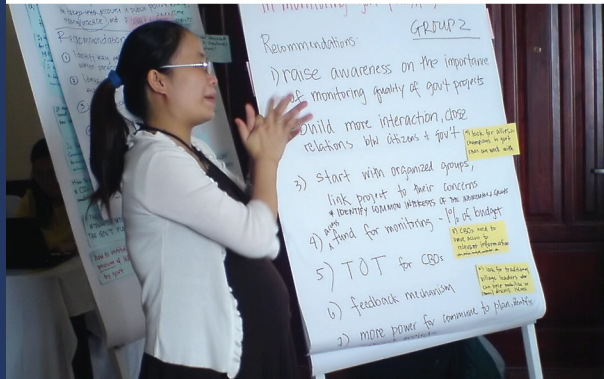




ANSA-EAP Learning Brief

No. 1 May 2010



A Better Way of Looking at Governance

Mainstreaming Social Accountability in Oxfam's Regional Change Strategies in East Asia

On September 2009, ANSA-EAP partnered with Oxfam Great Britain (OGB)-East Asia to boost OGB's efforts in the region in "building accountable and effective governments that enable the poorest, most marginalized, and vulnerable women and men in East Asia to claim their rights and to access quality services and economic opportunities." The partnership aims to mainstream social accountability in OGB-East Asia's governance framework for action, change strategies, approaches, key program areas, and ways of working.

Social accountability involves organized and capable citizen groups engaging

government and other duty bearers in a constructive and sustained manner to hold the latter accountable for their actions and performance.

This issue of ANSA-EAP Learning Brief tells the story of how social accountability is being mainstreamed in large, well-established nongovernmental organizations like Oxfam Great Britain. Five country teams have been participating in a series of learning and capacity building activities from October 2009 up to present. These are country teams from Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

The ANSA-EAP Learning Brief summarizes the key learning outcomes and findings of ANSA-EAP and its partner organizations from joint learning and capacity building programs to promote social accountability in East Asia and the Pacific.

Oxfam Great Britain aims to tackle the root causes of poverty and suffering in East Asia by supporting women's economic leadership, helping develop accountable and effective governments, and building resilience to climate change, disasters, and conflicts.

OGB has more than 300 staff and work with more than 530 partner organisations in Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. They also support projects in China.



Oxfam

Governance for the Poor and Marginalized

OGB-East Asia's change strategies for good governance hinge on strengthening civic engagement to empower marginalized and vulnerable groups, secure their rights and ensure a more equitable share of development outcomes.

While some of the country teams have stand-alone initiatives to promote good governance, the change strategy on governance is seen as a cross-cutting

element in OGB's development, advocacy, and humanitarian work. OGB also collaborates with other NGOs operating at various scales of governance, from national to sub-national and local levels. The table below summarizes the governance strategies that the OGB has been implementing in the region through the five country teams (Table 1):

Table 1. OGB's governance strategies and approaches in five countries in East Asia.

Governance Strategies	IND	CAM	MYN	PHL	VIET
Engaging poor women and men in local policy formulation	●	●			●
Monitoring government performance and procurement	●	●		●	
Influencing legal and institutional frameworks on climate change (Philippines) and access to land and trade policies (Cambodia)		●		●	
Creating an enabling environment for social accountability		●	●		●
Building capacities of citizen groups and poor women and men to participate in local planning and budgeting	●	●	●	●	●
Supporting alternative budgets in education, health, agriculture, and environment		●		●	
Anti-corruption	●			●	

Women groups of Bibida during a socialization activity of the "Raise Her Voice" Program of OGB-Indonesia.



While OGB seems to have ample experience and expertise on governance, it is an understatement to say that a lot of work still needs to be done. Experts point to poor governance as one of the principal obstacles to the achievement of poverty reduction and other critical human development goals in less developed regions like East Asia. But despite the growing attention being given by the international development community to promoting more capable, accountable, and responsive governments in less developed countries, the efforts don't seem to be enough. OGB-East Asia, in particular, finds governance a challenging task because of:

- Highly centralized governance system in some countries with little room for citizen participation;
- Weak competence of both citizen groups and the government to engage in a constructive and sustained way;
- Enabling factors* for a constructive civic engagement are not put in place; and
- The difficulty to link governance with other regional change strategies of OGB, i.e. poor women's economic leadership and resilient communities.

* These include access to information, organized and capable citizen groups, sensitivity to culture and context, and responsive governments.



OGB participants exchanging ideas and learning from their colleagues about social accountability during the first regional face-to-face training workshop on December 9-11, 2009, in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Bridging the Gap in Governance through Social Accountability

Central to OGB's work is the transformation of power relations to make public policies and projects more responsive to the interests of the poor and the marginalized. Social accountability can hasten this process by:

- Creating more spaces for the poor and the marginalized to be heard;
- Providing mechanisms for a more constructive engagement between the citizens and the government; and
- Developing the competence of citizen groups to hold governments more accountable to their actions.



