

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

**Summary of Discussion Points from Week 4 Chat**

**Participants:**

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Topic: Designing our social accountability strategies and programs

**Key points from the discussion:**

1. In designing our social accountability strategies or programs, one thing that we can look into is how to further enhance the enabling environment for citizen engagement and social accountability actions. Our experiences have shown how international donor organizations like Oxfam can contribute to this by: 1) sharing tools and lessons with their partners; 2) supporting locally-driven approaches for monitoring government and holding public officials accountable; 3) working with governments and capacitating them so they can be more transparent, accountable, and responsive to citizens' groups and the public.

a) In Vietnam, Oxfam has been capacitating education officials at the provincial, district, and school levels towards more effective school governance. The program team has recently integrated social accountability concepts and approaches in the content of the new learning courses that they're planning to run in the coming months. In line with the said course, the team has also been encouraging local public officials to ensure transparency and citizen engagement in planning, budgeting, and spending on the education sector. Oxfam partners like Pan-Nature has been monitoring policy-making, legislation, and revenue use in the mining sector.

b) In the Philippines, Oxfam's disaster risk reduction program team has been capacitating provincial governments to adopt a more pro-active approach in addressing threats from disasters. An important program component is for the local governments to inform citizens on disaster risks and build their capacities to reduce vulnerabilities and respond to disasters. The team is now looking at how such component can be further enhanced and broadened to include active citizenship towards ensuring a more responsive and accountable DRR program.

Oxfam has drawn in its partners in Mindanao to the learning program on social accountability. There may be a need to look into how the approach can be applied to support or enhance current local initiatives (e.g., monitoring of government work based on international targets like the MDGs).

c) In Cambodia, Oxfam has been building on policy guidelines supportive of citizen participation in commune planning and budgeting processes to: 1) Advocate for policy changes to help expand the enabling environment for citizen engagement and empowerment (e.g., providing access to budget information); and, 2) Push for the implementation of the guidelines by piloting and monitoring on the ground.

**Points for further reflection and discussion:**

- How can breakthroughs in our work with governments (e.g., local public officials realizing the need for transparency and accountability and thus agreeing to open up budget and expenditure information) be used to promote more pro-active engagement on the part of citizen groups or stakeholders? How can we integrate this concern in our strategy or program for promoting social accountability? (For instance, mechanisms or ways to make budget information more understandable to ordinary people.)

- One lesson clearly coming out from our earlier discussions on the success factors for social accountability is the need to support locally-driven, more context-appropriate approaches rather than imposing pre-defined strategies and tools. As a donor agency that can have substantial influence in terms of the design of interventions and programs implemented on the ground, how can Oxfam address such concern and achieve the right balance with facilitating citizen engagement?

- How do we sustain commitment to social accountability actions and mechanisms? From one of our assigned readings for the fourth week (Malena 2007): "Social accountability is not a short-term project but a long-term agenda requiring time and persistence and few immediate rewards." How can this be addressed in our program design or strategies?

2. From earlier reflections and online discussions, the group has identified the following ways by which the social accountability framework can add value to Oxfam's change strategy towards more effective and accountable governments:

- 1) The framework provides a systematic way of approaching Oxfam's work (rationale, strategies, tools);
- 2) It highlights the governance aspect in our work where it may not be too apparent or well-articulated;
- 3) It provides a frame for analyzing the context of our engagement with government; and,
- 4) It provides a framework for developing models of effective and accountable governance on the ground.

**Points for further reflection and discussion:**

- Can "effective and accountable governments" be achieved without the element of citizen engagement?

- Going back to our exchanges in week one, in cases where the state's internal accountability mechanisms are working effectively, or where governments are already delivering relatively well on their commitments to citizens (in terms of providing quality public services, protecting people's rights, and improving poor people's welfare) what can social accountability approaches and tools add or contribute towards achieving good governance?