

TRACKING TRENDS IN ETHIOPIA'S CIVIL SOCIETY (TECS)¹

POLICY BRIEF 14

The work of ChSOs in promoting social accountability

Issue Providing basic public services (education, health, water and sanitation) is the responsibility of Government. However, ensuring quality services that meet the needs of citizens requires input from the intended users or beneficiaries. The Ethiopian Social Accountability Programme phase 2 (ESAP 2) aims to strengthen the capacity of citizens and Government to work together to deliver quality public services. Civil society organisations play a vital role in ensuring accountability and improved services through empowering groups of citizens to participate in the assessment of services, voice their demands within Government policies and monitor the experience of service delivery. The activities of ChSOs in facilitating work with Government and empowering citizens enhances good governance. This policy brief seeks to explain social accountability procedures and to highlight good practice in the work of ChSOs.

Methodology for the rapid analysis

ESAP 2 is managed by VNG International (the managing agent) on behalf of a multi-donor fund which is administered by the World Bank. The programme operates in 223 woredas in all regions of the country. There are currently 49 lead civil society organisations which are grantees of ESAP 2. In addition to these Social Accountability Implementing Partners (SAIPs), there are 62 local partners (sub-recipients of the ESAP 2 fund), bringing the total to 111 organisations. The majority of the SAIPs are registered as Ethiopian Resident charities but some are Ethiopian charities or societies.

This rapid analysis focused on the work of three organisations who are SAIPs and one sub-partner. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with the staff of the SAIPs, members of the citizens' groups set up under the programme

¹The Development Assistance Group (DAG) was established in 2001 to foster information sharing, policy dialogue and harmonise donor support to Ethiopia in order to enable the country to meet the targets set in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). DAG also assists in the preparation, monitoring and evaluation of the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). DAG currently comprises 26 donor agencies providing development assistance to Ethiopia within the Paris Declaration principles of aid effectiveness and harmonization. Disclaimer: This briefing note is based on research commissioned by DAG members through the Tracking Trends in Ethiopia's Civil Society (TECS) project. The researcher was Ezana Amdework. The views presented in this briefing note are those of the researcher and Atos Consulting and do not necessarily represent the views of DAG members.

(called social accountability committees - SACs) representatives of Government service providers and ESAP 2 staff. Given the limited resources for the study, information was gathered from three woredas within the Addis Ababa area and one woreda in Oromia.

How do ChSOs become SAIPs?

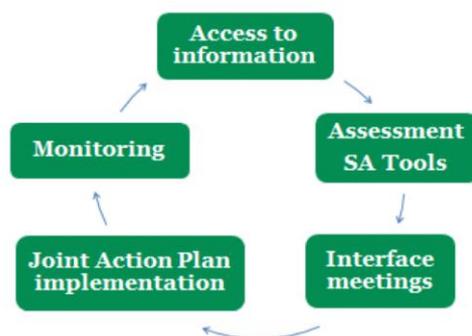
It is a competitive process. All organisations have to make an application to the ESAP 2 programme and undertake a rigorous vetting procedure to assess their capabilities as organisations. For example, the applicants must show that they are capable of managing money and have good financial accounting systems in place, that their Board of Management functions effectively and that the organisation will be able to monitor, evaluate and report on its activities.

The aims of the social accountability process

The overall aim of social accountability is that citizens should be aware of their entitlements to service, be able to voice their demands for priorities and improvements and can call government to account for the provision of services. The outcome of the work of the SAIPs is that the community understands social accountability and is empowered to carry on the process after the project ends.

How does the social accountability process work?

The SAIPs are there to facilitate several stages of a process as shown in the diagram below.



The first stage is to enable citizens to access information about expected service standards, budgets and planned targets. This is followed by a period in which service providers and users employ a variety of different ‘tools’ to assess the current level of service. The SAIPs then organise interface meetings between the service users and providers to agree on reforms which are set out in a joint action plan (JAP). SACs are formed to lead the assessment process and to steer the implementation and monitoring of these plans which is the final stage, although the whole process can be repeated or replicated with a different service.

The work of the SAIPs

Mobilising the community to participate

In addition to making contact with service providers and community groups, the initial work of the SAIPs studied included running workshops to explain the social accountability process to all stakeholders. These workshops were followed by a series of four day trainings to discuss service standards, the roles of different

stakeholders, issues of social inclusion and the use of social accountability tools such as those shown in the table below.

Social accountability tools

Citizens' Report Cards	Surveys that compile service users' opinions and satisfaction level with service delivery, availability, usage and quality
Community Score Card	The community group develops indicators against which they score the delivery of service
Participatory Budgeting	Citizens are involved in deciding the priorities within the budget for a service
Self Evaluation	Service providers evaluate their own performance based on indicators developed during the social accountability process

These trainings provided examples of an effective cascade process. In the SAIPs studied all staff had received this training themselves, and they then cascaded this to officials and community groups at the woreda level. One SAIP had continued the process of raising awareness of social accountability to wider community audiences by organising and training volunteers to carry out sensitisation at especially convened coffee ceremonies. Interviews and focus group discussions carried out during the study showed that the training had been effective with SAC members being able to name service standards and demonstrate understanding of the social accountability tools.

