

**Oxfam learning program on social accountability  
Phase I: Online discussions**

**Summary of Discussion Points from Week 2 Chat**

Dear Oxfam learners:

I'm re-posting the summary of our week 2 chat for the benefit of those who still haven't joined the Oxfam group and thus can't access the group's discussion forum.

**Topic 1: The Public Financial Management (PFM) cycle**

**Key points from our discussion:**

1) We need to understand the PFM cycle in our respective country context. This involves: a) looking at weaknesses or gaps in the state's internal processes and accountability mechanisms; b) possible entry points for our SAc interventions; and, c) areas for effective complementation between internal mechanisms and citizen-driven initiatives in the different phases of the cycle.

2) We need to see how we can effectively link our interventions for improving governance, particularly those involving SAc. As the PFM cycle shows, the different phases often overlap and are actually connected. Citizen groups who are monitoring a particular phase in the PFM cycle should thus be able to see the overall picture while relating their work to that of others who are looking or focusing on the other phases.

3) Ensuring accountability in our own organizations is also important – we can not advocate social accountability with government if we are not walking our talk. NGOs and other civil society groups are accountable not only to donor agencies who provide supports to their programs, but also to their own partner communities and organizations who are the immediate targets or beneficiaries of such projects.

4) Political will is an important factor for instituting changes or reforms in the way government works and in making the internal accountability mechanisms of the state more effective. But we have also seen the role of strong citizens' groups and their constructive engagement with government in improving governance and public service delivery. We've seen the impact of such kind of engagement in poor contexts. We need to sustain it by strengthening its enabling conditions (e.g., pushing for access to information, more conducive legal and policy frameworks, etc.).

## **Topic 2: Participatory planning and participatory budgeting**

### **Challenges in adapting these SAc tools in the participants' country contexts:**

1. There are some common challenges faced by Oxfam staff/partners and other SAc practitioners in adapting PP and PB to their country contexts. Some of these are related to political will, legal framework, space, capacity of CSOs, awareness of poor people.

For example, in the case of Vietnam, even though there's political will (in principle) and a legal framework to encourage people's participation in planning and budgeting, in reality, local governments do not facilitate the process. There is lack of concrete guidance on how to implement PP. There is no incentive or sanction for supporting or not supporting PP. On the other hand, in many cases, local people are not really aware of the impact of their participation (as most of them do not see the link between participation and better quality of life).

This is also the case in Cambodia, wherein the level of people participation is low, even though there is already some initial legal framework for people's participation in governance.

In the case of the Philippines, while there are already substantial spaces for PP and PB, CSOs have not been able to maximize these spaces effectively. It may be due to the limited capacity of CSOs to engage in PP and PB in a more sustained manner. Many CSO engagements are still limited to initial analysis and policy recommendations. Few have focused on budget formulation.

2. There is also a concern or challenge on how citizens/CSOs can engage in a PB process, especially with regards to the national level budget and when there is lack of government willingness to make information open to the public.

3. Some strategies or interventions for addressing the challenges:

- There is still a lot to be done in terms of encouraging citizen engagement in the budgeting process using good experiences from other places.

- Engagement in planning and budget monitoring (setting priorities, budget allocation) at local level can be entry points for CSOs to take the advantage of the decentralisation processes that are taking place in a number of countries in the EAP region (though at different levels).

- We may need to find other ways of getting information rather than just wait for the government to open up and provide such information.

- Networking is also a good strategy to synchronize efforts and complement each other's work or strengths. However, its effectiveness would depend very much on how CSOs share the vision/mission and approach of engaging with government.