Stakeholders of the Provincial Readiness to Institutionalize and Mainstream Risk Reduction, an initiative of OGB-Philippines

Groundwork on Social Accountability

In the regional workshop in Hanoi, the five country teams set-out plans on how to integrate social accountability in their respective change strategies and programs. Most of the country teams chose to imbed social accountability tools in ongoing projects on effective governments (Vietnam, Cambodia), poor women's economic leadership (Indonesia, Philippines), and building resilient communities (Philippines).

While social accountability tools are not entirely new to most of the country teams, a lot of work needs to be done in customizing the tools to

suit the local context and in imbedding social accountability to conceptual frameworks and tools currently being used by OGB particularly power analysis and gender.

As shown in Table 2, most of the country teams are interested in embedding social accountability tools, which are commonly used at various stages of the Public Financial Management Cycle. As such, an online mentoring program followed after the regional workshop in Hanoi to deepen the country teams' understanding and knowledge of social accountability tools.

Timeline of Learning Activities



Entry Points for Mainstreaming Social Accountability

In 9-11 December 2009, the five country teams met in a regional workshop in Hanoi to identify ways on how to integrate social accountability in their change strategies, program areas, and ways of working. The participants identified three C's as windows for mainstreaming social accountability:

- *Context.* Creating and nurturing an enabling environment for social accountability;
- *Capacities.* Enhancing capacities of citizen groups to engage with the government and other power holders; and
- *Change strategies.* Framing OGB's change strategies using a social accountability lens.

Context: Creating an enabling environment for social accountability

For social accountability mechanisms to work, there are at least four conditions that need to be satisfied. These are organized and capable citizen groups, responsive governments, access to and effective use of adequate and essential information; and sensitivity and relevance to culture and context.

Capacities: Enhancing the capacity of citizen groups to engage with the government and other power holders

Citizen groups need to be familiar with social accountability methods and tools, conditions where the tools work best and the context where they can be best applied. In terms of skills, citizen groups need negotiation skills, the capacity to do research, analyze, package data and effectively communicate the results to the government and other stakeholders.

Change strategies: Framing OGB-East Asia's regional change strategies using a social accountability lens

Does social accountability influence laws, policies and other aspects of the external environment in ways which support and promote women's economic leadership? Do legal frameworks and institutional arrangements for disaster management open-up spaces for citizens to monitor government's efficiency and effectiveness in using public funds and aid coming from the international community to prepare for and respond to disasters? How much of the total public funds allotted for agriculture, social services, and social safety nets reach frontline service providers? These are just some of the questions that illustrate how social accountability can help OGB rethink its change strategies on gender, resilience, and governance.

"In my context, the traditional authority is a mindset. Community people believe that authority is boss and boss is parent. The boss's word and the boss's manner are always good. Community people assume that boss have compulsory and authority to do many things as necessary without consultation with people. And community acknowledges themselves—powerless."

- Menh Navy
OGB-Cambodia

Online mentoring on social accountability concepts, tools, and application

Last regional face-to-face training workshop (May 19-21)

February

March

April

May

2010

Table 2. OGB country teams’ proposed projects on social accountability.

Country Project	Project Goals	Proposed Social Accountability Tools	Issues and Concerns
<p>Cambodia Pro-poor governance, civil society and markets program</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Build the capacities of poor women and men to engage in local decision-making processes and demand good governance ▪ Create spaces for engagement among CSOs, government, and communities at the commune level ▪ Push for adoption of pro-poor laws and policies on citizens’ rights over natural resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participatory Planning ▪ Participatory Budgeting ▪ Participatory Performance Monitoring ▪ Mechanisms to facilitate better sharing of information between the commune councils and citizen groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Existing laws (i.e. defamation and NGO laws) pose huge barriers to access information and the right to speak ▪ Patriarchal mindset of government officials and citizens ▪ Limited resources at the commune level that constrain commune officials from sharing resources to citizens
<p>Indonesia Raising Her Voice Program</p>	<p>Ensure that public policy, decision making and expenditure, and customary and traditional rights reflect the interests of poor and marginalised women, especially those excluded from political, social, and economic life</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participatory planning ▪ Participatory budgeting ▪ Participatory expenditure tracking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review project frame to ensure that objectives reflect indicated program goal ▪ Goals should reflect outcomes in terms of protecting poor women’s rights
<p>Myanmar Improving fishery governance project in the delta area</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improving local fishery governance by creating spaces for engagement between NAG-Myanmar Fisheries Federation and township authorities ▪ Organizing and building capacities of CSOs to engage with government and govern resource use ▪ Provide information on market and sustainable fishing practices (create local resource centers to improve access to information) 	<p>Mechanisms to establish the enabling conditions for constructive engagement and citizen monitoring</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The need to highlight gender and resilience strategies in social accountability initiatives ▪ The need to push more dialogue between fishers groups and government officials at township

