Guidelines for designing and monitoring social accountability interventions

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Acknowledgements

Section 1. Introduction

This document presents a set of principles and general guidelines for designing and monitoring social accountability processes, paying particular attention to the importance of context-specific Theories of Change (and therefore of context analysis). The information gathered here mostly derives from real day-to-day experiences confronted in programming in the SONAP[1] region, mirrored by learning from other relevant and recent large-scale programmes. It derived from a learning journey on social accountability in the SONAP region, led by the Regional Governance Advisor with support from the collaboration between IDS and the SDC Democratisation, Decentralisation and Local Governance Network (DDLGN) with colleagues and partners working in the SDC Governance domains in Tanzania and Mozambique. The findings of this process are set out in the learning journey report (Shankland *et al*. 2018).

This document is divided into six sections. Following this introduction, Section Two presents an overview of key concepts which underpin the assumptions behind social accountability programming. Section Three summarises key elements and principles for designing a social accountability strategy, while Section Four focuses on questions and elements to consider when conducting contextual analysis. Section Five goes on to review how context analysis can be used to inform the development of Theories of Change, Theories of Action, and the choice of tools for social accountability interventions. The final section provides guidance and indicates some practical tools for monitoring and measuring results.

Section 2. Social accountability: key concepts and approaches

2.1   Conceptual background

The English term 'accountability' is conventionally understood as having two components: 'giving an account' and 'holding to account'. The first refers to the requirement to explain why decisions have been made, especially by government officials and others with responsibility for public resources, and the second to the ability to sanction (whether via informal penalties or formal punishments) those who have behaved or used resources illegally or otherwise inappropriately. Accountability theorist Jonathan Fox has described these two aspects as 'voice' and 'teeth' (2015). Accountability is thus essentially a relationship of power: the power to demand explanations or apply sanctions on the one hand, or to refuse explanations and avoid sanctions on the other (Newell and Bellour 2002).

There are many different 'lenses' that can be used to understand accountability and plan ways to strengthen it, and these may emphasise legal, management, financial or other kinds of relationship (Nelson *et al*. 2017). At its heart, the concept of 'social accountability' emphasises relationships between citizens and the state – in other words, governance relationships. Social accountability is broadly defined by the World Bank as 'an approach to governance that involves citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) in public decision making'.[2] It has most commonly been applied to relationships between service users and service providers, since, even though not all providers are state bodies, they should be overseen by the state. It was initially promoted by the World Bank's 2004 *World Development Report* as a 'short route' to accountability that enabled citizens (or consumers) to engage directly with service providers.

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[1] This is SDC's term for its Division responsible for Southern, Eastern and Northern Africa and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

[2] See https://saeguide.worldbank.org/what-social-accountability. Please note that numerous other frameworks and approaches to social accountability exist; for a fuller discussion please see the complete learning journey report. We have focused on the World Bank framework here as it is one of the most widely used reference-points in governance programming.

Insofar as social accountability builds citizen power *vis-à-vis* the state, it is a political process – yet it is distinct from political accountability, which focuses specifically on elected officials and where citizen voice is often delegated to representatives (e.g. parliamentarians) who can then hold service providers to account on behalf of citizens (World Bank 2003). This distinction has highlighted social accountability as a particularly relevant approach for societies in which representative government is weak, unresponsive or non-existent.

Figure 1: The World Bank framework for accountability and key relationships of power
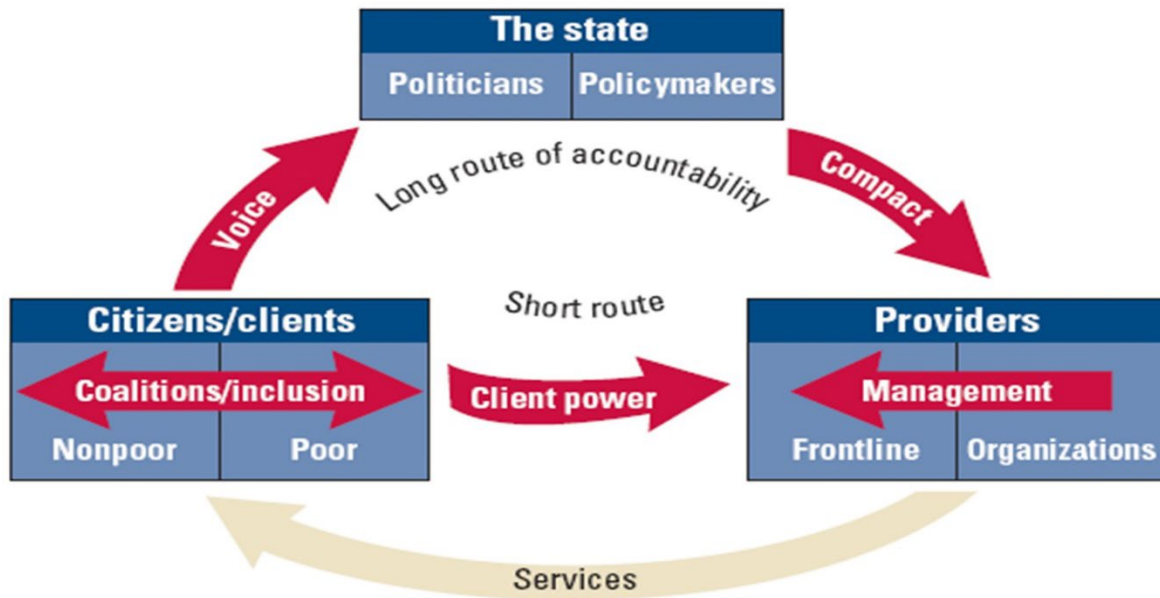
Source: World Bank (2013). Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license (CC BY 3.0)

The World Bank's approach identifies two separate accountability pathways – the long route in which citizens elect politicians who work with policymakers to ensure that providers deliver what citizens want; and the short route in which citizens can hold providers directly accountable for the gaps in access to services. Using the 'principal-agent' framing of the problem, in this framework the long route implies too great a distance between principals (citizens) and the agents (providers), which more often than not leads to non-responsiveness. In an attempt to reduce this distance, the World Bank promotes the short route – within which providers are directly accountable to citizens.

The World Bank's framework reflects just one of many different definitions of and approaches to social accountability, which emerge from different ideological streams in development. It was inspired by 'New Public Management' thinking, which contains some important differences in relation to a more rights-based approach. As Table 1 shows, these two streams differ in terms of the role they attribute to individual rather than collective action and in terms of their vision of the impacts that social accountability initiatives should produce.

