

ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

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The Capacity Development Resource Guides highlight the key technical areas of expertise needed to effectively influence health policy design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Each guide identifies the specific skills, knowledge, and capacities that individuals and organizations should possess in the area. The standardized indicators listed for each competency and capability map to the accompanying Capacity Indicators Catalog, which helps to generate a tailored tool for assessing and scoring an organization's capacity level. Each guide also includes a list of useful resources for designing and delivering capacity development assistance.

PROMOTING ACCOUNTABILITY FOR IMPROVED OUTCOMES

■ DEFINITION

An accountability system establishes the processes for monitoring, analyzing, and improving the performance of individuals and institutions, and as such, it is a key mechanism for achieving good governance outcomes. Good governance occurs when systems and the stakeholders who operate in them strive to be “efficient, effective, open, transparent, accountable, responsive, and inclusive” (Brinkerhoff, 2008, p. 3). Accountability systems can be both internal (within the government) and external (between government and civil society) (McGee and Gaventa, 2010).

■ RELEVANCE TO POLICY

Government leaders play a key role in fostering good governance and accountability by (1) determining the rules and regulations that govern the health system, (2) providing policy leadership and oversight, (3) guiding policy and program implementation, (4) harnessing resources, (5) creating mechanisms for social participation, and (6) answering to their citizens for pledged commitments. Civil society also plays a key role in monitoring how policies are actually rolling out and affecting communities, and they can contribute to government accountability by generating information and feedback, increasing transparency, and mobilizing citizen voices. Strong civil society networks, with the capability and relationships to influence policymaking and implementation, are a key component of the accountability system.

■ KEY CAPABILITIES

To foster good governance and accountability, government leaders must establish internal accountability mechanisms and also create space for social participation and systems for responding to civil society (McGee and Gaventa, 2010). Government should be committed to a culture of efficiency and transparency, routinely make government documents publicly available and accessible, and actively engage and facilitate the participation of a range of stakeholders in policy development and implementation.

To improve government accountability, civil society groups must actively engage in policy monitoring and utilize established mechanisms for participation, as well as external (watchdog) mechanisms, to hold policymakers accountable. Civil society groups should understand government structures (who is responsible for what); laws and policies that outline citizens' rights and service delivery standards (such as right to information legislation, established national standards); and existing redress mechanisms (such as compliant procedures, ombudsmen/women). They should be able to mobilize citizen action, analyze problems, and choose the most effective approach to elicit a government response. In many cases, successful accountability activities will require expertise in advocacy, coalition building, and media relations.

■ PERFORMANCE IDEAL

Government

High capacity in establishing accountability systems includes being able to

- Collect financing, service use, and performance data
- Translate the data into information that interested stakeholders can understand and use
- Facilitate participation by and respond to concerns from external stakeholders

Government officials and institutions have a wide range of obligations to, and relationships with, civil society, citizens groups, oversight boards, ombudsman offices, or national and sub-national parliaments; and they respond in a timely and coherent fashion to stakeholder preferences, as expressed through forums, advocacy efforts, or other mechanisms.

At the highest performance level, clear checks and balances exist, such as pathways for information reporting, justification, and oversight. As a result, governments often have horizontal (internal) mechanisms, where specific government bodies are tasked with requesting information or demanding questions of other government bodies to ensure performance and compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and standards. Goetz (2001) identified four types of mechanisms—political, fiscal, administrative, and legal—by which these oversight authorities hold government institutions accountable. Each mechanism has a different set of associated actors, including parliaments, government auditors, ombudsman offices, and the judiciary. High-performing institutions tasked with ensuring accountability investigate performance problems, uncover cases of inefficiency or corruption, mete out and enforce penalties/punishment, and report those findings to the public.

