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Social Accountability
Topic Guide

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Contents
- What are Social accountability assessments?
- Purpose and context of the assessments
- Assessment approaches
- Data sources
- Key issues and challenges
- Examples of promising practices

What are Social accountability assessments?

Social accountability is broadly defined as a citizen-centred approach to building state accountability[1]. Social accountability mechanisms cover a broad range of actions that citizens, communities and civil society organizations can use to hold government officials accountable, including, but not limited to: participatory budgeting, independent bugdet analysis, public expenditure tracking, citizen report cards, community scorecards, social audits, citizen's charters, public hearings, e-governance and e-procurement, citizens' juries and community radio.

This guide focuses specifically on those social accountability tools which (a) are diagnostic in nature (generally involving citizen monitoring), and (b) may include corruption/anti-corruption as one important area of analysis, namely citizen report cards (CRCs), community scorecards (CSCs) and social audits (SAs). Other social accountability tools which focus specifically on tracking resource flows are covered in the Public Finance Guide and Education Health & Water Guide[2].

In addition to these more well established social accountability mechanisms, there has been a recent proliferation of citizen-centred initiatives which use online technology to promote transparency and accountability in the public sector in general, and in politics in particular. Such initiatives generally work either by providing citizens with a platform to report on incidences of corruption/malpractice, or by aggregating and publishing data on political finance, the performance of public officials, and potential conflicts of interest in the public sector. Such initiatives, however, cannot be regarded as assessment tools per se, given that the data collected is rarely representative and/or systematically analysed. Nevertheless, as an innovative approach which has important research potential, these initiatives warrant a special mention here. A non-exhaustive list of such initiatives is provided in the appendix for reference.

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[1] World Bank (2004) Social Accountability: An Introduction to the Concept and Emerging Practice
[2] Other related guides include Access to Information and Local Governance

Purpose and context of the assessments

The multiple purposes of social accountability tools can broadly be broken down as: (a) improved governance and accountability, (b) increased development effectiveness, and (c) increased citizen empowerment[3]. It is important to note that social accountability is not a purely diagnostic approach, but also involves advocacy and empowerment elements. Furthermore, assessments are rarely designed specifically for the purpose of diagnosing corruption[4]. Nevertheless, most of these tools do assess levels of accountability and transparency which can act as a proxy for anti-corruption.

Citizen report cards (CRCs) and Community scorecards (CSCs) are designed to provide public agencies with feedback from service users on the quality and adequacy of public services. The principle difference between the two is that CRCs focus more on ongoing monitoring and scoring, whereas the emphasis of CSCs is more on immediate feedback from communities and less on systematic data collection. Specifically, CRCs/CSCs can be used as[5]:

- a diagnostic tool, providing governments with qualitative and quantitative information about gaps in service delivery and the level of citizens' awareness about their rights and responsibilities
- an accountability tool, revealing where service providers are not meeting expected standards and stimulating officials to address specific issues
- a monitoring tool, to track changes in service quality over time
- an anti-corruption tool, exposing hidden costs (including the extent of bribes and informal payments) as well as transparency gaps in service provisions (e.g. disclosure of service quality standards and norms).

Social Audits are designed to build accountability and transparency in the use and management of public resources, through citizen monitoring, analysis and evaluation of government performance. The scope of social audits is often broader than CRCs/CSC's focus on the delivery of services and may include all aspects of a public project, programme or policy, including financial management, efficiency, access to information, transparency and accountability, participation etc. Specific purposes may include[6]:

- helping to prevent corrupt practices and/or providing evidence to expose wrongdoings in government programmes (e.g. corruption among public officials)
- informing the government about the potential impact and consequences of public policies/programmes
- keeping the community informed about government policies and actions and articulating citizens' demands and needs
- measuring consistency between promises and actual results of public policies.

