



ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY FOR PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY

ADVANCING COUNTRY OWNERSHIP

Brief

Katherine West Slevin¹ and Cynthia Green²
¹ Consultant, ² Futures Group

Civil society organizations (CSOs) can make an important contribution to health programs and public welfare by encouraging governments to involve citizens and technical specialists in identifying and addressing important human needs. Good governance exists when decisionmakers are accountable to the public; processes are transparent; institutions and information are directly accessible; and the government is able to serve the needs of its people effectively (UNDP, 1997).

This brief is designed to provide leaders of CSOs with guidance on ensuring good governance, social accountability, and transparency. CSOs working in family planning (FP), HIV care and treatment, and maternal health (MH) programs can promote good governance by

- Building relationships with government leaders and other stakeholders;

- Ensuring government shares information and is transparent about its processes;
- Holding government officials accountable for the policies and promises they make;
- Tracking government commitments and ensuring that funds are spent as planned; and/or
- Working with government officials to ensure their policies and programs are evidence-based and reflect the priorities and needs of civil society (Jorgensen et al., 2012; GHI, 2012).

CSOs can begin to work with government officials and other stakeholders toward a system of good governance by initiating new activities within their expertise or by partnering with other CSOs.

How to Ensure Good Governance, Social Accountability, and Transparency

Build relationships with stakeholders

Building and maintaining good relationships are key to ensuring accountability and transparency in government. CSO leaders can build these relationships to facilitate their current and future work, help to establish credibility, and strengthen civil society's role overall.

STEP 1

Make contact with stakeholders. The first step in building relationships is to contact various stakeholder groups and government agencies (e.g., the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance, and provincial or local health departments); attend public events; and set up meetings. For example, in preparation for World AIDS Day, the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender

Violence, or other such key events, CSOs may want to consider reaching out to stakeholders to inform them of their planned activities, offer assistance, and/or explore possible collaborations.

Become an expert in your issue. CSOs need to be knowledgeable about the technical aspects of the issues they care about. Read current reports and articles. Subscribe to reputable listservs and electronic newsletters that link you to global knowledge on your issue. These will help you better understand the players, vocabulary, and the larger political context of the areas you are working in. For instance, a CSO working on affordable access to antiretrovirals (ARVs) for people living with HIV in their community may consider joining global listservs like Health GAP—an advocates' network that focuses on ARV availability.

STEP 2

Establish good working relationships with relevant government units. CSOs need to understand what the government's priorities are. Offer helpful collaboration by providing new information;

sharing the perspectives of disadvantaged, vulnerable, and marginalized populations; and performing useful tasks, such as convening meetings and drafting documents. This will help to open the door for future collaboration.

Build alliances with technical experts inside the government. Developing a rapport with technical experts can prove useful for accessing information and laying the foundation for civil society involvement. Provide technical experts with information or assistance they may need. For example, CSOs working in family planning could supply state health officials with information on community views about contraceptive methods. Begin by working with the government on non-controversial issues to build and strengthen relationships for future projects that may be more sensitive (see Case Study 1).

STEP 3

Join or build networks and coalitions. Introduce yourself and your organization to networks and coalitions that already work in your area of interest. By tapping into existing networks, you can capitalize on previously mobilized groups who can help to move your agenda forward, introduce you to other potential stakeholders, and expand your group's skills. If the right network or coalition does not already exist, approach like-minded organizations about establishing a new network or coalition to share information and work on common goals.

Establish a formal mechanism for civil society engagement. Formal channels, such as standing committees that meet regularly, are needed to ensure the ongoing exchange of information and views. They can also provide a recognized way to hold policymakers accountable. Likewise, participatory policy dialogues (rather than one-off engagements) build trust and allow for meaningful input. Advocate for the government to establish or strengthen formal mechanisms for civil society engagement. In addition to the creation of formal mechanisms, CSOs should advocate for these groups to have frequent, regularly scheduled meetings.

Case Study 1: Maternal health advocates take a measured approach to working with Uganda's Parliament

Maternal health advocates in Uganda found parliamentary champions by approaching them first on non-controversial issues. "If you're an advocate for maternal health, don't start with legalizing abortion," stated one insider, "Identify a soft ground from which you can begin talking about these issues. Then you can talk about abortion as a cause for maternal mortality" (Ssinabulya, 2012). Working with policymakers on "soft" issues helps to open the space to tackle more sensitive issues and can lead to a lasting alliance.

