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 third 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.
**Civic Education**

**What’s Civic Education?**

Education of the people about how the state works. In a democracy, it is generally accepted that people are actively involved in every aspect of their own governing. People should not passively follow others, but should be self-conscious and active. They can express concerns and queries about the political, social, administrative and economic management of the country. They need to keep alert and play a dynamic role. Civic education, therefore, means education for people with the aim of ensuring that they participate in every sector of the state and for the progress of the society.

1. Understanding of the operation of national and local political and administrative systems and how they function.

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**Right To Information (RTI)**

**What is Right to Information (RTI)?**

This means people have the right to seek and request information of public importance from public offices. Certain information is still kept secret; for example in Nepal: information related to Nepal's sovereignty, integrity, national security and peace and order; matters that may harm international relations; early information related to crime investigations; and information that may damage monetary and commercial confidentiality.

In the past, only government officials had access to public information. Since there was a culture of keeping most of this information confidential, people had little access to it. Times are changing and there is discussion in Myanmar about the value of having a Right To Information Act. Many nearby countries have these acts, a key example being India (www.righttoinformation.gov.in)

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**Checklist of Entitlements**

**What is a Check List of Entitlements?**

The state provides certain services, rights and entitlements to people, but the full extent of these is not well known and not published in a systematic way. A citizen has the entitlement to use a government clinic, a government school or a road: the people has the right to some seeds and some fertilizer; the citizen has the right to a nationality identity card which allows him or her to vote; the citizen is entitled to borrow money. There are many other examples.

In all cases there will be conditions about what is free and what has to be paid for. The problems is that all these entitlements are not well documented or publicised, so in many cases people do not know what they are entitled to for free and what they are expected to pay for. Government officials can make up their minds what they are going to charge. People do not know how they can protest and get the ‘true’ figure of what they are entitled to.

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1. Understanding of the operation of national and local political and administrative systems and how they function.
Why are RTI laws important?

The more information an individual possesses, the more he or she is considered powerful in society. Every year, government allocates large amounts of money to various development and social security sectors and information about these allocations is a source of power. A citizen should have access to such information as:

- What kind of programmes and projects the local authorities are conducting in the citizen’s area?
- Who is involved in those programmes and projects?
- What are the contractual arrangements for performing these works?
- How much is the budget?
- How long are the works expected to take?

Information should also be available to people on farming matters, such as:

- Agriculture fertiliser, pesticide and seeds
- Subsidy of agriculture tools' transportation
- Training.

In absence of information target groups have difficulty benefiting from government programmes and there remains a possibility that resources may be misused. If people are deprived of information about development, infrastructure and social entitlements, the personal interest of the individuals providing services will increase and this can lead to corruption.

Because these entitlements are not systematically publicised, people do not know what they are entitled to and cannot claim their entitlements. At the same time, some government officials can manipulate these entitlements to increase their personal income.

Information is power. It is the right of the people to receive information to the greatest possible extent. It is also necessary that the people themselves become aware and remain updated about their rights and entitlements. Such rights and entitlements should be understood as their rights – not as a gift which someone will provide to them.

What can people do about entitlements?

People can become active in seeking and providing public information. It is useful for them and useful for others as well. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) should disseminate such information as much as possible. They can prepare and distribute relevant booklets which contain such information. People should not be cheated because they do not know what they are (and are not) entitled to. At present it is not the responsibility of any government department in Myanmar to present an overall picture of people entitlements – people mostly hear about the different entitlements from speaking to government officials.

Why is it important?

Civic education is important because it can bring positive change in the way that a person views society. Civic education helps start the habit of developing an understanding and knowledge about the local context. People should know how central and local government works; how the budget is formulated; how it is spent and how the acts and laws (which are matters of public interest) are put together. Civic Education also deals with the ways people should be committed to work together. People should not use violence and conflict to achieve their objectives, but should commit to reaching consensus through negotiation, dialogue and discussion. People who commit to working for rights and entitlements should not be involved in corruption or crime. It is also important that no citizen should be forced to be involved in civic activities against their will.

2. Capacity to utilise the political and administrative systems
3. Understanding of what is meant by good peoplehip in a democracy – qualities such as tolerance, and behaviour that allows a person to negotiate.
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 third briefing note for Civil Society and government on Social Accountability tools and reforms.

Our first briefing note covers: Five tools
- People’s Charters
- Public Hearings
- Local Government Budgets
- Public Expenditure Tracking
- Public Audits.

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

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

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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.