Social Accountability and citizen engagement – understanding poor service delivery in the Zimbabwean context

By Thembile Phute

Pact Zimbabwe: Country Director/Chief of Party

Stakeholders from the demand side have long been working to improve accountability of service providers and policy makers towards efficient and effective service delivery. In recent years there has been an increasing interest in achieving this through social accountability, and related mechanisms, which involve the direct participation of users and their interaction with providers. The discussion will describe the framework for analysing relationships between policy-makers, providers and citizens as the "short route" to accountability involving citizens directly influencing, participating in, and supervising service delivery by providers[1]. The paper will analyse the legal framework in Zimbabwe which provides a conducive environment for the implementation of the SAM approach; for example, the new Constitution has progressive provisions that support social accountability (Sections 13, 119, 141, 194, 298, 299, 300 and 309 – 314). Different stakeholders in Zimbabwe including Government, NGOs and donors have experimented with various social accountability tools. The different tools (community scorecard, leadership performance score cards etc.) vary and some aim to inform citizens and communities about their rights, the standards of service delivery they should expect, and the actual performance of their providers. Others seek to facilitate access to formal redress mechanisms to address service delivery failures.

In discussing the applicability of Social accountability in the Zimbabwean context the paper will elucidate how access to information and opportunities to use it enable citizens individually and collectively to hold frontline providers and public officials accountable. The paper will discuss how politically polarized environments make the engagement between the supply-side (Executive) and civil society /citizens very difficult. In addition, it will examine the lack of political will by the Executive to take corrective action regarding the abuse of public resources by senior government officials, and the lack of funding to CSOs wishing to implement SAM programmes (donors are generally sceptical about the feasibility of the SAM approach in Zimbabwe due to the prevailing political environment).

The paper takes stock of citizens and CSOs interventions in the area of social accountability, looking at what is being done and the lessons learnt. It also looks at the growing body of evidence from impact evaluation studies and results coming from social accountability interventions. The paper will look at how strengthening the oversight role of CSOs/CBOs and oversight bodies like Parliament at national level and councils at local level can be done despite the prevailing political situation.

Background to the concept of Social Accountability

There are several definitions propounded on the discourse under discussion, however, it's essential to note that social accountability entails the right of citizens to obtain justifications and explanations for the use of public resources from those entrusted with their management in order to progressively realise human rights.

The Zimbabwean Constitution Chapter 9 deals with principles of public administration and leadership. The Constitution and the Public Finance Management Act provide a fairly sound legal framework for Parliament to monitor the use of public funds expended from the national budget. Due to the high standards set in the Constitution Zimbabweans should not be experiencing the current rampant abuse and mismanagement of public resources if provisions in these statutes were being enforced. Part 4 of the Act is largely to do with preparation of financial statements and reporting to Parliament. Sections 32, 33, 34 and 35 compel ministries to submit monthly and quarterly financial and accompanying reports to their respective portfolio committees. Besides the afore-mentioned provisions of the Public Finance Management Act, Section 119(3) of the Constitution states that "all institutions and agencies of

[1] *2004 World Development Report Making Services Work for Poor People*

the State and government at every level are accountable to Parliament"[2]. Government has adopted the concept of performance management or results-based management as its policy guiding the delivery of public services. Performance budgeting is therefore expected to be the guiding principle when formulating and implementing the budget.

Officials and service providers have the corresponding duty not only to produce such justifications, but to take corrective action in instances where public resources are not effectively utilised. It is important to discuss two themes under social accountability which are voice and accountability. Voice is the capacity of all people including the poor and most marginalised to express views and interests and demand action of those in power. The focus is not on the creation of voice for its own sake but on the capacity to access information, scrutinise and demand answers with a view to influencing governance.

Accountability is the capacity and will of those who set and, crucially, implement a society's rules, including the executive at different levels and public officials, to respond to citizens' demands. Answerability and enforceability are critical dimensions of substantive accountability and real accountability implies some form of sanction, be it through the ballot box, legal processes, institutional oversight bodies, or media exposure[3].

