



Knowledge brief

A review of social accountability approaches
in health in Tanzania

2016



Ambasáid na hÉireann
Embassy of Ireland

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Introduction

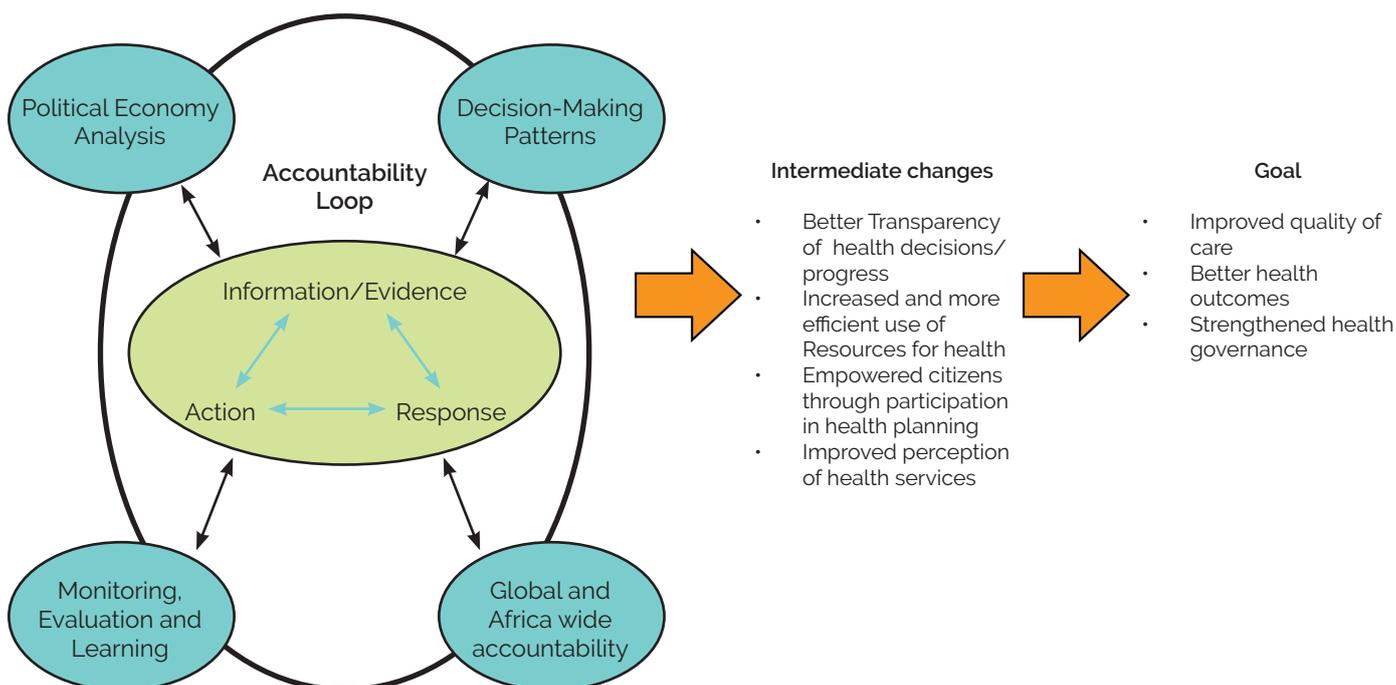
Accountability sits at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals and is considered a transformational approach to achieving real change. Social accountability is proliferating at global, regional and national levels and gaining wide acceptance in facilitating improvements in health services and strengthening governance.ⁱ Citizens are not only beneficiaries, they are catalysts for change. Definitions for social accountability are numerous, one that is frequently used is “formal or informal mechanisms through which citizens and/or civil society organisations engage to bring state officials or service providers to account”ⁱⁱ. In Tanzania, social accountability is a recognised approach to improving health services as it is entrenched in many government documents and guidelines.

Options Consultancy Services was commissioned by Irish Aid to conduct a review of social accountability approaches in health in Tanzania. A review of literature on best practices in implementing strong social accountability initiatives and key stakeholder interviews were undertaken. Learnings on the successes and challenges of social accountability approaches, with a focus on the pathways of change and enabling conditions through which health services and outcomes can be realised in Tanzania were captured. This briefing note summarises the key guiding principles emerging from the review and provides a recommended theory of change for designing and delivering effective social accountability approaches in health.

