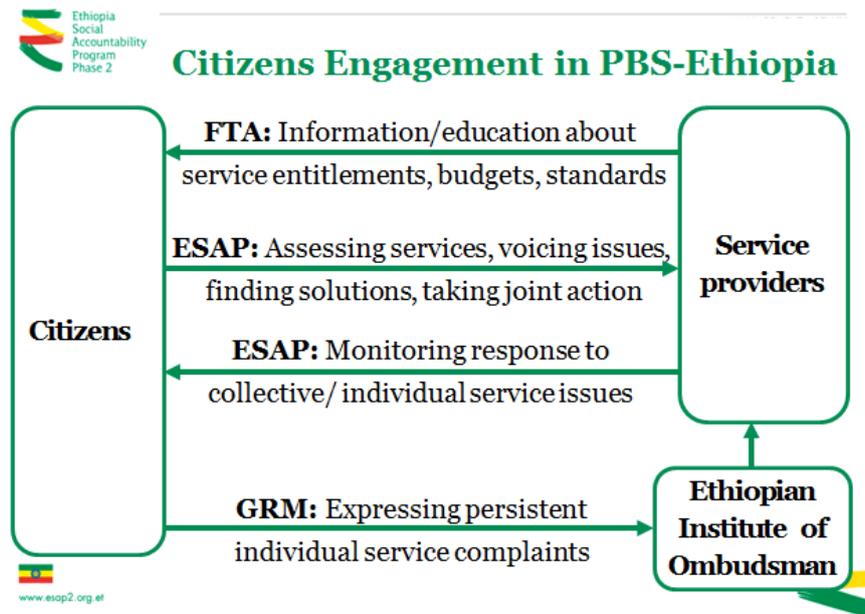## Handout: Citizen Engagement for improved basic services in Ethiopia

The Ethiopia Social Accountability Program, or ESAP2, is a multi-donor trust fund for grant making and capacity development. It is part of the Citizens Engagement component of a broader government program known as PBS - Promoting Basic Services.

This slide illustrates the complementarity between the 3 programs under the Citizens' Engagement component of PBS: Financial Transparency and Accountability (FTA), ESAP2 and Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM).

- FTA develops local government capacity to make service standards, plans and budgets available to citizens, and educates citizens on budget literacy.
- ESAP enables Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to work with citizens to assess the service situation based on the information made available by their local government.
- ESAP enables CSOs to monitor the response of service providers to service issues raised by citizens.
- GRM handles individual grievances or grievances of specific groups of service users, which are not satisfactorily handled by service providers.

FTA already covers all districts in the country, and there is a collaborative practice between FTA and ESAP in the districts where ESAP operates. The development of GRM has just started.

The 49 grantees of ESAP2 each work on two year projects in 3 to 5 districts. Some partners work with sub-grantees, so a total of 107 Ethiopian organisations are currently facilitating social accountability in 5 basic public service sectors, covering about 30 % of all districts in the country, across all 11 diverse regions of the country.

We will present three key challenges, and what we have done in the ESAP2 Capacity Development and Training team to overcome these.

Our first challenge is related to an initial focus on **social accountability Tools**, which made it difficult for our partners to make a good start with their two year project.

Social accountability starts with mobilisation and awareness raising of citizens and service providers, and it is critical to get the right people on board and to begin to build commitment with key stakeholders:

- Citizens, with an eye for diversity in terms of social and vulnerable groups
- Local leaders and their community based organisations
- Local government and their service providers
- Elected councillors

We quickly discovered that more guidance was needed to making a good start – and a good finish for that matter: working towards sustainability of Social Accountability, but more about that later.

Two things happened: we gradually designed a social accountability process, and we developed thoughts on how the SA tools might be combined over time

As this slide shows, the initial focus on SA tools was only one piece of the SA process puzzle. For instance, partners would ask us how to conduct and interface meeting, and what they would do after the interface meeting when the tool was "done".

