# Institutionalising Social Accountability

From early on in the ESAP2 program, the motto "putting citizens in the driver's seat of social accountability" has been crucial. It means that citizens should be able to take the initiative to hold service providers accountable, and share their views, needs and priorities regarding public service planning, budgeting and delivery.

## *Conditions to put citizens in the driver's seat of social accountability*

- All citizens, vulnerable ones included, can interact with their government without fear.
- Service providers and local government officials seek citizens' feedback, and take this into account in service delivery: they must be responsive.
- Citizens are supported by CSOs to understand government service standards, and the associated financial and planning information; to develop confidence and capacity to collect evidence of service shortcomings; and to improve their interactions with government officials and service providers when demanding for improvements.
- CSOs develop the capacity of public officials and service providers to interact with citizens in a transparent, accountable and responsive manner.
- Local elected councils see citizens and their groups as a credible source of public service performance assessment and improvement priorities.

In addition to knowing and demanding their entitlements, citizens must know and are prepared to discharge their responsibilities to make public services efficient and adequately responsive to their needs.

## *Building Blocks for institutionalisation*

The ESAP2 actions and achievements can be perceived as building blocks, on which the future of social accountability can flourish. The essential blocks include the following:

1. **Community Empowerment and Mobilization**: In communities where SA is implemented, SAIPs train citizens and service providers, who jointly elect members to represent them in the Social Accountability Committee (SAC). SAIPs mobilize all members of society, including the most vulnerable, so that everybody can express their needs. Members of vulnerable groups are often asked to elect their own representative on the SAC and are of vital importance for the mobilisation of vulnerable people. SAIPs furthermore create and sustain general SA awareness among citizens and citizen groups.

2. **Community Problem Identification & Prioritization:** The SA tools have enabled citizens to identify service problems through Focus Group Discussions or surveys, using the existing service standards. The problems are subsequently ordered according to highest prority, taking into account the needs of women, men and vulnerable members of the community. The problem identification and prioritization by citizens are critical steps to be completed in advance of the constructive face-to-face dialogue sessions with service providers. The most widely used SA tool, Community Score Cards includes self-assessment by service providers.

3. **Interface Meetings:**  A representative selection of citizens presents the community's problems and priorities at the Interface Meeting. Service providers and their sector

officers, as well as other relevant Kebele and Woreda level officials, are invited to respond. Other stakeholders, include elected council members, regional officials, CBO leaders, NGO and private sector representatives are invited to observe, and may play a role in the formulation of plans to resolve highlighted problems. Each meeting is facilitated by skilled SAIP facilitators, who can guide a constructive dialogue between citizens and service providers, helping to find local solutions and assist in the formulation of Joint Action Plans (JAPs).

4. **Joint Action Plan Development, Implementation and Monitoring:** During the interface meeting, a Joint Action Plan is developed. This service improvement plan is agreed by communities and service providers, and aims to address as many of the community's service improvement priorities as possible. The JAP is binding and jointly monitored through SAC-facilitated community-based mechanisms and government M&E structures.

5. **SA Monitoring and Learning:** Supportive supervision in the field helps SAIPs learn from practice as it evolves, and takes corrective action through on-the-job coaching. The bi-annual multi-stakeholder 'learning benchmark meetings' build on the findings of field monitoring and use quarterly project reports to review implementation progress, share experiences and document good practice. The innovative and productive learning methodologies have propelled good SA practice, facilitated stakeholder consultation and contributed to deepening stakeholder relationships and networks.

6. **SA Communications and Knowledge Management:** ESAP2 has an up-to-date website where the public can access all documentation produced by the program and other relevant resources. A quarterly newsletter is widely distributed throughout the country (6000 circulation). A Facebook page reaches over 7700 professionals, 92% Ethiopian from across all the regions, with messages and information several times a week. SAIPs were supported to make Participatory Videos (PV), and a dedicated ESAP2 YouTube channel contains over 200 short PV clips from stakeholders all over Ethiopia and in the local languages. SAIPs are producing quarterly 'Most Significant Change' stories: the best were published in a booklet. Theatre for Social Accountability was developed to raise public awareness. A professional documentary was completed, introducing SA to an Ethiopian audience of citizens and service providers. Competitions in 2014 and 2015 awarded the best communication products and the ceremonies attracted a lot of national media interest both years.

SA knowledge has been well managed and can be used to support scaling of SA with a mass communications strategy, which is part of the FTA-SA linkage agreement. Local community radio broadcasters have already featured SA related programmes, raising awareness about the interventions among the wider community. Some have broadcasted the entire process and every activity of SA implementation in their local areas.

## *Enabling Environment for institutionalisation and ways forward*

Other developments that will lead to sustainability and institutionalization of SA in Ethiopia include the following:

1. **Grassroots groups and existing structures for participation:** Iddirs, Farmers Cooperatives, Self-Help Groups, membership associations, religious associations and traditional structures have been trained to support SA. Many of these grassroots groups command the trust and respect of their constituents. They are locally embedded, often

self-financing and have contributed to the implementation of SA activities in the past. These groups may play a more prominent role in the institutionalisation of SA.

Existing sector structures for service and facility management such as Parent Teacher Associations, Health Boards, Water Committees, Farmer Training Centres, and Rural Roads Committees already provide space for citizen participation and co-management between citizens and government. These structures can make use of the SA arena to strengthen the role of citizens.

