

Examples on social accountability (2106)

SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY MONITORING IN TANZANIA

1. What is the context

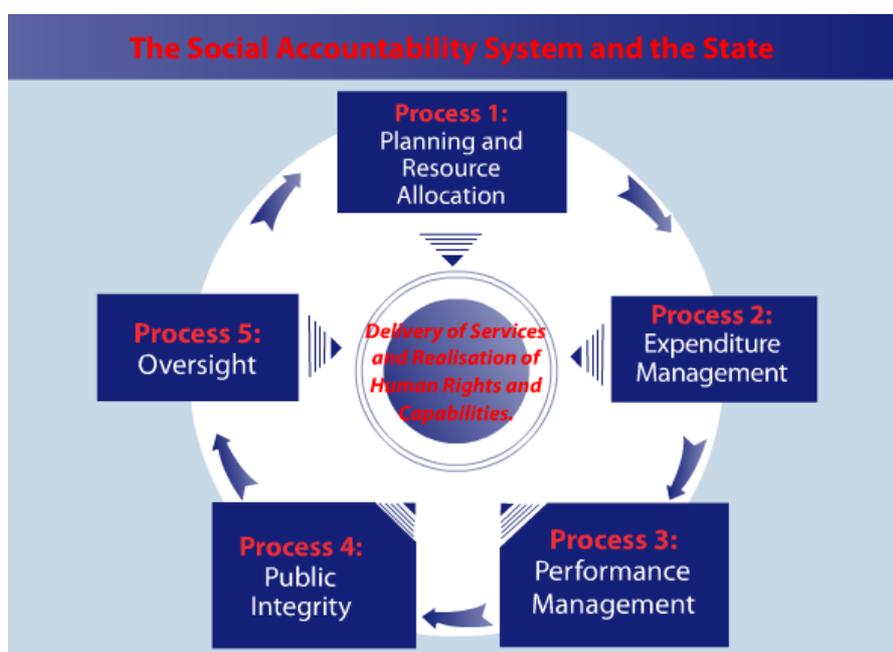
Tanzania has decentralised its government structure, transferring financial, political and administrative responsibilities from central to local government levels, and it has put in place a fairly comprehensive legal framework for governments at local level. The legislation requires participatory planning and budgeting processes, particularly at the local level. Also, public resource management information must be made available to the public. However, implementation remains limited: Local governments lack the required management capacities and citizens have limited awareness about their rights. Spaces for civil society and citizens to participate are only provided occasionally, depending on the willingness and commitment of the local government. Ordinary people and local civil society organisations face great challenges in accessing and processing relevant information. Local governments feel more accountable towards the national government than towards the people they are meant to serve. This limits the legitimacy of local governments substantially and trust in these institutions is low. Corruption is perceived as being high in the public sector.

2. Why is SDC engaging and what is the approach

Strategies to improve public service provision and to increase popular trust in local government go along with improved accountability. Starting from this assumption, SDC since several years implements the “social accountability programme”, which actually extends support to three leading Tanzanian advocacy organisations in the field of policy advocacy, health and agriculture. Each organisation represents a large network of civil society organisations and plays a key role in enhancing transparency and accountability of public resource management at national and local level, scrutinizing public resource data and empowering citizens and local organizations to engage more effectively in public oversight.

For this purpose the social accountability monitoring (SAM) methodology is being used, an approach developed and disseminated by an initiative and regional learning programme of the Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, with the support of SDC.

It is underpinned by the concept of an integrated Social Accountability System, structured along 5 essential processes of public resource management (PRM).



Before the process starts, in-depth training of civil society organisations and of involved citizens is essential to ensure collection of qualified data, solid analysis and credible interaction with government authorities. Subsequently, so called accountability assessments are carried out by the citizen composed social accountability monitoring committees, through information collection, analysing and synthesising findings based on the social accountability score card. And finally, findings are widely disseminated through public meetings to broad group of stakeholders, including community members, civic actors, councillors, local government officials and the media.

3. Key success factors and challenges of the SAM approach

- Experience proofed, that sound evidence and well-argued positions are essential for the credibility and success of social accountability initiatives. Due to their training and involvement with SAM, citizens are now better at analysing government documentation and use the evidence to question authorities. And the authorities realise that they are now dealing with more informed and self-conscious citizens. However, applying the SAM methodology requires a certain level of capacities due to the complexity of public resource management processes. Hence local CSOs and citizen committees need to be continuously coached and accompanied at the beginning of such processes.
- Without demand, there is no supply. If information is not requested from government departments on an on-going basis, there are no incentives for these institutions to improve the quality of their reports and to react more responsive. This requires persistence of civil society engagement.
- A crucial success factor is broad publication in the media. This prompts the public to react and pressure government to take action. This visibility has forced officials to release information or interact with certain groups when they were previously unwilling to do so. And it has enabled civic actors to question their leaders when they previously did not believe they had the mandate to do so.
- However, a suddenly empowered civil society questioning the local governments more strongly bears the potential for conflicts. Usually government institutions are not used to receiving complaints and do not know how to handle them in a professional and responsive way and thus become defensive. SDC learnt that such interventions cannot work if support is exclusively provided to citizens and civil society organisations. Local government authorities need to be included in trainings and preliminary sharing of findings to improve their understanding of public resource management and to build a relationship of trust with citizens for a more lasting change in the governance culture.
- Constructive collaboration between civil society and the local government authority is critical to enhance the effectiveness of civic engagement and the realisation of corrective measures by the authorities.