Table 1: Ideological background and vision of impact for social accountability initiatives

Ideological stream	Description	Perception of the individual	Vision of impact
New Public Management	Has its origins in the economic theory of rational choice and methodological individualism, emphasising the importance of increasing individual choice as both a means and an end of development.	Form of accountability to service users as individual consumers who could choose to use these mechanisms or, alternatively, exit in favour of other providers. Seeks to empower people as consumers through better information.	Developmental outcomes.
Rights-based approaches and direct democracy	Has its origins in human rights theory, radical democracy and neo-Marxist theories of social transformation, emphasising collective demands for accountability and their 'public good' qualities, as well as the importance of coherence between the aim of promoting rights and democratic values, and the methods and approaches used for this.	Form of accountability to people as citizens who have a right to claim their rights, and to seek redress from the government in case of inaction or violation of rights. This claim can be pursued on an individual or collective level, and may link individual consciousness-raising with collective action for change.	Democratic and empowerment outcomes (in cases where social accountability seeks to change the balance of power both between citizens and the state and also within citizen groups).

Source: Authors' own, based on Joshi (2012, 2013) and McGee and Kelbert (2013).

2.2   Linking supply-side and demand-side approaches

A distinctive characteristic of social accountability is that it requires the state (i.e. the 'supply side') to undertake efforts to enhance the knowledge that citizens (i.e. the 'demand side') have in relation to the existence and use of conventional mechanisms of accountability, as well as to make continued efforts to improve the effectiveness of internal accountability mechanisms through greater transparency and civic engagement (Sipondo 2015).[3]

In practice, however, most social accountability initiatives supported by donors (including SDC) are led not by state actors but by civil society organisations (CSOs) who are seeking to engage the state on behalf of citizens. This means that citizens seeking improvements in state service delivery often find themselves dealing with intermediaries just as they do in political accountability processes, but instead of channelling their concerns via elected politicians, they have to channel them via (often self-appointed) civil society actors.

In many cases, the CSOs promoting social accountability are not collective actors such as labour unions or neighbourhood associations, who at least in theory are accountable to their members, but rather NGOs who are accountable to the (bilateral or private sector) agencies who fund their activities, as well as potentially to the people they aim to assist and the broader constituencies who share their values. As we discuss in Section 4, the nature of civil society varies significantly across contexts. In some countries traditional/customary structures, faith based organisations, and other formations that are very different from NGOs will be also an important part of the social accountability landscape. In fragile and conflict-affected settings, armed non-state actors (religious, criminal and/or political in nature) may also be influential.

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[3] The relationships between supply and demand sides of the 'accountability equation' can be complex and the distinction is not always straightforward. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see http://archive.ids.ac.uk/drccitizen/system/assets/1052734700/original/1052734700-cdrc.2011-blurring.pdf.

Over the last decade, a vast array of tools have been promoted under the framing of 'social accountability' including community scorecards, budget tracking processes, public hearings and ICT-enabled feedback mechanisms (for definitions and some examples, see Table 3). Most of these are identified with the first of the two ideological streams described in Table 1, and centre on improving service delivery in different local and sectoral contexts with a consumer-focused approach. However, long before the boom in social accountability, activists and researchers working for social change noted the importance of changing power structures rather than simply bringing the less powerful into them. Studies of social accountability practice (Joshi and Houtzager 2012; Fox 2014; Tembo and Chapman 2014) have concluded that there is a risk that a focus on deploying tools can overshadow the wider aim of transforming citizen–state relationships. This makes it particularly important to ensure that the choice of social accountability tools or approaches is based on a clear Theory of Change.

Section 3. Designing social accountability interventions

This section briefly summarises the latest evidence from the international literature on the elements that contribute to effective social accountability processes. It goes on to present ten proposed principles for designing social accountability interventions, which combine insights from the literature with the findings from the SONAP learning journey.

3.1   Key elements

Numerous studies have shown that social accountability processes cannot follow a single blueprint if they wish to achieve impact. In an early review of experience, McGee and Gaventa (2011) noted the need to revise approaches to bring power and politics back into accountability. Tembo and Chapman (2014) and Joshi (2014), building on O'Meally (2013), highlighted the importance of a more nuanced and iterative approach to context analysis as essential to building successful social accountability development programmes. Tembo and Chapman (2014) found other 'game changers', including taking a multi-actor/multi-level approach, working with intermediary organisations ('interlocutors') who have the skills, networks and attributes to shape outcomes in a specific context, and being able to work with flexibility, innovation and agility to rethink all aspects of programme design, delivery, monitoring and impact evaluation.

In a substantial review of the evidence on the effectiveness of social accountability processes, Fox concluded that localised, short-term 'tactical' initiatives are less likely to be effective than 'strategic' interventions, which 'strengthen enabling environments for collective action, scale up citizen engagement beyond the local arena and attempt to strengthen governmental capacity to respond to voice' (2015: 356). Fox went on to argue for the need for 'synergy' between organisations carrying out monitoring and advocacy activities at different levels (see Figure 2), as well as between different organisations working at the same level. This is in line with the findings of a recent macro-evaluation of DFID's social accountability programmes, which concluded that 'support to networks of civil society groups can strengthen and sustain the effectiveness of citizens as they engage with government officials and service providers' (Holland 2017: 5).

Figure 2: Multi-level independent policy monitoring and advocacy
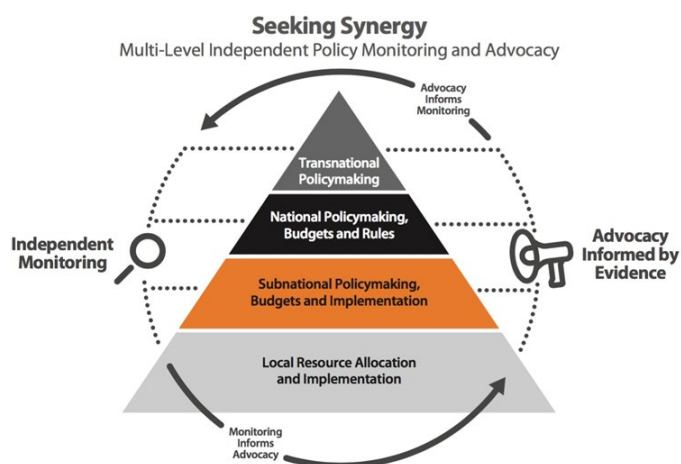
Figure 2 represents the loop connecting two key elements which support the case for accountability claims across all levels of governance (local to transnational):

1. Independent monitoring (left-hand side) generates the data and other qualitative stories to inform…
2. Evidence-based advocacy, which is carried out by different actors, ideally in multi-level coalitions.

