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SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY SERIES
SOUTH ASIA SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Social accountability refers to a broad range of actions and mechanisms that citizens, communities, independent media, and civil society organizations use to hold public officials and public servants accountable. Social accountability tools include participatory budgeting, public expenditure tracking, citizen report cards, community score cards, social audits, citizen charters, people's estimates, and so forth. These mechanisms are being increasingly recognized world-wide as a means of enhancing democratic governance, improving service delivery, and creating empowerment.

CASE STUDY 2

The Gemidiriya Program, Sri Lanka:
Piloting the Community Assessment Process

"Give us milk, we will survive for the day,
Give us cows, we will survive for the year,
Strengthen our capacities, we will survive for the lifetime"

BACKGROUND

Social Accountability (SAc) mechanisms serve as a channel for strengthening accountability relationships between communities, local governments, service providers, and the state, and for improving the demand-side of governance by emphasizing citizen participation. It was with these objectives that the community assessment process (CAP)[1] was applied to two villages in the Sri Lanka Community Development and Livelihood Improvement Program, better known as Gemidiriya, meaning village strength. The program builds on a successful pilot called Village Self-Help Learning Initiative (VSHLI), which was introduced in 2000 in the Mahaweli Project.

The Gemidiriya program's long-term objective is to reduce rural poverty and promote sustainable and equitable rural development. The program aims at creating an environment that enables rural communities to improve their livelihoods and quality of life. It paves the way for rural communities to get together, organize formally, plan village development by themselves with 50 percent women participation, and to mobilize self-help and community contributions. To achieve this, the Gemidiriya focuses on building accountable and self-governing local institutions by: (i) devolving decision-making power and resources to community organizations; (ii) strengthening selected local governments that demonstrate responsiveness and accountability to rural communities; and (iii) working with federations of village organizations (VOs), the private sector, and non governmental organizations (NGOs) on economic empowerment to increase the size and diversity of livelihoods. The Gemidiriya program seeks to empower villagers by giving them the authority to decide

1. The community score card (CSC) exercise was renamed the community assessment process (CAP) in the Gemidiriya program by participants in the first WBI Training of Trainers Course on SAc in September 2005, to reflect their understanding and reality. For the purpose of this note, the term community assessment process has been used in lieu of community score card.

their own priorities, plan and implement them, and manage their own funds. The Gemidiriya wheel for village self-development (Figure 1) depicts how this transformation is intended to be brought about.

The Gemidiriya program is designed to be a 12-year adaptable lending program, with three four-year operational phases. In the first phase, the project is to be implemented in 1,000 village communities in the Uva, Southern, and Sabargamuwa provinces of Sri Lanka. The districts in these provinces are primarily agricultural and lack access to basic economic and social infrastructure. In the next two phases, the program is expected to gradually expand from the southern districts to include all the poorest districts of the country in the process, covering 3,000 to 4,500 village communities.

The Gemidiriya program promotes and sets up SAc mechanisms and systems within and between VOs, service provider community based organizations and communities through SAc instruments such as report cards and the CAP. Transparency and accountability are promoted by openly displaying all financial and physical information in accessible form. Social audit subcommittees at the VO level use input and expendi-

Community Assessment Process

The community assessment process (CAP) is a community-based monitoring tool that is a hybrid of the techniques of social audits and citizen report cards. The community score card (CSC) is an instrument to exact social and public accountability and responsiveness from service providers. By linking service providers to the community, citizens are empowered to provide immediate feedback to service providers.

ture tracking and report cards to develop a culture of accountability within communities. This information is being used for developing a rating system for VOs. About 10 percent of the total budget envelope for village development is available as an incentive fund for those VOs that deliver results in terms of equity, transparency, good governance, and timely implementation. The incentive fund is disbursed after an external evaluation of VO performance which includes feedback from the CAP, report cards, and social audit subcommittee reports.

