SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY SOURCEBOOK

CHAPTER 2

SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE WORLD BANK?
Welcome to the World Bank’s Sourcebook on “Social Accountability: Strengthening the Demand Side of Governance and Service Delivery”!

There is growing recognition both among governments, donors and civil society that citizens and communities have an important role to play with regard to enhancing accountability of public officials, reducing corruption and leakage of funds and improving public service delivery. As a result, Social Accountability has become an attractive approach to both the public sector and civil society for improving governance processes, service delivery outcomes, and improving resource allocation decisions. Over the last decade, numerous examples have emerged that demonstrate how citizens can make their voice heard and effectively engage in making the public sector more responsive and accountable.

In an effort to capture the diverse experiences from across the world and make them available in one single place, the World Bank began developing a Sourcebook in 2005 on these approaches for reference, familiarization and inspiration. Practitioners and decision makers in the World Bank and in client countries constitute the primary audience for the Sourcebook.

The Sourcebook was originally developed as an interactive resource for use on-line or via CD-ROM. In order to cater for readers with limited web/computer access “downloadable” file versions of the main Sourcebook chapters have been made available (http://www-esd.worldbank.org/sac/).

This document is part of the larger Sourcebook on Social Accountability. It constitutes one of the main chapters of the Sourcebook, originally written as content of web pages and later converted into a comprehensive text.

The entire Sourcebook is organized in several main chapters:

- A Conceptual Chapter (“What is Social Accountability?”) providing an analytical framework of social accountability, and an overview of the main concepts and definitions.
- Tools and Methods, that are most frequently used as part of social accountability approaches such as participatory budgeting, citizens report cards and social audits;
- Social Accountability in the Regions provides access to case examples of social accountability in different regions.
- Sectoral and Thematic Applications: Social accountability in Public Expenditure Management, Decentralization, Education and Health;
- Social Accountability in Bank Operations provides guidance, case examples and lessons learned from the implementation of social accountability in Bank operations, including investment and development policy loans. It also provides
guidance on how to conduct analytical work on social accountability and access to examples of analytical studies on the topic.

- Knowledge and Learning Resources: access to knowledge and learning materials on social accountability, including case studies, publications, power point presentations, manuals etc.
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This chapter provides a conceptual overview of social accountability and distinguishes it from traditional accountability mechanisms. It discusses the rationale for social accountability and the scope for its application in policy reform and improvement in the quality of service delivery. Underscoring the fact that social accountability is an emerging area of practice, this chapter tries to draw out the critical factors, benefits, and emerging lessons.

This chapter is organized into five sections:

- **What is Social Accountability and Why is it Important?** The first section provides a working definition of the term, discusses its conceptual underpinnings, and outlines the arguments for social accountability.

- **Social Accountability in Practice.** The second section describes some practical applications of social accountability, especially with regard to the various points in the public expenditure cycle, as well as key building blocks and critical factors for achieving social accountability.

- **Key Benefits and Risks.** The third section makes a realistic assessment of the benefits and risks of social accountability mechanisms drawing on global experience.

- **How the Bank can Promote Social Accountability.** The fourth section describes the various ways in which the Bank can use and promote the social accountability agenda in its work.

- **Emerging Lessons.** The concluding section presents the lessons that have emerged in this relatively recent field of work including some pointers for the practitioner on what elements to consider while planning social accountability initiatives.
1. WHAT IS SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

1.1 What is accountability?

Accountability can be defined as the obligation of power-holders to account for or take responsibility for their actions. Power-holders refers to those who hold political, financial or other forms of power and include officials in government, private corporations, international financial institutions and civil society organizations (CSOs).

This sourcebook focuses on the accountability of government actors toward citizens and, in particular, toward poor people. This accountability is a consequence of the implicit social compact between citizens and their delegated representatives and agents in a democracy. A fundamental principle of democracy is that citizens have the right to demand accountability and public actors have an obligation to be accountable. Elected officials and civil servants are accountable for their conduct and performance. In other words, they can and should be held accountable to obey the law, not abuse their powers, and serve the public interest in an efficient, effective and fair manner.

