

Social accountability for a water-secure future: knowledge, practice and priorities

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Abstract: An urgent rethink is needed within the global water sector and the international donor community if we are to meet the goal of sustainable water management and sanitation for all by 2030. Despite some success in mobilising funds, capacity and institutional reform, global efforts to nurture effective water institutions and implement progressive policy, legal and financing frameworks have stumbled. Social accountability practice on water is attracting growing interest as a means of improving sector performance, service delivery and governance. Inspired by work in other sectors, and by notions of participation, inclusion, transparency, integrity and rights, a new wave of initiatives are applying diverse methodologies to support systematic citizen monitoring and civil-society advocacy for water security. This paper draws on literature, examples of practice and practitioner insights to explore current knowledge, practice and impact, and to synthesise key lessons. In conclusion, it is proposed that 'strategic' and context appropriate social accountability practice is likely to play an important role in successful delivery of SDG 6. Two areas of controversy remain. The first concerns the shift in roles and relationships required across the sector: from service delivery to oversight, implementing partner to outspoken critic, beneficiary to watchdog, process master to equal partner etc. The challenges and conflicts of interests this presents need to be managed, and 'accountability politics' given proper consideration to ensure genuine representation for the most vulnerable. The second relates to how social accountability practice in the water sector can best be nurtured and supported, with questions regarding the availability and conditionalities of financing, the risks of delegitimising or stifling local effort, and the need for enlightened approaches to monitoring, evaluation and learning. Resolving these questions can help unlock the potential of social accountability for a water-secure future.

Keywords: social accountability; water governance; transparency; participation; integrity; citizen oversight.

The quest for accountability is the single defining political idea of the 21st Century. A failure to deliver is likely to make the idea of development irrelevant.

Thomas Carothers, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,
Global Partnership for Social Accountability Forum, World Bank, Washington DC, May 2016

1. Introduction: the context, purpose, structure and methods behind the paper

Our ability to deliver on the ambitious water related targets within Sustainable Development Goal 6 by 2030 using business-as-usual approaches is doubtful². Despite arguable success in mobilising funds, capacity, institutional reform and political will, attainment against the Millennium Development Goals on water has been limited. The sector has struggled to deliver where need is greatest, in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, and striking inequalities within water and sanitation provision between the rich and poor persist (UNICEF and World Health Organization 2015)³. Despite international commitment to Integrated Water Resource

¹ This paper is the outcome of joint effort and contributions from several colleagues including Lotte Feuerstein at WIN, Louisa Gosling and Lucien Damiba at WaterAid, Marcos Mendiburu, previously of the World Bank, and Gulchekhra Boboeva and the team at Oxfam. Their contributions are warmly acknowledged and any errors or omissions are the responsibility of the lead author alone. This is a discussion paper intended to support debate at Stockholm World Water Week and we will seek to publish a subsequent version which draws on feedback and comment. Please send those to nickhepworth@waterwitness.org

² SDG 6 aims to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

³ In 2015, 663 million people lacked improved drinking water sources, and 2.4 billion lacked improved sanitation.

Management (IWRM)⁴, only 1 in 3 countries have implemented IWRM, and in many, progress has slowed or reversed (UN-Water 2012). Gloomy indicators of this inadequate progress include the 80% of global wastewater which remains untreated (Corcoran et al., 2010); the plummeting health of freshwater ecosystems (MEA, 2003; Vaughn, 2010); the growing frequency and costs of extreme weather events and water-related disasters (Handmer et al., 2012, Neumayer and Barthel, 2011); and the elevation of water crises as the primary threat to the global economy (World Economic Forum 2015).

The scale and immediacy of water-related challenges, their significance for social and economic progress, and the inconsistent performance of current strategies suggest that an urgent rethink and fresh tactics are needed. There is consensus that the effective functioning of water institutions is at the crux of water security⁵, (see the Human Development Report of 2006), and yet global efforts to implement policy, legal and financing frameworks, and to nurture the organisations responsible for managing and governing water have stumbled. Stubborn barriers range from insufficient finances and staffing, poor procedural design, through to capture and corruption. For example, it is conservatively estimated that the sector loses 10 percent or US\$ 75 billion of investment each year to corruption (WIN 2016).

Social accountability has emerged as a means of improving institutional performance through bolstering both citizen engagement and the public responsiveness of states and corporations. Interest and activity has grown rapidly since the World Development Report of 2004 used accountability to frame service delivery and governance failures (Fox, 2015). Social accountability is defined as civic engagement, in which citizens and civil society organizations participate in exacting accountability through a proactive process of institutional performance monitoring and open deliberation in the public domain⁶ (see Malena et al. 2004; Fox 2014). It incorporates an array of innovative institutional change mechanisms: citizen monitoring and oversight of public and private sector performance; user centred information access and dissemination; public complaint and grievance systems; citizen participation in decision making, and resource and budget allocation. At their heart lies the political process of bridging gaps and equalising power between state and citizens in order to build integrity and incentivise responsive governance. Despite important interconnections, social accountability is distinct from processes of legal, regulatory and political accountability and is therefore seen as particularly relevant where these mechanisms are weak or ineffective (Fox 2015).

Although the evidence about ‘what works and why’ is still formative, social accountability approaches hold exciting potential for improving government service delivery, good governance and citizen empowerment (McGee and Gaventa, 2011; Batley et al. 2012; Fox 2015). The related ideas of participation, transparency, inclusion, integrity, and rights-based approaches are by no means new to the water sector, but coherent and systematised monitoring and engagement by citizens and civil society to drive institutional performance are a recent phenomenon. Reflection on social accountability within and beyond the water sector, its attendant success factors and the potential for positive impact is therefore timely⁷.

1.1 Paper structure and methodology

This paper reviews the current status of knowledge and practice of social accountability in the water sector. Its potential to make a significant contribution to attainment of universal WASH, climate resilience, SDG 6 and shared water security are explored, and priorities for scaling and strengthening global application are

⁴ The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg committed all countries to have IWRM plans in place by 2005.

⁵ Water security is defined as sustainable access to adequate quantities of acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being, and socio-economic development, for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution and water-related disasters, and for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability (UN-Water, 2013).

⁶ Other definitions emphasise the roles of collective action: ‘an ongoing and collective effort to hold public officials and service providers to account for the provision of public goods which are existing state obligations, such as primary healthcare, education, sanitation and security’ (Houtzager and Joshi 2008); or of the citizen: ‘social accountability is about how citizens demand and enforce accountability from those in power’ (Claasen and Alpín-Lardiés 2010).

⁷ The need for this review paper was agreed by participants at the water side-event of the Global Partnership for Social Accountability Partners Forum in Washington DC in May 2016.

proposed. Evidence and insights are drawn from a review of literature, informant interviews, and responses to questionnaires by NGO practitioners⁸.

In the first section the conceptual framework of social accountability is set out together with current understanding drawn from existing literature. The social accountability approaches adopted by four NGOs working on water are introduced, along with recent examples of work in Tanzania, Burkina Faso and Tajikistan. Practitioner insight and external evaluation is drawn on to explore their results and key lessons. This data is synthesised to shape a set of priorities for the scaling and strengthening of social accountability for water security.

Drawing on the testimony of NGO protagonists as key informants provides useful learning, but it also risks introduction of bias. The draft paper will therefore be presented and shared at international meetings where a more balanced audience will critique and build on the material ahead of publication as a journal article and joint briefing note.

2. Understanding social accountability

Accountability concerns the obligation of one actor to provide information and justify actions in response to another actor with the power to make demands and apply sanctions for non-compliance. It incorporates answerability and enforcement, and can take multiple forms. These include: state-centred or ‘horizontal’ accountability where one state institution monitors compliance and controls abuses by other state agencies; and citizen-led accountability (vertical accountability) where civil society and citizens push officeholders to deliver services, report and answer for their actions (Romazek and Dubnick 1987; Sechdler 1999, in Brinkerhoff and Wetterberg 2015). Interest and investment in this latter ‘demand-side’ accountability has risen rapidly and features in many international development interventions which aim to remedy weak state-centred, horizontal accountability. Although complex and non-linear, with contested and dynamic links between process and outcome, social accountability approaches share the following broad aims (from Brinkerhoff and Wetterberg 2014):

- I. **Increased citizen empowerment:** enabling the disadvantaged and marginalised to express voice, claim rights and balance power relationships by embedding skills and capacity for collective action.
- II. **Better quality governance, development and democracy:** greater transparency and integrity within public institutions and reduced corruption to ‘deepen democracy’ and sustain improved governance.
- III. **Improved service delivery:** targeting improved responsiveness to citizens needs and better informed policy through increased citizen input.

