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# Social Accountability in the Public Sector

*A Conceptual Discussion and Learning Module*

WBI Working Papers



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# **Social Accountability in the Public Sector**

*A Conceptual Discussion and Learning Module*



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**Social Accountability in the Public Sector:**  
**A Conceptual Discussion and Learning Module**  
*2005. 103 pages. Stock No. 37249*

# Contents

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<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Foreword.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>CONCEPTUAL PAPER .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. Accountability .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Pro-Accountability Reform.....</b>	<b>9</b>
Weberian Reform.....	9
Marketization .....	10
Independent Agencies .....	10
Social Accountability.....	11
<b>4. Social Accountability .....</b>	<b>13</b>
Incentive Structure: Punishment Versus Reward-Based Mechanisms .....	13
Accountability For What: Rule Following Versus Performance-Based Mechanisms .....	15
Level Of Institutionalization .....	16
Depth Of Involvement .....	19
Inclusiveness Of Participation .....	22
Branches Of Government .....	23
Dimensions And Combinations .....	25
<b>5. Practical Lessons And Challenges .....</b>	<b>27</b>
Public Sector Reform.....	27
Decentralization .....	30
General Lessons And Challenges .....	34
<b>6. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY MODULE .....</b>	<b>M-1</b>
<b><i>SESSION 1</i>.....</b>	<b><i>M-3</i></b>
<b>Social Accountability Basics.....</b>	<b>M-5</b>
Slide 1: Challenges in improving services for poor people .....	M-5
Slide 2: WDR: Outcomes are worse for the poor .....	M-6
Slide 3: WDR: Outcomes are worse for poor .....	M-6
Slide 4: What is accountability? .....	M-7
Slide 5: What is social accountability? .....	M-7
Slide 6: What are government officials and other power holders responsible for? .....	M-8
Slide 7: Vertical versus horizontal accountability .....	M-8

Slide 8: Key concepts related to governance and social accountability.....	M-9
Slide 9: Risks of social accountability .....	M-9
Slide 10: Participatory public expenditure management cycle .....	M-10
Slide 11: Example: Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil .....	M-10
Slide 12: Example: Participatory budget review in Gujarat, India .....	M-11
Slide 13: Example: Public expenditure tracking surveys in Uganda .....	M-11
Slide 14: Example: Citizen report cards in Bangalore, India.....	M-12
Handout 1: Social Accountability Mechanisms: Ten Short Examples .....	M-13
Slide 15: Potential benefits and risks of SA.....	M-16
<b>SESSION 2.....</b>	<b>M-17</b>
<b>Overview of Social Accountability Mechanisms .....</b>	<b>M-18</b>
Handout 2: Social Accountability in Practice .....	M-19
Handout 3: Case 1: Mexico Electoral Accountability .....	M-20
Handout 4: Case 2: Philippines Local Government Code .....	M-21
Handout 5: Case 3: Croatia Budget Transparency.....	M-23
Handout 6: Case 4: Brazil Participatory Budgeting .....	M-24
Handout 7: Case 5: Uganda Public Expenditure Tracking .....	M-25
Handout 8: Case 6: Niger Participatory M&E Systems .....	M-26
Handout 9: Case 7: India Right to Information Act.....	M-28
Handout 10: Case 8: Marshall Islands Gender-Sensitive Budgets.....	M-29
Slide 16: Social accountability mechanisms: Some questions to ask .....	M-30
<b>SESSION 3.....</b>	<b>M-33</b>
<b>Assessing Dimensions of Social Accountability .....</b>	<b>M-34</b>
Slide 17: SA critical success factors .....	M-35
Slide 18: Assessing SA mechanisms: Six dimensions.....	M-35
Handout 11: Assessing Dimensions of Social Accountability.....	M-36
<b>SESSION 4.....</b>	<b>M-39</b>
<b>Designing a Social Accountability Strategy .....</b>	<b>M-40</b>
Slide 19: Developing an SA strategy .....	M-41
Slide 20: SA building blocks .....	M-42
Slide 21: Some diagnostic questions.....	M-42
Handout 12: Designing a Social Accountability Strategy .....	M-43
Slide 22: Conclusion .....	M-44
OPTIONAL—Handout 13: Social Accountability Role Play Exercise: Health Care in Throna.....	M-44
<b>Social Accountability Module: Selected Sources.....</b>	<b>M-49</b>

## Acknowledgements\*

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The paper and learning module were jointly commissioned by the Poverty Reduction and Economic Management (PREM) Network, the Social Development Department (SDV), and the World Bank Institute (WBI), and were written under the guidance of Ruth Alsop, Reiner Forster, Veronica Nyhan Jones, and Jeff Thindwa.

The conceptual paper, originally published as part of the Social Development Paper series (No. 82) in March 2005, was written by John M. Ackerman, Professor and Coordinator of the Research Program on Accountability, Legality and the Rule of Law at the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences in Mexico City (FLACSO-Mexico). The learning module, which is based on the conceptual paper, was developed by Social Impact, Inc.

Valuable comments and feedback were received from Janmejy Singh, Drew Harton, Gibwa Kajubi, and William Reuben. The paper also benefited greatly from comments by Nina Bhatt, Jose Edgardo Campos, Karen Hudes, Carmen Malena, Mary McNeil, Marcos Mendiburu, Stephen Ndegwa, Karen Sirker, Frederick Stapenhurst, Dana Weist, and Alex Widmer at the Concept Review Workshop on “Understanding Social Accountability” organized by PREM, SDV, and WBI January 2005. The learning module was reviewed during a separate clinic in June 2004 and sections were piloted in Serbia (2004, 2005) and India (2005).

We would like to gratefully acknowledge the financial support received from the Canadian International Development Agency and the Governments of Norway and Finland under their Trust Fund for Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development.

In addition thanks are due to C.V. Madhukar, Aditi Sen, Danielle Christophe, and Cathy Sunshine for their editorial and administrative assistance in preparing this paper for final publication.

This working paper forms part of the World Bank’s efforts to bolster the conceptual foundations of social accountability and strengthen the demand side of governance while offering tools to enhance capacity within local communities and government institutions.

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\* Views expressed in this paper are those of the authors only.

## Foreword

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The World Bank has increasingly focused on decentralization, local government reform, and civic participation to enhance development effectiveness. This approach is based on significant conceptual, empirical, and policy-related work on why top-down development approaches alone are insufficient and why combined government and citizen effort can advance poverty reduction. For example, the *World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People* investigates how countries can accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals<sup>1</sup> by improving service delivery for poor people. The report states that service provision falls short because of weak incentives for performance, corruption, imperfect, or nonexistent monitoring, and administrative logjams. In many cases such failures are due to a lack of social accountability—an approach towards building accountability which relies on civic engagement.

Some countries have tried to address the problem by involving poor people in service delivery and the results have been remarkably positive. Giving parents greater influence over their children's education, enabling patients to have a say over hospital management, or publishing public agency budgets in local newspapers all contribute to improving outcomes in human development. Increasingly, countries open up national budgets for public scrutiny, and encourage the independent oversight of public resources, as in the case of the multistakeholder monitoring committee of oil revenues in Chad. Installing these types of accountability mechanisms, wherein power holders including poor and disenfranchised groups report downward to citizens, is an important method of empowerment and sustainable governance. This is equally crucial in policy making as in service provision.

This conceptual paper and learning tool are the next rather than final step to improve our understanding of how government and civil society can co-produce more effective goods and services. The inclusion of the learning module, which can and should be adapted by local trainers for application in different contexts, puts the concepts into an accessible format and provides local actors with tools to readily initiate dialogue on these important issues.

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<sup>1</sup> For information on the Millennium Development Goals, go to: [www.developmentgoals.org](http://www.developmentgoals.org).

## Abstract

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A growing number of authors and practitioners have offered civic engagement as a way to improve the accountability of public institutions and office holders to their constituencies. This paper and learning module attempt to clarify one aspect of the growing literature on civic engagement: society's role in improving government accountability—a process increasingly being termed as “social accountability.” The paper presents accountability as “a proactive process by which public officials inform about and justify their plans of action, their behavior and results and are sanctioned accordingly.” It then explores the various ways in which civil society can participate in strengthening accountability in the public sector.

According to this definition, a social accountability approach relies on civic engagement, in which ordinary citizens or civil society organizations participate directly or indirectly to exact accountability. Initiatives such as participatory budgeting, social audits, citizen report cards, and community score cards all involve citizens in the oversight of government and can therefore be considered social accountability initiatives. Evidence suggests that social accountability can contribute to improved governance, increased development effectiveness through better service delivery, and empowerment. These improvements cannot be achieved however without understanding and perhaps enhancing the capacities—including skills, attitudes and behaviors—of government and civil society actors.

The paper also highlights two areas in which the World Bank can apply social accountability approaches: (a) public sector reform and (b) decentralization. When considering the practical application of social accountability mechanisms, a careful understanding of the political, administrative, historical, and social context is essential. It is also important to take into account the appropriate entry points, possibilities for synergy between state and society, and the right mix of social accountability tools. It is equally important to analyze how social accountability practices link with existing formal accountability mechanisms, institutional arrangements, and incentive structures for public servants.

When designing a social accountability initiative it is useful to think about six parameters:

1. Incentive structure—punishment vs. reward-based approaches.
2. Accountability for what?—rule following versus performance orientation.
3. Level of institutionalization—the extent to which the participation of citizens is institutionalized in the law or by other formal means.
4. Depth of involvement—the degree to which citizens are permitted to observe and participate in areas of government normally kept secret or out of reach of society.
5. Inclusiveness of participation—the extent to which participation is limited to only “well behaved” or socially acceptable groups from civil society or opened up to a wider variety of actors.
6. Branches of government—whether target of effort is executive, legislature, or judiciary.

Developing capacities and providing training to various constituencies is an integral part of implementing and institutionalizing social accountability. The learning module provides a starting point for trainers of diverse backgrounds to work through how they can present this material in a workshop setting. Of course, for effective learning, the module will need to be adapted to the particular audience, context, and objectives. Based on several years of training across geographical regions, the module has served as the foundation for learning events in diverse settings such as Serbia and India and will be put to use in Tanzania and Sri Lanka in the coming months. We encourage you to apply and disseminate these products and welcome your feedback on their relevance and effectiveness.



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# Conceptual Paper

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# 1. Introduction

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In recent years, a growing number of authors and practitioners have offered civic engagement as the solution to the double crisis of states and markets in the developing world. This school of thought argues that market failure can be corrected through proactive consumers who search out alternative sources of private goods and altruistic social organizations that overcome the free-rider problem for public goods. In addition, it defends the position that state failure can be reconstructed through the action of an informed citizenry that knows its rights and requires the government to uphold them. While the forty years after World War II were characterized by a faith in state intervention and the last twenty years have been marked by the acceptance of the market model, it appears that the next wave of development thought will be grounded in a solid commitment to civic engagement.

We should welcome this paradigm shift as an opportunity to rethink accepted categories and as a chance to give a dynamic boost to development thinking. Nevertheless, as with all new concepts and intellectual fads, we need to carefully analyze and evaluate the many meanings and practices embedded in this new current of thought. The present Conceptual paper attempts to clarify one aspect of the growing literature on civic engagement: society's role in improving government accountability—a process increasingly being termed as “social accountability.” The World Bank has defined social accountability as “an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e. in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability” (World Bank, 2004f: 1). This paper surveys a wide variety of literatures and practices and carefully outlines various criteria that can be used to evaluate and categorize such societal participation in improving government accountability. Development professionals should consider the full variety of possibilities and the strengths and weaknesses of each when considering tapping into the energies of society to improve government accountability.

This paper is focused exclusively on building a conceptual framework around strategies oriented towards improving the accountability of governments. It does not venture into the extremely important terrain of private sector accountability or the accountability of civil society organizations. Nevertheless, the hope is that it will still provide some tips that can help reformers think about how to approach accountability in these other two types of organizations.

The first section discusses the concept of accountability. After a discussion of some of the classic literature in the field it proposes a core definition of government accountability as a “proactive process by which public officials inform about and justify their plans of action, their behavior and results and are sanctioned accordingly” and distinguishes this definition from similar concepts such as transparency, oversight, and responsiveness. The section then briefly discusses why the conduct of free and fair elections is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for an accountable government. The problems of information asymmetry, ex post evaluation bias, and “externalism” that plague elections make it necessary to think of innovative new social accountability mechanisms that can improve government accountability in a much more direct and targeted fashion.

The second section provides a quick overview of the various strategies that can be used to improve government accountability: (1) Weberian Reform, (2) Marketization, (3) Independent Agencies, and (4) Social Accountability.

The third section then focuses in on the category of social accountability. It proposes six distinctions that can be used to evaluate and categorize such initiatives: punishment versus reward-based mechanisms, rule following versus performance-based mechanisms, level of institutionalization, depth of involvement, inclusiveness of participation, and branches of government. We can use these six distinctions both to evaluate existing practices and to plan new initiatives. Each has its particular strengths and weaknesses and the multiple possible combinations between each one open up the field to a virtual smorgasbord of options for the social accountability entrepreneur.

The fourth section then discusses the crucial question of how practically to go about constructing an accountability system grounded in civic engagement. What are the costs and benefits of the different forms of social accountability? What are the best “entry points” for initiating pro-accountability reform grounded in societal participation?

Finally, the paper concludes with a brief survey of the ground that has been covered and identifies a series of key questions that should be discussed by practitioners before embarking on pro-accountability reforms.

## 2. Accountability

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There are three fundamental threats to the construction of good governance and the rule of law in the developing world, namely corruption, clientelism, and capture. All three of these phenomena refer to the use of public office for private gain and their impact goes far beyond the simple diversion of funds. Corruption, in addition to directly enriching individual bureaucrats, distorts markets and hampers service delivery (Rose-Ackerman, 1999). Clientelism, in addition to unfairly channeling public resources to specific client groups, alters the dynamics of political competition and leads to the ineffective provision of public services (Fox, 1994). Capture, in addition to providing rents to specific economic actors, also greatly alters markets and worsens the position of consumers, workers, and the environment in relation to corporations (Stigler, 1971).

It is generally accepted that the best way to combat this three-headed monster and thereby guarantee the public interest character of the state is by strengthening government “accountability.” But what exactly does this concept mean? In its most literal sense, the term accountability means little more than the “ability” or the “possibility” that someone or something can be “accounted for” or “counted up.” Under this minimalist understanding, all that the accountability of government would imply is the most basic form of bookkeeping (for example, this many miles of highway were built last year, this much money was spent, this number of students attended public schools, and so on). It might also require the existence of someone who could possibly view the accounts if he or she so wished, a principle of “minimal exposure” if you will, but not much else. Transparency, punishment, performance, corruption, external surveillance, the public interest, power, and principal-agent relationships are all left out of this basic understanding of the concept of accountability.

Such a definition is clearly insufficient. Basic bookkeeping plus minimal exposure are not powerful enough levers to achieve the lofty goals of good governance and the rule of law. If my colleague at the Public Works Ministry knows that I built 300 miles of highway last year, would this in itself promote good governance? What if my 300 miles were made out of substandard concrete? What if the budget had called for me to build 1,000 miles? What if my colleague is actually my subordinate whose job depends on his maintaining favor with me? Clearly we need a much more robust definition of accountability in order for this term to do the work we expect of it.

The conceptual task therefore is to build a workable definition of accountability that has sufficient leverage and clarity so as to irrefutably push towards good government and the rule of law. But where should our conceptual construction project begin and where should it stop? The first element that most authors include is punishment or sanction. As Robert Behn has argued, “Those whom we want to hold accountable have a clear understanding of what accountability means: Accountability means punishment” (Behn, 2001: 3). Andreas Schedler also incorporates this element into his definition of accountability, including both *answerability*, or “the obligation of public officials to inform about and to explain what they are doing” (Schedler, 1999: 14), and *enforcement*, or “the capacity of accounting agencies to impose sanctions on power holders who have violated their public duties” (Schedler, 1999: 14).

As we can see from this second definition, once we start building in new elements to the concept it is very difficult to resist the temptation to push further. For instance, Schedler’s definition adds in the key

concepts of “information,” “explanation,” and “accounting agencies.” Here the author encourages us to go beyond the relatively passive requirement of minimal exposure to include a more proactive opening up on the part of public officials. It is not enough for bureaucrats to leave their ledgers open on their desks so that passersby can catch a glimpse of their reports. They must actively inform and explain what they are doing and perhaps even justify why in comprehensible language. In addition, Schedler’s reference to accounting agencies introduces the element of the participation of an external actor. For the author it is not sufficient for the members of a government agency to be in full communication with each other. For accountability to exist there must also be a vigilant eye that gazes in from the outside.

Richard Mulgan’s definition of accountability emphasizes precisely this external nature of the accountability relationship. He argues that accountability includes three central elements: (1) “It is *external*, in that the account is given to some other person or body outside the person or body being held accountable”; (2) “It involves *social interaction and exchange*, in that one side, that calling for the account, seeks answers and rectification while the other side, that being held accountable, responds and accepts sanctions”; and (3) “It implies *rights of authority*, in that those calling for an account are asserting rights of superior authority over those who are accountable” (Mulgan, 2000: 555). This third element of Mulgan’s definition introduces a crucial new element to our discussion: “superior authority.” According to Mulgan, accountability necessarily implies power. Only when the observer stands above the observed can we speak of accountability. Indeed, following this line of thinking, other authors argue that accountability can only exist as an element of a “principal-agent relationship” (Moreno, Crisp, and Shugart, 2003). Might it be that we can only speak of accountability when the actor being held accountable is directly at the service of the actor calling for the account?

I would argue that although externality and superior authority are indeed often important elements of accountability relationships, they are by no means necessary in order for accountability to exist. “Internal” accountability relationships are widespread, for instance within a sports team, a government agency, or even a single individual. The coach of a team evaluates each player’s performance and rewards or punishes them depending on the results, but so does each one of the players. External audit agencies often hold government agencies accountable for their actions, but so do fellow colleagues within a single ministry. In the extreme case, can’t an individual hold herself accountable for her own actions by, for instance, punishing herself if she fails to live up to her own standards of performance?

In addition, “horizontal” accountability relationships, between two actors of equal authority, are common in all areas of life and politics. Can’t one legislator hold another legislator accountable for whether or not she upholds the party platform during her floor votes? How about the relationship between an ombudsman and an executive agency or between two twin brothers? We should not confuse sanctioning power with superior authority. The fact that I can punish you does not necessarily mean that I am above you. My punishment might be more effective if I am indeed in a superior position, but I can still observe, evaluate, and punish if we are equals.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This last argument should of course not be interpreted as an attempt to weaken the strength or the relevance of those accountability relationships which are indeed grounded in power relationships. For instance, according to classic democratic theory governments are accountable to the people because the citizens are the original power holders who delegate authority temporarily and over certain specific issues to the government. This understanding of the structure of democracy should ground all discussions of accountability. Nevertheless, when we limit our

Independently of *how* public servants are held accountable, what can they be held accountable *for*? Here there are two broad schools of thought. One current equates accountability with honesty and rule following. Public servants should be evaluated, rewarded, and punished based on the extent to which they desist from corrupt and illegal practices. This is an essentially “negative” and process-based view of accountability in so far as it requires public servants only to restrain from certain activities. A second current defends the idea that accountability also implies the affirmative task of effective performance and proactive decision making (Paul, 1992). This perspective points out that it is not very helpful for a public servant to follow the rules and not accept bribes if her actions and decisions do not lead to effective policy outcomes.

The *temporal* dimension is another important aspect of accountability. Specifically, are there such things as “*ex ante*” or “simultaneous” accountability, or is all accountability necessarily *ex post*? In the strictest sense, accountability can only be exercised after the fact. Since accountability involves the evaluation of the behavior of public servants it is senseless to speak of evaluating something that does not already exist. Nevertheless, this truth should not lead us to conclude that public servants can only be held accountable for *completed* projects or “results.” For instance, an agent of accountability does not need to wait until the highway is already built in order to ask for information and explanations and evaluate the answers given. How was the strategic plan developed? How are the workers organized at the construction site? How do the engineers respond to unexpected circumstances? For the purposes of conceptual clarity, we will use the term “*ex post*” accountability to refer to the evaluation of *completed* projects, the term “*ex ante*” accountability to refer to the evaluation of plans of action and the term “simultaneous” accountability to refer to the evaluation of ongoing government initiatives.

For those who might have doubts about the existence of *ex ante* accountability mechanisms, the Administrative Procedures Act (APA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in the United States are excellent examples. Before agencies can put new regulations into effect they are required to give complete information as to their content, justify them, and even defend them in court if questioned by civil society groups or individuals with legal standing. Such accountability mechanisms have been criticized for unnecessarily slowing down government action, as agencies spend significant time and resources justifying their plans and responding to criticisms, but this is a very different point from affirming that such forms are not accountability relationships at all.

An additional central element of the accountability equation is to understand that it is a *process* and not a *state*. To “be” accountable is to be in motion, not simply sitting in an office “open to criticism.” To “be” accountable is to work with society and accounting agencies to improve government honesty and performance instead of doing one’s best to hide from scrutiny. The proactive behavior that accountability demands requires dialogue, explanation, and justification<sup>3</sup>.

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understanding exclusively to this framework we risk missing a great variety of other relationships which can be equally important for strengthening government accountability.

<sup>3</sup> This of course does not mean that different types of proactivity are equal from a moral or a political point of view. For instance, it is quite different for a public servant to proactively inform and dialogue with her superior, an international agency, a large corporation, or with a civil society group. Although each would consolidate her

One other important distinction present in the literature is that between accountability and “*responsiveness*.” Some scholars argue that there is a radical split between these two concepts, that responding to the demands of citizens is very different from being accountable to them. For instance, Bernard Manin, Adam Przeworski, and Susan Stokes have claimed that “a government is ‘responsive’ if it adopts policies that are signaled as preferred by citizens” (Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes, 1999: 9) while “governments are ‘accountable’ if citizens can discern representative from unrepresentative governments<sup>4</sup> and can sanction them appropriately, retaining in office those incumbents who perform well and ousting from office those who do not” (Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes, 1999: 10). The problem with such a radical distinction is that it conceptualizes government as an entity that citizens “alienate” or throw up into the air at each election and then try to discipline or control at the next. From this perspective accountability can only be exercised externally and *ex post*. Citizens are only empowered to sanction the government after it has “performed” by changing their vote during periodic elections.