There is considerable difference of opinion as to how narrowly or broadly the concept of accountability should be defined. Some see accountability as an essentially ex-post phenomenon while others argue that principles of accountability should be applied before, during and after the exercise of public authority (Ackerman, 2004). Some observers emphasize a distinction between government responsiveness vs. government accountability while others understand them as going hand in hand. This sourcebook, for both conceptual and practical reasons, adopts a broad definition of accountability.

1.2 What is social accountability?

In democratic states, the principal means by which citizens hold the state to account is elections. Elections, however, have proved to be a very weak and blunt instrument with which to hold government accountable. Social accountability is about affirming and operationalizing direct accountability relationships between citizens and the state. Social accountability refers to the broad range of actions and mechanisms beyond voting that citizens can use to hold the state to account, as well as actions on the part of government, civil society, media and other societal actors that promote or facilitate these efforts.

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1 Although this sourcebook focuses on the contribution of social accountability initiatives to public sector accountability, similar principles and approaches can be applied to increase the accountability of the private sector, civil society, and community leaders and representatives.

2 Even if citizens were fully and accurately informed of the views and actions of every political candidate (which is far from the case), elections still only allow citizens to select among a limited number of individuals or political parties. They do not offer citizens the opportunity to express their preferences on specific issues, to contribute in a meaningful way to public decision-making or to hold public actors accountable for specific decisions or behaviors. See World Bank (2004a) for a discussion of the weaknesses of elections as a mechanism of accountability.
Traditionally, citizen or civil society-led efforts to hold government accountable have included actions such as public demonstrations, protests, advocacy campaigns, investigative journalism, and public interest lawsuits. In recent years, the expanded use of participatory data collection and analysis tools combined with enhanced space and opportunity for citizen/civil society engagement with the state have led to a new generation of social accountability practices. They emphasize a solid evidence base and direct dialogue and negotiation with government counterparts. These include, for example, participatory public policy-making, participatory budgeting, public expenditure tracking, and citizen monitoring and evaluation of public services.

Social accountability mechanisms complement and enhance conventional internal (government) mechanisms of accountability. All governments have internal mechanisms in place to promote or ensure accountability of public servants. These include: (i) political mechanisms such as constitutional constraints, separation of powers, the legislature, and legislative investigative commissions, (ii) fiscal mechanisms including formal systems of auditing and financial accounting, (iii) administrative mechanisms, for example, hierarchical reporting, norms of public sector probity, public service codes of conduct, rules and procedures regarding transparency and public oversight, and (iv) legal mechanisms like corruption control agencies, ombudsmen and the judiciary (Gaventa and Goetz 2001). Internal (government) and external (citizens/civil society) mechanisms of accountability can and should be mutually reinforcing. Social accountability includes efforts to enhance citizen knowledge and use of conventional mechanisms of accountability (for example, through public education about legal rights and available services) and efforts to improve the effectiveness of internal accountability mechanisms through greater transparency and civic engagement (for example, citizen and community participation in public commissions, hearings, advisory boards and oversight committees). Strengthening legislative oversight and links between parliamentarians, citizens and civil society organizations are also important ways to enhance social accountability.

The concept of social accountability underlines both the right and the corresponding responsibility of citizens to expect and ensure that government acts in the best interests of the people. The obligation of government officials to be accountable to citizens derives from notions of citizens’ rights, often enshrined in constitutions, and the broader set of human rights. Social accountability initiatives help citizens understand their civic rights and play a proactive and responsible role in exercising those rights.

Sanctions give social accountability power. Social accountability initiatives use a range of formal and informal rewards and sanctions. Informal mechanisms of sanction or reward usually rely upon creating public pressure, for example, through media coverage, public displays of support or protest, meetings between citizens and public officials, and petitions. When necessary, citizens groups can appeal to formal means of sanction or enforcement to effect change, for example, by presenting evidence to a corruption control agency, appealing to a public

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3 A well-known example of such an approach are the highly publicized *jansunvais* or public hearings to reveal corruption in the use of local government funds organized by Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) in Rajasthan, India. See Jenkins and Goetz (1999).
ombudsman or filing a legal claim through the court system. Often, however, such means may be absent, ineffective or inadequate to effect real change. In such cases, citizen actions might aim to reveal the inadequacies of these mechanisms, lobby for their reform or seek to improve their effectiveness through enhanced public participation.