A simple schematic model of ‘how social accountability works’ to deliver across these inter-related aims is provided in Figure 1.

⁸ Water Integrity Network, WaterAid, Water Witness International and Oxfam. Copies of guiding questions and responses are available on request.



Figure 1. Processes at play in delivery of social accountability aims (after Robinson 2016).

In order to deliver these aims, social accountability draws from a methodological toolbox which includes: citizen monitoring and social audit; citizen report cards; community scorecards; participatory budget processes; public expenditure tracking surveys (PETS); public hearings; evidence-based advocacy; and freedom of information requests and campaigns, or a hybrid mixture of these or their components⁹. Initiatives are diverse and can be sector focused, whole-of-government, or cross-sectoral, and range from localised, ‘organic’ movements to high-profile and well-funded initiatives such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), the Construction Sector Transparency Initiative, The Open Contracting Partnership, the Open Government Partnership (OGP), the World Bank’s Global Partnership for Social Accountability and ‘Making All Voices Count’ programme funded by DFID UK, USAID, the Swedish Government, Open Society Foundation, Omidyar Network and others. Examples of state-led social accountability programmes also exist, most notably in Ethiopia.

A growing literature examines the performance, effectiveness and impacts of social accountability, and this is reviewed to provide a contemporary knowledge base, following the introduction below of some of the key concepts and terminology used in the accountability field.

2.1 Social accountability: some key ideas (drawn from Fox 2015).

Alongside the spatial metaphors of ‘horizontal accountability’, delivered by state ‘agencies of restraint’ via institutional checks and balances, and ‘vertical accountability’ where citizens make demands on the state directly, is the idea of ‘diagonal accountability’ (Fox 2015). Diagonal accountability refers to combinations of horizontal and vertical oversight where citizens engage directly within institutions, such as participatory management and oversight bodies, created either from above as ‘invited spaces’ or from below in response to citizen demand or protest. ‘Low-accountability traps’ and risks of poor governance and service delivery exist where horizontal, vertical and diagonal processes of accountability are weak or ineffective. These concepts are useful when thinking about entry points, interactions and pathways of social accountability, with

⁹ See UNDP Water Governance Facility/UNICEF (2015) for a reference manual on these approaches.

evidence that impacts on state performance can be effectively triggered by citizen and civil society activation of horizontal public oversight mechanisms (Fox 2007a; Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2006 in Fox 2015).

Accountability has also been characterised as either ‘demand’ or ‘supply’ side accountability, and this implies a market type relationship whereby civil society engagement generates demand, which is met by the supply of improved governance, and checks and balances. Whilst this provides a neat delineation of tasks: between support for societal demand, and assisting responsive government processes, the implication that building demand will simply generate greater supply, and vice versa via some kind of ‘invisible hand’ has been argued to be over-simplistic (Fox 2015).

Accountability has been characterised as being attainable via ‘long’ or ‘short’ routes. The long route sees citizens exercising power via electing political representatives who in turn deliver policy and shape front-line services. The short route links citizens directly to service providers through oversight and voice mechanisms. Within this conceptualisation, routes should not be seen as mutually exclusive, and the role of government redress, or check and balance mechanisms (Ombudsmen, Judiciary, Auditors, etc.) which span the two should be emphasised. In practice, because local service delivery failures often have their roots in higher levels of governance, the short route is often not so short after all.

Based on a re-interpretation of available evidence, Fox (2015) suggests a further delineation between tactical and strategic social accountability approaches. Tactical approaches or ‘tools’ are limited to society or demand-side interventions which assume that new access to information will motivate local collective action and influence public sector performance. He argues that a multi-pronged, strategic approach which uses a variety of mechanisms to raise and coordinate voice, create public sector responsiveness, and nurture an enabling environment for collective action are more likely to succeed. Elsewhere, Fox and Halloran (eds, 2015) provide a model to illustrate the important relationships between civil society and citizen monitoring, and policy advocacy implied within this strategic approach to social accountability where ‘grassroots’ evidence is used to lever legitimacy and impact for advocacy work at a variety of scales to drive improved sector performance (see Figure 2.)

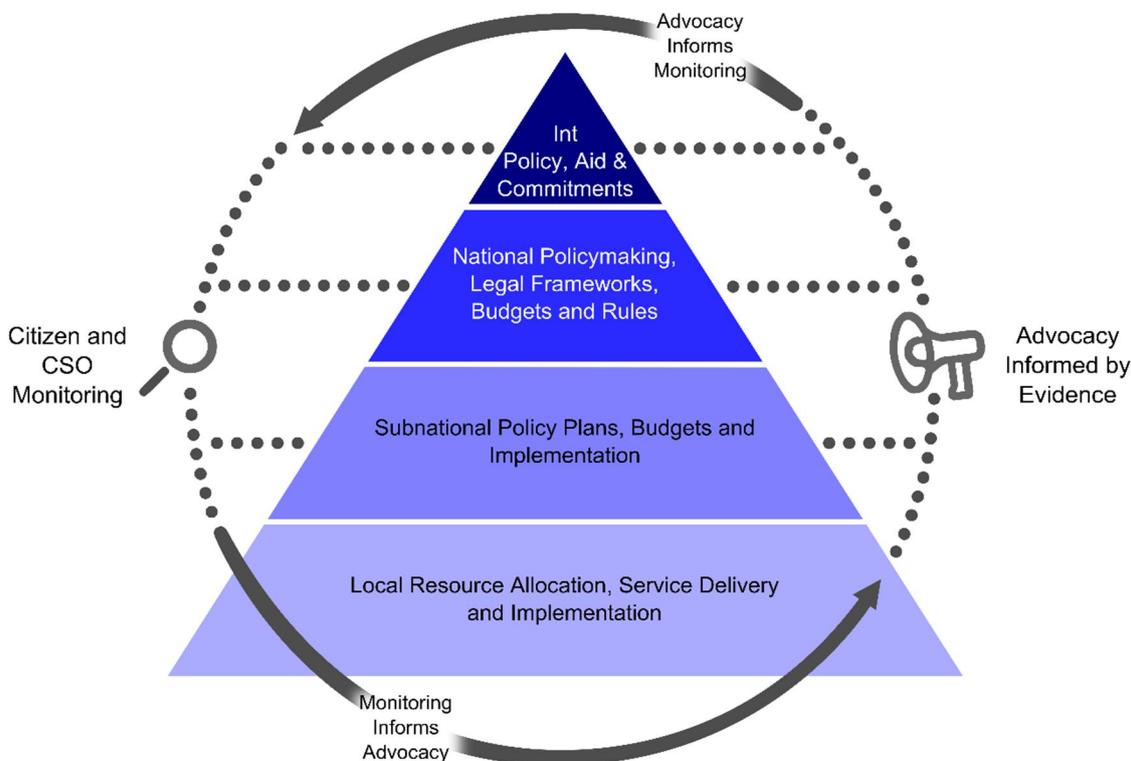


Figure 2. Driving sector performance through citizen and civil society monitoring and advocacy (adapted from Fox and Halloran (2015)).

2.2 Does social accountability work?

Several reviews aim to assess the impact and effectiveness of social accountability approaches, and lift generalizable lessons. McGee and Gaventa (2011) find evidence to show that under certain conditions, some transparency and accountability initiatives contribute to improved service delivery; better budget utilisation; greater state responsiveness; creation of spaces for citizen engagement, and the empowerment of local voices. The range of evidence they draw on for these outcomes is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Outcomes of transparency and accountability initiatives as reported by McGee and Gaventa (2011)