In Zimbabwe, as mandated by the Constitution, Citizens have the right to demand these justifications and explanations from the State and when it fails to provide them adequately, corrective action should be taken where required. In Zimbabwe, the rights-based social accountability monitoring framework focuses on the entire public resource management system of the State. This approach is based on the premise that there are five basic processes through which states manage public resources to deliver services that realise the socio-economic rights of citizens. The five processes are strategic planning and resource allocation; expenditure management; performance management, public integrity management; and oversight. Hence it is important to note how a politically polarized environment makes the engagement between the supply-side (Executive) and civil society /citizens (demand-side) very difficult. In the end it compromises the implementation of the social accountability approach

Vertical vs. Horizontal accountability

In Zimbabwe the concept of accountability is at the heart of both democratic, rights-based governance and equitable human development. A democratic and inclusive society is based on a social contract between a responsive and accountable state and responsible and active citizens, in which the interests of the poorest and most marginal are taken into account[4]. However, due to Zimbabwe's poor record on Human Rights issues there are several limitations which have suffocated the involvement of citizens in demanding social accountability from the government of Zimbabwe and these include the lack of oversight platforms. Accountability is often classified as either 'horizontal' or 'vertical'. While horizontal accountability prevails within the structures of the state (legislature, judicial bodies, ombudspersons, etc.), providing formal, institutional checks and balances to guard against abuse of power, vertical accountability originates outside the state. Unlike other forms of vertical accountability, such as periodic elections, social accountability can be exercised on a continuous basis or catalysed on demand. Based on 'voice' rather than votes, social accountability initiatives provide a channel for direct political participation (Norris, 2010), casting civil society actors in leading roles in the process of constructing more democratic states by facilitating their engagement with government bureaucracies in an informed, systematic and constructive way (Sadasivam and Førde, 2010). At the same time as strengthening civic engagement and amplifying 'citizen voice', social accountability initiatives aim to increase the transparency of governance in many arenas, ranging from local service delivery to national processes of development policy formulation. Information is central to this improved transparency. Social accountability initiatives frequently involve citizens in either seeking information from government in such areas as budgets, expenditures or

[2] Zimbabwean Public Finance Management Act of…….

[3] Catalyzing democratic governance to accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals . July 2013: REFLECTIONS ON SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

[4] Catalyzing democratic governance to accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. July 2013: REFLECTIONS ON SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

compliance with international legal frameworks or in creating new information about access to and quality of services. The framework in Zimbabwe has not been "marketed" to the supply-side, maybe due to the nature of the existing relationship between the Executive and civic society arising from a polarized environment, leading to mistrust, suspicion etc.

Whatever the level of the entry point of the initiative, a strategy to ensure effective links, both vertical and horizontal, can be instrumental to building sustainable processes. It is important that social accountability initiatives reflect socially accountable behaviour in their own practices and activities and those of their participating partners. Modelling socially accountable practices becomes particularly important in the light of the argument that initiatives are most effective and sustainable in the long-term when they are institutionalized and linked to existing governance structures and service delivery systems (Malena et al., 2004)[5].

Different types of accountability are possible in different circumstances. Answerability, the obligation to provide an account and the right to have a response, differs from enforceability: ensuring that action is taken or redress provided when accountability fails. Furthermore, "voicing demands can strengthen accountability, but it will not on its own deliver accountable relationships" (O'Neill et al., 2007)[6]. Much social accountability work has resulted only in answerability. Even though it is important to create mechanisms rewarding positive behaviour, it is equally important to create mechanisms that sanction unaccountable behaviour (Agarwal et al., 2009). This is a critical aspect of translating accountability work into both sustainable changes in government behaviour and civil society's capacity to make such changes happen (Fox, 2010)[7].

Understanding the Zimbabwean Context:

Implementable Interventions

The on-going social accountability interventions in Zimbabwe have resulted in a number of positive impacts. Among the most noticeable are increased citizen awareness and participation, growth in the influence of civil society organizations in resource allocation decisions, increased analytical and financial reporting capacity, and improved government practices.

Enhanced citizen awareness and participation

Over the year the citizens have been able to take part in one of the stages of social accountability which is planning. The budgeting process has been more accessible to ordinary citizens and this has contributed to greater public participation in government budget cycles. The finance ministry presentation of budget information and documents has been in a manner that ordinary people can understand and this has resulted in a demand for more training on budget issues and on economic matters in general.

[5] Malena, with C., R. Forster and J. Singh (2004a). Social Accountability: An Introduction to the Concept and Emerging Practice. Social Development Paper No. 76. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
(2004b). The Role of Civil Society in Holding Government Accountable: A Perspective from the World Bank on the Concept and Emerging Practice of "Social Accountability". Social Development Paper No. 76. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.

[6] O'Neill, T., M. Foresti and A. Hudson (2007). Evaluation of Citizens' Voice and Accountability: Review of the Literature and Donor Approaches. London: Department for International Development, p. 4– 5.