1.3 Why is social accountability important?

Accountability of public officials is the cornerstone of good governance and democracy. The effectiveness of conventional supply-side (government) mechanisms of accountability and elections (the principal traditional demand-side mechanism of accountability) has proved limited. By involving citizens in monitoring government performance, demanding and enhancing transparency and exposing government failures and misdeeds, social accountability mechanisms are potentially powerful tools against public sector corruption. In addition to improved government, social accountability empowers citizens (Figure 1).

![Figure 1: The Benefits of Social Accountability](image)

The 2004 World Development Report (WDR) argues that the key to making services work for poor people is to strengthen relationships of accountability between policymakers, service providers and citizens. According to the WDR 2004 framework (Figure 2), successful service delivery requires relationships in which citizens can have a strong voice in policymaking with politicians and bureaucrats (voice), clients can monitor and discipline providers (client power), and policymakers can provide the incentives for providers to serve clients (compact). The social accountability mechanisms described in this sourcebook offer concrete examples of ways in which each of these accountability relationships can be operationalized. By enhancing citizen information and voice, introducing incentives for downward accountability and creating

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6 See the economics research section of the World Bank website at http://econ.worldbank.org
mechanisms for participatory monitoring and citizen-state dialogue and negotiation, social accountability mechanisms can make an important contribution to more informed policy design and improved public service delivery (Ravindra 2004).

**Figure 2: The WDR 2004 Accountability Framework**

Finally, social accountability initiatives can contribute to empowerment, particularly of poor people. The 2001 World Development Report, the World Bank Empowerment and Poverty Reduction Sourcebook, and the Social Development Strategy (World Bank 2005) all recognize accountability as an integral component of empowerment, poverty reduction and sustainable development. The degree to which a person or group is empowered is influenced by agency (the capacity to make purposive choice) and opportunity structure (the institutional context in which choice is made). By providing critical information on rights and entitlements and introducing mechanisms that enhance citizen voice and influence vis-à-vis government, social accountability initiatives serve to enhance both of these key determinants of empowerment. Of particular importance is the potential of social accountability initiatives to empower those social groups that are systematically under-represented in formal political institutions such as women, youth and poor people. Numerous social accountability tools, such as gender budgeting and participatory monitoring and evaluation, are specifically designed to address issues of inequality and to ensure that less powerful societal groups also have the ability to express and act upon their choices and to demand accountability.

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7 Empowerment can be defined as a person’s capacity to make effective choices; that is, as the capacity to transform choices into desired actions and outcomes (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005).

2. SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN PRACTICE

2.1 Examples of Social Accountability Practices

Social accountability encompasses a broad array of methods and practices. These practices may be initiated by a wide range of actors (citizens, CSOs, communities, government agencies, parliamentarians or media), use diverse strategies (research, monitoring, planning, civic education, media coverage, coalition building), employ formal and informal sanctions, and vary according to the extent to which they are institutionalized, independent, collaborative or conflictive. This section briefly describes some of the social accountability practices in Table 1.

### Table 1: Examples of Social Accountability Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government Function</th>
<th>Social Accountability Process</th>
<th>Social Accountability Mechanisms and Tools</th>
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| Policies and Plans        | Participatory Policy Making and Planning                | - local issue forums  
- study circles  
- deliberative polling  
- consensus conferences  
- public hearings  
- citizens’ juries |
| Budgets and Expenditures  | Budget-Related Social Accountability Work              | - participatory budget formulation  
- alternative budgets  
- independent budget analysis  
- performance-based budgeting  
- public education to improve budget literacy  
- public expenditure tracking surveys  
- social audits  
- transparency portals (budget websites) |
| Delivery of Services and Goods | Social Accountability in the Monitoring and Evaluation of Public Services and Goods | - public hearings  
- citizens’ report cards  
- community scorecards  
- public opinion polls  
- citizen’s charters |
| Public Oversight          | Social Accountability and Public Oversight               | - CSO oversight committees  
- local oversight committees  
- ombudsman |

Social accountability can be enhanced ex ante through citizen and civil society participation in formulating public policies and plans. Examples include participatory policy-making (for example, the participatory formulation of poverty reduction strategies) and participatory development planning. In many countries, civil society actors also play a key role in reviewing, critiquing, and building public awareness about policies and plans in key areas such as gender equity, environmental protection, youth, employment and social services. Such activities can be initiated by either government or civil society. Ideally, government actors proactively seek citizen input and draw on the wide variety of existing tools—such as local issue fora, study
circles, deliberative polling and consensus conferences—to ensure transparent, inclusive and
effective public participation and deliberation.