This pilot introduces the community assessment process as an SAc tool to the Gemidiriya program, which communities can use to evaluate the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of different local-level service providers. These service providers include not only government agencies and private contractors but also village-level committees. The CAP provides the community and field operational staff with a simple mechanism to evaluate and assess the performance of service providers. A decentralized system to ensure accountability in the villages is vital to enhance project effectiveness given the large number of villages in which the Gemidiriya program is operational. The CAP is the tool that has the potential to create that decentralized system of social accountability. In the current pilot project, the CAP was applied to assess the performance of the Village Savings and Credit Organization (VSCO) in Pahalagama Village of Hambantota District and the Drinking Water Supply Sub-Project in Kabillegama Village of Badulla District.

Figure 1: The Gemidiriya Wheel for Village Self-Development[2]

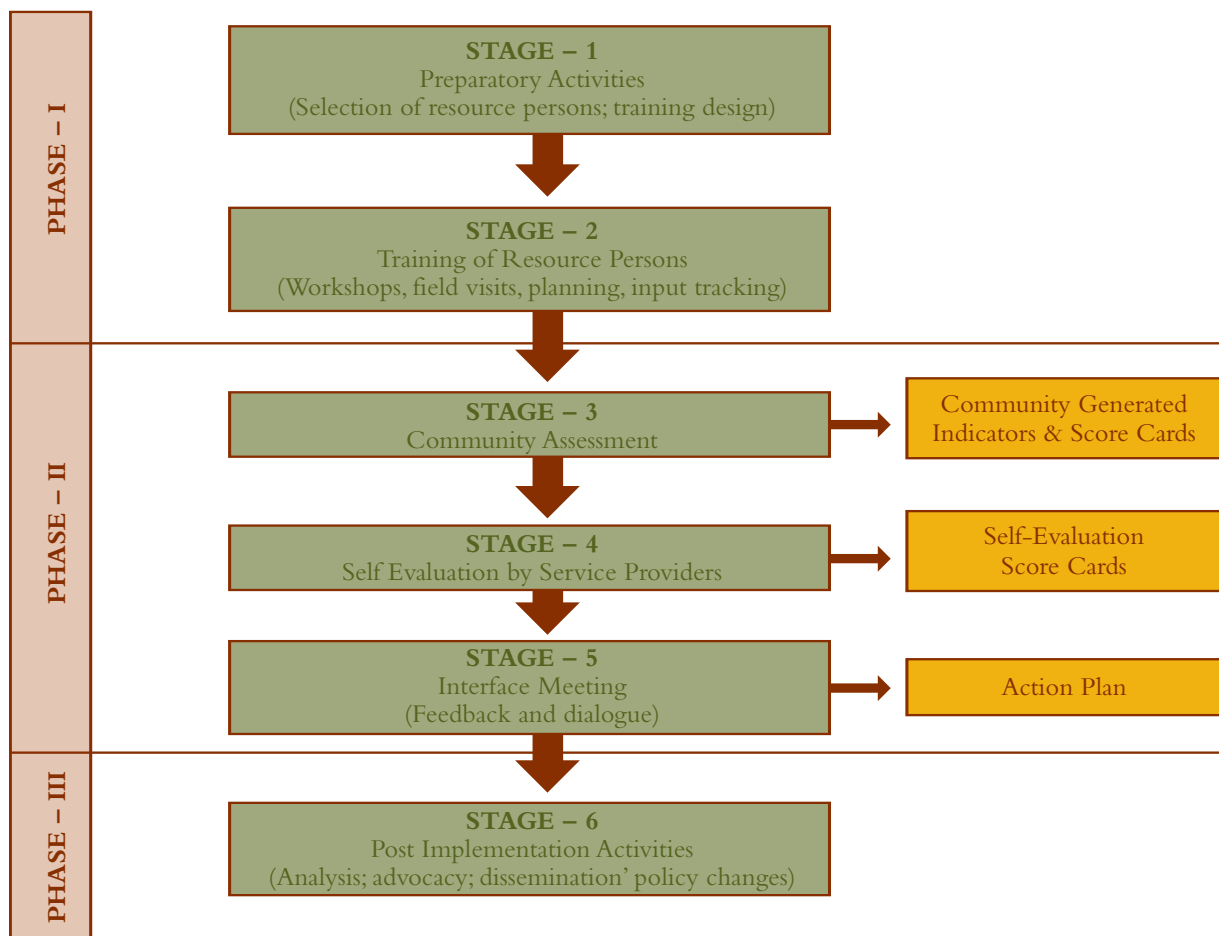2. http://www.gemidiriya.org/sub_link_view.php?doc=3