[7] Fox, J. (2010). The uncertain relationship between transparency and accountability. A. Cornwall and D. Eade. Deconstructing Development Discourse: Buzzwords and Fuzzwords. Rugby, UK: Oxfam and Practical Action Publications.

Increased civil society influence

Most of the Zimbabwean CSOs have made efforts to track budget expenditures which have led to greater recognition by ordinary citizens of the positive contribution that civil society networks and strategic alliances can make in building good national and local governance.

Upgraded analytical and financial reporting capacity

The demand side budget monitoring has improved and this has been necessitated by the research and analytical capacities of civil society organizations and, simultaneously, increased capacity in financial reporting. The Public Service Accountability Monitor (PSAM), through the Zimbabwe Learning Program, have built cross-country budgeting skills among participating country team members by partnering with civil society organizations and academia on research work. These partnerships have contributed significantly to narrowing the gap between theory and practice in fiscal transparency.

Improved government practices

Community awareness of the role of citizens in enforcing responsible government resource allocation has created more space for the democratic development process, whereby people's individual voices and choices have greater influence on their lives. Such innovations as poverty monitoring committees continually promote dialogue between communities and lower levels of government to discourage, among other things, the abuse of public funds. For example, Zimbabwe's Centre for Total Transformation has helped reduce corruption within rural schools in the Mazowe district and led to improved delivery of education services. School authorities are now aware that community members are closely monitoring them and that they must be publicly accountable for actions that they take.

The Zimbabwean experience on preparing community and civil society groups to engage includes raising the awareness of citizens, building confidence and capacity for engagement, building networks and coalitions. Collecting, generating and using knowledge includes finding, securing and analysing information on government activities, translating it into different formats, styles and languages, and sharing it through the media, and social and political networks. Undertaking accountability engagements with governments includes using instruments such as scorecards, audits and budget analysis to engage with a government, either by using existing formalized spaces for participation in planning or policy cycles or by developing new ones, or by mobilizing social protests.

In different contexts the social accountability initiatives have made a difference as they have enhanced development outcomes by strengthening links between governments and citizens to improve the efficiency of public service delivery, increase the responsiveness of services to a range of users, improve budget utilization, emphasize the needs of vulnerable, marginalized and traditionally excluded groups in policy formulation and implementation, tackle gender-based imbalances, demand transparency, and expose government failure and corruption.

Over the years CSOs in Zimbabwe have learnt to acquire a number of ideal qualities and capacities associated with successful social accountability initiatives, such as those suggested by Sadasivam and Førde (2010) and McGee et al. (2010)[8]. The CSOs have gained legitimacy and the authority to speak on behalf of constituents through open and accountable membership-based organizational structures, managerial capacity to plan and administer activities with coherent objectives and strategies, advocacy capacity to negotiate with and lobby government and to optimize the benefits of working in coalitions and networks, as well as connection to networks and coalitions in order to strengthen collective efforts and address them at different levels. Demand-side actors have learnt to share information and to create inclusive action. There is also a need to ensure the information and knowledge capacity to seek, create, interpret and learn from information, in order to provide evidence that informs accountability claims. In addition, there is a need for leadership to build alliances and identify strategic entry points for engagement with government.

Social accountability has been implemented in different contexts. Some partners working on urbanization explore the relevance of social accountability mechanisms for addressing challenges posed by the dramatic increase in

[8] Sadasivam, B. and B. Førde (2010). Civil society and social accountability. UNDP. Making Democracy Deliver: Innovative Governance for Human Development. New York.

urbanization. Social accountability and urbanization has been able to document how urban residents and the organizations in which they engage have held government agencies to account for their policies, investment priorities and expenditures. It also reviews how such efforts have influenced what infrastructure and services urban residents receive, especially those related to the achievement of the MDGs.

The Social accountability initiatives in Zimbabwe are underpinned on the rights-based approaches. Most transparency and accountability work is couched in the language of rights, such as the right to information or the right to carry out social audits on the use of public funds.

Access to Information Interventions

- Access to information laws (legal framework) have really been taking off however there is little experience of evaluation and further work needs to be undertaken to examine who has access to this information and what the impact is.
- Information campaigns have broadly looked at the content of services (rights, standards, financing, organisation of services, channels for participation) and the information related to the quality of service provider performance. The results suggest that there is great diversity in the impact on provider behaviour. It is difficult to disentangle demand side effects from provider efforts. The pathways through which information campaigns flow are complex and difficult to evaluate.
- Scorecards and social audits, which facilitate discussion between citizens and providers, are popular interventions, particularly in the area of health and have been used widely in Zimbabwe.