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[3] World Bank (2004) Social Accountability: An Introduction to the Concept and Emerging Practice

[4] Some exceptions include Transparency in Education. Report Card in Bangladesh, Learning Tool on Citizen Report Card on Drinking Water and Sanitation Services, Improving Municipal Service Delivery & Strengthening Citizen Engagement Through Citizen Report Cards. A Training & Implementation Manual; Social Audit of Public Services in Delhi Comparison across two Social Audits

[5] Improving Local Governance and Service Delivery: Citizen Report Card Learning Tool Kit; Improving municipal service delivery & strengthening citizen engagement through citizen report cards

[6] A Practical Guide to Social Audit as a Participatory Tool to Strengthen Democratic Governance, Transparency and Accountability, The CDF Social Audit Guide: A Handbook for Communities, Frutos de la Democracia: Manual de implementación del Programa Auditoría Ciudadana, Calidad de las Prácticas Democráticas en Municipios

Assessment approaches

CRCs, CSCs and Social Audits are usually carried out by independent (non-governmental) organisations although they are sometimes instigated and/or supported by local authorities and service providers themselves.

- Citizen report cards vary somewhat in their approach and design depending on the scope and purpose of the exercise. Nevertheless, the generally involve two related elements: (a) the collection of survey data on the quality and/or quantity of a public service, and (b) awareness-raising and broad-based advocacy based on the results of the survey[7]. CRCs can be carried out at the municipal, regional or national level[8].

- Community scorecards bring together service users and providers to jointly analyse and resolve service delivery problems. They differ from citizen report cards insofar as they do not rely on sampling but rather focus on ensuring maximum participation of a particular local community[9].

- Social audits can take different forms and cover a range of actors and practices. They can be undertaken individually or jointly by government, civil society and/or community-level actors[10]. The scope of social audits can range from a specific project to nation-wide government programme (e.g. CDF in Kenya)[11]

Each of the three approaches involve different degrees of citizen involvement at different stages of the assessment process. However, they can all be divided roughly into three key stages (preparatory, implementation and follow-up). Whilst the preparation and follow-up stages are similar for all three approaches, the key differences can be found in the implementation stage (see table 1 below).

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[7] A Practical Guide to Social Audit as a Participatory Tool to Strengthen Democratic Governance, Transaprency and Accountability

[8] Citizen Report Card Learning Tool Kit; Learning Tool on Citizen Report Card on Drinking Water and Sanitation Services; Improving Municipal Service Delivery & Strengthening Citizen Engagement Through Citizen Report Cards. A Training & Implementation Manual; Rwanda Citizen Report and Community Scorecards; Citizens Report Card on Urban, Water, Sanitation and Solid Waste Services in Kenya; Quality of Public Services in Brahmapur, Orissa - A Citizen Report Card;

[9] Operational Manual for Community Based Performance Monitoring; The Scorecard Toolkit: A Generic Guide for Implementing the Scorecard Process to Improve Quality of Services; Community Scorecards: A Tool for Accountability and Information Flow

[10] PG Exchange Toolkit: Social Audits; The CDF Social Audit Guide: A Handbook for Communities; NREGA Social Audit Toolkit; A Guide to Conducting Social Audits: Learning from the Experience of Andhra Pradesh; A Practical Guide to Social Audit as a Participatory Tool to Strengthen Democratic Governance, Transaprency and Accountability; Manual de Auditoría Social para Comisiones Ciudadanas de Transparencia

[11] The CDF Social Audit Guide: A Handbook for Communities; Frutos de la Democracia: Manual de implementación del Programa Auditoría Ciudadana, Calidad de las Prácticas Democráticas en Municipios

