



# REFLECTIONS AND LEARNING ON THE USE OF SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY MONITORING TOOLS IN TRACKING THE PROVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES

LESSONS FROM A PROJECT ON SCALING-UP SOCIAL  
ACCOUNTABILITY IN RURAL LOCAL AUTHORITIES OF ZIMBABWE



Funded by the European Union

**This document has been produced with the financial support of the European Union. The views expressed within this document are the sole responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor any person acting on its behalf is responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained herein.**

## **1. Background**

The Civic Forum on Human Development (CFHD) has been using Social Accountability approaches in Rural District Councils<sup>1</sup> of Zimbabwe under a series of EU-funded initiatives dating back to 2010. This has been aimed at empowering ordinary citizens, particularly disadvantaged citizens, to know and exercise their rights, obtain information and knowledge, make their voices heard, negotiate change, and hold public power holders accountable. This has been based on the premise that accountability is the cornerstone of good governance and unless public officials can be held to account, critical benefits associated with good governance such as social justice, poverty reduction, and development remain elusive. The work has involved supporting Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the application of Social Accountability strategies and tools in the empowerment of civic groups and ordinary citizens to exercise their inherent rights and to hold service providers accountable in the provision of service delivery. CFHD Social Accountability Monitoring (SAM) has been guided by a toolkit, which provides a systematic guide of key steps that are involved in holding public officials accountable. This reflection paper seeks to highlight the key processes, lessons and experiences noted by the CFHD in the implementation of the Social Accountability approaches in the 14 RDCs of Mutoko, Chipinge, Nyaminyami, Tsholotsho, Hwedza, Mudzi, Sanyati, Nyaminyami, Hurungwe, Guruve, Muzarabani, Mbire, Murewa, Goromonzi, Chegutu and Chikomba.

## **2. Social Accountability as a Concept**

The concept of Social Accountability, especially of Local Government institutions to citizens, has gained much traction in mainstreaming development work. This has been driven by the importance of creating mechanisms of accountability to citizens by Local Government institutions and other service providers. In practice, however, citizens face a widening gulf between themselves and the service providers as the duty bearers that are meant to serve them. Trying to understand accountability brings to the fore the questions of accountability for what (objectives), who (beneficiaries), how (means and processes), and where (context). Accountability has been characterized by key terms such as enforceability and answerability, holding actors responsible for their actions, and keeping the public informed and the service providers in check. Social Accountability can be defined as an 'approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability. Social Accountability aims to initiate demand-driven and bottom-up citizen voice and oversight in public service delivery.

## **3. Legal Framework**

In its work on Social Accountability, the CFHD has been guided by international, regional and domestic laws. These include the International Bill of Rights, and the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights "ICCPR". More specifically, the African Charter on Human and

---

<sup>1</sup> Mutoko, Chipinge, Nyaminyami, Tsholotsho, Hwedza, Mudzi, Sanyati, Nyaminyami, Hurungwe, Guruve, Muzarabani, Mbire, Murewa, Goromonzi, Chegutu, Chikomba

People's Rights states that all people have a right to "pursue economic and social development according to the policy they have freely chosen" and that all people shall have the right to their economic, social and cultural development with regard to their freedom, identity and equal enjoyment of common heritage of mankind. The fundamental obligation of Social Accountability is found in Zimbabwe's 2013 Constitution, which requires the state to involve the people in the formulation and implementation of development plans. The Constitution similarly recognizes the right of communities to manage their development. Putting this obligation into practice, Zimbabwe's current National Development Strategy (NDS1), affirms a commitment to "people-centred development". The legislative Acts that provide a framework for the implementation of Social Accountability in Zimbabwe include the Rural District Councils Act (Chapter:1988), the Urban Council Act (Chapter:1998) and the Traditional Leaders Act (Chapter: 2000).

#### 4. Actors Involved in Social Accountability

Social Accountability involves the participation of a wide range of actors from the demand and supply side. The demand side comprises the users of services and largely comprises members of the community, and community-based organizations and the supply side encompasses local authorities, service providers and duty-bearers. The role of the key actors involved in the provision of service delivery is summarized below as follows:

- **Local authorities:** The CFHD largely worked with rural local authorities who are responsible for the provision of social services such as water, education, roads, refuse collection and health care.
- **Policymakers:** Politicians and policymakers discharge the fundamental responsibilities of the state through using power to enforce rules, regulations and laws. The CFHD capacitated councillors in the use of Social Accountability tools to enable them to effectively conduct their oversight function in guaranteeing and safeguarding the provision of quality public services. The specific tools that were of interest to the councillors are public hearings, study circles and public revenue monitoring tools.
- **CSOs and CBOs:** The CSO's capacity development menu was focused on the managerial, advocacy, information and knowledge capacity, leadership and coalition building. Civic groups were also instrumental in mobilizing the participation of members of the community in Social Accountability processes. The Social Accountability tools that generated interest amongst the CSOs and CBOs are public expenditure tracking surveys, participatory budgeting, community scorecards and social audits.
- **Traditional Leaders:** Traditional leaders, such as village heads, chiefs and headmen, hold significant influence and authority in rural communities. They play a vital role in community development by mobilizing resources, resolving disputes, and facilitating local governance initiatives. The CFHD capacitated traditional leaders on Social Accountability tools such as participatory budgeting, citizen scorecards, and community monitoring mechanisms. The tools contributed to traditional leaders have better understanding and respond to the needs and priorities of their communities. This has been leading to more transparent, inclusive, and responsive governance practices at the local level.
- **Members of the community:** At the local level members of the community participated in the Social Accountability process through network-based organizations

to define collective problems such as accessing clean water, education and health services) for collective action. The members of the community were capacitated on Social Accountability and exposed to the structures and platforms available to them to monitor and constructively engage with their service providers, by amplifying their voice in policymaking. The Social Accountability tools that generated interest amongst members of the community are public expenditure tracking surveys, participatory budgeting, community scorecards and social audits.

## 5. Social Accountability Approaches

Social Accountability entails the use of a wide range of approaches and mechanisms. Approaches that have been used by the CFHD include legal channels for seeking redress; formal government structures and processes; citizen participation approaches; government policies; ICT-based; and traditional/conventional methods. The approaches are summarized below as follows.

**Table 1: Social Accountability Approaches**

| Approach                                        | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Direct engagement                               | Direct engagement between individual citizens and politicians and technical staff within local authorities is one means by which citizens can make local government accountable. Citizens are also able to inquire about related issues and get prompt feedback. Training for transformation (T4T) by the CFHD has been targeted on the duty bearers and policymakers to have an open working relationship with members of their constituency to enable more direct interactions and constructive engagements.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Using the law as a Social Accountability anchor | The law itself has become an important tool that citizens can use for the fulfilment of their needs and priorities within the planning, decision making and resource allocation framework. Based on these laws, citizens can take a judicial approach to have their problems solved by the responsible authorities. Regulations and policies on local government are deliberate provisions that foster Social Accountability and democratize governance systems making them responsive and transparent at both the local and national levels. The Constitution of Zimbabwe presents a number of institutions and mechanisms that seek to enhance the accountability of government institutions. These include local government and service delivery capacity-building programmes, different government tiers, fundamental human rights and freedoms, Chapter 13 institutions, principles of public administration and leadership, law reform, and devolution. |
| Utilizing government structures and processes   | Zimbabwe has development structures within the governance systems such as the Village Development Committee (VIDCO), Ward Development Committee (WADCO) and the District Development Committee which are existing platforms that can be used to advance Social Accountability. The structures are provided by the legislation and afford for the existence of horizontal accountability enabling institutional checks and balances to guard against abuse of power and resources and also enabling inclusive planning and resource allocation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

|                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Citizen participation as a means of fostering accountability | At the core of public administration is the need to ensure that citizens participate, actively, in how their affairs are managed by the authorities. Social Accountability mechanisms involve citizens seeking information from local authorities such as public budgets and public expenditures in ensuring access to and quality of services. The CFHD has been strengthening the capacity of existing public platforms and avenues available to constructive citizen engagements to ensure that they are functional and able to effectively respond to citizen needs and priorities.                                                                                          |
| Use of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT)       | ICT-based Social Accountability approaches that have been supported by the CFHD to improve governance include websites and portals and social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook. With the availability of resources, other digital platforms that can be used in digitalization can include video conferencing, telecentres, social media platforms, citizen service centres, and electronic kiosks. These can also include mobile phone-based services using short messages, interactive voice recording and hand-held devices such as personal digital assistants are now getting traction globally for their ability to strengthen Social Accountability mechanisms. |

## 6. Social Accountability Monitoring Tools

Social Accountability uses a variety of Social Accountability methodologies which should be used in a constructive manner meant to identify areas of improvement and strengthening in the provision of service delivery. Frequently reported methodologies include: interface meetings between communities and service providers, budget monitoring, community-based participatory monitoring and scorecard methodologies. Social Accountability is closely related to rights-based approaches to development. Social Accountability offers mechanisms to monitor and protect these rights. The CFHD has been using different Social Accountability monitoring tools to promote accountability and transparency. The tools have been applied and adapted to serve different purposes and contexts. Table 2 below illustrates some of the tools that can be used in Social Accountability Monitoring and the list is not exhaustive of other tools that are still to be piloted by the CFHD in rural communities of Zimbabwe.

