



SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN PRACTICE: PRACTICAL LESSONS FROM FIELD EXPERIENCES IN ZIMBABWE



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1. Background of the Project

The Civic Forum on Human Development (CFHD) in partnership with Lower Guruve Development Association (LGDA), Centre for Community Development Solutions (CCDS), Association of Rural District Councils of Zimbabwe (ARDCZ) and Nyahunhure Community Trust (NCT) is implementing a four-year project entitled “Strengthening Civil Society Capacity for Scaling-up Social Accountability in Rural Local Authorities of Zimbabwe”. The project is being implemented in the 8 districts of Goromonzi, Chikomba, Murewa, Mbire, Muzarabani, Guruve, Chegutu and Makonde districts. The aim of the project is to enhance meaningful participation of civil society and community-based organizations in demanding and monitoring inclusive, accountable and resilient governance and service delivery in rural local authorities of Zimbabwe. The report seeks to highlight some of the key practices that emerged from the implementation of the project.

2. Introduction

Social Accountability is a cornerstone of effective development work. It is a set of practices that ensures that public institutions are answerable and accountable to the people they serve. Within the social accountability framework, this refers to the processes, mechanisms, and relationships that hold institutions (public, private, and civil society) accountable to the public they serve. It involves citizens actively participating in monitoring service delivery, demanding transparency and responsiveness from authorities, and advocating for improvements based on agreed standards of service delivery.

Table 1: Importance of Social Accountability for Rural Development:

Importance	Description
Promotes Transparency and Good Governance	It strengthens decision-making processes and resource allocation, fostering trust between citizens and institutions.
Empowers Citizens	It equips communities with the knowledge and tools to hold authorities accountable, leading to a more participatory and inclusive development process.
Leads to Equitable and Sustainable Development Outcomes	When citizens have a voice, development efforts are more likely to address their needs and priorities, leading to long-term benefits for all.
Ensures Effective Use of Resources	By monitoring service delivery, social accountability helps prevent corruption and ensures resources are used efficiently for development goals.

In essence, social accountability is about creating a space where citizens are not just passive recipients of aid, but active participants in shaping their communities and their futures. By integrating social accountability practices into development work, we can build a more just, equitable, and sustainable society.

3. Objectives of the Paper

The key objectives of this paper are:

- To equip development practitioners with the knowledge, strategies and practical tools to effectively implement social accountability initiatives.
- To foster collaboration and knowledge sharing among stakeholders interested in promoting social accountability.
- To explain the concept of social accountability and its significance in development work
- To equip readers with practical tools and strategies for implementing social accountability initiatives at local level in a rural context.
- To contribute to a more just, equitable, and sustainable future by empowering communities to hold institutions accountable.
- To serve as a valuable resource for development practitioners, civil society organizations, and citizens seeking to make a positive difference in their communities.

4. Overview of the Work of CFHD in Rural Areas of Zimbabwe

Over the past 20 years, the CFHD has been supporting and spearheading the effective utilization of participatory and planning approaches to enhance meaningful participation of civil society and community-based organizations in demanding and monitoring inclusive, accountable and resilient governance and service delivery in rural local authorities of Zimbabwe. The CFHD participatory approaches have been strengthened over the years through the implementation of grassroots-centered programmes that have been supported by various development agencies such as the EU, USAID and the UN in urban, peri-urban and urban local authorities of Zimbabwe. The programmes have focused on citizen participation, local governance, peace-building, local economic development, social accountability and inclusive service delivery for local economic growth mainly in rural communities. The EU current support for the implementation of the project on “Strengthening CSO Capacity for Scaling-Up Social Accountability in Rural Local Authorities of Zimbabwe (SAP2)”, which has been implemented from February 2020 to March 2024, provided the CFHD with a strategic opportunity to build on its strong track record in strengthening grassroots based development approaches. The work has involved partnerships and collaboration with a wide range of networks of CBOs and CSOs interested in supporting and spearheading citizen participation and inclusive service delivery. CFHD’s work in rural areas over the past two decades is summarized in the figure below showing the programme areas of focus.