Civil Society

High capacity for utilizing accountability systems includes being able to

- Identify areas of concern, generate information/data, and develop proposed policy or programmatic solutions
- Think strategically and select appropriate approaches to elicit an effective government response
- Engage communities, other civil society organizations, the media, and the public at large to voice concerns and rally in support of proposed changes
- Conduct investigative journalism to expose issues and gauge government fulfillment of its commitments

At the highest performance level, civil society groups choose the best option for holding government officials and institutions accountable, either through external (vertical) mechanisms, which involve external pressures on government (elections, lobbying, petitions, etc.), or diagonal mechanisms, which involve direct citizen engagement in horizontal mechanisms (e.g., civil society participation in an oversight committee or public hearing). While some groups are more adept at detailed analysis of government information (e.g., to publish shadow reports), or the political knowledge/acumen to influence government from within, others excel at conducting public demonstrations or more visible advocacy efforts. Civil society also plays a role in internal/horizontal mechanisms when those mechanisms include oversight committees, public hearings, or other fora, whereby civil society is invited to participate.

In the ideal, the following would exist:

- Incentives for a public and transparent process of developing and implementing policy decisions, procuring services from private contractors, and accounting for expenditures
- Structures for stakeholders, such as citizens and civil society groups, to provide feedback to and request information from government on policy implementation and service delivery
- Functional structures for government to communicate with stakeholders on policy implementation and service delivery, including timely release of requested data (in useful formats); structures should be supported through legislation outlining citizens' rights to government information (e.g., Freedom of Information Act)
- Incentives that reinforce service provider performance-based behaviors
- Functioning governmental oversight mechanisms and institutions, such as an anti-corruption agency, ombudsman's office, or audit office
- Constitutional provisions for checks and balances on governmental actors, such as through a separation of powers, regular (and competitive) elections, freedom of the press, and independent commissions, as needed
- Legislation with sufficient sanctions to deter corrupt practices and judicial mechanisms with the power to prosecute and adjudicate legal cases against corrupt government actors

INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCIES

KNOWLEDGE OF

Legal and regulatory frameworks in place to hold government actors accountable	AC1
Applicable standards for service delivery and provider performance	AC2
Policies, processes, and institutions related to oversight of government actors	AC3
Local political and cultural context	AC4
Tools and mechanisms used to hold government actors accountable	AC5, AC6
Methods of engaging citizens, civil society, and media	AC7
The role and interests of different government and nongovernmental stakeholders in ensuring accountability	AC8

SKILLS TO BE ABLE TO

Promote citizen knowledge of legal rights and available services	AC9
Collect, analyze, and interpret financial and performance data, and be able to communicate it to a variety of audiences	AC10
Perform stakeholder and power mapping	AC11
Solicit constituent feedback on quality of services	AC12
Negotiate and build consensus among diverse actors	AC13
Initiate an organized and meaningful engagement with government actors/citizens/civil society organizations	AC14
Speak with or be interviewed by media outlets about specific accountability issues	AC15

ATTITUDES/VALUES/ATTRIBUTES

Has the courage to challenge government institutions on contentious issues (in the case of civil society, can challenge the government in general, including legislators and politicians)	AC16
Emphasizes collaboration and leadership; works with other organizations, government institutions, and citizens	AC17
Has the tenacity to monitor ongoing policy implementation	AC18

GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT UNIT ALSO

Has a willingness to work openly and collaboratively with other government units and with citizens (transparency)	AC19, AC20
Is committed to the government's role as guarantor of basic services to citizens	AC9
Is committed to ensuring ethical behavior	AC20
Encourages citizen participation in government oversight	AC14

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPABILITIES**TECHNICAL ABILITY TO**

Conduct independent analysis on government documents to understand and ask questions about financial management and health system performance	AC21
Request information (documents, commentary, testimony, as applicable) through available channels (In the case of civil society/media, request information through Freedom of Information Act or other available mechanisms. In the case of government, have the capacity to respond to requests for information within the mandated timeframe)	AC22, AC23, AC47
Investigate issues of public interest (government oversight officials and institutions may require express government approval, civil society will not)	AC24
Engage the media on accountability issues through press releases, interviews, and conferences	AC25
Persuade media outlets to report on stories relating to key accountability issues	AC26
Track legislation, regulatory, and policy documents through development, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation phases	AC27
Monitor legislation and policy implementation and communication	AC18
Develop credible analysis of budgets and spending to provide information on the effects of policy decisions; among civil society and the media, this may focus on monitoring and analyzing budget spending to identify gaps in services	AC28, AC29
Utilize accountability tools (e.g., mapping, public expenditure tracking, participatory budgeting, citizen feedback mechanisms, and scorecards)	AC30
Provide technical assistance to other organizations or agencies to develop their capacity for engaging in accountability activities and processes (as applicable)	AC48

GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT UNIT ALSO HAS THE ABILITY TO

Collect, analyze, and interpret financial and performance data (usage, access, quality, satisfaction) as input to provider oversight and to program/policy learning and adaptation	AC10
Collect, analyze, and disseminate public information so that citizens and civil society can use the data to ask questions about, and conduct separate analysis on, released data	AC31
Provide varied reports on institutional activities and policy implementation to other government units, the legislature, and the public	AC32

RELATIONAL ABILITY TO

Develop and maintain dialogue with politicians, legislators, government officials/ departments, independent oversight agencies, media, civil society/non-state actors on policy development, implementation, auditing, and monitoring issues	AC33
Hold consultative forums with a wide variety of stakeholders	AC34
Engage with oversight agencies and/or watchdog groups on the use of data developed and released by the institution	AC35
In the case of civil society actors, build coalitions of independent organizations around topic-specific issues (HIV, gender, public programs) to track different aspects of the government's work	AC36
Engage with service providers and managers for dialogue regarding performance (and in the case of government oversight units, on review and enforcement of performance)	AC37
Cultivate contacts inside and outside government to gather information about governmental priorities, actions, and policies	AC38
Cultivate contacts with media, civil society, and oversight agencies to quickly disseminate information	AC39
Be known as credible and independent experts by government institutions and civil society watchdogs; be sought as organizational participants in technical committees, working groups, and consultative forums	AC40, AC41

ORGANIZATIONAL OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT TO SUPPORT

Leadership that promotes transparency, responsiveness, stewardship, and high-quality service delivery and is comfortable challenging government agencies on information availability, organizational performance, and financial management	AC19, AC16, AC43
Dedicated resources (e.g., staff, time, and money) to conduct analysis of public policy implementation, oversight, and investigations of public officials, departments, and services; and in the case of civil society/media, resources to lead/participate in vertical or diagonal accountability activities; and in the case of government oversight units, respond to citizen and civil society requests	AC43, AC44
In the case of government, systems in place to disseminate information and routinely engage with service providers, citizens, and civil society (e.g., publications/internet, technical working groups, advisory committees, public forums)	AC31, AC45
Systems to request information and challenge government actors if relevant information is not disclosed, through any available mechanism, including subpoenas, hearings, or Freedom of Information Act requests, as applicable	AC22
Public legitimacy and credibility to conduct oversight, investigation, advocacy campaigns (vertical), or prosecution/mount legal challenges (horizontal)	AC46
Internal mechanisms to ensure the organization/government agency is itself accountable to its own vision, mission, and purpose	AC48

■ ILLUSTRATIVE CAPACITY- STRENGTHENING ACTIVITIES¹

- Provide technical assistance for legislative and regulatory framework reform to improve the legal claims that citizens can make against the state
- Train citizens and advocacy groups on the right to access information under current legislative and regulatory frameworks
- Provide small grants and technical support to advocacy groups to advocate to government for greater openness and transparency through legal reform mechanisms, such as developing, passing, and implementing a Freedom of Information Act
- Support civil society to employ various social accountability mechanisms and tools (e.g., citizen scorecards, social audits, public expenditure tracking, legal challenges, etc.)
- Organize and support technical working groups, advisory committees, and public forums that facilitate dialogue between citizens (through civil society, where appropriate) and government
- Conduct special leadership training and issue awards to promote and acknowledge internal champions of government accountability
- Assist the government to design incentive systems based on citizen feedback
- Provide training, peer recognition, awards programs, etc. to the media to enhance investigative journalism of government institutions and agencies

¹Many of these ideas are adapted from Goetz (2001).

■ RESOURCES

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