Citizen involvement in preparing and analyzing public budgets is another important category of
social accountability practices. Common examples of budget-related social accountability
practices include efforts by civil society to analyze the impact and implications of budget
allocations, demystify the technical content of the budget, raise awareness about budget-related
issues, point out discrepancies between government policy priorities and resource allocations,
and undertake public education campaigns to improve budget literacy. Such initiatives can be
introduced by government, as in the case of participatory budgeting in over 200 municipalities in
Brazil (Wagle and Shah 2003a), or undertaken independently by civil society, as in the case of
South Africa’s women’s budget or Canada’s alternative federal budget (Loxley, undated).

An important aspect of social accountability is for citizens to be able to hold government
accountable for how it handles public funds. An increasing number of local governments, for
example, now publicly announce, post or disseminate information about accounts and
expenditures. Public expenditure tracking surveys can be used to monitor the flow of financial
or physical resources and identify leakages and/or bottlenecks in the system. This approach often
involves the comparison of information received from disbursement records of finance
ministries, accounts submitted by line agencies and information obtained from independent
enquiry by using tools like social audits. Information is disseminated through the use of media,
publications and public meetings. The participatory tracking of primary education expenditures
in Uganda (Wagle and Shah 2003b) and the social audit techniques used under Bolivia’s social
monitoring initiative are examples of this approach.

Another category of social accountability practices seek accountability with regard to the
relevance, accessibility and quality of public goods and services. Typically this involves citizen
participation in the monitoring and evaluation of priority services using indicators that citizens
themselves have developed. Public opinion polls, public hearings or citizens’ report cards are
used to solicit citizen feedback that can be disseminated and presented to government officials to
Community scorecards allow both users and service providers to independently evaluate public
services, and then come together to share their findings, discuss problems and seek solutions
(Dedu and Kajubi 2005). Early experience has shown that each of these methods has the
potential to produce significant operational results (e.g., improved performance, the introduction
of corrective measures) as well as process outcomes (e.g., institutional and behavioral changes).

A final category of social accountability practices are those that aim to improve public oversight.
Such practices can involve the creation of independent citizen oversight committees or watchdog
groups and/or forms of civic engagement that aim to enhance the effectiveness of existing
oversight mechanisms. For example, CSOs play an intermediary or facilitating role between
citizens and government such as an ombudsman or anti-corruption commission,
citizen/community membership on school or hospital boards, or open up the work of
parliamentary or other internal oversight committees to public participation or scrutiny.

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2.2 Building Blocks of Social Accountability

While social accountability encompasses a broad array of diverse practices, there are several core elements or building blocks that are common to most social accountability approaches. These include (i) accessing information, (ii) making the voice of citizens heard, and (iii) engaging in a process of negotiation for change.\(^{10}\)

Accessing or generating relevant information and making it public is a critical aspect of social accountability. Building credible evidence that will serve to hold public officials accountable often involves obtaining and analyzing both supply-side information from government and service providers and demand-side information from users of government services, communities and citizens. The transparency of government and its capacity to produce and provide data and accounts are crucial for accessing supply-side information such as policy statements, budget commitments and accounts, records of inputs, outputs and expenditures, and audit findings. The initial focus of social accountability interventions often has been to lobby for enhanced information rights and public transparency. With regard to demand-side information, a wide variety of participatory methods and tools—such as community scorecards, citizen report cards, and participatory monitoring and evaluation techniques—have been developed to generate data while simultaneously serving to raise awareness and promote local-level mobilization and organization.

Another key element of social accountability is giving voice to the needs, opinions and concerns of citizens – helping government to better understand citizen priorities and how to better serve citizens. Important strategies for strengthening citizen voice include creating spaces for public debate and platforms for citizen-state dialogue, building citizen confidence and rights awareness, facilitating the development of coalitions and alliances that can speak with a strong, united voice, and making strategic use of (or helping to develop) both modern and traditional forms of media. A principal challenge of social accountability initiatives is to ensure that the voices of poorer and more marginal groups are not drowned out or dominated by more powerful and vocal groups.