**Table 2: Social Accountability Monitoring Tools**

| Mechanisms                           | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Policy Making and Planning</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Citizen Juries                       | Citizen juries are a form of deliberative mini-public process where a group of randomly selected citizens are brought together to consider a specific policy issue and provide recommendations. Composed of 12 to 24 purposively selected citizens, the process constitutes a direct method for obtaining informed citizens' input into policymaking processes. |
| Public Hearings                      | Are typically organized as a way to gather public opinions and concerns on issues of concern before a legislature, agency, or organization makes a decision or takes action. The tool can be used in public hearings by Local Authorities during policy consultation processes at the sub-district level.                                                       |

|                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Study Circles                              | Comprise a small group of people who meet over a period to deliberate on critical public administration issues. The CFHD has been supporting learning circles involving the participation of CSOs, CBOs, traditional leaders and councillors which have involved dialogue and engagement on topical service delivery issues.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Public Forums                              | It occurs when local authorities open their official meetings to the public to harness community input and concerns.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>2. Public Resources Monitoring</b>      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Public Revenue Monitoring                  | Revenue monitoring enables the citizens to know how much money is at the disposal of their government and how the revenue collected has been spent. The tool generated interest amongst councillors who have an oversight function in the management of local authority affairs. It was noted that the tool is key in ascertaining revenue that is mobilised by the local authority over a period of time and should be piloted within the targeted districts                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS) | PETS are tools to track the flow of public resources i.e. human, financial or in-kind, from any level of government to the intended beneficiary at the point of frontline service delivery. It can be used by citizens, through civil society organisations (CSOs) and is also used by the government. They enable citizens to participate in governance processes through the gathering of information and monitoring the flow of public funds and spending to deliver services. The tool generated a lot of interest during the Social Accountability Project capacity building workshops amongst both service providers and users of services |
| Gender-sensitive budgeting                 | Gender-responsive budgets are not separate budgets for women, instead, they are general budgets that are planned, approved, executed, monitored and audited in a gender-sensitive way. CBOs representing vulnerable and marginalized groups such as the elderly, women and youth expressed interest in using the tool in conducting their work.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>3. Public Services Monitoring</b>       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Community Score Cards                      | Community Score Cards are a tool through which citizens monitor the provision of community-based public services. It provides the opportunity for citizens to analyse any particular service they receive based on their personal feelings, to express dissatisfaction, to encourage if good work is done and further suggest measures to be taken if flaws remain. The tool was administered in all the targeted 8 districts by the project and community scorecards were much appreciated by all the targeted stakeholders in monitoring progress of their CBP priorities.                                                                     |
| Social Audits                              | Social audits are participatory and involve collecting information on public resources and their use in the delivery of public services. The information is analysed and shared publicly in a participatory manner. The central concern of a social audit is how resources are used for social objectives. The targeted communities highlighted that they have an interest in using the tool in monitoring progress on service delivery priorities.                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Stakeholder Surveys                        | A range of techniques are employed in mapping and understanding the perspectives of stakeholders with an interest                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

|                      |                                                                                                |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                      | in who have an interest in a particular policy reform programme by the government.             |
| Citizen Report Cards | Participatory surveys that seek to obtain user feedback on the performance of public services. |

## 7. Monitoring and Evaluation

The CFHD has been supporting strong M&E approaches which are key for the establishment of functional Social Accountability initiatives. The M&E designs advocated by the CFHD have increasingly focused on social inclusion. This deliberate emphasis ensures that women, people with disabilities, and other excluded groups are taken into account during the design, organization, implementation, and outcomes of various initiatives. The diversity of contexts, services, and relationships that Social Accountability initiatives address and have been operationalized by the CFHD calls for the piloting of new assessment approaches that draw on tools used to understand non-linear change and complexity in other fields, and which combine approaches and methods developed in other areas such as poverty reduction, governance and service delivery.

## 8. Lessons and Experiences

Several key lessons emerged from the implementation of the Social Accountability approach by the CFHD. The key emerging lessons from the Social Accountability approach point to the need for continued need for investing in awareness raising and capacity building, broad-based and multi-stakeholder involvement, inclusiveness, and the importance of political analysis and timing. The impact in the use of Social Accountability approaches is greatest when strategies are multidimensional and system-wide, flexible and innovative.

### 8.1 Lessons from CFHD Recent Work on Social Accountability

- The relationship between duty bearers and citizens is key to the success of Social Accountability programmes. Some of the key challenges noted during the administration of Social Accountability Monitoring Tools related to the unwillingness of Members of Parliament (MP)s, councillors and government ministers to afford operational space for the tools to be administered on the ground.
- A critical lesson specifically relevant to Murewa, Chikomba and Guruve district is the importance of ensuring SAM tools are developed in local languages, such as Shona. This fosters accessibility, empowers citizens, promotes accurate understanding and increases participation. This would ensure that the tools are more inclusive, empowering, and impactful, leading to a stronger foundation for Social Accountability and improved governance in the community.
- The District Action Team (DAT)<sup>2</sup> and CBOs from Chikomba district acknowledged that Social Accountability campaigns are a long-term endeavour, not a one-off event.

