

Project Brief

Promoting Social Accountability for Public Finances

Background and Context

According to the World Bank, the development community has recognized that both government institutions and private players in the developing world far too often tend to overlook the poor in the delivery of various goods and services. Such oversight results in either low quality good/service delivery or at times no delivery at all, and as such the consequence is continued deprivation of goods and services to citizens, dilapidated or poor infrastructure, and a lack of representation in important decision-making processes.

As a result of these deficiencies, social accountability has emerged as an important weapon in the fight for better governance and service delivery. While issues of poor public services affect entire societies, according to the World Bank (2009), unlike wealthier classes, the poor tend to be more affected as they are unable to compensate by switching to better-quality private services.

Public services can either be provided by the state directly, or through sub-contracted private service providers, however regardless of the channel, their effective delivery is crucial for poverty reduction and the attainment of critical development goals. Experiences around the world have demonstrated that generating and using information on the performance of service providers by both government and those contracted by government can lead to foster adherence to higher quality standards in service delivery.

Social Accountability

Social accountability can be defined as an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement. It is the process by which ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability.

The objective of undertaking social accountability is to:

- empower people
- minimise leakages and waste of public resources
- make programmes more appropriate and efficient and
- promote public ownership and
- promote public participation.

In order to ensure its effectiveness there needs to be: the involvement of affected people in planning, monitoring and evaluation; timely dissemination of information in an understandable form; extensive public consultation and consensus; and timely public response by authorities to issues raised.

Good and quality delivery of products and services resulting from social accountability ensures citizens benefit from quality and timely delivery of such services. Social accountability relies upon collective actors, such as government, consumer organisation, community organisation, media and private sector etc. to use their 'voice' to make success and failures public.

Social Audits of Public Finances

Public agencies are generally given mandates and funds however often their performances are not properly assessed and there does not exist suitable mechanisms to hold them accountable. Generally, public agencies are subjected to public audits of accounts and parliamentary reviews however follow up actions tend to be limited and it is becoming increasingly clear that the current existence of formal

mechanisms of accountability do not necessarily guarantee actual accountability on the ground. These discouraging outcomes have been attributed to a variety of factors.

Sometimes collusion between those who are responsible for the performance of the good or service provider and those who are responsible for their oversight and at times simply the prevalence of corruption are among the factors often highlighted in this context. As a result the delivery of good governance has been a major casualty in this process.

The pressure to enhance accountability can originate from two different sources: the government or civil society. As a potential source, the government is able to undertake this task however the precondition is that the political and bureaucratic leadership is motivated to usher in reform. More often than not however, civil society is the source of the pressure for increased public accountability. Institutions such as citizens' organizations and networks, independent media and think tanks generally tend to be at the forefront of the articulation of the demand for reforms.

Components of social audits

Social accountability tools work best when both citizens and the public sector are both able to benefit from and find value in their use. Citizens can seek significant gains in improving transparency and influencing public sector decision-making and service providers and public officials benefit from transparent management and improved legitimacy. In many countries, however, the public sector's commitment to transparency, inclusive decision-making, and citizen engagement is uneven.

According to CIET, there are seven key features of a social audit:

- 1. Getting the evidence** - Hard data from households, schools and communities, as well as from the service-provider itself, are gathered systematically to guide planning and action.
- 2. Community participation** - Communities not only co-produce the data, but, through focus groups and workshops involving community representatives, they also help design local and national solutions.
- 3. Impartiality** - A community-based audit by a neutral third party can help to foster a culture of transparency and strengthen service credibility.
- 4. Stakeholder buy-in** - All those who have a significant stake in service delivery are actively involved throughout the audit, from the initial design stage right
- 5. No finger pointing** - A social audit is intended to focus on systemic flaws and programme content, rather than on individuals or organisations. Even negative findings can be framed as a starting point for improvement.
- 6. Repeat audits** - Several audit cycles are usually needed to measure impact and progress over time, and to focus planning efforts where they can be most effective.
- 7. Dissemination of results** - A communication strategy, including feedback to communities, mapping and media dissemination is part of every social audit design.

In light of these key features, below are a number of activities that this project seeks to undertake to increase transparency in the allocation and use of public finances through the use of social audits.

Proposed Activities

Increasingly, the use of social accountability as a governance tool for political, economic and social purposes is becoming more prevalent around the world. The objective of this project is therefore to increase transparency on allocation and spending of resources in selected states in Zambia. It is the right of every citizen to understand the utility of the funds against the welfare gains of the targeted beneficiaries.

In order to ensure increased transparency on allocation and spending of resources CS POG will be undertaking a series of activities:

Activities	
1.	Conduct trainings on social audit/social accountability
2.	Evidence gathering (dissemination of budget information/ review of budget implementation in selected areas and using such existing tools as annual budget performance)
3.	Support establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms in relation to revenue sharing and responsible investments from extractives into education, health and agriculture
4.	Advocate for legislation of EITI, especially implementation of the African Extractive Industry Governance Framework
5.	Engaging media: Formation of radio listening groups, dissemination of information using community radio.
6.	Increase transparency on allocation and spending of resources
7.	Enhance gathering and dissemination of budget information / review of budget implementation in selected areas and using existing tools as annual budget performance

While social audits are innovative mechanisms that can create the enabling conditions for public accountability, without a knowledgeable and demanding civil society, it is difficult to make social audits work at the field level.

The focus therefore of this phase of the project implementation is to undertake capacity building and raise the awareness of civil society. Over the period April to March, of the above activities, the following activities will be implemented by the Policy and Research Technical Working Group (TWG) led by Consumer Unity Trust Society – Zambia (CUTS) and supported by Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR) and PANOS.

1. Conduct trainings on social audits/social accountability
2. Engaging Media: Formation of radio listening groups, dissemination of information using community radio.

Expected Outcomes

It is expected that the following will be outcomes of the project:

- Increased engagement of civil society, think tanks and other non-state actors among others in public expenditures
- Increased demand for transparency on the use of public finance
- Increased influence on expenditure of public finance in line with developmental goals
- Increased accountability for spending, budget implementation and performance
- Increased involvement of stakeholders in economic governance issues raising their voices to propose policy interventions at various levels that offer both short, medium and long term responses