The box below gives an example of the training carried out by one SAIP.

<p>Providing access to information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for 300 students, teachers and administrators on social accountability tools and concepts • Gender mainstreaming training for 103 participants • Workshop on self evaluation for 45 service providers • Awareness raising for 58 participants from various groups • Training on participatory budgeting for 82 participants
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Ensuring social inclusion

A further good practice issue was identified in the study. All SAIPs had sought to ensure that the groups involved in the social accountability process were socially inclusive. Thus strong efforts were made to ensure a balance of men and women and of different age groups, representation of people living with HIV/AIDS and people with disabilities. The results of ensuring this socially inclusive mix can be seen in the issues raised for action. For example, discussions on education services raised issues of gender equality and sexual harassment alongside the lack of facilities for students with disabilities and the need for improved provision of school furniture and school books. This is direct evidence of the voices of vulnerable groups being heard.

A review of the participants of the trainings and the SACs shows involvement of many community groups in order to achieve social inclusion. Iddirs were said to be most useful in having a very clear understanding of the community and being able to identify people from vulnerable groups who should be represented.

Creating a structure for implementation and monitoring

During the initial workshops for the four day training, social accountability committees (SACs) are formed who are responsible for implementation and monitoring. These are tripartite structures formed at woreda and kebele levels with a membership of service providers, woreda officials and citizen representatives who form the majority in order to ensure social accountability. The SAIPs studied had created additional structures to ensure that community voices could be heard. For example, one had organized additional committees at the kebele level to feed into the SAC while another organised additional committees to capture views according to sector, for instance, for health and education.

A typical Social Accountability Committee

- Woreda Administrator
- Education office
- Health office
- Finance and Economic Development office
- Women, Children and Youth Affairs Office
- Iddir Council
- Elder's association
- Association of PWD
- PLWHA
- Women's Association
- Youth Association

In most cases the SAC also drew up an MOU setting out the objectives of the committee in leading the social accountability process and this was signed by the SAC and Government officials.

Use of the social accountability tools

The SAIPs studied had all conducted rapid assessments at the start of the project in order to identify the key issues and assess the level of social accountability in the community, providing a base line against which future action on improvements could be measured. Some organisations used trained volunteers from the community to carry out these rapid assessment to garner local knowledge and ensure the inclusion of vulnerable groups. Following the formal social accountability training, the SAIPs then led the full service assessments, using the social accountability tools. In some cases the citizens' report card (questionnaire) was developed and administered and in others the community score card was deployed. The score card system was preferred by most of the organisations involved in the study. This involves organising focus groups that discuss and identify the key issues in service provision. The focus groups are generally organised to reflect different groupings of citizens: men, women, older and younger people and to ensure representation of vulnerable groups. Once identified, the key issues are prioritized and used as indicators to be scored by both citizens and service providers.

Example: Average scoring of service issues in school provision

	Issue	Indicator	Score	Justification
1	Water supply	Adequate water supply	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small number of water taps - Long queue - Irregular supply/no water tank - Not sanitary situation
2	Access to toilets	Adequate access to toilets	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of toilets too few - Lacks water supply - Boys' and girls' toilets not on separate locations - Not clean - Needs maintenance

Rating 1- 5 in which 1= low and 5 = very high severity of problem

In the example above the prioritised list included: access to drinking water, access to toilets, access to a dining hall, access to first aid room, access to laboratories, appropriate school compound, size of library, use of information and communication technology in teaching, access to meeting hall, gender equality, special needs education facilities, slack of friendly situations for pupils with disabilities, shortage of class rooms and shortage of notice boards.

In some areas community members and service providers had made joint visits to schools and other services to observe the condition of facilities. This had enhanced understanding by all parties and was noted as good practice.

Forming the joint action plans (JAPs)

Following the gathering of evidence using the social accountability tools, the SAIPs facilitated interface meetings between the service providers and SACs and selected community members. Some organisations used these meetings as the occasion on which to draw up joint action plans, others deferred the formation of the plan to a later date. Below is an example of a JAP.

Objective	Output	Indicator	Start time	End time	Authority responsible
Improve education service delivery in school	Improve water supply: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Change plumbing - Introduce new water taps near toilet - Include a water tanker in the system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adequate water supply - number of water taps - Presence of water tanker 	1 Jan, 2014	31 March 2014	School administration
	Improve access to toilets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintenance of existing toilet - Separating girls' and boys' toilets - Adequate water supply - Construction of additional toilets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adequate access to toilets - Toilet seats proportional to number of students 	31 March 2014		School administration

Examination of the JAPs from the four organisations showed that all contained issues that required additional budget or action by a higher authority as well as

issues that could be resolved using existing resources, local decision making and community support. The SACs had tried to include issues that could be tackled immediately and without additional budget. In some areas there was evidence that issues that did require additional budget were scheduled to be included in the woreda plan for the next fiscal year. This inclusion demonstrates that the process is effective and accepted by the Government officials responsible for service delivery.