With the second batch of 19 grantees, we have introduced the notion that **SA is a process**:

- The SA process starts with access to information about service standards, plans and budgets; partners make sure that citizens have the confidence and build the relationships that help them to ask for information (Note that FTA helps government to provide such information, as we have seen in the first slide)
- Based on this information citizens can assess the service situation compared to the standard/plan/budget; partners enable service users and providers to use SA tools to assess the service situation from various perspectives (e.g. vulnerable groups may have different needs) – the tools help to build an evidence base of needs and priorities of citizens

- When the assessment is complete, interface meetings are organised to facilitate a dialogue about the service situation, to identify local solutions, and to agree among all stakeholders on joint actions (= reform agenda)
- A Joint Action Plan is implemented as agreed between users, providers and woreda officials during the interface meeting
- Citizens then monitor the improvements and when required start the SA process again.

The SA process includes an overview of **roles of various stakeholders** at each step of the process (See: table at the end of the handout)

We noticed that some of our partners do not fully understand the different roles and responsibilities of stakeholders and their accountability relationships. In a nutshell:

- The service standards, budgets and plans are approved by the district council, usually within a framework set by Regional or Federal parliament.
- Based on this approval, the district administration and sectors execute plans and deliver services. The district administration delegates day-to-day implementation to service providers (schools, clinics etc).
- Citizens also have responsibilities such as paying fees where these are due, or reporting problems, e.g. when the water system has stopped functioning properly, or when a teacher is not showing up at school.

Because service delivery is delegated, the first step in social accountability is from citizens to the (sub-district level) service providers, like teachers, health and agricultural extension workers, water supply and road maintenance committees. Are they delivering services as approved?

In case the service issue cannot be resolved at that level, the second step is to the district administration/sectors. Are they delegating as approved? Are they making sure that service providers can do a good job, by providing approved resources and support?

With social accountability in Ethiopia, citizens are supported to hold service providers accountable, and to go up to the district if needed.

The district councils (local parliament) will control if government executes the standards and plans as per what was approved. The council can do this through a direct link with the citizens, for instance by participating in the social accountability process: where citizens hold service providers to account.

We can see this tri-partite structure back in the composition of the SA Committee. More about this committee in a moment.

ESAP2 partners, civil society organisation, aim to make these accountability relationships functional through education and process facilitation.

Some of the challenges noted in this regard are:
•   High government official turnover
•   Some political leaders lack commitment and have their own priorities

Next to designing the social accountability process, and working out the roles of each stakeholders, we also had a closer look at **how the SA tools were used** by our partners.

We noticed that most of our partners had selected Community Score Card and Participatory Planning and Budgeting. Partners found that our Gender Responsive Budgeting tool was not very practical, and we were discussing if they could use GRB principles to enrich the PPB process. Later, when we were developing the PETS tool, we realized that it could be seen as a tool with which citizens could monitor service improvements or budget allocations that were agreed earlier on in the SA process when the CSC or Citizen Report Card survey was used. PETS can of course be used for assessment, but this is usually not where CSO's and citizens in Ethiopia choose to start the SA process.

These findings inspired us to think about the tools in a slightly different manner:

•   There are tools to **assess** the services (e.g. CSC and CRC), and
•   there are tools to **influence** government processes through which services are planned/budgeted and executed (PPB, GRB). If citizens want to be influential, they best plan their SA interventions in line with the government budget process.
•   And there are tools that help to **monitor** service improvements, for instance:

    •   Community mapping can be used to understand and monitor the service situation
    •   Social audit can be used to monitor citizen satisfaction with the improvements
    •   PETS can be used to monitor if agreed budgets are executed as intended; or if books and medicines reach as intended.

One partner explained it as follows: through the community score card people are educated about their rights as well as their responsibilities. When they start considering the mobilisation of resources for service improvements, it occurs to them that they need to understand the sector budget. When issues are beyond the community resources to deal with, they can ask for future assistance from the Woreda budget. The participatory planning and budgeting tool facilitates this process.

Our second challenge is the contextualized identification of **vulnerable groups** and their inclusion in the SA process.

We promote inclusion of vulnerable groups in the SA process. The challenge was that the concept of vulnerability (women, youth, elders, people living with HIV-AIDS or with

disability) was not always well contextualized to the situation in the district, or the sector. For instance, food insecure households were not identified as a specific vulnerable group in agriculture. Also, partners felt they had to target PLWHA or physically challenged people even-though they had no contextualised understanding of why this would be important. Thus we could find PLWHA were participating in the assessment of the agricultural sector, but they were not users of agriculture services.