	Citizen report cards	Community scorecards	Social audits
Preparatory stage	(1) Assessing the local political climate, the openness of service providers, and the strength of local civil society and media; (2) Awareness-raising among stakeholders; (3) Assessing the skills, resources, independence and commitment of the implementing organisation to carry out a CRC; (4) Training on the key concepts and methodology of the CRC; (5) Identifying goals, objectives, unit of analysis and sample; (6) Design and testing of the questionnaire.	(1) Identifying the sector, service providers and community(ies) to be included; (2) identifying patterns of service usage within the selected community(ies); (3) securing the support of local leaders, community partners and service providers; (4) training facilitators; agreeing on the purpose of the scorecard process; (5) identifying inputs to be tracked	(1) Organizing and training the social audit team (community volunteers/civil society groups/coalitions of NGOs); (2) planning the audit (timeline, resources, information required).
Implementation stage	(7) Selecting and training survey administrators; (8) Conducting the survey among the selected sample; (9) Analysis of the data based on the established purpose of the assessment, (quality, access, reliability, informal payments and bribery etc)	(6) *Community gathering:* Prioritizing issues; developing indicators and scoring matrix; completing the scorecard (assessment of service providers); developing suggestions for improvement. (7) *Meeting with service providers:* Prioritizing issues; developing indicators and scoring matrix; completing the scorecard (self-assessment by service providers); developing suggestions for	(3) Collecting and analysing relevant public documents (accounts, payrolls, technical reports etc); (4) conducting interviews/ focus groups with public officials, community representatives and other relevant stakeholders on their perceptions of the project/programme under analysis; (5) developing a social audit report.

Table 1. Key stages of social accountability assessments

		improvement. (8) *Interface meeting:* sharing matrices and scores between communities and service providers; discussing the rationale behind scores; developing a joint action plan.	
Follow-up stage	(10) Dissemination of findings through the media and public meetings etc; (11) Meetings between users and service providers to foster dialogue and advocate for improvements in the performance of service providers; (12) Planning for future report cards to monitor changes over time.	(9) Disseminating the results of the scorecard process through the media and community; (10) advocating for changes in service delivery planning and budgeting; (11) monitoring the implementation of the joint action plan; (12) planning a repeat of the scorecard process to monitor changes over time.	(6) Disseminating findings through the media, public meetings etc; (7) convening a public meeting with officials to discuss findings and develop an action plan; (8) advocacy around specific examples of mismanagement and corruption; (9) monitoring the implementation of the recommendations from the social audit; (10) planning for future social audits to monitor changes over time.

Data sources

The types of data used for social accountability assessments vary according to the approach taken. CRCs rely largely on stratified surveys of citizens to assess their perceptions of, and experiences with, the public service(s) in question. CSCs are more dependent on community level meetings and focus groups with government officials to gather data. Social audits meanwhile combine secondary data (official records) with key informant interviews. They also sometimes employ direct observation techniques to assess the quality of the project/programme under analysis.

Key issues and challenges

Key issues and challenges which cut across all social accountability interventions relate in particular to the preparatory stage of the three approaches covered here, namely ensuring that the conditions are right before taking the decision to undertake an assessment. The Public Affairs Centre in Bangalore, who pioneered the CRC method, suggest a list of 9 critical factors which need to be assessed before a final decision is made on whether to conduct a CRC in a particular context, namely: political context; the impact of decentralization; security; citizen's freedom to voice; presence and activism of CSOs; professional NGO activity; quality of media; leadership orientation of service providers; and government interest[12].

- Managing the assessment process**:** Ensuring that the assessment team - whatever form it may take - has the necessary skills and resources to undertake the work is crucial. In the case of CRCs, for example, the competence of the lead institution is one the most critical factors for success. Essential characteristics of the lead institution include credibility, neutrality, commitment, technical competence in survey-related work, and experience in working with multiple constituents. Rather than a single organization serving as the lead institution, an independent consortium (e.g. government officials, civil society members, representatives from the media and academia) may increase the likelihood that the independence of findings will be maintained[13]. In the case of CSCs, a critical stage in the process is the interface meeting between communities and service providers, which can sometimes lead to conflict. Because they can make certain participants feel uncomfortable or threatened, they therefore require good facilitation skills.[14]