PROCESS

Methodology. The activities in the pilot were undertaken in four phases (Figure 2). Phase I consisted of preparatory activities such as building capacity and pilot design. The World Bank Institute (WBI) conducted three training of trainers (TOT) workshops for the Gemidiriya program in the period September 2005 to March 2006. Participants in the three workshops included Gemidiriya project staff, community professionals, hub and district-level leaders, and divisional council members and secretaries. Two workshops were broadcasted by the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation in the Uva and southern provinces where the Gemidiriya is active to an estimated 1.2 million people.

Phase II saw the actual implementation of the first CSC through the action learning component of the WBI training workshops in two villages in March 2006. In Phase III, the CAP exercise was repeated in the same villages in August 2006, to compare results with the earlier assessment. All key activities such as input tracking, community assessment, self-evaluation by service providers, consolidation of score cards, and interface meetings were conducted in both Phases II and III as depicted in the figure below. Finally, Phase IV included post-implementation activities such as data analysis, report writing, and dissemination of results.

Village Savings and Credit Organization (VSCO). A VSCO has been set up in each village under the Livelihood Support

Figure 2: Stages in the Community Assessment Process

PHASE		
PHASE – I	**STAGE – 1** Preparatory Activities (Selection of resource persons; training design)	
	STAGE – 2 Training of Resource Persons (Workshops, field visits, planning, input tracking)	
PHASE – II	**STAGE – 3** Community Assessment	Community Generated Indicators & Score Cards
	STAGE – 4 Self Evaluation by Service Providers	Self-Evaluation Score Cards
	STAGE – 5 Interface Meeting (Feedback and dialogue)	Action Plan
PHASE – III	**STAGE – 6** Post Implementation Activities (Analysis; advocacy; dissemination' policy changes)	

Fund of the Gemidiriya program to promote savings and credit activities in the village. Beneficiaries of the Livelihood Support Fund organize themselves into small groups of five to seven members. A maximum of six small groups form a cluster committee and all chairpersons of cluster committees constitute the Village Savings and Credit Committee. The VSCO was assessed by the CAP in Pahalagama Village. The main indicators to assess VSCO performance that emerged from the self-evaluation exercises and community assessments were almost similar and can be classified into three categories: 1. **VSCO Service Delivery Issues,** which included parameters such as loan processing time, loan appraisal schedule, introduction of new business ventures, and prioritizing credit to the poor. 2. **Transparency Issues,** which included parameters such as maintaining transparent records and tabling the budget at the village council. 3. **Capacity Building Issues,** which looked at indicators such as training of small groups and VSCO officials such as the president, secretary, treasurer, and bookkeeper.

Drinking Water Supply Sub-Project (DWSSP). The DWSSP in Kabillegama Village falls under the Community and Social Infrastructure Fund of the Gemidiriya program. The main indicators to assess DWSSP performance that emerged from the self-evaluations and community assessments can be classified into four categories: 1. **Water Supply and Management,** which included indicators such as release of water to beneficiaries as per plan; distribution of quality water; ensuring equity and fairness; provision of water at a time convenient to the community; levying fair and timely user charges; receipts of payments from beneficiaries; development and implementation of a maintenance plan; and supply of accurate water meters. 2. **Procurement Related Issues,** which included indicators to ensure provision of high-quality, low-cost supplies/inputs; timely supply of inputs; and adherence to established procurement procedures. 3. **Transparency Issues,** which included parameters such as creation of community awareness about the project and prudent money management and maintenance of financial records. 4. **Overall Project Goals** such as adherence to guiding principles of Gemidiriya and conflict resolution systems.