Conceptual framework

A conceptual framework was developed, enabling the mapping of social accountability approaches in health across a continuum. The framework explored the means through which specific interventions have used the accountability loop (i.e. information–action–response cycle), and the approaches used to a) enable interventions to move along the continuum to achieve intermediary changes (i.e. better transparency, empowered citizens, improved perceptions of health services) and b) achieve overall outcomes and goals (i.e. improved health outcomes, strengthened health governance and better quality of care). The wider contextual analysis is also considered including political analysis, decision-making patterns, monitoring/evaluation/learning and global and Africa wide accountability mechanisms.

Figure 1: Framework to review social accountability approaches in health



ⁱ Agarwal S, Heltberg, R., Diachok, M. Scaling-up social accountability in World Bank operations: World Bank; 200
ⁱⁱ Camargo C, Jacobs, E Social Accountability and its conceptual challenges: an analytical framework: Basel Institute of Governance, working paper no. 16; 2013.

Table 1: Examples of content in approaches in each area of the accountability loop

Information/evidence	Action	Response
Performance tracking data Scorecards & comparative analysis Awareness of entitlements & standards Stories of change to inspire others	Tactful and targeted engagement strategies (i.e. citizen hearings) Use of interlocutors/influencers to drive action	Investigations Release of information Reforms Unblocking bottlenecks

Guiding principles for enhancing social accountability approaches in health

Undertake an analysis of political, economic and decision-making patterns to consider the wider context at play in driving change

- Social accountability is inherently a political process therefore approaches need to be grounded in the socio-economic and political contexts for real change to happen and for outcomes to be realised.
- Continued analysis of the wider political, social and economic context and local factors, including a gender analysis, helps identify risks and enabling factors which can facilitate or hinder social accountability efforts.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Analysis should include identification of key influencers, the policy environment and service provider-government interactions.
- Information from the analysis should help draw up and validate assumptions, and to identify opportunities and challenges to setting up functional feedback mechanisms and scaling up efforts.

Ensure government policies and practices on social accountability are fully enacted

- It is critical to overcome misconceptions on the purpose of social accountability mechanisms and ensure that implementation is prioritised and resources are allocated.
- To ensure citizens are effectively engaged, members of various committees and boards should be selected by citizens and not by leadership. Membership should have a gender-balance.
- Feedback from government-led accountability efforts (i.e. client charters, scorecards) to the community should be mandatory.
- Ensuring that citizens understand the benefits of engaging in health-related social accountability efforts is critical.

Develop flexible and adaptive theories of change with explicit pathways to achieving outcomes

- Theories of change that evolve according to the contextual landscape are needed to ensure social accountability approaches are effectively responding to shifting political dynamics and decision-making patterns.
- Theories of change need clear pathways to achieving results and show how these will attain the overall goal.
- Outcomes influenced by the implementation of social accountability mechanisms need to be robustly identified, documented, monitored and evaluated, especially those related to quality of care or service improvements.
- Work backwards from outcome level to pathways of change and then determine the level of effort and conditions that are required so that it is an outcome driven process.^{iv}
- A well-informed theory of change can help ensure experiences are documented, shared and replicated to achieve wide scale impact.

Promote coordinated civil society movements for collective action and to reduce backlash

- Civil society organisations (CSOs) need to be organized and supportive of one another through

ⁱⁱⁱ Joshi A. Context matters: A causal chain approach to unpacking social accountability interventions: Institute of Development Studies, Work in Progress Paper, 2013.

^{iv} Tembo F. Citizen voice and state accountability: Towards theories of change that embrace contextual dynamics: Overseas Development Institute, working paper 343, 2012.

coalitions with media and other key stakeholders to ensure social accountability efforts are mutually reinforcing and to present a common front on key health issues.

- A learning platform could bring together stakeholders working on social accountability across sectors to facilitate a continual culture of experience sharing.
- Social accountability approaches need to be sensitive in how they engage citizens to avoid unnecessary risks, reprisals or backlash.
- CSOs that are leading on social accountability approaches should identify how they can be part of the solution in addressing health outcomes at national and sub-national levels.

Balance citizen and state capacity in social accountability to facilitate actions and responses

- Citizens' involvement should catalyse actions and response, rather than just tokenistic participation that lies outside the system without mechanism for follow-up.
- Link to existing government processes where civil society can actively engage, including through decentralised health budgeting exercises.
- Building the government's capacity to respond to accountability demands, which can include facilitating transparency, implementing reforms and changing policy is critical.
- Social accountability approaches need to be informed and balanced with the budget and resources that are actually available for government to respond.

Link different types of accountability processes together for more effective impact from local to national levels

- A practical way in which CSOs can engage at local as well as other levels of the accountability chain is through vertical policy analysis; identifying different decision-making patterns and dynamics at play. This will enable CSOs to identify lever points and opportunities to influence different policy processes from local to national levels.
- Careful consideration should be placed on the many steps and consistent engagement required on an issue to get meaningful action and results.
- Linking more formal approaches to accountability such as through citizens electing officials and through internal mechanisms, such as through legislatures will help amplify efforts, identify allies and networks to collectively join forces and progress accountability issues to the right level at which action and responses can be taken.