The contrary point of view sees government as a part of the polity itself, not an external actor that the citizens lift up above them and then try to control after the fact. This alternative conceptualization of government envisions a constant give and take between state and society and the exercise of accountability both before and during the exercise of public authority. Here “responsiveness” and “accountability” are still two different concepts, the former referring to the motivation for an action or decision and the latter referring to the quality of the action or decision itself. Nevertheless, they are inextricably linked since a government that opens itself up fully to scrutiny and sanction before, during, and after it acts will usually also take very seriously the interests and demands of citizens.<sup>5</sup>

The above discussion brings us to settle on a definition of accountability that includes proactive behaviors like information and justification, the evaluation of performance in addition to rule-following, the calling to account before, during, and after decisions are made, and, of course, the application of sanctions (both positive and negative). We can therefore define accountability as a *proactive process by which public officials inform about and justify their plans of action, their behavior, and results and are sanctioned accordingly*.

But why worry about accountability as a specific target of intervention? Aren’t free and fair elections enough? Citizens elect representatives and then supposedly hold them accountable for their behavior at the following election. The representatives in turn appoint and hold bureaucrats and the members of the

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accountability to the respective actor, our evaluation of each type of accountability will depend on the importance that we place on the respective “agent of accountability.”

<sup>4</sup> The authors define “representation” as “acting in the best interest of the public” (Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes, 1999:2).

<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, this is of course not always the case. As Alex Widmer has pointed out in comments on a previous version of this paper, “even if public officials inform about and justify their plans of action *ex ante*, if citizens do not have means to tangibly influence decision making, responsiveness to the demand is not necessarily given. A clear example of this was the decision of many European states to back the U.S. intervention in Iraq against the will of 80% of the population. The citizens were informed and the intervention was justified, but the people could not decide directly” (personal communication with the author).

judicial branch accountable for their behavior. Such an “accountability chain” is supposed to assure good government and the rule of law since the jobs of all public officials ultimately depend on the popular vote.

Unfortunately, empirical research has shown that the accountability that public officials are exposed to through the conduct of periodic elections is not enough to guarantee good government and the rule of law (Geddes, 1994; Przeworski, Stokes, 2003; Stokes and Manin, 1999; Varshney, 1999). There are four central problems with elections as accountability mechanisms. First, there is a profound problem of *information asymmetry* both between elected officials and the electorate and between bureaucrats and elected officials. It is simply impossible for citizens to be aware of each and every decision that an elected representative makes or for an elected representative to be aware of every act performed by unelected public servants. The second problem with elections as accountability mechanisms is that they only operate *ex post*. If we rely exclusively on *ex post* accountability we in effect “alienate” our voice by delegating our authority entirely during the periods between elections. Third, elections only allow citizens to exercise accountability “*externally*,” from “outside” of government. Citizens send representatives to the capital through their vote, but do not participate themselves in the tasks of government. Under formal representative democracy citizens do not have any concrete authority over government. A final problem with elections is that there is not always more than one viable candidate running for a particular position. Such situations significantly diminish the extent to which elected officials are obliged to inform and hold themselves accountable to their constituents.

### 3. Pro-Accountability Reform

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The conduct of free and fair elections is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the establishment of good governance and the rule of law. Democracy needs to be complemented with reforms explicitly designed to improve government accountability. We can identify four general approaches of pro-accountability reform: Weberian Reform, Marketization, Independent Agencies, and Social Accountability. This section outlines the nature of each one of these approaches in turn. Although each one of these approaches summarizes a distinct way of approaching pro-accountability reform, they are by no means mutually exclusive. Indeed, in practice the best strategy is usually to combine various approaches in order to have the maximum impact. For instance, there is no contradiction in simultaneously strengthening bureaucracy along Weberian lines and opening up the doors of government to practices of Social Accountability. Indeed, when initiatives are well designed these two types of strategies can create synergies which make the whole much more than a sum of the parts (see Ackerman, 2004a).

#### Weberian Reform

Max Weber understood bureaucracy to be the institutionalization of rationality in which each public servant had a specific task to carry out and was fully accountable for her actions to her superior. This created a vertically integrated structure with power concentrated at the top in which “good governance” is guaranteed through careful supervision and the rational organization of the tasks of government.

This “ideal type”<sup>6</sup> of bureaucracy dominated the field of public administration and public management for most of the twentieth century. Indeed, up to the present day, it is viewed as particularly important for scholars and practitioners in the developing world where the government apparatus is weak and the state is still not consolidated. A solid, rationally organized government is seen as the first line of attack against corruption, clientelism, and capture. Unfortunately, in the contemporary world of “flexible government” the strengthening of the command-and-control functions of government has fallen out of favor with many. Nevertheless, such “old” public management strategies like civil service reform and the improvement of internal auditing, evaluation, and surveillance are absolutely central elements of any pro-accountability reform package. If the central administrative apparatus does not have sufficient strength and legitimacy to control its own employees, other pro-accountability reforms will surely fail.

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<sup>6</sup> Weber’s “ideal types” are expressions of the essential characteristics of social forms and do not necessarily reflect the reality of particular existing cases.

## **Marketization**

The most popular recent wave of public administration reforms emphasizes both the privatization of public services and the imitation of private sector management techniques by government. These two strategies are analytically and empirically distinct. It is one thing for the government to sell off government monopolies and it is quite another for the government to run itself like a business. Nevertheless, both strategies look to improve the accountability of service provision by introducing the discipline of the market. Privatization introduces the market in a single act whereas strategies such as managed competition, subcontracting, deregulation of government procedures, and flexibilization of government labor markets introduce market behavior in a more piecemeal and indirect fashion. Such reforms involve society as an aggregation of consumers who can punish or reward service providers depending on their effectiveness. The functioning of the market here serves as an incredibly powerful pro-accountability mechanism.

Nevertheless, marketization should not be confused with social accountability. Although they both look to tap into the energy of society to improve accountability, each reform strategy has a very different logic. While marketization seeks to send sections of the state off to society, social accountability seeks to invite society into the state. While marketization is grounded in the discourse of consumer choice, social accountability is based in the language of citizens' rights and empowerment. As a result, social accountability avoids the inequality-producing effects of market-based service delivery and caters to inclusion and social justice more directly. In addition, social accountability retains the comparative advantage that the state has over the market in the provision of public goods, natural monopolies, basic necessities, and goods that require long-term planning and development.

State reformers should remember that the New Public Management (NPM) can be applied in a wide variety of ways. As B. Guy Peters (2001) has pointed out, NPM is a catch-all term that actually holds within it four different models of government: "Market Government," "Participative Government," "Flexible Government," and "Deregulated Government." Pro-accountability entrepreneurs should think twice before assuming that marketization is the best and only way to apply the NPM. Careful attention needs to be paid to the type of good or service being provided, the possible loss of strength in the accountability signal when "citizens" are replaced with "consumers," and the potential for increases in inequality that can arise from marketization. In the end, the "participative" model of the NPM frequently can be even more effective than the "market," "flexible," or "deregulation" models.

## **Independent Agencies**

One of the most popular pro-accountability reforms in recent years has been the creation of Independent Pro-Accountability Agencies (IPAs) (Ackerman, 2003). IPAs are autonomous public institutions that are responsible for holding government accountable in a specific issue area. Examples include autonomous corruption control bodies, independent electoral institutes, auditing agencies, human rights ombudsmen, and "public prosecutors." In the last decade there has been a veritable explosion in the creation of such institutions in the developing world. In Latin America, Belize, Brazil, Columbia, Costa Rica, Chile, Peru, and Mexico have all created or revived one or more such independent institutions in the last decade. This trend is also present in Asia, Africa, Australia, and Eastern Europe. Some recent examples include the new ombudsmen in Poland (founded in 1987), the Philippines (founded 1989), and South Korea (founded

in 1994), the National Counter Corruption Commission in Thailand (founded in 1998), the Independent Commission Against Corruption in New South Wales, Australia (founded in 1988), the Public Protector in South Africa (founded in 1994), and the Inspector-General of Government in Uganda (founded in 1996) (Pope, 2000). Another indicator of this trend is that over 80 countries currently have a national ombudsman while only a dozen had one only 20 years ago (Bennett, 1997).

Some countries have distinguished themselves as especially innovative cases in the creation of new pro-accountability institutions. Thailand's 1997 constitution created seven different such institutions: a National Counter Corruption Commission, an independent Electoral Commission, an ombudsman, a Constitutional Court, an Administrative Court, an environmental review board responsible for evaluating the environmental impact of public projects, and a consumer review board which involves consumer representatives in the design of consumer protection laws (Pratijarn, 2002; Unger, 2003). Hungary is another fascinating case in so far as it has recently established four different ombudsmen, one for human rights protection, a second for national and ethnic minorities, a third for data protection and freedom of information, and a fourth for education (Rose-Ackerman, 2004). In Latin America, the Chilean *Contralor* (Siavelis, 2002), the Peruvian Ombudsman (Santistesvan, 2000), the Brazilian *Ministerio Público* (Bastos, 2002, Sadek and Batista Cavalcanti, 2003) and the flurry of new agencies recently created by the Mexican government (Ackerman, 2003) stand out as particularly interesting cases.

The performance of IPAs varies widely between countries. Indeed, it would be safe to say that there are as many cases of IPAs that serve to help governments avoid accountability as there are IPAs that successfully strengthen government accountability. In many countries there is a long tradition of creating new "independent" bureaucracies in response to problems in order to make the government appear as if it were committed to resolving the issue at hand, whether it be corruption, human rights violations, free and fair elections, and so forth. Such institutional innovations often successfully deflect criticism from the central bureaucracy, thereby permitting the government to avoid a full reform of the state. The transparency and openness to participation also varies widely between IPAs. For instance, while ombudsmen tend to be open and to provide much needed information to the public, auditing agencies tend to be much more close lipped.

Research shows that there is a direct relationship between the effectiveness of IPAs and the level and intensity of their interaction with society (Ackerman, 2003; Moreno, Crisp and Shugart, 2003; O'Donnell, 2002; Sadek and Cavalcanti, 2003). Those IPAs that take their role as bridges seriously are the ones that fulfill their mandates more effectively, while those that separate themselves from either the government or society tend to end in isolation and ineffectiveness. Here we see that so called "horizontal" and "vertical" accountability cannot be so easily separated. The strength of government accounting agencies depends on their connection with society at large, which brings us to the notion of social accountability.

### **Social Accountability**

Governments can do a great deal on their own to improve accountability through actions such as strengthening top-down oversight, professionalizing staff through civil service reform, empowering internal comptrollers, establishing performance contracts, and creating new independent public oversight agencies. Nevertheless, pro-accountability reform is much more effective when societal actors play a central role as well. The World Bank has defined Social Accountability as "an approach towards building

accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e. in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability” (World Bank, 2004f: 1). There are a great variety of initiatives that fall under this category. Initiatives as different as participatory budgeting, administrative procedures acts, social audits, and citizen report cards all involve citizens in the oversight and control of government and can therefore be considered social accountability initiatives. Here we give a brief overview of this category of pro-accountability reform. Section 4 is dedicated to an in-depth exploration of the different dimensions of social accountability.

The universe of government action is so broad that it is virtually impossible to “oversee” the entirety of the operation. Comptrollers can only perform a limited number of audits. Human rights ombudsmen can only respond to a certain number of complaints. Legislatures can only follow up on a specific number of government programs. Budgets can be expanded and powers can be extended, but the infinite detail of government behavior will always escape the view of the overseer. There is no single all-seeing “god’s eye” point of view from which to control the government apparatus.

It is therefore necessary to complement such top-down “police patrol” oversight strategies with bottom-up “fire alarm” mechanisms (McCubbins and Schwartz, 1984). For McCubbins and Schwartz, “police patrol” oversight is the traditional modality in which supervisory agencies try to keep a constant eye on those they are supposed to monitor. To the contrary, “fire alarm” oversight occurs when an agency relies on external actors to detect when there are problems (to “sound the alarm”) and then focuses its attention particularly carefully on those areas that receive extra attention. While a roving police car might happen to come upon a burglar or a burning building, society is everywhere. Indeed, according to Catalina Smulovitz (2003), this gives society an extra plus. Since society is everywhere, it doesn’t even have to act in all cases to make its presence felt. The mere threat that society might sound the alarm or respond in other more disruptive ways is often enough to control public servants.

Unfortunately, although society is omnipresent it is often quite dormant and apathetic. Indeed, the capacity of onlookers to *not* intervene to resolve problems is well known, particularly in highly modernized, urban areas. Examples abound of circles of curious passersby who do little or nothing to help victims of accidents, heart attacks, or theft. In addition, civil society is not always as “pure” as it is often made out to be. Any power that is given to society risks being co-opted by criminal organizations and powerful interest groups who only look for personal and group benefits.

Society is a powerful potential force for strengthening government accountability. Nevertheless, this force does not come alive automatically or always in the most productive forms. Pro-accountability entrepreneurs need to design mechanisms that both help translate this potentiality into action and privilege social actors that work for the public interest. Context is absolutely crucial. There is no single “silver bullet” or special recipe for creating successful social accountability initiatives. As we will see in Section 5, the best strategy will always depend on the social and political context.

## 4. Social Accountability

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This section examines the diversity of ways in which civic engagement can have a positive impact on government accountability, defined in Section 2 as “a proactive process by which public officials inform about and justify their plans of action, their behavior and results and are sanctioned accordingly.” It also explores how social accountability complements and interacts with the other three strategies of pro-accountability reform. The discussion therefore goes far beyond just a review of the category of social accountability to include a broader analysis of how civic engagement can form a central part of an “accountability system” as a whole.

We can use six different distinctions to capture the variety of practices that make up the broad category of “social accountability”: punishment versus reward-based mechanisms, rule following versus performance-based mechanisms, level of institutionalization, depth of involvement, inclusiveness of participation, and branches of government. Many of these distinctions can be used to evaluate any type of pro-accountability reform. For instance, the first category of punishment versus reward-based systems is a distinction that would be just as useful in evaluating Weberian reforms as in examining social accountability initiatives. Nevertheless, the central interest of this section is to use these distinctions to understand specifically the variety of social accountability initiatives available to practitioners.

### **Incentive Structure: Punishment versus Reward-Based Mechanisms**

Accountability is most commonly associated with punishment. From this perspective an accountable government is one that is constantly exposed to the glaring eye of a government auditor, a street protest, or a journalist ready for the next corruption scandal. Punishment is an absolutely crucial element of accountability. In an ideal world of perfectly honest bureaucrats and equal societies it would not be necessary to include such “teeth” in the concept of accountability. Nevertheless, with human nature as it is and with the presence of such radical social, political, and economic inequalities, punishment is indeed necessary to assure honest, fair, and effective behavior. The problem of course is that excessive punishment tends to corner public officials into a state of fear and paralysis. While this may be positive from the perspective of rule-following it is often counterproductive from the perspective of improving government performance.

Rewards also have their difficulties. Although they stimulate already relatively honest and proactive officials to perform even better and might coax mediocre employees to turn the corner, they do not do a very good job at correcting the behavior of the “bad apples.” The opportunity costs involved are just too large for such officials to be convinced by simple rewards. Corrupt officials are already earning a great deal of extra money, probably much more than any reward scheme could offer them. Vastly inefficient officials have already decided to choose leisure over work, independent of the missed rewards this may entail.

Social accountability is often seen to be closer to the punishment than to the reward side of the spectrum. This is because we tend to associate social mobilization with anger and protest, with social movements that challenge the state and try to punish government officials for malfeasance or for taking particular policy directions. Such actions are indeed important. Nevertheless, social accountability is also effective when it is grounded in constructive partnerships between civil society and the state. As a recent World Bank document on the subject states, “Across the world, we find citizens are mobilizing, often locally, to demand better services. Not by shouting, but by counting. Making sure their governments spend effectively, and keep their promises” (World Bank, 2004a: 2). Shouting is often effective. Indeed, it is often the only recourse civil society is left with. Nevertheless, setting up arrangements of “state-society synergy” which lead to rewards for both sides of the equation can be even more fruitful (Ackerman, 2004b).

One example of a social accountability mechanism which is grounded in a positive-sum, rewards-based view of accountability is the Citizen Report Card. The use of this instrument is on the rise throughout the world. In recent years, report cards have been supported by the World Bank in Uganda, Albania, the Philippines, and Peru. Beyond the World Bank, the methodology has been taken up by municipal presidents in the Ukraine and numerous cities in India. The experience that began this flurry of innovation is the scorecard organized by Public Affairs Centre (PAC) in Bangalore, India in 1994, and then repeated in 1999 and 2003 (See Box 1).

**Box 1: The Bangalore Citizen Report Card**

The original motivation for the citizen report card in Bangalore was the deficient provision of public services in the city. This problem was, and continues to be, widespread for most services. Transportation, telephone, electricity, water, and waste disposal services are all profoundly unsatisfactory, especially in the poorest areas of the city. The hypothesis grounding the report card methodology is that the reason why the services are so poor is because government agencies are not enmeshed in an effective incentive structure. Many of the services are monopolies that are not exposed to the discipline of the market and all of them are run by an overloaded government that operates in the context of an outdated legal and regulatory system.

The report card methodology was therefore developed in order to expose government agencies to the “consumer feedback” they are lacking. The guiding idea behind the methodology is to introduce market-type incentives to the functioning of government. Through the report card methodology, agencies can see how their performance changes from year to year as well as compare themselves to other agencies in a comparative, competitive dynamic similar to that imposed by the market. And all of this occurs through the independent action of civil society and the power of information.

Report cards have seven key phases: (i) Identification of Scope, Actors and Purpose, (ii) Design of Questionnaires, (iii) Sampling, (iv) Execution of Survey, (v) Data Analysis, (vi) Dissemination, and (vii) Institutionalization (World Bank, 2004b). Experience reveals that the three core elements which are most important for a successful initiative are: (a) technical expertise in the design, implementation and analysis of the report card, (b) an active civil society that is willing and able to use the information provided in the report card to pressure the government for reform, and (c) reform-minded top public officials who are willing and able to use the information to implement changes in service provision.

In Bangalore the report card has played a crucial role in reenergizing public services (Ravindra, 2003: 17-18). Specifically, nudged forward by the results of the report card, various agencies like the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) and the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) have initiated training programs to improve customer service skills of their staff. The Bangalore Municipal Corporation (BMC) has established a new, more transparent, and less corrupt property tax system. The Karnataka Electricity Board has installed a system that facilitates bill collection through the use of mobile counters. The performance of Bangalore Telecom has also vastly improved.

The report card methodology has been criticized for being grounded in a fundamentally naïve view of politics and bureaucratic inefficiency. For instance, Robert Jenkins and Anne Marie Goetz have argued that such accountability mechanisms “can be considered ‘weapons’ only if the politicians and bureaucrats in question are ignorant of the service-delivery problems in the first place. Most, in fact, are already aware of the dismal state of public amenities in India’s slums” (Jenkins and Goetz, 1999: 619). This is perhaps a bit overstated. Even given its shortcomings, the scorecard is definitely a “weapon.” Nevertheless, Goetz and Jenkins’ point stands that it is not enough to “grade” public servants on their performance in a friendly attempt to nudge them to improve. Such measures should be complemented by tougher measures which directly question and sanction public servants and agencies that do not perform up to standard.

In general, the best “accountability system” is one that includes both punishments and rewards so that public officials have strong incentives both not to break the rules and to perform at their maximum capacity. When designing their initiatives government pro-accountability reformers should think about combining “nice” strategies like scorecards and surveys with “tougher” strategies like the creation of an independent anti-corruption ombudsman that is both in close touch with civil society and has the power to directly sanction or prosecute government officials. Brazil’s *Ministerio Público* is an excellent example of such an institution (see Sadek and Cavalcanti, 2003).

### **Accountability for What: Rule Following versus Performance-Based Mechanisms**

A focus on rule following is linked to the so-called “Old Public Management” and its emphasis on the construction of a Weberian bureaucracy grounded in rational action and a structured chain of command. Although such strategies are usually directed by governments, society can also play an important role in such pro-accountability initiatives. For instance, the activities of Transparency International and its numerous national chapters are oriented precisely towards assuring that governments follow their own rules for procurement, construction, contracting, and so forth. The problem with an exclusive focus on rules is that it can quickly lead to over-bureaucratization, which slows down service delivery and breeds ineffectiveness.

On the other side of the coin there are mechanisms that look to stimulate effective performance. This is the core of the so-called “New Public Management” (NPM) which argues that governments need to liberate themselves from strictly process-based evaluation, which slows down government action and stifles creativity, and turn to results-based evaluation. Over the last two decades dozens of countries in both the north and the south have incorporated performance evaluation as a central element of their normal auditing process (Barzelay, 2003).

Society can play an important role in evaluating the performance or “quality” of government services. Education, police, and health care reform are key areas in this regard. Examples of successful school councils abound (Cabrero et. al., 2003; World Bank, 2003a: 62; 5). Community supervision of local health care clinics has also been shown to be highly effective (Cornwall, Lucas and Pasteur, 2000; World Bank, 2001: 14). In recent years there has also been an important wave of community policing reform (Fung 2001).

There are of course problems with an exclusive focus on performance as well. In technical terms, there may be a tradeoff between “accountability for rule following” or “legal accountability” (Ackerman, 2004a) and “accountability for performance.” Indeed, this is what Robert Behn has characterized as “*the* accountability dilemma” (Behn, 2001). The discretion that allows bureaucrats to focus on performance and to discover creative ways to solve problems might also open up room for increased malfeasance. Nevertheless, it appears that this risk is reduced when civil society actors are vigilant since they usually maintain a close watch on both procedural and performance indicators simultaneously.

The best pro-accountability strategies are ones that simultaneously focus citizen participation on enforcing the rules and on improving performance. For instance, the citizen participation outlined in Goetz and Jenkins's research on India involves both of these characteristics (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001). They document how local rationing committees were set up in Mumbai in order both to assure that local shop owners followed the rules with respect to the handling of money and delivered high-quality rations to the users of the shops. Here citizens are acting simultaneously as conscientious consumers and as vigilant observers of the legality of the process by which the products are delivered (See Box 2).

### **Level of Institutionalization**

Most efforts at involving society to strengthen government accountability tend to be ad-hoc initiatives initiated by civil society activists and embraced by well-meaning public servants who believe in the value and the power of democratic participation. Rarely do such strategies find themselves institutionalized into the law or otherwise permanently embedded in the structure of the state. As Walter Eberlei has written, a certain "event culture" tends to prevail when the concepts of societal participation and civic engagement are brought to the table (Eberlei, 2001: 9). Many public officials seem to believe that all that these concepts imply is the holding of a series of hearings, workshops, and consultations, not the establishment of a long-term participatory dialogue with civil society.

There are three different levels at which participatory mechanisms can be institutionalized in the state. First, participatory mechanisms can be built into the strategic plans of government agencies and rules and procedures can be mandated that require "street-level bureaucrats" to consult or otherwise engage with societal actors. Second, specific government agencies can be created that have the goal of assuring societal participation in government activities or act as a liaison in charge of building links with societal actors. Third, participatory mechanisms can be inscribed in law, requiring individual agencies or the government as a whole to involve societal actors at specific moments of the public policy process.