Both VSCO and DWSSP performance were assessed by service providers and the community by scoring selected criteria on a 0-5 point rating scale.

Interface meetings brought users and the service providers together to discuss results and seek solutions. In these meetings the community-generated assessment and provider self-assessment were compared, and action plans for improved VSCO or DWSSP performance were formulated. The main issues discussed during the interface meetings in Pahalagama Village related to accessing loans, records management, generating awareness about loans and business opportunities, and skills development. In Kabillegama Village, the main issues discussed during the interface meetings were adherence to procurement procedures, equitable distribution of water, awareness generation, creation of a maintenance plan, and financial management. The action plans clearly identified the activities to be undertaken, the people responsible for the activity, and the timelines for action.

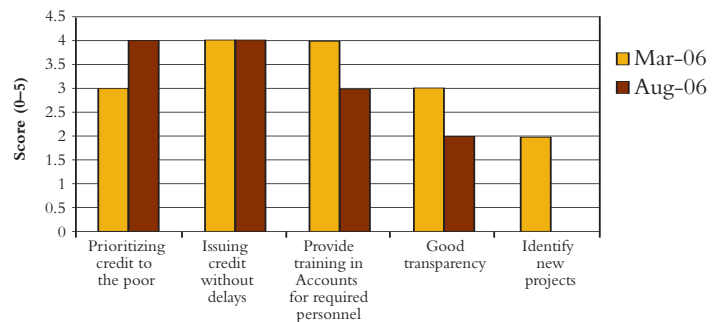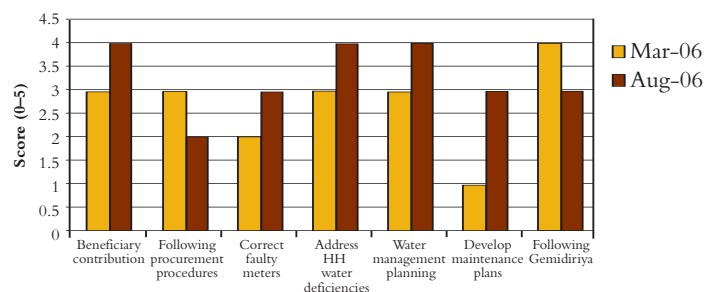## Figure 3: Pahalagama VSCO: Community Assessment Trends

Figure 4: Kabillegama Drinking Water Supply: Community Assessment Trends

RESULTS

The implementation of the community assessment process in Pahalagama and Kabillegama villages has resulted in an **enhanced level of community accountability and improved service delivery** in all activities in the Gemidiriya program. The choice of well-thought-out indicators and specific, measurable, achievable, and realistic action plans created by the service providers and the community (Annex 1) display the level of commitment and involvement of all stakeholders. **Ownership of the action plan by the community and the service providers** has enabled its successful and timely implementation.

A comparison of the community assessment scores (Figure 3) in the March 2006 and August 2006 CAP for Pahalagama Village revealed that the community was of the opinion that the VSCO had not only **improved its pro-poor focus** with **better lending to the poor** but also its disbursal of loans, which were now more timely. However, the community also maintained that there was a **decrease in transparency, in identification of new projects, and in provision of accounts training,** and this was reflected in the decline in scores. The community felt that **information was not being displayed** on the notice board of the VSCO, new projects were not being identified (as a result of which the community gave a score of 0 for this indicator), and training was not being imparted to new treasurers.

Similarly, a comparison of the community assessment scores (Figure 4) in the March 2006 and August 2006 CAP for Kabillegama Village revealed that most indicators demonstrated a positive trend indicating that the **community was by and large satisfied** with the performance of the Drinking Water Supply Sub-Project Committee, except in its adherence to procurement procedures and Gemidiriya guiding principles.