FINDINGS

Overall the findings show that:

- Over half of human development projects used social accountability language, mostly in the area of social protection in Zimbabwe (health scorecards).
- However, the incorporation of social accountability in project design is much less prevalent. This is critical as the design of social accountability interventions is a key determinant of their success.
- Moving forward, social accountability tools can be effective but within a context of broader mechanisms to influence provider behaviour and change incentives.
- Intermediaries such as civil society and the media must play an important role in facilitating access to information and redress.
- Design of information campaigns is especially important. Technology is an important aspect of the design but is not a panacea.

Challenges to Social Accountability in the Zimbabwean context:

- The institutional capacity of the state often limits the scope for positive outcomes from accountability work. The state needs to respond to demands for accountability by making changes in policy or practice. Although responsiveness is partly a function of capacity, it is also a matter of prevailing policy culture
- The second factor is the nature of civil society. Just as a functional democratic state cannot be taken as a given, neither can a capable, organized civil society with a strong, independent media be presumed. The formation and growth of local associations, interest groups, NGOs and community-based organizations depend on individuals having the capacity and the political space to take collective action, which in turn is strongly influenced by social cleavages along lines of gender, ethnicity and religion (UNRISD, 2010)[9]. Nor can it be assumed that all civil society organizations will want to become a voice for the poor and marginalized or engage with government.

[9] UNRISD (2010). UNRISD Flagship Report: Combating Poverty and Inequality. Geneva.

- Social change, whether in human rights, participation or democratic behaviour, is notoriously difficult to measure and evaluate (Hulme, 2010)[10], and the pathway from social change to actually improved development outcomes is almost never direct. Although the positive outcomes discussed previously resonate with the priorities for MDG attainment, challenges persist in directly attributing social accountability initiatives to MDG outcomes (McGee et al., 2010)[11].
- Politically polarized environment makes the engagement between the supply-side and civil society /citizens very difficult
- There is a lack of political will by the Executive to take corrective action regarding the abuse of public resources by senior government officials.
- There is a lack of funding to CSOs wishing to implement SAM programmes (Donors are generally sceptical about the feasibility of the SAM approach in Zim due to the prevailing political environment)
- Inclusion needs an explicit focus: This write up has provided insights on the importance of inclusion in social accountability initiatives. Many assessments that examine the progress towards the MDGs unfortunately use macro-level statistics that tend to suffer from the 'tyranny of averages' and hide pockets of exclusion and inequalities that are buried within the gross indicators. For inclusive progress on the MDGs, an important lesson is to look beyond the national data and determine where the most marginalized groups are located and then ensure that steps are taken to encourage their participation, including through social accountability initiatives.
- Capacity constraints: The lack of skilled personnel to undertake credible social accountability initiatives is a major problem. The same holds true for the Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network, which lacks skilled personnel for carrying out its gender budget analysis. low capacity on the part of several actors has continued to impinge upon certain operational aspects of the social accountability initiatives in Zimbabwe
- Lack of financial resources and equipment: Lack of adequate financial resources is a serious problem that threatens the sustainability of social accountability initiatives in Zimbabwe. Activities such as budget monitoring are expensive undertakings. Many other civil society organizations face similar constraints.
- Lack of cooperation and mistrust by government: Government officials often resist social accountability interventions, and therefore governments have cooperated little with the interventions identified by the stocktaking. This lack of cooperation is compounded by a theme, acknowledged by many of the initiatives, that most government officials view civil society organizations as sympathizers of opposition political parties. As such, some governments including Zimbabwe now view civil society organizations not as civil, but as "evil" society organizations bent on effecting regime change.
- Political power relations: Who performs accountability across polarized divides? Conflict polarizes society and typically erodes the authority of the state; traditional approaches, such as judicial sanctioning of corruption or parliamentary oversight of budgeting and spending, are likely non-existent. As well, individuals and agencies may be beholden to powerful, militarized political interests with little opportunity for them to monitor accountability or to penetrate the tightly controlled reins of political power.
- Difficulties in accessing information: In order to update and carry out comprehensive analysis of budgets and expenditure patterns, timely access to relevant information is needed; however, the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act has actually hindered rather than facilitated free access to information on revenues and expenditures. The relationship between the government and nongovernmental organizations, which is often marred by suspicion and mistrust, has compounded the situation. As noted earlier, government officials unjustly perceive many genuine development nongovernmental organizations as allies of opposition parties bent on ousting the ruling party from power.

