Social accountability hinges on the principle that the state is accountable to its people; it implies that the state is obligated to inform its people about what it is doing. While people, equally, have the right to know what is going on. Central to the concept are a responsive government and active networks.

This is the first in a series of three briefing papers on Social Accountability. Turn to the back page for details of the other briefing papers and how to get them.
Why a SACC project?

SACC is a four-year project to:

- Improve transparency, accountability and people’s participation in management of public finances
- Contribute to better development outcomes for vulnerable people through improved government planning
- Improve Social Accountability through constructive engagement between CSOs and local administrations for transparent, people-centred policies, programmes and budgets, including in delivery of core public services and natural resource management.

We’ll be working directly with:

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<tr>
<td>CSOs</td>
<td>local/township authorities</td>
<td>village administrators</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>parliamentarians</td>
<td>national network</td>
<td>state/region networks</td>
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Myanmar people lived under a powerful and largely unaccountable government for nearly 60 years. The country continues to be severely limited by weak public financial management and a lack of transparency and accountability to its people. In 2011, the Myanmar government began a range of political and economic reforms for good governance. It is expected that following the November 2015 general election, people can hope for a continued trend of increased transparency and accountability of government plans and budgets, and more say in how public money is spent on local services. Social accountability provides a framework for supporting both communities and local administrations to constructively work together towards increased accountability and transparency of local service planning and delivery to communities.

Who we are:

Oxfam, Spectrum SDKN and Scholar Institute aim to enhance constructive engagement between people, government and other duty bearers across Myanmar. We aim to help improve transparency, accountability and public participation in planning, budgeting processes and delivery of core services and development programmes.

People’s Charters

What? Public notices provided by the government for all users of public services. What services are available? Who provides them? When are they available? What’s the fee? What are the terms and procedures of delivery? What should people do if a service is not available? They can be put up at clinics, government offices, land registration offices, etc.

Why? Such notices encourage fast, quality services from accountable and transparent providers. People are informed about what they are entitled to and government can quickly be alerted when delivery goes wrong.

Public hearings

What? A formal meeting where people receiving services can ask questions of government officials who provide the service on issues of public interest (e.g. the need for a road, poor service at a clinic, corruption at the land registry).

Why? People can question officials, express any grievances they might have and suggest measures to improve the situation. It’s a chance for people to speak up about issues important to them. Officials can get feedback on services they provide and coordinate effective reform.

Public Audits

What? Once a local development project, particularly infrastructure, like a new clinic is complete, stakeholders (CSOs and Government) hold a public audit of the financial investment. This helps to discover whether the planned results were obtained at the planned costs; whether there were problems; and highlights irregularities and possible misuse of funds.

Why? Sometimes people cannot trust internal audits carried out through the agencies involved. They want an opportunity to investigate and present grievances about issues like cost overruns, delays and poor workmanship. Public audits can help initiate legal action if malpractice has occurred.
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**How?** CSOs can ask local authorities to set up Public Audits on the completion of projects and work with them to carry them out. Government can also legislate for public audits to be carried out on all infrastructure projects as a way of evaluating spending on new projects and making information available widely.

**In Action** In Kenya a water pumping and reticulation system did not work even after large amounts of money had been spent by local government. People demanded a public audit which revealed that the contractor had used a sub-standard pump and laid the water pipes badly.
How social accountability works

Social Accountability, as defined by the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific (www.ansa-eap.net) is: “Constructive engagement between citizen’s groups and the government for the purpose of checking and monitoring the conduct and performance of public officials and service providers in their use or allocation of public resources.”

The definition roughly describes the type of relationship between state and stakeholders that Open Government Partnership seeks in its programmes and projects. For social accountability to work there must be at least four enabling conditions:

1. Organised and capable citizen groups that can gather and analyse information about government programs; then use this information judiciously to directly engage public officials, politicians, and service providers; and request that they serve the public interest justly, efficiently and effectively.

2. A responsive government that provides spaces, structures and processes for constructive civic engagement. A social accountability approach is particularly useful in the context of decentralisation which provide opportunities for civil society to interact with government officials and public servants.

3. Access to and effective use of adequate and essential information. People request information from government and, in turn, provide evidence they have collected, which is helpful to government.

4. Sensitivity and relevance to culture and context. This requires understanding of contextual factors that can help both government and people to appreciate difficulties and challenges in the topics identified.

This is Spectrum’s first briefing note for civil society and government on Social Accountability tools and reforms.

Our second briefing note covers five further tools:
- Independent citizen oversight committees
- Citizens Report Cards
- Participatory budgeting
- Community scorecards
- Budget literacy.

Our third briefing note covers three key aspects of Social Accountability:
- Right to information
- Checklist of entitlement
- Civic education.

Please contact us to download or request leaflets, and find out more about how you can get involved in Social Accountability work in Myanmar.

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The SAcc project will create 4 state/region networks and strengthen 1 national network. This means that thousands of people can come together to work for stronger social accountability in Myanmar.

The SAcc partners are: