

# Engaging with Local Authorities

## What is it?

In the context of the SDGs, local authorities are those individuals and institutions who are accountable for the delivery of the goals at the local level. Local authorities vary by context, but in general include a combination of elected and appointed officials, civil servants, and service providers.

**1. Elected officials** include mayors, local councils, committees and boards, and are typically elected by a local constituency. These officials provide overall oversight for local development priorities. For example, mayors hold civil servants accountable and can help ensure that budgets are matched to community priorities (SDG targets 16.6, 16.7).

**2. Appointed officials** vary by context but are typically appointed by elected officials to deliver on priorities defined by the current government. These officials may include district education or health officers, finance officers, police chiefs and prosecutors. For example, a police chief might have special responsibility to deliver on a government's promise to ensure children are safe from violence (SDG target 16.2).

**3. Civil servants** are typically hired for their technical expertise; their jobs endure from one government to the next. Civil servants include health, education or water and sanitation experts at district or subdistrict offices and are accountable for ensuring the technical quality of service delivery. For example, a district water and sanitation officer might be accountable for ensuring that water points and sewage systems meet government standards (SDG target 6).

**4. Service providers** are frequently considered the “front line” of the SDG because they provide the services that are crucial to the delivery of the SDGs. For example, teachers are accountable for delivering quality education in order to achieve SDG 4; doctors and nurses are accountable for delivering quality health care to advance SDG 3; and agricultural extension workers are accountable for helping farmers produce enough nutritious food to help meet SDG 2.

## Why is it important?

In many ways, local authorities are the touchstone of SDG accountability because they provide the frontline basic services required for development and have direct contact with the very people the SDGs are meant to serve. Their actions help to make the SDGs real in the lives of communities.

However, even though local authorities might be closest to communities, their power to make decisions about local laws, resources and services that advance the SDGs will largely depend upon the degree to which a country has decentralized, the political will at the centre and the effectiveness of intergovernmental financial transfers. In more highly decentralized contexts, local authorities may have more discretion and resources, depending on whether resources support delineated service functions and responsibilities, which can prove challenging in many countries. This can be crucial to contextualizing the SDGs and ensuring their accountable delivery. In centralized contexts, local authorities play an important role in ensuring that laws and services are administered in ways that fulfil centrally set policies

and budgets with a high degree of quality. However, the optimal mix of decentralization and centralization for effective local service delivery is still a matter of experimentation in many countries, as well as international research and debate.

As CSOs and communities consider how best to engage with local authorities, it is important to analyse in detail what the decentralized governance arrangements are, where service responsibilities lie, what budget supports these functions and whether that budget is received or not. Specifically, which government entity is responsible for what service function and do they have the resources to deliver it? These are key questions for CSOs to understand in their respective countries in order to foster participatory governance, which has been demonstrated to impact service delivery, and thus, achieve the SDGs.

## How can it be used?

CSOs can engage with, and facilitate communities to directly connect to, local authorities to ensure that the SDGs actually deliver on the ground for communities. Towards this end, CSOs should think critically about the spaces that exist for engagement.

**1. Engage local authorities in “formal” or “invited” spaces** – “Formal” or “invited” spaces, are administered by the government and open to public participation. Elections are the most common example of “invited” spaces for public participation. Elections carry consequences for elected and appointed government officials who do not perform their duties accountably. But between elections, governments often open spaces for input by communities and civil society which can open opportunities to ensure the accountable delivery of the SDGs. For example, CSOs and communities can:

**a. Participate in city, village, and town council meetings** – These meetings often include space in agendas for public comment. Organized communities and civil society groups can use these meetings to highlight ways that SDG-related services or laws could be more accountably delivered.

**b. Participate in service-specific meetings** – Convened by

local authorities, these include “School Management Committees,” “Village Health Committees,” “WASH committees,” and “Child Protection Committees,” and can offer important opportunities for communities and CSOs to engage directly with service providers about the detailed operations of services, many of which make or break the delivery of the SDGs.

**c. Facilitate community access to grievance redress mechanisms or “GRMs”** – GRMs offer opportunities for communities to report (sometimes anonymously) problems with service delivery by post, telephone, or internet so that local governments can take action. Sometimes, complaints must be publicly disclosed so that the CSOs and the broader public can more easily identify patterns that require systemic reform.

**d. Support or advocate for participatory budgeting mechanisms** – These can provide communities and civil society with opportunities to help define how discretionary local resources are spent. These meetings can help prioritize expenditures and include opportunities to ensure that they are accountably spent.