The most crucial and challenging element of a social accountability strategy is to be able to elicit a response from public officials and achieve real change. Negotiation processes may be ad hoc or institutionalized. They can take the form of direct citizen-state interaction, for example, community level meetings with government officials or indirect, mediated forms of consultation and negotiation. In negotiating change, citizens groups employ a range of both informal and formal means of persuasion, pressure, reward and sanction. These include creating public pressure (e.g., media campaigns and public meetings) or when necessary, resorting to formal means of enforcement (e.g., legal and judicial processes). The space and opportunity for negotiation, as well as the possibility of appeal to formal means of sanction, vary greatly from

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\(^{10}\) The identification of these core building blocks draws from the Civic Engagement Analytical Framework, an analytical tool designed by the Participation and Civic Engagement Group of the World Bank to assess the conditions for civic engagement.
In many countries, citizen’s groups have found that legal and/or institutional reforms are necessary to facilitate meaningful negotiation.

### 2.3 Critical Factors for Achieving Social Accountability

Figure 3 depicts four groups of factors that are critical to achieving social accountability:

1. **citizen-state bridging mechanisms**
2. **attitudes and capacities of citizens and civil society actors**
3. **attitudes and capacities of state actors**
4. **an enabling environment.**

Each of these groups of factors can be looked at in terms of the three key core elements of social accountability – information, voice and negotiation. While social accountability initiatives usually focus on creating or strengthening mechanisms for enhanced accountability, it is also important to take into account actions by government, civil society, development partners or other actors that can promote social accountability by addressing factors in each of these four key areas. In order to be effective, social accountability mechanisms often need to be preceded or complemented by efforts to enhance the willingness and capacities of citizens, civil society and government actors to engage in actions to promote a more enabling environment.

Many social accountability initiatives focus on strengthening *bridging mechanisms*—mechanisms for information exchange, dialogue and negotiation—between citizens and the state. This can involve the introduction of new tools, opportunities or platforms for citizen-state interaction, or the improvement, renewal or reform of existing mechanisms, systems and agencies. Examples include introducing or improving proactive government information disclosure through the establishment of public information centers or campaigns; creating
platforms for public debate and citizen-state dialogue such as radio “call in” programs, public hearings, town hall meetings and citizen’s juries; and establishing fora for negotiation and participatory decision-making such as public meetings, joint committees and participatory budgeting processes.

The willingness and ability of citizens and civil society to actively seek government accountability is another key determinant of successful social accountability. These factors can represent a major obstacle in contexts where civil society may be weak and notions of citizenship are undeveloped. Key issues include: the capacity of civil society actors—including independent media—to research, analyze, demystify and disseminate relevant information; the capacity of citizens to organize, mobilize, build coalitions and speak with a common voice; the willingness and ability to interact and negotiate with government and to adopt a constructive and solution-oriented approach; and the capacity of CSOs to build public support and to demonstrate credible and accountable behavior. A wide variety of training, capacity building and support measures targeting diverse civil society actors—including citizens associations, community based organizations, intermediary NGOs, social movements, media, think tanks, and public interest law centers—can be used to address capacity issues in this area. Efforts by civil society to build organizational capacities and improve internal governance practices, as well as initiatives by government and development partners to support such efforts, are an important component of enhanced social accountability.

The willingness and ability of politicians and civil servants to account to the people is a third critical factor in achieving social accountability. From the perspective of the three building blocks of social accountability—information, voice and negotiation—the willingness and ability of state actors to disclose information and to listen to and engage with citizens is key. Many governments have taken important steps towards enhancing their capacity to share information and engage with citizens. Such actions, sometimes undertaken with donor support and in collaboration with civil society actors, include improved information management systems, staff training to enhance communication and facilitation skills, the use of rewards and sanctions to promote transparent and responsive behavior, the adoption of professional codes of ethics, and information campaigns on accountability policies or citizens’ rights.