Focus on scale-up and sustainability of successful approaches

- There is a need for social accountability approaches to move beyond short term activities to longer term approaches that help embed change. Specifically, efforts which improve citizen voices at various levels of the health system through the client charter, health facility governing committees, village committees and district meetings should be prioritized.
- Strategic and less confrontational citizen engagement is more effective in catalysing action.
- Where possible, successful accountability approaches should be incorporated into formal systems to facilitate institutionalisation and longer-term impact.

Improve access and transparency to information

- The quality and availability of evidence and information is key to the success of social accountability interventions.^v
- Ensuring information and evidence is accessible means packaging it and communicating it in a way that is understandable to different key audiences.
- Requiring governments to report on key health issues can bolster accountability efforts across levels.

Ensure robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks

- There is a need to engage in M&E efforts on a more continual basis to assess whether the accountability approach is working, where course correction is needed and to help build an evidence base on effectiveness. This also requires ongoing monitoring of assumptions, and whether these still hold true in the course of implementation.
- Indicators directly linked to monitoring efforts should be incorporated into M&E systems such as collective action, empowerment, budget changes, social capital, information access and

^v Global Health Visions. Engendering Accountability: Upholding Commitments to Maternal and Newborn Health 2015.

transparency.^{vi}

- Specific indicators should also be identified to measure the wider impact of efforts on health including coverage, access and quality of care.

Tailor social accountability tools to specific gaps that need to be addressed

- Approaches and tools for social accountability should be tailored to the specific accountability gap that needs to be addressed.
- Understanding the political and operating context is imperative to inform the types of tools required and for effective implementation of social accountability approaches.
- Tools can be complementary, for example scorecards tracking services and quality of care complemented by budget analysis can be valuable evidence to convince decision-makers on where resources should be prioritised and directed.
- Other tools including citizens' hearings can amplify citizen voice and collective action while advocacy can put pressure on governments to realise their commitments.

Target key influencers and allies across levels to reinforce efforts and unblock barriers

- Stakeholders (i.e. media, parliamentarians, state representatives) are important intermediaries and influencers who can support accountability processes.
- It is critical to recognise that key influencers and interlocutors are likely to change throughout the intervention and that consistent efforts are needed to groom a wider network of interlocutors for effective citizen representation.

Ensure stronger connections between global-regional-national and local accountability efforts

- Commitments and associated actions that are regularly tracked have a greater chance of being achieved.
- Civil societies and media play a key intermediary role in which to make citizens aware of country commitments made at international forums to ensure governments are held to account for their promises in their own settings.

Leverage use of Information, Technology and Communication (ICT) platforms for wider reach and impact

- ICT has the potential to create an enabling environment for social accountability to flourish.
- Social media, mass SMS and tailored applications represent strong potential for effective citizen engagement and can circumvent the logistical challenges of bringing together citizens on a large scale to demand change.
- ICT can be used to monitor trends and provide instantaneous data to inform decision making and course correct in real time.



vi Hoffmann KD. The Role of Social Accountability in Improving Health Outcomes: Overview and Analysis of Selected International NGO Experiences to Advance the Field. Washington, DC: CORE Group; 2014

Theory of Change

Based on the evidence and findings, the building blocks for a recommended model of a theory of change was developed which involves:

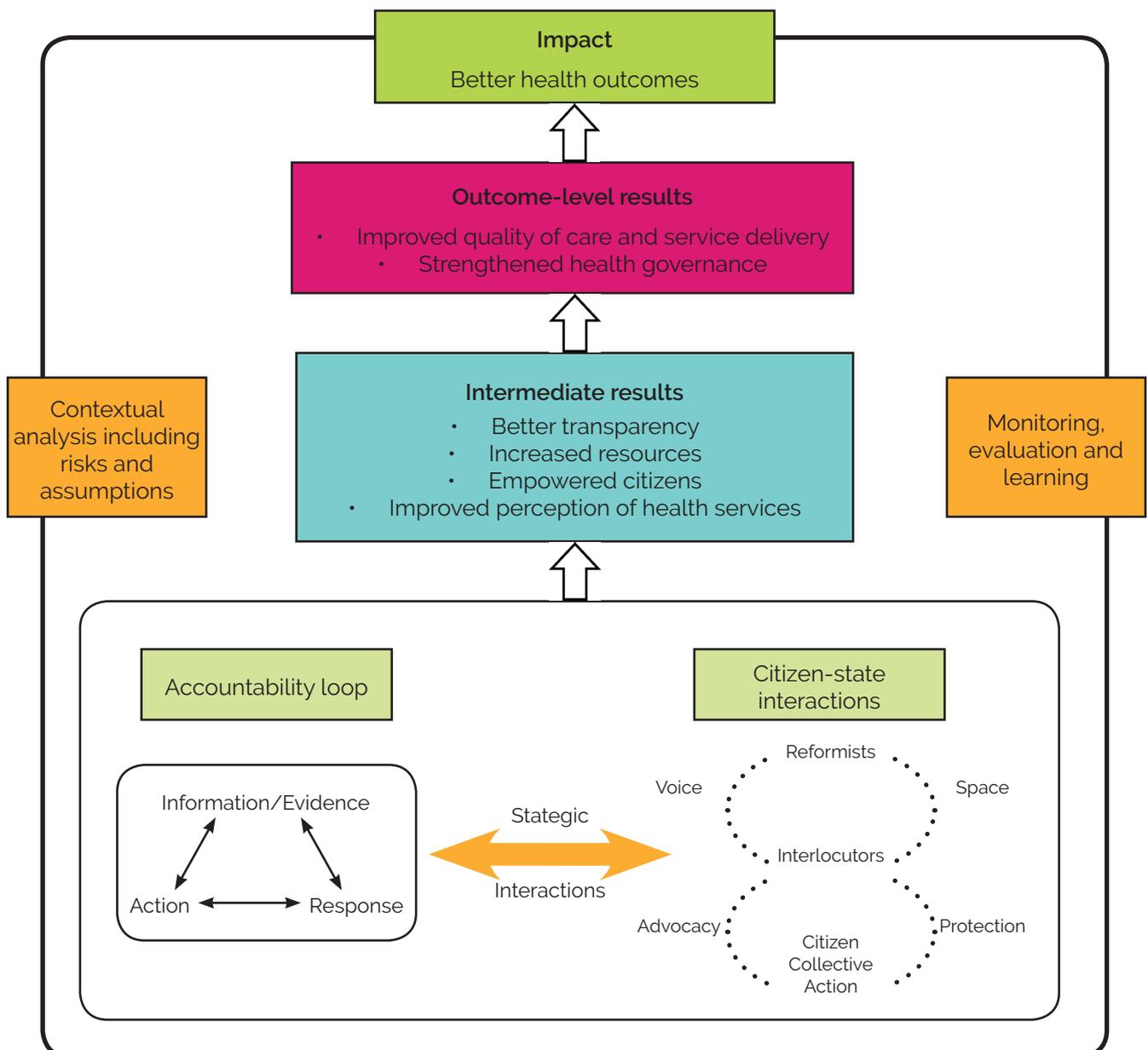
- conducting a regular contextual analysis and learning from implementation
- ensuring a functional accountability loop
- fostering citizen-state interactions and responsiveness

If all three areas are functioning well, this can lead to **intermediate results** (empowered and informed citizens who can take action, and capacity of the state to respond to health system accountability gaps based on citizen demand) and **intended outcomes** (i.e. improved quality of care) and **impact** (improved health outcomes).

The theory of change is premised on an active accountability loop where both citizens and state are empowered and have capacity to take action and respond to improve health services. Three elements need to be considered:

1. citizens empowerment through voice
2. state responsiveness (health care providers and government)
3. citizen and state interactions, facilitated by interlocutors, which opens up space for voice to be expressed and acted upon.

Theory of change model



Conclusion

Social accountability approaches have the power to accelerate and sustain progress on maternal, newborn and child health and lead to wider health system improvements. Promising social accountability approaches that were reviewed have pursued a strategy focused on a cycle of information–action–response with clear examples of how these efforts have led to health service or quality improvements. Each has also made good use of interlocutors and engaging allies such as citizens, service providers, media, health administrators and political leadership to ensure effective implementation towards specified health results. Greater focus is needed to expand both scale and sustainability of promising approaches.

Challenges in implementing social accountability programmes still remain. To overcome these, the wider environment needs to be considered, with a strong political contextual analysis to inform actions. Social accountability approaches need to have a solid understanding of the institutional arrangements that facilitate power and decision-making at multiple levels. Approaches should focus on both supply and demand side accountability while carefully monitoring success and learning from implementation. There is also a need to take into account wider forces at play at regional and global levels that will impact country level accountability efforts. If all of these are considered, social accountability strategies have the potential to improve services, strengthen governance and empower citizens through voice and action to ultimately improve health outcomes.



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