Ensure government is transparent

CSOs need to understand how policies that affect health financing or services are developed and implemented. Begin by making sure you, your staff, and your networks understand the current system. Then, incrementally, work toward creating a greater degree of transparency by demanding that government make key information public. Finally, urge the government to formalize civil society's role in the development of health policies and budgets.

STEP 1

Learn the system. Familiarize yourself with relevant policies and regulations. Start by mapping out the various players and stakeholders for your issue and become acquainted with the overall policy environment. What is each government agency responsible for? What unit is accountable for specific policies? How are policies formed? Are national plans in place for FP, HIV, and/or MH and who helped draft them? What laws affect your issue and what implications do current laws and policies have for disadvantaged, vulnerable, and marginalized populations? To assist with this mapping, tap into existing networks and coalitions and seek the assistance of technical experts both in and outside of government.

STEP 2

Request and collect information. Request key documents (e.g., program plans, budget documents, government reports, and policy and program evaluations) from the relevant agency. Investigate whether there are laws that give citizens the right to access information and/or a process to formally request documents. If the government is slow to act, talk to your allies inside the government to see if they can help. Alternatively, urge partner organizations and/or your constituents to make similar information requests—adding pressure to the relevant agencies to respond. See Box 1 for more strategies you can use to address information challenges.

Box 1. Addressing Information Challenges

Information Challenge	Possible Actions
The document exists but you cannot gain access to it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use access to information laws. Lobby government information offices. Make formal, written requests for information to the government and keep a record of your efforts. Ask the media to report on your denial of access to information. Talk to other CSOs: do they have copies or know who does? Talk to powerful stakeholders inside or outside government: do they have copies or could they help put pressure on someone who does? Develop closer relationships with key people in relevant government departments and convince them that they can benefit from your work.
You can access the document but it is incomplete or unreliable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supplement the documents with information from other sources, including reports or data from other government departments, CSOs, international bodies, universities, etc. Develop or bring in external analytical abilities (e.g., a statistician from a local university) to study the data and assess what can/not be used. Interview government officials to clarify and fill in what is missing from documents or explain discrepancies.
The information you need does not exist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop your own survey to gather relevant information (see Unit 6.2 in <i>Monitoring government policies: A toolkit for civil society organizations in Africa</i> under Key Resources). See if you can use existing information sources (e.g., household survey data) to extract the information you need. Advocate for better information: call on government to begin recording the kind of data needed to monitor policy implementation.

Adapted from Monitoring government policies: A toolkit for civil society organizations in Africa. ©2007 Christian Aid, by permission.

Hold government officials accountable

CSOs can play a crucial role in holding governments accountable for their health policies and spending. Start by keeping track of the policies and promises government makes. Next, investigate whether the government has the means to deliver on its promises. Finally, follow the money. How have resources been allocated, where are the funds coming from, and how is the money being spent? By engaging in this kind of policy monitoring and financial tracking, CSOs can produce evidence to help them advocate for more appropriate policies, the fair and transparent allocation of resources, and greater government accountability.

STEP 1

Engage in the policy development process to ensure FP, HIV, and MH policies and national plans are evidence-based

and reflect the priorities and needs of civil society—especially disadvantaged, vulnerable, and marginalized populations. Attend meetings. Volunteer to serve on committees and working groups, such as national task forces on family planning. If you feel appropriate policies and plans are not in place, call on the appropriate government agency to act.

STEP 2

Track commitments and financial allocations. Keep a record of the promises that policymakers make (in speeches, in national plans, via policies) and what resources and funds they have allocated to FP, HIV, and MH activities. Advocate that the government provide clear information about its plans and programs, as well as information on how resources are being allocated. Request the relevant documents, including implementation timelines and budget documents. Track commitments and share the information you collect with your networks.

Investigate what resources are needed for the government to be able to deliver on its policies and promises. CSOs can do this by investigating whether the necessary items are in place. How much money is required and is it available? What other resources are needed? In the case of maternal health, this could mean a sufficient number of skilled service providers, well-equipped health facilities, and necessary medications.

STEP 3

Track financial expenditures. While it can sometimes be difficult to track money and resources, CSOs can play an essential role in holding donors and governments accountable by examining how funds are being spent. Document what monies have been allocated to FP, HIV, and MH activities and what resources are needed to make government commitments a reality. Follow up by monitoring financial expenditures to ensure that funds are being spent as they were promised. Seek out assistance from experts (e.g., from an international NGO that is skilled in health financing and budgeting) or work through established networks and coalitions to help

establish a collective system to monitor finances.