Finally, social accountability is strongly influenced by a range of underlying political, legal, social, cultural and economic factors. These factors play an important role in determining the feasibility and likelihood of success of social accountability initiatives. Some aspects of the enabling environment are so critical that they can almost be considered prerequisites for social accountability. For example, the opportunities for social accountability initiatives are clearly greater where the political regime is democratic, a multi-party system is in place, and basic political and civil rights are guaranteed. Rule of law and the existence of legal guarantees of the freedom of information, press, expression, association and assembly are crucial. Underlying socio-cultural and economic factors also have an important influence on key aspects such as citizens’ expectations of and relations with the state, peoples’ willingness to question authority or speak out, and the capacity and means of
CSOs to organize and act. An unfavorable environment does not mean that social accountability activities cannot be pursued. However, actions or reforms to create a more enabling environment—for example, by introducing freedom of information legislation or facilitating the registration of NGOs—can be critical to achieving effective and sustainable social accountability outcomes.
3. KEY BENEFITS AND RISKS OF SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

3.1 Benefits

While some government actors play a key role in introducing and supporting social accountability initiatives, others initially may be hesitant or feel threatened by such initiatives. Experience shows that enhanced social accountability offers important potential benefits for governments including increased effectiveness, legitimacy, popularity, resources and political stability. Sharing such experiences with reticent public sector actors or, better yet, facilitating exchanges with peers who can share their own first-hand experiences with social accountability experiences, can go a long way towards achieving government buy-in.

Social accountability mechanisms have been shown to lead to improvements in government programs and services. Citizen participation in policy-making and planning processes, for example, can lead to the development of programs that better reflect citizen priorities and are better adapted to their needs. Citizen monitoring can ensure the rational use of resources and provide a safeguard against leakages while citizen evaluation can provide feedback on problems or shortcomings in service delivery and propose collective solutions. In Porto Alegre, Brazil, participatory budgeting has led to expanded increased school enrollment and expanded sanitation services (Wagle and Shah 2003). In Ghana, enhanced citizen participation in local governance has led to improvements in streetlights, drains and the maintenance of township roads (GAIT 2004).

Many governments currently suffer from a lack of legitimacy. Citizens cite corruption, weak accountability, and a lack of responsiveness on the part of government as the reasons for their growing disillusionment. On the other hand, citizens’ trust in government grows when they feel they have a say and an eye on government’s activities, and when government listens and responds to their concerns. Social accountability mechanisms can play an important role in enhancing government credibility and legitimacy.

Improved effectiveness and enhanced legitimacy can lead to greater popularity and public support for the government. Citizens who are better informed about government policies, budgets, expenditures, services and conduct are more likely to vote and are better placed to select candidates who they feel are trustworthy and will best serve their interests.

Enhanced social accountability can also lead to increased government resources, both from international donors (who increasingly request or require enhanced mechanisms of accountability) and from tax-paying citizens. After introducing a system of participatory budgeting, for example, the municipality of Porto Alegre in Brazil saw its municipal revenues increase by almost 50 percent in four years.11 After considerable reluctance to open up discussions on the budget with local civil society leaders, the mayors of some communities participating in Ghana’s Government Accountability Improves Trust program saw significant

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11 Budget resources just for investment increased from $54m in 1992 to $70m in 1996 (Wagle and Shah 2003).
increases in their municipal revenues with leaders of local associations even playing a role in helping to collect taxes from their members in order to finance mutually agreed municipal projects.

Finally, enhanced social accountability can contribute to political stability and peace. The risk of instability is increased when citizens lack trust in government, when government is perceived as corrupt or unresponsive, or when it fails to deliver the basic services that people need. Actions such as public protests, street demonstrations and strikes result when channels for more constructive dialogue and negotiation are lacking. Social accountability mechanisms create opportunities for informed and constructive dialogue and negotiation between citizens and government and the identification of mutually agreed solutions, thus contributing to better government and greater political stability.

### 3.2 Risks

*Raising citizen expectations* is inherent in social accountability initiatives. Social accountability is possible when citizens are aware of their rights and expect and demand that public sector actors respect those rights and live up to their role as genuine public servants. Care must be taken to ensure that those expectations are realistic and reasonable. Social accountability initiatives should emphasize both citizens’ rights and responsibilities and help citizens develop a realistic understanding of the challenges and constraints faced by government through information sharing and dialogue.

In seeking accountability, there is always the risk of conflict or adversarial attitudes. One of the key precepts of social accountability approaches is to promote constructive approaches that go beyond making accusations or lodging complaints to seeking collective solutions. For example, Talking Drum Studios in Sierra Leone works through community radio to promote greater government accountability in the areas of education, mining and HIV/AIDS and advocates collaborative approaches to resolving social problems. In particularly sensitive or politically charged contexts, the use of professional mediators, facilitators or conflict management specialists may prove useful.

