

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

Summary of Discussion Points from Week 2 Chat

Key points from the discussion:

1) Oxfam has done expenditure tracking and performance monitoring in the region:

a) Oxfam Philippines supported expenditure tracking initiatives in the education sector similar to the Malawi case and related to the Education For All (EFA) advocacy. Real World Strategies (RWS) is a project of the Asia South Pacific Bureau, Oxfam's co-convenor in East Asia for the EFA campaign. The RWS supported initiatives by local networks of parents-teachers' associations, teachers' unions, and other groups working on education reform. The networks used Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodologies to monitor basic education indicators on the ground.

b) OGB-Philippines was also part of Alternative Budget Initiative. The initiative involved civil society organizations, lawmakers, and national agencies (Department of Education, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of Health, Department of Agriculture) working together to draft budgets that would respond to most pressing sectoral needs. The ABI organized multi-stakeholder forums where government officials were asked to present their budgets and expenditure reports, and account for their performance. The network also worked to "demystify" or simplify the highly technical planning and budgeting processes to the public. Budget information from ABI were used in the budget deliberations in congress.

c) Oxfams in Cambodia contributed to the donors' fund pool that supported national advocacy partners like NGO Forum in their efforts at independent analysis of the national government's budget. NGO Forum has also trained members of their CSO network in expenditure tracking.

d) In Vietnam, under the Strengthening People's Participation project, Oxfam supported capacity building of the Community Infrastructure Supervision Group. The group monitored the government's housing for the poor programs using field survey and data analysis. It then provided feedback on contractors' faults during the building phase. Contractors responded by correcting the identified problems. Partner community-based organizations (CBOs) also monitored other public services like water systems. The government used to install local water system without provisions for management and maintenance. Oxfam's partners organized community water management groups. These groups then conducted community surveys to identify problems with the water systems and possible causes. Meetings with the water companies, local authorities, and the communities were then organized to disseminate results and recommendations

from the surveys. Oxfam also works with parents-teachers' groups to monitor the teachers' performance and students' learning results.

2) Connecting with other stakeholders is critical to the success of social accountability initiatives like the Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS), citizen report cards, community score cards, and social audits. Both the cases and our program experiences show that linking with the government, with decision-makers and implementers who champion citizen participation in governance, were important elements of these actions. Citizen groups have also established working relations with other civil society actors like the media and religious groups.

- In getting budget and expenditure information, citizen groups can demand it from executive agencies, tap champions of citizen participation among legislators, or make use of internal accountability or oversight mechanisms within government.

3) Many of our social accountability actions like tracking public budgets, expenditures, and performance are not being sustained.

a) One reason could be the fact that most of these initiatives are project-driven and have not been institutionalized in practices of governments and in people's lives.

b) Maintaining communities' and governments' interests in the process are also important. Ensuring that the actions produce results is really critical. In the experiences of some citizens' groups, as in the Philippines, maintaining governments' involvement often require the use of both problem-solving and pressure politics approaches. In Vietnam, the main strategy has been helping government fulfill its duties. In Cambodia, results like policy reforms have been hard to achieve even in light of the partnerships between CSOs and government agencies.

4) As highlighted in our earlier discussions, it is important to adapt and ground these tools to the local context. There is also a need to come up with more appropriate framing of these approaches for people in government to facilitate their acceptance of these initiatives:

a) The tools can be introduced to them as ways to make their decisions in planning and budgeting more relevant to their constituents' needs and more evidence-based.

b) Citizens' groups working with specific agencies can also frame the objective of monitoring actions as ensuring that the agency receive adequate budget allocation for quality performance.

c) Framing can also be done by using international instruments or agreements (e.g., Millenium Development Goals, Education For All, IHL, Hyogo Framework, etc.) that government have committed to.

5) Initial project ideas for strengthening social accountability in Oxfam's program frameworks and approaches/strategies:

a) The country program team in Vietnam finds tools like the PETS, Quantitative Service Delivery Survey (QSDS), and Participatory Monitoring (PM) approaches very relevant to their work. The team is now thinking of introducing these instruments to their partners and supporting their application in order to help vulnerable communities and groups influence government:

- The tools can be used to influence decisions by the People's Council regarding allocation of government resources to particular public services and programs.

- The education team is thinking of doing a budget tracking to see how the education budget has been allocated and spent on education services for ethnic minorities.

- The team working on participatory local planning is thinking of integrating the PETS in their project design as part of their monitoring and evaluation system.

- Pan-Nature is now considering applying PETS in their on-going research on government revenues from the extractive industries (e.g., mining) and how such money is subsequently spent on public programs and projects.

b) The Philippine team wants to assess Oxfam's efforts to strengthen local governments' capacities in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). The assessment will use a social accountability framework. The team's hypothesis is that citizen engagement is the critical factor that the DRR program needs to look into. So, the research will look into possible integration of social accountability into existing DRR tools to strengthen the citizen engagement component of the program. "Citizens" should include women, men, youth, children, people with disabilities, etc..

- We should also ensure women leadership in all our social accountability projects. We should analyze the factors that facilitate and constrain women participation in SAc initiatives. Then we can think of specific strategies to improve on their participation and leadership roles. (Jing will try to post some guide questions on this.)