Both action plans indicate that the community wants **service providers to increase their efforts in including poor and vulnerable households.** While in Pahalagama Village, the community assessment recommends the following: *"ensure all people are in groups and issue loans to them."* In Kabillegama Village, the assessment suggests that *"relief measures such as a grace period of 6-8 months should be given to poorest families for payments."* This is desirable as it indicates that the community will design processes that include the poor; these processes may, for example, involve loan sanctions or the distribution of water. The key changes proposed during interface meetings to improve the performance of village service provider organizations are described in Box 1.

The CAP has provided a channel through which the communities can articulate their concerns, voice their needs, and engage with service providers. For example, despite the existence of an elaborate capacity-building component in the Gemidiriya program, both committee and group members voice the need for more training and skills development, especially in technical fields such as accounts and operations and maintenance. This, they claim, will enable them to discharge their responsibilities effectively. Similarly, there is a belief among all stakeholders that information about procedures, implementation processes, and financial management practices needs to be widely disseminated. The need for simplifying procedures has also been articulated. This demonstrates that the CAP can act as an effective formal mechanism for gathering community feedback and redressing grievances and thus improve project implementation through increased civic engagement and participation.

LESSONS FOR INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND SCALING UP:

1. Application of CAP to a large number of villages is not easy. The criterion for selecting pilot villages was outstanding performance in the service chosen for evaluation through the CAP. While Pahalagama Village had one of the best performing VSCOs, Kabillegama Village was a model for procurement, bookkeeping, community contribution, planning, and self-help practices. Since the pilot villages were outstanding performers, the application of CAP was relatively easy. This may not be the case when the CAP is applied to other villages.

2. Scaling up to include multiple services makes CAP complex. The CAP in the current pilot has been applied to assess the performance of one service in each of the two villages. Broadening its scope to include other services in the same village will make the CAP complex. Also, using the CAP in other villages in the Gemidiriya program will invite inter-village comparisons on the basis of CAP performance scores. For this to happen meaningfully, the element of subjectivity ingrained in the CAP will have to be minimized. One possible way of doing this could be to get service providers and communities to specify in detail the criteria adopted for awarding different scores to various indicators. Ways to simplify the CAP while ensuring that it remains meaningful need to be identified.

BOX 1:
Changes Proposed During Interface Meetings

The interface meetings held during the CAP resulted in a number of systemic and technical suggestions for improving performance of the assessed service delivery organization. For example, the salient suggestions for improving the performance of the Village Savings and Credit Organization in Pahalagama Village were:

1. *Revisit Roles and Responsibilities:* The operations manual clearly describes the roles and responsibilities of members of VSCO including VSCC, cluster committees, and small groups. Members should reinforce these roles for higher effectiveness.
2. *Simplify Procedures:* Forms and processes for loan applications should be simplified; various ways of using information and communication technologies (ICT) should be explored, such as creating databases of all households in the community, to speed up the loan-sanctioning process.
3. *Build Capacity of Key Functionaries:* Capacity building is key for effective VSCO functioning; members of the VSCC, cluster committees, and small groups need to be trained in areas such as bookkeeping and accounting methods to discharge their roles effectively.
4. *Increase Transparency and Communication:* Greater emphasis needs to be given to information sharing, especially in areas such as progress of activities, financial transactions, display of information, and so forth.
5. *Monitor VSCO Activities:* VSCO activities should be regularly monitored by the Mahasabha to enable mid-term course corrections.

Similarly, the salient suggestions from interface meetings for improving the performance of the Drinking Water Supply Sub-Project in Kabillegama Village were:

1. *Develop a Broad Strategy to Include Community:* Some community members expressed their inability to fulfill the obligations under the current plan for accessing drinking water. This led to the articulation of the need to develop a more flexible and pro-poor strategy so that all members can access drinking water.
2. *Create a Water Management and Maintenance Plan:* Some households do not get water bills on time, making it inconvenient to pay them on time. The billing system should be streamlined to ensure timely issuance of bills.
3. *Increase Community Awareness:* All community members should know the basic guidelines for accessing water, e.g., the number of liters to which they are entitled per day and the times at which they get access to water. Strict guidelines should be issued for preventing misuse of water.
4. *Improve Quality of Water:* Many members repeatedly raised the issue of bad water quality. The quality of drinking water being supplied to the community should be regularly checked.
5. *Observe Financial Prudence and Transparency:* Procurement procedures should be strictly followed by the respective committees to ensure financial discipline.

