CLIMATE AND SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY:
A Resource Guide
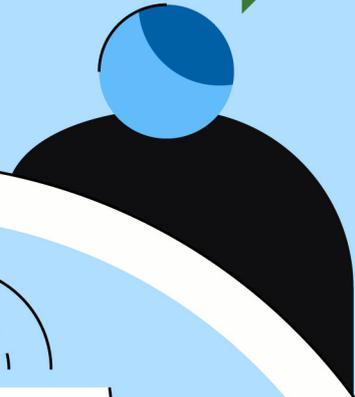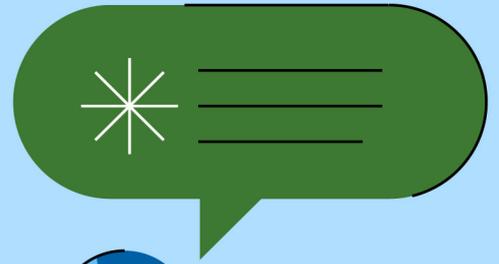
FEBRUARY 2026

The Climate Governance Integrity Programme, implemented by Transparency International in countries across the globe, aims to enhance transparency, inclusivity, and accountability of climate governance frameworks so that climate efforts are shielded from corruption and reach the groups most vulnerable to climate change.

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1. Introduction

Effective climate action requires more than just ambitious policies; it requires transparent decision-making, meaningful and inclusive public participation, and robust mechanisms that enable individuals and communities to hold authorities and duty-bearers accountable for climate promises, actions, and outcomes. Without these strong governance safeguards in place, climate initiatives risk reinforcing inequalities, amplifying corruption risks, and further undermining declining legitimacy and public trust in institutions.

Social accountability tools, strategies, and approaches offer tangible ways to open climate governance, improve responsiveness, and ensure that climate finance and resources reach the people and places that need them most. However, while there is growing recognition of the importance of public oversight in safeguarding the integrity of climate initiatives, many civil society - and more broadly civic - actors lack tailored guidance on how to design and adapt social accountability efforts in climate contexts, and on how to make these approaches work in practice.

BOX 1: SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN CLIMATE INITIATIVES

Social accountability refers to the actions, mechanisms, and processes through which individuals, communities, and civil society organisations influence, monitor, challenge, and scrutinise how resources and services are allocated and delivered, including those related to climate.
By strengthening public oversight in climate initiatives, social accountability can help to ensure that climate commitments are implemented fairly, equitably, effectively, and without corruption.

Please see here for more information.
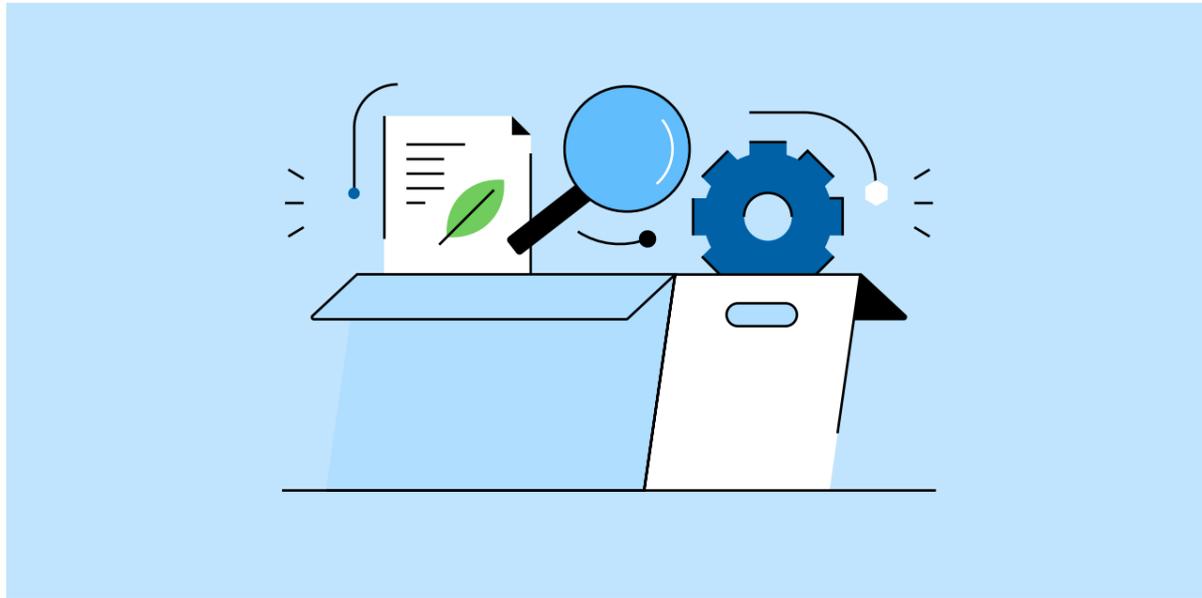
A. What is this Resource Guide (and what is it not)?

This resource guide is a strategic, practical and user-friendly reference for civil society organisations and practitioners who work, or intend to work, to advance transparency, participation, and oversight in climate-related initiatives. The guide is designed to help practitioners develop effective social accountability strategies and approaches; identify social accountability tools that best fit their needs, capacities, political realities, and contexts; understand how these can apply to climate initiatives; and connect to further reading and resources.

The guide is **not** an exhaustive review or detailed account of every social accountability tool and methodology; neither does it claim to present a prescriptive "one-size-fits-all" model for climate accountability; nor should it be viewed as a technical manual for designing and implementing climate governance initiatives.

Instead, this resource guide provides a structured set of ideas, insights and resources, including a menu of social accountability strategies, tools and case-studies that can be used or referred to by civic actors to advance accountable climate governance. In doing so, the guide aims to bridge the potential of social accountability with the urgency of effective climate action, by grounding itself in adaptable approaches, practical resources, and diverse experiences from around the world.

B. How is this Resource Guide framed?

This resource guide is grounded in practice-based learning on social accountability and governance. It draws on growing evidence on how accountability functions in complex systems such as climate governance. Rather than proposing a single model or pathway, the guide reflects the reality that climate initiatives are shaped by multiple actors, levels of decision making, and formal and informal power dynamics.

The guide takes a systems-oriented view of social accountability. This means focusing not only on individual tools or mechanisms, but also on how civic actors can analyse their context, build collective agency, engage with power holders, and adapt their approaches over time. The emphasis is on strategic, context-specific choices and combinations of approaches, recognising that a single approach or tool is rarely sufficient on its own.

In framing the content, the guide showcases a select set of social accountability strategies and tools that are:

Informed by evidence and experience from governance and accountability work across the TI Movement and other civil society organisations;

Adaptable to different political, institutional, and civic space contexts;

Particularly relevant and adaptable to climate governance contexts, including climate policies, climate finance, and projects;

Capable of being led and implemented by civil society actors with differing levels of social accountability experience and capacity; and

Most effective when used in combination as part of a broader accountability ecosystem.

The guide is intentionally selective. It does not seek to catalogue all accountability mechanisms relevant to climate governance. Instead, it aims to support practitioners to think critically about their operating contexts, identify key accountability bottlenecks, and make informed decisions about which approaches, strategies, and tools are most likely to strengthen inclusive and responsive climate governance in their setting.

To support this, the guide combines concise conceptual descriptions with practical examples, text boxes and case-studies that illustrate how social accountability can be applied across different climate issues and levels of governance.

C. How to use this Resource Guide?

This resource guide is designed to be used flexibly, depending on users' roles, priorities, and levels of familiarity with climate governance and social accountability. While the chapters build on one another, the guide is modular and can be read selectively.

For **civil society practitioners and advocates**, the guide offers both a conceptual grounding in accountability and climate governance, and practical strategies, tools and examples that can be adapted to different contexts. Practitioners new to social accountability may find it useful to begin with the **conceptual framing**, while more experienced civic actors may jump directly to the **strategies**, **tools** and **cases.**

For those **designing, funding, implementing or monitoring climate initiatives**, the guide can support reflection on how accountability and social accountability can strengthen climate programme design, implementation and outcomes. The case studies and further reading provide concrete examples of how civic-led accountability has been applied in different climate finance and governance settings.
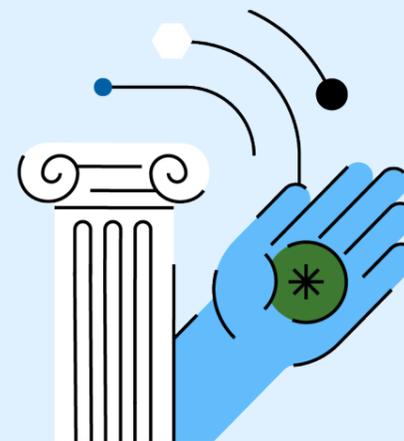
For **public institutions, donors and accredited implementing agencies**, the guide offers insight into how social accountability operates in practice, the roles played by civic actors, and the conditions that enable more inclusive, transparent and responsive climate governance, especially for climate vulnerable communities.

Across all chapters, explanatory text boxes, summaries, and curated resources are intended to make the guide easy to navigate, reference and adapt, whether to inform a new initiative, strengthen social accountability within an existing climate project, or deepen understanding of social accountability approaches more broadly.
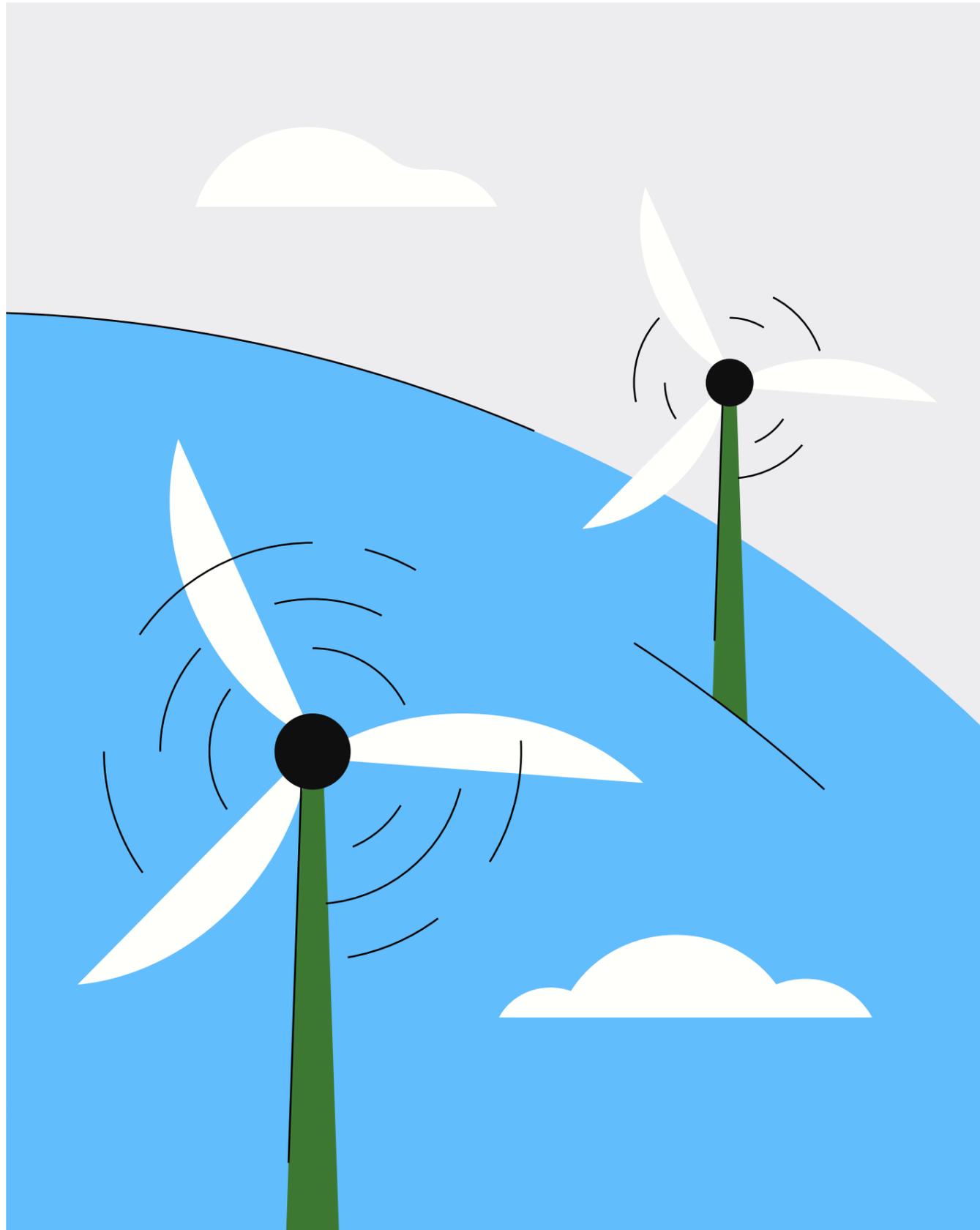
2. Climate Governance and Social Accountability

A. What is Climate Governance?

Climate governance encompasses the complex interaction of actors, institutions, power-dynamics, and decision-making processes that shape how we respond to climate change and build climate resilience. These dynamics operate at multiple levels (global, national, and local) and influence how climate policies and initiatives are designed, financed, implemented and monitored. In practice, the political economy of climate governance, entrenched power asymmetries, and misaligned incentives often result in decisions and actions that are neither inclusive nor responsive to the needs and priorities of those most affected by the climate crisis. In many contexts, these challenges are often compounded by corruption and integrity risks, including the misallocation or capture of climate finance. These risks can undermine trust, effectiveness and equity in climate responses.