Outcomes	Selected evidence
Better delivery of services	<p>Citizen report cards can have considerable impact on local service delivery in some settings. India (Ravindra 2004);</p> <p>Community monitoring of services, when combined with other factors, can contribute to more responsive delivery of services, such as increased teacher attendance in schools. Uganda, India (Björkman and Svensson 2009; Duflo et al. 2008);</p> <p>Social audits contribute to exposure of corruption and enhanced programme effectiveness. India (Singh and Vutukuru 2010);</p> <p>Participatory budgeting initiatives can – but do not necessarily - contribute to multiple outcomes, including improved public services. Multiple, but largely Brazil or Latin America (Goldfrank 2006);</p> <p>Budget monitoring initiatives can contribute to enhanced resources and efficiency in expenditure utilisation (Robinson 2006);</p> <p>Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys, when combined with public information campaigns, can contribute to reduced leakages and improved delivery of services, though other studies point to additional causal factors. Uganda, other studies, such as in Tanzania, show less impact. (Reinikka and Svensson 2005; Sundet 2008);</p> <p>Community-based Freedom of Information strategies, which go beyond simple information and disclosure, can be instrumental in leveraging other rights, related to housing and water. South Africa (ODAC 2010);</p> <p>The International Aid Transparency Initiative and related initiatives can contribute to stronger aid tracking and thereby potentially to better aid delivery and improvements in aid-funded services. Multi-country (Martin 2010).</p>
Better budget utilisation	<p>Public Expenditure Tracking contributed to reduced leakage in service delivery budgets. Uganda (Reinikka & Svensson 2005);</p> <p>Complaint mechanisms can contribute to reduction of corruption and social audits contributed to exposure of corruption and more effective programme implementation in India (Caseley 2003, Singh and Vutukuru 2010);</p> <p>Participatory budgeting initiatives contributed to multiple outcomes, including re-direction of resources to poor communities in Brazil and Latin America (Goldfrank 2006);</p> <p>Aid transparency initiatives are credited with contributing to a decrease in corruption in aid-recipient countries though this is based on a number of assumptions and estimates not yet tested (Christensen et al. 2010).</p>
Greater state responsiveness	<p>Community scorecards monitoring service delivery can contribute to better user satisfaction. India (Misra 2007);</p> <p>Freedom of Information can contribute to improved government decision-making, public understanding, and increased trust between government and public. UK (Hazell and Worthy 2009);</p> <p>Freedom of Information requests can contribute to responsiveness of public officials, though not always, and are highly dependent on status of person submitting request and civil society pressure. 14-country study (OSJI 2006);</p> <p>The World Bank Inspection Panel led to a variety of impacts including policy reforms and withdrawals of Bank funding for certain projects. The Panel also contributed to some negative or more perverse effects, such as backlash against claimants and risk aversion in Bank lending. This case is about an inter-governmental institution as the accountability-bearer, rather than state responsiveness at national level. Multi-country (Clark et al. 2003).</p>
Building spaces for citizen engagement	<p>Information provision about education-related entitlements has been found by one study to have little impact by itself. In another study, when tied to a community– based information campaign, positive impacts were found. India (Bannerjee et al. 2010, Pandey et al. 2009);</p> <p>Participatory budgeting initiatives can – but do not necessarily – contribute to multiple outcomes, including new civic associations and strengthened democratic processes. (Goldfrank 2006);</p> <p>Freedom of Information can contribute to improved public understanding, enhanced public participation, and increased trust. UK (Hazell and Worthy 2009);</p> <p>The Right to Information campaign in India led to new legislation and widely mobilised constituencies to use information for developmental purposes. India (Jenkins 2007);</p> <p>Community-based Freedom of Information strategies can be instrumental in leveraging other rights, such as those related to housing and water. South Africa (ODAC 2010).</p>
Empowerment of local voices	<p>Local budget monitoring can contribute to improved budget transparency and awareness. Multi-country (Robinson 2006);</p> <p>The Right to Information campaign in India led to new legislation and widely mobilised constituencies to use information for developmental purposes. India (Jenkins 2007);</p> <p>The Right to Information legislation in India has been found through ‘Peoples’ Assessments’ to contribute to perceptions of satisfaction in a range of areas, including decline in corruption and curtailing wasteful public expenditure, exposing misuse of power and influence, and redressing grievances. India (RAAG/NCPRI2009);</p> <p>The EITI can contribute to the public’s capacity to analyse fiscal policy in countries which previously lacked transparency. Multi-country (Rainbow Insight 2009);</p> <p>Downward aid accountability mechanisms by NGOs can lead to the sharing of power with partner organisations. Multiple countries linked to ActionAid and Concern (David et al. 2006; Jacobs and Wilford 2010);</p>

The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative risks the negative effect of empowering elite groups, technocrats and policy makers with new information, rather than empowering broader public stakeholders, who are more likely to use it to shift power balances rather than entrench them. Nigeria (Shaxson 2009).
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Carothers and Brechenmacher (2014) report that whilst the instrumental and political value of accountability, transparency, participation and inclusion is intuitively very significant, empirical evidence for their developmental impact is limited and inconclusive. More recently, Fox (2015) agrees that whilst there are many reasons to be interested in social accountability and its potential, the results of simplistic applications of social accountability tools have been mixed.

Each of these authors point out challenges and warnings regarding the evidence for social accountability which help to explain these mixed results. They also lift the following lessons from the available evidence.

Context is critical. The setting of application significantly influences the potential for social accountability to deliver its aims. There are therefore hazards in simply transferring strategies and tools without adaptation based on a sophisticated understanding of context, in particular the political economy (O’Meally 2013, Brinkerhoff and Wetterberg 2015, McGee and Gaventa 2011, Tembo 2012, Fox 2014). Issues to be considered include:

- a. **Demand side context:** There can be a tendency to idealise the role of citizens and civil society without recognising the huge diversity of views, capacities, access, skills, knowledge, interests and motivations which influence demand side capabilities to act in the collective interest. Citizen voice also needs to overcome the ‘fear factor’, based on threat of reprisals which can prevent engagement (Fox 2015). It also needs representation, and for this, agents or interlocutors need to have a seat at the negotiating table, and have ‘legitimacy’¹⁰. External support can easily de-legitimise or de-incentivise local autonomous effort: approached in the wrong way, it may lead to rejection out of hand as ‘political meddling’. These issues have important implications when designing interventions, or responding to self-selected actors, and require proper consideration of ‘accountability politics’ (McGee and Gaventa, 2011).
- b. **Supply-side context:** The importance of state readiness and capacity to respond to demand for accountability should not be underplayed. At a practical level, limitations include dysfunctional processes and systems, absence of human and financial resources, mismanagement, poor oversight, political patronage and corruption (Holland 2012). There is also a need for ‘space’ and institutional architecture for effective interaction. The willingness of the state to engage is also key, and can be passive or active, along a spectrum from repression, grudging assent, encouragement, support and championing (Brinkerhoff and Wetterberg 2015, Blair 2011). Stakeholders should be in no doubt that however objective or transparent the intent, performance monitoring and advocacy are political and highly vulnerable to partisan manipulation.
- c. **History:** delivery of aims can be path-dependent and strongly influenced by long-term dynamics between state, citizens and CSOs, and the legitimacy this confers on all sides (Coster 1998).

Strategic, aligned and integrated approaches are needed. There is a risk of oversimplifying the roles of information and transparency, and mobilisation of citizens and civil society to demand accountability without giving adequate consideration to supply-side accountability, and the relationships which shape outcomes. Information alone is not enough and empirical support for the assumption that transparency will automatically lead to accountability is weak (Fox 2007a; Banerjee et al 2010; liemenel et al 2010). Neither is strengthening and projecting the voice of citizens and civil society alone adequate: bottom-up approaches on their own may lack ‘bite’ (Olken 2007; Fox 2015). Strategies which balance these aspects with support for institutional architectures, capacities and the creation of spaces within which citizens can interact with officials and exercise accountability are likely to be more successful. Alignment between supply and demand side

¹⁰ Legitimacy describes the ‘formal and informal ways in which processes, policies, structures and agents are validated and consequently empowered’. Legitimacy is volatile, constantly under review and determined within a network of economic, social and political relationships, constantly in flux, but which legitimise or delegitimise policies, practices and people (Gearey and Jeffrey 2006).

processes, and mutually reinforcing horizontal, vertical and diagonal accountability should be accompanied by 'teeth' in supply-side responses via reactive, corrective action to address historical grievances, and an ability to shape future reforms.

Be aware and responsive to politics, power and risk of perverse outcomes. Citizens and civil society are non-homogenous and so special attention should be afforded to agency, politics and power dynamics. Capture of accountability processes by local elites, or by the state within officially endorsed programmes are real hazards, as are the short-circuiting and crowding out of 'organic' and autonomous grassroots efforts by better funded but less legitimate donor-led initiatives. The importance of the interlocutor's role should not be underestimated (Fox 2015). Initiatives should also beware the phenomenon of 'squeezing the balloon' whereby problems are simply transferred to another part of the bureaucracy; and of providing an illusion of accountability and 'clogging the airwaves' whilst being ultimately ineffective.

Extended interaction is needed. Long-term engagement is important to allow processes to evolve and capacities on all sides to be built and implemented (Brinkerhoff and Wetterberg 2015). Learning and extended interaction on both sides of the supply and demand dynamic builds trust and the legitimacy of both sides within evolving processes of bargaining, mutual learning and accommodation, and supports the mutual empowerment of pro-accountability actors in state and society (Fox 2015).

