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

Government Function	Social Accountability Process	Social Accountability Mechanisms and Tools
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[9] 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 demand accountability and lobby for change (Paul 2002, Ravindra 2004, and World Bank 2001). 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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[9] See http://www.idasa.org.za/index.asp?page=programme_details.asp%3FRID%3D29.