Efforts to strengthen climate governance require understanding, carefully navigating, and influencing these processes and dynamics in diverse contexts. Around the world, civic actors are working to make climate initiatives and the governance of climate finance more transparent, participatory, and responsive. As we have highlighted in the cases below, accessing key information and leveraging this information to engage with decision-makers in participatory spaces can lead to more effective and responsive climate actions and outcomes.

However, in contexts of power asymmetries, political patronage, misaligned incentives, and other political economy challenges, transparency and public participation are rarely sufficient levers on their own. When accountability mechanisms are weak or absent, the responsiveness to critical needs and priorities remains at the discretion of decision-makers. To ensure climate decisions and resources reach the people and places that need them most, transparency and public participation must be accompanied by meaningful accountability.

B. Accountability in Climate Governance

Accountability is central to "governance that delivers" effective public goods and services. It shapes how and whether public authorities and duty-bearers explain decisions, answer for their actions, and face consequences or sanctions for misconduct or misuse of public resources. In the context of climate governance, accountability can help ensure climate finance is used effectively, outcomes of climate actions better meet community needs, and climate commitments lead to real results. While accountability is not a "magic bullet", it is widely (and increasingly) considered a necessary feature of inclusive and responsive climate finance and action. Moving away from unchecked discretion, accountability ensures that responses to the climate crisis are institutionally and democratically grounded, including answerability for decisions and sanctions for rule-breaking actions.

In most contexts, accountable governance emerges from an ecosystem of actors, mechanisms, and factors that influence accountability, both positively and negatively. This "Accountability Ecosystem" typically includes:
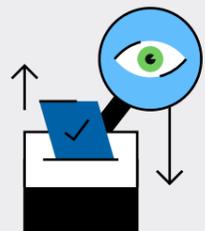
Vertical Accountability:
Individuals, communities, and civil society engaging with public or elected officials through democratic processes, including top-down elections and bottom-up social accountability actions.

Horizontal Accountability:
Formal oversight institutions such as supreme audit institutions, ombudspersons offices, and parliaments providing independent oversight.

Hybrid / Diagonal Accountability:
*Hybrid forms of accountability, where civil society and oversight institutions interact through collaborative accountability mechanisms such as **participatory audits.***

BOX 2: UNDERSTANDING ACCOUNTABILITY ECOSYSTEMS IN CLIMATE GOVERNANCE

Accountability in climate rarely depends on a single institution or mechanism. It emerges, instead, from an ecosystem of actors and processes that interact across different levels of governance. In climate governance, this ecosystem may include citizens and communities monitoring climate project impacts; civil society organisations aggregating evidence and mobilizing collective action; the media amplifying stories and messages; oversight institutions reviewing climate-related spending; or courts and other enforcement agencies sanctioning consequences.

A strong accountability ecosystem depends not only on the presence of these actors, but on how well they interact and reinforce one another, creating incentives for responsiveness across the system.

Where this accountability ecosystem is weak or captured by vested interests - as is often the case across climate governance and climate finance domains - powerful actors can influence policies and decisions, siphon resources, and pursue interests that are not inclusive or responsive to the needs and priorities of communities, including those most vulnerable to climate impacts. Essentially, the absence of accountability undermines and compromises the incentives and compulsion for duty-bearers to ensure that climate resources are used effectively and responsively.

Despite their importance, accountability efforts are faced with significant barriers across different contexts, compounded by a lack of understanding on how to address these barriers effectively. For example, many accountability initiatives fail as they focus primarily on the enforcement of formal laws, policies, and procedures rather than the political incentives, informal norms, or power dynamics that shape how climate-related decisions are made. As a result, many accountability ecosystems may appear strong on paper but remain limited in practice.

BOX 3: MULTI-LEVEL ACCOUNTABILITY IN CLIMATE GOVERNANCE

*Climate initiatives are often embedded in multi-level governance systems, where responsibilities for decisions, financing and implementation are distributed across international, national and subnational institutions. While this can enable coordination and scaling of initiatives, it can also make accountability **challenging** i.e., when roles are unclear or fragmented, actors at different levels of governance may shift responsibility to others.*

For example, international climate funds may point to national implementing agencies as being responsible for outcomes; national authorities may cite subnational governments or private contractors, while civic actors may lack clarity on where decisions were made or who has the authority to respond. In such contexts, effective social accountability requires careful analysis of where decisions are taken, where discretion lies, and which actors have the capacity to act on public demands.

Civic actors can strengthen accountability by:

- *Mapping decision-making authority and financial flows across levels of governance;*
- *Linking local-level monitoring and evidence to national or international accountability mechanisms;*
- *Coordinating action across different levels of governance, including escalation to higher-level institutions when local accountability channels are unresponsive; and*
- *Using multiple, complementary accountability channels and levers to reduce opportunities for responsibility shifting.*

Understanding these multi-level dynamics is especially important in climate finance, as international commitments and funding decisions often only translate into meaningful outcomes.

C. Social Accountability in Climate Governance

Social accountability in climate governance involves individuals, communities, and civil society using a variety of collective approaches, tools, and mechanisms to influence, monitor, challenge, and scrutinise how climate-related resources and services are allocated and delivered. A crucial complement to other accountability actors, spaces, and mechanisms, social accountability forms an important part of a strong accountability ecosystem. When effectively designed and implemented, inclusive social accountability actions and approaches can help ensure that climate policies, projects, and finance effectively respond to key priorities, including and especially those of communities most vulnerable to climate impacts.

Generally, accountability efforts can take place through a) 'invited' institutionalised spaces, typically initiated *from above* by state actors, or b) through 'autonomous' non-institutionalised mechanisms claimed or created *from below* by civic actors (see here and here). These efforts are not mutually exclusive; in practice, accountability approaches may draw on both formal and informal channels. Invited and autonomous spaces exist across levels of governance, from local to national to global, with important interlinkages among them. For example, accountability exercised across the flow of climate finance from international financing mechanisms through to national programmes which then reach local communities.

Social accountability is initiated and led by civic actors, often in autonomous and claimed spaces and processes. However, we recognise that the line between social accountability actions and 'invited' civic engagement in public oversight mechanisms is blurry, and often dependent on the particularities of the accountability ecosystem in any given context. Indeed, the effectiveness of social accountability efforts often lies in working across formal and informal spaces in the climate governance system, including connecting local citizen action to civic engagement at national or higher levels of governance. Prior to pursuing any accountability action, civic actors are encouraged to analyse which combinations of channels and mechanisms are most suitable to ensure accountability for the specific climate problem, context, and political economy realities they face.

While individuals, communities and civic actors continue to mobilise against corruption and for climate justice, the call and need for social accountability in climate governance arises at a challenging time. Around the world, democratic institutions are weakening, civic space is shrinking, and resources for civil society are declining. These conditions demand new ways of thinking, including more strategic, collaborative, and systemic approaches that align civic-led efforts with other accountability actors and mechanisms.

Based on this understanding, Chapter 3 outlines key strategies, approaches and tools that can characterise effective social accountability in climate initiatives. In doing so, it offers practical guidance for civic actors on how to apply these tools and strategies in their own contexts.

3. Strategies and Approaches for Social Accountability in Climate Initiatives

Climate initiatives, which include climate policies, finance, and projects, operate within complex governance systems shaped by diverse actors, incentives, interests, and power dynamics. These systems span government, the private sector, and crucially, individuals, communities and other civic actors. While climate commitments and financing have increased steadily in recent years, many climate initiatives continue to function within weak accountability ecosystems. This often undermines the effective and equitable implementation of such initiatives, leaving climate vulnerable communities with limited avenues to monitor, influence or challenge decisions, actions and outcomes.

Addressing these accountability deficits require more than the application of individual accountability tools. Over the past decades, social accountability efforts across sectors and contexts have generated substantial experience, evidence and insight which confirm that narrowly tool-focused efforts, which fail to account for the complexities of political economy dynamics, power relations and the institutional incentives that shape service delivery and public decision-making, rarely lead to sustained and meaningful change (see here and here).

More recent practice has therefore shifted towards systems-aware approaches that enable civic actors and coalitions to analyse their accountability ecosystem, identify bottlenecks and engage strategically across multiple actors, spaces and levels of governance (see here and here). This shift is particularly relevant for climate initiatives, which

often take place within complex, multi-level governance systems and arrangements (see Box 3 above).

A *systems-aware* social accountability approach for climate initiatives thus goes beyond the use of isolated actions, tools, or mechanisms. It complements transparency and public participation efforts, while actively supporting collective civic engagement, including by climate vulnerable communities. It engages formal elements of climate governance, such as policies, institutions, resources and procedural rules, as well as informal factors that shape behaviour and incentives, such as power relations, societal norms, relationships, institutional culture, or even mental models and biases.

This approach also entails working with actors across the accountability ecosystem – from local to national, and where relevant, even regional or international actors. Together, these key dimensions are essential to strengthening accountability and the responsiveness of climate actors and, ultimately, stand to determine whether climate actions translate into meaningful and inclusive outcomes.

The ideas and resources presented in this guide reflect this systems-aware perspective. This chapter, Chapter 3, outlines four strategic elements that underpin effective social accountability in climate initiatives; Chapter 4 presents a curated menu of social accountability tools and methodologies that civic actors can adapt, combine and apply in different contexts; while Chapter 5 provides a brief overview of two important enablers and amplifiers of social accountability. This selection is intentionally non-exhaustive and non-prescriptive; its purpose is to support strategic choices, context-specific design and adaptive practice within diverse climate governance settings.

Taken together, these strategic elements, enablers, and illustrative citizen-centred tools are intended to support civic actors in developing social accountability initiatives that are grounded in context, responsive to power dynamics and truly capable of strengthening accountability across the climate governance system.

ANALYSING, LEARNING & ADAPTING

a. What is it?

Understanding the system, i.e. the problem, actors, relationships and incentives, is key to a successful social accountability strategy. Climate initiatives, from energy transitions to building climate resilience and nature conservation, are shaped and influenced by political and economic interests and incentives that often do not align with global climate goals, much less with accountability to vulnerable communities. It is, therefore, important for those engaging in social accountability efforts to have a 'good enough' understanding of the drivers of the status quo within weak accountability ecosystems around specific climate issues or challenges.

Many accountability efforts have focused primarily on formal and technical dimensions of governance, such as laws, policies and institutional mechanisms, and less on what it takes to ensure meaningful accountability in practice. Political economy analyses, stakeholder mapping and related analytical approaches support a more systemic understanding of accountability dynamics, enabling social accountability strategies to be better aligned with how change often occurs.