Challenges exist for monitoring, evaluation and tracing impact. Several factors conspire against the drawing of generalizable lessons and unequivocal evidence on social accountability. The evidence base is evolving but is unlikely to be conclusive, and waiting for proof of concept may be in vain. Firstly, the nature and contexts of practice are endlessly diverse and evolving, and comparative analysis is akin to seeking lessons from apples about oranges. Secondly, practice is fast moving and iterative and tends to outpace research, and theoretical and conceptual development. Thirdly, social and political outcomes and impact are unpredictable, happen along 'long and twisting rivers of change' (Carothers 2016) and so do not lend themselves to enumeration using traditional frameworks for monitoring and evaluation. Attributing institutional change to discrete activities can be harder still. There is therefore a need to re-think the metrics of success, and this is a serious challenge within the prevailing paradigm of 'logframes', impact and results (McGee and Gaventa 2011). A learning approach to evaluation which is sensitive to power and politics, and the views and inputs of beneficiary communities and stakeholders, which continually tests the assumptions within theories of change is essential to demonstrate the real value of social accountability work (McGee and Gaventa 2011; Tembo 2012).

Social accountability requires proactive support. Mainstream programmes and processes of aid and reform must build, maintain and protect the space within which social accountability can be practiced. This is particularly important given the increasingly restrictive financial and political environment facing independent civil society¹¹. Scale and scaling of engagement is likely to be important for realising the benefits of social accountability in terms of both width, to build representation, and vertically, to increase 'clout'. The challenge and priority 'is to trigger virtuous circles in which enabling environments embolden citizens to exercise voice, which in turn can trigger and empower reforms which can then encourage more voice' (Fox 2015).

To precis these insights regarding whether social accountability works: the answer is 'it depends'. The efficacy of social accountability depends on how well it responds to and negotiates the context of application; its strategic 'fit'; concurrent activation of demand and supply-side responses and facilitation of constructive interaction between them; and the motivation, capacity and external support available for tenacious application. To conflate the answer further, it also depends on how success is measured, with standard logical framework approaches unlikely to be fit for purpose. What is clear is that simple replication is risky, and that learning is a priority to understand value, and nurture practice. We reflect back on these insights to tease out

¹¹ Research by Carothers and Brechenmacher (2014) describes the global pushback on civil society by increasingly authoritarian states with more than 50 national governments 'erecting legal and logistical barriers to democracy and rights programs, publicly vilifying international aid groups and their local partners, and harassing such groups or expelling them altogether. Despite the significant implications of the pushback, the roots and full scope of the phenomenon remain poorly understood and responses to it are often weak'.

priorities for water sector social accountability following an overview of practice and lessons from water sector specific application.

3. Social accountability in the water sector: aims, objectives and practice

Participation and inclusion have long been water sector staples, even before their codification in the Dublin Principles of 1992. Transparency, accountability, integrity and rights-based approaches have also been heavily promoted as sector priorities for at least a decade. Despite their interwoven connotations and goals, formal review of their collective or individual impact on sector performance are difficult to find (though see WIN 2016). A diverse lexicon and fragmented practice may help explain this, though it also reflects a problematic lack of evidence and learning regarding the determinants of water institution performance more broadly (see Hepworth et al. 2012).

In this review we explore a range of initiatives which fall under our earlier definition social accountability as implemented by sector NGOs and their local partners. The frame of analysis is water security: both water supply and sanitation and water resource management. Before reviewing these examples of practice, their NGO protagonists are introduced to set context.

Established to combat corruption in the water sector in 2006, the **Water Integrity Network** (WIN) has always featured accountability as a key element of its work, with focus on both demand and supply-side. In recognition that political will in many situations is too weak to exercise state-side accountability, WIN is increasingly working on grassroots approaches to activate accountability relationships and trigger change. To support its new strategy, WIN is interested in developing concepts, tools and research to link social accountability, sector performance, corruption and integrity. Examples include work under way in Nepal and Mozambique with partners including Helvetas, FEDWASUN and SDC, the results of which are the focus of forthcoming research.

Water Witness International (WWI) was established in 2009 with the explicit objective of improving sector performance through the application of social accountability. WWI works with local civil society and communities to activate legal rights and statutory obligations related to water security (water rights and tenure, pollution control, development safeguards, flood and drought management, infrastructure, ecosystem protection, etc.). Monitoring of responses combined with tracking of sector budgets helps to diagnose implementation bottlenecks, and generates evidence-based advocacy for system change and international learning. WWI also works to drive accountable water use by corporations, and accountable aid in the sector. The example featured in this paper is drawn from the DFID funded Fair Water Futures Programme delivered with partners Shahidi wa Maji in Tanzania, and Action for Water in Zambia¹². Scaling contextually appropriate accountability monitoring, nurturing a community of practice and sector learning are central to WWI's strategy. WWI recently hosted a regional learning event for African civil society where strong demand for systematic social accountability was expressed by practitioners from 12 countries¹³.

Social accountability is a key element of **Oxfam's** governance work and connects civil society and citizen engagement to policy advocacy at local and global levels. The organization's approach has been inspired and informed by the World Bank, UNDP, national organizations such as PRIA in India, peer organisations such as Care International and ActionAid, and the work of WaterAid. Oxfam have contributed knowledge, through documentation of research and practice (for example, GPSA, Fox and Grandvoinet et al 2015). Oxfam's network and community of practice for social accountability is growing and the approach features as a cross cutting aspect of their latest Strategic Plan 2013-19 as a means of addressing inequality of voice and power as causes of extreme poverty. The featured example concerns GPSA funded work in Tajikistan.

Like many other development organisations **WaterAid**, has built a body of experience in programmes that use the concept of human rights to strengthen both demand and accountability. Initial focus has been on supporting citizens to hold duty bearers to account in context-specific ways in order to improve governance and transparency in WASH services. Recent projects have taken a more systematic rights-based approach to

¹² The report of the external evaluation of this work is available at <http://waterwitness.org/fair-water-futures>

¹³ See <http://waterwitness.org/fair-water-futures> for the event report

enable marginalised communities to hold duty bearers to account and raise awareness of rights and responsibilities. The drivers for this work include the framework provided by the human rights to water and sanitation¹⁴; earlier work with the Freshwater Action Network (FAN) under the Governance and Transparency Fund Programme from 2008-2013¹⁵; and the End Water Poverty and Rural Water Supply Networks which address the practical challenges of realising the human rights to water and sanitation. Since 2013, the Human Rights Action Learning Initiative (HRAI) has provided experiential learning about rights based approaches to WASH and seeks to drive behaviour change, capacity development, and system change. Although yet to be fully documented, this work provides examples and lessons for the role of social accountability in improved WASH provision from Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ghana, India, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi and Uganda. WaterAid has a long history of impact and is seeking to integrate human rights approaches into their programmes, supported by rigorous analysis in collaboration with relevant stakeholders. The implied shift from 'traditional' service delivery to addressing root causes will take time, but is supported by the focus of the 2015-20 Global Strategy on the elimination of inequality. WaterAid increasingly seeks to work as a catalyst and facilitator of systemic change, rather than as a 'donor', although this has implications for financing and communications. There is a particular need for clear and understandable stories about what a rights-based approach looks like. The featured example concerns the use of the securing water resources approach in Burkino Faso. This was not specifically set up as a rights based approach, but the communities have been empowered by measuring their water resources to take this information to government and advocate for more support.

Details of each example including an overview, impacts, success factors and challenges are set out in Appendix 1.

¹⁴ www.righttowater.info and particularly the Handbook of the Special Rapporteur <http://www.righttowater.info/handbook/>; see also Waterlines Vol. 33 special edition on the human rights to WASH: <http://www.developmentbookshelf.com/toc/wl/33/4> which includes chapters on WaterAid's journey towards a rights based approach and integrity.

¹⁵ This aimed to increase the capacity and resources of civil society in 16 countries and 30 civil society organisations across Africa, Asia and Central America in order to participate in effective evidence-based dialogue with decision-makers to improve pro-poor service delivery, documentation and learning from the Governance and Transparency Programme can be found here: <http://www.wateraid.org/google-search?query=GTF&refinement=Publications> and <http://www.wateraid.org/what-we-do/our-approach/research-and-publications/view-publication?id=f1738e29-266b-4c97-bbf7-2fa538d67092>.