Although the first level of institutionalization is more or less widespread and the second level is relatively common, the third level is extremely rare. There are of course some important exceptions, including the Administrative Procedures Act in the United States (See Box 3), Bolivia's Popular Participation Law, Porto Alegre's Participatory Budgeting framework, Mexico City's Citizen Participation Law, and the wave of freedom of information laws that has swept the world over the past two decades. Nevertheless, these exceptions only prove the rule that participatory mechanisms are usually vastly under-institutionalized, depending too much on the ingenuity and good will of individual bureaucrats.

### **Box 2: The Rationing Kruti Samiti (RKS) in India**

The Rationing Kruti Samiti (RKS) movement, or Action Committee for Rationing, based in Mumbai, India shows that when reformist bureaucrats are faced with an active pro-accountability movement in civil society it is possible to make important inroads into the area of social auditing. As Anne Marie Goetz and Rob Jenkins document, the central accountability problem that this organization faces is the widespread corruption in the provision of government services to the poor. Specifically, the nation's Public Distribution System (PDS), which is in charge of channeling basic food items and other fundamental household goods like kerosene to the poorest households, is rife with corruption. One of the principal problems here is the selling of these goods by owners of "ration shops" for personal profit.

Most communities in India already have local "participatory" institutions that are supposedly responsible for monitoring the performance of government programs. Nevertheless, these "Vigilance Committees" and "Village Assemblies" are often captured by actors who are implicated in the process of corruption itself. For instance, the "Vigilance Committees" are usually chaired by the representative of the municipal ward and their members are appointed in a top-down fashion. As Goetz and Jenkins argue, "appointment to [vigilance] committees through a process of official selection increases the probability of capture by the very political organizations that are central to the operation of the systems of leakage" (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001: 371). In addition, "since many ration shops are actually owned or controlled by politicians, who are themselves on the vigilance committees, committee members have little incentive to remain eternally vigilant" (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001: 371). Finally, often the shopkeepers themselves sit on the Vigilance Committees, thus setting up a situation in which the auditor and the "auditee" are the same person.

The RKS usually only advocates for policy reform from the outside, but recently it has decided to get involved in directly monitoring the operation of the PDS. Since the official "Vigilance Committees" are ineffective, the RKS has developed its own parallel system of informal vigilance committees. For each ration shop, five local women who are clients of the shop come together to monitor and evaluate the quality and prices of the goods being sold. This activity has been facilitated by the RKS citywide campaign to oblige shop owners to publicly display prices as well as samples of the goods on sale. The reports of the informal committees are then put together and presented both to the user community and to the central coordinating bureaucracy of the PDS in the city.

This process was particularly successful during the period immediately following the 1992 riots in Mumbai, after which the city government was very interested in being perceived as being responsive to the poor. In addition, during this period an important reform-minded bureaucrat held the job of Regional Controller of Rationing. Nevertheless, in the end, "this joint civil society–state monitoring initiative was undermined by politics. State politicians were infuriated that their control over the PDS had been undermined by a bureaucrat and a group of CBOs [community-based organizations]. Without state support for its work, the RKS has had to return to more conflict and rather ad hoc tactics (such as city-wide protest action and sustained community pressure on individual shopkeepers) to pressure local shopkeepers to leak smaller amounts to the open market" (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001: 373).

The authors therefore claim that the RKS's experience with "diagonal accountability" has been only a "limited success story." Society-driven pro-accountability initiatives that confront the state and demand inclusion in the basic activities of government can be highly effective. Nevertheless, the RKS experience also shows us that ultimately the success of these movements often also depends on constructing alliances with progressive government officials as well.

**Box 3: The Administrative Procedures Act (APA) in the United States**

One way that governments have sought to institutionalize citizen voices in the central tasks of government is through the passage of administrative procedure acts that require agencies to notify the public, as well justify and defend, any new rules or regulations before putting them into effect. For instance, the United States Administrative Procedures Act (APA) passed in 1946 obliges federal agencies to publish proposed rules and decisions and open them up for “public comment” for at least 30 days before they take effect. During this period individuals and groups may question the legality of the rule or decision based on constitutional principles or on the statute that supposedly empowers the agency to make the rule/decision. Afterwards, the agency must respond to these challenges and justify that its rule is legal, “reasonable,” and constitutionally sound. The rules, decisions, and justifications can then be appealed to Federal Appeals Court and ultimately decided on by the Supreme Court.

As administrative law scholar Jerry Mashaw has written, with the APA we demand that bureaucrats “must not only give reasons, they must give complete ones. We insist that they be authentic by demanding that they be both transparent and contemporaneous. ‘Expertise’ is no longer a protective shield to be worn like a sacred vestment. It is a competence to be demonstrated by cogent reasoning” (Mashaw, 2001: 26). The APA therefore brings societal actors into the most intimate chambers of the state and forces bureaucrats to face up to and justify themselves before society.

The APA has revolutionized bureaucratic rule making and decision making in the United States. Before that congress was the only actor that could oversee the executive branch through extremely costly and ineffective “police-patrol” oversight. Now normal citizens, nonprofit organizations, and corporations are empowered to question and call executive agencies to account. Through the APA Congress has “responded to its own relative impotence by giving outsiders access not only to the bureaucracy but also to courts” (Rose-Ackerman, 1995: 16).

In recent years, many other countries have designed and implement similar laws. Jeeyang Rhee Baum (2002) has documented the process by which APAs were approved in Korea in 1994 and 1997 and Taiwan in 1999. Nuria Cunill (2000) documents how a great number of Latin American countries, including Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, and Uruguay, have also recently passed administrative procedure acts. Nevertheless, many of these acts do not put many powerful legal resources in the hands of citizens and the distance between law and its firm application continues to be large for many of these countries.

Why this is the case is more or less evident. Law making under democratic conditions involves the messy process of legislative bargaining and a full role for political parties. State reformers and multilateral agencies tend to shy away from such arenas, especially when they are dominated by opposing parties or factions. Therefore, reformers usually settle for executive procedures, special agencies, or innovative individual bureaucrats to carry out their participative strategies.

This is a mistake. If dealt with in a creative fashion partisanship can be just as effective as isolation in the search for effective accountability mechanisms (Ackerman, 2004b). It is absolutely crucial to involve political parties and the legislature in order to fully institutionalize participative mechanisms through the law.

In addition to the institutionalization of social accountability mechanisms in the state we can also speak of their institutionalization in society. Good laws, open institutions, and proactive public servants will do

very little if civil society itself is not able to take advantage of these openings. Civil society organizations and groups need to build their capacity to conduct a dialogue with government and hold it to account. This involves including the education and training of civil society as a central element of any social accountability initiative. Civil society groups also ought to band together to assure the long-term continuity and “institutionalization” of social accountability initiatives. With many groups participating in a coordinated fashion the sustenance of the effort is much more likely.

Nevertheless, there is such a thing as “over-institutionalization.” Once participation is legally recognized and socially organized it is also controlled. Institutionalization can work as a double-edged sword. In general, the risk is the creation of an elite class of individuals or civil society organizations who supposedly speak for the people but do not have a social base or legitimacy to claim to represent their views.

The debate with regard to the nature of institutionalized participation is an old one, going back to the discussions with regard to the corporatist form of interest mediation during the 1970s. At that time the important distinction was made between “state corporatism” and “societal corporatism.” The former category includes those states that created new labor and business “corporations” and controlled them from above. The latter category refers to those states in which previously existing labor and business groups negotiated their entrance into the state from a position of power.<sup>7</sup>

A similar distinction can be made with respect to the institutionalization of civic engagement for accountability. When this institutionalization leaves the state with the power to divide, co-opt, and control civil society we have reached the problematic situation of “over-institutionalization,” or “statist institutionalization.” When it empowers previously existing societal actors to make their voices heard and to apply sanctions on misbehaving or ineffective governments we have the much more productive case of what can be called “societal institutionalization.”

Finally, it is important to note that institutionalization itself is not enough to assure compliance. For instance, a recent pilot study conducted by the Open Society Institute (2004) in five countries shows that problems with the implementation of freedom of information laws may be endemic in some countries. The study revealed that on average, only 35 percent of requests for information are fulfilled. Many requests for information were not even accepted or processed to start out with. About 36 percent of requests submitted resulted in tacit or “mute” refusals. This once again points to the importance of the continual vigilance, activism, and institutionalization of civil society itself in order to assure the long-term success of social accountability initiatives.

### **Depth of Involvement**

In addition to being under-institutionalized, most pro-accountability initiatives grounded in civic engagement tend to be “under-involved” or too “externalist.” Consultations and workshops are common and protests and elections are frequent, but it is very difficult to find cases in which societal actors are “invited into the kitchen” to observe step-by-step the process of government planning or “meal preparation.” For instance, transparency laws often only give access to documents that report on concluded processes, not permitting citizens to have access to information about the process that led up to

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<sup>7</sup> These terms come from Schmitter (1974), which he uses to rename the two classic categories of Mihail Manoilescu which are “*corporatisme pur* [Schmitter’s ‘societal corporatism’], in which the legitimacy and functioning of the state were primarily or exclusively dependent on the activity of singular, noncompetitive, hierarchically ordered representative ‘corporations’” (102) and “*corporatisme subordonné* [Schmitter’s ‘state corporatism’], in which similarly structured ‘corporations’ were created by and kept as auxiliary and dependent organs of the state which founded its legitimacy and effective functioning on other bases” (102-103).

the decision or action. Governments usually claim the need to protect personal privacy and national security as their reasons for resisting a policy of total transparency. Although this may often be the case, governments also frequently use such claims only as excuses to hide uncomfortable information from the public eye.

Nevertheless, there is a limit to the extent to which citizens as agents of accountability can be invited into the core of the state. Paraphrasing what Jeff Thindwa argued during a Bank workshop on a previous version of this paper, “How can we expect someone who participated in cooking a dish to have an objective perspective on whether the dish is good or not?” Nuria Cunill has put forth a similar argument. “Co-management is irreconcilable with control. The efficacy of [social control] is directly dependent on the independence and the autonomy that societal actors maintain with respect to state actors” (Cunill, 2000: 9—author’s translation). According to this point of view, pro-accountability initiatives based in civic engagement need to defend the *autonomy* of society.

There is indeed a point at which individual citizens or civil society groups go so far into the state that they end up being consumed by the monster that they were supposed to control. Funding is a crucial issue here. If the individuals and groups who are holding government accountable are funded by that very same government *in a discretionary manner*, this will compromise their ability to exercise their pro-accountability function.

We should not take this argument too far. An organization that receives resources from the government is not necessarily “bought off.” If resources are disbursed transparently and with the use of objective criteria the fear of cooptation is significantly reduced. The numerous existing public universities, public investigation commissions, and government-funded citizen councils demonstrate that public money and public criticism can go hand in hand. In addition, there are numerous ways in which societal actors can be invited inside the state without any money exchanging hands, including legal figures such as “social audits” and “citizen comptrollers.” The General, State, and District councils of Mexico’s Federal Election Institute are excellent examples of how societal actors can enforce accountability from within the state itself (see Box 4).

“Depth of involvement” is frequently related to “Level of Institutionalization.” The closer societal actors get to the core of the state the more their behavior is usually regulated. But this is by no means necessarily the case. Many countries require by law relatively “external” forms of participation like public consultations of large infrastructure projects, while many civil society organizations or movements are able to reach into the very core of the state even without legal permission, as when informal but powerful bargaining tables are set up between guerrilla leaders and government officials. These are therefore two distinct dimensions and each needs to be given its due attention in the design of social accountability mechanisms.

**Box 4: Mexico's Federal Electoral Institute**

Mexico's Federal Electoral Institute's (IFE) principal activities include organizing federal elections, distributing public funds to political parties, monitoring the use of both public and private funds by the parties, checking for media bias in the coverage of political campaigns, putting together and cleaning up the official electoral roll, and running public education campaigns (IFE, 2000a). The IFE actively involves societal actors at five different levels.

First, the IFE is run by an independent, nine member "citizen" General Council that serves as both a special horizontal accountability agency for electoral affairs and as the IFE's principal directive body (Schedler, 1999b). Second, the meetings of the General Council are public. The minutes and decisions are widely publicized, reported on by the media, and are available via the Internet. Third, one representative from each registered political party sits on the General Council. These party representatives can fully participate in the discussions of the General Council and have access to all of the same information as the councilors but do not have the power to vote on initiatives or decisions. Fourth, the IFE commissions that are responsible for organizing and supervising the federal elections at the state level are also "citizen-run" in so far as they are appointed by the General Council without any formal interference from local or state governments (Isunza, 2003).

Fifth, during its most important moment of "service delivery," the organization of the federal elections, the IFE recruits a huge army of citizen volunteers. For instance, during the months leading up to the 2000 elections the IFE trained over 800,000 volunteer citizens to run 113,423 polling sites (Woldenberg, 2001). All of the participants receive two training courses that are designed and implemented by the IFE. In addition, the IFE trains both national and international observers in the basics of electoral law (Pozas, 1996). Finally, each political party is permitted to send one representative to each voting booth on election day. In total, more than one million citizens were mobilized in 2000 to assure the realization of free and fair elections.

Overall, the IFE has been remarkably successful. The lack of significant post-electoral protests and mobilizations in the year 2000 was unprecedented for a presidential election in Mexico. In addition, the fact that there has not been a new electoral reform since 1996 is a testament both to the great breakthrough of this reform and to the legitimacy that the institution continues to enjoy up through the present. Other than the 1933-1942 and 1963-1970 periods, the seven years from 1996-2003 marks the longest period the Mexican political system has gone without an electoral reform since the promulgation of the Mexican constitution of 1917 (Molinar, 1996). Finally, the IFE's recent historic 100 million dollar fine of the Party of the Institutional Revolution (PRI) and its aggressive investigation of the irregular financing of the campaign of sitting president Vicente Fox demonstrates its ability to stand up to even the most powerful interests.

The stimulant for the 1996 reform was the widespread social unrest and demands for democracy that arose out of the economic meltdown of 1994-1995 as well as the Zapatista uprising. In addition, one of the most important influences on this electoral reform was the activism of nonprofit electoral watchdog groups. The leading group during this period was *Alianza Cívica*. For the 1994 elections, this group mobilized over 12 thousand national electoral observers and 400 international observers, carried out its own parallel "quick count" of the electoral results, and published a report on bias in media coverage of the campaigns, as well as a guide for electoral observers and a final evaluation of the election as a whole (Olvera, 2003). This organized civic activity motivated the 1996 reform and many of the activities that the IFE carries out today (for example, the "quick counts," the training of electoral observers, and the analysis of the media) are based in practices that *Alianza Cívica* first initiated (Olvera, 2003).

### **Inclusiveness of Participation**

There is a tendency for participatory pro-accountability mechanisms to only involve a small group of “well behaved” NGOs, middle class professionals, and centrist politicians. The argument, or simply the fear, is usually that the participation of broad-based grassroots movements, uneducated citizens, and leftist politicians will only make things more difficult. The fundamental problem here is one of communication and value sharing. Communication with the “well behaved” groups is much easier because they usually speak the same language, both literally and figuratively, and have often even studied at the same universities as the public officials. Language, class, and cultural barriers make it much more difficult to truly listen to and understand the “raucous” group. Clear proposals are often misinterpreted as destructive criticism and the need to be taken into account is frequently confused with a desire to disrupt. The simplest option is therefore to only open up participation to those one already understands.

This is clearly a mistake. As Eberlei has written, “The circle of participating actors established must be gradually and systematically expanded, in order to broaden the scope of dialogue and make it largely inclusive” (Eberlei, 2001: 15). Such broad-based participation is crucial for three reasons. First, civic engagement for accountability is usually more effective precisely when government officials *don't* know what to expect from civil society. When public officials and society actors form part of the same “epistemic community,” officials can anticipate exactly when, where, and how they will be observed, judged, and held accountable. Some level of predictability is positive in so far as it allows for coherent long-term planning. But too much predictability is dangerous because it may tend towards complicity. Social accountability can be most effective when it keeps government officials on their toes.

Second, “well behaved” civil society groups are usually well behaved because they “trust” government to do a good job. Although some level of social trust in government is necessary for national cohesion, too much trust can be counterproductive. As Catalina Smulovitz has pointed out, it is often the case that “the social trust that results from value-sharing weakens citizens’ oversight and control capacities of what rulers do, and increases, in turn, the chances of opportunistic actions by one of them” (Smulovitz, 2003). “Distrust” is one of the most powerful motivating forces for the vigilant observation of government and it is often the “raucous” groups that score high on this criteria. In the end, “autonomous civil society is [not so] important because citizens share values that sustain the benefits of self-restraint ... [it] is important because it implies the existence of multiple external eyes with interests in the enforcement of law and denunciation of non-obedience” (Smulovitz, 2003).

Third, pro-accountability initiatives that involve a wide range of interests and ideological positions are much more legitimate than those based in a small hand-picked group of professionals. Expanding the circle of participation is clearly a challenge, but it is the only way to achieve broad-based acceptance and ownership in such pro-accountability initiatives. We should be careful not to fall prey to depoliticized or neutral ideas of civil society that see “cooperative” or “moderate” forms of social organization as the only ones that can positively influence the construction of accountability arrangements.

In the end, we should question the commonly accepted idea that the absence of partisanship and political conflict is the only fertile ground for neutrality and accountability. Professionalism and independence are necessary but by no means sufficient to assure the long-term survival of accountability. In order to survive, pro-accountability structures need to be legitimated by society both at their founding moment and during their everyday operations. This requires the multiplication, not the reduction, of “external eyes” and the diversification, not unification, of political and ideological perspectives. Indeed, sometimes the most effective strategy for state reformers might be to stimulate dynamic social movements and social protest and let them take the lead in pressuring and undermining the power of recalcitrant elements of the state. The example of the influence of social movements on the judicial system in Argentina is a case in point (see Box 5).

### **Box 5: Social Movements and the Judicial System in Argentina**

In their analysis of the social response to two extra-judicial killings in Argentina, Enrique Peruzzotti and Catalina Smulovitz have documented how the combination of mobilization, legal action, and media exposure can effectively guarantee that the judicial system operates impartially, even when the perpetrators are well connected or even part of the government apparatus itself (Smulovitz and Peruzzotti, 2003). The authors analyze two important cases. The first case is the murder of a high school student in the province of Catamarca, an area “crossed by circuits of privatized and sultanistic power where vertical electoral mechanisms—although in place—were permeated by extensive political clientelism.” (Smulovitz and Peruzzotti, 2003: 317). In the process of investigating the crime evidence was hidden and tampered with, judges were pressured, scapegoats were sought out, and those who sought justice were libeled in the media. The second case is the shooting and killing by a police patrol of three youths who were drinking on a corner in a working class neighborhood. Such cases are unfortunately typical throughout the developing and developed world. Here, as in most such cases, “the immediate reactions of state agencies were geared toward avoiding accountability by fabricating an armed confrontation that never existed” (Smulovitz and Peruzzotti, 2003: 324).

The authors document how in both cases the affected community organized mass mobilizations, marches, and protests, drawing widespread media attention. This media attention, combined with the pursuit of legal action by the affected parties, helped push other government agencies and social organizations to get involved in the case. In the case of the murdered teenager, the federal legislature eventually got directly involved through the creation of a special investigative commission. In the case of the youths, the protests led to the creation of a series of new national organizations for the prevention and punishment of police brutality. In the end, the culprits were found in both cases and justice was found. But perhaps more importantly the ground was set for the long-term mobilization of civil society in the defense of the rights of citizens against the often corrupt workings of the judicial system.

There are of course dangers with the opposite extreme as well. As we saw in the above discussion of elections, when there is a cacophony of voices it is extremely difficult to perceive clear accountability signals. Participation needs to be organized and structured in order for the message from society to government to be clear. Often the easiest way to do this is by simply limiting participation to a specific group of individuals or groups. The better path is to coordinate and structure participation in such a way so that a diverse set of actors are able to express their points of view in an orderly and systematic manner, as with Community Scorecards in Malawi (see Box 9 below) and Porto Alegre’s Participatory Budget (World Bank, 2003b). All of this does not mean that the more limited participation schemes such as citizen councils and NGO surveillance are useless. On the contrary, the expertise and professionalism that such actors bring to the table are invaluable in the process of enforcing government accountability and have been fundamental in the improvement of governance throughout the world. As with the above distinctions, the message here is that the best accountability systems are those that combine *both* types of mechanisms.

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### **Branches of Government**

Social accountability initiatives tend to be directed towards the executive branch. Since the executive manages the vast majority of resources and is one step removed from the democratic process it is most often the central target for pro-accountability reform.

Reforming the executive branch is indeed an important challenge. But, we should not let it blind us with regard to the equally important tasks of reforming the legislative and the judicial branches. Of the three branches of government the judiciary is often the most impenetrable. Since judges deal with highly sensitive material and information it is quite easy for them to hide from the public eye simply by claiming that their work is “confidential” and that they need to protect the right to privacy of the parties involved. Nevertheless, civil society does have an important role to play in holding the judiciary accountable, as in the above example from Argentina (see Box 5) and in the Justice for the Poor Program in Indonesia (See Box 10 below).

Legislatures are the untapped gold mine for the development of innovative new pro-accountability initiatives grounded in civic engagement. In addition to holding legislators accountable through their vote, citizens can also work side by side with legislators to hold the executive and judicial branches accountable. Indeed, given its constant interaction with the public the legislature is one of the more productive locations for citizen participation. Legislatures constantly hold public hearings, conduct consultations, speak with lobbyists, inform the public as to the status of bills, and so forth (see Box 6).

**Box 6: Parliaments in Africa**

A recent study by Joel Barkan, Ladipo Ademolekun, and Yongmei Zhou (2003) on parliaments in Africa demonstrates that a parliament’s capacity to fulfill its oversight and accountability functions depends to a great extent on the nature of its relationship to civil society. The authors point out that one of the central problems with the performance of parliaments in Africa is that citizens do not focus on the “public good” that the legislature provides to all citizens in terms of passing laws and overseeing the executive. Instead, constituents are almost exclusively interested in receiving favors or particularistic benefits from their legislators. “Pork barrel” politics is therefore the norm. This was particularly predominant during the period of one-party rule in Africa when members of the parliament couldn’t have performed their more universal functions even if they had wanted to, but this legacy continues to be very much alive in the present day.

Fortunately, in recent years many new civil society groups have begun to form that have dedicated themselves to pressuring the parliament to comply with its public mandate. As Barkan, et. al. point out, “whereas in the early to mid-1990s, most civil society organizations were concerned mainly with holding ‘free and fair’ elections and improving human rights, by the end of the decade their attention began to shift toward strengthening other institutions to hold the executive accountable. These included the legislature, the judiciary and the press” (Barkan, et. al, 2003: 15). Specifically, these groups have started to organize training workshops for members of parliament and to directly lobby the parliament to fulfill its mandate. The emergence of such actors has started to push parliament in the right direction. The strengthening of the relationship between such groups in civil society and parliament is a crucial way in which societal actors can participate in strengthening government accountability.