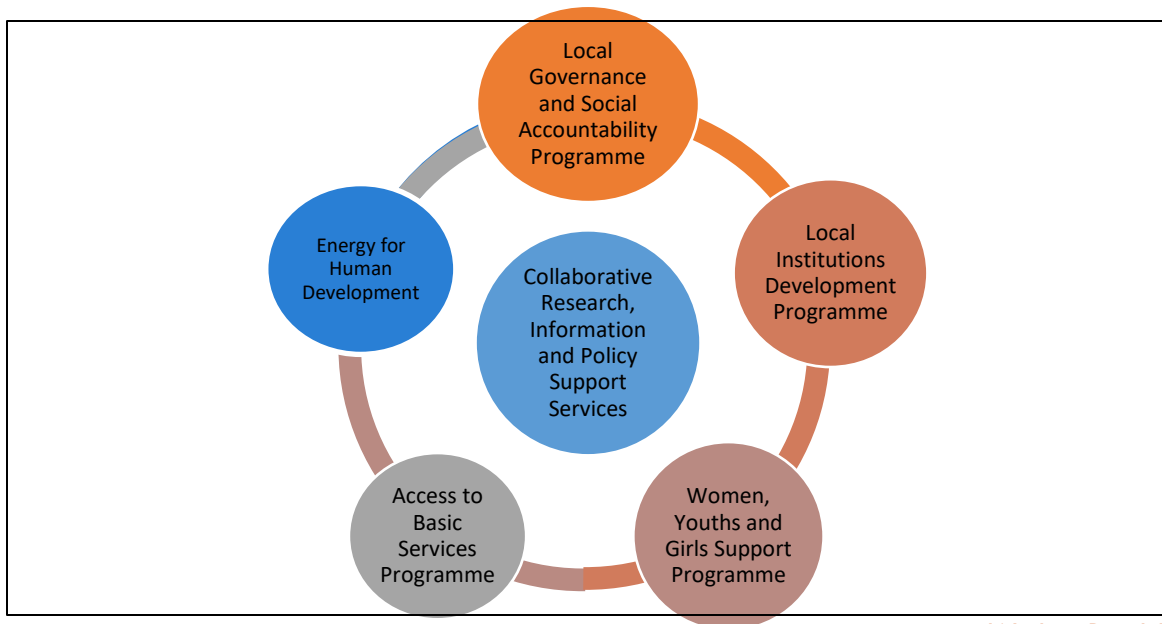


Figure 1: Summary of CFHD

Work in Rural Areas

The above components appear to work together to address development goals at all levels. These elements have contributed to national, regional, and global development goals by empowering communities and fostering inclusive approaches under the social accountability project:

Local Governance and Social Accountability Programme: Work in this area has focused on strengthen citizen participation in local governance, people to people conflict transformation for sustainable development in rural areas, local governance and social accountability and scaling approaches to social accountability and gender-sensitive service delivery. Best practices approaches from this scaling-up process on community based planning, social cohesion, social accountability and community fund management have been mainstreamed into development programmes in the Southern and East African context through collaborative partnerships.

Local Institutions Development Programme: Work in this area has focused on strengthening capacities of CSOs and CBOs as drivers of local development and champions of human rights promotion and protection at local level, strengthening local leadership transformation and development and community based natural resources management.

Access to Basic Services Programme: Work in this area has included support to gender-sensitive water and sanitation, participatory urban planning for integrated urban development, expanding civic space for local economic development for women and youth and future proofing basic services in the context of climate change.

Energy for Human Development Programme: Work in this area has focused on advocacy for renewable energy policy awareness and implementation, increasing energy options in environmentally-sensitive areas, energy efficiency for sustainable urban economies and environments including the production of building materials.

Women, Youths and Girls Support Programme: Work in this focuses on amplifying the empowerment of women, youth and girls to maximize efforts to build their engagement, decision-making power and influence in the development process. We work with grassroots organizations advancing the

interests of these groups as policy and research partners to explore sustainable pathways for addressing their needs and priorities. We also help them to forge supportive networks and partnerships while building their organizational capacity to grow and sustain themselves creating innovation hubs and centres of excellences for others to learn from and strengthening their movement building processes,

Collaborative Research, Information and Policy Support Services: Work in this area has focused has focused on collaborative research on community health systems with the Training and Research Support Centre, regional collaboration with EQUINET, collaborative research on mitigating the impact of COVID-19 with CBOs and CSOS Human Development Network to strengthen evidence-based advocacy for inclusive policies that address the specific needs of diverse groups within the community (women, youth, and people with disabilities).

5. CFHD's Approach to Social Accountability in Zimbabwe

CFHD approach to Social Accountability is based on the light touch model and the community engagement model. The light touch and the community engagement model approach has been used as a vehicle for promoting inclusive development processes that are sensitive to cultural diversity, gender, environment, climate change, local ownership, empowerment and sustainable development.