3.1 Impact, processes and insights arising from social accountability practice on water

Based on synthesis across examples of practice and their reported results, the change processes through which social accountability can deliver impact in the water sector are set out in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of changes driven by water sector social accountability initiatives

Sector change	Mechanisms of change	Examples
Increased knowledge	Enhanced understanding of water related roles, rights, responsibilities and issues amongst communities, decision makers, government, key workers, and the public, in particular women.	Baseline training on laws, regulations, arrangements for service performance monitoring and value of fee payment (Oxfam). New knowledge within communities, practitioners and policy makers on water law, rights, obligations and their relevance (WWI). Enhanced understanding of water related threats and causes (WaterAid)
Greater capability	Nurturing capability of citizens and key staff on both demand and supply-side to be active in accountability and state-citizen relationships, including through training and learning-by-doing.	Community Advisory Boards (CABs) were created with tangible improvements in operations, leadership and ability to respond to consumers' requests and complaints (Oxfam). Training of several hundred practitioners and community members and long-term support for CSOs (WWI). Training communities and authorities to generate evidence for advocacy (WaterAid)
New state-citizen engagement and interaction	Instigating action and communication between stakeholders to activate rights and responsibilities, collect data, make decisions, report issues, make demands, advise and advocate.	Complaints by CABs in Tajikistan (Oxfam). Applications for water use permits and formal complaints about pollution (WWI). Data collection by communities (WaterAid).
Evidence generation through action research	Generation of empirical data and evidence on the status of water or environmental services, quality of service delivery and governance in the sector, or against specific indicators.	Community monitoring of pollution control, social audit and participatory budget analysis to identify delivery bottlenecks (WWI). More than six years of high-quality water resource data collected & used as a basis for allocation (WaterAid). Citizen report card study on service satisfaction and participation in budgeting and procurement processes (WIN, Mozambique).
Improved advocacy with greater impact	Collation and channelling of evidence in targeted advocacy, delivered with compelling stories on implications for development, by those affected.	Policy briefs, radio and film, case study bulletins and delivery of community video clips in Tanzania (WWI). Advocacy in local and regional development observatories (WIN, Mozambique). Enhance dialogue and bargaining between water users about priorities for water allocation. (WaterAid)
Enhanced dialogue and bargaining processes	Creation of new, and sustenance of existing spaces and processes for oversight, exchange, deliberation, and decision making between citizens, state agencies and authorities.	CAB meetings to enable relationships between consumers and service providers (Oxfam). Joint Sector Review and engagement in National Water Board in Tanzania; Water Witness Hearings (WWI). Public hearings on water and sanitation services in districts (WIN, Nepal).
Material improvements in water security & services	Tangible changes in the adequacy of water supply and sanitation services e.g. fee collection, coverage and maintenance; or water security status, via pollution control, entitlements, enforcement, and implemented plans.	New and renovated water sources, certain sources designated for domestic use only and others for multiple uses. Reduced conflict between water users. (WaterAid) Fee collection for water consumption has increased by 16% (Tajikistan). Enforcement action initiated at sites; Improved water security status for 160 000 through pollution control, new legal entitlements and conflict resolution (WWI). Improved district water services (WIN, Nepal).
Systems, policy and practice change	Reform, revision or new systems, policies and processes to improve sector integrity, performance, or commitment towards these.	Development of service indicators and civil-society monitoring mechanism on: quality; reliability; quantity; access and tariff (Oxfam). Ministerial review of permitting and pollution enforcement (WWI). Institutionalized consultation with civil society by MoF and Parliamentary budget commission during budget planning and evaluation leading to additional funding allocation to WASH and other social services (WIN, Mozambique). Promoting value of community collected hydrometric data to inform planning for use and new services (WaterAid)
Building of trust and legitimacy	Profile, credibility, legitimacy and support for the sector and sector actors, and buy in to accountability processes, in part through positive feedback cycles of action & response.	Nurturing of credible civil-society presence to drive continual improvement (WWI). Credible evidence and increased dialogue between communities and districts (WaterAid)
Outward learning and uptake	Generation, testing and communication about models and achievements; and outreach to scale and share knowledge and experience in response to demand for uptake.	Models for social accountability tested, documented and shared, and demand from 52 organisations in 14 countries and scaling (WWI). Independent expansion to new areas (WaterAid).

Drawing from this synthesis, social accountability activities on water aim to stimulate a series of processes to deliver improved water security. These include: increasing knowledge and understanding of water related rights, statutory responsibilities, processes and issues, and raising awareness and 'profile' of their importance; support for the capacity and capability¹⁶ of government, civil society and government to implement and act on this knowledge; new engagement between stakeholders to activate rights, express voice, collect data and make decisions; research and collection of data to track this action and related responses to generate evidence; the use of this evidence to advocate for change¹⁷; and the stimulation of dialogue, and bargaining to broker this change. The outcomes sought by these processes – which lead to delivery of the wider goal of water security - are two-fold. First, they seek to deliver material change in the water security status of citizens (vulnerable / poor citizens and communities in particular) through for example: improved water supply and sanitation service delivery, coverage, operation and maintenance; secure legal entitlement or tenure through water rights and use permits; the control of pollution and improved quality; maintenance of water related ecosystems services (i.e. fisheries and wetlands); and management of conflicts, droughts and floods. Secondly, they seek to deliver systemic change through step changes in policies, laws, financing, processes and management organisations, so that water institutions work more effectively 'across the board'. Important related processes include the generation of trust and legitimacy among stakeholders and the accountability mechanisms they create and work through, and a focus on learning to inform adaptive management of accountability work, and its wider uptake and learning.

These change processes are not linear, and have varying entry points, sequencing and emphasis in different contexts of application, with multiple feedback cycles and interactions between each process. Representing these processes as a sequential model or fixed theory of change would therefore provide for doubtful generalisability, so they are therefore represented across repeating cycles of change in Figure 3.

¹⁶ Capability is used alongside capacity to emphasise the 'intention to act'.

¹⁷ Advocacy aims to influence decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions and can include many activities including media campaigns, public speaking, publishing research or briefings and lobbying decision makers. Evidence-based advocacy uses well-researched, relevant and reliable information to support and illustrate recommendations and messages in order to encourage a positive response.

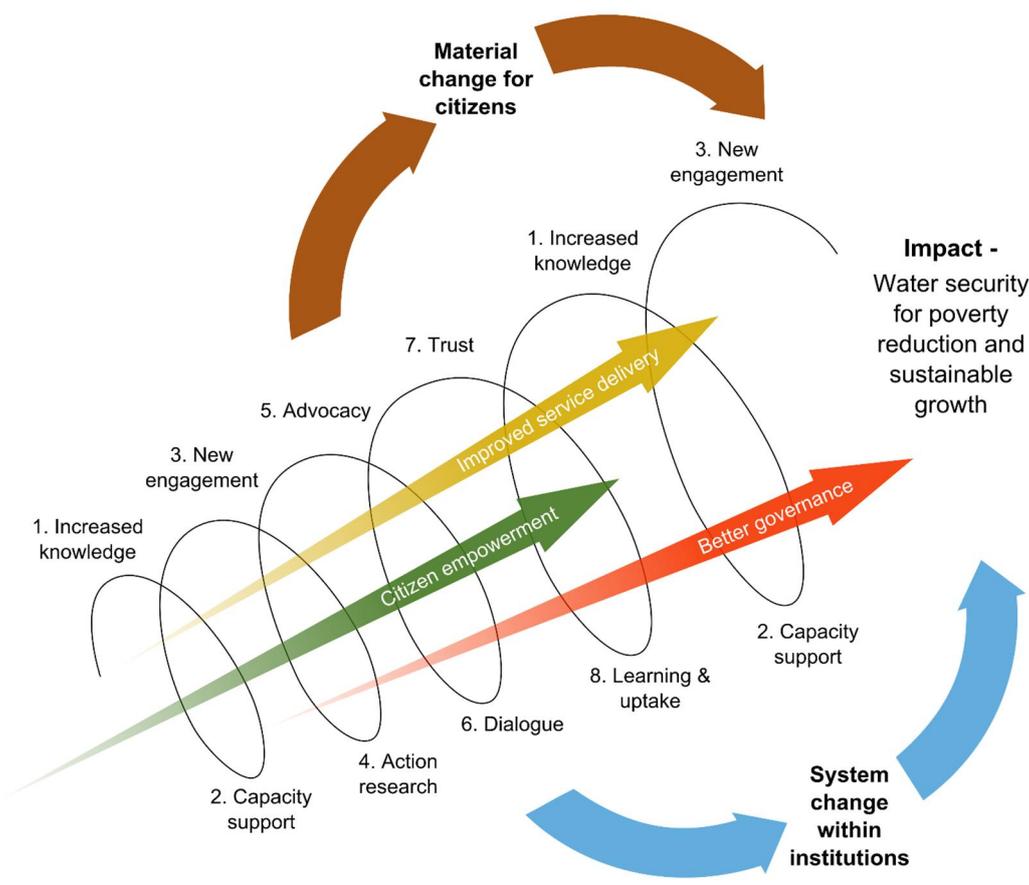


Figure 3. Cycles of change and impact driven by social accountability in the water sector

In each of the examples described, practitioner experience and external evaluation provide insights about the factors which have led to successful outcomes, alongside the challenges these initiatives have faced. Table 3 organises these insights against the emerging lessons from the accountability literature introduced earlier, and this mapping illustrates how these generalizable lessons hold true in water sector applications, how they play out in practical terms. This exercise is particularly useful in highlighting the assumptions and risks associated with undertaking social accountability on water.