As Walter Eberlei and Heike Henn (2003) argue in their own study of parliaments in Sub-Saharan Africa, “while parliaments have democratic legitimacy and constitutional rights to make and affect policy, civil society actors are extensively (if not always) rooted in the social movements in the country, and have specialist knowledge of issues relevant to poverty which parliamentarians generally do not have. A potentially promising scenario in many countries would thus be close cooperation between parliaments and civil societies vis-à-vis the executives” (Eberlei and Henn, 2003: 47).

In the United States, citizen groups are very much aware of the power of the legislature and of the possibility to influence it. Capitol Hill is full of eager lobbyists pushing their agendas. In poor countries

this practice is much less developed. Funding agencies are very hesitant to finance “advocacy” work and legislatures have typically taken second stage to the executive in terms of power and influence. In addition, it is usually assumed that political parties are the appropriate channel to pressure, influence, or work with legislators, not civil society groups. Nevertheless, legislatures are becoming more important in the developing world and have started to extend their communication with civil society.

Social accountability can have an important role in each of the three branches of government. Pro-accountability reformers should always keep their eyes open to possible missed opportunities in other branches of government. It is particularly important to work with legislatures, as their close interaction with the public makes them privileged places for the development of innovative society driven pro-accountability initiatives.

**Dimensions and Combinations**

Table 1 below summarizes the various distinctions outlined above. The first five distinctions can be represented as continua between polar extremes, while the last one can be divided into three categories. Typically, social accountability initiatives are heavily weighed toward the left hand side of the table. They tend to emphasize the punishment of executive officials for breaking the rules and involve a small group of “well behaved” societal actors in under-institutionalized and externalist practices such as consultations and workshops. The central challenge is to move along each continuum towards a more healthy balance within each one of the dimensions.

**Table 1: Six Dimensions of Social Accountability**

<b>Incentive Structure</b>	<b>Punishments</b> ←————→	<b>Rewards</b>	
<b>Accountability for What?</b>	<b>Rule Following</b> ←————→	<b>Performance</b>	
<b>Institutionalization</b>	<b>Low</b> ←————→	<b>High</b>	
<b>Involvement</b>	<b>External</b> ←————→	<b>Internal</b>	
<b>Inclusiveness</b>	<b>Elitist</b> ←————→	<b>Inclusive</b>	
<b>Branches of Government</b>	<b>Executive</b>	<b>Judicial</b>	<b>Legislative</b>

The middle point is not necessarily always the best for all dimensions at all times. Extremes are sometimes the best solution. For example, mechanisms like participatory budgeting fall on the extreme right hand side of the table because they are highly institutionalized, focused on results, involve citizens in the core tasks of government, and involve sharing the legislature’s “power of the purse.” Depending on the context and the political will, such ambitious strategies are often the most successful.

There are multiple ways in which an individual social accountability mechanism can combine the elements of the various dimensions. For instance, a mechanism like scorecards involves an eclectic mix

since it is focused on performance and rewards but is externalist and usually designed and run by highly professional NGOs. A mechanism like an Administrative Procedure Act involves a different combination since it is highly institutionalized but focuses on rule following.

In the end, the goal is to construct a healthy balance within the overall “accountability system” in a particular location. Even though individual mechanisms might fall on one extreme or the other, these can be balanced out by other mechanisms that complement for the other’s weak spots. For instance, a mechanism like an ombudsman would be a perfect complement to citizen scorecards since ombudsmen fall on the opposite side of almost every dimension, orienting their activities towards punishments for breaking the rules from a highly institutionalized position. The ideal mix of mechanisms will depend on the other elements of the “accountability system” as a whole as well as on the social and political context of the location where the initiatives are being implemented. This is the topic of the following section.

## 5. Practical Lessons and Challenges

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Up to this point we have discussed the concept of accountability, presented four general categories of pro-accountability reform, and explored six different dimensions that can be used to define and evaluate social accountability initiatives in particular. We have also given various specific examples of social accountability mechanisms, including the Bangalore Scorecard, the Administrative Procedures Act in the United States, the Federal Electoral Institute in Mexico, the *Rationing Kruti Samiti* (RKS) in India, and the impact of social movements on the justice system in Argentina. Nevertheless, the question remains as to how such initiatives can be strengthened and put more purposefully to the task in the context of policy reforms and programs in developing countries. Also, how can development partners, in particular the World Bank, promote social accountability initiatives from the outside through their policy dialogue and support to development operations?

A conceptual paper like this one can only begin to suggest possible directions to answer these questions. In this section we first take up two program areas particularly suited for the integration of social accountability mechanisms: *Public Sector Reform* and *Decentralization*. Each program area has specific strengths and weaknesses as well as more and less effective entry points from a social accountability perspective. We then conclude with a more general exploration of some key challenges and lessons which should be taken into account when planning and implementing social accountability initiatives.

### Public Sector Reform

The typical public sector reform agenda is focused on what we have called Weberian reform (civil service reform, improvement of internal oversight, and so forth) and Marketization (privatization of service delivery, performance contracts, and so forth). Recently there has also been a worldwide push towards the creation of new Independent Pro-Accountability Agencies. Although the area of Social Accountability is recognized as a crucial element in the equation by actors such as the World Bank (World Bank, 2000: 22), it remains relatively unexploited.

Public sector reform programs and projects require focus on both “rule-based” and “performance-based” accountability. It is just as important to assure that public servants “deliver the goods” as it is to guarantee that they follow legal procedures. It is also key to maintain a balance between negative and positive sanctions. Each side of the coin has its specific strengths and weaknesses and works best when put together in complementary fashion.

The use of Citizen Report Cards has recently become popular in the area of public sector reform. Report cards are extremely appealing in so far as they are grounded in a positive-sum, rewards-based understanding of accountability. Nevertheless, for this very same reason they often lack the “teeth” necessary to discipline misbehaving public officials. They are also rarely fully institutionalized or inclusive.

In general, the two central problems with social accountability initiatives in the area of public sector tend to be lack of both institutionalization and inclusiveness. The central reason for this is power. Central executive agencies have accumulated a great deal of power. They have been endowed with the management of national policy in a specific area of government and see both widespread participation and institutionalization of social accountability initiatives as a threat to their authority. They therefore very much prefer mechanisms like scorecards, public consultations, or advisory committees that don't infringe on their authority.

Such mechanisms are clearly a step in the right direction, but they should be complemented by other initiatives, which are more institutionalized and grounded in broad-based participation in order for the social accountability system as a whole to flourish. For instance, in Peru the World Bank has supported a national “System of Social Accountability,” which brings together both top-down and bottom-up reforms in an integrated pro-accountability initiative (see Box 7).

### Box 7: Peru's Emerging System of Social Accountability

After the fall of the Fujimori government in September 2000 Peruvian society was thirsty for both greater accountability and expanded democracy. The corruption scandals that brought down the president left the population with a profound distrust of government, and Fujimori's heavy-handed style of rule had limited the democratization of the Peruvian state. It was therefore natural for Paniagua's transition government, and Toledo's government afterwards, to emphasize accountability and citizen participation in their attempt to reconstruct government legitimacy.

One of the most important initiatives taken during the transition period in 2001 was the creation of *Mesas de Concertación para la Lucha Contra la Pobreza (MCLCP)*. These "Round Tables for Attacking Poverty" brought together government officials with representatives of civil society to design social policies to combat poverty. The objective of the *Mesas* was to "institutionalize the participation of civil society in the design, decision-making and control of poverty-related programs" (World Bank, 2001: 17). Half of the Executive Committee of the MCLCP consisted of civil society representatives and a central element of the *Carta Social* that emerged from the discussions was the active participation of civil society organizations in the planning and monitoring of local development programs (Felicio and Abraham, 2004: 1). Beginning in 2001, the government also launched a participatory budget experiment in Peru's newly established regions which led to wide-ranging public discussions about the priorities for public investment. As a result, 22 out of the 24 regions formulated "concerted plans" and participatory budgets for 2003. Indeed, "40 percent of the regions completed participatory budgets with support from all of the public regional administrations, all mayors, and the principal civil society organizations" (Felicio and Abraham, 2004: 2).

Other initiatives include the strengthening of community participation in the management of local health clinics through the expansion of the *Comunidades Locales de Administración de Servicios de Salud (CLAS)*. One of the benchmarks for the first stage of the Programmatic Social Reform Loan that the Bank extended to Peru beginning in 2001 was the expansion of the proportion of the public primary clinics under the CLAS arrangement from 15 to 20 percent (World Bank, 2001: 14). In addition, under this loan a "Task Force" was created between the Ministry of Finance and the national Ombudsman to "recommend measures for building the capacity of beneficiaries/grass roots organizations to utilize proactively budget information that will be increasingly available to the general public" (World Bank, 2001: 18). Finally, the Ministry of Education has begun to open itself up more to public participation. On January 13, 2001 the ministry launched a new *Comisión para un Acuerdo Nacional por la Educación* ("Commission for a National Consensus on Education"), which includes representatives from civil society, academia, the teachers' union, and industry.

These "bottom-up" initiatives have been joined with other equally important "top-down" initiatives to form an emerging "system of social accountability" in Peru. For instance, the Ministry of Finance has updated its "Integrated Financial Management System" to include budget information on all three levels of government and made its Internet site much more user friendly and easily accessible by civil society organizations. Indeed, facilitating public access to this information was an important benchmark for the first stage of the World Bank loan and a "trigger" for the second stage of the loan. As the World Bank states, this "information and data will help beneficiaries, NGOs, civil society and others to exercise social control over social programs by allowing them to verify whether programs are actually spending resources in those areas where they claim to be, whether geographic targeting is appropriate, and whether there appears to be any politically-motivated use of social expenditures" (World Bank, 2001:17). Finally, the National Statistics and Information Institute (INEI) was granted greater autonomy and strength and questions regarding public perceptions about government transparency have been included in the National Household Survey applied throughout the country.

Such integrated strategies are the most effective because they strengthen accountability from multiple

locations at once, creating the conditions for a virtuous self-sustaining cycle. On the one hand, the improved management and transparency of financial data permits civil society groups to better monitor the use of public funds. On the other hand, the organization of participative budgets at the national level motivates the population to get involved in monitoring the use of the funds approved.

There are many other possibilities for mixing and matching strategies. For instance, the approval of an administrative procedures act, a transparency law, or a law that requires the publication of sensitive data is often a good entry point, but rarely are such laws enough to stimulate the participation of civil society on their own. They should be complemented by the training of civil society leaders and organizations to use the new laws. For instance, even the effectiveness of the Toxics Release Inventory in the United States depends on the active stimulation of societal participation (see Box 8). The same is true for cases like the Porto Alegre Participatory Budget, Police, and School Councils in Chicago and decentralization in Mexico (Ackerman, 2004b). In general, the government can usually only get out of society as much as it puts into it. In addition to opening up new spaces for participation, the government should actively recruit and train new actors in civil society. Although it is important to work with groups that are already organized, it is equally crucial to reach out to the unorganized majority and to show them that their participation matters as well.

### **Decentralization**

Throughout the world there is an increasing trend towards the decentralization of government. The objective of decentralization programs is usually to improve resource allocation and service provision by bringing decision makers and service providers closer to the citizens and service users. Decentralization is supposed to encourage government responsiveness, citizen participation and, in the end, greater accountability. However, research has shown that decentralization alone does not automatically facilitate the increased participation of civil society or an improvement in the accountability of government. For instance, in their conclusion to a major study on the topic, Richard Crook and James Manor conclude that “it is clear, both from the findings presented in this book and from the general literature, that even the most appropriately designed institutions for decentralization cannot work independently of or even against contradictory forces coming from the social and political structures within which they are embedded” (Crook and Manor, 1998: 302).

Although devolution and decentralization are important because they bring government closer to the people, if carried out blindly they tend to reinforce inequalities both within the newly “autonomous” local units as well as between them. Local power holders are allowed to run free, and underprivileged localities are abandoned to their own devices. Decentralization is only productive if it is accompanied by proactive efforts to involve citizens and stimulate pro-accountability processes.

**Box 8: Toxics Release Inventory in the United States**

The Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) in the United States is essentially only a pollution accounting system. Developed by the government in 1986 in a top-down fashion in order to help community planning and in the aftermath of the Bhopal chemical disaster, the TRI requires manufacturing firms to report their annual emissions of 651 toxic chemicals to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This information is reported by the firms themselves with very little follow up by the EPA (only about 3 percent of firms are inspected each year) and then made widely available via print and Internet media by the government. In total, the government only invests US\$23 million in the TRI each year, much less than the tens of billions spent under the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts.

The TRI has been incredibly successful. Between 1988 and 1995 total releases and transfers of 330 of the chemicals on the TRI list decreased by over 45 percent (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1995). This means that roughly 1.3 billion pounds less of toxic chemicals were emitted in 1995 than in 1988 (Fung and O'Rourke, 1998: 6). These numbers compare quite favorably to other EPA activities.

According to Fung and O'Rourke, the TRI database works both directly and indirectly to reduce pollution through the participation of civil society. It functions directly by generating a great deal of negative publicity and public pressure against those corporations that are the worst in their class. This creates immediate problems in terms of operations and sales, and can also seriously affect stock-prices as conscientious investors pull out their support and more pragmatic ones follow.

It also functions indirectly by inspiring fear in all firms that are not at the bottom of the list. It is clearly in the interests of managers to invest relatively small amounts of money in making sure that they are not the worst polluters rather than spending huge amounts to defend themselves against a public relations nightmare. Since this is true for all corporations, the tendency is for emissions to go down across the board. As a result, the overall level of "worst performance" will improve, leading to a situation in which the pressure only increases on all corporations to even further improve their levels of pollution in order not to be caught at the end of the list. This creates a seemingly endless virtuous cycle of environmental improvement.

There is still much more that needs to be done. In spite of the success of the society-driven aspect of the TRI, the government still needs to clamp down more on the reporting requirements and should set clearer minimum standards. In addition, the government could also do much more to directly enable the participation of social actors in holding corporations accountable for their toxic emissions. For instance, Fung and O'Rourke propose that the EPA should consider setting up "Offices of Community Assistance" that "supply technical support to citizen groups that must live with highly polluting facilities" (Fung and O'Rourke, 1998: 28) and supporting "Community Based Organizations or other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to run community environmental assistance programs" (Fung and O'Rourke, 1998: 28).

Indeed, as Don Sherman Grant has recently argued, even the present day effectiveness of the TRI depends a great deal on more proactive state efforts to stimulate societal participation. Sherman Grant conducts a statistical analysis of TRI numbers for states that have implemented the "right-to-sue" provision of the 1986 Superfund Act and those that have dedicated significant funding to "right-to-know" programs. He concludes that when states are actively engaged in empowering societal actors the success of society-driven environmental regulation is much higher.

Fortunately, at the local level it is usually easier to stimulate community participation. In addition, change at this level can often appear less threatening to national powerbrokers, thereby reducing resistance to citizen participation by the regime in power. There are a great number of successful examples of local social accountability initiatives. For instance, the Malawi community scorecard methodology is an important step beyond the Bangalore Report Card. First, while citizen report cards are run by professional NGOs and consulting firms, community scorecards are designed and applied by the service providers and service users. Second, while citizen report cards are oriented principally towards providing and disseminating information on public opinion, the central objective of community score cards is to make decisions and develop action plans. Third, while citizen report cards are most effective in relatively macro settings like large cities, the best terrain for the application of community scorecards is the community level. (see Box 9).

**Box 9: Community Scorecard in Malawi**

The community scorecard methodology was first developed in Malawi by CARE International through its Local Initiatives for Health (LIFH) project in 2002. In Malawi there is a long history of deficient provision of health care services to the poor. The central objective of the project is to improve the provision of health services to the rural poor through the empowerment of the user community.

The model applied in Malawi includes four basic elements (World Bank, 2004c). First, facilitators organize community meetings with villages surrounding the specific health center to be evaluated. At these meetings the participants are asked to talk about their health problems, their access and use of health services, and their opinions of the health center under evaluation. The facilitator then works to help the participants design a list of indicators that can be used to evaluate the health center. Finally, the participants are asked to rank the performance of the health center along each one of the indicators.

Second, the staff at the health clinic goes through a similar process. They are asked to discuss the present situation at the clinic, develop a series of indicators, and rank their performance along these indicators. Third, an “interface meeting” is organized where community members and clinic staff present their respective scorecards, compare the outcomes, and try to work together to design solutions to the common problems identified. Fourth, the action plans need to be implemented and followed up.

There is evidence that there was significant improvement in the service of the health center between the two interface meetings that took place in Malawi and that most of this improvement can be attributed to the implementation of the community scorecard. Almost all of the indicators received higher scores in the second scorecard and there was quite significant improvement, particularly in the areas of “respect for patients,” “listening to patients’ problems,” “honest and transparent staff,” “giving priority to serious cases,” “no discrimination in providing supplementary nutrition,” and “no preferential treatment” (Shah, 2003).

The World Bank is currently exploring support to the Justice for the Poor initiative in Indonesia, another example of an effective decentralized approach to improving accountability that is grounded in community participation. This project is based in the conviction that top-down institutional reforms to the justice system are not enough. The “demand side” for justice also needs to be strengthened at the local level. Individuals, communities, and civil society at large need to be empowered both to use the judicial system to resolve their disputes and to oversee the judicial system to assure that it functions well.

In addition, the initiative looks beyond the formal judicial system to explore how “informal” justice institutions work. These other institutions are “informal” in so far as they are places where disputes are resolved outside of the law. They are often quite structured and effective at reaching definitive solutions to problems. Examples include the local village governments (including both the village head and the village parliament), semi-official forums set up by development projects (for example the public hearings used by the Bank funded KDP project), and the more traditional *adat* institutions (see Box 10).

**Box 10: Justice for the Poor Initiative in Indonesia**

As in many places in the world both North and South, the Indonesian people have learned to distrust judges, prosecutors, and the police. These figures are thought of as working either in their own personal interests or in the interests of the powerful, instead of for justice or the public interest. As one village leader expressed in an interview with World Bank staff, “our legal system is like a spider’s web; if it’s a little insect that flies past it will be caught, but if it’s a bird that comes along, it will just break the web” (Village leader, World Bank, 2004d: 8).

The proposed program therefore takes a multidimensional perspective on the situation of access to justice in Indonesia. Its central purpose is “to develop a sub-national justice reform and dispute-resolution strategy to improve poor people’s access to justice institutions (formal and informal) and the likelihood of a just outcome from them” (World Bank, 2004d: 3). The focus is on “the social institutions that underlie a society of law” (World Bank, 2004e: 1) instead of on the technical aspects of judicial reform.

The central conclusion of the initiative’s first major study is that the mobilization of civil society is the most important factor that determines whether disputes are resolved in an effective fashion. This goes for both informal and formal dispute resolution mechanisms. “The crux of the findings was that although power and institutional history still largely shaped how village communities handled disputes, how justice institutions responded and how cases were resolved, community mobilization and external interventions were able in some circumstances to break the institutional impasse and enable poor communities to defend their interests successfully” (World Bank, 2004d: 58).

Power and empowerment are at the center of this study. Cases are only resolved successfully when power imbalances are explicitly challenged through the use of extra-institutional mobilization. For instance, it is not enough to simply provide technical legal aid for communities or individuals looking to use the legal system. The most effective legal aid is that which is conceptualized as part of a “broader community advocacy effort.” “Legal empowerment efforts should target concrete cases and use them as opportunities for integrated activities: providing legal assistance, mobilizing socially and fostering links to civil society institutions to monitor the legal system” (World Bank, 2004d: 68).

Other examples abound. For instance, Porto Alegre’s Participatory Budget is now very well known in international circles (World Bank, 2003b). The important common factor across these different initiatives is that they successfully motivate the widespread participation of society and channel this energy towards the productive resolution of problems at the local level.

The difficulty in the area of decentralization and community driven development is the issue of “scaling up.” This involves the linking together of local initiatives into a national social accountability strategy or, what seems to be even more difficult, the use of similar mechanisms at the national scale. As mentioned

above, the forces working against social accountability are often much more powerful at the national than at the local level. Nevertheless, this may not be reason enough to give up the struggle and abdicate the national arena to those who do not see any value-added through the participation of civil society.

### **General Lessons and Challenges**

The design of an effective pro-accountability system grounded in civic engagement is much more of an art than a science. The pro-accountability entrepreneur needs to have a keen eye for windows of opportunity and a highly developed sensitivity to the country's history, culture, and politics. There is no single recipe that can be applied mechanically at all times and places. Even the key actors change depending on the context. While in some locations grassroots groups and NGOs take the lead while government is resistant to change, in others it is entirely the opposite with government opening up spaces and civil society coming later. In still other cases international agencies are the driving force while NGOs are positioned against change. It is therefore impossible to define an overall strategy for each actor in the equation independent of place. The best we can do is to identify some key issues that need to be resolved by any "pro-accountability entrepreneur" who is interested in strengthening government accountability through civic engagement.

- i. *Entry Points:* Where to begin? What problem area should be tackled first? At what level should it be tackled? For example, should we start by tackling corruption in the national finance ministry or in the inefficient operation of local health clinics, in human rights abuses in indigenous areas, or in the lack of accountability of legislators to their constituents? Civil society groups, government agencies, and international actors all need to take careful stock of the possible options and should choose, preferably in a coordinated manner, one or two areas for strategic intervention.

Here there will most likely be intense debate both within each type of actor and between them. One strategy is to take the path of least resistance, to choose the issue and the particular location which has the fewest problems for all of the actors involved. For instance, the passage of a "sunshine law" that requires all important meetings undertaken by federal government agencies to be public normally runs up against significant resistance from the government. On the other side of the coin, efforts to oversee the objectivity of the media often run up against resistance from civil society itself in defense of the right to freedom of expression. The publication on the Internet of all of the financial data of the government or the tackling of corruption in municipal governments may be more acceptable to all of the actors involved, but even this depends on the context.

Such a consensus-based strategy is by no means the only path to follow. Sometimes the path of least resistance is relatively easy precisely because it does not touch on deep-seated interests linked to corruption, inefficiency, and a lack of accountability. When civil society groups are faced with a highly closed authoritarian regime which refuses to open itself up to civil society, often the best strategy is to confront the government by demanding entrance into sensitive areas like tax collection or regulatory policy. If civil society is successful in this initiative this may empower groups to request more information and give them the legitimacy to gain much more mass support from society. Here international actors that work through governments, like the World Bank, are crucial actors in so far as they can encourage positive responses by the government to the demands of civil society.