Country Project	Project Goals	Proposed Social Accountability Tools	Issues and Concerns
<p>Philippines Philippine Economic Justice Campaign</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase public and private sector investments for sustainable livelihoods in agriculture and fisheries ▪ Ensure national climate change adaptation agenda supports food security ▪ Make visible women's role in agriculture and fisheries ▪ Ensure trade agreements entered into by government are beneficial to small producers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participatory Planning ▪ Participatory Budgeting ▪ Participatory Expenditure Tracking ▪ Participatory Performance monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need to decide on the mainstreaming approach (e.g. embedding social accountability across many initiatives or having a stand-alone social accountability initiative) ▪ Need to harmonize social accountability with policy advocacy, long-term development strategies, and humanitarian efforts. ▪ Need to incorporate power analysis tools and process
<p>Vietnam (1) Promoting Social Accountability at Grassroots Level in Bac Ai District, Ninh Thuan province</p>	<p>The project aims at enhancing the commitment and capacity of local authorities, local CSOs (Bac Ai Father Front-BAFF, CBOs) in interacting effectively in policy work towards policies and programmes are more pro-poor and transparent. The project shall start rolling out in April 2010.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participatory performance monitoring ▪ Participatory budget and expenditure tracking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The need for social accountability tools that they can imbed in their strategies ▪ Lack of evaluation criteria and indicators to measure how well social accountability is mainstreamed in the project's strategies ▪ The need to customize social accountability tools to suit local context
<p>(2) Enhancing the representative role of People's Council in Ninh Thuan province</p>	<p>The project aims at enhancing representative roles of People's Council at all level in Ninh Thuan province in holding the government accountable for their actions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participatory Budgeting ▪ Participatory Expenditure Tracking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of knowledge and experience in embedding social accountability tools in the project strategies ▪ Practical and applicable techniques to bring case studies on Sac from grassroots level project to higher policy level

Learning to Mainstream Social Accountability: Some Key Lessons

The story of social accountability in OGB is still unfolding. The process of learning and unlearning is a long and hard way that requires time, strong commitment from the top-level management, and close collaboration with partner organizations working on the ground. Despite the constraints, the five country teams have generated valuable lessons from the process of integrating social accountability in their current work. These lessons and insights were gained from the reflections and discussions with their fellow colleagues as well as from social accountability experts who joined the online discussions as mentors.

- *There is a need for a clear set of evaluation criteria and indicators to assess the process and outcomes of social accountability mainstreaming in OGB.* The participants arrived at three evaluation criteria during the online mentoring. These are (i) access to information, (ii) mechanisms to engage citizens and the government; (iii) planning and budgeting; and (iv) budget allocation for poor women and men.
- *Efforts to create and sustain a constructive civic engagement must come from both national and local levels-- taking advantage of openings from reformers at the national center while gathering and building constituencies and formalizing agreements at the local level.*

- *Participatory planning and budgeting has often been easy at the level of the village, where people know everyone and where the most pressing problems are often well-known. However, the very limited resources, hence limited incentives for village officials is a significant constraint to sharing resources and decision-making powers to citizen groups.*
- *Even when there are laws in place that allow for popular participation, implementation does not always follow. The space for civic engagement has to be negotiated continuously with stakeholders.*
- *It is often the case that the reformers in the central government are those who need to be tapped in order to help swing the bargaining power of people on the ground so that they can exercise their right to be heard in accordance with the law.*
- *While there are many manuals on the use of social accountability tools, the challenge is in activities that will lead the authorities to make these a part of their routine. Social accountability can be threatening to authorities.*
- *Social accountability as applied in the public financial management is just one of the many options that citizen groups and governments can make use of. Social accountability is not a one-size-fits-all solution to all development and governance problems.*

"We... Women in Paniai should strengthen what we have... We now realize that we have right in development process... in governance... We should not be left behind... We learned... now we know... we have to fight for our right... for better lives of women, our children and family"

-Maria Pigai, member of a women's group in Paniai, Papua Province of Indonesia

About ANSA-EAP

Launched in February 2008, ANSA-EAP is a regional network promoting the practice of social accountability by providing a common platform for exchange of information and experience and by providing capacity building opportunities and technical assistance to citizen groups and governments.

The Ateneo School of Government (ASoG), a unit of the Ateneo de Manila University, operationalizes and oversees the development of ANSA-EAP, which has start-up support from the World Bank.

For more information, visit <http://www.ansa-eap.net> or email Randee Cabaces, ANSA-EAP Learning and Capacity Building Coordinator, at randeecab@yahoo.com.

Photos:

ANSA-EAP, OGB-Philippines, Sushanty (<http://raisinghervoice.ning.com/photo/indonesia-participant-on-rhv/next?context=user>).