Table 3. Do generalizable lessons on social accountability hold true in these water sector examples?

Key insight from existing literature	Example of how this is reflected in water sector case studies
<p>Context is critical: Demand-side</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>Expertise of implementing partners requires development (WIN). High turnover of staff in team created challenges (WWI). Overcoming hesitancy of people to voice concerns (Oxfam). Capacity and agency of communities to engage (WWI). Managing community expectations (WWI, Oxfam). Strong network & convening power of local partners (WIN). Working with competent staff and credible partners (WWI). Strong demand driven focus – working with communities facing acute water insecurity (i.e. strong alignment with interests and agency) (WWI). Strong legitimacy of the heads of communities (mahalas), and leadership of powerful women within the CABs (Oxfam).</p>
<p>Context is critical: Supply-side</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>Obtaining reliable data from government was a challenge (WWI). Capacity and turnover of government staff involved in the programme, and unrealistic demands for allowances (WWI). Due to high turnover in government appointments, initial MOUs with previous district governors were not always honoured (Oxfam). Obtaining reliable data on complaints (Oxfam). Strong focus on capacity development of sector actors and mutual learning by doing was important for success (WWI).</p>

		Using information from local level action research and feedback mechanisms in policy review and sector processes at regional and national level (WIN, Mozambique).
Context is critical: history	✓	Expertise & trust relationships that were built over years (Oxfam). Need to build trust (WIN). Credibility of programme and partners at policy level and local level, and their credibility in technical and legal matters related to public services management were vital (WWI). Working within existing relationships with communities and government (WWI, WIN)
Strategic, aligned and integrated approaches needed	✓	Policy and infrastructure programmes were merged with social accountability to ensure impact and help track and attribute change (Oxfam). Combination of approaches (public hearings, radio programmes, monitoring) (WIN). Use of innovative media and communication tools, alongside traditional engagement (WWI). Alignment of focus with sector priorities (WWI). Building on existing and proven structure: CABs, already working for electricity (WIN). Access to formal national sector dialogue process, and other 'spaces' for state engagement (National Water Board, Sector Working Groups) to feedback results and broker change. (WWI) Strong legitimacy of the process for dialogue and feedback as part of JWRSR (WWI).
Awareness of politics, power and risk of perverse outcomes	✓	Ensuring balanced gender engagement and inclusion of the most vulnerable (WWI). Low availability of women participants (Oxfam). Local ownership and collective oversight and delivery through a coalition of stakeholders (WWI)
Extended interaction needed	✓	Short timescale is challenging, particularly for building trust with communities and tenacious advocacy engagement (WWI). Time required to develop a productive working relationship with communities (WIN, Oxfam, WaterAid).
Challenges for monitoring, evaluation, showing impact	✓	Challenges of MEL in reflecting, attributing and tracking achievements (WIN, WWI, Oxfam). Difficult to track between activities, outcomes and impacts e.g. from a public hearing to increased accountability to how district water projects are implemented (WIN).
Social accountability needs support	✓	Restrictive new laws are closing the space for civil society activity (WWI). Project is understaffed (Oxfam). Funding is not adequate to fully realise benefits (WWI).

Alongside this verification of lessons from the literature, the following new insights emerge to supplement existing knowledge and guide future thinking and action:

Co-ordination and collaboration around social accountability is vital: Feedback from Tanzania and Tajikistan suggests that aligning understanding and effort on the donor and civil society side is crucial but challenging. For example, where several sector NGOs are focused on accountability and advocacy, it is important to gain consensus on change priorities, to pool evidence and collaborate in delivery to avoid confusing messages and 'advocacy overload' for supply-side actors. Similarly, citizen engagement needs coordination to make best use of sector resources: one can easily foresee the chaos of several initiatives working to empower citizens on the same topics in the same places. Whilst the need for collaboration is clear, acting on this need has been challenging, particularly given a tendency for the advocacy agendas and modalities of some international NGOs to mirror their wider organisational aims, rather than country specific needs. All informants emphasized the urgent need for collaboration and coherence on social accountability.

Social accountability interventions need to be adaptive: The ability to respond iteratively to changing political and social contexts, and strategically to the changes and opportunities emerging through the work is an important condition of success. For example, where social accountability efforts to use knowledge or 'truth' to challenge power have no effect – where powerful interests remain resilient to change – it is important to have an escalating 'ladder' of accountability mechanisms to drive change and address grievances, for example via public hearings, media campaigns, public petitions, engagement with MPs, government ombudsmen and via legal or civil actions. An example ladder of accountability mechanisms is provided in Figure 4 below. This insight, that 'the future is unwritten' is particularly important when considering the design and monitoring framework for social accountability interventions.

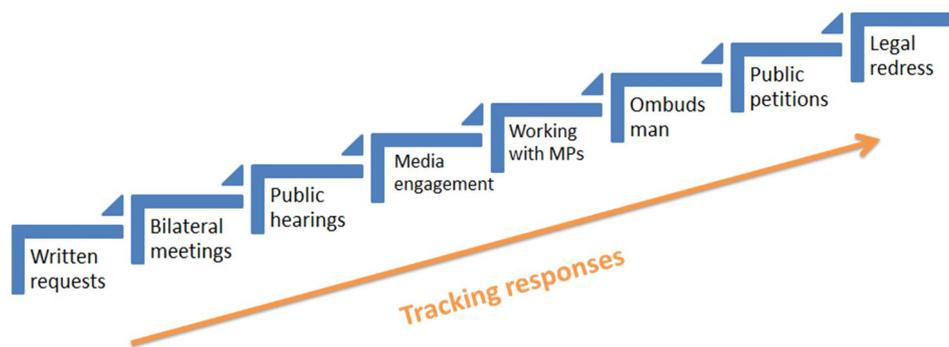


Figure 4. Ladder of escalating accountability engagement (Water Witness International 2016)

Rigorous, objective and constructive approaches: Practitioners also report that rigour in methodological design, delivery and reporting is an important success factor. Social accountability action based on reliable information and which generates unequivocal data provides a much stronger foundation for change, rather than simple polemical, opinion based output, or that which is (or perceived to be) politically driven. The ability to point to verifiable data is a key advantage within advocacy, and for this, a strong and transparent method is needed, supported by rigorously documented – and beneficiary owned - data. Equally, well-informed situation and political economy analyses are required to prepare for and support appropriate design.

The ‘style’ of engagement is also reported to be important. ‘Constructive’ engagement which does not spark outright conflict, or infer or accuse stakeholders of corruption, stupidity or laziness, together with advocacy focusing on realistic and tangible change is important for building relationships of trust and strength, which also enable an appropriate challenge function with CSOs acting as a ‘critical friend’.

The water sector appears well placed to benefit from social accountability approaches: As a concluding insight, drawing on these examples of practice and the literature, it appears that the water sector is well placed to benefit from social accountability approaches. This is supported by the following observations:

- i. **The need is significant.** Ongoing stagnation in water resource management, stubborn obstacles to scaling universal water supply and sanitation, and underwhelming performance of climate change adaptation investment in the sector suggest that the determinants of strong institutional functioning are not yet in place. The assertion that social accountability and the incentives it provides can play an important role in improving this institutional functioning on water is supported by institutional theory as well as the emerging evidence base. Israel (1987) undertook meta-analysis to try to explain why some institutions succeeded, whilst others struggled or failed. His work has since been cited as generating ‘one of the most powerful lessons to have been learned about institutional performance over the last 30 years’ (Teskey 2005). Israel was able to show that some institutional activities have in-built attributes which support relatively stronger performance. For example, building a nuclear power station, aeroplane or road have strong in-built incentives because successful delivery can be easily recognised, signals of success or failure are immediate and cataclysmic, and there are typically fixed blueprints for professionals with clearly bounded mandates to abide by. Other institutional tasks, such as education, managing water or responding to climate change possess different attributes which mean the in-built incentives for successful delivery are much weaker: clear attribution of outcomes to performance is difficult, signals of success or failure can be distant in time or in terms of geography; there is necessarily no solution blueprint – adaptive management is needed; and multiple actors have partial and overlapping responsibilities. In real terms this is reflected in the low political priority afforded to the water sector, where politicians are unable to point to a well-managed aquifer and ask for re-election, and where decisive action can ‘fall through the gaps’ between organisations with overlapping mandates, which can literally ‘blame the weather’ when things go wrong. Israel concluded that these ‘low specificity tasks’ required especially strong public and citizen oversight, supported by informed deliberation in the public domain to compensate, and ramp-up incentives for

performance for the public good. On a conceptual basis, social accountability approaches therefore play an important role in stimulating improved water sector performance.

- ii. **Spaces for social accountability on water already exist:** A success factor seen in both the literature and water sector practice is the availability of the institutional architecture for state-citizen interaction through which grievances can be addressed, and future plans and reforms negotiated. That is, the 'spaces' within which social accountability, and in particular 'diagonal' accountability can be practiced need to already exist or be created. Because of the historical importance placed on participation, multi-stakeholder oversight and co-management mechanisms feature throughout the water sector and its institutions. Examples include the Joint Water Sector dialogue process, multi-stakeholder Basin Water Boards, and National Water Board through which Water Witness are engaging in Tanzania; the Citizen Advisory Boards supported by Oxfam in Tajikistan; and the water user associations, community water councils and water consumer watch entities which exist up and down the sector hierarchy in many countries. There is a clear opportunity for social accountability to inform, strengthen and shape increasingly productive engagement in these pre-existing spaces. The opportunity lies in equipping citizens and civil society with the capability to undertake constructive, rigorous and systematic social accountability monitoring and to use the credible and relevant knowledge generated in these engagement spaces to demand, negotiate and track service delivery and system change. The fact that these spaces pre-exist, and often have statutory basis in law and policy greatly reduces the transaction costs and provides legitimate entry points for potentially rapid impact. There is a related argument regarding sector civil society actors. Many water sector CSOs exist with a wide variety of interests and capacities. Social accountability is one route to harness their potential and stimulate their greater impact – helping to avoid fragmented 'noise' and strengthening targeted 'voice'.
- iii. **It appears to work, and to be good value for money:** Notwithstanding the need for objective and ideally, third-party evaluation of sector interventions on social accountability¹⁸, and the challenges discussed in terms of ME&L, their reported achievements are impressive, particularly considering the relatively low levels of investment involved, and the limited timespan within which results have been generated. Investment in social accountability seems to present a good value for money opportunity for improving water sector performance.

4. Concluding discussion: priorities for realising the potential of social accountability for water security

In conclusion, based on review of existing knowledge and practice it is clear that strategic and contextually appropriate social accountability can play an essential role in ensuring delivery against SDG 6. The evidence from applications in other sectors and the emerging evidence, and experience in the sector suggest that citizen and civil society monitoring and advocacy can lever material improvements in water services, greater levels of integrity, and system change for improved performance across the sector. The need is significant, and in many countries the sector seems particularly well placed to benefit from the approach because of pre-existing, but arguably underutilised spaces for oversight and multi-stakeholder deliberation. Effort and investment should therefore focus on strengthening, scaling, and embedding contextually appropriate social accountability practice.

Figure 4 represents the opportunity for:

- Broadening impact through wider geographical application to increase the number of direct beneficiaries, expand the evidence base and build representation and legitimacy;
- Strengthen vertical impact through making advocacy more powerful and effective in unlocking institutional and system change; and;

¹⁸ At the time of writing only the WWI supported work in Tanzania has been externally evaluated.

- Embed long-term change by supporting citizens and civil society to enact social accountability into the future with the tenacity required to sustain change.

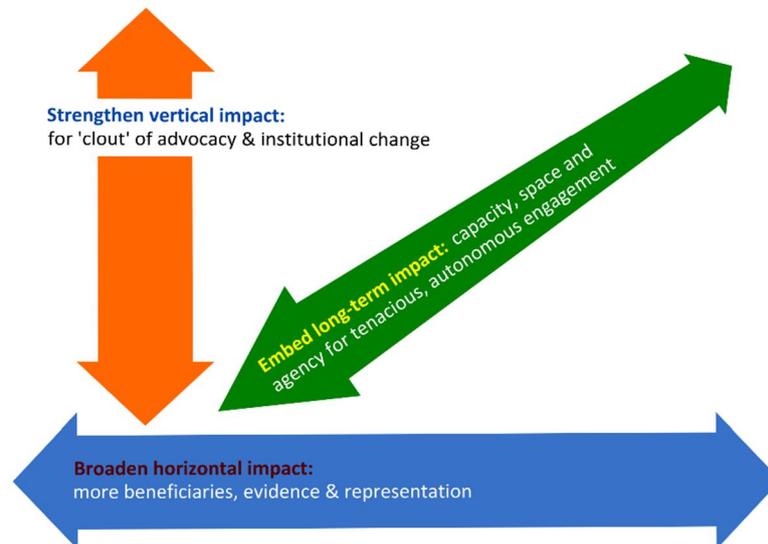


Figure 4. Strengthening, broadening and embedding social accountability practice

This review also flags a series of outstanding questions and controversies which need to be resolved to unlock the significant potential of social accountability for a water secure future. They can be grouped under the following two questions:

I. Social accountability requires new roles and relationships across the sector. What conflicts of interest and challenges do these pose, and how can they be managed?

Shifting support away from direct implementation and infrastructure provision is likely to be uncomfortable for many stakeholders including donors, NGOs, recipient governments and beneficiary communities, many of whom have entrenched bias toward service provision.

- Roles of CSOs and NGOs:** Are traditional service delivery and implementation roles compatible with facilitation of social accountability and citizen oversight? How can conflicts of interests be managed or overcome? Can CSOs be both friends of government and donors as well as outspoken critics?
- The government role:** Social accountability practice presents particular challenges and risks for government actors, and yet to be effective it requires their buy in and co-operation, through for example provision of data and responsiveness to findings. How can a positive response from government be nurtured, and the risks of seeding citizen-state conflict be mitigated? How should governments respond to growing social accountability practice? What are the different roles for different agencies – i.e. central Ministry vs regulator vs utility?
- Communities:** Are communities ready to engage in social accountability, and what constraints or risks might they face, and how can these be managed? How can we ensure that the most vulnerable are represented and have equal voice? Is social accountability simply too dangerous in some places? How can these risks be identified, and what is the appropriate response in these contexts?
- Private sector:** Corporate engagement and water stewardship emphasise a growing role for the private sector in public policy debates and process. Is stewardship compatible and complimentary

with social accountability? what are the potential roles of the private sector in social accountability? What risks do they bring and how can these be managed?

II. What external support is needed to nurture effective social accountability practice in the water sector?

- a. *How can structural support and adequate funding be made available?*** Social accountability work needs to be long-term, flexible and adaptive and yet the funding environment for civil society interlocutors in particular often conspires against this. Funding for social accountability is thin on the ground and is rarely programmatic, often imposing a project timescale against externally set conditions which can undermine the development of human resources, trusting relationships and legitimacy required. Practitioners suggest a minimum operational timescale of support of between five to seven years. Although external funding is often essential its delivery can also stifle, crowd out or delegitimise autonomous local efforts, and this tension needs to be resolved effectively¹⁹. Similarly, the increasingly restrictive and authoritarian laws governing civil-society freedoms and freedom of information, which have significant potential to restrict social accountability work need to be countered.
- b. *How can we ensure that donor support strengthens autonomous social accountability mechanisms rather than crowding out, stifling, or delegitimising local efforts?***
- c. *How can social accountability efforts on water be best coordinated and a community of practice and learning established?*** Social accountability is unlikely to deliver sustained progress through information, technology and transparency initiatives alone, or through focusing only on amplifying the voices of citizens. Efforts to support and nurture social accountability need to be strategic, nurturing both supply and demand side capabilities, and the interfaces between these. They should be constructive in terms of their use of solid evidence and information, focus on actionable outcomes for communities, government and other stakeholders, and prioritise a ‘positive’ style of engagement. There is a need to be clear-eyed about the risks associated with social accountability and advocacy, which is in essence highly political, and can lead to discomfort, tension and challenges within relationships between sector stakeholders. Rather than acting in isolation, social accountability should be integrated with policy advocacy so that lessons are lifted. This is not to imply that all social accountability initiatives need to – or indeed, can - cover all these bases. It will be unusual for those groups with the skills sets and credibility required to engage with communities, to also have the access and leverage required to shape supply-side accountability capacity (which is more likely to fall to consultant Technical Assistance roles). Rather, planning and delivery to activate social accountability for water security at a local, national and international scales is likely to benefit from strong co-ordination, and improved communication between donor, state, civil society and NGO actors to ensure effective collaborative action and learning – and importantly to avoid the chaos of overlapping initiatives. Learning and sharing of knowledge appear to be vital components, in particular there is a need to learn how social accountability approaches can be adapted across contexts.
- d. *How can monitoring and evaluation be improved to untangle attribution, impact and support learning for social accountability?*** As has been discussed, despite its significance, social accountability does not lend itself to simple enumeration using tradition logical framework approaches to monitoring and evaluation. Neither is attributing impact and tracing causality within ‘long and twisting rivers of change’ easy or possible. For example: the determinants of citizen or