BOX 4: ASSESSING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND OVERSIGHT IN CLIMATE FINANCE

Strengthening social accountability in climate finance requires ensuring that participation and oversight mechanisms exist or function as intended. Transparency International is working to analyse, assess, and benchmark the 'state of participation and public oversight' in climate finance institutions in Honduras, Nepal and Zambia. This involves the development and application of a structured checklist with universally applicable indicators, covering areas such as access to information, inclusivity of participation spaces, institutional responsiveness to public input, and the functioning of oversight and grievance mechanisms.

The findings from these assessments will be used to identify concrete accountability gaps, inform dialogue with decision-makers and support targeted reform efforts. Importantly, this approach treats assessment not as a one-off diagnostic exercise, but as part of a learning and adaptation process, helping civic actors work with climate finance institutions to refine strategies, priorities engagement and track changes in accountability conditions over time.

Please see here for more information.

b. How can this strategy or approach be used to advance climate governance?

Initial analysis should be 'good enough' to identify the most important drivers, dynamics and constraints shaping accountability for the specific climate issue and context. Where existing analysis on these dynamics already exist, these can be used and built upon rather than starting from zero. This initial understanding provides the foundation for shaping realistic, context-specific social accountability strategies and for identifying where leverage and opportunities for change may exist within an accountability ecosystem.

→ ⊙ Practice 1: Problem Analysis

An initial, light-touch problem analysis should be undertaken to inform the overall social accountability strategy. Ideally, this would be undertaken with a core set of stakeholders anticipated to engage together in the social accountability effort in order to benefit from diverse perspectives and build shared understanding. This problem analysis could focus on the following questions:

- *What is the main problem(s) or challenge(s) that we are trying to address? Are we defining the problem as the absence of our preferred 'solution' (and if so, can we reframe the problem more objectively)?*

- *What are the different causes of this problem or issue? How are the causes related to each other? Is the problem we are focusing on potentially the symptom of a deeper problem?*

- *Who are key actors (government, civil society, private sector, etc.) who are relevant to this problem or issue? What are their existing capabilities, incentives and relationships? What potential is there to leverage these to strengthen the accountability ecosystem?*

- *What are the political and power dimensions of this problem or issue? Who is incentivized to maintain the status quo? Who might be incentivized to work towards stronger accountability?*

Any of these areas of analysis can be deepened and/or embedded in ongoing analysis as implementation of the social accountability strategy moves forward, as we discuss below with respect to political economy analyses.

→ ⊙ Practice 2: Political Economy Analysis (PEA)

Climate-related challenges and issues often have strong political economy dimensions, which are often reflected in weak accountability ecosystems. Political Economy Analysis (PEA) helps civic actors move beyond formal rules and institutions to better understand how power,

incentives, interests and relationships shape decisions and outcomes in practice. PEA can either deepen an initial problem analysis or be integrated into a single analytical process.

Generally, the PEA should include three different aspects, from the broader to the more specific:

- **Structural Factors:** *What are the historical, political, economic and geographic factors that relate to the climate problem or issue that are unlikely to change in the short term, and thus will need to be accounted for in the social accountability approach? What actual or potential windows of opportunity could shift these structural factors?*

  This will include major political and economic interests related to the issue.

- **Formal and Informal Governance:** *What are the relevant formal policies and institutional frameworks related to the climate problem or issue? To what extent are these followed and implemented? What informal norms or other factors shape actual practice?*

  Although formal aspects of governance are important to assess, it is equally important to understand what influences actual decisions and practices on the ground.

- **Actors and Motivations:** *Who benefits from the status quo and who would benefit from change to the climate problem or issue? What levels of power and influence do these actors and stakeholders have on decisions and practices? What other ideas, narratives and norms shape these key actors' motivations?*

  The incentives and other motivations of some actors will be more obvious, whereas for others it may be less clear. Initial assessment can then be tested through engagement with these actors, based on an initial understanding of their motivations.

PEA is, therefore, not an optional add-on, but a central component of effective social accountability strategies. Insights generated through such analyses help clarify how accountability plays out in practice, elucidate the underlying theory of change for what it takes to strengthen accountability, and guide strategic choices about where

and how civic actors can engage most effectively to address a climate issue. Crucially, PEA can also inform the identification of potential coalitions of actors that share incentives or interests in shifting the status quo towards more inclusive and accountable climate governance.
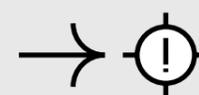
 Practice 3: Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Adaptation

Strengthening accountable climate governance is an inherently long-term, unpredictable and iterative process. Successful social accountability strategies must include efforts to monitor and assess progress and challenges, draw out lessons and insights, and adapt tools and approaches accordingly. This entails:

- *Developing a hypothesis or theory of change for strengthening accountable climate governance based on problem and political economy analyses. This includes identifying what will indicate progress towards accountability is being made or not, and how to monitor and assess these changes.*

- *Identifying learning questions to guide periodic review and reflection, including both implementation-focused single-loop ("Are we doing things right?") and strategy-focused double-loop ("Are we doing the right things?") questions.*

- *Building in the flexibility to adapt social accountability tools, methodologies, and broader accountability strategies based on evidence and insights generated through on-going learning and analyses, as well as leveraging any emerging windows of opportunity and entry-points.*

Effective learning and adaptation require an enabling environment. Generally, civil society organisations and coalitions that emphasise the importance of learning (including ensuring adequate resources and time), and modelling learning in practice, encourage members to prioritise learning as part of their standard workflow.

Ensuring safe spaces for constructively critique allows for real reflection and improvement in planning and implementing social

accountability actions. Ultimately, an organisational culture and processes that incentivize and enable evidence-based learning and adaptation enables social accountability strategies to succeed in navigating and strengthening the overall accountability ecosystem.

c. Resources and Further Reading

- **[Guide]** Worker, J. and Palmer, N., A Guide to Assessing the Political Economy of Domestic Climate Change Governance, World Resources Institute, March 2021 (see [here](#))
- **[Guide]** Nixon, N. and Denney, L., PEA in Practice: A Practical Guide to Political Economy Analysis, The Asia Foundation, May 2025 (see [here](#))
- **[Further Reading]** Fox, J., Halloran, B., Fölscher, A. and McGee, R., Disentangling Government Responses: How do we know when accountability work is gaining traction?, January 2024 (see [here](#))
- **[Further Reading]** The Strategy Testing Workbook: Politically-Smart Adaptive Programming in Complex Environments, The Asia Foundation, July 2024 (see [here](#))
- **[Further Reading]** Halloran, B. Navigating the Public Resources Governance System: A reflection on Strengthening System MEL, n.d. (see [here](#))

BUILDING INCLUSIVE COALITIONS

Communities and groups most vulnerable to climate impacts are often under-represented and under-recognised in climate-related decision making and accountability processes. This can be attributed to a variety of factors, including power asymmetries, exclusionary norms and practical barriers that undermine inclusive governance. Acting individually, these groups often have limited leverage to influence decisions or demand accountability. However, organizing collectively or in broader coalitions, can help strengthen legitimacy, amplify voice, and shift incentives within the accountability ecosystem.

Building inclusive coalitions and enabling collective action is, therefore,

a key strategy for strengthening social accountability. Coalition-based approaches enable climate vulnerable communities to pool knowledge and resources, build collective agency and engage more credibly (and safely) with power holders and duty-bearers. They also allow accountability efforts to move beyond isolated actions towards sustained engagement capable of influencing complex and multi-level climate governance systems.

a. What is it?

A lack of collective organizing is one reason why some groups remain under-represented in decision making processes and outcomes. However, marginalized groups frequently have existing formal or informal grassroots networks and organisations that can serve as entry-points for social accountability efforts. These include faith-based organisations, women's groups, youth-led movements, livelihoods-based associations, and other membership community-based groups and networks formed by and for under-represented populations.

Although marginalized groups often organise around shared places, identities or priorities, such networks do not always employ inclusive or internally accountable decision-making practices. Leadership structures may not fully reflect the breadth of experiences, identities and priorities within a constituency or community. Social accountability engagements with local organisations should, therefore, prioritise inclusive processes, rather than relying solely on individual leaders. Effective collective agency should reflect credible and participatory decision-making processes that give representatives legitimacy to speak and act on behalf of their communities, or mobilise collective action when needed.

b. How can this strategy or approach be used to advance climate governance?

Engaging with groups representing under-represented and under-recognised communities requires civic actors to build trust and relationship through respect, dialogue and mutual accountability. It entails listening to and understanding community perspectives, experiences and priorities, and reflecting these meaningfully in

social accountability approaches. Concurrently, engagement should recognise, and account for, the potential for credible collective agency and leadership by under-represented groups, but also the vulnerabilities these groups face, including exposure to climate risks, political pressure, or even the potential for retaliation in certain contexts when challenging powerful actors.

BOX 5: LOCALLY LED RENEWABLE ENERGY COALITIONS IN COLOMBIA

The Government of Colombia aims to expand renewable energy across the country through the establishments of local Energy Communities. Advancing this goal requires understanding and addressing emerging challenges related to inclusion, implementation and accountability.

The Governance Action Hub undertook an inclusive analytical process combining listening to local perspectives with a political economy analysis of the energy sector. This engagement helped identify key obstacles and opportunities, and informed a participatory, learning-focused coalition-building approach with local partners. Emphasis was placed on building trust and developing relationships to create the conditions for the emergence of community-led coalitions.

Beyond local engagement, the initiative creates and supports spaces for sharing evidence, tools and lessons across the emerging network of Energy Communities and other relevant stakeholders. These connections help inform both local action and national-level policy discussions, illustrating how inclusive coalitions can operate, and thrive, across different levels of climate governance.

Practical steps include:
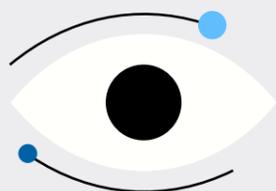
Identify Collective Actors and Networks:
Identify existing collective actors and networks among climate vulnerable communities and groups, with special attention to the features of inclusivity and representation of leadership and membership.

Engaging through Dialogue and Reflection:
Engage with these collective actors and networks through dialogue and joint reflection to listen to and understand their challenges, perspectives, experiences, lessons, and prioritise, and meaningfully shape social accountability actions and approaches on that basis.

Empowering Representative Leadership:
Ensure that inclusive and collectively mandated representatives of such actors, networks and groups have and occupy meaningful leadership roles in the chosen social accountability actions and approaches, while recognising constraints related to resources, capacity and potential risks.

While this resource guide emphasises critical engagement with climate vulnerable groups, effective accountability coalitions often benefit from engaging other relevant actors. These may include environmental organisations, the media, research and educational institutions and – where appropriate – reform-minded actors and duty-bearers from within government and public institutions.

c. Resources and Further Reading

- **[Guide]** Learning Brief 1: The role of collective agency in securing fiscal governance change, International Budget Partnership, November 2021 (see here)
- **[Guide]** Learning Brief 2: Working with reform and accountability allies to secure fiscal governance challenges, International Budget Partnership, November 2021 (see here)
- **[Guide]** de Soysa, A., Engaging Reluctant Duty-Bearers: Considerations and Strategies for Civil Society Organisations, January 2022 (see here)
- **[Further Reading]** Halloran, B., From Surviving to Collaborative Systemic Change: Civil Society at a Crossroads, Accountable Now, September 2025 (see here)

- **[Further Reading]** Halloran, B. and Flores, W., Mobilizing Accountability: Citizens, Movements and the State, Transparency & Accountability Initiative, April 2015 (see here)
- **[Further Reading]** Bellows, A., Bridging the Elite-Grassroots Divide Among Anticorruption Activists, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 2020 (see here)

STRENGTHENING COLLECTIVE CAPACITIES

a. What is it?

Communities, grassroots groups and membership-based organisations representing under-represented populations often possess important strengths and capacities that support collective action. These include strong social ties, local knowledge of climate impacts and vulnerabilities, lived experience of public service delivery and a direct understanding of how decisions, public authority and accountability are exercised in practice.

However, many of these organisations face constraints that limit their ability to engage meaningfully in accountability processes. These include power asymmetries between their members and other actors, limited access to information or evidence of other grassroot efforts, and an incomplete understanding of how climate policies, finance or programmes are designed, implemented and overseen. Acknowledging these constraints and working to address them is, therefore, an important feature of successful social accountability strategies and efforts.