The loop comes back to its start once actions agreed through advocacy need to be monitored to ensure they happen.

Source: Fox, J. et al. (2016). Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Public License. © Open Society Foundation

The specific roles played by different actors at each level (national, state/provincial, district/municipal, local/community) will vary according to the specific context. Building on a vast array of literature and empirical data, Grandvoinnet and colleagues (2015) at the World Bank set out to deepen further understanding of how numerous contextual factors have a crucial impact on the ways in which citizens engage with their governments to secure accountability. This resulted in a framework composed of five key elements which can help practitioners to assess both opportunities and risks in citizen engagement (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Social accountability as the interplay of five elements
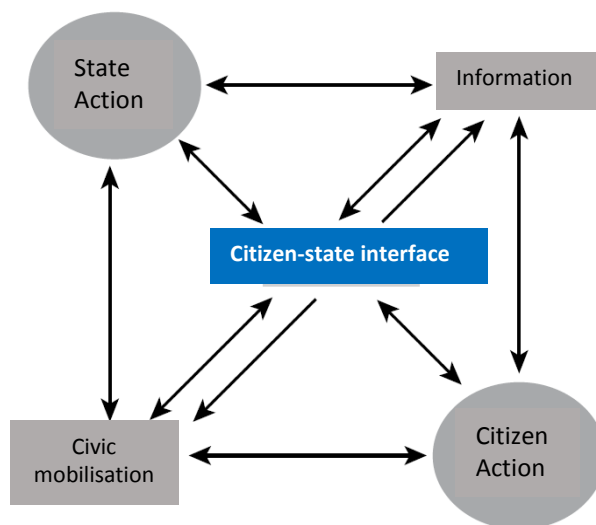
Source: Grandvoinnet *et al.* (2015). Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 IGO license (CC BY 3.0 IGO) © International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank

The framework illustrates that social accountability primarily stems from the potential of the citizen-state interface (centre box), which in reality is a dynamic, iterative process of engagement between citizen groups and state officials. In this model, information acts as both a driver and an output of this engagement, which may (or may not) encourage further citizen and state action via civic mobilisation. Information, the interface, and civic mobilisation are the three 'mobile' elements, acting as levers on the other two (citizen action and state action).

Building on the work of Grandvoinnet *et al*. (2015) and an extensive literature review carried out by IDS for the Citizen Engagement Programme in Mozambique (Lopez Franco 2015) the key issues for social accountability intervention design in each of these five areas can be summarised as follows:

Information

- **Transparency, access to and availability of information:** existence of legislation and government bodies responsible for guaranteeing citizens' right to information as well as the availability and accessibility of this information.

Citizen Action

- **Capacities of implementing CSOs to fulfil their roles:** whether these intermediary actors, described by Tembo and Chapman (2014) as 'interlocutors', have the characteristics and skills necessary to contribute to social accountability processes. From a technical point of view, this involves the capacity to analyse, understand and use information and understand the context; from a political point of view, they must also have legitimacy.

State Action

- **Incentives or sanctions in place for authorities to respond:** either 'hard/formal' incentives and sanctions, in the form of legislation and administrative measures, or 'soft/informal', reflecting historical legacies and power relations, the nature of patronage and clientelistic networks and other social norms.

Civic Mobilisation

- **Motivation and capacity of citizens to participate:** whether collective civic mobilisation occurs through external interventions (participation mechanisms created by the state, donors, CSOs) or through organic political processes such as protests, rallies, etc. or community self-help initiatives building community processes. This is highly dependent on civic culture and levels of civic education.

Interface

- **Relationship between authorities and citizens:** the full range of complex interactions between the state (considering its different layers and complexities) and citizens, not only at the specific moment when authorities and citizens come face to face, but also in the processes that lead up to this and those that follow.

3.2   Key principles[4]

Based on the issues briefly summarised in the previous section and the insights from SDC experiences, this section presents ten key principles to consider when implementing social accountability initiatives. These are:

1.   **Understand the context:** find the answers to key questions about the context before implementation and review them throughout; invest appropriate time in partnering with those who understand the relevant political and power dynamics (from micro to global levels); look for relevant insights from history and culture (key to understanding existing informal/traditional processes of accountability).

2.   **Develop a clear Theory of Change:** use context analysis to inform and guide the programme's Theories of Change and Action, including identification of the most appropriate combination of tools and methods, channels, networks, and partnerships that can lead to the desired changes. Review these Theories of Change and Action throughout implementation, involving as many stakeholders as possible; use them as the basis for monitoring the outcomes of the programme and reaching conclusions about the impact it has achieved.

3.   **Be strategic:** link social accountability initiatives to other institutions of political accountability and other legally constituted participatory spaces/consultation processes from the start of the intervention; take scale into account via vertical and horizontal integration, connecting vertically with counterparts at higher and lower levels and horizontally to branches of the state at the same level and relevant non-state actors; enhance state capacity to respond by supporting pro-accountability coalitions across the state–society divide.

4.   **Understand and work with powerholders:** Based on political economy, stakeholder and power analysis (see Box 1), build relationships well in advance of implementation, at different levels, with a focus on identifying champions for the programme; think of the benefits authorities could also get from participating in the initiative and communicate these possibilities to them. Develop a specific strategy to raise awareness of the benefits of citizen participation with examples from their reality, involving both politicians and technical staff. Help to bridge the gap in understanding what separates powerholders (most of whom come from better-off backgrounds) from the lived experiences of the majority of the population; monitor how authorities respond when receiving demands to identify new strategies for incentivising action; learn to navigate the informal (and often shady) relations that underpin formal power structures.

5.   **Recognise that civil society and communities are not immune to the influence of power and politics:** invest enough time in selecting implementing partner organisations, getting to know them and developing training plans where necessary; identify and support the development of good facilitation skills, which are key to determining the credibility and outcomes of processes. Think of CSOs and the media as politically embedded institutions, as it is not their technical capacities alone that influence social accountability. Identify and engage with local community, traditional, religious leaders, and other informal leaders/patrons as entry points to mobilising people; seek to ensure that CSOs support people to raise their own voices rather than appropriating citizen voice; remain vigilant about those voices that may be being left out of 'the community', and make provision for inclusion of the most vulnerable.

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[4] Developed by Erika Lopez Franco drawing on Fox (2015); Fox (2016); Joshi (2014); Joshi and McCluskey (2017); Flores and Halloran (2015); Grandvoinnet *et al*. (2015); Lopez Franco and Shahrokh (2015); and Flores (2017).