**2. Engage local authorities in “informal” or “claimed” spaces** – “Informal” or “claimed” spaces are opportunities for dialogue that are brokered by civil society or communities rather than government. Some of the most promising approaches for engaging local authorities are termed “social accountability” approaches.<sup>54</sup> These approaches typically serve to gather crucial evidence about local level service delivery and mobilize the political power of local communities to press local authorities for improvements. For example, CSOs and communities can:

**a. Conduct social audits**, by which communities and CSOs measure the degree to which services have the staff and inputs required under local law. For example: social audits of schools might measure whether teacher-pupil ratios match national policy; and social audits of water services might measure whether water points are built to standards defined under national policy.

**b. Facilitate community score cards** – This tool allows focus groups – including marginalized groups – to measure the degree to which services are meeting performance criteria that are defined by communities

### Sample SDG Scorecard Review Framework<sup>55</sup>

1. No Policy/Plan	2. Initial planning phase	3. Plans or actions started	4. Delivery Underway	5. Successful Implementation
a) No/weak Policy/legal framework available	Policy/legal framework in planning phase	Some Policy/legal framework available	Policy/legal framework agreed	Strong Policy/legal framework in use
b) No/weak plans and strategies exist	Plans & strategies in planning stage	Some Plans and strategies exist	Plans & strategies agreed	Strong Plans and strategies exist
c) No/weak Agencies with clear mandate available	Agencies planning their engagement	Some Agencies with clear mandate available	Agencies beginning to develop their implementation	Strong Agencies available with clear mandate
d) No/weak implementation of policies, plans and strategies on regular basis	Implementation of policies, plans and strategies in planning phase	Some implementation of policies, plans and strategies on irregular basis	Implementation of policies, plans and strategies has started across all areas	Strong Agencies available with clear mandate

themselves. For example, communities and CSOs might measure their satisfaction with their last experience with a clinic or agricultural extension service, or investigate how a service is performing for a particularly marginalized group. These results correspond directly to SDG indicator 16.6.2.

**c. Conduct citizen report cards** –These participatory local level surveys are designed to help clarify community opinions about certain types of service delivery.

**d. Convene “interface meetings”** –The evidence from score cards, social audits, or citizen report cards can serve as the basis for dialogue and the creation of an

action plan to improve services. Interface meetings are typically driven by communities themselves and demonstrate collective political power in ways that researcher-driven evidence may not.

When deployed strategically, the social accountability approaches described above can lead to important impact on development outcomes at the local level.<sup>56</sup> In addition, CSOs sometimes work together to monitor services across whole regions, aggregate evidence, and press for more systemic change.<sup>57</sup> This type of “vertical integration” is particularly important for creating the kind of grassroots-to-global accountability needed in the context of the SDGs.<sup>58</sup>

### Key Resources:

- **World Bank Sourcebook: 21 Social Accountability Tools** provides detailed implementation instructions for the use of social accountability tools to engage local authorities. See: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/513571468059674130/pdf/718040WP00PUBL0ebook0English0Final0.pdf>
- **CARE Community Score Card** serves as the basis of much of the social accountability work of the past two decades. See: [https://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/FP-2013-CARE\\_CommunityScoreCardToolkit.pdf](https://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/FP-2013-CARE_CommunityScoreCardToolkit.pdf)
- **Citizen Voice and Action: World Vision’s Approach to Social Accountability**, produced by World Vision, contextualizes and applies its social accountability approach in more than 40 countries with positive results. See: [https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/CVA\\_Field\\_Guide\\_0.pdf](https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/CVA_Field_Guide_0.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> See full scorecard and other resources for engaging with local authorities at <https://action4sd.org/>

<sup>56</sup> Fox, Jonathan A. (2015). Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say? <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X15000704>

<sup>57</sup> Fox, Jonathan A. et al (2016). Doing accountability differently: A proposal for the vertical integration of civil society monitoring and advocacy. <https://www.u4.no/publications/doing-accountability-differently-a-proposal-for-the-vertical-integration-of-civil-society-monitoring-and-advocacy.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> World Vision (2015). Grassroots to Global Policy Report: Seven Steps to Citizen-Driven Accountability for the Sustainable Development Goals. [https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Grassroots%20to%20Global\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Grassroots%20to%20Global_Report_FINAL.pdf)