Use the evidence you collect as a basis for advocacy. The goal of policy monitoring and financial tracking should be to generate evidence as a basis for advocacy (Schnell and Coetzee, 2007). CSOs have an important role to play as government watchdogs, holding government accountable for the responsible program planning and management of resources. If funds are not spent as planned, remind policymakers of the commitments they have made and apply pressure to government officials to manage the funds properly (GHI, 2012). In some instances, it will be necessary to approach policymakers and/or government officials in a sensitive way to avoid alienating them or escalating the situation. In others, the best strategy may be to take the information public (see Case Study 2). Work with partners and allies—including donors and respected NGOs that have experience in this area—to develop the most appropriate strategies, based on the circumstances. Finally, remember to be proactive as well as reactive in your advocacy. Engage in the budget process to ensure that health budgets address key issues from the start (i.e., by advocating that government include a separate budget line for the provision of contraceptives and/or ARVs).

Case Study 2: Holding Zimbabwe’s government accountable for HIV/AIDS spending

In 1999, in the face of staggering HIV rates and a gross shortage of resources, Zimbabwe’s government instituted an AIDS tax to raise domestic funds to care for those affected by HIV/AIDS (Mhofu 2012). Known as the “AIDS levy,” the tax was the first to be implemented in Africa and increased Zimbabwe’s income tax by 3 percent (Winter, 2000 and Mhofu, 2012).

Since the levy’s implementation, Zimbabwe has received external praise for its efforts at raising domestic revenue for HIV/AIDS and the AIDS levy has generally been lauded as a success (UNAIDS 2012). There is no doubt that the numbers are impressive. According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), from 2007 to 2010, Zimbabwe saw one of the sharpest declines in HIV prevalence in Southern Africa, with rates dropping from 27 percent to just over 14 percent (UNAIDS, 2012). In that same period, Zimbabwe also expanded treatment from 15 percent to 80 percent of adults (UNAIDS, 2012).

However, the on the ground experience is a different story. Despite the government’s promise of access to antiretrovirals (ARVs)—and the high taxes designed to fund it—HIV-positive individuals and organizations in Zimbabwe report regular stockouts of ARVs at pharmacies and clinics and allegations of financial mismanagement are abundant (Mhofu 2012). In response, AIDS activists in Zimbabwe took to the streets. In October 2012, hundreds of activists held a demonstration outside Zimbabwe’s National AIDS Council, calling for transparency on how the millions raised by the national AIDS tax are being spent (Mhofu, 2012). Using a diversity of tactics to hold government accountable, the group Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights simultaneously filed a formal petition to the National AIDS Council requesting they release information on how the AIDS levy is being administered (Mhofu, 2012).

Ensure policies and programs are evidence-based and reflect the needs of civil society

A primary role of CSOs is to ensure that the government’s priorities are informed by civil society—particularly disadvantaged, vulnerable, and marginalized populations. CSOs can work toward more inclusive policies by collecting information to help inform government’s FP, HIV, and MH agenda and by helping to broaden government’s definition of civil society participation. However, to achieve any one of these goals, you must first ensure your organization remains connected and accountable to the people it represents.

STEP 1

Stay connected to the ground. CSOs—particularly as they gain increased access and power—need to remain accountable to the people they represent. Specifically, CSOs should work to ensure internal accountability and transparency in choosing representatives, responding to potential conflicts of interest, and engaging and informing their constituencies. CSOs should have systems in place (i.e., a newsletter or website) to keep their constituents up-to-date and solicit feedback. Whenever possible, CSOs should use participatory approaches and create two-way channels of communication, such as stakeholder consultations or town hall meetings. By maintaining this internal dialogue, CSOs establish trust, demonstrate mutual respect, and ensure that affected communities continuously inform their work.

STEP 2

Ensure that civil society groups and disadvantaged, vulnerable, and marginalized populations are involved in all aspects of program planning, implementation, and monitoring. Advocate for the meaningful inclusion of civil society—not just one-off engagements. Urge government agencies to hold regular meetings and to share meeting conclusions and outcomes with the broader civil society community. Furthermore, demand that government be transparent about how civil society representatives are chosen and engaged and weigh in on formal processes for selecting those representatives.