2. **SA - Financial Transparency and Accountability (FTA) - Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRM) Linkages:** With MoFEC leadership, FTA staff and SA implementers are increasingly working together with SA tools such as Participatory Planning and Budgeting, Gender Responsive Budgeting and Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys. FTA focal persons are often members of the Woreda SAC. At the regional level, the FTA-SA partnerships are being formalized in MoUs between BoFEC and SAIPs. The SA process enables the government to identify typical performance issues that may require a regional policy response, or signal the need for a sector specific solution. In due course, the MoUs between BoFEC and SAIPs could be expanded to serve this purpose. Further integration of SA into government systems for planning, budgeting, facility management, service delivery performance management, and policy learning will enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of basic public service delivery.

   In some cases, service providers will not be responsive to SA demands, and citizens currently have no recourse to protect their entitlements. In this respect, a clearer role for established government GRM, the Ethiopian Institute of Ombudsman (EIO) and the Office of the Federal Auditor General (OFAG) could be considered. The involvement of EIO and OFAG as parliamentarian bodies that protect citizen's voice might serve as an additional motivator for service providers to be responsive and accountable.

3. **Councils & Citizens' Engagement:** In ESAP2 target areas it is evident that elected council members have started to play an active part in the 'decentralized governance triangle': Their participation in the SA process has enabled them to becoming a vital link between citizens, service providers, and the executive, and has strengthened their oversight role. Regional councils, for example in Tigray and SNNPR, have shown an interest in the role they can play to benefit optimally from the investment in SA and collaboration with CSOs/SAIPs. The capacity development strategies for the next phase could more clearly target councilors and enhance citizen's relationships with them.

4. **Good governance:** The Government of Ethiopia, through its civil service reform program, has introduced a good governance package with the objective of making public services effective and citizen friendly. SA is considered a natural fit with the Citizens' Charter, which aims to make public service responsive and effective. The MoPS&HD has a directorate dedicated to "NGO and civil society capacity building" and may, in the long run, play a pivotal role in supporting SAIPs to strengthen demand side actions. The ministry is also in a position to organise training to public servants on responsive practices. Performance Management Systems (PMS) of the government can specifically monitor staff's responsiveness to citizen demands, by adding SA indicators into the PMS check lists. The added advantage of integrating SA into government systems is that the citizens' engagement practice can, over time, be spread to other public services, as suggested by key informants for MoFEC. In a similar vein, integration of SA concepts and tools in school curriculums and activities for civic education will prepare the future generation for SA as a way of life.

5. An expanded **SA Expertise Pool** now exists of over 350 SAIP staff which will be able to facilitate the scaling-up and institutionalization of SA. A group of 10 SA experts has started to provide leadership to this pool. Certain SAIPs and academic institutions (e.g. JeCCDO, KMG Ethiopia, and Jimma University) have shown interest in providing SA courses in the future. Consultants who have worked with ESAP1 and ESAP2 continue to engage in SA programmes, and will be an important source of first-hand knowledge and experience that can be called upon in the future.

6. **Development Partners (DPs) and SA financing**: USAID, the World Bank, the European Union and others have begun to consider integrating SA into their bilateral programs. In coordination with ESAP2, these actions will add to the scaling up of SA across all regions where DP-supported programs are implemented. In addition, some CSOs have started integrating the concept and tools of SA into their other programs.

Mobilizing sufficient resources from Donor Partners will be necessary. However, several DPs have recently re-evaluated their participation in the Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) that currently supports ESAP2. Innovative solutions must be found to create the most suitable and sustainable funding envelope(s) to implement subsequent SA programs that can eventually bring SA to all Woredas and Kebeles of Ethiopia. Experiences with Multi-Donor Trust Funds (MDTFs), in the long run, are mixed, although the Ghana Research and Advocacy Programme "G-RAP" appears to be an exception.[1]

Some key informants have suggested that the government top up DPs funding of SA. Alternatively, government (possibly with DP support) may earmark funding for mainstreaming SA, possibly under the heading 'Citizens Engagement or People's Participation Program', channelled through MoFEC or MoPS&HD, but run independently outside the government system. In this regard, in Kenya, the Parliament set aside a community development fund, for communities to use for improving basic services in their localities.

The medium term investment needed to reach the majority of all Woredas is extensive, but the cost drops off significantly after a Woreda has been exposed to SA: Once the capacity to implement SA has been created, grassroots groups are expected to be able to support citizens to engage with service providers, Kebele and Woreda officials, using SA tools. More light-touch support from SAIPS will be required in the final phase to ensure that communities who still need help with SA can access it easily.

7. **Steering of Social Accountability.** SA is currently managed through a program modality, with oversight by a Steering Committee Meeting (SCM) chaired by MoFEC's State Minister of Economic Cooperation, with DPs, CSO networks, MoPS&HD, Charities and Societies Agency, and the MA as members. Such a coordination mechanism will remain useful for years to come. It is crucial that the Government moves SA from a program to a policy to give it legitimacy and to allow it a platform from which it can readily take off. In this light, the current ESAP SCM could grow into a more permanent strategic and coordinating body, with a similar tripartite composition, convening quarterly with the current composition, and annually with sector ministries and their DPs. The body could report progress to the Parliament, which has a special stake in SA. The continued support from the Charities and Societies Agency will enable SAIPs and other CSOs to play their role in scaling and sustaining the SA process.

---

[1] Example of an effective multi-donor funding mechanism that has been functioning for many years in Ghana - http://www.g-rap.org/

www.esap2.org.et