If genuine political will or buy-in is lacking, there is a risk that public sector actors will only pay lip-service to social accountability approaches and no concrete results will be achieved. One strategy for overcoming this risk is to build safeguards into the design of social accountability mechanisms, for example, explicit agreed guidelines about participation, rules of engagement, monitoring, and follow-up. Another longer-term, but ultimately more productive, strategy is to promote greater government buy-in. This can be done by identifying and nurturing within the public sector social accountability champions who genuinely believe in and are willing to support the approach and investing time and energy in educating government actors about the concrete benefits of social accountability approaches including, for example, in-country demonstration pilots and cross-country exchanges or study tours.
As with almost any development intervention, social accountability initiatives run the risk of elite capture of agenda-setting and decision-making processes by more powerful or influential stakeholders. Specific efforts are required to ensure the meaningful inclusion and participation of less organized and less powerful groups such as the poor, women, minorities, youth, and groups with special needs. Many of the social accountability methods and tools described in this sourcebook are specifically designed to identify and promote the equitable participation of marginalized groups. These tools are only as effective as their user. Promoters of social accountability must exercise vigilance at every step of the process to ensure that traditionally marginalized stakeholders remain at the forefront.

Another risk is to include only a limited universe of friendly actors in social accountability processes and to exclude more critical or radical viewpoints. Even if it is not intentional, processes of dialogue and negotiation frequently end up involving the “usual suspects” or “well behaved” NGOs. The maximum benefits of social accountability processes are gained, however, when a full spectrum of societal viewpoints are represented. Here, facilitators of social accountability processes must make specific efforts to explore the broad universe of diverse viewpoints on the issue or sector at hand and promote meaningful, and ideally non-partisan, interaction of diverse stakeholders.

Along with enhanced inclusion of non-governmental actors in processes of public dialogue and negotiation comes the risk of real or perceived co-optation. Civil society actors who become too closely associated with government processes can suffer weakened links with their constituencies and a loss of legitimacy. If their own power or interests are enhanced by their involvement in institutionalized mechanisms of dialogue or negotiation, they may be tempted to allow themselves to be co-opted in order to sustain their newfound status or influence. In order to mitigate this risk, care must be taken in aiming for an optimal and appropriate level of institutionalization of social accountability mechanisms, safeguards against co-optation should be introduced, and fora for state-civil society dialogue and negotiation should be made as open and transparent as possible.

Social accountability initiatives, especially if not well explained and prepared in a participatory manner, can be demoralizing or threatening to state actors or service providers. Hence, it is important to actively involve state actors in the design and preparation of social accountability initiatives, to pay attention to creating/enhancing incentives for accountability, and to build in mechanisms of reward as well as sanction.

Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, are the potential risks that social accountability approaches pose to those individuals or organizations that speak out. Depending on the country context, citizens who dare criticize government actions or question the conduct of authorities do so at considerable personal risk. For this reason, promoters of social accountability must take very seriously their primary responsibility to protect the security of individual citizens, in particular, those who are least powerful and most vulnerable. Where basic rights and freedoms of information, association and expression are not guaranteed, preliminary efforts should focus on developing these.
4. HOW THE WORLD BANK CAN PROMOTE SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The World Bank can intervene in a variety of different ways and at a number of different levels to promote social accountability. The Bank can contribute to enhanced social accountability in client countries through: (i) strategy and policy advice, (ii) lending operations, and (iii) research and capacity building.

**Strategy and policy advice.** Through economic and sector work and other forms of country research and analysis, the Bank provides policy advice to client governments about promoting an enabling environment for social accountability, creating mechanisms for enhanced social accountability, and linking social accountability to broader public sector reform, anti-corruption or service delivery agendas. The Bank can also raise social accountability-related issues in the context of policy dialogue, country roundtables, and other development fora. It can promote or facilitate participatory policy-making and encourage and practice public information disclosure. The Bank can also promote social accountability principles and practices in the context of country programming. Country Assistance Strategies increasingly include social accountability-related analysis and recommendations.