- **The Engine Room Guide to Participatory Budgeting** reflects 30 years of practice of participatory budgeting from around the world. See: <https://library.theengineroom.org/participatory-budgeting/>
- **The Global Partnership for Social Accountability** is a multi-donor trust fund and learning hub dedicated to supporting engagement between CSOs and local governments through social accountability. The GPSA hosts learning events, publishes a newsletter, and convenes an annual forum for practitioners. See: <https://www.thegpsa.org/>
- The **Community of Practitioners on Accountability and Social Action in Health** share an interest and passion for the field of community monitoring for accountability in health. See: <https://www.copasah.net/>
- **Accountability Research Centre** collaborates with partners to contribute to global thinking on how to improve public accountability and build more inclusive societies. Includes a regular newsletter and a focus on local level accountability. See: <https://accountabilityresearch.org/about/>
- The World Bank's **Open Knowledge Repository** provides more information about grievance redress mechanisms. See: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/20117>
- **Participatory Budgeting**, a report from the World Bank's Public Sector Governance and Accountability Series, advances provides tools and lessons from practices in improving the efficiency and equity of public services provision and strengthening institutions of accountability in governance. See: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/PSGLP/Resources/ParticipatoryBudgeting.pdf>
- Learn more about social audits in the Centre for Good Governance's report, **Social Audits: A Toolkit – A Guide for Performance Improvement and Outcome Measurement**. See: <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/cgg/unpan023752.pdf>
- Learn more about how to develop effective community scorecards in GAC in Projects report, **How-to Notes – Rapid Feedback: The Role of Community Scorecards in Improving Service Delivery**. See: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/462221468333561977/pdf/884970WPORapid00Box385225B00PUBLIC0.pdf>
- Learn more about spaces for engagement in the Institute of Development Studies report, **Making Spaces, Changing Places: Situating Participation in Development**. See: [https://www.powercube.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/making\\_spaces\\_changing\\_places.pdf](https://www.powercube.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/making_spaces_changing_places.pdf)

### Case Study: Utilizing Scorecards, Social Audits and Other Participatory Budgeting Mechanisms

**Uganda:** World Vision's approach to social accountability combines score cards, social audits and interface meetings within a long-term development approach. The approach has led to important improvements in health and education outcomes.<sup>59</sup>

**Brazil:** Researchers in Brazil show that municipal governments that adopted participatory budgeting spent more on education and sanitation. Infant mortality declined in these areas.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> World Vision. Citizen Voice and Action: Civic demand for better health and education services. <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B01TNkdj61ccVhIUU1dzN00Dg/edit>

<sup>60</sup> The Washington Post (2014). Brazil let its citizens make decisions about city budgets. Here's what happened. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/22/brazil-let-its-citizens-make-decisions-about-city-budgets-heres-what-happened/?utm\\_term=.c7398d7388e6&noredirect=on](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/22/brazil-let-its-citizens-make-decisions-about-city-budgets-heres-what-happened/?utm_term=.c7398d7388e6&noredirect=on)

### Case Study: Implementing a Public Expenditure Tracking System with Local Authorities

**Tanzania:** A four-member team from three CSOs worked with local authorities in Tanzania to carry out a budget assessment and implement a public expenditure tracking system in the rural Mbulu District. The team conducted a visit to the District's headquarters and held a discussion with District officials from the education and planning departments. In addition, the CSOs reviewed documents including the District Strategic Plan, Medium Term Expenditure Framework, and quarterly reports. Three primary schools and three secondary schools from six different wards were selected for data collection and verification of construction activities. The team carried out discussions with teachers, community leaders and members at the grass-roots level.<sup>61</sup>

### Case Study: Engaging Local Authorities through Grassroots Community Meetings

**South Sudan:** In Juba City Municipality, South Sudan, from 2015-2016, UNA South Sudan implemented Local Development Forums (LDFs), enabling 15 grassroots communities to engage with their local authorities on the SDGs, particularly on transparency and accountability. The LDFs empowered the communities through learning processes, skills and knowledge formation that enabled them to articulate their development needs and priorities and hold service providers accountable. The LDFs are a long-term program aimed at mobilizing communities to participate fully and effectively in identifying and monitoring the quality of service delivery being offered to them by the government and other public actors. By ensuring the participation of women, youth, the elderly and persons with disabilities as the primary beneficiaries, the LDFs became a great asset in underserved communities across South Sudan. Secondary beneficiaries included policy makers who benefited from the synergy of working with the poor in determining choices and priorities for development programs and processes. This collaboration strengthens confidence and respect for those in power, thereby improving working relationships with community members. Challenges of the LDFs implementation included: lack of skilled personnel; inadequate financial resources; lack of timely cooperation by public officials; and difficulties in accessing relevant information. Nonetheless, the LDFs led to improved service delivery, increased development effectiveness, and empowered citizens at the grassroots level in Juba City Municipality.<sup>62</sup>

61 CSYM HUDUMA Christian Spiritual Youth Ministry (2018). Case study.

62 United Nations Association of South Sudan (UNA South Sudan) (2018). Case study.