3. Community fatigue could hamper sustainability. Communities may begin to suffer from CAP fatigue if multiple services are being assessed at frequent intervals or if there are delays in implementing action plans. To prevent this, a plan for simultaneously assessing multiple services needs to be prepared and implemented. Continuous follow-up to ensure that action plans are promptly implemented is required. The community needs to be regularly informed of progress in action plan implementation.

4. A service delivery satisfaction score can be the basis for performance-based incentives. A service delivery satisfaction score based on the results of the score cards generated during the CAP can be made the basis for resource allocation. A system

to rate village organizations and to award performance-based incentives to service provider organizations will further motivate service providers and improve service delivery.

5. Both demand and supply-side measures need to be pursued for institutionalization. The CAP exercise serves little long-term use unless follow-up exercises are conducted on a sustained basis. Both demand and supply-side measures need to be undertaken to ensure institutionalization. On the supply side, service providers and local governments need to respond to community feedback and implement suggestions. On the demand side, community-based organizations need to teach their staff how to conduct the CAP, so that they become institutions responsible for undertaking the exercise on a sustained basis.

The pilot demonstrates that the community assessment process is a powerful instrument for community self-evaluation, participation, and empowerment. Today, the CAP is effectively being used to evaluate the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of different local-level service providers by communities in hundreds of Gemidiriya villages. The CAP has been successful in creating a decentralized system of social accountability. The government is planning to scale up the CAP to include programs implemented by local governments in select districts.

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ANNEX 1:
Action Plans (August 2006)

PAHALAGAMA VSCO

S.No.	Criteria	Recommendations	Time	Responsibility
1	Giving loan on time	1. Step by step loan appraisal procedure; 2. Preparing a time table; 3. Training village volunteers about the procedure	31.8.2006	VSCO Secretary
2	Accounts training/methods for small groups	1. Prepare training tools and implement	15.9.2006	Company
3	Strengthening small groups	1. Reporting and evaluating small-group activities by small-group volunteers; 2. Develop new small groups; 3. Prepare activity plan for developing inactive clusters	31.8.2006	Livelihood Development, Director; Village Volunteer; President
4	Introduce new projects	1. Build the Livelihood Committee; 2. Collect the information about village resources; 3. Identify market opportunities and inform members of the small groups; 4. Study successful businesses outside the village	20.9.2006	President, Livelihood Committee
5	Transparency	1. Display all information on notice boards; 2. Inform the budget of VSCO in the monthly progress committee; 3. Prepare VSCO plans and implement		
6	Increase savings	1. Develop competitive methods for improving savings; 2. Identify labor sharing programs		President VSCO

KABILLEGAMA DRINKING WATER SUPPLY SUB-PROJECT

Criteria	Recommendations	Time	Responsibility
Act according to golden rules	Restructuring infrastructure sub-project committee; Increase unity; Revive village information and communication committee; Increase transparency through display boards, etc.	Before 1.09.2006	Mahasabha; BOD and Mahasabha; Social Audit Committee
Water distribution according to plan	Include new valves in water lines; Discussion with committee members on grace period and other things; Social audit committee responsible for identifying issues and submitting them to Mahasabha	30.9.2006	Maintenance and Social Audit Committee
Water quality—gas coming with the water	Preparing a leaflet to guide members on reasons and generating awareness		
Reasonable maintenance cost and periodic maintenance	Water bills to be paid on time (monthly)	4/5 of every month	Office Clerk
Cash contributions from community members	Increase grace period from 6 to 8 months; All members must be made aware of the problems in the next Mahasabha	7.09.2006	Chairperson
Water management/procedures	Clean water tanks	Jan/Feb 2007	All Community Members