6. **Aim to shift the underlying relationships between powerholders and ordinary citizens:** work with all stakeholders to shift the image of people in poverty from beneficiaries/consumers to citizens/right-holders; encourage citizens to recognise authorities as providing a service rather than having total control over resources and decision-making; invest appropriate resources, time and effort in rights awareness and civic education geared towards mobilising citizens to participate; take into account citizens' needs and opinions in identifying the best forms of participation and mobilisation to support.

7. **Place practical and operational learning at the core of implementation:** design a learning structure that brings together multiple stakeholders; use simple tools and everyday spaces to make learning processes accessible; make sure that changes are implemented iteratively based on what is being learnt, so that programmes are managed in an adaptive way.

8. **Collect, systematise, and share multiple-forms of evidence:** develop a system for aggregating data that emerges from the programme, as relevant and legitimate information is a key resource for evidence-based advocacy with authorities; cultivate political savviness to identify windows of opportunity for presenting relevant evidence, spotting which are the 'hot topics' already on the political agenda; identify kinds of 'evidence' that go beyond academic-style outputs emphasising scientific rigour and numerical data, analysing how information communicated via different media (photography, video, testimonies, life-stories) may be used to open up different channels of engagement (face to face or via social media, depending on what is most appropriate) and increase the scope for joint problem-solving with authorities.

9. **Work in longer-term partnerships to build ownership and sustainability:** donors need to be aware that their role is only a part of the bigger social accountability puzzle and that long-term programming, with careful phasing in/phasing out of support, is a key success factor for change that is sustainable and locally owned by both citizens and governments.

10. **Avoid participation fatigue by incentivising quick wins:** Showcase and spread news about example of the positive difference made through social accountability, emphasising its favourable relation to the efforts and costs involved in increasing participation. While pursuing long-term change it is important to keep in mind that people are motivated and incentivised to keep engaged when they see practical changes following from their participation.

11. **Build on the existing accountability systems:** integrate social accountability programmes with other relevant mechanisms that exist for sanctioning bad behaviour, allocating human and financial resources to enable these links to be strengthened and sustained over time.

Section 4. Understanding the context for social accountability

The first of the principles outlined above, 'Understand the context', emerged as one of the most important conclusions of the learning journey. This section analyses some of the key contextual aspects identified during the learning journey and in the literature review, and identifies some tools that can be used to analyse them. It includes guidance on unpacking the characteristics of the five key elements which Grandvoinnet *et al*. (2015) argue should shape the way that a social accountability programme is designed and its vision of impact, and drive adjustments in its implementation and in the framing of the impact achieved.

4.1   Power, history and culture

As noted above, accountability is a relationship embedded in social structures and institutions (formal and informal) that shape the way that politics and policy making operate in each context. Hence, it is essential to understand which forms of power may operate to block or distort social accountability processes – ranging from the visible power of legal barriers to the hidden power of corruption networks to the invisible power of social norms that silence or exclude more vulnerable citizens. With this in mind, it is clear that understanding political and power relations/dynamics must be at the forefront of designing and operationalising social accountability interventions.

This means that it will be important to carry out some form of power and political economy analysis (Pettit and Mejía Acosta 2014) as part of the initial effort to understand the context for interventions. Although the detail and methodology may vary, the primary focus of PEA is on actors, networks, institutions and their competing interests. PEA can incorporate varying levels from micro to macro and be carried out with different audiences in mind, via approaches including rigorous academic assessments, country practice guides and rapid assessments (Reich and Balarajan 2012).

In addition, mapping key actors and their interests (for example using the Net-mapping tool listed in Box 1), including external/global actors such as multilateral or bilateral donors, trade and finance institutions, will help to design interventions with an understanding of the incentives of powerholders either to support or to hinder them. Other tools listed in Box 1, including those influenced by the 'powercube' approach proposed by John Gaventa (2006), go beyond the focus of PEA on actors and the 'visible power' that they have to pursue their interests, and analyse more 'hidden' or even 'invisible' power dynamics.

Box 1: Tools for analysis of political economy and power dynamics

- ✓ **Political economy analysis (PEA)**
  - Drivers of change:
    https://www.shareweb.ch/site/DDLGN/Documents/SDC%20PED%20Network%20-%20Basic%20Tools%20No%2002%20-%20Drivers%20of%20Change.pdf
  - Political Economy Analysis: Three basic tools
    https://www.shareweb.ch/site/DDLGN/Documents/SDC%20PED%20Network%20-%20Basic%20Tools%20-%20Introduction.pdf
  - Applied political economy analysis: five practical issues: https://goo.gl/YAtQhF
  - Political Economy Analysis for Food and Nutrition Security:
    https://goo.gl/7YMonN
  - PEA for operations in water and sanitation; a guidance note:
    https://goo.gl/mpZjUV

- ✓ **Power analysis and collective action**
  - SDC Guide to PEPA:
    https://www.shareweb.ch/site/DDLGN/Documents/SDC_IDS_ACombinedApproachtoPEandPAAMejiaAcostaandJPettit2013.pdf
  - Power: A practical guide for Facilitating Social Change: https://goo.gl/8QtEfA
  - Power: Elite capture and hidden influence: https://goo.gl/Qobn1d

- ✓ **Stakeholder mapping**
  - Influence network maps (e.g. Net-mapping): https://goo.gl/Zk9SAV
  - SDC Stakeholder Analysis Guide:
    https://www.shareweb.ch/site/DDLGN/Documents/SDC%20PED%20Network%20-%20Basic%20Tools%20No%2001%20-%20Stakeholder%20Analysis.pdf
  - SDC Stakeholder analysis in the context of PCM:
    https://www.shareweb.ch/site/DDLGN/Documents/SDC%20How%20to%20do%20stakeholder%20analysis_May%202013.pdf

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One dimension of context that has tended to be neglected in social accountability processes, but which is now increasingly recognised as central, is the role of history. Joshi and Houtzager, for example, have called for 'a conceptualisation of social accountability that focuses on ongoing political engagement by social actors with the state as a part of a long-term pattern of interaction shaped both by historical forces and the current context' (2012: 146).

History shapes citizens' understandings about their rights and entitlements, and about the responsiveness and legitimacy of the state. For example, the learning journey noted that Mozambique and Tanzania are both ruled by political parties that have remained continuously in power since independence and can use their historical roles in liberation and nation-building to claim legitimacy as 'representatives of the people'. This can enable them to challenge the right of CSOs to represent citizens' concerns in social accountability processes. Examples like this show the importance of designing interventions based on an understanding of how accountability develops 'in time' in a particular context (Nelson *et al.* 2017).