Regardless of whether there is consensus or disagreement, each actor interested in implementing social accountability mechanisms should survey the field far and wide to choose topics and locations with significant resonance in society. For instance, it will do no good to set up a citizen watchdog of the communications ministry if an extremely small percentage of the population has telephone service. In this case it would probably be much more productive to look at the health ministry or the education ministry. One way for any actor to discover what topics have sufficient resonance to merit the development of a formal social accountability initiative is to analyze political campaigns. What are the major accountability issues which have found their way into the campaigns of politicians? Which messages appear to be the most appealing to the citizens? For instance, do people seem to be more worried about the fact that they have to pay bribes to receive basic public services like garbage collection, police protection, and potable water, or are they more concerned about the high level political corruption linked to the recent privatization of the national telephone company?

Public opinion surveys can also be an interesting barometer of the feeling of the public with regard to these issues. Transparency International has now expanded its reach to dozens of countries and carries out such surveys regularly. Public protests are another good indicator of existing demands for more accountable government. Have there been any recent protests with regard to the violation of the human rights of journalists, workers, or youth? Have “autonomous” communities or armed resistance sprung up in any areas in response to corrupt and irresponsible regional governors?

- ii. *State-Society Synergy*: Who takes the lead? Social consciousness and action are the essential elements for all social accountability initiatives and such projects usually originate in civil society. Nevertheless, the most successful experiences are those in which they are also fully taken up by and supported by the state as well as international actors. Indeed, in many successful experiences the state or international agencies are the ones who first take the initiative and place social accountability on the agenda, as with the oversight of funds for rural municipalities in Mexico (Fox and Aranda, 1996).

The best strategy is usually to balance the leadership of civil society and the state. If the initiative is viewed as a civil society project it will most likely create strong resistance within government as they feel their authority is being questioned. Societal actors should therefore look for ways to gain the confidence of government. If it is viewed as a government project it will be difficult for it to find sufficient civil society participation as groups will be afraid of being co-opted or otherwise controlled. Government actors should therefore look to open themselves up to societal participation as much and as soon as possible in the process of developing social accountability initiatives. Here international actors can play an important role in helping assure the balance by pushing or nudging government to respond positively to civil society or encouraging government to hand over some control over the project to civil society.

Sometimes such consensus-based strategies are simply not possible. Confrontational action by civil society can also be highly successful in poking holes in government and establishing effective social accountability relationships.

- iii. *Finding the Right Mix of Pro-Accountability Mechanisms*

The above discussion in Sections 2 and 3 of the various different categories and distinctions is helpful in understanding pro-accountability initiatives in general and social accountability initiatives in particular. The implementation of social accountability initiatives will be particularly appealing in countries and in program areas where there is either resistance to the other three categories of reform (Weberian Reform, Marketization, Independent Agencies) or a history of bad experiences with them. For instance, in the case of a country or a ministry with an extremely hierarchical organization and a recent negative experience with market-based reform, the implementation of a social accountability mechanism is probably the ideal path towards good government. Social accountability can also be used effectively as a complementary strategy to the other three. Independent agencies tend to function better when they have a solid footing in civil society and civil society mechanisms are more effective when they trigger internal government oversight mechanisms.

Within the area of social accountability initiatives, there is a broad diversity of practices and approaches. In general, the objective is for the overall “accountability system” to be in balance along each of the six dimensions included in Table 1. Therefore, the best social accountability initiatives to implement in a particular context will be those that help bring the system to a balance. This means that the most effective mechanisms will be those that go against the grain of reigning pro-accountability practices. If there is a general outlook of suspicion, oversight, and punishment for public servants, performance-based social accountability mechanisms like a score card or a report card might be the perfect addition. If there is a corporatist regime that has “over-institutionalized” societal participation, it probably doesn’t make sense to start with the promulgation of a “Citizen Participation Law,” but to move on more informal terrain, perhaps with the media. If societal participation tends to be elitist and highly dependent on professional NGOs, the best strategy is most likely to involve grassroots organizations directly in the task of oversight.

*iv. Capacity Building*

Social accountability means change and innovation. It means shaking up the old form of state-society relations and both societal and government actors are often not prepared to fulfill their new roles. Most government officials have been accustomed to a closed bureaucratic culture and see societal participation as a threat to their authority. Common citizens frequently do not have enough knowledge or organization to take advantage of the openings provided to them in a productive manner.

As a result, a crucial element of any social accountability initiative is capacity building for both government and society. Government officials need to be trained to work with society and societal actors to work with government. Too often this element is forgotten in the design of social accountability initiatives. It is somehow expected that with the design of the right tool things will magically come into place.

This is a suggestive list of some of the most important issues that need to be taken into account by all actors when putting together new social accountability initiatives or looking to strengthen old ones. A more detailed and exhaustive list should be constructed out of a close analysis of existing practices and, perhaps even more importantly, the *history* of the emergence of these practices. All that this Conceptual paper can do is try to frame some of the most important issues that should be taken into account in this effort.

## 6. Conclusion

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Transparency and information are not enough. Opening up the dark chambers of the state to the eyes of the public is a major move forward, but it is only a first step. Governments cannot expect information provision to single-handedly and spontaneously generate positive feedback loops between state and society. Governments need to be encouraged to directly stimulate the participation of society and to institutionalize mechanisms of state-society relations.

Poor people are exceptionally willing and able to work with government in constructive ways once they perceive that their participation can make a difference. In addition, effective societal participation is by no means limited to the provision of basic services. The poor care about much more than simple survival and local issues. It is a grave mistake to think that the poor are incapable of mobilizing themselves in the pursuit of larger social goals.

This paper has argued that the active involvement of civil society and the strengthening of the state apparatus are not mutually exclusive or even contradictory initiatives. If institutions are properly designed, a virtuous cycle that reinforces both state and society is possible. This is particularly important to emphasize today given the thrust of much of the NPM literature that proposes the devolution of state responsibilities to social actors via the market.

In addition, this paper questions those strands of the “old” public management literature that emphasize the insulation of bureaucracy from societal actors. As Robert Kaufman has recently argued,

The implication of accountability reform is different, however, when it refers to the establishment of popular assemblies and other forms of direct grassroots participation in administrative decisions. Although some forms of inclusion, such as partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may enhance capacity, others, such as popular assemblies, may be a step backward in terms of the efficiency, effectiveness, and even the accountability of state organizations (Kaufman, 2003: 284).

We need to challenge this sort of circumscription of societal participation to “well behaved” or “enlightened” actors like NGOs and work for the full inclusion of the citizenry as a whole in the core activities of government.

In the end, one’s definition of accountability will depend on one’s vision of the role of the state. If one conceptualizes the state as fundamentally an obstacle to development, as a predator that must be controlled in its unceasing desire to take over the market and the private sector, one will tend to grasp a more external, ex post, legal, hierarchical vision of government accountability. If one imagines the state as a possible facilitator of development, as a central actor in the provision of public goods and the stimulation of investment and citizen participation, one will lean towards a more ex ante, performance-based, proactive, horizontal concept of accountability.

This paper encourages the latter strategy. Such initiatives are usually more difficult to implement, but they are well worth the effort. By crossing the boundaries between state and society, institutional reformers can unleash invaluable pro-accountability processes which are almost impossible to tap into through less ambitious strategies.

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# Social Accountability Module

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In order to design and support more effective decentralization and local governance reform programs, development practitioners need to understand basic concepts of social accountability (SA): its rationale, benefits, and risks, as well as the relevance of SA to their own country contexts and to the programs they manage and support.

This introductory-level, interactive learning module covers these basic SA elements. It consists of four training sessions and should normally require a total of four to eight hours for delivery. The generic sessions can be adapted to suit different target audiences and time frames.

The module materials include trainer's notes, with step-by-step instructions for leading the four training sessions; handouts and PowerPoint slides to be used with the sessions; and a list of publications and Web sites for further reference.

A series of social development notes on social accountability are being developed. For more information, please contact Aditi Sen at [asen@worldbank.org](mailto:asen@worldbank.org).

For more information on using the module or for additional materials, contact Veronica Nyhan Jones at [vnyhan@worldbank.org](mailto:vnyhan@worldbank.org).



# *Social Accountability Module*

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## *Session 1*



## Session 1: Social Accountability Basics

### Purpose

To help participants understand basic concepts of social accountability (SA), including its rationale, core concepts, benefits, and risks, and the potential relevance of SA to their own country and program contexts.

### Objectives

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

- Provide a working definition of SA
- Explain the rationale for SA
- Describe some of the risks and benefits related to SA in general terms
- Describe the relevance of SA to their own country context and project work.

### Materials

- Slides 1–15
- Handout 1, “Social Accountability Mechanisms: Ten Short Examples”
- Flip chart or white board and markers for trainer.

### Time

1 hour

### Process

1. Explain the purpose and objectives of the session.
2. Review and discuss some of the critical challenges in improving services for poor people, and show Slides 1–3. These provide the rationale for social accountability.

## ***Challenges in improving services for poor people***

### ***World Development Report 2004:***

- **Outcomes are substantially worse for poor people.**
- **Affordable access to services is low, especially for poor people.**
- **Services to poor people are often of low quality:**
  - **Services are often dysfunctional.**
  - **Technical quality of services is often rudimentary.**
  - **Services are not responsive to clients.**
  - **There is little evaluation, little innovation, and stagnant productivity in**

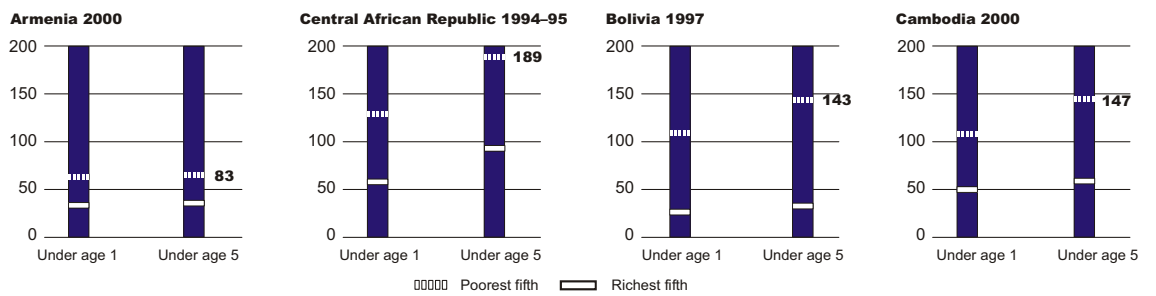
service arrangements.

Slide  
2

**WDR: Outcomes  
are worse for the poor**

**Child mortality is substantially higher in poor households**

**Deaths per 1,000 live births, for poorest and richest quintiles of population**

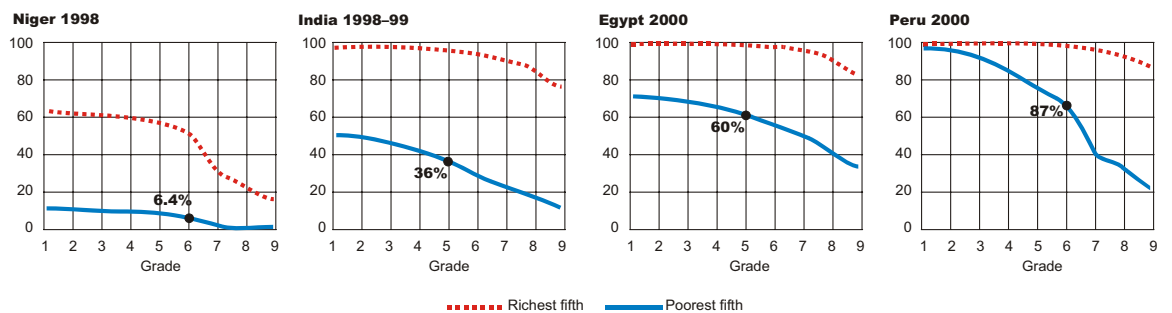


Slide  
3

**WDR: Outcomes  
are worse for poor**

**Poor children are less likely to start school, more likely to drop out**

**Percentage of 15- to 19-year-olds who have completed each grade or higher, for poorest and richest quintiles of population**



Trainer	<p>3. Ask participants to think about what the term “accountability” means to them. What images come to mind when they hear this term? Then show Slide 4.</p> <p>4. Ask participants to think about what the term “social accountability” means to them. What images come to mind when they hear this term? Build a definition of SA using the group’s ideas. Then show Slide 5 and summarize:</p> <p>“Social accountability can be defined as an approach toward building accountability that relies on civic engagement, that is, in which ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability from government.”</p>
Slide 4	<p style="text-align: right;"><b><u>What is accountability?</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Accountability is the obligation of power holders to account for or take responsibility for their actions.</b></li> <li>• <b>Power holders possess political, financial, or other forms of power. They may include public officials, private employers, donors, service providers, traditional leaders, and nongovernmental organizations.</b></li> <li>• <b>A key type of accountability is government or public accountability. It builds on the implicit social compact <i>between citizens and their delegated representatives</i>.</b></li> </ul>
Slide 5	<p style="text-align: right;"><b><u>What is social accountability?</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Social accountability can be defined as an approach toward building accountability that relies on civic engagement, that is, in which ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability from government.</b></li> <li>• <b>SA mechanisms include many actions and tools that citizens, NGOs, and media can use to hold public authorities accountable.</b></li> <li>• <b>SA mechanisms can be initiated and supported by the state, citizens, or both, but very often they are <i>demand-driven and operate from the bottom up</i>.</b></li> </ul>
Trainer	<p>5. Ask participants: “What should government officials and other power holders be held accountable for?” After a few replies, review Slide 6.</p>

<p><b>Slide</b> <b>6</b></p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b><i>What are government officials and other power holders responsible for?</i></b></p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Their conduct—they must obey the law and not abuse their powers.</li><li>• Their performance—they must serve the public interest in an efficient, effective, and fair manner.</li></ul> <p>All states have some types of mechanisms to promote or ensure accountability of public actors.</p>
<p><b>Trainer</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>6. Briefly describe the difference between vertical and horizontal accountability (show Slide 7).</li><li>7. Discuss how SA is linked to and complemented by other key concepts and global trends in governance reform and participatory development (show Slide 8).</li></ul>
<p><b>Slide</b> <b>7</b></p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b><i>Vertical versus horizontal accountability</i></b></p> <hr/> <p><b><i>Vertical accountability:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Requires government officials to report “downward” to the public.</li><li>• Examples: elections, referendums, and a wide variety of SA mechanisms involving pressure from citizens.</li></ul> <p><b><i>Horizontal accountability:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Requires government officials to report “sideways” to other officials and agencies within the state.</li><li>• Examples: independent electoral institutes, corruption control agencies, legislative investigative commissions.</li></ul>

Slide  
8

## ***Key concepts related to governance and social accountability***



Trainer

8. Tell the group: “Now that you have a sense of what SA is, you can probably imagine that it brings with it many potential risks.” Briefly point out some of the risks (show Slide 9), and ask participants to identify some others. The discussion will come back to the subject of risk when the group reviews some SA cases later in the session.

Slide  
9

## ***Risks of social accountability***

SA may:

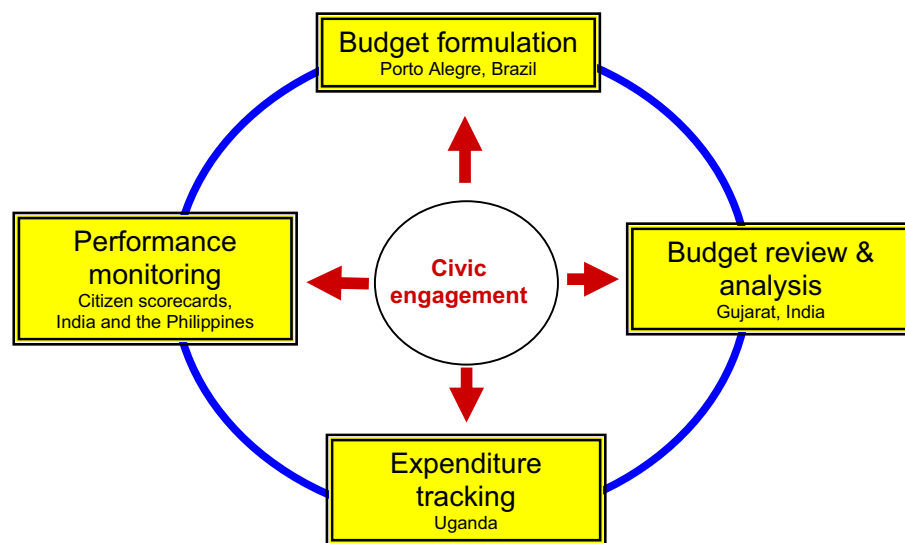
- Not be an effective remedy if a fiscal “straightjacket” is the main cause of inefficiency, corruption, poor service quality, and professional apathy.
- Not be effective when governments do not have the capacity or financial means to sustain improvements in services, although they are responsive.
- Lead to elite capture—local authorities are particularly prone to capture by local elites and interests.
- Increase the social power of those civil society organizations and interests that are better able to participate.
- Lead to disorganization of the bureaucratic apparatus.
- Create tensions between citizens and authorities and trigger reprisals by elected officials.
- Increase the costs of participation.

Trainer

9. Briefly review Slide 10, which provides an overview of the participatory public expenditure management cycle. Show Slides 11–14, which illustrate four examples of social accountability mechanisms and the potential results when SA mechanisms are used effectively.

Slide 10

### ***Participatory public expenditure management cycle***



Slide 11

### ***Example: Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil***

**Results:**

- **Between 1989 and 1996:**
  - **Number of households with access to water services rose from 80% to 98%.**
  - **Number of children in public schools doubled.**
  - **Tax revenue increased by nearly 50% because greater transparency encouraged payment of taxes.**
- **Participatory budgeting has helped to balance earnings and expenditure.**
- **Over 80 Brazilian cities are now following the Porto Alegre model.**

Slide  
12

***Example: Participatory budget review in Gujarat, India***

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**Results:**

- Allocation and release of funds to priority sectors has improved.
- Numeric discrepancies and other errors (around 600 in first year) are picked up by members of the legislature.
- Media has publicized results.
- There is better flow of information among ministries.
- Gujarat model is being replicated in 12 other Indian states.
- National budget is now analyzed by the People's Budget Information and Analysis Service.

Slide  
13

***Example: Public expenditure tracking surveys in Uganda***

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**Results:**

- Primary school enrollment in Uganda rose from 3.6 million students to 6.9 million between 1996 and 2001.
- Share of funds reaching schools increased from 20% in 1995 to 80% in 2001.
- Based on survey findings, central government launched a mass information campaign requiring newspapers and radio to publish data on monthly transfers of grants to districts.
- Primary schools and district authorities are required to post notices on all inflows of funds.
- Schools and parents now have access to information needed to understand and monitor the grant program.

## ***Example: Citizen report cards in Bangalore, India***

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**Slide  
14**

### **Results:**

- Formerly apathetic public agencies now listen and react to citizen concerns.
- Worst-rated agency (Bangalore Development Agency) held public forums, reviewed internal systems for service delivery, and introduced reforms to solve high-priority problems.
- Karnataka Electrical Board formalized periodic dialogues with household consumer associations to redress grievances.
- Public awareness on issues of service quality has substantially increased.
- Report cards have stimulated civil society activism in Bangalore, with many more groups engaged in citizen monitoring.
- Report cards have been replicated in other Indian cities and internationally (e.g., Ukraine, the Philippines, and Washington, DC).

**Trainer**

10. The next exercise gives participants a feel for the variety of social accountability mechanisms by having them classify short examples according to the participatory public expenditure management cycle illustrated in Slide 10. The exercise also has them outline some of the costs and benefits that distinguish the approaches.
11. Distribute Handout 1, “Social Accountability Mechanisms: 10 Short Examples.” Have participants read the handout and ask if they have any questions.

**Handout 1****Social Accountability Mechanisms: Ten Short Examples****1. Women’s Budget Initiative—South Africa**

This civil society initiative analyzes public expenditure patterns in terms of their likely impact on the economic and social conditions of women. The aim is to monitor central government commitments to gender equality by tracking expenditures on gender-sensitive policy measures and public services. The South African initiative replicates a state-based budget analysis initiative in Australia and has inspired similar programs in Canada, Croatia, Jamaica, Mozambique, Russia, Tanzania, and Uganda. The focus is on ex-post budget analysis, as there is limited access to government budgets before they are published.

**2. Participatory Municipal Budgeting—Brazil**

Participatory budgeting is a process through which newly created regional assemblies and participatory budget councils participate in allocating resources and monitoring how they are used. Each council is composed of delegates elected from municipal unions, neighborhood associations, and local government. The councils are responsible for organizing consultation meetings, representing district priorities to the municipal governments, and—in collaboration with government representatives—formulating and monitoring local budgets. Pioneered in Porto Alegre, participatory budgeting is now established in some 80 cities in Brazil. The process is currently being applied to the state level, covering about 500 municipalities.

**3. Civil Service Performance Improvement Program—Ghana**

Ghana’s district assemblies, set up in 1989, provide two key mechanisms for improving the responsiveness and performance of government. The first enhances popular participation in local government through both direct and representative methods. The second seeks to create a more service-conscious and responsive public service through civil service reforms. The reforms involve government agencies in designing their own “performance improvement plans,” which form the basis for performance agreements between staff and management. The plans are developed using self-appraisal and participatory management methods, supplemented by client satisfaction surveys to encourage staff to confront problems and design solutions.

**4. Citizen Report Cards—Mumbai, Bangalore, and Calcutta, India**

Formal, quantitative surveys of client satisfaction with public services have been conducted by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in low-income neighborhoods in several Indian cities. The surveys generate “report cards” on the perceived quality and responsiveness of a range of urban services. They are used to put pressure on elected officials by demonstrating the extent of public dissatisfaction and areas in need of improvement, with hope that this will result in greater responsiveness on the part of public servants responsible for services. The surveys are also used to educate the media, other public interest groups, and citizens.

**5. Citizens' Information Centers—Romania**

As part of general public administration reform in Romania, the government established a national public relations unit and citizens' information centers in eight local councils with the aim of creating a more open, accessible, and "citizen-friendly" public service. The overall results have not been very encouraging on account of continued patronage appointments in government, low pay and staff demoralization, excessive "legalism" in civil service attitudes, and high turnover in top levels of management. However, the centers have greatly improved the transparency of local government and have encouraged citizens to become involved by contacting and petitioning officials.