Monitoring change

The SACs are responsible for monitoring the progress of the JAPs, but the study showed that interventions by the SAIP staff in maintaining frequent contact with the local officials was important in maintaining momentum. Interviewees explain the process: *“two SAC members who are aware of the issue and have a strong relationship with the school were assigned by the SAC to monitor the progress”... “they inform the chair of the SAC about their progress every week...” “we pay woreda officials periodic courtesy visits which serve as reminders of SA and help encourage their participation”.*

The results of social accountability

Although the study was early in the ESAP 2 programme, there are some very encouraging results which demonstrate what can be achieved through this process. Below are a few of the many examples.

- **Increased knowledge of service standards and entitlements**

“Previously parents didn’t complain when students had to share one book with four students because they were not aware that the service standard states that one student should receive one book per subject... Students also had to share their seat with two/three students but the standard states that only two students should make use of a desk... As a result (of involvement in SA) parents are demanding books for their children. Students are also stating that they shouldn’t share their seat with more than one student.” (SAC member)

- **Increased awareness of rights and greater capacity for advocacy**

“Female students of a school in our woreda raised the practice of khat vending near the school premises.. They... were constantly facing sexual harassment by customers and vendors... we took the matter to the woreda administration, which made its own inquiries and closed down the khat vending shops... We now know that we have the right to raise issues and get answers from the relevant offices.” (SAC member)

“...patients have become more aware of their rights. For instance, if they feel that they have been mistreated, they go with their complaints to the health center head or one of the SAC members.” (Service provider)

- **Increased understanding of the rights of vulnerable groups**

“The schools in the woreda are not disability friendly. There are no access ramps for wheelchair users and there is no disability-friendly toilet. Recognizing this, the education office has incorporated the construction of such toilets in its new budget and plan”. (SAC member)

- **Increased understanding among service providers of accountability**
“the health center in our woreda has prepared a comment box to receive anonymous complaints.” (SAC member)

- **Improved linkage between citizens and local officials**

Following the interface meeting in Kuyyu woreda, the woreda administration assigned specific woreda cabinet members to each kebele. SAC members and other citizens can now communicate their concerns directly to these people.

- **Examples of improvements to service delivery**

Bishoftu woreda: purchase of 450 desks from underused budget heading; purchase of two vacuum trucks to improve sanitation facilities; incorporation of other suggested improvements into woreda plans for next year.

Kirkos woreda: construction of new school toilets with support from the SAIP, the community and another NGO.

Gulele woreda included issues that did not require a budget. Changes implemented included providing name tags so that staff could be readily identified and addressing complaints of impatience and rude behavior by some employees. Gulele woreda women complained that they felt pressurized to use certain types of contraceptive which they feared would have long term consequences. This issue is being resolved by requesting the health personnel to give better information about the advantages and disadvantages of different contraceptive methods.

Remote villages complained that they were excluded from a vaccination campaign. The health centre officials have agreed to follow this up.

Challenges and sustainability

The SAIPs interviewed commented that initially both service providers and communities had different expectations of the project, thinking that the ChSOs would provide services and welfare. It took some time for all to understand that the focus is on improving service provision by increasing accountability of service providers through citizen participation. There was also mistrust of the process by some service providers who saw it as another system of individual performance evaluation. The busy schedules and high turnover of Government staff in some offices creates difficulties in terms of continuity and sustainability.

Interviewees suggested that sustainability and mainstreaming of social accountability processes would be increased by mass media campaigns instituting the practice in other structures such as parent teachers associations and the mass based organisations. Comments were also made that service providers themselves were often unaware of the standards set for their own institutions and that information about budgets and plans should be public.

Good practice in social accountability: the role of the ChSOs

The study has highlighted a number of areas of good practice on the part of the ChSOs involved. There was clear evidence of understanding of issues of vulnerability and the need to ensure that the views of marginalized people should be heard. Organisations representing vulnerable groups were fully involved in the social accountability process and included in focus group discussions and

surveys. This process has assisted a greater understanding of the issues of gender and disability within government officials and the wider community.

All SAIPs studied co-operated closely with Government personnel and service providers giving training and through dialogue and visits. This is vital if JAPs are to be incorporated into Government plans and subsequently implemented.

The study demonstrated that ChSOs use their links in the community and their understanding of how CBOs and traditional organisations work to build trust, enabling them to gain legitimacy and acceptance which in turn enables the social accountability process. These two points emphasise that the independence of civil society organisations is key: ChSOs are not Government employees, service providers or community members but they are able to gain trust and work effectively with all these parties.

Recommendations

- This brief study was conducted early on in the life of ESAP 2. It is recommended that the Managing Agent will consider a longer, in depth, independent study towards the end of the programme that can more fully describe the social accountability process, its results and other lessons learned.
- These early results point to significant benefits in the delivery of appropriate services that meet the needs of citizens. The Government, ESAP 2 and representatives of ChSOs should work together to determine how the social accountability process can be mainstreamed, using civil society facilitation and become a regular procedure in the delivery of public service.

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