STEP 3

Collect information from civil society and disadvantaged, vulnerable, and marginalized populations to pass on to governments to help inform policy. Collect information about the community’s needs, barriers to accessing care and services, and other factors that contribute to poor health outcomes. For groups working on maternal health, this may mean counting the number of skilled birth attendants. For HIV advocates, it might entail tracking the outcomes of a government program to provide universal access to ARVs through public-run health clinics. CSOs have used various methods to collect information, including citizen monitoring (i.e., recording incidences and collecting stories) of gender-based violence; surveys to record the number of skilled personnel available at local health facilities; and national networks to monitor the implementation of family planning policies (see Case Study 3). CSOs can bring civil society’s voice and needs into policy development by following a step-wise process. Collect the information described; get help from experts to analyze the information; and then use it to educate policymakers and program managers, inform policy, and advocate for equitable, appropriate, and well-resourced programs.

Case Study 3: Civil society networks in Guatemala use policy monitoring to hold government accountable

CSOs working on a range of issues from indigenous rights and peace and security to health and development joined forces to create Guatemala’s Reproductive Health Observatories Network (OSAR) (Merino, 2012). A national network responsible for monitoring Guatemala’s reproductive health and family planning policies, OSAR serves as a democratic mechanism for accountability. Specifically, OSAR monitors the implementation of Guatemala’s Universal Law for Family Planning and Sexual Education and the subsequent improvement of reproductive health outcomes across the country (Merino, 2012). To do this, OSAR systematically develops indicators, monitors policies and programs, and collects data to identify barriers to the implementation of reproductive health policy (Merino, 2012). At the same time, OSAR actively engages communities to analyze its own health situations, helping to foster the increased inclusion of key populations—particularly indigenous women—in the policy process (Merino, 2012). If and when barriers are identified, OSAR works closely with government officials and other key stakeholders to find sustainable solutions (Merino, 2012).

Summary

CSOs have an important role to play in ensuring good governance. Take on a few specific actions and partner with networks and coalitions to help spread the workload. Focus on building relationships and learning about the policy development process. Then push government toward greater transparency by making official requests for information and demanding that civil society’s participation be formalized, genuine, and inclusive of poor and vulnerable populations. Finally, ensure greater accountability by keeping a record of what the government has promised, whether it has the means to deliver on its promises, and how agencies are committing and spending resources. By incorporating some of these practical actions into your work, civil society can begin to effectively move government toward a system where information and processes are accessible; policies are informed by the needs of the people; there is greater access to health services; and policymakers are held accountable for what they say and do.

Key Resources

The references listed below provide greater guidance on how CSOs can implement the tasks and actions outlined in this paper.

Advocacy Partnership. 2011. *TB/MDR-TB Advocacy Toolkit*. Leamington Spa: Advocacy Partnership. Available at www.stoptb.org/assets/global/awards/cfcs/TB_MDR_Advocacy_Tool_Kit.pdf.

Description: While this toolkit is primarily focused on tuberculosis (TB), the skills covered—including understanding the decision-making process, coalitions/networks/partnerships, working with government officials, and creating parliamentary champions—can be applied to any health area.

Arroniz Pérez, R. 2010. *Handbook for Political Analysis and Mapping*. New York: International Planned Parenthood Federation, Western Hemisphere Region. Available at <http://dev.ippfwhr.org/en/resource/handbook-political-analysis-and-mapping>.

Description: This handbook provides three modules to help organizations demand greater transparency and accountability from their governments. The modules are (1) identifying entry points to the political system, (2) understanding the political context, and (3) key actors.

Department for International Development (DFID). 2003. *Chapter 10: Building Partnerships. Tools for development: a handbook for those engaged in development activity*. Version 15.1. London: DFID. Available at www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/toolsfordevelopment.pdf.

Description: Chapter 10 of this development handbook, Building

Partnerships, walks readers through the four stages of how to develop partnerships and includes a Partnership Readiness Questionnaire.

Malajovich, L. 2010. *Handbook for Budget Analysis and Tracking in Advocacy Projects*. New York: International Planned Parenthood Federation, Western Hemisphere Region. Available at <http://www.ippfwhr.org/en/resource/handbook-budget-analysis>.

Description: This handbook, published by the International Planned Parenthood Federation, is structured as a workshop, providing activities on how to conduct a budget analysis and track financial expenditures.

People's Voice Project and International Centre for Policy Studies. 2002. *Citizen Participation Handbook*. Kyiv: World Bank, Canadian Bureau for International Education, and Canadian International Development Agency. Available at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTBELARUS/Resources/eng.pdf>.

Description: Among other useful tips, this handbook provides a participatory social monitoring tool CSOs can use to measure and monitor policy.