**6. Law of Popular Participation—Bolivia**

The Law of Popular Participation of 1994 empowers democratically elected municipal councils in Bolivia to design and implement local development policies and programs, with finance transferred from local government. In addition, the law empowers community organizations to participate in the development of five-year municipal plans. These groups are given jurisdiction over a specific territory and assigned rights and duties covering a range of social, infrastructural, productive, and environmental matters. In addition, so-called vigilance committees act as watchdogs on the municipal council and ensure that community priorities are reflected in municipal budgets and expenditures.

**7. Participatory Local Government—The Philippines**

The Local Government Code of 1991 establishes a local development council (LDC) for every province, city, municipality, and *barangay* (village) in the Philippines. The primary responsibility of the LDCs is to draft comprehensive multisector development plans, including a land-use plan for each local government. A least one-fourth of the total membership of the LDCs should come from NGOs, people's organizations, and the private sector. LDCs have become vehicles for civil society organizations to mobilize people in the barangays to demand minimum basic services from government and to prioritize local projects. A national network of NGOs (known as BATMAN) has worked to strengthen planning and interaction between local government and civil society.

**8. Community Radio—Karnataka, India**

In the state of Karnataka, a community radio show initiated by citizens' aims to educate marginalized groups about how local government structures should work, especially in light of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution calling for greater representation of women in local government. With characters and story lines relevant to people at the local level, the show weaves messages about the roles and responsibilities of local government into the plot of each episode. Radio reaches 98 percent of the population in India, including many people who cannot read. The show especially targets women, who can listen while they are at home doing chores and get information on issues such as the role of local forums, women's rights, and service delivery.

### 9. Assembly of the Poor—Thailand

The Assembly of the Poor is a loose farmers' network that organizes mass agitation campaigns and sit-ins to demand responses from government officials on issues affecting poor rural communities in Thailand. Issues of concern include dam displacement and rural people's access and rights to local resources such as land, water, and forests. Campaigns target policy makers continuously at the local level; they reached the national level during a mass mobilization in 1997, when 20,000 farmers staged a sit-in for 99 days. Objective media coverage and leadership that bridges the urban-rural cultural divide are essential elements of this movement's success in raising awareness of rural issues.

### 10. Participatory Poverty Assessment—Uganda

Participatory poverty assessments (PPAs) involve the use of participatory and qualitative research techniques for national-level consultation on local people's perceptions of poverty and their priorities for poverty reduction. The Ugandan PPA is an extensive consultation exercise that has generated nuanced qualitative information about the experience, depth, and breadth of poverty. It has sought to build a national system to integrate quantitative and qualitative poverty monitoring and to inform policies on poverty alleviation. It was initiated by bilateral donors (with some World Bank support) and NGOs, and is managed by Oxfam. The PPA has focused on building government ownership and is housed in the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development.

12. Show Slide 10 again. Ask the participants where each approach fits into the participatory public expenditure management cycle, and why. An example may fit into more than one phase of the cycle. Ask participants to outline the costs and benefits of each approach in the sketches in terms of time frame, investment, public participation, scope, and impact. The questions below are examples.

Based on the information in the sketches, and building on your own practical experience:

- Where would you place this example in the participatory public expenditure management cycle? Remember that a given approach may be relevant to more than one phase of the cycle.
- What are the benefits of this approach?
- What are the disadvantages of this approach?
- Can this approach be implemented quickly, or does it require a longer period of planning and organization?
- How much participation by the public does this approach require to work effectively?
- How much investment of resources (such as time, money, etc.) does this approach require to be successful?
- Does the approach affect a range of issues or is it focused on specific issues?
- Does this approach have a broad impact or a narrow one?

You may have participants discuss all of the sketches or only selected ones. You may also have participants bring their own practical experiences into the discussion.

<b>Trainer</b>	<p>This exercise can be done either in small groups, with the groups discussing written questions, or in plenary, with the instructor asking the questions orally. If the exercise is done in small groups, ask the participants to present highlights of their discussion in plenary.</p> <p>13. In the large group, ask participants to summarize what they see as the main rationale for social accountability. Why is social accountability important? Post the main responses on a flip chart. Some of the points might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowerment of local groups, especially those with less voice</li> <li>• More democratic local governance</li> <li>• More responsive public services</li> <li>• Increased development effectiveness</li> </ul> <p>14. Ask the group to summarize the main benefits and risks of SA. Post the main points on the flip chart in two columns headed “Potential Benefits of SA” and “Potential Risks of SA.” Summarize by reviewing the main points on Slide 15. Link to next session.</p>
<b>Slide 15</b>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b><i>Potential benefits and risks of SA</i></b></p> <hr style="width: 40%; margin-left: auto; margin-right: 0;"/> <p><b><i>Benefits:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved governance</li> <li>• Poverty reduction</li> <li>• Citizen voice and empowerment at the macro level, especially for the poor</li> <li>• Enhanced transparency</li> <li>• Reduced corruption</li> <li>• Strengthened social capital</li> <li>• Strengthened public sector reforms and decentralization.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Risks:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raised citizen expectations</li> <li>• Lack of sustainability or institutionalization</li> <li>• Failure to result in service improvements</li> <li>• Superficial level of citizen involvement</li> <li>• Lack of inclusiveness—may involve only a small group of “well-behaved” NGOs, professionals, and centrist politicians.</li> </ul>

# *Social Accountability Module*

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## *Session 2*

## Session 2: Overview of Social Accountability Mechanisms

### Purpose

To provide an overview of the wide range of methods for promoting social accountability (SA) and for amplifying citizen voice and engagement with public service providers.

### Objectives

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

- Identify different mechanisms for amplifying citizen voice to improve the responsiveness of service providers to the needs of service users, especially the poor.
- Identify some promising SA methods for their own countries.

### Materials

- Slide 16
- OPTIONAL: Handout 13, “Role Play Exercise: Improving Healthcare in Throna”. This exercise will take approximately 45–75 minutes to complete and could be used here or elsewhere during a workshop.
- Handout 2, “Social Accountability in Practice”
- Handouts 3–10, presenting eight short case studies.
- (Note: Depending on time available, you may wish to select a subset of the cases for review. Cases 2, 7, and 8 together provide a mixed review of SA mechanisms. If you select only one case, Case 2 represents a good choice because of the combination of typical SA strengths and weaknesses that it represents.)
- Flip chart or whiteboard and markers for trainer

### Time

1.5 hours–2.5 hours (with role play)

### Process

1. Explain the purpose and objectives of the session.
2. Explain that there are many ways in which ordinary citizens can induce government to provide more responsive services, especially for the poor. Some mechanisms for exacting greater responsiveness and accountability are initiated by citizens and civil society organizations, while others are promoted by collaboration between citizens and local government. The mechanisms also differ in the degree to which citizens actually influence government and can hold government accountable for service improvements. Some provide a one-time-only opportunity for citizens to make their voices heard; others offer more regular representation, especially for poor people. Yet others provide an institutional framework in which citizens can build voice and representation to exact accountability over the long haul.

## Trainer

3. **OPTIONAL Role Play:** Purpose is to establish that social accountability is not necessarily a zero-sum game where some parties win and other parties lose. This exercise also invites participants to bring into the discussion their own experiences and to draw on these as they practice communicating and ideally collaborating with other parties. Divide the participants into groups of approximately 6 and give each participant one of the role play handouts. Then explain: “In this role-play, we’ll explore different rationale and environments for social accountability. Each person in the group will receive a description of a different character involved in healthcare in the fictional town of Santoa in the fictional country of Throna. After reading your description, in your group, you will discuss the healthcare situation as your character.” Explain the directions and ask for any questions. Have group members read their roles and prepare for the discussion (5–10 minutes). Allow 30–45 minutes for the group discussions and 10–20 minutes for groups to present their conclusions and wrap up lessons for application in real life contexts.
4. Explain that during this next activity, “We’ll explore some of these approaches and mechanisms—their similarities and differences, and their relevance and potential with regard to our work in real life.” Distribute Handout 2, “Social Accountability in Practice.” Explain the instructions on the handout.
5. Organize participants into case study groups of 4–8 people. Give each group copies of the case study handout (Handouts 3–10) corresponding to the case it will review. Participants can be arranged in country groups, or if all participants are from the same country, they can be grouped randomly into approximately eight different groups.

## Handout 2

**Handout 2****Social Accountability in Practice**

Poor people’s dissatisfaction with public service institutions relates largely to issues of voice and accountability. Many poor people believe that state institutions—whether delivering services, providing police protection, administering justice, or making political and policy decisions—either are not accountable to anyone or are accountable only to the rich and powerful. For a fuller discussion of poor people’s perceptions of formal institutions, see Narayan et al., *Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

**Step 1.** In your small group, choose one of the eight case studies on social accountability mechanisms. There are many different kinds of SA mechanisms; these represent just a few examples.

**Step 2.** In small groups, discuss your case study by focusing on the following questions:

- What is the mechanism and how does it work?
- Who or what interests initiated and supported it?
- Whose voice was articulated, and by whom?
- What sector or service is addressed, and at what level of government?
- What factors promote success or limit impact?
- To what extent does the mechanism build citizen voice and strengthen connections between citizens and the state?

It may not be possible to answer all of the questions for every example, so you’ll need to extrapolate from your own practical experiences and contexts you are more familiar with.

**Step 3.** Using the questions as an outline, summarize the main points of your discussion in a brief (2 minute) presentation to the large group.

**Handout 3****Case 1: Mexico Electoral Accountability**

The Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) of Mexico organizes the country's federal elections. A 1996 electoral reform gave the IFE autonomy from the executive branch while increasing transparency and fairness in the electoral system. The IFE distributes public funds to the political parties, monitors the use of both public and private funds by the parties, checks for media bias in the coverage of political campaigns, compiles and maintains the official electoral roll, and runs public education campaigns. The IFE actively involves societal actors in two main ways: through its internal administration and through its activities on election day.

First, the IFE is administered by an independent, nine-member citizen-run General Council that serves both as a special horizontal accountability agency for electoral affairs and as the IFE's principal directive body. The meetings of the General Council are public and the minutes and decisions are widely publicized, both by the media and over the Internet. One representative from each registered political party sits on the General Council.

These party representatives can participate in the discussions of the General Council and have access to all of the same information as the councilors, but do not have the power to vote on initiatives or decisions. The IFE commissions that are responsible for organizing and supervising the federal elections at the state level are also "citizen-run" insofar as they are appointed by the General Council without formal interference from local or state governments.

Second, during its most important moment of service delivery—the holding of federal elections—the IFE recruits a huge army of citizen volunteers. For instance, during the months leading up to the 2000 elections, the IFE trained over 800,000 citizens to run 113,423 polling sites. All the participants receive two training courses designed and implemented by the IFE. In addition, the IFE trains both national and international observers in the basics of Mexican electoral law. Finally, each political party is permitted to send representatives to polling places on election day. In total, more than one million citizens were mobilized in 2000 to ensure the realization of free and fair elections.

Overall, the IFE has been remarkably successful. The lack of significant post-electoral protests and mobilizations in 2000 was unprecedented for a presidential election in Mexico. In addition, the fact that there has not been a new electoral reform since 1996 is a testament both to the great breakthrough of this reform and to the legitimacy that IFE continues to enjoy. Except for the 1933–42 and 1963–70 periods, the seven years from 1996 to 2003 constitute the longest period the Mexican political system has gone without an electoral reform since the promulgation of the constitution of 1917. Finally, the IFE's recent historic \$100 million fine leveled against the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and its aggressive investigation of the irregular financing of the campaign of sitting president Vicente Fox demonstrate its ability to stand up to even the most powerful interests.

## Handout 3

The stimulus for the 1996 reform was the widespread social unrest and demands for democracy that arose out of the economic meltdown of 1994–95 as well as the Zapatista uprising. In addition, one of the most important influences on this electoral reform was the activism of nonprofit electoral watchdog groups. The leading group during this period was Alianza Cívica (Civic Alliance). For the 1994 elections, this group mobilized over 12,000 national electoral observers and 400 international observers and carried out its own parallel “quick count” of the electoral results. It published a report on bias in media coverage of the campaigns, a guide for electoral observers, and a final evaluation of the election as a whole. This organized civic activity motivated the 1996 reform, and many of the activities that the IFE carries out today (including the quick counts, the training of electoral observers, and the analysis of media coverage) are based on practices that the Alianza Cívica initiated.

*Source:* Adapted from John Ackerman, “Social Accountability in the Public Sector: A Conceptual Discussion” (Social Development Paper 82, World Bank, Washington, DC, 2005).

## Handout 4

**Handout 4****Case 2: Philippines Local Government Code**

Decentralization and local autonomy have been continuing issues in central-local relations in the Philippines for the last 50 years. Despite constitutional provisions promoting local autonomy, centralism has historically been the main feature of governance. The 1991 Local Government Code seeks to expand the powers and prerogatives of local governments, increase their share of the national income, and expand their sources of local revenue. The code clearly shifts the sharing of power in favor of local government.

The code provides the mandate for people’s participation in local development councils (LDCs). The LDCs assist the local assemblies in setting economic and social development priorities and coordinating development efforts within their territory. The code mandates participation of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in LDCs such as the village development council, the local pre-qualification, bids and awards committee, the local school board, the local health board, and the local peace and order council.

Naga City’s enactment of an empowerment ordinance in 1995 is a success story in the implementation of the Local Government Code. After the code was enacted, the city government found itself unprepared for its new responsibilities in managing and delivering basic services. The city therefore developed an empowerment ordinance to establish the structure for an active partnership between the city government and the people of Naga City.

This ordinance led to the design and implementation of several initiatives involving partnership between local government and civil society. It spells out the norms of accreditation of NGOs and their rights and privileges. Accredited NGOs are deemed eligible for joint ventures with the city government to engage in municipal tasks such as infrastructure, capacity building, and livelihood projects, and other activities that enhance the economic and social well-being of the people.

The ordinance institutionalizes all accredited NGOs under an autonomous council, called the Naga City People's Council. Among the council's powers are to:

- vote and participate in the deliberation, conceptualization, implementation, and evaluation of projects, activities, and programs of the city government;
- propose legislation;
- participate and vote at the committee level of the city legislature; and
- represent the people in the exercise of their constitutional rights to information on matters of public concern and access to official records and documents.

The ordinance mandates sectoral representation in the city legislature from three specific sectors in the city: nonagricultural labor, women, and the urban poor. The representatives of these sectors are to be elected from among the members of accredited NGOs and people's organizations in each sector.

With external capacity-building support, Naga City initiated a series of successful projects in partnership with civil society: the Naga City River Watershed Plan, the Naga City Solid Waste Management Plan, and the City Health Development Plan.

Countrywide, however, the overall record of the LDCs is mixed. In locales where the LDCs do promote active people's participation, both the local governments and the NGOs want to strengthen the design of the LDCs because of several pervasive problems. First, there is too much focus on the selection and accreditation of NGOs and people's organizations, and too little attention to procedures for enabling people to participate effectively. Second, few guidelines exist to assist LDC members in local planning, investment promotion, and prioritization of projects. Third, at the level of capabilities, little or no support exists to help LDC members acquire the skills and expertise needed to fulfill their mandates. Fourth, there are too few resources available to local government units for carrying out investment promotion and project monitoring. Fifth, many NGOs were unfamiliar with procedures for participating in the councils, and government often invited them to meetings without seriously considering their proposals. In a series of consultations commissioned by the Department of Interior and Local Government, a majority of NGO representatives expressed more frustration than satisfaction with the LDCs.

*Sources:* Adapted from UN-HABITAT, Consultative Group on Participatory Local Governance, "Third Submission to the Task Force on the Review, Amendment and Harmonization of the Local Government Act with other Acts of Parliament" (Nairobi, August 2, 2001, [http://www.unchs.org/campaigns/governance/kenya\\_local\\_govt\\_submission.asp](http://www.unchs.org/campaigns/governance/kenya_local_govt_submission.asp)); and World Bank Institute, "Social Accountability Stocktaking Exercise for South and East Asia: Local Development Councils in the Philippines" ([http://siteresources.worldbank.org/CESILPROGRAM/Resources/459660-1108070841342/completed\\_templates.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/CESILPROGRAM/Resources/459660-1108070841342/completed_templates.pdf)).

## Handout 5

### Case 3: Croatia Budget Transparency

One of the central issues in Croatia is the lack of transparency in public sector activities. This undermines the credibility and effectiveness of public authority and contributes to corruption and uneven influence on important public policy decisions.

The Institute of Public Finance (IPF), a local nongovernmental organization, undertakes research in all aspects of public sector economics, including public sector expenditure and revenues, fiscal policy, budget policy, public debt, and the role of the state in the economy. IPF provides independent analysis of important economic issues in order to educate citizens, members of parliament, and government officials on the implications of alternative policies being considered and to improve fiscal transparency and accountability in public sector institutions.

IPF published its first public policy briefing paper, or “newsletter,” in 1999, timing the release with the parliamentary debate on the government’s 1999 budget proposals. At that time the government was also in the midst of a debate on the nation’s fundamental macroeconomic accounting system. The newsletter, entitled “Public Policy Note of the IPF in Connection with the Budget of the Republic of Croatia, 1999,” was published in both English and Croatian. It was sent free of charge to approximately 1,000 people, including the president of the Republic, members of parliament, relevant parliamentary boards, ministries, agencies, public enterprises, and the media. To reach an even broader audience at a low cost, IPF also posted the newsletter on its Web site.

Following the initial publication, IPF published an additional newsletter to address the amendments to the 1999 national budget. Its purpose was not to analyze the soundness of the allocative decisions, but rather to highlight ways that transparency could be increased during execution of the budget.

Encouraged by the positive response to the newsletters, IPF decided to publish additional newsletters on other salient public policy concerns, focusing mostly on budget and taxation issues. For example, in connection with Croatia’s 2000 election that resulted in a much different parliament, government, and president, IPF published a comprehensive newsletter entitled “Economics of the Public Sector: Situation, Problems, and Possible Solutions.” This publication discussed the role of the state, the budget, the public debt, the tax system, the underground economy, and social security issues.

IPF gathers the information it needs for its analysis from officially published data, as well as through direct contacts with administration officials and members of parliament. Personal contacts have proven particularly important when the Ministry of Finance has been unwilling to disclose its budget suggestions before sending them to parliament. Gaining access to that information through other channels has allowed IPF to consistently provide advanced analysis of government’s policy recommendations for the members of parliament.

IPF’s independent review and analysis of the government budget has helped to create greater public awareness about the importance of transparency and accountability in the public sector. Moreover, it has had tremendous educational impact, in large part because the media quotes and comments on the newsletter and the budgetary issues raised. In fact, the level of media coverage is one indicator of IPF’s impact on the policy dialogue surrounding the budget.

## Handout 5

Long after publication of different IPF papers, the media has continued to refer to them in its evaluation of government policy, making statements such as “Government intends to introduce lower tax rates for tourism, although IPF expressly warned against such measures.” News reports sometimes quote entire sections of the IPF newsletters.

Measuring the impact of IPF’s work on policy makers is more difficult. While in all likelihood IPF’s role in the debate has helped shape the thinking of many officials, it is impossible to know whether government makes a particular decision because of IPF’s advocacy or in response to some other influence.

IPF’s next goal is to form groups consisting of leading independent economists, lawyers, sociologists, and mathematicians for the permanent assessment of public policy issues. The function of the groups will be to raise public and parliamentary awareness of key public policy issues by providing independent analysis of governmental decision making.

*Source:* Adapted from International Budget Project, “Analyzing and Affecting Policy: Institute of Public Finance, Croatia” (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Washington, DC, 2000).

## Handout 6

**Handout 6****Case 4: Brazil Participatory Budgeting**

As part of its agenda of deepening democracy through “popular administration” of government, the Workers Party (PT) of Brazil has introduced a set of innovations around participatory budgeting. After winning several municipal elections in 1989, including in São Paulo, a city of over 10 million people, the PT began an experiment to engage a wide spectrum of citizens in formulating city budgets. It began in the city of Porto Alegre, and this case stands out as a demonstration of efficient practice in democratic resource management. The Porto Alegre initiative was nominated by the 1996 United Nations Summit on Human Settlements in Istanbul as an exemplary “urban innovation.” Participatory budgeting is now being established in some 80 Brazilian cities.

In Porto Alegre the PT successfully linked the municipal political and legislative structures with consultation and decision-making processes involving several communities in the city. Intra-community assemblies were formed to review investment plans of the previous year, discuss proposals for the next year, and elect people to a delegates’ forum for subsequent deliberations. These assemblies then collected a series of demands from discussions in five broad areas: transportation; education, leisure, and culture; health and social welfare; economic development and taxation; and city organization and urban development.

These demands were subsequently mapped to different city regions and assessed by the municipal executive administration in terms of need (measured by how much access a region has had to a particular service) and population size. The assemblies and the Participatory Budget Council participate in allocating resources and monitoring how they are used. The council is composed of delegates elected from municipal unions, neighborhood associations, and local government. It is responsible for organizing ongoing consultation meetings, representing district priorities to the municipal government, and—in collaboration with government representatives—formulating and monitoring the local budget.

## Handout 6

Porto Alegre has experienced some impressive results that have led many observers to praise the initiative. Between 1989 and 1996, the percentage of households with access to water services rose from 80 to 98 percent, and the percentage of the population served by the municipal sewage system rose from 46 to 85 percent. The number of children enrolled in the public schools doubled. In the poorer neighborhoods, 30 kilometers of roads were paved each year. Because the greater transparency encouraged payment of taxes, revenue increased by nearly 50 percent (budget resources for investment went up from US\$54 million in 1992 to US\$70 million in 1996).

The Porto Alegre experiment also presents a strong example of democratic accountability, equity, and redistributive justice. Citizen participation lends legitimacy to decisions, and objective budgeting helps to ensure fairness in what is otherwise an arbitrary process of translating political decisions into distributed resources. A notable change in the attitudes of technical staff, well versed in matters of budgeting and engineering, appears to be a result of their increasing interaction with ordinary citizens.

In general, the technical staff have changed the way they communicate with the communities and have tried to make themselves understood in simple language—what some have called a jump from “techno-bureaucracy” to “techno-democracy.” Overall, in marked contrast to the protest-based culture of the 1980s, these participatory budget exercises have fostered a more civil and less disruptive form of conflict resolution through dialogue and negotiations.

Some concerns have nonetheless arisen regarding the balance between participation and quality of representation. The municipality’s executive administration has asked for a narrower representative base, for example, while citizens have continued to demand more representatives on the council. Some other problems concern the lack of constitutional recognition for this mayoral initiative, with the municipality sometimes being unable to set the agenda, timing, and debates. A point that has also been raised is that as participation becomes socially institutionalized, common citizens may be replaced by specialized “participatory citizens” as actors in the process.

*Sources:* Adapted from *The World Bank Participation Sourcebook* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2001); and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre: Toward a Redistributive Democracy,” *Politics and Society* 26 (December 1998): 461–510.