In this guide, the call to strengthen collective capacities does not refer to one-off trainings or awareness raising activities. Instead, it involves building the appropriate practical, relational and strategic capacities needed to participate effectively and sustainably in social accountability efforts. Such capacity is particularly pertinent in contexts where decision-making power and authority is unevenly distributed, including in complex governance ecosystems such as those associated with climate action.

b. How can this strategy or approach be used to advance climate governance?

Capacity strengthening is most effective when it is participatory, problem-driven and embedded within on-going social accountability efforts. Rather than treating capacity as a pre-requisite, this guide emphasises the importance of *learning-by-doing*, where capacities of civic actors are developed through collective analysis, engagement, reflection, and adaptation.

Two interrelated capacities are especially important for grassroots organisations and coalitions to engage in climate-related social accountability:

Collective learning for adaptive strategic decision making, including the ability to reflect on what is working, what is not and how strategies may need to shift in response to changing contexts (see also 'Analysing, Learning and Adapting' above); and
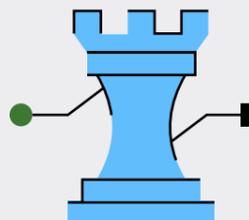
Relational capacities, including the ability to build, maintain and strategically use relationships with other actors across the accountability ecosystem, such as oversight institutions, media, allies within government and other civil society organisations (see also 'Building Inclusive Coalitions' above).

External allies, including national civil society organisations, intermediaries and technical partners, can play an important role in supporting capacity strengthening along these lines. This can be done by, for example, facilitating reflection, convening participatory dialogue and brokering connections across the wider accountability ecosystem. Such facilitation should not, however, substitute the leadership and agency of grassroots actors.

BOX 6: BUILDING CAPACITY FOR CLIMATE FINANCE OVERSIGHT IN KENYA AND SENEGAL

In Kenya, Transparency International Kenya (TI Kenya) strengthened social accountability for devolved climate finance by strengthening the capacity of county-level civil society organisations to use access to information tools strategically. Following targeted training in Elgeyo Marakwet and Homa Bay counties, CSO networks became more active in climate planning and budgeting processes, submitted formal information requests and used the information obtained to monitor climate finance allocations and spending. In both counties, access to information requests were taken up by the Ombudsman's Office, reinforcing institutional follow-up and improving the flow of information between public authorities and civil society. This experience highlights how capacity strengthening can shift engagement from reactive participation towards evidence-based oversight and institutional responsiveness.

*Please see **here** for more information.*

In Senegal, BudgIT supported capacity strengthening for climate finance accountability by combining accessible data with citizen engagement through an innovative monitoring platform. The platform translated complex climate finance and project data into simplified, user-friendly formats, enabling citizens and civic actors to track project implementation and raise questions about the use of climate funds. By linking access to data with collective engagement, this approach strengthened civic actors' ability to participate meaningfully in climate finance oversight and to articulate informed accountability demands.

Practical steps include:

Reflecting and Adapting: *Embed participatory learning, reflection and adaptation into the social accountability approach, ensuring regular opportunities to assess progress, challenges, and emerging opportunities in the operating environment.*
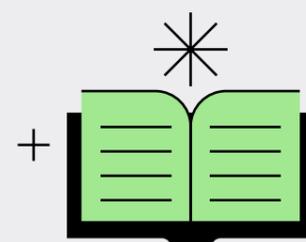
Learning-by-Doing: *Incorporate learning-by-doing approaches that support communities, grassroots and membership-based organisations to actively participate in mapping accountability actors, assessing collaboration possibilities, analysing power dynamics, negotiating terms and modes of engagement, and trialling different forms of social accountability action.*
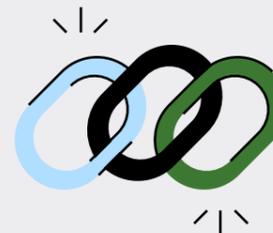
Brokering and Convening Spaces: *Complement the relationship-building efforts of grassroots organisations through brokering and convening spaces for connection and engagement, or even facilitating joint actions, with other actors in the climate governance and accountability ecosystem.*

Over time, strengthened capacities of civic actors can support more confident, credible and sustained engagement by climate vulnerable communities, increasing the likelihood that social accountability efforts contribute to meaningful and responsive climate governance outcomes.

c. Resources and Further Reading

- **[Guide]** Learning Brief 2: Working with reform and accountability allies to secure fiscal governance challenges, International Budget Partnership, November 2021 (see **here**)
- **[Further Reading]** Booth, Tobin, J. et al, Understanding Strategic Capacity in Constituency-Based Organisations, The P3 Lab, May 2021 (see **here**)
- **[Further Reading]** Fox, J., Halloran, B., Fölscher, A. and McGee, R., Disentangling Government Responses: How do we know when accountability work is gaining traction?, January 2024 (see **here**)
- **[Further Reading]** Bellows, A., Bridging the Elite-Grassroots Divide Among Anticorruption Activists, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 2020 (see **here**)

BOX 7: CLIMATE ASSEMBLIES

Climate Assemblies are deliberative public processes that bring together a diverse, representative group of public stakeholders to learn about complex climate issues, deliberate collectively and develop recommendations for decision-makers. While they do not necessarily demand responses or impose obligations on duty-bearers, Climate Assemblies can strengthen accountability by improving the quality, legitimacy and inclusiveness of public participation, particularly in areas such as climate finance.

Evidence from Climate Assemblies in the Amazon region shows that, when well designed and implemented, these processes can help surface community priorities and create credible mandates for reform. When linked to formal decision-making or oversight processes, Climate Assemblies can complement social accountability tools, such as Citizen Report Cards, by deepening collective understanding, strengthening public voice and increasing the political cost of ignoring public recommendations.

Overall, this evidence suggests that Climate Assemblies are most effective when their outputs are clearly linked to institutional follow-up mechanisms and when civic actors use recommendations as evidence to support on-going oversight, dialogue and accountability efforts. Participatory mechanisms such as Climate Assemblies can, therefore,

either reinforce symbolic participation or contribute to meaningful accountability, depending on whether they are linked to clear mandates, institutional responsiveness and sustained follow-up by power holders and duty-bearers.

Please see here for more information.

ENGAGING POWER HOLDERS AND DUTY-BEARERS
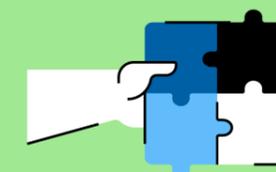
a. What is it?

Social accountability in climate initiatives involves engaging power holders and duty-bearers around their commitments, decisions, actions and results, to ensure these are responsive to the needs and priorities of the public and particularly those of communities and groups most vulnerable to climate impacts. Whether it is demanding explanations for decisions, scrutinising the use of climate finance and resources or pushing for reform where outcomes and results fall short of public commitments, constructive interaction between the public and public officials is a central feature of successful social accountability.

In practice, this interaction involves civic actors engaging and leveraging formal or 'invited' spaces, channels and mechanisms. These comprise, for example, participatory planning and budgeting processes, grievance redress channels, or audit mechanisms, and provide important entry-points for social accountability. However, while such spaces, channels and mechanisms might look open, participatory and accountable on paper, many are often restricted, inaccessible and/or superficial in practice.

Effective social accountability efforts therefore require distinguishing between symbolic, one-off responses to public demands - or

responses that are dependent on the discretion of power holders - and meaningful responsiveness that is proactive, consistent and underpinned by strong and enforceable accountability arrangements. More specifically, inclusive, sustained and meaningful engagement and responsiveness require civic actors and duty-bearers to go beyond irregular, tick-box or episodic interactions.

However, given the complexity and multi-level nature of climate governance, a single space, actor, or mechanism on its own is often insufficient to ensure accountability. Civic actors often need to engage across multiple, complementary spaces and mechanisms, while leveraging collective action by climate vulnerable groups and broader coalitions to rebalance power and strengthen answerability.

b. How can this strategy or approach be used to advance climate governance?

Social accountability actors should first aim to map relevant spaces and mechanisms to engage with for climate decisions and implementation, from local to national and, where relevant, international levels. This includes assessing the design and enabling environment for these channels, which in turns helps civic actors understand how conducive they are for meaningful accountability, and what parallel social accountability engagements and connections are needed. This holds true both for formal, 'invited' spaces for citizen action and response, as well as formal mechanisms of oversight.

Formal spaces, channels and mechanisms for accountability include, for example: invited processes such as Participatory Budgeting; public hearings and other citizen participation channels; formal complaint or grievance redress mechanisms; or even independent audits by public entities such as Supreme Audit Institutions.

Practical, and potentially sequential, steps for engaging and leveraging power holders and duty-bearers through formal accountability spaces, channels and mechanisms include:

Step 1: Identify and assess relevant formal spaces, channels and mechanisms with respect to the potential for public participation, oversight and accountability.

Transparency International's Assessment Toolkit on public participation in budget processes, and a forthcoming Rapid Assessment Checklist on public participation and oversight in climate finance processes, for example, outline several key criteria that invited spaces should meet in order to advance meaningful and inclusive participation and oversight. These criteria include:

- *Formal and informal rules, legal frameworks, power dynamics and incentives shaping participation and oversight;*
- *Capacities, motivations and opportunities of key actors, including potential alignment around addressing visible problems, (re)building public trust, strengthening oversight of public resources;*
- *Other enabling and constraining factors, including potential barriers to participation and engagement by climate vulnerable groups.*

Step 2: Engage collectively with most relevant and/or promising formal spaces, channels and mechanisms.

- *Build and leverage relationships with relevant government actors around shared incentives and motivations;*
- *Ensure inclusive participation and representation of vulnerable communities, membership-based organisations, and broader coalition members;*
- *Facilitate active participation by those most impacted by climate issues or problem to ensure credible and legitimate accountability claims.*
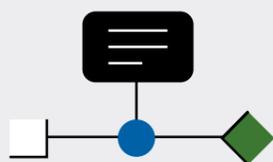
Step 3: *Leverage evidence to diagnose problems, propose solutions and assess progress and responsiveness.*

- *Frame social accountability monitoring evidence as supporting identification, diagnosis and action to address legitimate demands of public for climate action;*
- *Use monitoring evidence (alongside other information) to explain challenges and bottlenecks undermining progress and responsiveness;*
- *Propose and jointly explore realistic concrete actions to address identified obstacles, including opportunities for collaborative actions;*
- *Incorporate ongoing and updated monitoring evidence to assess progress, limitations and adaptations (see also 'Analysing, Learning and Adapting' above).*
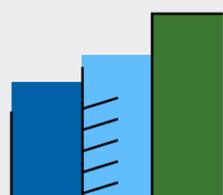
Step 4: *Collaborate on shared priorities to advance incremental changes, build trust and strengthen relationships, and strengthen and connect spaces and mechanisms.*

- *Propose and undertake collaborative actions by government and civic actors (as well as private sector and other stakeholders, where relevant) to advance climate actions and strengthen responsiveness to priorities of climate vulnerable communities;*
- *Engage in ongoing dialogue on progress, limitations, adaptations, and lessons learned, including gaps and challenges in and across formal spaces, channels and mechanisms;*
- *Engage other stakeholders and/or escalate to pre-identified higher levels of government when/if significant obstacles are encountered;*
- *Consider how to strengthen the inclusiveness, responsiveness and accountability of individual spaces and mechanisms, as well as the connections between them, across the wider accountability ecosystem (see also 'Building Inclusive Coalitions' above).*

BOX 8: ENGAGING DUTY-BEARERS IN COMMUNITY FORESTRY GOVERNANCE IN NEPAL

Forestry governance in Nepal has a strong formal legal framework but its effectiveness is constrained by coordination challenges and power asymmetries. Nepal's community forestry system comprises a range of formal accountability mechanisms, including local management plans and transparency and audit requirements of Community Forestry User Groups (CFUGs). Although these processes are mandated on paper, they are weakened in practice by the concentration of power in government and local elites, gaps in CFUG oversight and accountability, and may be treated as a 'box ticking' activity or ignored entirely.