Another frequently neglected contextual aspect is the importance of culture. Grandvoinnet *et al.* (2015) argue that cultural factors can profoundly influence the relationships among individuals within groups, among groups, and between ideas and perspectives in relation to social accountability. According to a review of SDC-supported social accountability and monitoring experiences in Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia, 'there is no true culture of social accountability in Africa, and both the supply and demand side need to make effort to create that culture' (Sipondo 2015: 40). However, there are often strong local understandings of how rulers should behave. When these 'moral economy' norms are violated, then citizens may take (sometimes unruly) mass action – and this action may successfully secure some degree of accountability, as in the case of the protests over food and fuel price rises that many countries have seen in recent years (Hossain and Scott-Villiers 2017).

There will also often be local cultural traditions and expressions that can be drawn upon to encourage citizen engagement with social accountability. This includes making creative use of terms in local languages that may resonate with social accountability ideas. As Fox (2018) notes, 'accountability keywords have different meanings, to different actors, in different contexts – and in different languages', and it is important to find the right words to mobilise citizens' own understandings of rights, responsibilities and good governance.

In sum, in analysing the context for social accountability interventions, it is important to go beyond describing the institutional and policy framework to consider the interests at stake, the forms of power that may operate to further those interests, the different historical experiences that have shaped understandings of accountability and the different cultural practices and languages through which these understandings may be expressed.

4.2 Questions for unpacking the context

Table 2 proposes some guiding questions to unpack each of the five elements of the social accountability framework proposed by Grandvoinnet *et al.* (2015) when starting to think about the implementation of a programme.

Table 2: Questions to unpack the five key elements of context

CONTEXT shaped by power relations, history, cultural practices				
Transparency, access and availability of information	*Capacities of implementing agents to fulfil their role*	*Incentives or sanctions in place for authorities to respond*	*Motivation and capacity of citizens to participate*	*Relationship between authorities and citizens*
- Does the country have a law on transparency and access to information, and if so how comprehensive and well-known is it? - Does the law cover all sectors and all levels of government? - Is the information provided by the state accessible and understandable, i.e. useful? - Are there documented cases in which the law has been used to hold the powerful to account? - How can access to certain information (or the absence of it) help us shape the basic assumptions of the programme's ToC? - What type of skills exist amongst potential local partners for collecting, systematising and sharing different types of information (e.g. numerical data, life stories, visual pieces, etc.)?	- Is it possible to find CSOs that are trusted and considered as legitimate and non-partisan by all/most stakeholders? - Do implementing agents have a track record of working in the sector or locality? - Is there a clear map of the range of capacities (i.e. understanding of key technical issues in social accountability; political and power analysis; facilitation skills; conflict analysis and risk assessment, etc.) that implementing agents will need to have? - What resources would be needed to support implementing agents (especially CSOs) to develop capacities prior to and during implementation?	- Does the country have formal redress mechanisms in case of wrongdoing (e.g. corruption)? - Are there documented cases in which these mechanisms have been used? - Are there free and mass media outlets and social media channels which can be used to apply pressure to take action or shed light on positive and negative actions by authorities? - Is there knowledge of the structural arrangements that guide decision-making by local authorities (i.e. their vertical accountability)? - Are authorities by law required to respond to decisions made by formal mechanisms of co-management or citizen participation? - Is there space for developing positive non-monetary rewards for supportive authorities (e.g. via diplomas, prizes, etc.)?	- Is there an understanding of the ways in which citizens have already participated (or not) in demanding social change? - How has the political system incentivised or altered the informal/ traditional participation structures? - Are there resources available to raise awareness of rights and of the mechanisms available for citizens to use in demanding these rights? - Are citizens aware of the existing participation mechanisms? - Is there an enabling legal framework for participation?	- What is the view of the state that people have (as paternalist, authoritarian, etc.) and how has this been shaped by history? - How do authorities relate to people (e.g. as citizens, as subjects or as children)? - Are there spaces and mechanisms created by law for people to engage directly with authorities? - Is there a shrinking space for civil society (e.g. government targeting/ threatening CSOs, intellectuals and activists)? - Do relations with donors distort the potential for mutual accountability between states and citizens?

Section 5. Theories of Change and Theories of Action for social accountability

5.1 Building context analysis into Theories of Change

Theories of Change make assumptions about what will happen if a programme follows a particular course of action (described in a Theory of Action). Unless these assumptions are rooted in a thorough understanding of the context, they may well prove false and, as a result, the action may fail to achieve its desired outcomes, or may even have negative unintended consequences. Conducting an initial context analysis allows for identifying entry points for different strategies, to strengthen the design of social accountability interventions. These entry points will be very different according to whether conditions are favourable (see Box 2) or unfavourable (see Box 3).

Box 2: Building a Theory of Change and a Theory of Action in a favourable context

If your context analysis shows that…	*then your ToC may assume that...*	*and your ToA can work towards…*
Authorities are aware that they lack information on the quality of service provision and desire to address this	Citizen monitoring will collect data that authorities see as useful for fulfilling their responsibilities	Ensuring that data collection can be systematised and shared with other relevant actors to support evidence-based advocacy
A 'culture of participation' is well established in some places but less so in others	Processes centred on community monitoring and participation will strengthen engagement via a demonstration effect	Supporting peer-to-peer training efforts to grow capacities and skills for incentivising participation in places where this is weaker
CSOs have a trajectory of working closely with local community leaders and change agents	Community leaders will help to take issues identified through social accountability processes to the authorities	Putting in place interface meetings and other spaces where community leaders can raise issues
There is a desire to strengthen connections between local level CSOs and those working at the national level	'Vertical integration' between local and national level CSOs will help to develop stronger collective citizen voice	A set of gatherings and other virtual and face-to-face encounters where organisations can come together and strategise
Formal mechanisms for citizen participation are already in place in the sector from local to national levels	CSO-led social accountability processes will strengthen formal participation mechanisms	Ensuring that formal participation mechanisms are involved from the beginning of the initiative

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While context analysis should help with identifying allies and windows of opportunity that can strengthen the impact of social accountability interventions, it may well also reveal a highly unfavourable set of circumstances for an intervention's implementation. In unfavourable contexts, it will be all the more important to use the information from an initial process of power and political economy analysis to design a Theory of Action that can minimise the risk

of a programme being blocked, as well as maximise its potential for supporting positive change on the ground.

Box 3 presents an example of how a future SDC municipal accountability programme combining demand-side and supply-side activities might be designed to overcome some of the contextual challenges that were identified during the learning journey.