---

<sup>2</sup> DAT are district government officials, council staff and other key stakeholders that work with CFHD in driving the Social accountability Project

Building trust and establishing strong relationships between citizens and the government is a crucial yet gradual process. It requires sustained effort on both sides of the equation. Citizens need to feel confident that their voices are heard and their concerns addressed, while the government needs to demonstrate a genuine commitment to transparency and accountability. This back-and-forth relationship-building is essential for the success of any Social Accountability campaign.

- A key takeaway from the discussions across all the 8 districts was the need for continued measurement, monitoring, and tracking to ensure the sustained impact of the selected priorities from the community-based planning (CBP) processes. However, participants also acknowledged the inherent challenges in measuring the results of these initiatives since they had lost track of some of the progress that was being made since the selection of the priorities.
- Patriarchy tendencies often downplay the role of women actors within the Social Accountability framework. There is a need to ensure that the Social Accountability approaches and tools in use are cognisant of gender and social inclusion for vulnerable and marginalized groups. In one of the wards in Murewa, it was noted that the views of women were downplayed in favour of men priorities.

## **9.2 Other Common Lessons from the use of SAM Tools**

- Most duty bearers get convinced when provided with adequate research evidence and documentation from the amplified voices of the community itself.
- Lack of skilled personnel to undertake credible Social Accountability initiatives is a major problem. Low capacity on the part of several actors has continued to impinge upon certain operational aspects of the Social Accountability initiatives in Zimbabwe.
- Limited financial resources are a serious problem that threatens the sustainability of Social Accountability initiatives in most rural local authorities. Activities such as participatory budget monitoring are expensive undertakings for both the demand and supply side.
- Social Accountability requires an engaged citizenry as low levels of participation by communities or particular groups may hinder accountability efforts. In its programming, the CFHD has noted that citizen participation in Social Accountability has depended upon a wide range of factors, including trust in outcomes, fear of reprisal and history of interactions with state institutions, which vary by context. Building capacity for participation and mobilization as well as collective design and application of the tools is an essential element of Social Accountability work.

## **9. Recommendations**

- There is a need to enhance internal capacity/knowledge on Social Accountability by developing appropriate guidance, documenting best practices and setting up local learning platforms within the targeted districts.
- There is a need to explore how ICT-led platforms such as U-Report and RapidPro for use to promote citizen engagement and amplify the voices of the citizens in supporting the effectiveness and reach of Social Accountability mechanisms while ensuring that such technologies do not negatively affect inclusion.
- There is a need to strongly invest in localized strong M&E that focuses on results for local governance and citizen participation programming, including the most marginalized, and document experiences for upstream policy advocacy and local, national and global learning.

- There is a need for increased lobby and advocacy for strengthening legislation and policies to support community action for Social Accountability and devolution.

## **10. Conclusion**

SAM tools have become a powerful force for positive change. However, their effectiveness relies on several key factors. An open and participatory environment, where local governments are transparent and citizens are actively engaged, is essential. Equipping citizen groups and CSOs with the skills and resources to utilize SAM tools effectively is equally important. This empowers them to collect, analyze data, and advocate for change. Reaching marginalized groups is crucial for inclusive and successful Social Accountability efforts. User-friendly languages, targeted outreach, and capacity-building initiatives are all necessary to ensure their voices are heard in the monitoring process. Technology can also be a powerful ally. Online platforms, , and social media can enhance communication, data collection, and awareness raising. It was also acknowledged that SAM is not a one-time event and that sustained efforts are required to ensure lasting improvements in governance and service delivery. Challenges like limited resources, weak enforcement mechanisms, and restrictions on freedom of expression need to be acknowledged and addressed for SAM initiatives to succeed. In conclusion, Social Accountability monitoring tools, when implemented thoughtfully and strategically, can be a catalyst for positive change. By fostering transparency, empowering citizens, and promoting collaboration, SAM can contribute to a more just, equitable, and accountable society.

### **Contact Details:**

Civic Forum on Human Development  
15 Atkinson Drive, Hillside  
Harare, Zimbabwe  
Email: [admin@civicforumonhd.org](mailto:admin@civicforumonhd.org) / [civicforumonhd@gmail.com](mailto:civicforumonhd@gmail.com)  
Website: [civicforumonhd.org](http://civicforumonhd.org)  
Tel: +263 783 830 616