5.1. Light Touch Model

The light touch model is a project management approach used in development work that emphasizes **decentralization, flexibility, and empowering local actors to drive the process** which is being used by CFHD in its development work. This is achieved through the formation of the District Action Team (DAT) which comprises of resident government line ministries. The DAT team comprises of between 15-25 facilitators from each district drawn from different government line Ministries¹. The project used the light touch facilitation model which is an approach that seeks to enable local actors from the local authorities, Government departments and CBOs to drive the whole planning, implementation and capacity building process at district and sub-district level under the mentorship of the CFHD and its partners. Each targeted district established the DAT to drive the project processes at the district and sub-district level. These DAT members were trained on the Social Accountability Monitoring Tools for them to be able to confidently drive the whole process without external support. The decision to focus on DAT helped to promote greater integration by various stakeholders operating at the district level in their approach to community planning and development processes.

5.2. Community Engagement

Community engagement is a powerful strategy within the broader framework of social accountability, which has been used by CFHD in its current work. Community engagement emphasizes active participation of citizens in decision-making processes related to service delivery which was a major approach used by CFHD in conducting its previous work which has yielded so many results. It has ensured their voices are heard and priorities are considered. Community engagement aimed to empower

¹ Rural Local Authorities officials, Ministry of Local Government and Public Works, Ministry of Women Affairs and Cultural Heritage, Environment and Management Agency, Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Development and Vocational Training, Ministry of Health and Child Care, Agritex,

communities with the knowledge and skills necessary to hold local authorities accountable. This includes training on social accountability tools and advocacy strategies which were done by the CFHD in the targeted eight local authorities of Zimbabwe. The CFHD used a wide range of participatory processes to constructively engage rural communities which include community based planning (CBP), participatory budgeting linked with public expenditure tracking, transformational leadership training of traditional leaders and councilors to understand and support inclusive service delivery and social accountability as good practices within their communities.

6. Operationalization and Adaptations in Rural Local Authorities

The operationalization of social accountability tools in the context of rural communities and political sensitivities requires careful planning and facilitation at local level. There are a number of key steps that CFHD applied the approach at district and community level targeting local authorities that fully endorsed the principles of inclusive service delivery and social accountability as practices for guiding their operations.

6.1. Selection of Pilot Sites for In-depth Testing of Social Accountability Monitoring (SAM) Tools

The project successfully managed to train six rural local authorities which are Murewa, Goromonzi, Chegutu, Chikomba, Goromonzi and Guruve in the use of Social Accountability Monitoring Tools (SAMT). Two wards were involved per district which was informed by a pilot which was done in Chikomba and Murewa districts. As already stated above, CFHD and its partners targeted sites where communities and the local authorities expressed interest in social accountability and were willing to participate in testing the SAM tools during the quarterly review meetings which were done in the districts. Considering the long-term potential for using the SAM tools in the chosen pilot sites, these communities would serve as models for wider adoption the social accountability approach as a result of progressive local governance reforms at district level as well as influencing uptake by other service providers.

6.2. Design of the Process at Local Authority and Ward Level

A practical approach in administering the process of the SAM Tool was used by the project to build the capacities in the use of the tools at district and at ward levels. The methodology is discussed in detail below.

6.2.1. Training of DAT and CBOs

The first day at the district levels focused on the training of DAT members and CBOs focusing on the perception audit tool. The targeted groups were the Rural District Council staff, government departments, Council Chairperson, the chairpersons for the Finance and the Social Services Committees. The training was done in an interactive process that was open for discussion following presentations that were made by the project staff and partners through the facilitation process on the use of social accountability monitoring tools.



Training workshop of CBOs, DAT, CSOs on Gender mainstreaming, Community Led Resilience and Social Accountability in Murewa District

6.2.2. Ward-based Focus Group Discussion

The second day was an outreach activity to the two selected wards for the training and administration of the Community Score Card tool, which was facilitated by DAT members who attended the training. After the outreach, the DAT and CBO members re-convened and gave feedback on the experiences from the wards, community views on the use of scorecard, DAT/CBOs/CSOs views on the use of the score card and perception audit and agreed on an action plan of the district. To ensure a productive workshop the participants were divided into three groups (men, youth and women) as the facilitators were administering the scorecard tool.