Related to this was the empowerment of vulnerable groups and their involvement in the SA committee, the tri-partite structure we briefly hinted at in a previous slide. In Ethiopia, SA is driven by the government, so local government wants to be firmly represented in the SAC. They see it as part and parcel of the good governance agenda of the federal government. Yet it is important that various social and vulnerable groups are in the majority, otherwise the whole idea of _Social_ Accountability is lost. However, due to pressure of local government to be on the committee, and also other considerations, for instance with local government on the SAC the SA process can be sustained; or citizens find it difficult to attend frequent, far away meetings in the district capital; a situation had grown were most SA committees at district level were either dominated or complete composed of government staff.

This issue was on top of our first learning agenda last February. Under the slogan: "citizens in the driver's seat". We are pleased to report that the composition of SACs has drastically changed since then.

What is the SAC? The SAC facilitates the SA process, with support from our partners for a period of two years. The SAC is a tri-partite structure that brings together representatives of citizens in various social and vulnerable groups, service providers (and their administrators) and elected council members.

Why not just citizens in the SAC, you may wonder? In the pilot phase of ESAP1, the tri-partite composition proved to enable trust building and to facilitate dialogue from the start of the SA process.

Apart from us making majority citizen membership a major point during the learning benchmark meetings, two things appear to have facilitated the drastic change away from government domination in the SAC. First of all, most projects were at the interface meeting stage, and this seemed a good time to simply elected a new SAC to monitor service improvement agreements. Secondly, to convince the local government that citizens should be in the majority, the partners explained that an all government SAC looks like an internal accountability mechanisms, and misses the point of citizens holding government to account. Local government is beginning to like social accountability, because it solves local service problems and mobilizes local resources like never before. They understand it better now, some time into the process.

So, now there is a better representation of diverse social and vulnerable groups, not just during the tool application, and in the sub-district SAC, but also also in the district level SA Committee.

Our third challenge is the **scaling and sustainability** of the SA process and the SAC

Partners work in 3 kebeles (sub-districts) per district, but there are actually many more sub-districts per district, up to 25 or more. We encourage partners to disseminate SA messages beyond these 3 kebeles, but there is little experience on how to do this well. There is also little evidence to suggest that in Ethiopia citizens will take up an SA process on their own. So one of the questions is how the district SAC can gradually loop other Kebeles into the SA process. Can this be driven by service providers?

The SAC is to be sustained from local resources – Indeed, there are SACs from the pilot phase that are still functioning without external support, but we must further study these cases to understand the conditions in which this can happen.

Moreover, sustaining the SAC locally points in the direction of mainstreaming SA processes into existing structures and organisations (e.g. ICBPP, and mass based organisation having representation in the SA process as part of their duties). We are building an action-research agenda to support SA mainstreaming.

There is also a longer term dimension to sustainability. The attitudinal changes that we are aiming for are so great that it will require many, many years of awareness raising and process facilitation in one way or the other before SA can become a way of life. In Indonesia for instance, it took 15 years to develop and sustain mature dialogue capacities between citizens and their local government. Such a long term investment requires a sustained commitment from government to keep investing in civil society facilitation of awareness and dialogues.

We have four key strategies to build commitment for this, which can be summarized as follows:

- **Social Media and other media:** although citizens have very limited access to Social Media, most CSOs and Government offices do have such access. We use social media to actively target this group with a Facebook page - close to 2000 Ethiopian followers, many of which are young female professionals. We have also trained interested partners in the use of Participatory Video (PV) – so that there is access to examples of voice and service improvements. The PVs are available on the ESAP2 YouTube Channel. The PVs are also used to support community dialogues, and to document/monitor project progress. We are also on Twitter, but not yet very active. We feel twitter will become more interesting once a wider, academic and NGO audience starts to take an interest in our work. Next to this we produce a quarterly newsletter in English and Amhara (hard and soft), which you can subscribe to on our website.
- **Peer learning**, not just among the CSOs that facilitate the process and their peers in civil society, but also among the SACs. Our main activity is bi-annual learning benchmarks in which project progress and results are compared to trigger learning. We are now decentralising these events to regions, so that representatives from SAC and interested NGOs can participate.
- **Networks and hubs:** The MA is currently providing all capacity development and training support, but some of our partners are in a position to develop capacities of others, and to mainstream SA in their other projects. For the next phase, we envisage that the MA would shift roles to "capacitate the capacity developers" / and to structure learning and research agendas (again possibly in collaboration with one or more local partners). We are already working towards that (e.g. Social Network Analysis report).
- **Widening the space** is all about networking, and about feeding people and organisations that can influence the political process, such as:

  - Partners presenting good practices/results at the local NGO-GO forums
  - Keeping our Steering Committee (chaired by the State Minister of MOFED, and with participants from CSO-networks and donors) actively informed
  - Debriefing regional BOFEDs at every monitoring trip – inviting them to our learning benchmarks, linking actively with FTA, etc.
  - Coordination and sharing with other Civil Society grant makers, and liaising with the donor groups such as the Transparency and Accountability Group – looking for opportunities to mainstream social accountability.

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- We have also planned a national conference next year to reach the federal sector ministries.

Does the social accountability process lead to service improvements?

Although it is early days, from the Joint Action Plans in 80 districts we can distill a number of service improvements results, which are summarized here in three bullets.

- Citizens are beginning to get better services as per their priorities – this includes being treated with dignity eventhough they are poor
- Citizens are contributing to make this happen – they invest with their own resources and labour to get the services they want
- Local Governments are beginning to use existing resources more effectively – they execute budgets without delay, and re-allocate resources to where the needs are highest

Below some sector specific examples are provided of service improvements that have already been realized although the projects are still ongoing.

Education sector – Examples of service improvements:

- **Community** – financial, material and labor contributions for toilet blocks (boys and girls), new class rooms, teacher and student shelters/dining rooms, and school fencing

- **Service providers/local government** –
  – hiring teachers as per standard/budget provisions;
  – pay for class room roofing;
  – lobby private sector to level school grounds;
  – improve water supply;
  – books out of the store rooms into the schools

Health sector – Examples of service improvements:

- **Community** – keep villages clean
- **NGO** - allocate resources to equip health center
- **Service providers/local government** –
  – treat patients with respect, e.g. confidentiality for women and youth using FP/RH services
  – Clean delivery rooms;
  – Increased drugs budget; availability of drugs;
  – Reduced staff turn-over; new staff appointed (including guards and cleaners);
  – Expansion of the health centers to admit more in- patients

Rural Roads sector:

- **Community** – financial and labor contributions to improve roads (e.g. 132,000 ETB, 238 people); monitor construction of new roads according to the standard
- **Local government:** make better, sustainable investments and achieve more kms in cooperation with SAC and community (e.g. URRAP resources reallocated); assign engineers to work with community on road maintenance

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Annex: Key functions and stakeholder roles in the Social Accountability process

Key function	Citizens	Service providers	Sector Bureaus	Councils	SA experts[1]
Access to information about service standards, targets and budgets	Ask for information and know where to go	Provide information with the aim to reach as many citizens as possible	Develop standards, targets, and budget, taking specific citizen needs into account	Approve sector plans and budgets	Raise stakeholder awareness, and facilitate citizen participation in planning and budgeting processes
Survey the status of the service: **Discuss specific needs of vulnerable groups**	Mobilise citizens, vulnerable groups , to share needs and views about service quality	Share service data and obstacles to providing quality service	Participate to develop understanding of service situation	Participate to develop understanding of citizen needs and views	Provide technical assistance to facilitate SA Committee establishment, to mobilizing vulnerable groups and use SA tools
Interface meetings citizens – service providers, including joint action planning	Mobilise citizens, share and discuss evidence, agree and commit to actions	Consider and discuss the evidence, agree and commit to actions	Confirm sector support for the agreed actions	Ensure that the evidence is considered by the service providers and sectors	Support the SA committee to facilitate the interface meetings, to involve all stakeholders, to present the evidence, to come to agreement about actions
Monitoring improvements	SA committee conducts rapid assessments	Report on joint action plan to SA committee and Sectors	Supervise the implementation of the joint action plan	Participate in rapid assessments, or inquire about the results thereof	Respond to requests for consultancy support from the stakeholders

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[1] In the long run, SA experts play a role where local capacity is insufficient, and where research and innovation may be needed.

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