**Lending operations.** Through development policy and investment loans, the Bank can enhance conditions for social accountability in client countries. For example, governance, decentralization, public sector reform and media development programs can support actions and reforms that lead to a more enabling environment and enhanced capacity for social accountability. The Bank can support the creation or improvement of mechanisms for social accountability in the context of poverty reduction support credits (PRSCs), community-driven development (CDD) projects, social funds, and interventions in sectors important to poor people such as health, education, transport, and water and sanitation. Lending operations specifically devoted to the enhancement of social accountability mechanisms across sectors and ministries can also be envisaged.

**Research and capacity building.** The Bank can support the capacity development of key stakeholders (government and civil society) to engage in social accountability practices through research, training, information sharing and capacity building activities. Trust funds and small grants can be used to assess country conditions for social accountability and provide direct support to independent capacity-building initiatives or pilot social accountability initiatives. As a global actor, the Bank can play an important role in monitoring and evaluating the impact of social accountability initiatives, documenting good practices and lessons learned, and promoting and supporting cross-country learning. The Bank can continue to contribute to the conceptual development of social accountability and to evaluate its links to the overarching goals of improved governance, development effectiveness and poverty reduction.

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12 Trust fund-supported assessments of country conditions for social accountability are currently being carried out in Ecuador, Ghana, Mongolia and Sierra Leone. Small grants have been used to support civil society-driven social accountability initiatives in Ghana, Mauritania and Senegal.
5. **EMERGING LESSONS**

*Social accountability is about more than just tools.* In the words of one experienced practitioner, social accountability is 80 percent political and 20 percent technical. Although the methods and tools outlined in this sourcebook are a very important aspect of promoting social accountability, the ultimate success of social accountability initiatives depends upon the context in which these tools are used, the principles and values that guide their use, who is involved and how. Social accountability is as much about changing mentalities, building relationships, and developing capacities as it is about introducing mechanisms and technical tools.

**Know your stakeholders.** A crucial step in the design of almost any social accountability initiative is formal or informal stakeholder analysis. This analysis should serve to identify the full range of stakeholders influential to, or influenced by, the initiative, and to assess accountability relationships and power relations between them. In conducting such an analysis, it is particularly important to unpack broad notions such as government and civil society, acknowledging the complex and heterogeneous nature of these conceptual entities and exploring the diversity of views, interests and relations between and within them.

**Use both supply and demand side approaches.** In promoting social accountability, interventions on both the supply side (government) and demand side (citizen/civil society) are important. Although individual initiatives may tackle only one set of factors, they should seek to take into account strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges on both the supply and demand side and remember that the interface between the two is key.

**Sanctions and incentives are key.** Experience shows that a combination of incentives and sanctions are often most effective in achieving enhanced social accountability. Ideally, social accountability initiatives should offer rewards for accountable behavior (e.g., public recognition, positive feedback, bonuses or promotion based on client assessment) as well as the prospect of punishment or sanctions (e.g., public embarrassment, legal actions, demotion) for unaccountable behavior. Citizens may have a variety of both formal and informal rewards and sanctions at their disposal and these should be fully and carefully explored in the design of social accountability interventions.

**Tailor the approach to the context.** Social accountability approaches are highly dependent upon the context in which they are applied. Therefore, decisions about what methods to use, who to involve, whether to take a more political or pragmatic approach, and the extent to which social accountability mechanisms should be independent or institutionalized, must be made on a case-by-case basis.

**Access to information and media is crucial.** The quality and accessibility of public information and data is a key determinant of the success of social accountability mechanisms. In many cases, initial social accountability efforts may need to focus on promoting freedom of information, addressing a lack of political will to disclose information, or strengthening the technical capacity
of public institutions to record, manage and make available relevant data. The role of independent media in educating citizens and monitoring government performance is critical. In many countries, community radio can play a particularly important role in informing and giving voice to rural and/or illiterate populations. A common element of almost all successful social accountability initiatives is the strategic use of and support to both traditional and modern forms of media.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{Put the weakest first.} Reaching out to the marginalized, giving voice to the unheard and empowering the weak, all involve swimming against the mainstream. It is crucial to design explicit strategies and dedicate specific resources towards ensuring the equitable and effective inclusion of women, youth, poor people and other marginalized groups in social accountability initiatives.

\textsuperscript{13} Support to media can include, for example, professional or institutional development programs, capacity building initiatives and efforts to promote strategic partnerships or an enabling legal and regulatory environment.
6. REFERENCES