Box 3: Example Theory of Action for social accountability in an unfavourable context

Context analysis indicates that there are:

(a) low levels of trust between CSOs and local governments;
(b) increasing levels of inequality within municipalities;
(c) inadequate linkages between demand- and supply-side programmes;
(d) no mechanisms to collect citizens' views on the quality of municipal services;
(e) low levels of cooperation between local and national NGOs;
(f) political incentives for mayors to be more accountable to their parties than to their constituents;
(g) signs that the Local Government Ministry is unwilling to allow donors to channel resources directly to municipalities rather than placing them under central government control.

Based on this, the Theory of Action combines municipal-level SA intervention with vertically integrated civil society activity and with supply-side interventions providing additional resources to strengthen municipal delivery capacity at the local level and policy and oversight capacity at the national level.

Under this theory of action…

At the LOCAL LEVEL the programme supports:	(1) Close collaboration between local CSOs and municipal governments on public awareness campaigns to increase local revenue mobilisation; (2) A sustained effort by CSOs to ensure that they are listening to all groups of citizens, especially the most marginalised, and campaigning for equity in revenue raising and allocation to ensure that the better-off do not monopolise the benefits from public investment while passing on the burden of tax-paying to the poor; (3) Local-level supply-side disbursements which are tied to satisfactory performance criteria and improvements in citizen satisfaction with service quality (NB: these criteria incorporate gender and other equity dimensions).
While at the NATIONAL LEVEL:	(4) Data from social accountability processes such as scorecards is aggregated across municipalities to provide a national picture and enable comparison; other CSOs are invited to contribute their data and participate in joint analysis and advocacy, whilst the local government ministry is invited to advise on how the data can be integrated with its own performance monitoring indicators for municipal administrations; (5) Municipal governments that perform well are highlighted and given publicity by the programme, through a system of innovation and accountability prizes jointly awarded with the ministry; (6) Joint action by CSOs and municipal authorities to campaign for central government to follow through on its decentralisation commitments and improve resource transfers to local levels. (7) This is encouraged by a matching grants programme for Ministry-identified priorities and central-level capacity building, funded by supply-side donor programmes.
In sum:	At the local level, process (1) builds trust between CSOs and municipal governments, helping to reduce political tensions and therefore the risk of conflict, (2) ensures that social inclusion and equity are built into the process and helps to overcome the divisions among citizens that result from local inequalities, while process (3) provides an incentive for municipal governments to take the process seriously. Process (4) provides the evidence base both for scaled-up civil society action and for enhanced central government monitoring, while (5) encourages the emergence of 'champions' who can help to make the case for further decentralisation, and builds co-ownership of the programme among civil society, local government and central government actors. At the national level, process (6) applies pressure on central government to hand over power and resources, while (7) provides incentives for this, reducing the risk that the ministry will block or sabotage the programme.

5.2 Tools and approaches

Once a clear Theory of Change and Theory of Action have been developed, then programmes can make a more informed selection of tools and approaches. As discussed above, these will need to be brought together in strategic ways to achieve broader impacts, combining and aligning interventions led by different CSO and government partners. There is a very substantial range of social accountability experience already available within the SONAP region, among existing SDC partners and other actors, that can be drawn on to complement the approaches discussed in the SONAP Learning Journey report. Some examples from Eastern and Southern African countries are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Social accountability approaches used in East and Southern Africa

Approach	Examples
Community monitoring Community monitoring aims to monitor ongoing activities of public agencies. Often community monitoring is used as a way of ensuring that ongoing performance is as per norms – and is focused on observable features, for example, teacher or doctor attendance, quality of construction in facilities or ensuring appropriate procedures are followed. In particular, community monitoring has been useful in bringing to light instances of corruption or diversion of public resources (Joshi 2012).	• eduTrac – Uganda • mTRAC – Uganda • PALNetwork for citizen-led, household assessments of basic reading and numeracy competencies – Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda
Participatory Budgeting A Participatory Budget is a mechanism (or process) through which the population decides on, or contributes to decisions made on, the destination of all or part of the available public resources (UN-HABITAT 2008).	• Participatory Budgeting – several countries in the region including Mozambique
Public expenditure tracking This monitoring exercise aims to highlight leakages and gaps in the delivery of funds to the local level. By tracking budgets throughout their implementation, civil society groups can hold public officials accountable by assessing whether public resources are being spent as they are supposed to be.	• Centre for Public Integrity (CIP) – Mozambique • Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group – Uganda
Social audits Social audit is the process of cross-verification of government records/data with realities on the ground, conducted by the people who are affected by the implementation of any particular project, law, or policy.	• Social Audits in Kenya's Constituency Development Fund – Kenya • Participatory social audit with youth – Kenya
Information and communication technologies for transparency and accountability (ICT4TA)[5] Approaches to fostering accountable, responsive governance across many sectors using tools and platforms based on mobile phone and digital technologies. **Interactive radio** provides citizens with a platform to engage in debate with fellow citizens and their leaders. It can promote transparency and accountability; amplify individual voices or aggregate them into a collective voice; add weight and profile to callers' attempts to secure redress or hold leaders or service providers answerable; collect, process and permit rapid visualisation of public opinion data.	• U-report – Uganda • OLAVULA – Mozambique • M-Health – Mozambique • TRAC FM – Uganda • Diálogo – Mozambique

Source: McGee and Kelbert (2013).

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[5] For a discussion of key findings from a wide range of ICT4TA initiatives, see McGee *et al*. 2018.

Section 6. Monitoring and measuring results

This section briefly summarises some of the key issues involved in designing appropriate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategies, before summarising four M&E approaches that can be used in this context. It concludes with a brief discussion of appropriate indicators and measurement approaches.

6.1 Key issues for monitoring and measuring social accountability

M&E needs to incorporate a theory-based approach, drawing on realist evaluation principles

The importance of Theories of Change in designing social accountability interventions means that, in setting out to monitor and evaluate their results, it is appropriate to incorporate a theory-based approach, drawing on realist evaluation principles (Pawson 2013). Pawson and Tilley (1997) argued that, in order to be useful for decision makers, evaluations need to identify '*what works, for whom, in what respects, to what extent, in what contexts, and how?*'. In order to answer this question, realist evaluators aim to identify the underlying generative mechanisms that explain 'how' the outcomes were caused and the influence of context.[6] This helps to ensure that evaluation focuses on assessing the actual contribution of different actors and interventions to observed changes, rather than simply measuring the changes that have occurred and assuming attribution.

It is important to be clear which kinds of change the monitoring and evaluation system will aim to capture

Again, this will depend on the intervention's Theory of Change. Among the interventions visited during the learning journey, some had Theories of Change that assumed results would be derived from increasing the capacity of specific actors (as was the case for SDC Mozambique's effort to strengthen national civil society organisations), some assumed that results would come from behaviour change on the part of local authorities (as was the case for the MuniSAM programme's municipal-level social accountability work) and some assumed that results would come from a change in the quality of interactions among different stakeholders (as was the case for the DFID-funded Diálogo participatory municipal governance programme).