- Political will and enabling environment: A further factor which is crucial for successful social accountability work is committed leadership at different levels. This includes leadership from within service provider agencies themselves, the presence of local champions, as well as interest from higher levels of Government[15]. The support of key individuals, however, is not enough. An appropriate normative framework that guarantees the right to public information, citizen participation, accountability and transparency is also a key requirement of social accountability. This includes functioning recourse mechanisms for addressing grievances to ensure

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[12] Improving Local Governance and Service Delivery: Citizen Report Card Learning Tool Kit
[13] Improving Local Governance and Service Delivery: Citizen Report Card Learning Tool Kit
[14] The Scorecard Toolkit: A Generic Guide for Implementing the Scorecard Process to Improve Quality of Services
[15] Governance Knowledge Centre - Critical Success Factors for Citizen Report Cards: The experience of Public Affairs Foundation

that confidence in the process is maintained[16]. Building political will and raising awareness about the democratic process through the media are therefore critical[17].

Promising practices

<u>Institutionalising social accountability:</u> Andhra Pradesh is the only state government in India to have formally institutionalized social audits, designed to monitor the transparency and accountability of the country's national job guarantee scheme, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). The recognised success of this process of institutionalisation has been attributed to a number of key factors, including[18]:

- Committed and continued support from within the local public administration at different levels (senior public officials, frontline bureaucrats and importantly, implementing officials who can often act as an obstacle to reform efforts)
- starting out small and gradually scaling up to ensure that vested interests are not overtly threatened, and to allow for incremental improvements to the methodology and process
- developing a system to undertake regular training and capacity building of local social auditors
- access to complete and accurate records which are understandable and easy to verify
- developing the right balance between government support and independence through the establishment of a parallel structure within the responsible government department made up of senior government officials and prominent members of civil society.

A similar example is that of Delhi's social audit project instigated by the chief minster of Delhi and implemented by the Public Affairs Centre in Bangalore, using the CRC methodology. In this case, the social audit process was repeated for the same set of services after a period of two years to measure the impact of the reforms initiated in response to the findings from the baseline study. The results of the second social audit indicate that the reforms resulted in positive outcomes in terms of increased satisfaction and improvement in service delivery[19].

<u>Identifying corruption and building trust</u>: There are a number examples of corrupt practices being identified through social accountability assessments. The International Institute for Education Planning's Citizen Report Card in Bangladesh, for example, used participatory diagnosis to facilitate the location and investigation of corruption in the country's basic education system (in the appointment of school teachers, in student admissions in primary schools, in the Upazulla Education office and in the Food for Education Program)[20]. Meanwhile, the second Social Audit of Public Services in Delhi (see above) found a decrease in the proportion of users reporting paying speed money when interacting with the majority of services assessed, in comparison with the first audit[21].

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[16] A Guide to Conducting Social Audits: Learning from the Experience of Andhra Pradesh
[17] A Practical Guide to Social Audit as a Participatory Tool to Strengthen Democratic Governance, Transparency and Accountability
[18] A Guide to Conducting Social Audits: Learning from the Experience of Andhra Pradesh
[19] Social Audit of Public Services in Delhi Comparison across two Social Audits
[20] Transparency in Education: Report Card in Bangladesh
[21] Social Audit of Public Services in Delhi Comparison across two Social Audits

At the same time, the application of social accountability mechanisms can itself lead to a decrease in the opportunities for corruption, as in the case of the People's Voice Program (PVP) in Ukraine. The PVP used of Citizen Report Cards (CRC) to develop feedback mechanisms between local people and local government service delivery institutions. One outcome was an improvement in the perceived integrity of local government officials, whilst local government institutions became more responsive to the demands of citizens. As a result, citizens have been motivated to engage further with local authorities, creating a virtuous cycle[22].

All tools referenced in this guide are accessible via the gateway tool database:
http://gateway.transparency.org/tools

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[22] Improving Municipal Service Delivery & Strengthening
Citizen Engagement Through Citizen Report Cards. A Training & Implementation Manual

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