## Handout 7

**Handout 7****Case 5: Uganda Public Expenditure Tracking**

In December 1996, soon after a landslide victory, President Yoweri Museveni announced the abolition of primary school fees. Since then there has been a sustained shift in Ugandan expenditures in favor of education, especially for primary schools. Spending on education rose as a share of government expenditures from an average of 20 percent in the three fiscal years preceding the election to an average of 26 percent in the three years following. Total enrollment in primary education skyrocketed from 3.6 million students to 6.9 million between 1996 and 2001.

## Handout 7

Budget allocation alone can be a poor indicator of the quality and quantity of public services. While shifting budgetary resources to priority sectors is a good first step, it is crucial to ascertain where and how the allocated sum is spent.

The 1996 Uganda–World Bank public expenditure tracking surveys (PETS) of local governments and primary schools revealed that only 13 percent of the per-student capitation grants made it to the schools in 1991–95. In 1995, for every dollar spent on nonwage education items by the central government, only about 20 cents reached the schools, with the local government capturing most of the funding. Most poor schools received nothing, and poor students suffered disproportionately.

Case study evidence and other data showed that the school funds were not going to other sectors either. The disbursements were rarely monitored, and most schools and parents had little or no information about their entitlements to the grants. Most funds went to purposes unrelated to education or for private gain, as indicated by numerous news articles about indictment of district education officers after the survey findings went public.

To respond to the problem, the central government began publishing data on monthly transfers of grants to districts in newspapers and broadcasting them on the radio. It required primary schools and district administrations to post notices on all inflows of funds. This promoted accountability by giving schools and parents access to information needed to understand and monitor the grant program.

An evaluation of the information campaign reveals a large improvement. Schools are still not receiving the entire grant, and there are delays. But the capture by interests along the way has been reduced from 80 percent in 1995 to 20 percent in 2001. Related analysis suggests that the information campaign explains two-thirds of the improvement.

With an inexpensive policy action—the provision of mass information—Uganda dramatically reduced the capture of a public program aimed at increasing access to textbooks and other instructional materials. Because poor people were less able than others to claim their entitlement from the district officials before the campaign, they benefited most from it.

*Source:* Adapted from World Bank, *World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 62–63.

## Handout 8

**Handout 8****Case 6: Niger Participatory M&E Systems**

The World Bank–supported Community Action Program (CAP) in Niger relies upon community management of local development microprojects, beginning with an integrated process of community self-assessment. The process serves as a catalyst for community empowerment, operational efficiency, development sustainability, and stakeholder accountability. The basic steps of the process include:

## Handout 8

- Community needs assessment
- Development of a local development plan oriented toward service delivery and/or income generation
- Implementation of microprojects specified in the plan
- Operation and maintenance of microprojects
- Monitoring of microprojects
- Reassessment of the local development plan annually, with necessary adjustments and continued implementation.

The community self-assessment is designed to ensure that the empowerment taking place during the participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process is as broadly based as possible. The community self-assessment process begins with a community-wide discussion (in the village general assembly), triggering community interest in the development process and using the history of the village as a tool for analyzing the rate of local development over time. The second stage of discussions also includes the entire community and focuses more specifically on the community's vision and objectives for local development, while introducing the concept of a community-based monitoring and evaluation system.

Following these open and public discussions, the community selects a monitoring and evaluation committee. Members of this committee ensure ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and learning during each stage of the microproject, based on objectives and processes agreed upon by the community as a whole and in collaboration with the project's overall management committee. Although M&E committee members are the primary individuals involved in participatory monitoring and evaluation, the community as a whole holds the committee accountable to the objectives identified in the local development plan by analyzing progress and adjustment needs.

Based on community-wide discussions of well-being objectives, the M&E committee (or M&E organizers of the village development committee) develops indicators that help track progress against the local development plan. The committee then works with the community to define M&E methods, the division of responsibilities, and the timing of information gathering, with a schedule of community meetings and consultations. This process facilitates the identification of subcommittees, organizations, and individuals who will assume monitoring responsibilities and maintain active involvement in M&E throughout the project. The schedule includes the type of committees involved, the type of consultation or reporting required, and the timing of the meetings, which often coincide with seasonal (agricultural), religious, or other traditional events.

The selected M&E committee is also required to report back to the community during quarterly and annual meetings and during meetings managed by the overall project management committee.

*Source:* Adapted from World Bank, "Niger—Community Action Program Project, Volume 1. Project Appraisal Document" (Report No. 23819-NIR, February 24, 2003).

**Handout 9****Case 7: India Right to Information Act**

The Goa Right to Information Act (GRIA) was passed in 1997. When the chief minister of Goa state announced that his government would introduce right-to-information legislation, Goa's activists and press corps were caught off guard. When the press finally obtained a copy of the bill—ironically, through a leak from sources within the bureaucracy—they discovered a number of draconian provisions that had little to do with increasing accountability. One clause stipulated fines for anyone who used information obtained under the act for “malafide purposes.” Many felt that this clause revealed the government's true intent: intimidation of the press.

In response to these concerns, the Goa Union of Journalists promoted amendments to the law, which civil society mobilized to support. The amendments passed in 1998. The GRIA, as amended, guarantees the right of any citizen to apply in writing for “any information relating to the affairs of state or any local authorities.” Information can be refused only in special cases. “Competent authorities” listed in the act have 30 days to furnish or refuse the information, once the request is received. The law also provides a procedure for adjudicating appeals against requests that have been denied. \

In the first three years after enactment of the law, over 1,000 applications were filed by a wide range of citizens. Individuals have sought information about such matters as potentially illegal construction, clearances given to polluting industries, and business taxes paid by individuals known to be favored by those in government. Only a few civil society organizations have extensively exercised their rights under the law, however, and many of Goa's journalists prefer to use their established channels of disclosure rather than invoke the GRIA.

Some cases of corruption and nepotism have been exposed. One group filed for an audited financial statement of a district cooperative bank, which turned out to document aspects of the bank's mismanagement. As a result, a local politician who controlled the bank lost the election that followed publication of the exposé. In another situation, a federation of “other backward castes” (OBC) used the GRIA to examine the granting of OBC status to a large “forward” caste. The information obtained through the GRIA revealed that a political party rather than the relevant commission had granted the OBC status. As a result, the federation filed an injunction and secured a Supreme Court stay on the decision.

Feedback about the law has been mixed. Despite the growing exercise of the right to information through the GRIA, critics argue that the petitions filed so far “do not yet add up to a concerted campaign against corruption affecting less privileged constituencies.” The GRIA imposes processing and photocopying fees that critics warn may be prohibitive for the most marginalized groups who would benefit most from the release of information. There are also some gray areas in the law, particularly a clause that allows “personal information” in documents to be construed as a barrier to disclosure. This clause has prevented the release of some tax documents of officials suspected of tax evasion. The monitoring of the law is supposed to be undertaken by the State Information Council, which includes representatives from NGOs and the press, but the council is not yet operating effectively.

## Handout 9

The response of government employees to the GRIA has likewise been mixed. Some have complied with the law, disclosing information in response to applications filed. But others have ignored applications and the 30-day time limit for responses. In one case, after the refusal of an application was overturned on appeal, the agency used bureaucratic tactics to deny the citizen the information she sought.

*Source:* Adapted from World Bank Institute, “Social Accountability Stocktaking Exercise for South and East Asia: The Right to Information Act of Goa, India” ([http://siteresources.worldbank.org/CESILPROGRAM/Resources/459660-1108070841342/completed\\_templates.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/CESILPROGRAM/Resources/459660-1108070841342/completed_templates.pdf)).

## Handout 10

**Handout 10****Case 8: Marshall Islands Gender-Sensitive Budgets**

A project team from the Asian Development Bank and the University of South Australia provided technical assistance to the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) to support analysis of the budget and public spending in terms of their impact on gender issues. The project was carried out over 15 months during the 2002–03 budget cycle.

The main objectives of the assistance were to: (a) assist in the design of people-centered budgets and gender-appropriate policies, programs, and institutions based on global good practices; (b) assist the government in collecting disaggregated data on gender; (c) build capacity among senior RMI officials and representatives of women’s groups to support implementation of gender-sensitive public expenditure management; (d) raise awareness of policy issues and how the budget affects women and men; (e) promote transparency and accountability of government policy commitments and budgets in relation to gender; and (f) change policies and budgets to ensure equity and equality of opportunity between men and women, following local priorities.

Assisted by nongovernmental organizations in the society, the Ministry of Finance served as the project coordinator and undertook to realize the objectives above through three steps. The first was to assess the gender impacts of budgets and policies. This involved demystifying the budget and analyzing it in terms of its impact on women and on gender issues. Workshops also dealt with raising awareness of gender issues. The second step was to foster the government’s accountability for the gender equality impacts of its policies. This phase of the project established administrative procedures within the government to guarantee the execution of the project. NGOs received capacity-building support. The third step was to change budgets and policies in light of the gender assessments and accountability.

A steering committee was formed with several officials from the Ministry of Finance, a women’s desk officer from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and a representative from a women’s NGO umbrella group. The steering committee decided to focus on teenage pregnancy, a major gender issue that had caused much community concern. A second workshop was held for government officials on the issues of how their budgets and policies affected matters concerning gender and teenage pregnancy in particular.

<b>Handout 10</b>	<p>The project was making progress during the pilot year when the compact negotiations between the United States and the Marshall Islands broke down. As the RMI budget is heavily dependent on U.S. foreign assistance, this caused the normal budget process to falter. There were other problems as well. The one-year time frame was adequate for the goal of raising awareness, but too short to have an impact on changing the budget itself. Several factors slowed down the momentum of the project, including poor coordination within the Ministry of Finance and cancellation by the Asian Development Bank of an important regional workshop on the pilot project. Finally, the project was undermined by the absence of a transparent system of expenditure management. There was no public document, and funds were misappropriated.</p> <p>The project failed to create a cross-cutting budget to address the problem of teenage pregnancy. Nevertheless, the capacity-building activities did result in some changes in the budget, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs received a reallocation of funds which it earmarked for the teenage pregnancy program.</p> <p><i>Source:</i> Adapted from World Bank Institute, “Social Accountability Stocktaking Exercise for South and East Asia: Integrating a Gender Perspective into Public Expenditure Management in the Republic of the Marshall Islands” (<a href="http://siteresources.worldbank.org/CESILPROGRAM/Resources/459660-1108070841342/completed_templates.pdf">http://siteresources.worldbank.org/CESILPROGRAM/Resources/459660-1108070841342/completed_templates.pdf</a>).</p>
<b>Trainer</b>	<p>6. Show Slide 16 to remind participants of the discussion questions.</p>
<b>Slide 16</b>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b><i>Social accountability mechanisms: Some questions to ask</i></b></p> <hr style="width: 40%; margin-left: auto; margin-right: 0;"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What is the mechanism and how does it work?</b></li> <li>• <b>Who or what interests initiated and supported it?</b></li> <li>• <b>Whose voice was articulated, and by whom?</b></li> <li>• <b>What sector or service is addressed, and at what level of government?</b></li> <li>• <b>What factors promote success or limit impact?</b></li> <li>• <b>To what extent does the mechanism build citizen voice and strengthen connections between citizens and the state?</b></li> </ul>

**Trainer**

7. Allow 40–50 minutes for reading and discussion based on the questions in the handout. Remind participants when they have 10 minutes left and again when there are 5 minutes left that they should be prepared to make their short presentations.
8. Debrief by asking groups to volunteer their responses to the questions on the handout for each of the sample mechanisms they discussed. Start with the first example and proceed with the remaining examples in the same way. Keep the debrief moving quickly, allowing about 2 minutes per example; the discussion should take about 20 minutes in total.
9. Synthesis and summary (5 minutes). Discuss the following questions in the large group:
  - Which of the mechanisms seem to be closest to our definition of SA, and why?
  - What might be some of the common success factors across examples?
  - What might be some of the common pitfalls to avoid?
  - Which mechanism(s) might have particular promise for work in your country or region, and why?
10. Summarize and link to the next session.



# *Social Accountability Module*

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## *Session 3*

<b>Trainer</b>	<p><b>Session 3: Assessing Dimensions of Social Accountability</b></p> <p><b>Purpose</b></p> <p>To deepen participants’ understanding of some selected SA mechanisms, including benefits, risks, and six important dimensions related to successful implementation. To develop skills in assessing SA mechanisms and their feasibility for a specific country context.</p> <p><b>Objectives</b></p> <p>By the end of the session, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify six important dimensions of SA that relate to its successful implementation.</li> <li>• Describe key benefits, risks, and dimensions of several SA mechanisms.</li> <li>• Assess the characteristics and feasibility of a SA mechanism for a given country context.</li> </ul> <p><b>Materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slides 17–18</li> <li>• Handout 11, “Assessing Dimensions of Social Accountability”</li> <li>• Handouts 3–10 again refer to the eight case studies. Decide if you want groups to choose the same or a different case to work on in this section. They will review one or two cases according to the dimensions of SA.</li> <li>• Flip chart and markers for each group</li> </ul> <p><b>Time</b></p> <p>Approximately 1.5 hours, depending on the size of the group</p>
<b>Trainer</b>	<p><b>Process</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain the purpose and objectives of the session. The session involves a brief lecturette and group work.</li> <li>2. Review and explain Slide 17 (critical success factors) and Slide 18 (six dimensions of SA mechanisms). The key point is that we must understand the critical success factors of SA and the key characteristics of different SA mechanisms in order to determine their feasibility in a specific country setting.</li> </ol>

<b>Slide 17</b>	<p><b><u>SA critical success factors</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political context and culture</li> <li>• Access to information</li> <li>• Role of the media</li> <li>• Civil society capacity</li> <li>• State capacity</li> <li>• State-society synergy</li> <li>• Institutionalization</li> </ul>																		
<b>Slide 18</b>	<p><b><u>Assessing SA mechanisms: Six dimensions</u></b></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 5%; text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="width: 30%;">Incentive structure</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Punishments ←————→ Rewards</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">2</td> <td>Accountability</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Rules ←————→ Performance</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">3</td> <td>Institutionalization</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Low ←————→ High</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">4</td> <td>Involvement</td> <td style="text-align: center;">External ←————→ Internal</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">5</td> <td>Inclusiveness</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Elitist ←————→ Inclusive</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">6</td> <td>Branches of government</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Executive                      Judicial                      Legislative</td> </tr> </table>	1	Incentive structure	Punishments ←————→ Rewards	2	Accountability	Rules ←————→ Performance	3	Institutionalization	Low ←————→ High	4	Involvement	External ←————→ Internal	5	Inclusiveness	Elitist ←————→ Inclusive	6	Branches of government	Executive                      Judicial                      Legislative
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6	Branches of government	Executive                      Judicial                      Legislative																	
<b>Trainer</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Explain that we will practice assessing the key characteristics of several SA mechanisms and make an initial estimate of their feasibility for a given country.</li> <li>4. Explain the instructions for the exercise. Give each participant a copy of Handout 11, “Assessing Dimensions of Social Accountability.” You may have the groups look at another case study rather than the one they used in the previous session.</li> <li>5. Have participants return to their case study groups and begin the exercise.</li> </ol>																		

## Handout 11

### Assessing Dimensions of Social Accountability

Social accountability (SA) mechanisms can be characterized in relation to six dimensions: incentive structure, type of accountability, level of institutionalization, depth of involvement, degree of inclusiveness, and orientation to branches of government. Each of these is important for planning and for assessing how feasible and sustainable a particular SA mechanism may be for a particular country and institutional context.

**Step 1. Review the descriptions of the six SA dimensions below.**

<p><b>1. Incentive structure: punishments or rewards?</b></p> <p>To what extent is the accountability mechanism oriented toward rewards or sanctions? Mechanisms relying too heavily on sanctions may threaten officials and cause paralysis, while rewards alone may not correct the behavior of “bad apples.” Some of the strongest SA mechanisms rely on a balance of punishments and rewards.</p>
<p><b>2. Accountability: rule- or performance-based?</b></p> <p>A focus on following rules reflects the old style of public management, grounded in traditional notions of bureaucracy and rational action. Newer approaches seek to stimulate performance improvement and use performance evaluation to measure results. Some of the best SA strategies focus citizen participation both on enforcing rules and on improving performance.</p>
<p><b>3. Institutionalization: low or high?</b></p> <p>Many accountability mechanisms are ad hoc initiatives by well-meaning public servants and are not permanently embedded in the structure of the state. To what extent are SA mechanisms inscribed into law, requiring individual agencies or government as a whole to involve societal actors at specific moments in the public policy process?</p>
<p><b>4. Involvement: external or internal?</b></p> <p>Many SA mechanisms involve consultations with societal actors, but few involve inviting actors to become involved in the step-by-step process of government planning. To what extent does the mechanism encourage deep, internal involvement that goes beyond shallow consultation?</p>
<p><b>5. Inclusiveness: elitist or inclusive?</b></p> <p>There is a tendency of SA mechanisms to involve only a small group of “well-behaved” NGOs, middle-class professionals, and centrist politicians. To what extent does the mechanism promote participation of groups with less voice, or with alternative interests and ideological perspectives?</p>
<p><b>6. Branches of government: executive, judicial, or legislative?</b></p> <p>Accountability mechanisms are often directed toward the executive branch. Though reforming the executive is an important challenge, the legislative and judicial branches are equally important. The judiciary may be difficult to penetrate, while the legislative branch is often an untapped “gold mine” for pro-accountability reform.</p>

*Source:* Adapted from John Ackerman, State-Society Synergy for Accountability: Lessons for the World Bank

Handout 11

**Step 2. Look again at your case study. In your small group, review and discuss the case to determine which SA dimensions it reflects. Plot the dimensions of your case on the grid below.**

1	Incentive structure	Punishments	←————→	Rewards
2	Accountability	Rules	←————→	Performance
3	Institutionalization	Low	←————→	High
4	Involvement	External	←————→	Internal
5	Inclusiveness	Elitist	←————→	Inclusive
6	Branches of government	Executive	Judicial	Legislative

**Step 3. After plotting the dimensions of your example, discuss the following questions in your small group:**

1. What does your assessment of the dimensions of the SA mechanism suggest to you about the viability of a similar mechanism in your own country?
2. What might be some of the benefits and risks of this particular SA mechanism in your country?
3. How might the mechanism be adapted or modified to better fit your country context and institutional setting?

**Step 4. Put your grid on a flip chart and present a brief summary of your analysis of the case to the large group.**

Trainer

6. Allow groups to spend approximately 40 minutes on the case study exercise (step 2 on the handout). Give groups appropriate time warnings with 15, 10, and 5 minutes left.
7. Ask each group to briefly present its case study analysis based on their plot of the six dimensions and the questions on the handout. Take any questions for clarification.
8. After each group has made a brief presentation, ask a few participants to synthesize the main learning points or “take-aways” from this session. Explain that we’ll take some of the ideas from this session to help design a social accountability strategy in the next session. Review responses to Step 3 bringing in more pf participants practical examples.



# *Social Accountability Module*

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## *Session 4*

## Session 4: Designing a Social Accountability Strategy

### Purpose

To understand some of the global experience and best practices in successfully designing and implementing SA strategies and approaches. To practice designing a pro-accountability strategy.

### Objectives

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

- Understand the basic steps for conducting an SA situation assessment (or diagnostic) as a basis for designing a realistic SA strategy.

Time permitting, design a first-cut SA strategy/approach for a specific country/district/community.

### Materials

- Slides 19–22
- Handout 12, “Designing a Social Accountability Strategy”
- Flip chart and markers for each group.

### Time

1.5–3 hours

### Process

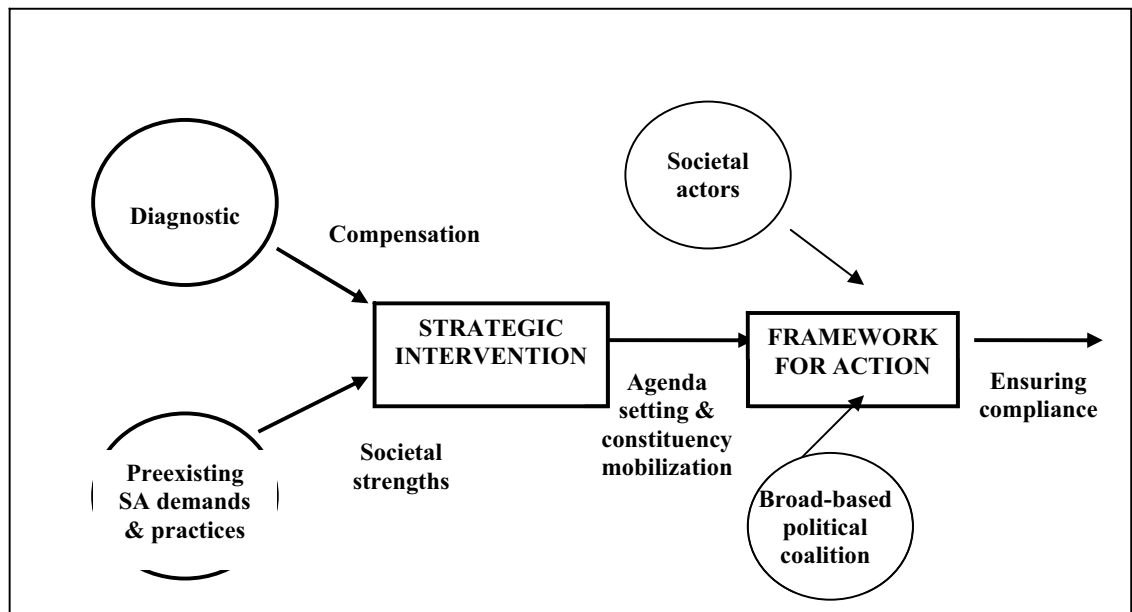
1. Explain the purpose and objectives of the session. The session involves a brief lecturette (steps 2–5), small group work (steps 6–8), and reporting/summarizing (steps 9–11).
2. In a 25-minute lecturette, review some of the critical success factors in effective SA approaches (as illustrated in Slide 17) and link these to the discussion in the previous session. We need to understand these success factors as we begin to design SA strategies and approaches.
3. Review the six key dimensions of SA illustrated in Slide 18 and outlined below.
  - Incentive structure: Are the incentives for the SA approach geared toward rewards or punishments for public servants? The strongest accountability approach usually balances both sanctions and rewards.
  - Accountability: Does the approach call for following bureaucratic rules in a hierarchy, or is there a focus on performance-based management and results?
  - Level of institutionalization: Is the approach ad hoc (occurring once or a few times only), or does it have potential to be institutionalized?
  - Depth of involvement: Does the approach promote shallow forms of participation or consultation, or deeper involvement of poor and disadvantaged groups?
  - Inclusiveness: Does the approach promote involvement of a small group of “well-behaved” NGOs or broader involvement of a wide range of interests, especially of poor and disadvantaged groups?