Some of the CBOs being helped to fill in the perception audit at the district level in Guruve District

6.2.3. District Level Reflection

The third day involved a reflection by the facilitators, which included CBOs and DAT members. The reflection provided a dedicated space for district representatives to capture and analyze the feedback received from community members. This included identifying key themes, concerns, and suggestions raised during the meeting. By analyzing the gathered feedback, the district can gain valuable insights into the needs and perspectives of the communities it serves. This information can then be used to inform decision-making processes, ensuring that district policies and initiatives are aligned with community priorities and concerns. Reflecting on the meeting enabled the district to identify areas where communication can be strengthened and collaboration with the community can be improved. The process enabled the development of more effective communication channels, fostering stronger relationships with community leaders, and actively engaging community members in ongoing dialogue.



Participants in attendance during the workshop training on the social accountability monitoring tools in Goromonzi District.

6.3. Range of Tools Tested and Preferred Choices by CSOs, CBOs and DATs

In administering SAM tools, the CFHD was mainly focused on two tools that were proposed by the communities and the DAT which include the perception audit and scorecard. The DATs preferred the use of the perception audit while the CSOs and CBOs preferred the use of the scorecard. Different actors based their choice of tools on the following considerations:

Table 3: Tools preferred choices by CSOs, CBOs and DATs

Tool	Actor	Preferred Choices
Perception Audit Tool	DAT Members	• The DAT members highlighted that the perception audit has the ability to act as a systematic check-up on public officials and bodies, ensuring they are meeting community expectations and delivering optimal value for allocated resources. • By uncovering gaps and challenges in service delivery through the lens of DAT and CBOs perceptions, a perception audit paves the way for targeted interventions and improvements. This data-driven tool helps to identify bottlenecks and inefficiencies, ultimately leading to enhanced service quality and accessibility based on publicly agreed measures and standards. • It was highlighted that the results of a perception audit provide objective and valuable insights into the quality of services provided by public officials and bodies. By understanding how the DAT and

Tool	Actor	Preferred Choices
		CBOs perceive and experience the services offered, stakeholders can gain a clearer picture of areas where service delivery can be strengthened and optimized. • A perception audit establishes a baseline for measuring progress against community expectations. This quantifiable data serves as a roadmap for continuous improvement, allowing stakeholders to track progress, identify areas for further action, and demonstrate the effectiveness of implemented solutions which was observed by the DAT members. • More so it was noted that the perception audit offer a straightforward and valuable tool for various stakeholders. • DAT members acknowledged that they were now able to evaluate progress on key priorities identified by community members during the CBP process, ensuring initiatives are addressing actual needs and concerns.
Score Card Tool	CSOs & CBOs	• By participating in the data collection and analysis process, community members gained a sense of ownership and empowerment. The scorecard has provided a platform for them to express their concerns and hold authorities accountable for service delivery shortcomings which was observed by CSOs and CBOs • CBOs have also noted that the scorecard has helped communities identify the most pressing service delivery issues. This allows them to focus their advocacy efforts and prioritize areas where improvement is most needed • This allows them to measure the effectiveness of interventions and celebrate improvements in service delivery. • Furthermore, the CSOs highlighted that by equipping communities with the knowledge and tools to monitor service delivery, the community scorecard empowers them to hold institutions accountable on an ongoing basis. This can lead to long-term improvements in service quality and a more just and equitable society. • It was also observed that the scorecard process can foster a sense of social cohesion within the community as residents work together to address shared concerns. Additionally, increased transparency can lead to greater trust between communities and service providers.

6.4. Field Outcomes from the Application of Selected Tools

CFHD implemented a range of tools designed to empower communities and shed light on service delivery performance. The following outcomes were noted:

- Engaging community members in data collection and scorecard development fosters a sense of ownership. Communities become more interested in monitoring service delivery and advocating for change especially in Murewa district where communities managed to demand the reduction of levy fee from \$10usd to \$5usd.
- Focus group discussions and interviews conducted during the perception audit provide a platform for citizens to voice their concerns and hold authorities accountable, especially in

Mbire district where women were demanding the promised clinic construction from their fee levy.

- Combining data from both tools can create a more comprehensive picture of service delivery, facilitating constructive dialogue between communities, service providers, and government officials.
- By working together to address issues identified through the scorecard and perception audit, stakeholders helped in developing collaborative solutions for improving service delivery between the supply and demand sides. This was noted during the training whereby the councilor in one of the wards in Chikomba district donated 5 bags of cement in the rehabilitation of a bridge.