SDC cooperation offices need to think about broader expected outcomes

In line with SDC's Results-Based Management approach, programmes' logframes are expected to define targets and desired outcomes in relation to baselines and assumptions that relate to the implementation context. This means that monitoring and evaluation systems need to assess three different things: (1) the changes that have occurred in outcome areas such as revenue mobilisation, citizen participation or service delivery; (2) the changes in higher-level impact areas such as poverty reduction, trust in government or human development; and (3) the ways in which different programme activities have contributed to these outcomes. In practice, country strategy monitoring tends to leave measurement of higher-level impacts to secondary data sources and to assume rather than investigate the contribution of programme-generated outcomes to these higher-level changes. However, effective management of development cooperation (and accountability to Swiss taxpayers) does require country programme staff to be able to assess whether and how different SDC-supported interventions are contributing to observed changes in intermediate outcomes. In carrying out this assessment, changes need to be measured, and therefore it is important to be clear what the situation observed at any given moment is being measured against. Some approaches measure progress towards a pre-defined 'ideal model', scoring particular processes or capacities according to how close they have got to this desired end-state. Others use a baseline survey to establish an initial value for the indicator and then follow-up surveys to measure progress in relation to this baseline.

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[6] This description is from http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/approach/realist_evaluation.

An experimental evaluation approach might not be suitable for social accountability programmes

Some governance programmes have used experimental evaluation approaches such as Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs), which borrow techniques from biomedical sciences to measure how much difference an intervention has made by comparing different 'treatment' and 'control' cases at the same points in time. Because RCTs use a 'with intervention / without intervention' comparison rather than a 'before intervention / after intervention' one, they can potentially generate more conclusive evidence on whether an observed change can be attributed to a given intervention. However, there are debates about the appropriateness of RCTs for evaluating empowerment and accountability programmes due to their complexity (incorporating many actors and multiple feedback loops) and because their effects are difficult to isolate (Shutt and McGee 2013).

It is important that monitoring is underpinned by a learning approach to programming

In addition to criteria such as relevance, robustness and cost, the choice of strategy for monitoring and evaluating social accountability interventions should also take into account the strategy's usefulness in supporting programme management. It is important to ensure that monitoring data is not only used for reporting upwards, but can also feed into regular revisiting by the implementing team and partners of the assumptions and links in a programme's Theory of Change. Recognising the complexity of governance processes, social accountability interventions are increasingly being designed around a series of action-reflection cycles, after each of which there may be changes in resource allocation patterns and choice of priority partners in response to evidence about what is working where, how, why and for whom.

6.2   Approaches to monitoring and evaluation for social accountability

Although each programme will need to design its own monitoring and evaluation strategy to reflect its Theory of Change, there are some general approaches that have already been applied to monitoring and evaluating social accountability interventions, and programmes can draw on this existing experience when deciding on their own strategies. Three of the most important of these approaches are summarised in Table 4, which also includes links to websites and guidance notes detailing how they can be applied.

Table 4: Three social accountability monitoring and evaluation approaches

Approach	Value	Resources
Outcome Mapping	Designed to provide a set of tools for ongoing monitoring of the results of a change process, measured in terms of the changes in behaviour, actions or relationships that can be influenced by the team or programme, especially among its 'boundary partners'	Learning community: https://www.outcomemapping.ca RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA): https://goo.gl/f6R98S
Contribution Analysis	Designed to reduce uncertainty about the contribution an intervention is making to the observed results through an increased understanding of why changes have occurred (or not!) and the roles played by the intervention and other internal and external factors	4 page step-by-step note: https://goo.gl/8TkVSR Contribution analysis combined with process tracing: http://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/idsbo/article/view/139
Process Tracing	Designed to explain the relationship between an intervention/programme and an outcome, generating findings that can be applied in other programmes, rather than a case-specific explanation of an outcome that is only relevant to one individual example	What can Process Tracing offer impact evaluation? https://goo.gl/dUH2TU Guide to theory-building and theory-testing for process tracing: https://goo.gl/3GLCSZ

Outcome Mapping focuses on identifying changes in behaviour on the part of authorities and in relationships between citizens and authorities. It is an approach already widely used by SDC and some of its key social accountability partners (such as Policy Forum in Tanzania), as well as by other social accountability programmes in the SONAP region (such as the DFID-funded *Diálogo* programme in Mozambique). Outcome Mapping can generate progress scores (using both self-scoring and scoring by other stakeholders), based on desired changes in the behaviour of 'boundary partners' that can be identified based on the programme's Theory of Change. Programmes can incorporate these Outcome Mapping progress scores into their results monitoring frameworks, along with the existing means of verification such as partner reports and third-party or specially-commissioned surveys. However, an SDC-commissioned evaluation of Policy Forum's strategic plan found that there is a risk that results-based monitoring systems (such as those proposed by the logical framework approach) can push organisations towards a focus on reporting delivery of outputs instead of generating the kinds of reflection and learning that Outcome Mapping is supposed to encourage (Allan *et al*. 2016). It is therefore important to avoid the risk of bureaucratisation of Outcome Mapping that this combination can involve.

When it comes to evaluation, programmes will produce stronger and more useful findings if, instead of simply reporting activities and impacts, they investigate links along the causal chain between activities, outputs, intermediate outcomes and impacts. Using Contribution Analysis allows programmes to focus evaluation questions on the links in their Theory of Change, and is therefore helpful in guiding causal attribution in an impact evaluation. The evaluation may confirm the Theory of Change or it may suggest refinements based on the analysis of evidence (Rogers 2014).

Using Contribution Analysis helps explicitly link the parts of the results framework that are within the control of SDC and its partners (activities and outputs) with those that are not (outcomes and impact). It does this by taking the different steps in the Theory of Change and examining whether the assumptions made about the contributions of activities and outputs to observed changes at the outcome and impact levels are robust, or whether other actors and/or factors beyond the control of the programme might have played a more significant role in bringing about these changes.

Once it has been established that the programme intervention did contribute to the observed changes, analysis focuses on the mechanisms (including both strategies and tactics) that made this possible, in order to feed learning about the relative effectiveness of different mechanisms in different contexts back into the programme planning process.

Depending on the level of rigour required (and the volume of resources available for data collection), this qualitative contribution analysis process can be combined with surveys and other quantitative data sources to provide for more statistically rigorous process tracing (Befani and Mayne 2014). Process Tracing is a qualitative method that uses probability tests to assess the strength of evidence for specified causal relationships. It offers the potential to evaluate impact (including in ex post designs) through establishing confidence in how and why an effect occurred (Punton and Welle 2015).