**Trainer**

- Branches of government: What branch of government does the SA mechanism target? Many SA initiatives are directed at the executive branch as it manages the vast majority of resources. A few are directed toward the judicial branch. The legislative branch may be an untapped “gold mine” for accountability approaches.
4. Explain the diagnostic approach: “Understanding these dimensions of SA enables us to better understand how certain approaches or mechanisms might fit within a particular country and political context. However, we’ll need to conduct some additional diagnostics to see if SA approaches are really feasible in a given setting, and if they are, which ones might have the highest potential for success.” The steps for the diagnostic are very similar to those that would be used for an assessment of local governance and the local governance–civil society relationship.
  5. Show Slides 19 and 20 and explain the basic building blocks for an SA strategy. Show Slide 21 and explain some of the key questions that an SA diagnostic should address. Ask for any questions or comments from the group.

### ***Developing an SA strategy***

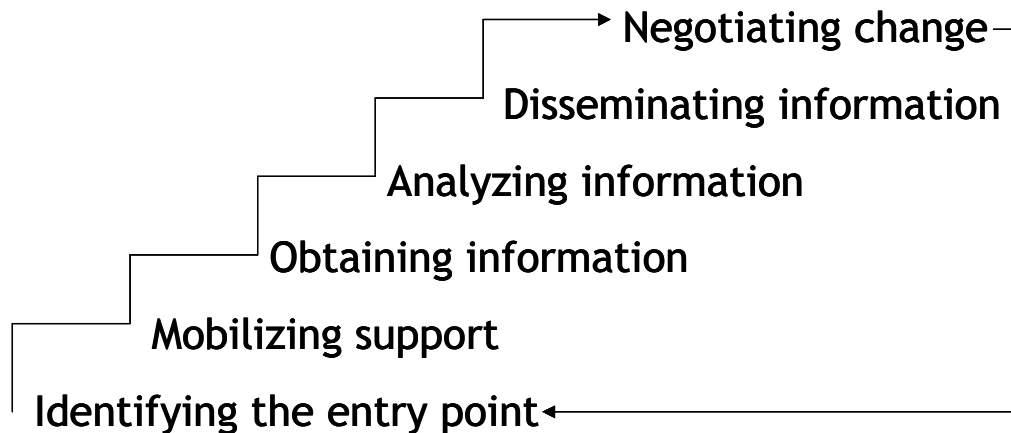
**Slide 19**



Slide  
20

***SA building blocks***

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Slide  
21

***Some diagnostic questions***

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1. To what extent are punitive or reward-based incentives emphasized for public officials?
2. To what extent are rule-following or performance-based criteria the norm for the evaluation of public officials?
3. What is the nature of the relationship between civil society and the state?
4. To what extent are societal actors normally allowed to engage with the state? Is government generally open or very closed?
5. What is the nature of societal participation? Is it broad-based or limited to a few elite groups or organizations?
6. How do the executive, legislative, and judicial branches compare in terms of accountability and openness?
7. What are the preexisting demands and practices that support SA?
8. Which groups and coalitions can be mobilized to support SA?
9. What are some strategic entry points?

## Trainer

6. Organize participants into groups of 5–6 people. The groups may be formed as country teams if appropriate. Explain that each group will develop a strategy for introducing SA mechanisms that have good potential for success in their country. Each group will: (a) conduct a first-cut SA diagnostic for a particular district or region, using the diagnostic questions; (b) select a candidate SA mechanism that seems to have characteristics well matched to the local context and good potential to draw on some of the success factors discussed earlier; and (c) design a basic strategy for the introducing the SA mechanism. These mechanisms can be adapted by the participants.
7. Distribute Handout 12, “Designing a Social Accountability Strategy.” Tell the groups they have 45 minutes to complete the tasks. (Note: This activity could easily be expanded to a half-day to enable participants to develop more detailed strategy designs. In such case, participants could also assess risks for their SA strategies and develop key performance indicators to measure adoption and effectiveness of the SA mechanisms.)

## Handout 12

## Handout 12

### Designing a Social Accountability Strategy

Designing an effective social accountability (SA) strategy grounded in the experiences and realities of a particular country is not easy. This task requires a good eye for windows of opportunity and a highly developed sensitivity to the country’s history, culture, and politics. Although no single recipe can be applied in all cases, experience shows that the most successful cases of designing and adapting social accountability systems follow a basic pattern. In other words, certain basic steps can be followed creatively to identify and distill an effective SA strategy.

Your team will design a first-cut SA strategy for a particular country, focusing on a district or set of municipalities you have selected. In this activity you’ll need to integrate a number of issues that we’ve covered and quickly follow several steps.

## Handout 12

**Step 1.** Conduct a brief SA diagnostic of the district or municipality you have selected (see Slides 10 and 21).

**Step 2.** Identify a few candidate SA approaches or mechanisms that might be a good fit in the geographic area you have selected (see Handouts 1, 3–10).

**Step 3.** Quickly review some of the main characteristics of the candidate SA approaches to see how they fit with your diagnostic. Select the best SA approach.

**Step 4.** Develop a first-cut strategy. The strategy should:

- Build on preexisting SA demands and practices in country
- Draw on good practices and lessons that have been discussed during this workshop
- Have a clear entry point (see Handout 10 and make as specific as possible)
- Describe how key interest groups will be mobilized and how coalitions will be formed to support the SA approach
- Provide a clear objective of how the SA approach will be used in practice and by whom
- Provide a realistic time frame for adoption of the SA approach

**Step 5.** Post the main points from your diagnosis and the key elements of your strategy on a flip chart. Summarize your findings/analysis in a brief (2–3 minute) presentation to the large group.

<b>Trainer</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. When 10 minutes are left, remind the teams to begin preparing for their short presentations. When 5 minutes are left, remind the teams to wrap up their work. When 1 minute is left, ask the teams to finish.</li> <li>9. Report out (15–20 minutes). If time permits, ask each team to make a brief (2–3 minute) presentation summarizing their diagnostic and SA strategy. If there is not time for presentations from all the groups, you’ll need to ask just one or two to report out. If it is a very large group (over 50–60) consider having a “gallery walk” where people can visit with other country teams to discuss the strategies they have posted on the wall or on flip charts.</li> <li>10. Summary and wrap-up (5 minutes). Bring the group back together and ask participants to summarize some of the key things they have learned and will take away from the SA sessions. Building on participant comments, you can use Slide 22 as the foundation for your concluding remarks.</li> <li>11. Close the session. Ask participants what they plan to do specifically following this event. Distribute a workshop evaluation for the SA module. This is very important to reinforce the concept of social accountability in service delivery.</li> </ol>
<b>Slide 22</b>	<p style="text-align: right;"><b><i>Conclusion</i></b></p> <hr style="width: 40%; margin-left: auto; margin-right: 0;"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Social accountability has tremendous potential to improve the responsiveness of government officials and other power holders to the needs of local people, especially those with less “voice.”</b></li> <li>• <b>A tremendous range of homegrown SA mechanisms have arisen in different local contexts, spanning almost all sectors and regions. SA mechanisms are developed in response to specific needs, local power imbalances, and a desire to improve services.</b></li> <li>• <b>The benefits and risks of a particular SA mechanism depend upon the social, political, and economic context in which it is applied. The success of a given mechanism in one local context in no way guarantees its success in another.</b></li> </ul>
<b>Handout 13</b>	<p><b>OPTIONAL—Handout 13</b></p> <p><b>Social Accountability Role Play Exercise: Health Care in Throna</b></p> <hr/> <p>In this exercise, you will discuss health care in the fictional town of Santoa in the fictional country of Throna. Each person in the group will play the role of a different character (if there are more group members than characters, several members can play the same character). One person will serve as a facilitator who manages the discussion.</p> <p>Begin by reading the short background on Throna and Santoa and the description of your character. Prepare to discuss the following questions from your character’s point of view:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why doesn’t the Santoa clinic meet the health care needs of everyone?</li> <li>• What people or groups, if any, need to cooperate to solve problems with health care in Santoa?</li> </ul>

To start the discussion, each person introduces his or her character and explains what that character sees as a key problem affecting Santoa's health care system. The facilitator should then open a group discussion of the two questions above. During the discussion, be sure to present your character's point of view, not your own. The group does not need to agree on answers to the questions. Choose one person to summarize the discussion briefly (2–3 minutes).

**Background**

Throna is a developing country with a population of nearly 14 million. The country gained independence in 1960, and while Throna has made advances since then, it remains very poor. Per capita GDP is only US\$1,520, and life expectancy at birth is 47 years. Infant mortality is high (90 per 1,000 live births), as is mortality for children under five (155 per 1,000).

The country has a very modest health care system based on a network of free clinics run by the Ministry of Health. In the 1970s, the health care sector received substantial investment that built the clinics and greatly benefited the health of the population. Rapid improvement in health care made citizens of Throna the healthiest in the region, a claim that was often heralded as evidence of the country's successful development. Unfortunately, the investment was financed almost entirely by foreign loans. As Throna went deeper into debt and the loans dwindled, it became clear that the achievements of the health care system were not sustainable.

The country's economy declined precipitously in the 1980s, with drastic effects on health care. The health care system has rebounded to some extent since that low point, as the economy has gradually emerged from recession and Ministry of Health officials, clinic managers, and staff have adjusted to the new situation. But in the 1990s the health care system largely stagnated. While many roads were built during the 1970s boom, they have fallen into disrepair, making it difficult to deliver supplies and medicines to clinics regularly. Most clinics do not let patients schedule visits in advance, resulting in long waits when patients arrive for care. Overall, the health of Throna citizens is better now than it was in the 1980s, but much worse than it was in the 1970s.

The central Ministry of Health in the capital is responsible for planning, allocating, and delivering health care throughout the country through the free clinics. These regional clinics depend on the ministry to provide supplies and resources and to set health care policy. The parliament of Throna approved a new law on decentralization six months ago which gives local and municipal governments' primary responsibility for delivering local services, including health care. Under the law, the Ministry of Health transfers 60 percent of its budget to local governments responsible for health care and retains 40 percent to spend on the clinics as it sees fit. The law has a long implementation period, and has only been put into practice in a few communities.

Santoa is a rural village 400 kilometers from the capital. It has one clinic that serves both Santoa and surrounding villages. The clinic sees many patients, both women and men, but service is generally poor, with long waiting times. The clinic often lacks supplies and medicines and never seems to have enough doctors and nurses to deal with all the patients. Doctors, nurses, and other staff are often absent from the clinic with no excuse, as low salaries and irregular paychecks sap their motivation. The new decentralization policies have yet to be applied in Santoa.

**Character 1: Ministry of Health Official**

You are an official at the central Ministry of Health, which traditionally has been responsible for delivering health care throughout Throna. You and your colleagues have expertise and experience in health administration, and you work hard to formulate policy, plan services, and respond to the needs of the population. You feel that it is easier, faster, and more efficient for the ministry to allocate and deliver services throughout the country. You also believe that when fewer people are involved in this process, there is less chance for corruption.

You know there are inadequacies in the country's health care system, but you believe the problems to be mainly the fault of poorly trained and irresponsible providers in the field. From your perspective, poor managers in the regional clinics are largely responsible for the problems in clinic care. Lax management of the regional clinics has kept your ministry involved in the actual delivery of the health care (logistics, purchasing, etc.). This leaves you less time to set health care policy and implement public health strategies, and the failure to carry out public health campaigns has had a noticeable effect.

Furthermore, you have little control over the funding that your ministry receives. The ministry has not had a budget increase in five years, while costs have skyrocketed. You feel that you and your colleagues do the best you can with the resources you have.

Contrary to what some people think, you and your colleagues at the ministry do not view the new law on decentralization negatively. In fact, you are excited about the prospect of focusing on health policy and monitoring instead of on the day-to-day running of clinics. You believe, however, that the local governments do not have the capacity to take on more responsibility, as they lack skilled personnel to manage the health services. Indeed, few local officials have come forward to discuss decentralization or ask for more authority. You want to be sure that any changes under the decentralization law respond to real needs. Finally, given the need to set priorities and balance the many demands for very limited resources, you fear that local officials and community leaders will not always make informed decisions that are in the best interests of the country as a whole.

**Character 2: NGO staff member**

You work for Mokotow, a nongovernmental organization that advocates for health care for the poor. You and your organization have tried many times to improve service at the clinic for the poorest members of the community, but you have not been successful. The services that reach your community are not the most urgently needed ones, and they usually cater to men's health needs rather than to the needs of women and children. You think that the latter should be higher priorities, based on the pattern of health care problems that you have observed in the community.

The clinic manager seems indifferent to your concerns, always saying that he has to follow the directives of the central Ministry of Health. You asked that a pediatrician and a midwife be assigned to the clinic, but the clinic manager told you that the decision is up to the ministry. You have tried to contact the ministry, but it is difficult to reach anyone by telephone. You have written many times but never received a response, and the ministry is far away in the capital—too far to visit in person to present your complaints. You know that local government is supposed to have more control over health care since the decentralization law was passed, but you have not seen any change so far. You are frustrated that your organization has no input and cannot find a way to force officials to respond to your concerns and deliver health care to those who need it most.

**Character 3: Clinic Manager**

You are the manager of the local health clinic in Santoa and oversee the day-to-day running of the clinic. You spend much of your time trying to find resources and supplies to provide care to all who need it, but lack of funds makes this very difficult.

You work hard and make the clinic function as well as possible under the circumstances. Obtaining drugs and medical supplies is a constant problem. You do not receive supplies for specialized women's or children's care, just general health care supplies, so it is hard to provide adequate care to all segments of the village population. The ministry controls your entire budget and the acquisition of supplies and medicine. The ministry also sets health care policy and transmits specific policy goals that you are supposed to fulfill, even though these goals often seem unrealistic given the conditions in Santoa. Given the time you spend trying to round up supplies, it is not always possible to supervise the staff as needed.

You are frustrated that you are constantly attacked by the public for poor service. You know the clinic does not meet everyone's needs, but it is just not possible to improve the care with the resources available. Besides, people in the community always tell you what they need, but everybody asks for different things, so it is hard to know what is most urgent. You feel helpless, caught between an angry, ungrateful public and a distant, unresponsive central ministry.

**Character 4: Member of a Women's Cooperative**

You are a member of Novas, a cooperative of women who make and sell soap. All the cooperative members have children and several are pregnant. Everyone complains about the poor service at the clinic, for themselves and for their children. While working at the cooperative, the women talk about their needs and have elected you to represent them.

The women are angry about the time it takes to visit the clinic. Since the clinic does not make appointments, patients have no choice but to show up and wait to be seen—which may or may not happen the same day. The doctors are often not at the clinic when they are supposed to be, and no one knows when they will return. The cooperative cannot afford to pay women while they visit the clinic, so going to the clinic usually means loss of a day's wages.

Medicine is another problem. Even if a person manages to see a doctor, the clinic often does not have the medicine the doctor prescribes, which means a return trip to the clinic later on. The clinic seems to have plenty of medicine one day and none the next. For example, one woman in your cooperative took her daughter for a measles vaccination last week. Hearing the clinic had vaccine, you and several other women from the cooperative took your children to be vaccinated the next day, but the nurses told you there was no vaccine! How could the supply vary that much from day to day? The women think the staff members are lying to them and may be saving the vaccines for their friends or relatives or for people who can afford to pay them—which your co-workers cannot. The co-op women always feel that they are getting cheated.

You think women and children's health care is the biggest problem in the community, and you want the clinic to provide better service to women. Men and women visit the clinic at the same rate, but women have more health needs than men—they need prenatal and postnatal care and care for their children. Your biggest complaint is that no one seems to take responsibility for the clinic. Whoever you talk to about a problem, that person says it is not their fault.

**Character 5: Municipal Government Official**

You are an official of the local government in Santoa. Your office acts as an intermediary between the Ministry of Health and the local clinic, but you have no practical influence on the day-to-day running of the clinic; your office is only a link in the chain. You receive directives and communications from the ministry and pass them on to the clinic manager. You also receive money from the ministry and transmit it to the clinic to pay staff salaries. As a member of local government you are supposed to respond to the community's needs, so you are frustrated that you are only a liaison and can do little to improve the delivery of health care.

In your opinion, the Ministry of Health is too far away from Santoa to be responsible for providing good health care. Officials in the ministry do not understand local conditions or respond to local needs. The clinic never has the medicines it needs. If your office were responsible for the clinic, you believe, you could improve service and direct resources to the areas of greatest need.

You and your colleagues hope that the new decentralization law will give you that opportunity. Although you are excited about the prospects, you are not sure how to proceed. The decentralization law has not been implemented in Santoa, and there is no blueprint for doing so. You do not know which health care needs are most important to the community or how the clinic could be run to meet those needs. These factors make it hard for your office to insert itself into the health care process and take advantage of decentralization. You are frustrated by your position between the clinic and the ministry and your inability to help the community. You are also frustrated that decentralization has not moved ahead, but you do not know how to speed up the process.

**Facilitator**

You are a neutral participant who has agreed to facilitate this meeting. You will preside over the group to ensure that the meeting is fair and constructive for everyone. You must be sure that all participants speak and present their views; this means you may have to encourage some participants to speak and tactfully encourage others to listen. You are also responsible for organizing the group's activities to make sure the group finishes in the allotted time.

You should remain impartial during the discussion. As a skilled facilitator, you know that having a bias against a participant, or even the appearance of bias, can generate mistrust and undermine the group's work. You are from a different town that is served by a different clinic, so you have no vested interest in Santoa's health care.

## Social Accountability Module

### Selected Sources

#### Publications

- Ackerman, John. 2004. "State-Society Synergy for Accountability: Lessons for the World Bank." Working Paper 30, World Bank, Washington, DC.  
Surveys the literature on accountability and outlines different ways in which civil society can interact with the state to improve accountability. Also presents seven case studies of successful social accountability and draws conceptual and practical lessons for the Bank.
- . 2005. "Social Accountability in the Public Sector: A Conceptual Discussion." Social Development Paper 82, World Bank, Washington, DC.  
Presents a theoretical framework, cases, practical strategies, and a review of costs and benefits for improving the accountability of governments to local citizens.
- Goetz, Ann Marie, and John Gaventa. 2001. "Bringing Citizen Voice and Client Focus to Service Delivery." Working Paper 138, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK.  
Looks at efforts to improve the responsiveness of public service providers to the needs of the poor. Examines over 60 case studies from around the world and concludes with findings on ways of enhancing citizen voice in public policy decision making.
- Goetz, Ann Marie, and Rob Jenkins. 2004. *Reinventing Accountability: Making Democracy Work for the Poor*. London: Palgrave.  
Explains the emergence of social accountability and places it within the context of democratic theory and social justice. Also assesses the effectiveness of accountability innovations and enabling conditions.
- Narayan, Deepa, with Raj Patel, Kai Schafft, Anne Rademacher, and Sarah Koch-Schulte. 2000. *Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?* New York: Oxford University Press for the World Bank.  
Gathers the voices of over 40,000 poor women and men in 50 countries from the World Bank's participatory poverty assessments.
- Schroeder, Larry. 2002. "Mechanisms for Strengthening Local Accountability." Syracuse University.  
Examines local accountability concepts, cases, mechanisms, and linkages in devolved governance systems.
- World Bank. 2003. "Case Study 1—Peru: Towards a System of Social Accountability." Social Development Note 83, Participation and Civic Engagement Group, World Bank, Washington, DC.  
Illustrates a multipronged approach to social accountability based on participatory budget formulation, analysis, and tracking, and the use of participatory evaluation to enable citizens to directly monitor and evaluate the quality of basic services provided to them.
- . 2003. *World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Presents an analytic framework, global case material, and policy recommendations for increasing citizen voice, innovating with service delivery arrangements, and scaling up services to improve the lives of the poor.

———. 2004. “Social Accountability: An Introduction to the Concept and Emerging Practice.” Participation and Civic Engagement Group, World Bank, Washington, DC.

Sets forth a conceptual framework and rationale for social accountability, along with some key mechanisms and tools and critical success factors for institutionalizing social accountability mechanisms.

World Bank Institute. Forthcoming 2005. “Social Stocktaking of Social Accountability Initiatives in Asia and Pacific” written by Dennis Arroyo with the collaboration of Karen Sirker. Surveys on-going social accountability practices across Asia and the Pacific with emphasis on results and impact to date. [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/CESILPROGRAM/Resources/459660-1108070841342/completed\\_templates.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/CESILPROGRAM/Resources/459660-1108070841342/completed_templates.pdf).

### **Web Sites**

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, International Budget Project. Assists nongovernmental organizations and researchers in their efforts both to analyze budget policies and to improve budget processes and institutions. [www.internationalbudget.org](http://www.internationalbudget.org)

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). Contains useful resources on social accountability, including the “Local Governance Handbook” for enhancing citizens’ participation in decision making. [www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)

UN-Habitat (United Nations Human Settlements Programme). Promotes socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities. Site contains the recent publication “Tools to Support Transparency in Local Governance.” [www.unhabitat.org](http://www.unhabitat.org)

United Nations Capital Development Fund. Country reports and evaluations of local governance projects. [www.uncdf.org](http://www.uncdf.org)

United Nations Development Programme, Democratic Governance Programme. Useful resources and links on local governance, accountability, decentralization, gender and governance, and civil society and participation. [www.undp.org/governance/local](http://www.undp.org/governance/local)

University of Sussex, Institute of Development Studies, Civil Society and Governance Group. Contains useful case studies and working papers on topics related to social accountability. [www.ids.ac.uk/ids/civsoc/index.html](http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/civsoc/index.html)

University of Sussex, Institute of Development Studies, Participation Group. Presents research, innovation and learning in citizen participation and participatory approaches to development and governance. Also contains useful working papers and articles on social accountability. [www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip](http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip)

World Bank, Public Sector Governance, Decentralization and Subnational Regional Economics. Resources on governance accountability in social sector decentralization.

[www.worldbank.org/publicsector/decentralization](http://www.worldbank.org/publicsector/decentralization)

World Bank, Empowerment home page. Resources, initiatives, community of practice, and calendar for empowerment-related activities supported by the Bank. <http://www.worldbank.org/empowerment>

World Bank, Social Development Department, Participation and Civic Engagement Group. Promotes methods and approaches that encourage stakeholders, especially the poor, to influence and share control over priority setting, policy making, resource allocations, and access to public goods and services.

<http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/ESSD/sdvext.nsf/66ParentDoc/ParticipationandCivicEngagement>

World Bank Institute, Community Empowerment and Social Inclusion (CESI) Program. Presents a learning program focused on issues of empowerment and governance to make institutions more accountable to the needs of the poor. [www.worldbank.org/wbi/communityempowerment](http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/communityempowerment)