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 second 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:

- 25 CSOs
- 100 local/township authorities
- 90 village administrators
- 20 parliamentarians
- 01 national network
- 04 state/region networks

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.

Report Cards

What? In the case of poor service by a government institution, people want a way to inform those responsible of their dissatisfaction. They can conduct a service user survey and produce results to show how people feel. Data is presented to institution directors with a request to meet them to discuss the survey and seek improvements.

Why? Many institutions do not have a way of checking consumers feelings about services and consumers won’t complain because of fears of retribution. A survey provides an objective picture of service users’ experiences and complaints are presented by a group, not individuals.

Independent Oversight Committees

What? People concerned about a particular issue in their area or state can, on their own initiative, form an oversight committee. This keeps people informed and seeks consultation with government officials about the issue. Examples might be land acquisition and registration, free drugs at clinics or attendance of teachers at schools.

Why? Myanmar people have been used to accepting what ever has been implemented by government. However, In the present reform climate, people feel empowered to raise issues with government and form groups to do so.

Community Score Cards

What? Problems at a local government facility (e.g. a clinic) are felt by service providers (doctors, nurses, midwives) and service users. Community Score Cards recognises this and arrange for each group to list their problems separately, then come together and see how many problems are common. This can be the basis of a joint action plan.

Why? A Community Score Card recognises problems of both service users (e.g. lack of drugs) and services providers (late payment of salaries). It educates both sides about their problems and seeks to develop a common approach to solving problems in which both can be involved.
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How? A facilitator meets the two group separately and asks them to identify their problems and score the importance of these problems to them. The facilitator brings the groups and their reports together, helps them to show them to each other. He or she supports a discussion about which ones they can overcome together and which ones they can both work on together to overcome.

In Action In Rwanda villagers are required by the government officials to provide voluntary labour on community projects. A Community Score Card process identified that service providers had difficulties getting villagers to volunteer, whereas service users complained that community projects were too far from home and that, with journey time included, there was no time for farming. The joint resolution was to agree projects closer to home that would get a better turn out.

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How? A CSO skilled in managing surveys identifies the catchment area for a government institution (e.g. a hospital), and prepares a questionnaire on aspects of the institution’s work that is important to local users (e.g. attitude of staff, availability of drugs, opening hours, overcharging). After the questionnaire is completed and analysed, it is presented to the institution with a request for consultation and can also be shared with the media.

In Action UNDP in Myanmar, recently completed a ‘Local Governance Mapping’ exercise in all states and regions. In order to have information with which they could hold consultations with Government and Hluttaw in each state or region, they arranged a questionnaire based on a sample of townships. They asked questions about people’s use of health, education, and water services. Results were communicated to the government as a basis for discussions on satisfaction.

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How? Any group of people, often assisted by a Civil Society Organisation (CSO) or a Community Based Organisation (CBO), with strong feelings about an issue that is affecting their daily lives, can get together to learn more, understand government’s perspective and seek opportunities for consultation. Groups can request opportunities to talk to government and be accepted by them as a representative group for discussions on this issue.

In Action In Rakhine State fishing licenses were sold to the highest bidder, who then required small fishers, or fishing groups, to pay such people for the right to fish the waters off Rakhine. This was strongly disliked by local fishing communities. They raised this issue with the state government Department of Fisheries. As the topic was further discussed in Rakhine, a group representing fishermen was recognised as a dialogue partner by government.
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 second briefing note for Civil Society and government on Social Accountability tools and reforms.

Our first briefing note covers Five further tools
• Citizen Charters
• Public Hearings
• Local Government Budgets
• Public Expenditure Tracking
• Public Audits.

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

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

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Supported by the

European Commission