These constraints undermine the ability of public institutions to be responsive and accountable to communities. This example illustrates that legal and institutional frameworks alone are insufficient to ensure accountability in climate governance, reaffirming the complementary need for ongoing public oversight and civic engagement. This includes carefully monitoring and assessing dynamics of inclusiveness, responsiveness and accountability at various levels of the governance system. On that basis civic actors can coordinate efforts to update frameworks and laws, facilitate spaces for dialogue and relationship building among government and community actors, and influence the inclusiveness and accountability of community groups like the CFUGs.

Please see here for more information.

Engaging, strengthening and connecting formal participatory and oversight spaces is not a linear process. Coalitions, therefore, need to invest in on-going reflection, learning and adaptation in order to decisively shift towards a more inclusive and effective accountability ecosystem. It is also important to bear in mind that the relative balance between engaging in formal spaces and mechanisms and leveraging social accountability tools outside of these spaces is also likely to evolve over time, as key actors and contextual factors grow more open and conducive to accountability.

c. Resources and Further Reading

- **[Guide]** de Soysa, A., Engaging Reluctant Duty-Bearers: Considerations and Strategies for Civil Society Organisations, January 2022 (see **here**)
- **[Guide]** de Soysa, A., Assessing Public Participation in Budget Processes: Assessment Toolkit and Indicators, Transparency International, December 2022 (see **here**)
- **[Guide]** Halloran, B., Strengthening Accountability Ecosystems: A Discussion Paper, Transparency and Accountability Initiative, March 2017 (see **here**)
- **[Further Reading]** Fox, J., Halloran, B., Fölscher, A. and McGee, R., Disentangling Government Responses: How do we know when accountability work is gaining traction?, January 2024 (see **here**)
- **[Further Reading]** Gaventa, J., Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis, Power Cube, December 2009 (see **here**)
- **[Further Reading]** Gaventa, J. and Barrett, G., So What Difference Does it Make? Mapping the Outcomes of Citizen Engagement, Working Paper 347, Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Brighton (see **here**)
- **[Further Reading]** de Soysa, A., Participatory Budgeting: A Primer on Public Participation in Budget Processes, Transparency International, March 2022 (see **here**)
- **[Further Reading]** Climate Finance Accountability Synthesis Report, International Budget Partnership, May 2022 [A learning assessment of engaging formal spaces for climate accountability] (see **here**)

4. Tools for Social Accountability in Climate Initiatives

Individuals, communities, and civil society have used a wide range of social accountability tools and methodologies to advance transparency, participation, and oversight in decision-making and the delivery of public services for several decades. These range from access to information processes and integrity pacts to citizen report cards and social audits. Each of these also serve different functions at various stages of the decision-making, budgeting, or policy cycle. They can help the public obtain critical information, influence planning and budgeting, monitor the implementation and execution of projects, track the use of public resources; and assess results and outcomes.

In climate governance, social accountability tools and complementary methodologies can easily be adapted to strengthen public oversight of climate policies, finance, and projects. Those presented below aim to illustrate options that can be tailored to reinforce social accountability within climate initiatives. They are intentionally non-exhaustive, selective and diverse. However, if designed and implemented as intended, they all stand to enable civic actors to generate evidence, exercise oversight, and engage power holders and duty-bearers in ways that can effectively trigger answerability and institutional responsiveness and advance social accountability.

This resource guide does **not** attempt to catalogue all forms of citizen action relevant to climate governance. Instead, it focuses on highlighting a selection of tools that directly support accountability efforts, while recognising that other forms of citizen action, such as media engagement and collective mobilisation, often play a critical, complementary role in amplifying accountability demands and strengthening incentives for response.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

a. What is it?

Access to information, the right to information or the freedom of information, refers to the public's legal and practical ability to obtain documents, data and records held by public authorities or implementing agencies. In the context of climate initiatives, this may include climate budgets, project plans, environmental impact assessments (EIAs), procurement contracts, and monitoring reports. In many countries and contexts, legal and regulatory frameworks often define disclosure processes and how individuals, communities, and civil society can request and receive such information. However, in practice, the response of authorities and public awareness of this right vary widely across contexts.

b. How can this tool be used to advance climate governance?

Access to information can help civic actors to identity and trace climate promises and commitments, follow the flow of climate finance, and monitor the performance of climate projects and initiatives. Requests for information can also help shed light on discrepancies between stated goals and results, monitor the distribution of resources and expose potential misuse of climate finance.

Civic actors can use access to information requests strategically, including to determine whether funds reach priority regions or whether projects are reviewed. In this manner, effective access to information processes can help to produce information and evidence for advocacy, support community-led monitoring, and create a strong evidence-base for media reporting, or even legal action if necessary. Where such regulation and processes are weak or absent, proactive disclosure and open climate data initiatives can substitute or complement formal requests for information.

BOX 9: ACCESS TO INFORMATION TO STRENGTHEN CLIMATE ACCOUNTABILITY IN PAKISTAN

In Pakistan, Transparency International Pakistan (TI Pakistan) used access to information laws as a key social accountability strategy to strengthen public oversight of climate governance. Working in climate vulnerable districts across four provinces, TI Pakistan supported communities to use Right to Information (RTI) laws to request data on climate projects, disaster response, budgets and institutional responsibilities. These efforts were embedded in community dialogues and public hearings that brought citizens into direct engagement with local authorities and oversight institutions.

Community-level action was reinforced by national advocacy through the publication of the State of Data Disclosure of Climate Related Departments report, which assessed proactive disclosure practices across 59 public bodies. By linking grassroots evidence to systemic analysis, the initiative moved beyond transparency alone, using learning and evidence to advocate for targeted institutional reforms and improved disclosure practices. The case demonstrates how access to information can function as a collective, adaptive strategy for strengthening climate accountability.

c. Resources and Further Reading

- **[Guide]** Access to documents and environmental information held by EU institutions and bodies: A guide for citizens and NGOs, The European Union Aarhus Centre, n.d. (see here)
- **[Guide]** Public access to information for development: a guide to effective implementation of right to information laws, Directions in Development, The World Bank Group, n.d. (see here)
- **[Framework]** The Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Maling and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (The Aarhus Convention), 26 June 1998 (see here)
- **[Further Reading]** Access to information on climate change and human rights, Summary of the report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, A/79/196,

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, July 2025 (see here)
- **[Further Reading]** Open Government Foundations – Right to Information, The Open Gov Guide, Open Government Partnership, n.d. (see here and here)
- **[Further Reading]** Citizens' Access to Information in South Asia – Regional Synthesis Report, The Asia Foundation, August 2014 (see here)

CITIZEN REPORT CARDS

a. What is it?

Citizen Report Cards (CRCs) are participatory, survey-based social accountability tools that collect and publish public feedback on the quality, efficiency and fairness of public services. The survey results are compiled and presented to service providers and the public with the goal of encouraging performance improvements and greater responsiveness. CRCs typically combine quantitative ratings with qualitative comments and focus on identifying gaps and issues with the service, inequities, and alignment with user priorities, which can inform dialogue and remedial action.

b. How can this tool be used to advance climate governance?

In climate initiatives, CRCs can be used to capture and present community perspectives on the performance and accessibility of climate-related projects and services. This may include surveys on the success of irrigation and water schemes, the effectiveness of public-private renewable energy services, or even public satisfaction with municipal waste management programmes. CRC findings can reveal an array of useful insights including gaps in service delivery, inequitable access, delayed implementation, or poor maintenance that may not be visible through reports and project documents alone.

When CRCs are combined with facilitated public dialogues, debates, and multistakeholder meetings, they can help translate community feedback into concrete actions, and thereby help build credibility between those involved in the delivery and receipt of climate-related initiatives and services. Generally, successful CRC processes require survey capacity on the part of civic actors, strong outreach and facilitation, and commitments to follow up on the part of the government and/or service providers.

c. Resources and Further Reading

- **[Guide]** Citizen Report Card Surveys: A Note on the Concept and Methodology, The World Bank, February 2004 (see here)
- **[Guide]** Lakshmisha, A., Citizen Report Card – A powerful social audit tool, Civil Society Academy, n.d. (see here)
- **[Further Reading]** Pekkonen, A., Citizen Report Cards, Monitoring and Evaluation of Public Services, CIVICUS, n.d. (see here)
- **[Further Reading]** Citizen Report Cards, Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD), n.d. (see here)

INTEGRITY PACTS

a. What is it?

An Integrity Pact (IP) is a multistakeholder, collective action agreement designed to protect and safeguard public procurement from corruption and strengthen transparency, fair competition, and public trust. The agreement, or pact, typically brings together contracting authorities or government agencies, businesses bidding on contracts, and independent civil society monitors, who jointly commit to integrity standards throughout the entire procurement cycle.

Developed by Transparency International, IPs set out clear obligations for the disclosure of information, open competition, ethical conduct, and constructive engagement with civil society monitoring and reporting efforts. IPs also typically outline protocol for parties to the pact to declare conflicts of interest, complaints and dispute resolution mechanisms, and sanctions and incentives to foster compliance. Independent monitors track the process from tender design to contract implementation, publish findings, and engage with authorities to prevent corruption risks from materialising.

b. How can this tool be used to advance climate governance?

Integrity Pacts have been adapted and applied across sectors including infrastructure, transportation, water supply, and pharmaceuticals. Climate initiatives often entail similarly complex, large, and technically specific public investments, making climate procurement particularly vulnerable to corruption, collusion, or weak oversight.

When applied to climate initiatives, IPs can improve access to procurement information through disclosure requirements and strengthen accountability by introducing channels for independent monitoring of the procurement process from the outset. This can help ensure transparent tender processes, fair competition, and the responsible implementation of climate contracts. In providing opportunities for continuous, independent oversight, IPs can build trust among communities, bidders, and public authorities and facilitate the early identification and resolution of corruption and other project risks. In addition, reporting and potential media visibility arising out of the IP process can create strong incentives for compliance.

c. Resources and Further Reading

- **[Guide]** Greco, A., The Integrity Pact: Harnessing collective action for good governance and business integrity in public procurement, Transparency International, December 2024 (see here)
- **[Guide]** YouTube Playlist: Integrity Pacts, Transparency International,

February 2022 (see here)
- **[Further Reading]** Greco, A., Turšič, Z., and Zupan, I., Monitoring Public Contracting: Experience from 19 Integrity Pacts in the EU, Transparency International, April 2022 (see here)
- **[Further Reading]** Integrity Pacts: Safeguarding public investments through multi-stakeholder collective action, Transparency International (see here)

SOCIAL AUDITS

a. What is it?

A social audit is a participatory tool or process through which communities and civil society examine the implementation of a specific programme, project, or service. A social audit typically involves a variety of oversight exercises including reviewing financial records and expenditures, verifying physical work, conducting community inspections, and more generally assessing whether project results and activities align with commitments made by public authorities, or even the contractual obligations of private sector entities. Social audits combine evidence with local verification and public dissemination of information to create pressure for preventative or remedial action.

b. How can this tool be used to advance climate governance?

In climate initiatives, social audits can help verify whether climate financing, for example, was used in the manner it was intended, or whether the services provided through such finance effectively reached intended groups. This community-led verification can take place in different ways; site-visits, photo or GPS evidence, or by reviewing project details and financial invoices. The evidence generated through such verification can contribute to a better understanding of the causes of issues and bottlenecks in a climate initiative or investment and inform more nuanced engagement with relevant stakeholders.