Save the Children. 2012. *Health Sector Budget Advocacy: A guide for civil society organizations*. London: Save the Children. Available at http://www.who.int/pmnch/media/news/2012/201205_health_sector_budget_advocacy.pdf.

Description: This guide introduces readers to the concept of health budget advocacy, describes how budget systems and policies work, and

provides guidance on budget analysis and advocacy.

Schnell, Anna, and Erika Coetzee. 2007. *Monitoring government policies: A toolkit for civil society organizations in Africa*. London: Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), Christian Aid, and Trócaire. Available at <http://www.cafod.org.uk/Media/Files/Resources/Policy/Monitoring-government-policy>.

Description: This toolkit—specifically designed for CSOs—provides in-depth, practical guidance and exercises on everything from how to build relationships and establish networks to how to analyze policy budgets and monitor government policies.

Transparency International. 2002. *Corruption Fighter's Toolkit: Civil Society Experiences and Emerging Strategies*. Berlin: Transparency International. Available at http://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/tools/corruption_fighters_toolkits_introduction/2/.

Description: This toolkit provides many case studies and examples of how CSOs have monitored public institutions, demanded greater access to information, and held government accountable for its procurement practices.

World Health Organization (WHO). 2008. *Health Systems Governance: A Toolkit on Monitoring Health Systems Strengthening*. Geneva: WHO. Available at http://www.who.int/healthinfo/statistics/toolkit_hss/EN_PDF_Toolkit_HSS_Governance.pdf.

Description: This toolkit provides insight into health financing, how to track financial commitments, and the relevant sources of information around health systems governance.

References

Global Health Initiative (GHI). 2012. *U.S. Government Interagency Paper on Country Ownership*. Washington, DC: GHI. Available at <http://www.ghi.gov/documents/organization/195554.pdf>.

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). 2012. *UNAIDS highlights Zimbabwe's progress in responding to AIDS*. Retrieved March 11, 2013, from <http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2012/may/20120528fszimbabwe/>.

Jorgensen, A., K. Hardee, E. Rottach, A. Sunseri, M. Kinghorn, and A. Bhuyan. 2012. *Capacity Development Framework and Approach for Health Policy, Governance, and Social Participation*. Washington, DC: Futures Group, Health Policy Project.

Merino, L. 2012. "Moving Forward to FP/RH/HIV Policy Monitoring and Implementation; Key Civil Society Contributions in Central America, Experiences in Guatemala and El Salvador." Presented at the *Advancing Country Ownership: Civil Society's Role in Sustaining Global Investments Consultation*, Washington, DC, September 11–12, 2012.

Mhofu, S. 2012. "Zimbabwe HIV Activists Push for Government Accountability." *Voice of America*. Retrieved March 11, 2013, from http://www.voanews.com/content/zimbabwe_hiv_activists_push_for_government_accountability/1524053.html.

Schnell, Anna, and Erika Coetzee. 2007. *Monitoring government policies: A toolkit for civil society organizations in Africa*. London: CAFOD, Christian Aid, and Trócaire. Available at <http://www.ebpdn.org/download/download.php?table=resources&id=481>.

Ssinabulya, S.N. 2012. "Advancing Country Ownership: Civil Society's Role in Sustaining Global Health Investments." Presented at the *Advancing Country Ownership: Civil Society's Role in Sustaining Global Investments Consultation*, Washington, DC, September 11–12, 2012.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 1997. *Governance for sustainable human development: A UNDP policy document*. New York: UNDP. Available at <http://mirror.undp.org/magnet/policy/>.

Winter, J. 2000. "Doubts over Zimbabwe Aids tax." *BBC News*. Retrieved March 11, 2013, from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/602294.stm>.

Suggested Citation

West Slevin, K., and C. Green. 2013. "Accountability and Transparency for Public Health Policy: Advancing Country Ownership." Washington, DC: Health Policy Project, Futures Group.

Contact Us

Health Policy Project
One Thomas Circle NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20005
www.healthpolicyproject.com
policyinfo@futuresgroup.com

The Health Policy Project is a five-year cooperative agreement funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development under Agreement No. AID-OAA-A-10-00067, beginning September 30, 2010. It is implemented by Futures Group, in collaboration with CEDPA (CEDPA is now a part of Plan International USA), Futures Institute, Partners in Population and Development, Africa Regional Office (PPD ARO), Population Reference Bureau (PRB), RTI International, and the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood (WRA).

The information provided in this document is not official U.S. Government information and does not necessarily represent the views or positions of the U.S. Agency for International Development.