Women participating during the implementation of the community score card in Chegutu District

6.5. Emerging Issues from the Action Learning Process in Different Local Authority Settings

Table 4. Emerging issues

Emerging Issue	Description
Lack of knowledge and continuity	• There was concern that newly elected councillors might not be familiar with the priorities established during the Community Based Planning (CBP) process. To address this, copies of the priorities were printed and distributed for reference. • Communities lacked awareness of other tools like the RDC's strategic plan and the client service charter, which were still under development. • Males in Murewa district demonstrated a tendency of dominating the discussions over the suggestions that were made by women. Both males and females realized gender awareness and training is needed to ensure women's voice are fully considered in inclusive service delivery planning and monitoring.

Problem with the score card	• The scorecard's effectiveness relied heavily on a skilled facilitator who could guide discussions and ensure informative feedback. • Potential biases from past conflicts with local government staff could compromise the quality of feedback if the monitoring process wasn't handled objectively. • Discussing the scoring scale and key areas together with the community was crucial to ensure responses reflected the entire community's perspective.
Positive appreciation	• Both the DAT and CSOs/CBOs (Civil Society Organizations/Community Based Organizations) appreciated the scorecard as a tool for measuring service delivery and gathering community feedback. • The community acknowledged the need to improve paying levies, which were often used by local leadership to fund development projects.
Community participation	• Youth participation in projects was low, with a perceived lack of value in community meetings and local development activities. • Few community groups actively supported ward-level projects financially. There was a need to educate Internal Savings and Lending Scheme (ISAL) participants on the importance of reinvesting in the community for collective development. • Some ward leaders often missed meetings, hindering communication and participation in the development process within their wards. • Limited access to Information Communication Technology (ICT) among WADCO (Ward Development Committee) and VIDCO (Village Development Committee) members meant they relied solely on quarterly physical meetings, potentially missing crucial updates. • Communities lacked ongoing training and support in monitoring development and service delivery beyond the initial project intervention.
Project Implementation	• Youths openly admitted to not participating in most development initiatives, because they would not be aware of existing development initiatives or how they can get involved and also limited outreach or communication strategies leave them uninformed about opportunities. • The practice of naming projects after donors was identified as a factor hindering a sense of community ownership.
Communication and Feedback	• There was an overreliance on councillors for feedback, and councillors themselves had to manage various other ward-related issues. • The absence of alternative communication channels, such as social media platforms, limited opportunities for community dialogue on ward progress.

6.6. Key Adaptations Needed for Operationalization of SAM at Community Level

Social Accountability Monitoring (SAM) tools are powerful instruments for empowering communities. However, successful operationalization at the community level requires adaptations to address potential challenges and ensure effective implementation. Here are some key areas for adaptation:

Table 5. Adaptations needed for operationalization of SAM

Item	Description
Tool Complexity	It was noted in Murewa district that complex methodologies can be overwhelming for communities with limited resources and expertise. Consider simplifying scorecards, using visuals and local languages, and breaking down complex tasks into manageable steps.
Capacity Building	Equip community members with the necessary skills to use SAM tools effectively. This includes training on data collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation
Mentorship and Ongoing Support	Provide ongoing support and mentorship to community leaders and volunteers involved in SAM activities. This can help them troubleshoot challenges and ensure long-term sustainability and operationalization.
Resource mobilization	Explore options for resource mobilization to support community-level SAM initiatives. This might involve partnering with CSOs, government agencies, or donor organizations
Tailor Tools	"One-size-fits-all" approaches rarely work. Adapt SAM tools to the specific context of each community, considering factors like literacy levels, access to technology, and cultural norms.
Local Ownership	Encourage community ownership by involving them in the adaptation process. This ensures the tools address their priorities and are culturally appropriate.
Multilingual Tools	Develop SAM tools in local languages to ensure accessibility for all community members, especially marginalized groups.
Integration with Existing Structures	Integrate SAM activities with existing community structures and decision-making processes to ensure long-term sustainability.

7. Lessons Learned from the SAM Process in Rural Local Authorities

Implementing Social Accountability Monitoring (SAM) in rural local authorities presents unique challenges and opportunities. Here are some key lessons learned from this process:

Table 6. Lessons learnt

Lesson	Description
Sense of Community Ownership	Rural communities are often more interested in their local environment and more likely to take ownership of SAM initiatives if they perceive them as beneficial.
Strong Social Networks	Rural communities often have strong social networks that can facilitate information sharing and collective action for SAM initiatives.
Local Knowledge and Expertise	Community members possess valuable local knowledge and experience that can inform the development and application of SAM tools.
Focus on Basic Services	SAM can be particularly impactful in rural areas by focusing on monitoring the delivery of essential services like healthcare, education, and water and sanitation.
Building Trust and Collaboration	The SAM process can foster trust and collaboration between communities, local authorities, CSOs and CBOs
Context-Specificity is Essential	SAM tools and approaches need to be adapted to the specific context of each rural local authority, considering factors like literacy levels, access to technology, and existing social structures.