As with many other social accountability tools, social audits are more likely to result in reform when they are linked to formal oversight channels such as auditor-general offices or parliamentary committees, or to public disclosure and follow-up mechanisms. This has recently been reinforced through comparative evidence from a series of climate finance accountability initiatives, across different contexts, which further highlights the importance of combining community-led verification with institutional follow-up and coalition-based advocacy to sustain impacts. In this way, social audit findings can also support advocacy, trigger official audits, or form the basis of media or legal action.

c. Resources and Further Reading

- **[Guide]** A practical guide to social audit as a participatory tool to strengthen democratic governance, transparency and accountability, UNDP, October 2016 (see here)
- **[Guide]** Accountability in Practice: Social Audit Toolkit, Transparency Maldives and the Anti-Corruption Commission of the Maldives, November 2023 (see here)
- **[Guide]** Social Audit: A Toolkit, Centre for Good Governance, 2017 (see here)
- **[Guide]** A Pocket Guide to Conducting Social Audits in South Africa, Social Audit Network, Social Justice Coalition, International Budget Partnership, and Open Society Foundation for South Africa, 2023 (see here)
- **[Further Reading]** Enhancing transparency, inclusion and accountability in climate finance: stories from Bangladesh, Brazil, Cameroon, Mexico and Senegal, Green Accountability Platform, January 2026 (see here)
- **[Further Reading]** Farag, M., Social Audit in 20 Steps. Transparency International, 2018 (see here)
- **[Further Reading]** Pande, S., Social Audits in Service Delivery: An annotated bibliography, Accountability Research Centre and Open Government Partnership, May 2022 (see here)

5. Enablers of Social Accountability in Climate Initiatives

While social accountability strategies and tools generate evidence, participation and oversight, this guide emphasises that their effectiveness often depends on broader dynamics that shape incentives, visibility and power. Media engagement and collective mobilisation are not social accountability in themselves, but cross-cutting enablers that can amplify the reach, credibility and impact of social accountability efforts. When used strategically and in combination with other approaches, they can strengthen public pressure, shift narratives, and increase the likelihood of meaningful response by power holders and duty-bearers.

MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

a. What is it?

Media engagement refers to the strategic use of traditional and digital media to share information with the public, shape narratives, and amplify evidence to influence decision-making and action. Media channels may include print, radio, television, online platforms, and community media. In different contexts, these platforms can vary in terms of their reach, independence, underlying economic incentives, and degree of political influence.

Civic actors can produce media content themselves, such as through reports, social media, opinion pieces, campaigns, and community radio, or collaborate and engage with journalists and media outlets to highlight issues, including those related to climate and climate governance. Media engagement stands to connect evidence to public awareness, civic pressure, and policy action.

b. How can media engagement be used to advance accountable climate governance?

In climate initiatives, media engagement can amplify the impact of social accountability tools by bringing the evidence they generate into the public domain and increasing pressure on decision-makers to respond. Findings from access to information requests, CRCs, or social audits, for example, often gain greater traction when communicated through independent media channels. This can help expose discrepancies in climate projects, elevate community concerns, and create windows of opportunity for political or administrative reform.

Effective media engagement requires clear, credible, and evidence-based messaging around a) the climate or climate governance issue at stake, b) the implications on affected communities, and c) specific calls to action directed at decision-making authorities. Civic actors also need a strong understanding of the media landscape including the reach and independence of different media platforms, the relevance to distinct audiences, and their experience reporting on climate or climate governance issues.

Linked to understanding the media landscape, it is also important to recognise that media engagement also carries risks. In some contexts, reporting an issue may trigger backlash from authorities, strain relations with decision-makers, or perhaps expose civic actors to reputational or security threats. Conducting a risk analysis prior to engaging the media and tailoring engagement to the operating context can help ameliorate these risks.

More generally, civic actors can look to seize windows of opportunities created by effective media coverage, such as a widely reported climate governance failure or investigative story, and link these to advocacy,

dialogue, or reform efforts. As we have emphasised elsewhere in this guide, media engagement is most effective in advancing accountability when used as part of a systems approach that involves the implementation of other strategies and tools across the accountability ecosystem.

c. Resources and Further Reading

- **[Guide]** Engaging with the Media, SDG Accountability Handbook, TAP Network, May 2019 (see here)
- **[Guide]** Taylor, W., Doing debate differently: media and accountability, BBC Media Action, February 2017 (see here)
- **[Further Reading]** Schauseil, W. Media and anti-corruption, U4 Helpdesk Answer, Transparency International, May 2019 (see here)
- **[Further Reading]** Malila, V., Beyond Watchdog Journalism: Media and Social Accountability, Public Service Accountability Monitor, April 2018 (see here)
- **[Further Reading]** World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law, Spotlight 12: The media, World Bank Group, 2017 (see here)

COLLECTIVE MOBILIZATION

a. What is it?

Collective mobilisation refers to organized, non-violent collective and collaborative action that can amplify accountability demands, demonstrate public support for reform and increase incentives for response by power holders and duty-bearers. This can encompass diverse mobilisation tactics such as marches, protests, petitions, or strikes. Collective mobilisations may be a single event, either spontaneous or planned, or a longer-term, sustained action.

They are often triggered by evidence of a problem, corruption, government inaction, impunity, or when other efforts to demand accountability have been ignored. Their main objective is to demonstrate the scope of popular support for change and accountability and incentivize action from authorities in response to concrete public demands.

b. How can collective mobilisation be used to advance climate governance?

In climate initiatives, collective mobilisation can be triggered in response to communities experiencing impacts of poor decisions, stalled project implementation, or corruption scandals and the mismanagement of climate funds and investments. In such situations, civic actors can engage directly with mobilised groups to channel public anger and energy into targeted accountability actions. In doing so, civic actors can leverage windows of opportunity and incentives for reform to ensure that the momentum of collective mobilisation translates into concrete results.

Mobilisation efforts may also be planned strategically to complement the use of other social accountability tools, or when those actions have proven ineffective. In such cases, coalitions can align coordinated public action with media coverage and use the evidence generated from other social accountability tools, to increase pressure on decision-makers and open new opportunities for change.

As with media engagement, effective collective mobilisation requires clear objectives, credible and evidence-based messaging, and careful consideration of risks to civic actors and mobilised communities. Through mobilisations, civic actors can communicate the nature of the climate or climate governance problem, highlight why a response is needed, and outline potential steps that can be taken.

c. Resources and Further Reading

- **[Guide]** Naimark-Rowse, B., Nonviolent collective action in democratic development, USAID, 2024 (see here)
- **[Further Reading]** Dudouet, V. and Pinckney, J., Nonviolent Action and Transitions to Democracy: The Impact of Inclusive Dialogue and Negotiation, United States Institute of Peace, July 2021 (see here)
- **[Further Reading]** Halloran, B. and Flores, W., Mobilizing Accountability: Citizens, Movements and the State, Transparency and Accountability Initiative, 2015 (see here)
- **[Further Reading]** Bellows, A., Bridging the Elite-Grassroots Divide Among Anticorruption Activists, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 2020 (see here)
- **[Further Reading]** Hossain, N., Agbonifo, J. et al., Demanding Power: Do Protests Empower Citizens to Hold Governments Accountable over Energy?, Institute of Development Studies, September 2021 (see here)
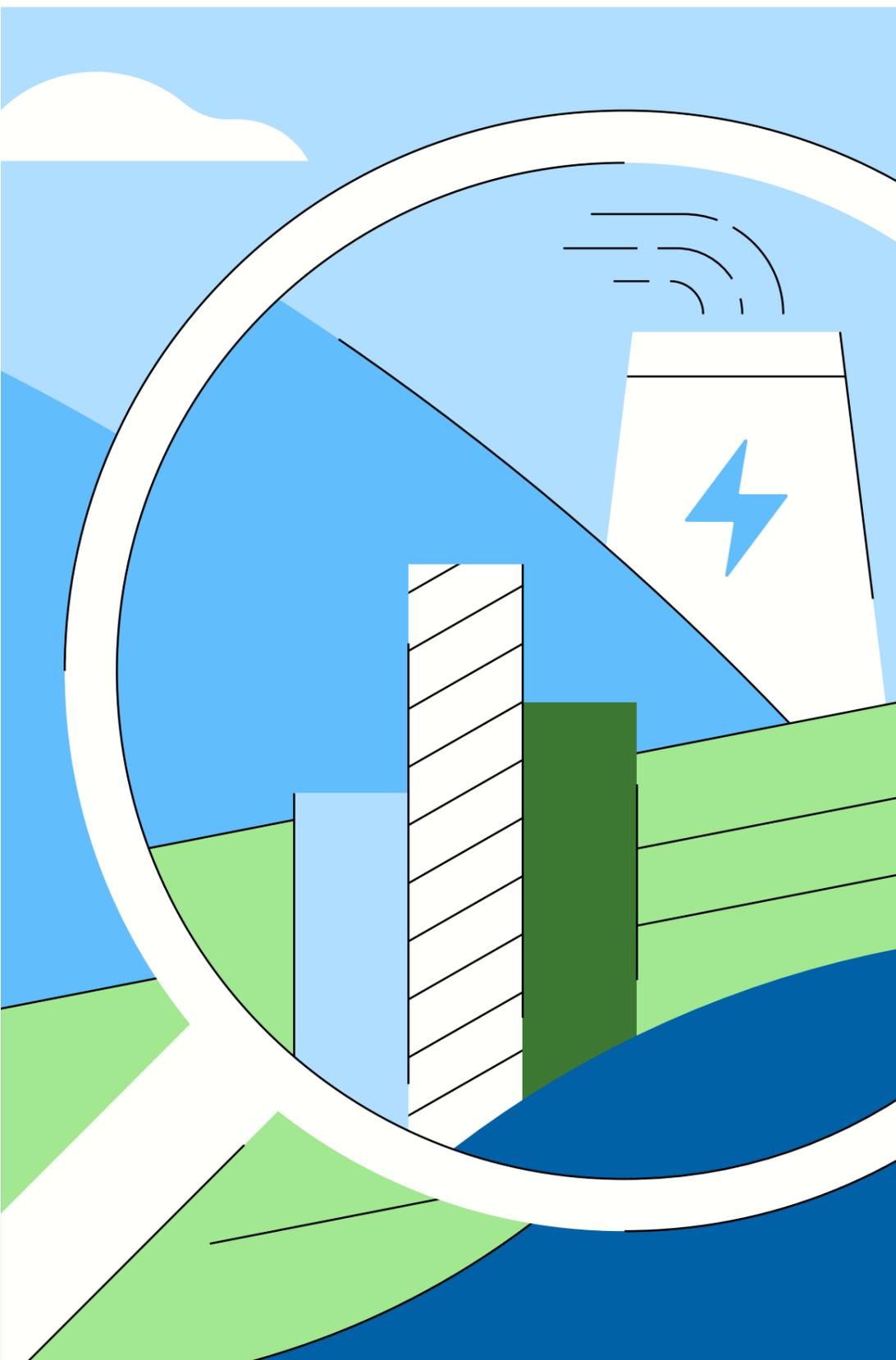
6. Takeaways and Practical Implications

Inclusive, responsive and accountable climate governance is essential to ensure that climate finance, resources, programmes and outcomes reach individuals and communities most vulnerable to climate impacts and reflect their needs and priorities. Robust social accountability strategies and tools are, therefore, critical elements of a strong climate accountability ecosystem; one that enables effective oversight of climate commitments, decisions, actions and results.

This resource guide emphasises a *systems-aware* approach to social accountability for climate initiatives. It highlights the importance of grounding action in contextual analyses, facilitating collective agency through inclusive coalitions, strengthening capacities to exercise accountability and using practical tools to engage accountability actors, spaces and mechanisms in complementary ways.

Taken together, the practical implications of this guide are that effective social accountability in climate governance is strategic rather than tool-driven, collective rather than individual, and adaptive rather than linear. Civic actors are most likely to influence climate decisions and outcomes when they move beyond isolated interventions and instead combine analysis, coalition building, capacity strengthening and engagement with power holders in ways that respond to shifting contexts and power dynamics. This requires ongoing appraisal, learning and adjustment, and a holistic approach to accountability that goes beyond the mechanical application of predefined tools or models.

TABLE: ILLUSTRATIVE PATHWAYS FOR APPLYING SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN CLIMATE GOVERNANCE

To help practitioners navigate the complexity of climate governance, the Table below provides **illustrative examples** of how different social accountability strategies, tools and enablers may be combined to respond to common governance and accountability challenges. The table is **not** intended to suggest that challenges occur in isolation, nor that strategies and responses should be applied separately or sequentially. In practice, multiple challenges often coexist, and – as we have reinforced across this guide – effective accountability efforts typically require simultaneous attention to analysis, coalition building, capacity strengthening and engagement with power holders, along with the use of different tools and amplifiers.

Therefore, instead of positing or serving as a blueprint, this Table is simply intended as a thinking or reflection aid; helping practitioners reflect on where accountability bottlenecks lie in different contexts and how different strategies, tools and enabling elements can be emphasised or combined to strengthen inclusive and responsive climate governance.

CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGE	STRATEGIC EMPHASIS	ILLUSTRATIVE TOOLS	POTENTIAL ENABLERS AND AMPLIFIERS
Climate finance allocations and spending do not address the needs of climate vulnerable communities	Analysis; Evidence Generation	Access to Information; Social Audits	Amplify findings; Build public pressure
Inputs from climate-vulnerable communities are not reflected in climate decisions or programmes	Coalition Building; Capacity Strengthening	Citizen Report Cards; Participatory Monitoring	Elevate community voices; Legitimize public demand
High corruption risks in climate-related procurement	Oversight; Engagement with Power Holders and Duty-Bearers	Integrity Pacts; Social Audits	Increase visibility; Support deterrence
Low trust between climate-affected communities and public authorities responsible for climate action	Dialogue; Incremental Engagement	Citizen Report Cards, Public Hearings	Increase visibility; Support deterrence

NB. *This table is illustrative only. In practice, social accountability strategies, approaches, tools and enablers should be* **adapted** *and* **combined** *based on a deep understanding of context, political economy dynamics and other emerging entry-points and opportunities. As highlighted throughout this resource guide, the most effective accountability efforts address* **multiple** *challenges simultaneously and rely on reinforcing combinations of strategies as opposed to isolated or linear interventions.*
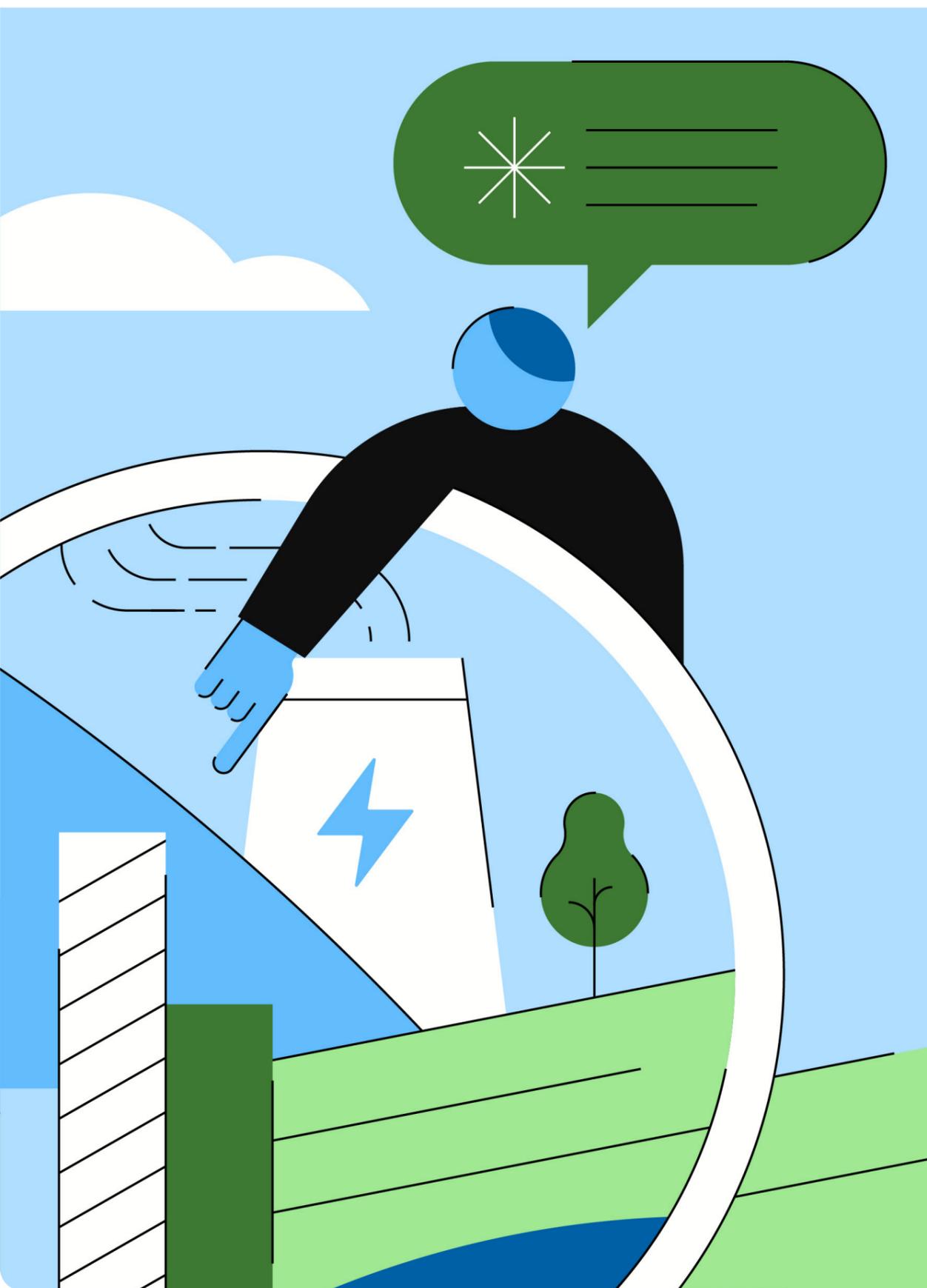
Annex – Case Studies

CASE STUDY OVERVIEW – RATIONALE, KEY LESSONS AND TAKEAWAYS

The following case studies illustrate how social accountability strategies and tools are being applied in practice to strengthen climate governance across diverse political, institutional and social contexts. They are drawn from the experiences of civil society organisations working at local, national and multinational level to address concrete accountability challenges related to climate-related policies, finance and projects.

Across the five case studies, social accountability efforts have applied a range of practices related to accountability, including access to information, collective action, monitoring, engagement with different power holders and coalition building to address concrete climate governance challenges. While many of these cases remain more strongly oriented towards **transparency and participation** than towards sustained accountability outcomes, they nonetheless offer valuable insights into how accountability ecosystems can be strengthened over time.

Collectively, the cases illustrate how civic actors adapt tools and strategies to unique political and institutional contexts, link local evidence and action to national reform processes, and navigate power asymmetries, institutional resistance and capacity constraints. Importantly, they also highlight opportunities where social accountability strategies and tools could be integrated more deliberately and systematically to deepen accountability impacts.

The cases also reflect lessons emerging from broader comparative work on climate accountability, including an initiative supported through the **Green Accountability Platform**, which underscore the importance of collective approaches, sustained engagement and the strategic use of evidence to strengthen public oversight of climate

finance. Each case study is presented in a standardised format to support cross-learning, while recognising that effective social accountability is inherently context-specific:
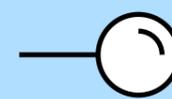
1. PAKISTAN

2. KENYA

3. SENEGAL

4. COLOMBIA

5. NEPAL

CASE STUDY 1: STRENGTHENING CLIMATE ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH ACCESS TO INFORMATION IN PAKISTAN

a. Case Study Summary

Transparency International Pakistan (TI Pakistan) used access to information laws as a social accountability tool to enable climate-vulnerable communities to obtain climate-related information and hold public authorities accountable for commitments. Community dialogues and public hearings across climate-affected districts were combined with national-level advocacy, linking grassroots demands for information with systemic efforts to improve climate data disclosure by public institutions.

b. Problem

Pakistan is highly vulnerable to climate impacts, including floods, heatwaves and environmental degradation, which disproportionately affect low-income and often under-represented and under-recognised communities. In climate-affected areas, communities often lack timely and reliable information on disaster management planning, climate finance allocations, procurement and project implementation that directly influence their exposure to risk and access to relief and recovery support.

Despite constitutional guarantees under Article 19A of the Constitution of Pakistan and the existence of federal and provincial access to information laws, disclosure of climate-related information remains weak. Limited proactive disclosure, inconsistent implementation across provinces and barriers to accessing information constrain public oversight, increase risks of mismanagement and corruption and weaken trust in climate governance processes.

c. Social Accountability Approach

At the community level, TI Pakistan organised dialogues and public

hearings in climate-vulnerable districts across four provinces. These engagements brought together community members, including women, youth, marginalised groups and transgender participants, with district administrators, Public Information Officers, Provincial Ombudsman offices and Disaster Management Authorities. Participants received practical guidance on how to use access to information laws to request data on climate projects, disaster relief, environmental approvals and climate-related budgets, with follow-up support provided through TI Pakistan's Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre.

In parallel, TI Pakistan undertook structured national advocacy by publishing the **State of Data Disclosure of Climate Related Departments** as per the Access to Information Laws report, assessing proactive disclosure practices across 59 climate-related public entities. The findings were shared with public institutions and Information Commissions and accompanied by technical guidance and bilateral engagement to strengthen institutional compliance with access to information obligations.

d. Results, Limitations and Lessons

The initiative strengthened community awareness and confidence in using access to information as a climate accountability tool and improved engagement between citizens and local authorities. The data disclosure assessment provided an evidence base for national advocacy and contributed to directives issued by Information Commissions and departments to improve disclosure practices.

However, disclosure remains uneven across provinces in Pakistan and enforcement of access to information laws is weak. Institutional resistance, limited digital capacity, and weak sanctions continue to limit progress. A key lesson from this case is that access to information is most effective when used collectively with other social accountability strategies and reinforced through sustained follow-up and advocacy, rather than being treated as an end in itself, or limited to isolated requests for information (see **here**).

Looking ahead, future efforts should continue to explicitly anchor information demands around specific, locally experienced climate challenges in order to further strengthen the link between disclosure, accountability and tangible climate outcomes.

e. Resources and Further Reading

- TI Pakistan, State of Data Disclosure of Climate Related Departments, 2024 (see **here**)
- Business Recorder, "TI publishes report on data disclosure of climate related depts", October 2024 (see **here**)
- TI Pakistan, "KP Information Commission directives", November 2024 (see **here**)
- TI Pakistan, "RTI advocacy", Facebook, December 2024 (see **here**)
- TI Pakistan, Community Dialogue in Flood-Affected District: Raising Awareness Against Corruption and Improving Climate Governance Accountability through Community Participation in Climate Planning and Decision Making, July 2024 (see **here**)
- TI Pakistan, Training Workshop on Climate Change Mitigation, Adaptation, and Social Accountability to Enhance Citizens and Civil Society Participation in Climate Governance, July 2024 (see **here**)
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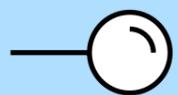
CASE STUDY 2: STRENGTHENING COUNTY-LEVEL CLIMATE FINANCE OVERSIGHT IN KENYA

a. Case Study Summary

Transparency International Kenya (TI Kenya) strengthened social accountability in devolved climate finance by building the capacity of county-level civil society organisations to use access to information tools. Following targeted training, CSO networks in Elgeyo Marakwet and Homa Bay counties increased their engagement in climate planning and budgeting processes, submitted formal information requests and began using evidence to monitor climate finance allocations and spending.

b. Problem

Kenya's devolution framework assigns significant responsibility for climate adaptation and resilience to county governments. However, transparency and accountability in county-level climate finance remains weak. This weak accountability context increases the risk that climate adaptation and resilience investments are misallocated, delayed or fail to reach climate vulnerable communities. This, in turn, undermines counties' ability to respond effectively to recurrent droughts, floods and other climate-related shocks.

Civil society organisations often face challenges in accessing timely, accurate and disaggregated information on climate-related budgets and expenditure. This limits their ability to engage meaningfully in climate governance and oversight processes. Baseline assessments showed low CSO participation and minimal use of access to information mechanisms.

c. Social Accountability Approach

TI Kenya conducted training on access to information tools for members of county-level CSO networks, focusing on the legal framework, practical use of information requests and application of disclosed information for climate finance oversight. Following the training, CSOs began participating more actively in public planning and budgeting forums and submitting formal information requests to county institutions.

Two access to information requests were submitted: one in Elgeyo Marakwet and one in Homa Bay county. In both counties, the Ombudsman's office took up the request on behalf of the CSO network, reinforcing institutional follow-up and improving information sharing with civic actors.

d. Results, Limitations and Lessons

CSO networks in both counties began submitting formal access to information requests and using the information obtained to track climate-related resource allocations, identify gaps and question inconsistencies in climate finance management. The intervention shifted CSO engagement from reactive or token participation to meaningful, evidence-based oversight.