[10] Hulme, D. (2010). Lessons from the making of the MDGs: human development meets results-based management in an unfair world. IDS Bulletin 41(1): 15 - 25

[11] McGee, R., J. Gaventa, G. Barrett, R. Calland, R. Carlitz, A. Joshi and A. Mejia Acosta (2010). The Impact and Effectiveness of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives: A Review of the Evidence to Date. Synthesis Report prepared for the Transparency and Accountability Initiative Workshop, October.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- "There should be increase democratic participation in governance by all citizens and communities of Zimbabwe, as started in Paragraph B of the preamble to Chapter 14 of the Constitution as this will lead to enhanced service delivery and improved quality of life amongst citizens and to promote sustainable and accountable governance in the management of public resource at local government level for effective service delivery.
- The demand side and the Parliament of Zimbabwe will need to expedite the formation of an independent commission of inquiry to investigate reports of corruption and mega salaries in the public sector in order to weed out these cases and restore order and public confidence. Parliament must further hasten the harmonization of old statues with the new Constitution which clearly promotes good corporate governance. Zimbabwean government should make available resources to the Anti-Corruption Commission since it is the body charged with investigating incidents of public corruption.

- There is growing evidence that the rise of access to and the use of ICT has had an impact on corruption. On the most general level, there is evidence that the increased penetration of ICT and the media within a society is correlated with lower levels of corruption (Bandyopadhyay, 2006; Ballard, 2009[12]). To explain the correlation, Baillard (2009)[13] argues that decentralized information diminishes the opportunities for civil servants and bureaucrats to engage in corruption undetected. Similarly, Shim and Eom (2009)[14] note that social capital (the strength of positive social relations) and ICT use and penetration both affect corruption. In the context of e-service delivery programming, ICT certainly can have impact. There is considerable evidence to suggest that e-service-delivery mechanisms can reduce corruption by increasing the transparency of processes to citizens as clients and reduce the opportunity for civil service bribe taking.

- From the wider social accountability perspective, evaluations have revealed varying means by which corruption has been reduced. There is some evidence to suggest that social audits (Singh and Vutukuru, 2010[15]), complaints mechanisms and public expenditure tracking surveys have had an impact on reducing corruption.
- Social accountability, whether initiated by governments, NGOs or grass-roots organizations, is one among many measures that have improved the delivery of services in urban areas and the accountability to citizens of service providers. It also has importance with the long-term pressure it generates for more efficient, accountable and transparent government hence it is important to sustain it.
- Political economy analysis: Can the incentives for accountability be mapped? Elite incentives may work against state strengthening. A critical need is the mapping of the incentives among public officials to seek public legitimacy and to participate genuinely in accountability initiatives.
- Assessments can improve the ways in which social accountability initiatives are targeted; country-wide and localized analysis of the causes of fragility and sector-specific or localized indicators can help contribute to ways in which the level of intervention can be better calibrated and choices made on the types of social accountability tools that best relate to, and may mitigate, underlying drivers of conflict.
- The role of informal institutions, such as indigenous, non-state or traditional leaders, is critical in engaging communities in a state that is weak and fragmented like Zimbabwe. Engaging informal institutions allows for local or historical accountability mechanisms to work. Social accountability initiatives should build in participation and engagement of such leaders. But at the same time, it is important that the selection of

[12] Bandyopadhyay, S. (2006). Knowledge-driven economic development. Economics Series Working Papers, No 267, Oxford: Department of Economics, University of Oxford.
[13] Baillard, C S. (2009). Phone diffusion and corruption in Africa. Political Communication, 26(3): 333.
[14] Shim, D. C. and T. H. Eom (2009). Anticorruption effects of information communication and technology (ICT) and social capital. International Review of Administrative Sciences, 75(1): 99116. Singh
[15] Singh, R. and V. Vutukuru (2010). Enhancing Accotability in Public Service Delivery through Social Audits: A Case Study of Andhra Pradesh. New Delhi: Centre for Policy Research

monitors or participants goes beyond informal leaders and directly engages the community as participants and/or in the selection of those involved in monitoring and measuring state performance.