¹⁹ For example, an international challenge fund arrangement with structural support and ring-fenced funding for SAcc on water could be an appropriate response.

community water security are multifaceted and unlikely to be cemented through the work of a single initiative or action; and it is a rare policy maker who would claim, or openly admit that decisions have been influenced by civil-society driven initiatives. These challenges for MEL have important implications for lesson learning, legitimacy and the securing of long term support – especially in the age of results based aid. A priority challenge therefore is to modify the way we think about and construct MEL around social accountability, and articulate its benefits. Drawing from approaches which track ‘most significant change’ and which prioritise learning lessons and testing assumptions with those involved hold potential here, along with monitoring against the type of ‘SMART’ rules which monitor and support appropriate process rather than attempting to pin down distant change. Greater emphasis on learning is needed across the board to address uncertainties and better understand connections, for example between social accountability interventions and the empowerment of women and girls.

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Appendix 1. Social accountability in the water sector: examples and practitioner insights from Tanzania, Burkina Faso, and Tajikistan

	Water Witness International et al. Tanzania	WaterAid in Burkina Faso	Oxfam et al. Tajikistan
Case overview	<p>Fair Water Futures Programme in Tanzania (Uhakika wa Maji in Swahili) uses citizen monitoring, budget tracking and evidence based advocacy to improve community water security and drive system change.</p> <p>The work is delivered in partnership with Shahidi wa Maji, TaWaSaNet, the Ministry of Water, the National Environment Management Council and a wide stakeholder advisory committee with funding from a DFID Innovation Grant.</p>	<p>The Securing Water Resources Approach in Burkina Faso develops capacity for communities to monitor water resources and highlight threats to their water security. Evidence from monitoring is used to manage these threats and call on authorities to provide assistance, to ensure water management decisions are enforced, and services are improved.</p> <p>The work is delivered by WaterAid in partnership with DACUPA, a local NGO, and with District Authorities, and DEIE, the national body responsible for monitoring water resources.</p>	<p>Social Accountability in the water sector project in Tajikistan (TWISA) through performance monitoring of water supply and sanitation service providers, to ensure that women's needs and rights are prioritised and to develop service quality indicators in the sector.</p> <p>This work is delivered directly by Oxfam in collaboration with its main partner, the Consumer Union and it is funded by GPSA (World Bank). Memorandum of Understanding signed with district governors, and official support from Head of MK, the state agency responsible for water supply and sanitation.</p>
Aims of the work	<p>To deliver improved water security for 240 000 vulnerable people through activation of water laws and institutions; diagnose systemic barriers to improved sector functioning and generate and target compelling advocacy to address these.</p> <p>Document and share methodology and lessons emerging internationally.</p>	<p>Deliver improved water security by ensuring communities are able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree allocations of scarce supplies • Use monitoring data for early warning of drought. • Enforce protection of water catchments • Ration during scarcity • Temporary restriction of certain uses • Demand better WASH services from responsible authorities • Also to strengthen links between communities and authorities to be able to call for assistance at times of drought. 	<p>Increased engagement from the beneficiary populations in Tajikistan in monitoring the performance of the water supply and sanitation subsector in targeted districts with the following aims:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knowledge and learning on gender mainstreaming needs in the subsector. 2. Development of new service performance indicators, to be endorsed at the national level. 3. Civil society-based monitoring mechanism, opening the way for citizens' participation. 4. Raising awareness of consumer's rights, responsibilities and opportunities to participate.
Impact and achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 269 000 reached with action to improve water security at <£1/person. • Improved water security delivered for 160 000 at £0.79 /person. • Diagnoses of water governance challenges, and constructive recommendations in the public domain. • New enforcement action initiated at sites. • Ministerial review of permitting and pollution enforcement. • Credible civil-society presence to drive continual improvement in the long-term. • Raised public and political profile of the sector. • New model for social accountability tested, documented and shared: demand from 52 organisations in 14 countries. • Scaling in Zambia underway. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved WASH services for communities for xxx people. • More than six years of high-quality water resource data collected & used as a basis for allocation and advocacy • Independent expansion to new areas • High level of local government engagement • Increased climate resilience • Effective early warning • Advocacy tool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Advisory Boards (CABs) were created to monitor drinking water and sanitation service provision in 5 target districts with tangible improvements in operations, leadership, responsiveness to consumers' requests and complaints. • Trust and high level support for the approach. • Consumers understand their rights and responsibilities and engage with CABs. • Women well represented and vocal in CABs. • New relationships between consumers and service providers, with common goals established and incentives to fix problems. • Baseline study of existing laws and regulations and arrangements for service performance monitoring. • Development of the service performance indicators and civil-society monitoring mechanism. • Development of gender sensitive civil society based monitoring framework (CBM).

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fee collection for water consumption has increased by 16%.
Factors contributing to success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with competent staff and credible partners with existing relationships with communities and government. • Access to formal national sector dialogue process, and other 'spaces' for state engagement (National Water Board, Sector Working Groups) to feedback results and broker change. • Strong demand driven focus – working with communities facing acute water insecurity. • Rigorous and objective documentation including through participatory analysis. • Local ownership and collective oversight and delivery through a coalition of stakeholders • Constructive advocacy focusing on tangible and targeted change, and a strong but challenging relationship with government. • Ability to adapt approach and methods to match changing context. • Sophisticated understanding of institutional landscape, sector challenges, political economy and alignment with sector priorities. • Use of innovative media and communication tools. • Strong focus on capacity development of sector actors and mutual learning by doing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full engagement of national and regional actors from early stage • Engagement of meteorological department to ensure data is credible • Thorough participatory assessment of threats to water resources at early stage for common understanding of what the problems are. • Willingness of farmers and community members to collect water resource data • Mastery of monitoring and analysis techniques gives community members confidence and credibility for advocacy • Incentives for community monitors include status as well as the recognition that data is useful for farming and water use planning. • Strong leadership and some level of literacy is important here. • Credibility of WaterAid with national and district actors in Burkina Faso. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building on existing and proven structure: CABs, already working for electricity. • Strong and lengthy preparation of the enabling environment at both local and national level, thanks to a good understanding of key stakeholders, their incentives, and the political economy of the water sector in Tajikistan, ever since the Soviet era. • Strong legitimacy of the heads of communities (mahalas), and leadership of powerful women within the CABs. • Combination of Oxfam's role at the national level, thanks to the credibility of TajWSS programme at policy level and the Consumer Union's existing work at the local level, and their credibility in technical and legal matters related to public services management.
Main challenges faced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability and high turnover of staff in team and partner organisations. • Capacity and agency of communities to engage, and managing community expectations. • Challenges of MEL in reflecting, attributing and tracking achievements. • Short timescale and limited budget for delivery – particularly for building trust with communities and tenacious advocacy engagement. • Closing space for civil society activity. • Ensuring balanced gender engagement and inclusion of poorest community members. • Some challenges in coordinating coherent engagement with other sector NGOs – INGOs not easy to work with. • Obtaining reliable data from government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor advocacy skills of agency staff and communities as the programme has been led by technical specialists in water security with less experience in governance and advocacy. • It is difficult to incentivise communities to continue monitoring over a long period. • External support is needed to analyse multi-year trends in the data • Lack of literacy and understanding of data and the implications in communities and authorities especially at local level. • Assuring the quality of WASH services that are provided and having the confidence and knowledge to challenge what is provided by government. • Making sure the data from communities is properly used by national systems to monitor trends in groundwater. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Obtaining reliable data on complaints. - Low availability of women participants in some areas of the project. - Time required to develop a productive working relationship with communities. - Managing community expectations - many community members and service providers still strongly insist on hardware infrastructure. - Building trust. Due to revolving nature of government appointments, initial MOUs with previous district governors may not always be honoured by incoming new person. - Securing a long term commitment from the members of the Working Group, and coordination of donors. - Project is understaffed visa vie the scope of work and ambitions of the project. - Many other actors are directly involved in water provision and accountability such as WB directly, UNDP - overcame by working closely with them since the beginning and acknowledging specific areas of interventions and strengths.