However, the initiative primarily focused on strengthening access to information and initial engagement, highlighting the need for sustained follow-up, coalition building and engagement with decision-makers to translate improved transparency into stronger accountability and tangible climate outcomes.

e. Resources and Further Reading

- Crick, F., Hesse, C., Orindi, V., Bonaya, M. and Kiiru, J., Delivering climate finance at local level to support adaptation: experiences of County Climate Change Funds in Kenya, Ada Consortium, Working Paper, July 2019 (see **here**)
- Wanzala, J., National Treasury report exposes misuse of climate funds by counties, The Saturday Standard, 2024 (see **here**)
- Greene, S. and Ododa, K., Democratic practices in climate change adaptation: Kenya, WFD, November 2025 (see **here**)
- Basak, R. et al, Information for Climate Finance Accountability regimes: Proposed framework and case study of the Green Climate Fund, Public Administration and development, December 2022 (see **here**)
- Landscape of Climate Finance in Africa, Climate Policy Initiative, October 2024 (see **here**)

- Larrea, G. Accountability in the Climate Funds, In: Climate Funds and Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals Series, January 2024 (see [here](#))

CASE STUDY 3: CITIZEN-LED CLIMATE FINANCE TRACKING IN SENEGAL

a. Case Study Summary

BudgIT Senegal developed a data-driven and citizen-centred approach to climate finance accountability by using its *Tracka* monitoring tool to track climate projects at national and local levels. Through simplified data presentation, creative design and citizen participation, BudgIT improved public access to climate finance information and helped strengthen community-led monitoring of climate investments.

b. Problem

Senegal is highly exposed to climate impacts affecting agriculture, water and sanitation, energy access and livelihoods, especially for communities in rural and peri-urban areas. Climate finance plays a critical role in supporting adaptation and resilience efforts in these sectors, but the benefits of such investments are often unevenly experienced at the community level.

In practice, communities face significant barriers to accessing information on climate allocations and project implementation. Low levels of climate budget literacy, the technical complexity of financial data, language barriers and weak transparency limit meaningful public engagement and oversight. As a result, climate vulnerable communities find it difficult to assess whether climate funds are being used effectively, equitably and in line with stated priorities.

c. Social Accountability Approach

BudgIT used the [Tracka tool](#) and platform to aggregate and present government climate finance data in simplified, accessible formats, including infographics, videos and local language content. Data was sourced from government and research institutions and translated into citizen-friendly formats to reduce technical and literacy barriers. The initiative combined data transparency with community engagement and capacity-building, enabling citizens to understand

climate budgets, track project implementation and participate in monitoring climate investments. As in the case studies above, a key lesson from this case is that access to information is most effective when paired with creative multistakeholder engagement and practical tools that enable individuals and communities to translate data into collective action, oversight and dialogue with public authorities.

d. Results, Limitations and Lessons

The dissemination of simplified climate finance data improved citizen understanding of climate investments and enabled community participation in monitoring projects across agriculture, energy, water and sanitation sectors. Capacity-building activities strengthened citizens' ability to use data for oversight and advocacy. This contributed to greater transparency and accountability in climate finance implementation.

Challenges remain in sustaining engagement and ensuring consistent access to up-to-date data. As in the Pakistan case-study above, a key lesson is that access to information is most effective when paired with creative multistakeholder engagement and innovative yet practical tools that enable individuals and communities to translate data into action.

e. Resources and Further Reading

- BudgIT Sénégal, Promoting Green Accountability in Senegal, Senegal Green Accountability Project (see **here**)
- BudgIT Sénégal, Community Engagements in **Fatick** and **Saint Louis**, LinkedIn, 2025
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- BudgIT Sénégal, Capacity Building for communities in Ziguinchor Region, LinkedIn, 2025 (see **here**)
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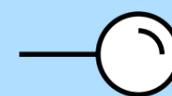
CASE STUDY 4: IMPROVING ACCESS TO RENEWABLE ENERGY IN COLOMBIA

a. Case Study Summary

The Colombian government aims to expand access to renewable energy through local Energy Communities. Achieving this goal requires addressing persistent barriers to inclusion, implementation and accountability in the energy sector.

The Governance Action Hub undertook an inclusive analytical process, combining community consultations with a robust political economy analysis of the energy sector, to identify barriers and opportunities for change. This analysis has informed an ongoing coalition building and systems-change approach to strengthening inclusive governance and accountability.

b. Problem

Historically, the energy sector in Colombia has focused on urban areas and private sector needs, leaving behind large parts of the country. Access to reliable and affordable energy has improved over the past decades but remains a challenge particularly in rural areas. For example, in the region of La Guajira, approximately 70% of the population lacks access to affordable or reliable electricity.

The government has recently prioritised ensuring that regions like La Guajira gain access to renewable energy. However, insufficient resources are generated from surcharges on wealthier electricity users to finance expanded access, while decentralized public investments in energy have been vulnerable to rent-seeking and clientelist behaviour.

Furthermore, bureaucratic and technical obstacles have led to slow deployment of decentralized renewables in regions facing energy poverty. Finally, regions like La Guajira have a legacy of extractive industries that have generated mistrust between communities and government institutions.

There is an opportunity for expanding access to renewable energy in historically excluded areas by leveraging the government's ambitious goals of supporting 20,000 Energy Communities across the country to achieve greater access to renewable energy technologies. However, this requires understanding and overcoming existing and emerging obstacles to inclusion, implementation and accountability.

c. Social Accountability Approach

In 2024, the Governance Action Hub undertook broad consultations with government, private sector, civil society and communities, as well as a political economy analysis of the energy sector in Colombia to explore how they could support more inclusive and effective governance of access to renewable energy. In assessing the opportunities and obstacles with local stakeholders, the Governance Action Hub began work with local partners to support a participatory, learning-focused coalition building approach to enable local Energy Communities to navigate the complexities of expanding renewable energy access in their areas.

At the local level, this involves sustained efforts to build trust and relationships between communities, local authorities and other stakeholders, creating conditions for community-led coalitions to engage in decision-making and implementation around access to renewable energy.

More broadly, the Governance Action Hub and its partners create spaces for sharing evidence, tools, and lessons across the emerging network of Energy Communities and other relevant stakeholders to inform local change efforts and national policy makers. This contributes to change at scale across the system of actors working on access to renewable energy in the country.

d. Results, Limitations and Lessons

The Governance Action Hub and its partners began with analysis, listening and local engagement to explore the potential approach to strengthening inclusive governance for increasing access to renewable energy. They began to create or connect to spaces for

collaborative learning, and develop and deploy training and capacity building on politically aware, technically sound systems approaches with local actors.

A first challenge that the Governance Action Hub has started to address is that of the lack of connections and collaboration among the diverse actors in the energy system, both vertically between local and national actors and horizontally among the newly forming Energy Communities.

A second challenge is the lack of clear and inclusive governance frameworks and practices, both within local government and among newly formed Energy Communities. This can undermine local engagement and leadership in the energy transition process.

A final challenge was in accessing the needed financial and technical resources to enable and maintain local renewable energy projects, and in leveraging increased energy access for sustainable local development. Public financing for the energy transition in Colombia is still inadequate to achieve the government's goals, and is dividing across multiple agencies and local governments, presenting challenges for coherence, efficiency and accountability across the energy transition.

e. Resources and Further Reading

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- García, H., The Main National Investment Priorities and Gaps for a Just Transition in Colombia, Climate Strategies, 2023 (see here)
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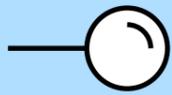
CASE STUDY 5: STRENGTHENING FOREST GOVERNANCE IN NEPAL

a. Case Study Summary

This case study examines Nepal's community forestry system to illustrate how formal accountability frameworks can coexist with weak accountability and responsiveness in practice. Specifically, it highlights how gaps in oversight, power asymmetries and limited social accountability mechanisms within Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs), and between communities and state actors, constrain inclusive climate and natural resource governance. This case is used to draw lessons on why strong legal frameworks alone are insufficient and where social accountability strategies could be strengthened.

b. Problem

After the failure of centralized forestry management in Nepal in the late 1970's the country moved towards a decentralized community-forestry governance approach. The objective was sustainable management ensuring conservations of forests while enabling local livelihood and development benefits. Community forest governance is enabled by a legal framework (1993 Forestry law and subsequent additional regulations) and the creation of autonomous Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs), of which there are over 23,000 across the country covering over a third of the population.

Over time, subsequent reforms have given more power to government bureaucrats at the expense of CFUGs. On the government side, weak capacity, complex regulations, a lack of trust in citizens, and often misaligned incentives have made forestry governance less responsive and accountable to local communities. This has limited communities' roles in local forest management decisions, livelihoods activities related to forest resources, and potentially contributes to corruption in the form of government officials demanding pay for providing services and approvals to CFUGs. In general, there is little collaboration between forestry bureaucrats, local elected officials and CFUGs, exacerbating coordination and responsiveness challenges, and undermining effective forest management.

At the community level, CFUGs do not always fully reflect the progressive goals that were enshrined in the initial framework. Women are mandated to have 50% representation, however, their influence on actual decision making is often less than that of male members. In some cases, CFUG leadership does not hold mandated community meetings, or produce and share required financial information with the government or community. No government actor has clear authority to demand greater accountability from CFUGs, other than the blunt instrument of denying sale of forestry products. Thus, overall, CFUG responsiveness and accountability are not as strong as they could be, allowing elite capture of decisions and resources in some cases.

c. Social Accountability Approach

This case does not document a singular or distinct social accountability intervention. Instead, it examines the existing accountability ecosystem within Nepal's community forestry system and the roles played by different actors in promoting or restricting accountability in practice. It, therefore, serves as a diagnostic case study, highlighting where social accountability strategies and tools could be more deliberately applied.

Nepal's forestry governance system has formal accountability mechanisms. This includes local management plans and transparency and audit requirements of CFUGs. As noted, while these processes are mandated on paper, they are weakened in practice by the concentration of power in government and local elites, gaps in CFUG oversight and accountability, and may be treated as a 'box ticking' activity or ignored entirely.

There have been efforts to promote more coordination and collaboration among forest agencies, local governments, CFUGs and communities that have resulted in some improvements in broader governance and effectiveness, though they didn't necessarily address the accountability and responsiveness of CFUGs themselves.

Finally, the Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN) does play a role in promoting accountability in forestry governance. FECOFUN has strong internal inclusion, transparency and accountability mechanisms to ensure responsiveness to members and effectiveness in its practices. FECOFUN provides capacity strengthening to CFUGs, while also advocating for policies that strengthen forestry governance and benefit forest communities, but not necessarily social accountability at the local level. Furthermore, because the federation is directed by CFUG leaders, it is not necessarily well positioned to promote CFUG responsiveness and accountability.

d. Results, Limitations and Lessons

Community forestry in Nepal is seen to be a successful model for forest conservation and ensuring local livelihoods benefits. Forestry governance does have a relatively strong legal foundation based on progressive principles of inclusive local leadership and management. However, in practice, the forestry governance system does not ensure strong responsiveness and accountability at subnational and community levels, despite the role of FECOFUN in engaging government. Overall, the accountability of and coordination between forestry officials, local government, CFUGs and community members is limited, weakening the inclusiveness, responsiveness and effectiveness of forest governance.

The overall lesson is that a strong legal framework is important but not sufficient for inclusive, responsive and accountable forestry governance. A governance framework sets up formal responsibilities, structures and processes that may align with key principles, however power asymmetries, unaligned incentives, a lack of effective coordination, and accountability gaps can undermine forestry governance processes and results on the ground. Civic and other actors need to carefully monitor and assess the ongoing dynamics of inclusiveness, responsiveness and accountability at various levels in a governance system. On that basis they can coordinate efforts to update frameworks and laws, facilitate spaces for dialogue and relationship building among government and community actors, and

influence the inclusiveness and accountability of community groups like the CFUGs.

From a social accountability perspective, this case underscores the need for strategies, such as those outlined in this resource guide, that strengthen answerability and responsiveness across levels of governance. This can include independent monitoring, collective civic action, and other mechanisms that hold both public institutions and community-based organisations to account.

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