts have yet to show any signs of calming the situation.

Why is this unfortunate saga relevant to ANSA?

The notion of social accountability is premised on the integrity of democratic process, the legitimacy of state, and a level of civic order to enable meaningful engagement between the state and those it governs. The question, then, is how does social accountability play out in a context where the underlying democratic ideals are frustrated or seen to be frustrated?

Key to the democratic process is the power to vote. This represents the single most important means by which citizens are able to ensure their civil liberties. Without these civil liberties, it is impossible to assure social accountability in its various forms.

1. Is it possible to speak about social accountability in such a fragile environment where so many citizens feel that their democratic participation in the affairs of state has been threatened or taken away?
2. What recourse do citizens have in this regard to achieve the goals and outcomes of effective social accountability?
3. How can social accountability be applied in a manner to forestall events such as those happening in Kenya today?
4. How can we engineer our institutions and their supportive frameworks to promote social accountability?
5. What is the role social accountability in the democratic context and how do we respond to the suggestion that western style democracy might be unsuitable to Africa?

The ANSA Network invites you to contribute your thoughts on what the implications of this kind of contemporary crisis might bear for the future of social accountability in Africa. You can do so simply by emailing your comments to [ansa@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:ansa@hsrc.ac.za). Please do take a moment to contribute. Even just a few pertinent words could introduce a vital contribution to this important discussion. In May this year ANSA-Africa will host a regional conference focusing on social accountability in fragile and post-conflict states. Even if you cannot attend the conference, sending your comments and ideas would be a valuable contribution.

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In the month just past ...

- **Africa's Social Accountability Profile (ASAP)** has finalized its field investigations and reports on Egypt, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Senegal, Tanzania and Togo. All the reports are being edited at the moment and should be available on [www.ansa-africa.net](http://www.ansa-africa.net) within the next month.

- **New additions to the website include** these links to informative Web documents:
  - [Public financial management and corruption](#)
  - [Seminar on the role of parliamentarians in promoting good public financial management and accountability in Africa](#)
  - [Assessing and improving governance for results-based management in Rwanda: ensuring good governance for effective service delivery](#)
  - [The business of health in Africa: partnering with the private sector to improve people's lives](#)

In the months ahead ...

- **The National Social Accountability Forum** will take place in Antananarivo, Madagascar on February 7-9: Bara Gueye, a member of the ANSA-Africa executive committee based in Senegal, will be one of the featured speakers. The forum will introduce social accountability tools such as citizen report cards, community scorecards and participatory public expenditure tracking surveys.
- The ANSA-Africa executive committee will meet next month.
- **ANSA-Africa will be part of the Participation & Accountability** regional conference organized by the Municipal Development Partnership for Eastern and Southern Africa (MDP-ESA) in Durban, South Africa on March 10-14. Please visit [www.ansa-africa.net](http://www.ansa-africa.net) or [www.asaaf.org.zw](http://www.asaaf.org.zw) for more information.

Every new year holds the promise of great things to come. As you develop or participate in new social accountability initiatives or opportunities, please feel free to inform the ANSA-Africa network about them. And remember the ANSA-Africa Web portal provides a wealth of information to inspire and equip you for your efforts in social accountability. Mail us any time with your input or questions.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours for the growth of social accountability,

**The ANSA-Africa Team**

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