- CSOs have a critical role in integrating social accountability approaches in Zimbabwe through facilitation of interaction among international service providers, national and sub national governments, civil society and affected communities. This, in turn, requires working across central government institutions, such as line ministries, local governments, civil society and communities. Capacity development approaches must be complementary to ensure the success of social accountability initiatives.
- Interventions at the local level require capacity development not just for communities and individuals engaged in the monitoring but also with sub national officials who must be willing and incentivized to create spaces for enhanced participation by the community. At this level, it is important to analyse the incentives that local officials may have for accountability and to understand the lines of accountability that may run upwards to central governments but also outwards to communities. Local officials must have the resources and capacities to respond to community demands if they are to be held accountable for delivery.
- Social media and new information and communication technology has proven to be especially useful in providing new ways to allow for direct (and discrete) community monitoring, reporting and sharing of grievances. New approaches, such as the use of mobile phones to allow for crowd sourcing receipt of citizen inputs, can provide individuals a direct sense of participation; however, the results may be unreliable, and there are concerns regarding how confidentially citizens' inputs are handled. Confidentiality, thus trust, is necessary to reduce people's very real fears of retribution or punishment for expressing their views.
- Linking social accountability efforts to broader public debates in the media is critical. At the national level, engaging the media is essential to engendering a culture in which citizens' views influence policy processes; at the local level, media reporting on social accountability can impress upon communities that their voice is important and being heard more broadly.
- From the point of view of social inclusion, several lessons emerge. First, social accountability mechanisms are not automatically inclusive, although the rhetoric implies that they would be. Even though the genesis of social accountability is typically a concern with the marginalized, initiatives rarely track disaggregated outcomes. As in all development programmes, successful accountability demands may benefit those who are better off more and may exclude already marginalized groups, thus exacerbating social inequalities. Explicit efforts must link social accountability mechanisms to the needs of the excluded and include them in social accountability processes so that outcomes benefit the most vulnerable and marginalized.
- Following from the previous point, social accountability demands that are targeted specifically towards marginalized groups are more likely to be inclusive. Gender budgeting and gender budget analysis aimed at the empowerment of poor women is a good example of such targeting. Yet, such targeting might be difficult, especially in cases in which there are no specific official targets in policy or accepted social norms and expectations. Disaggregated information is often not collected or is difficult to access. Additionally, narrow targeting of specific social groups might also alienate others from participating. Overcoming these constraints will shape whether social accountability initiatives end up inclusive.
- A promising entry point is to target social accountability processes (information gathering, mobilization and engagement) to be inclusive by explicitly tailoring processes to match the capacities of excluded groups. For example, meetings can be arranged during times when women are able to attend, at locations that are easier for the disabled or use illustrations and enactments for illiterate populations. Identifying the constraints that excluded groups experience and redressing them is essential for enabling inclusive social accountability processes.
- Most social inclusion initiatives generally do not explicitly seek to improve capacity for demanding accountability, although they are concerned with having the voices of the marginalized heard. More explicit effort to make accountability demands one of the elements of their mandate could help to build more synergies between empowerment and accountability processes. For example, livelihood projects for indigenous groups can spread information about work-related rights and entitlements as part of the project, encouraging both monitoring and accountability.

- Credible information (if possible, in disaggregated form) is essential (but not sufficient, see Fox, 2007[16]) for social accountability to work. In most of the examples reviewed here, part of the social accountability initiative was to gather information that was accepted as credible by all stakeholders. Sometimes this requires alliances with reformists within the government; at other times, initiatives work with perceptions, as in the case of citizen report cards or community scorecards.
- Social accountability requires an engaged citizenry. Lack of participation by communities or particular groups may hinder accountability efforts. Whether or not people participate depends upon a range of factors, including trust in outcomes, fear of reprisal and past history of interactions with state institutions, which will vary by context. Building capacity for participation and mobilization is an essential element of social accountability work.

- Politics is an important contextual variable because provider and user behaviour is deeply embedded in politics.
- In the types of social accountability interventions there is a huge gap between access to information and formal grievance redress. At the local level access to formal grievance redress is limited. It would be interesting to look at how informal complaints are addressed.
- Types of grievance are more likely to be easily taken up at the community level than others. For example in the education system informing citizens about the quality of teaching is more difficult than questions such as absenteeism.
- There are fundamental knowledge gaps in social accountability work which need to be addressed including what the sustainability and costs of interventions are
- Networked governance is a must for achieving accountability. Involving the right people and creating alliances among people working to stimulate interests in transparency and accountability is necessary to achieve reform.
- A clear theory of change is needed to make impact.
- The process of energizing communities is key as communities have unique knowledge that others lack.

[16] Fox, J. (2007). The uncertain relationship between transparency and accountability. Development in Practice, 17(4): 663-671.