



Chapter 1: Social Accountability

1.1 Defining Social Accountability ¹

Broadly speaking, accountability can be defined as a relationship between two bodies, in which the performance of one is subject to oversight by another. In the context of public administration, for oversight to be exercised, two distinct mechanisms need to be in place - “answerability” defined as the obligation of public officials to inform and explain what they are doing, and “enforcement”, defined as the ability to impose sanctions on those who violate their mandate.

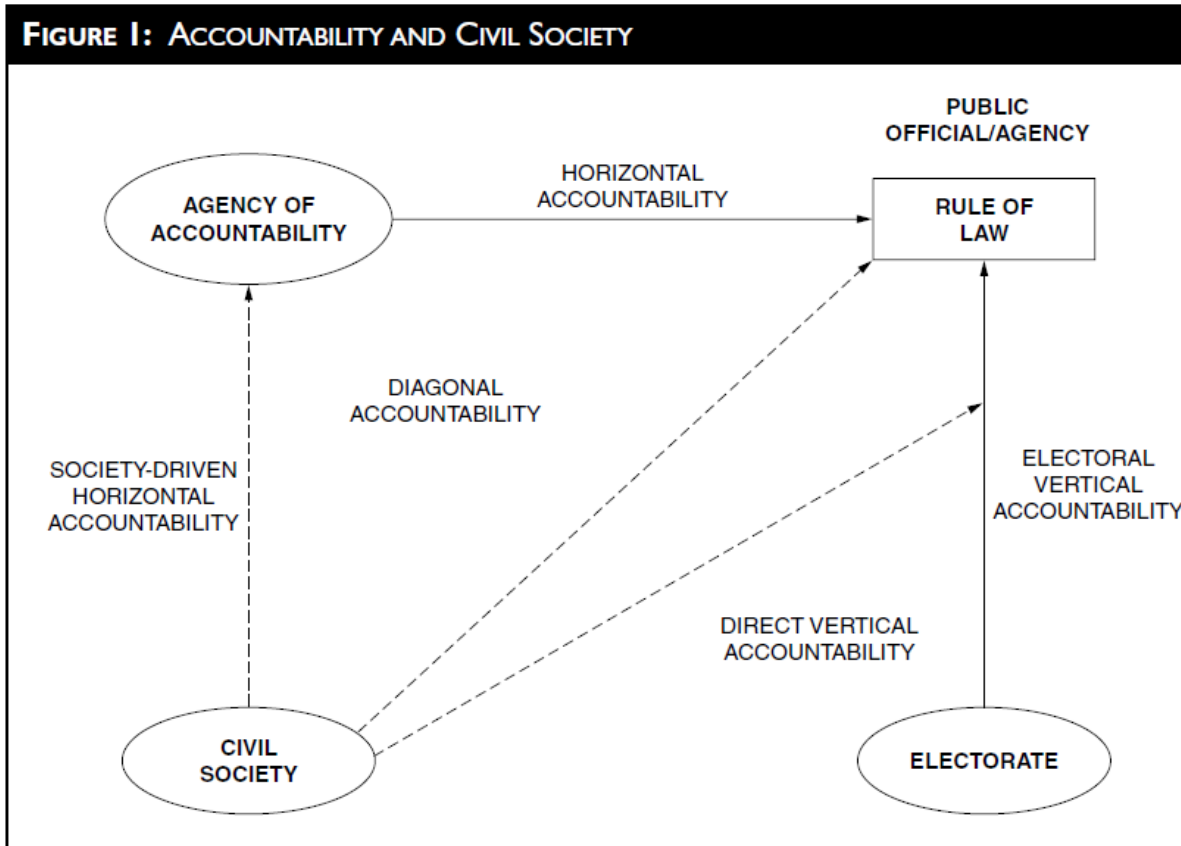
In a democracy, the main instrument that citizens can use to hold the legislative accountable is periodic elections, a key mechanism of vertical accountability. In practice, as has been shown by many studies, free and fair elections are insufficient to ensure that duty bearers and service providers adhere to the principles of good governance like rule of law, transparency and accountability. The system of checks and balances between the institutions of the state is referred to as horizontal accountability. It includes the ability of the legislative (parliament or council) to hold the executive politically accountable (political oversight) through planning and budgeting and ministerial oversight. In many countries, the parliament and the judiciary are supported to implement their oversight function by various secondary institutions like ombudsmen offices, human right commission and anti-corruption bodies. Independent judiciary is playing a powerful role in holding executive branch to account. Horizontal accountability is also exercised through fiscal mechanisms, like formal systems of auditing and financial accounting, and administrative mechanisms like hierarchical reporting, public service codes of conduct, etc.

Vertical and horizontal accountability measures are not sufficient to ensure that public money is actually spent in accordance with existing regulations and standards and for the purpose it is intended. Additional accountability mechanisms allowing for more direct participation of citizens in accountability processes beyond elections are termed diagonal or social accountability.

Social accountability refers to a form of accountability that emerges through actions by citizens and civil society organizations [CSOs] aimed at holding the State to account, as well as efforts by government and other actors [media, private sector, donors] to support and respond to these actions ². The goal of social accountability is not to replace but to reinforce and complement existing (horizontal and vertical) accountability mechanisms. It affirms the fundamental principle that duty-bearers (public officials and service providers) are accountable to rights-holders (citizens) and offers a rich set of approaches and tools for applying that principle into practice. Social accountability approaches can be applied at local to national level and can target a range of governance issues and processes including: public information-sharing, policy-making and planning; the analysis and tracking of public budgets, expenditures and procurement processes; the participatory monitoring and evaluation of public service delivery, as well as broader oversight roles, anti-corruption measures and complaints handling mechanisms.

¹ This introductory section is based on the background paper “Challenges and opportunities for improving Social Accountability at the local level in the Arab region; how can local governance assessments contribute?” by Paul Van Hoof, IDASA, commissioned by UNDP.

² UNDP (2010) Fostering Social Accountability: From Principle to Practice, Guidance Note



World Bank, 2004, State-society synergy for accountability: lessons for the World Bank, working paper 30)

There are differences between social accountability mechanisms and horizontal accountability mechanisms. The latter are based on a formal obligation of the duty bearer to be answerable to his/or her superior or to parliament and they are backed up by legally defined sanctions that should ideally prevent, or at least punish misuse of office. As there is usually no formal obligation of duty bearers to account to the public, such reporting often remains voluntary and can only be stimulated using social or media pressure. In addition, citizens or civil society organizations usually lack mechanisms to sanction misuse of office. For social accountability to be effective in terms of disciplining misuse of office by duty bearers, it depends on subsequent corrective actions taken by government itself through one of the other two mechanisms of accountability. Social accountability therefore has a strong signaling function especially if the media are actively involved in exposing misuse of office. It is important to realize that social accountability remains complementary to and dependent on other forms of accountability in order to be effective and it can't replace these other mechanisms.



Another difference between social accountability and legal and political accountability is that the objective of improving social accountability is more encompassing than that of legal and political accountability. All three forms of accountability promote the practice of good governance by reducing misuse of office and thus improve the trust and confidence citizens have in the state as a legitimate institution. Because social accountability aims to alter the relationship between those who govern and those who are governed, or those who provide and receive services, it has a strong enabling function as well. By making or holding duty bearers and service providers answerable to the public, it reinforces (or sometimes even establishes) the notion that those who govern can only do so based on the mandate given to them (directly or indirectly) by the electorate and that the mandate can be withdrawn or altered. On the other hand, improved social accountability aggregates the voice of people and helps to change passive “subjects” into active “citizens” and offers them an alternative to move beyond protesting and to engage constructively with government.

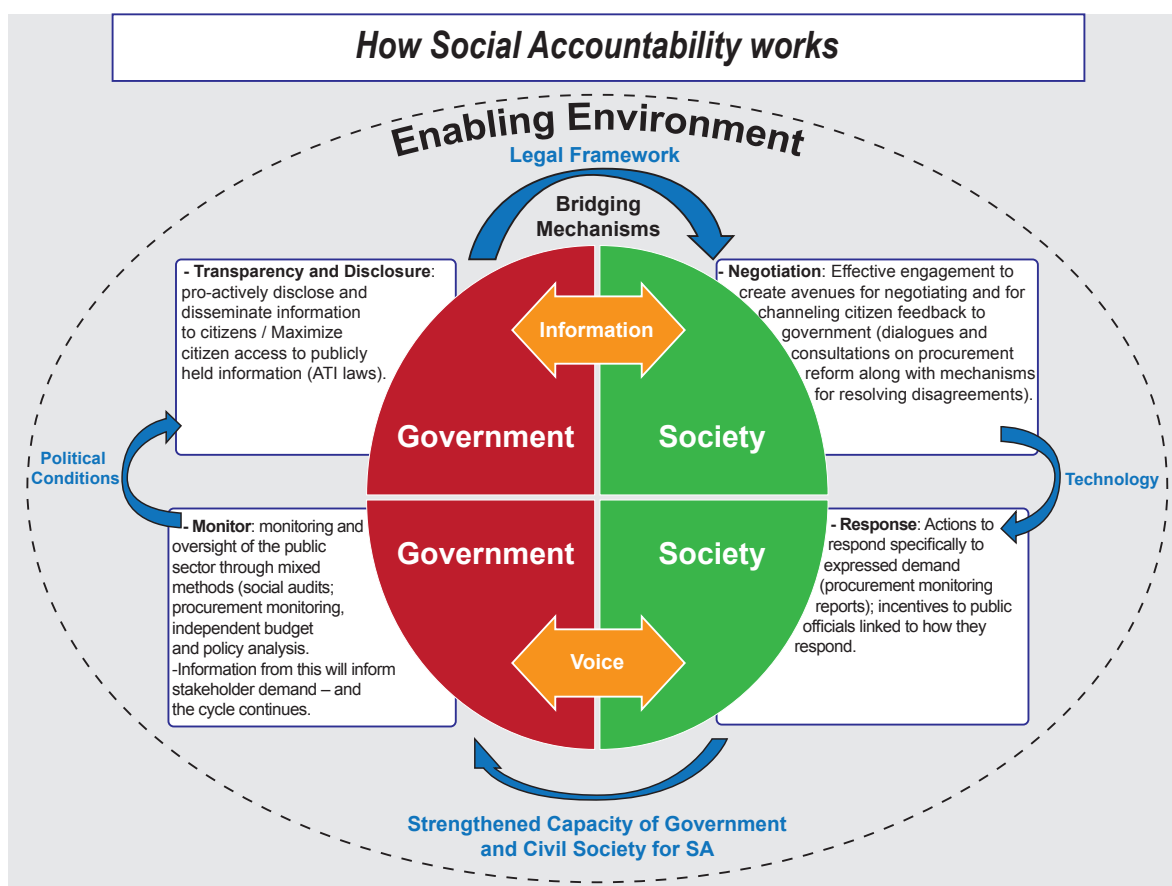


Figure 2: How Social Accountability Works (from presentation by Jeff Thindwa, Social Accountability Practice, World Bank Institute)

Improved social accountability is not only a mechanism to punish and control misuse of office. If applied in a constructive manner and institutionalized in regular government procedures and behavior, it is also a mean to structure communication between a government and its citizens and could contribute to a change in the relationship between the two parties, from a “producer-consumer” type of relationship to one where they work together to improve services (co-production) .



1.2 Social Accountability in the Context of Transition in the Arab States ³

Most governments in the Arab region have recently experienced, either directly or indirectly, the vigor of ordinary citizens holding their governments accountable. Partly because there was a lack of formal institutions regulating and facilitating proper legal, political and social accountability, citizens used the only power they had, showing their resentment of the former regimes by protesting in huge numbers. This realization that a ruler can ultimately be held accountable by citizens created a temporary impetus for reinforcing the mechanisms and institutions that are essential for democratic governance. Establishing a democratic state involves more than building the basic institutions and mechanisms for democratic rule, like free and fair elections, a powerful and enabled legislative body and an independent judiciary. Democracy cannot function without institutionalized communication mechanisms in place between the state and its citizens that create a minimal level of trust and legitimacy.

Experiences of transitional processes from other parts of the world show that transitions seldom follow a predictable path. We are yet to see whether the countries emerging from transformative changes in the Arab region would accept globalized norms of constitutionalism, good governance, and human rights, adapting them to local socio-cultural context; or would attempt a full reinvention of a developmental state. Transitional processes also require a delicate balance to nurture the evolution of indigenous governance structures, including the re-emergent political Islam, with values enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The process of re-writing society's values into new constitutions highlights the tensions between secular and religious worldviews. These new constitutions will be setting the legal framework for accountability, and the process matters as much as the substance, necessitating inclusion of diverse voices.

Three key actors have a role to play in strengthening social accountability: the State, civil society, and media. First, the State has a central responsibility to implement the important political, legislative and judicial reforms needed to achieve a democratic transition. All Arab States have ratified various international human rights treaties and more than 16 countries have committed to implement the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). Such international legally binding instruments codify the minimum standards that need to be achieved by duty-bearers at all levels of society—but especially organs of the State – and against which they will be held accountable. The State is also responsible for creating an enabling environment for social accountability relations, guaranteeing the freedom of association and access to information, ensuring citizens' rights to public information and opening up public budget and expenditure records, improving internal systems of transparency, etc.

³ This section draws on the presentations in the session "1: Understanding accountability in the context of transition"



Second, civil society has emerged as a growing actor that can and should play an active role in holding the State accountable and advocating for policy proposals to advance the social justice agenda. Since many of the underlying grievances in the region that led to the revolutions and uprisings have come from excluded parts of the society, including the poor, vulnerable, migrant and rural parts of the society, it is important to ensure that their voices are heard. Basic public services (water, sanitation, health, education) are vital for their welfare; social accountability initiatives ensuring citizen oversight of such services and their participation in decision-making could significantly improve the quality and accessibility of such services. Related efforts have begun to emerge in a number of Arab countries, but are still limited in scope and impact.

In the Arab region, organized civil society has suffered from different modalities of control, and often retained a narrow focus on service provision. At the same time, the events of the “Arab spring” have demonstrated the power of new emerging forms of civic engagement. Yet, these emerging civil society movements are still in the process of identifying modes of engagement with other stakeholders that could lead to constructive and positive contributions to the process of change, beyond street mobilization. In the given, highly volatile, environment that characterizes the transition period, it can also be very difficult for external actors to effectively assess the most appropriate entry points for working with civil society.

Third, both traditional media and new social media could play a crucial role in amplifying the voice of the citizens and facilitating the dialogue between the civil society and the state. The media can pressure the State for accountability by disseminating information about social and economic inequity, and, more importantly, framing those issues in a way to hold the state accountable and to encourage a sense of empowerment.

Finally, while accountability is often presented as a triad equation, there is a need to consider the role of the fourth player, one that has significant influence, particularly in so-called developing countries. That fourth player is international agencies, including the World Bank and IMF, the foreign governments that push certain policies within these agencies – such as the US and the EU, and the agreements that result. In the past, these organizations and foreign governments have played a role in shielding governments from being accountable to the citizens. International indices, such as the Human Development Index, have often been used by the Governments to make claims about developmental progress. Conditionality imposed by Bretton Woods’s institutions can actually undermine policy space for collaborative action by the State and civil society in charting a new development course in the post Arab Spring context. Consequently, discussing social accountability as if it was solely a national issue, one that can be dealt with amongst and between state actors, civil society, and media, fails to recognize the significant and detrimental threat to social accountability imposed by external actors, a threat that includes limiting information, curtailing the rights of civil society, and distorting national accountability.



Bi-Lateral and Regional Free Trade Agreements

As reported by OXFAM⁴, Bi-Lateral and Regional Free Trade Agreements, led by the US and the EU, have severely undermined the rights of governments and their citizens by transferring power from governments to largely unaccountable multinational firms. They also severely curtail the participation of civil society, thus denying the voices of small businesses, trade unions, women's groups, and others. The worst of the agreements strip developing countries of the capacity to effectively govern their economies and to protect their poorest people. Going beyond the provisions negotiated at a multilateral level, they impose far-reaching, hard-to-reverse rules that systematically dismantle national policies designed to promote development. In some FTAs, developing countries are committing themselves to let foreign investors into public utilities if the sector is opened up to domestic private companies. The investment chapters of FTAs and bilateral investment agreements make governments vulnerable to being sued by foreign investors if a new regulation is perceived as damaging the investor's profits, even when such reforms are in the public interest.

Finally, it is important to remember that social accountability is exercised on a continuous basis – we see it manifested through the media, the judiciary, public hearings, campaigns and demonstrations. It can be both formal and informal; but it must be exercised responsibly. As Nelson Mandela once said, "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."

1.3 Social Accountability: The role of the State⁵

Given the dominance of the political economy of rent in the region, to move from a situation where the citizens have traditionally been dependent on the State to one of mutual accountability between the state and citizen is a major challenge. The access of the State to a direct source for funding its operations out of revenues from political and economic rents has underpinned a social contract whereby the citizen is forced to trade the right to participate in decisions on how the State is organized and uses the wealth of the country for a minimal level of public services. The events of the Arab Spring, however, herald the potential demise of the traditional social contract and the ever more widespread demand for a new social contract of mutual accountability between the state and citizen.

⁴ Signing Away The Future, Oxfam Briefing Paper, March 2007

⁵ This section draws on the presentations and discussions in the session "2: Social Accountability: The Role of the State".



The main challenge that remains is continued access of the State to economic and political rents, which can lead to the development of a new set of clients of the State who oppress the rest of the population while continuing to exploit an unequal share of public revenues. The weak capacity of civil society actors and media in exercising social responsibility is an additional challenge. Transition towards deeper social accountability of the state will be challenging due to an entrenched culture of centralized and government centric state institutions and civil servants. As the powerful messages articulated by the Arab events run the risk of becoming fainter, new governments may perceive strengthened social accountability as a threat and could focus primarily on consolidating their newly gained power and subsequently reinstating the viscous cycle. For change to take hold and to yield the desired transformation in people's lives, both the newly forming and reforming governments and civil societies carry a shared responsibility to take this difficult process forward.

Newly formed governments headed by new political powers/actors need to recognize the crucial and foundational value accountability of the state to its citizens and to foster mechanisms for citizen participation in governance processes from local to national level. To ensure state responsiveness to the needs of its people, governance systems on local level need to be strengthened, with power and resources decentralized. Only when municipalities are empowered to properly perform their function, can the citizens hold them accountable as well. The State also plays a crucial role in creating the enabling environment for civil society development, introducing progressive legislation governing the work of NGOs and protecting the right of assembly. Evolving states and reforming governments in the Arab Region can benefit from learning from the experiences of other governments around the world who went through similar and relevant stages of transformation while keeping in mind the specificity of their regional and country contexts.

Civil society needs to keep up its constructive and proactive pressure on evolving state structures and on governing political parties – civil society actions must become institutionalized to increase effectiveness and sustainability and most critically, must remain peaceful. At the same time civil society should also see itself as partners and advocates of the government, especially on the local level, helping the government internalize the concept of “government by the people and for the people”.

In the Arab region, bridges of trust - between governments and civil society – still need to be built, and proactive measures on behalf of the state are required. To enable civil society organizations to hold the State to account, access to information has to be ensured through relevant legislative acts and changing practices of the civil servants. A transparent relationship with the media is also important. Participation of CSOs in national development planning should also be made mandatory.

In Tunisia, the Ministry of Regional Development and Regional Planning has been applying participatory processes to discuss distribution of resources, using a transparent set of indicators. A number of meetings between the government and NGOs were organized to draw on their recommendations. More than 600 focus groups were held to discuss strategic vision and projects that should be implemented on the ground. In Sudan, the Government has taken measures to reach out to CSOs through the mechanism of General Review Report. In Egypt, Social Fund for Development is focusing specifically on reaching out to and working with civil society organizations.



To live up to its role in holding the state to account, civil society organization should also demonstrate the same levels of transparency and accountability that they demand from the governments. Internal governance structures of the CSOs in the region need strengthening, and their capacities built through continuous trainings.

1.4 Social Accountability: the Role of Civil Society ⁶

Social accountability mechanisms have the potential to channel current, and sometimes volatile, levels of “social energy” in a constructive and productive manner. In contrast to some forms of advocacy and social activism that adopt confrontational approaches and aggravate citizen-state relations, social accountability approaches often result in strengthened citizen-state relations, while fighting corruption and achieving institutional/behavioral change. Emerging civil society movements are still in the process of identifying modes of engagement with other stakeholders that could lead to a constructive and positive contribution to the process of change, beyond street mobilization.

To be effective agents of social accountability, CSOs must be able to access information, mobilize citizens, make their voices heard and negotiate a response from public authorities. CSOs must also themselves strive to be legitimate, transparent, democratic and accountable organizations. Fundamentally, social accountability is about transforming relations between civil society and state actors - creating new forms of balanced, evidence-based and “critically collaborative” relationships, based on a shared understanding of each other’s respective legitimate rights and responsibilities.

Experiences from transitions in Eastern Europe highlight that “democracy is a marathon, not a sprint”, as it requires long-term focused trust building and establishment of sustainable mechanisms of interaction.

In Croatia, during the years of transition, a long journey for nurturing trust between civil society and government actors, based on mutual respect and a shared understanding of respective rights and responsibilities, was undertaken. To have accountability mechanisms properly set up and functioning in the transition countries, a vision of what needs to be achieved is necessary along with the mechanisms and systems specifically designed to the context and needs of the individual country. The National Foundation for Civil Society Development in Croatia was created with the support from the state to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations. It was one example of a mechanism for dialogue, collaboration and partnership between civil society and government.

⁶ This section draws on the presentations and discussions in the session “3: Social Accountability: The Role of Civil Society”.



To foster social accountability in the Arab region, social accountability infrastructure comprised of institutionalized and sustainable mechanisms that remain in place even after a change of the government, is required. There is also a need for an analysis of past failures in development policies and a systematic examination of accountability practices and codes of conduct that have been used in the past by governments and civil society in the region. To achieve constructive engagement, governments must realize that although civil society wants to engage with the government and participate in its policy making and decisions, it nevertheless has a right to scrutinize and contest government's decisions. Unfortunately, although CSOs now have the possibility to reach high level government officials, such access has not led to an optimal level of transparent information-sharing or increased their influence on policy-making.

Case-study 2.1 The Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in the Arab World (ANSA-AW) is the first regional network that focuses on promoting social accountability. The ANSA-AW targets four main actors namely: Government, Civil Society, Media and Private Sector. The ANSA-AW is the result of several national and regional consultations, culminating in Regional Launching Conference held in Morocco in 2012. That conference brought together more than 100 representatives of the civil society, the government, the private sector and media personnel, and a number of donors and regional and international social accountability practitioners.

ANSA-AW's objectives include: Raising Awareness on the theory and practice of social accountability and participatory governance; Developing and Building the Capacity of the network's members on the concepts and tools of social accountability; Providing Technical and Financial Support to interested members in applying social accountability tools; and Strengthening Communication and Knowledge and Experience Exchange between members and regional and international stakeholders. The ANSA-AW currently includes members from 7 Arab countries (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen). The focus of its work has been on the following pillars: Access to Information; Budget Transparency; Improving Service Delivery; and Freedom of Association.

Amr Lashin, CARE Egypt/ ANSA AW Executive Secretariat. <http://www.ansa-aw.net>

Youth-led uprisings testify to a process of emergence and renewal of civil society after decades of control that have profoundly weakened societal organization. Social and youth movements (especially those using social networks and information and communications technology), volunteer initiatives, new civil society organizations, independent labor unions, and new political parties are on the rise, and established civil society organizations are growing in strength. Yet, many of these actors are still relatively weak, and lack the required capacities and tools to propose and to advocate for the necessary interventions, whether at a policy or program level, that could affect the desired change. One of the major dimensions of the needed transformative change in the Arab region is the independence of civil society. Authoritarian regimes had manipulated and captured civil society through various mechanisms of selective repression, cooptation, clientelism and corruption. The governments in the region should take active measures to empower CSOs, trade unions and other professional associations through legislative frameworks and other incentives. They also need to recognize civil society as an equal partner in the governance process, creating institutionalized mechanisms for engaging citizens and CSOs in policy making.



In this context, one of the main development challenges in the Arab region is to pass from an instrumental approach that uses civil society to achieve developmental objectives, such as democratization and poverty reduction, to an approach that focuses on supporting civil society development as an end in itself. Therefore, development work should focus less on the participation of CSOs in the execution of programs and activities and more on the utilization of these development programs and activities as opportunities to solicit and facilitate civic engagement. Work should focus on the development and strengthening of the capacities of new civil society organizations through their participation in these programs and through development planning and policy processes at large. In other words, the issue in the situation of transition is less on how to programmatically partner with existing CSOs than on how to harness evolving civil society movements into constructive outlets for public goods that lead to representative developmental States.

1.5 Social Accountability: the role of media – both traditional and social media ⁷

A strong, independent media has a powerful role to play in promoting social accountability, amplifying the voice of the citizens, facilitating the dialogue between the citizens and the state, acting as a sounding board for government policies, and fulfilling the watch dog function to protect against abuse of power. To enable media to play a prominent role in holding the government accountable, it needs to have a functioning infrastructure, professional skills and editorial independence, financial sustainability, as well as a broader enabling environment, which includes the legislation, regulatory frameworks and other institutional factors.

In times of transitions, the role of the media is even more complex. With many forces actively involved in the political process, such as the military, the revolutionary movement, the representatives of the old regime, traditional religious institution, figures of the opposition, to name just some of them, media has to strive for a delicate balance, of providing voice for all of those forces, but also holding them all accountable. Transition periods have broken numerous taboos. For example, in Egypt before the revolution, the idea of media monitoring military institutions or big religious figures was unthinkable; now it is a common practice. New media is increasingly playing a leading role in this process, initiatives such as Morsi Meter and Askar Kaziboun in Egypt, as shining examples of that. Twitter, facebook and youtube could be seen as the social radars and social warning systems, providing indicators of how society moves towards a certain trend. But the absolute freedom for this type of media also raises concerns about its credibility as the source of news.

Although the discussion about the media revolved around the new approaches to dealing with the news, some of the speakers have questioned the degree to which the media has actually changed post-revolution. Some speakers argued that there are not many differences between traditional and new media except for technology, and that the present performance of the media does not differ that much from the past - talk shows are filled with opinion, rather than facts and in-depth analysis.

⁷This section draws on the presentations and discussions in the session “4: Social Accountability: The Role of the Media”.



Furthermore, although the role of the media in strengthening governmental accountability is critical, there is also a need to ensure media credibility. Yet accredited streamlined mechanisms for ensuring credibility are weak and many journalists gather their news based on their contacts and present news based on their bias. The Mediterranean Network of Regulatory Authorities (MNRA) is one example of such mechanism that was discussed. A recent meeting of MNRA in Lisbon adopted a declaration on the fight against gender stereotyping in the audiovisual media and a set of indicators and assessment tools that identify sexism and discriminatory stereotypes in the audiovisual media .

The issue of media accountability in relation to the sources of funding was also debated, and arguments made for the need to introduce legislation to shield the media from control by the funding sources. Media outlets owned by governments or businessmen, who have their own interests to promote, cannot be perceived as independent. Although fully independent media does not exist, media environment that ensures some independence has to be created. The recipients on information should be free to receive all messages, representing different political views and interests, without control or censorship.

The role of citizen journalists in offering alternative view to the public, alongside other sources of information, is also very important, and should be protected. Bloggers and journalists have an important role to play, both in distributing information and in influencing conventional media. Bloggers, offer an alternative opinion to what is presented in the mainstream. Citizen journalism is investigative journalism by people reporting directly from the events. However, citizen journalism is still overwhelmingly limited to the Internet.

1.6 Conclusions and Recommendations ⁸

There are numerous actions necessary to promote social accountability, actions that all actors- from government officials, to civil society and the media, and to citizens themselves - must undertake. The first prerequisite at the country level is to define social accountability within the country setting so that it fits its social, economic and political context. A broad dialogue in which all parties participate is fundamental and requires a basic awareness among all stakeholders (government, private sector, CSOs including media and citizens) about the importance of social accountability, including the true meaning of citizenship with both its rights and responsibilities. Raising awareness about social accountability should be accompanied by stimulating the emergence of a culture of respecting and fulfilling human rights in society and increasing citizens' knowledge of their rights as these are the basic values to which a government can be held accountable.

The establishment of a minimum legal and institutional framework to create an enabling environment for social accountability is another step. If citizens cannot access relevant information, either because such information it is not systematically collected by the service provider or not made available by government and government is not transparent in the way it allocates resources and provides services , it becomes very

⁸ This section draws on results of discussions during the working groups of Session 5: Social Accountability: key challenges and opportunities in the Arab region.



difficult for citizens to hold their government to account. Even in countries where certain information should be made public by law, government institutions have a tendency to be secretive and regularly frustrate efforts to access such information. In addition to access for information, additional rights and freedom are necessary, including the freedom of expression and the freedom of association and an independent judiciary.

An additional action is to ensure consistency and balance. To enhance the capacity of civil society actors in holding governments accountable, civil society organizations and media need to become more transparent and accountable to their constituencies as well. Simultaneously, legislation governing NGOs should not impair the free functioning capabilities of the organizations.

Building the capacity and ability of citizens to demand accountability and to manage the process itself is also crucial. What is needed is a culture of asking critical questions to those in power. Citizens need to regard basic services not as generous gifts from government officials but rather the fulfillment of their rights. Even if such awareness exists, experienced civil society organizations are necessary to collect and analyze information, to involve the media, to generate wider public support and understanding, and to negotiate with the government.

Of course, the willingness and capacity of the government to listen and respond to citizens also has to be strengthened. For the government to respond adequately to demands for improved services there needs to be sufficient pressure from higher levels in government or from the public to enforce decision makers to respond. Failure to respond could lead to potential sanctions like not being re-elected or being reprimanded by the system. Service providers should be willing to respond, and, fundamentally, must have the ability to respond to citizen feedback.

During the discussion, no clear consensus on which actor should take a primary, leading role in promoting social accountability was evident. Disagreements arose as to whether civil society actors or the government itself should take the lead. Government officials spoke of a concerted effort, while civil society actors revealed a deep mistrust of the government and spoke of their fear that the government would lead to influence and circumvent the process itself. One government official spoke of his distrust of civil society organizations, and complained that CSOs must not criticize the government's policies after officials had conceded to a meeting with them. Thus, critically, much depends on the attitude and openness of government and its willingness (i.e. political will) to create a conducive environment for improved social accountability. For governments to enhance their legitimacy and build trust, they must begin by taking a clear and strong stance against corruption, beginning with in-house anti-corruption actions. In addition, what was and remains evident is the importance of an organized civil society working with or influencing an independent media; their constant monitoring of the social accountability process cannot be over-stated. For social accountability to work in transition countries, it is necessary to build trust among actors, and to establish stable mechanisms and infrastructure of interaction between government and CSOs.



Based on plenary discussions, as well as working group deliberations, the following recommendations were proposed for the four actors:

For the State

- While social accountability is important, horizontal accountability also needs to be strengthened, by building capacity and ensuring independence of the judiciary, as well as audit and oversight institutions.
- Access to information and particularity disclosure of information related to budgets on national and local levels is essential for increasing efficiency of government institutions through improved accountability. Freedom of information legislation should be prioritized by the Government.
- Decentralization should be clearly addressed in the new constitutions in the region. Comprehensive strategies for gradual decentralization should be developed, considering issues of budgets, allocation of functions, service delivery and capacity development. Implementation of national policies on local level should also be monitored, opening up access to local level information and introducing sound information management and monitoring systems at local level. Possibilities for creating public/private partnership to increase the revenues of the municipalities should also be studied.
- State Institutions should view CSOs as partners, encouraging civil society participation in planning, budget allocation and service delivery; recognizing their legitimate role in contesting government's decisions. Legislation on the freedom to assemble and organize, as well as freedom of speech needs to be revised. Laws on NGOs should also be revised to reflect a more constructive and equal relationship between the state and society.
- The role of the media in promoting accountability should be recognized by the civil servants, who should cooperate with the media in sharing information with the public.

For Civil Society

- Civil society organizations need to play a more active role in advocating for new laws on access to information, freedom to assessable and NGO laws. They should also more actively advocate for decentralization as means to foster grass-roots democracy.
- Coordination among CSOs focusing on similar issues needs to be improved, to foster complementarity instead of competition.
- CSOs should also work on improving their standards of performance, ensuring transparency of their operations, and strengthening internal governance systems.
- For CSOs, especially on the national level, outreach at the grassroots level is crucial, to ensure they are accountable to the citizens and communities, not external actors.
- It is necessary to revisit definitions of civil society, particularly to include those outside the professional NGO sector (e.g. community-based organizations and social movements).



For the Media

- There is a lack of legislation in the region to enable media to hold government, political parties, and other actors accountable. Access to information is crucial for media to play a more active role in promoting accountability. Mass media, both traditional and social media, should be looking at ways to partner with civil society organizations to lobby for freedom of information legislation and monitor its implementation.
- Media should play a more active role in educating citizens about their rights and responsibilities. Special emphasis should be placed on projecting a more positive and active image of the role of women in the society, and on advocating for the rights of women.
- Complementary relationships should be developed between the social and traditional media.

For International organizations

- International organizations should play a more active role in promoting social accountability. They hold a convening power to bring together state actors, civil society and media to discuss complex governance issues (Arab Governance Week is example of such work). By promoting multi-stakeholder consultation processes, such as country-led governance assessments, they create platforms for potentially constructive dialogue focused on objective criteria, such as indicators, allowing for more constructive discussions.
- Accountability standards should also apply to the operations of international organizations. They should strive to be fully transparent by disclosing information about budgets and their operations, and inclusive, by involving and consulting a wide range of civil society organizations.