As noted above, the choice of approach will depend on the importance attributed by the programme to criteria such as cost, value for internal learning and value for external results demonstration. In practice, programmes will often combine different approaches, though it is important to be aware of the risk of biasing programme monitoring towards external reporting and away from internal reflection and learning – and without the latter it will be impossible to be properly adaptive and keep adjusting the Theory of Change and Theory of Action to reflect changes in the context.

6.3 Indicators and measurement for social accountability interventions

The indicators chosen for monitoring and measuring the results of a social accountability intervention will also need to reflect its Theory of Change: if this is based on increasing the capacity of individual actors, then a capacity scoring indicator system will be most useful, whereas if this is based on changing behaviours and relationships, then a relational monitoring system such as Outcome Mapping will be most useful. If the Theory of Change emphasises changes in citizen–state relationships, then it will be important to collect perception data (recording citizens' opinions about government actions, service quality or the trustworthiness of different institutions) as well as activity data (recording initiatives taken by government to engage citizens, numbers of participants, etc.).

As noted above, it is possible to combine multiple approaches to monitoring and evaluation, and thus a single programme's results framework might include indicators derived from several different approaches. Table 5 is an attempt to demonstrate this using some of SDC's Aggregated and Thematic Reference Indicators (ARI/TRI) mapped onto key social accountability outcomes, drawing on the Guidance for Monitoring Governance in the Dispatch on Switzerland's International Cooperation 2017–2020.

Table 5: Illustration of social accountability programme outcomes mapped to ARI/TRIs

Outcome	ARI/TRI	Data source	Collection/analysis
Change of practice in local governments	yy local authorities informed zz citizens transparently, involving them in decision-making processes and considering their interests in local development and budget plans	• Annual reports • Surveys	Desk-based review of documentation
	Among the local authorities, xyz take specific measures for balanced participation and consideration of interests of women and vulnerable groups	• Stories of change	Outcome harvesting Semi-structured interviews
Citizen Participation	zz number of citizens that are better informed and co-determine development activities and budgets in their localities *Complemented by* Gathering views from different stakeholders on the quality and inclusiveness (i.e. people with different vulnerable identities are being included) of participation in resource allocation	• Knowledge-Attitudes-Practices (KAP) surveys • Reporting numbers of people participating in public decision-making (headcounts or recording votes cast) • Statements from focus group discussions	Participatory dialogues with different stakeholders triangulated with indicators derived from surveys
Effectiveness of civil society initiatives	Number of well-founded, concerted requests or proposals by supported civil society organisations, citizens' initiatives or media to state authorities to contribute to public policy (e.g. laws, ordinances, strategies, plans, development projects, investments)	• Annual reports • Policy analysis • World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators Governance Surveys • Freedom House Democracy Index • CIVICUS annual state of civil society reports and country reports • Self-assessment and peer-assessments	Outcome mapping Process Tracing
	Number of proposals including the interests of women and disadvantaged population groups, and the number of initiatives which result in concrete measures being taken by state authorities		Semi-structured interviews Stories of change Outcome mapping
Outcome	**ARI**	**Data source**	**Collection/analysis**

Solid public financial management	Number of governmental authorities at sub-national level with public administration (public revenue and expenditure management) practices in accordance with internationally recognised minimum standards	• Annual reports Surveys • PEFA reports	Desk-based review of documentation
Accountability	Number of investigations, reports and debates (at different levels of government) by supported public supervisory bodies (e.g. parliaments, media, citizens' initiatives, NGOs, auditors, independent institutions), on performance assessment and control of government authorities	• Annual reports, surveys • World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators and Governance Surveys	Desk-based review of documentation Key informant interviews Media monitoring Discourse analysis
	The number of corrective measures or sanctions following complaints		

6.4   Whose voice counts in measuring the impact of interventions?

In deciding which indicators to include in results frameworks, programmes should think about a number of key issues:

1)   *Whose perspective each indicator represents*
As well as using expert-driven assessments, self-assessment and/or peer assessment scores can also be used (this approach is often taken in Outcome Mapping processes). Such indicators represent an aggregation of the views of individuals, all of whom have their own biases and limitations, whether they are ordinary citizens or academic experts, hence deemed less objective. Nevertheless, **perception-based indicators should remain an essential part of social accountability monitoring as they measure relationships which are shaped by power.** As shown throughout this document, accountability is as much about relationships and power as it is about procedures, plans and budgets.

2)   *How different data sources can be combined in order to gather a more thorough insight to that particular indicator*
The robustness of perception-based indicators can be increased by 'triangulation', which involves **cross-referencing the scores given by different respondents to identify and address biases**. Triangulation is also important for ensuring that participatory or beneficiary-led approaches to evaluation can be integrated into a wider system of M&E in a way that ensures that structural drivers and contextual dynamics are properly taken into account.

3)   *How the methods used for data collection and analysis can strengthen engagement with partners and beneficiaries*
In addition to generating specific indicators for reporting to the donor, different data collection methods can be combined to interrogate a programme's Theory of Change in a way that strengthens the engagement of different stakeholder groups with the programme (e.g. via the use of Participatory M&E methods like Outcome Harvesting or Beneficiary Assessment within Theory-Based Evaluation approaches).

For example: a social accountability programme may rely on the assumption that introducing SMS text-based systems for monitoring service quality would enable more women to use their mobile phones as channels for demanding accountability on service delivery issues. However, on the one hand, implementing partner reports may indicate that more community radio stations are using SMS-based platforms to collect opinions/complaints, while on the other hand a citizen perception survey shows that there is no increase in the percentage of women who report using SMS to raise their demands via radio stations. This somewhat contradictory data indicates that the initial assumption would need to be reviewed and potentially the Theory of Change and Theory of Action adjusted.

In cases similar to this, it is recommended that programmes conduct additional research and learning activities to understand the implications of trends in different indicators for their Theory of Change. In the example above, **it would be important to use context-appropriate qualitative and participatory methods to engage directly with women in seeking to understand the reasons that impede them from using SMS monitoring platforms.** Are women not engaging more with radio stations because they do not find the issues they are discussing relevant to their priorities? Is it because the stations are broadcasting in the national language and not in the local languages that women are more likely to speak? Or is it because women do want to send SMS messages to radio stations but are unable to do so because their husbands control the households' mobile phones and decide that women's needs come last in deciding how to use scarce phone credit? In sum, the only way to understand the roles played by these different possible factors is by listening to the women.

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