8. Challenges Encountered and How they were Addressed

Table 7. Challenges encountered and how they were addressed

Challenges	Solution
Capacity Gaps in Communities and language barrier	The SAM tools were later on translated into local languages to ensure accessibility and also the facilitators encouraged peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing among participants.
Power Dynamics and Limited Voice	The CFHD have managed to create a safe and supportive training environment where participants feel comfortable expressing concerns by dividing into three groups which include women, boys and girls , so that they are able to express their views freely.
Low Awareness of SAM Concepts	The facilitators/DAT team start with introductory sessions explaining basic principles of social accountability and its benefits for communities and use real-life examples and case studies from similar rural contexts. So the quality of SAM facilitation is critical at community level.
Time Constraints	Keeping training sessions focused and concise, maximizing learning within a limited timeframe.
Acceptance	Use of the DAT approach enables the voices of the stakeholders to be heard and by doing that the level of trust in the relationships increases (between stakeholders and community; among stakeholders themselves). It also means community feedback is direct to the stakeholders and service providers in the district and there is more positive acceptance.

9. Recommendations for Scaling-up SAM in Rural Local Authorities of Zimbabwe.

Social Accountability Monitoring (SAM) offers a valuable approach for empowering rural communities and promoting good governance. Here are some recommendations for scaling up successful SAM initiatives in rural local authorities

- Leveraging the networks and learning hubs of CBOs fosters a collaborative environment where knowledge is shared, expertise is amplified, and communities are empowered to create positive change.
- Promote Peer Learning: Facilitate knowledge exchange between communities that have implemented SAM. This allows them to share experiences, best practices, and challenges encountered
- Institutionalize SAM: Work with local authorities to integrate SAM practices into existing governance structures and decision-making processes. This ensures long-term commitment and sustainability of social accountability efforts
- Promote Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration: Encourage collaboration between communities, local authorities, CSOs, and the media to create a supportive environment for social accountability.

- **Community Mobilization and Outreach:** Develop strategies to raise awareness and understanding of SAM concepts among a wider range of community members. This fosters broader engagement and ownership of social accountability initiatives.
- **Technology for Accessibility:** Consider utilizing technology strategically to enhance accessibility and data management for SAM processes in rural areas. This could involve developing offline data collection apps or utilizing low-cost mobile technology solutions. However, ensure technology doesn't become a barrier for communities with limited access.
- **Connect and integrate with other Successful Models:** Analyze existing successful SAM initiatives in rural areas. Learn from their approaches, tools, and strategies for adaptation and replication in other communities.
- **Supporting Capacity Building at Scale:** Develop and implement training programs to equip a wider range of community members with the necessary skills to utilize SAM tools effectively.
- **Dissemination of Best Practices:** Document and share success stories and lessons learned from rural SAM initiatives. This can inspire and guide other communities embarking on similar journeys towards social accountability

By strategically scaling up successful SAM initiatives and addressing potential challenges, we can empower rural communities to play a more active role in holding local governments accountable and achieving greater development outcomes.

10. Way Forward for the CFHD

Social Accountability Monitoring (SAM) has the potential to be a transformative tool for promoting good governance and empowering rural communities. By equipping citizens with the knowledge and tools to hold institutions accountable, SAM can lead to improved service delivery, more equitable development outcomes, and a more just society. Effective SAM initiatives require context-specific approaches that consider the unique challenges and opportunities faced by rural communities. Based on the positive outcomes on Social Accountability Monitoring, CFHD should continue to support the scaling-up of SAM at provincial and national levels through:

- **Wider dissemination:** the experiences on SAM to EU, donors, the UN and other international development agencies for expanded partnerships across Zimbabwe.
- Invest in knowledge sharing with key governments departments and policy maker's responsibility for implementation of rural development programs for increasing their social accountability.
- **Develop Responsive Training and Capacity Building Resources:** Create accessible training materials and resources to equip more community members with SAM skills and other interested stakeholders.
- **Promote Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships:** Forge partnerships between government agencies, civil society organizations, and the private sector to support and scale up SAM initiatives.
- **Advocate for Policies that Support SAM:** Advocate for policies that promote citizen participation, access to information, and legal frameworks that protect citizens who hold authorities accountable.

