

An aerial night photograph of a mountain village. Several tall, stone towers are illuminated from within, casting a warm glow. The houses and buildings are also lit up, and the surrounding landscape is dark with some greenery visible. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Vibrant Mountain Communities

Regional Development in Mountains:
Realizing Potentials, Tackling Disparities

Sustainable Mountain
Development Series

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The high-mountain town of Mestia (1 500 m asl) in the Upper Svaneti region of Georgia, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Agriculture is a pillar of the region's economy (GTW/shutterstock.com)

Citizen engagement for better public services in Ethiopia



Serkalem Tafesse

The Ethiopia Social Accountability Program (ESAP) has set in motion a new way of engagement between citizens and public officials to improve the delivery of basic services that are crucial for local socio-economic development. This is particularly important in the Ethiopian Highlands, where basic services have been inadequate and have not met people's specific needs.

Experimental planting of crops by farmers in Machakel district (ESAP)

Despite a long history of statehood, Ethiopia has deep-rooted socio-economic and governance problems. Access to basic service delivery is still a serious challenge to many Ethiopians, particularly in rural areas of the country. The Ethiopia Social Accountability Program (ESAP) is a countrywide programme that aims at strengthening local-level social service delivery in five sectors: education, health, water and sanitation, rural roads and agriculture (Box). Now in its third phase, ESAP has partnered with 76 civil society organizations to support local community-based organizations in becoming more knowledgeable about service delivery and in providing guidance on holding public officials accountable for the quality delivery of services. During its second phase, Social Accountability Committees (SACs) were established at the village and district levels. These facilitated processes with a wide range of community members, particularly members of vulnerable groups, to identify priorities for improving public social services and developing joint action plans (JAPs) that respond to the local needs of the different social groups (Figure 1). This is of particular importance to Ethiopia's highlands with their specific socio-economic and environmental conditions.

Machakel district in the highlands of Amhara region (between 1 500 and 2 000 masl) is one example where ESAP is active. It is home to about 143 000 people, more than 80 percent of whom depend on agriculture as their main livelihood. In the 1990s and 2000s the population declined by more than 30 percent [1]. A rapid assessment conducted by ESAP in 2015 revealed that 88 percent of the communities were previously not involved in the planning, budgeting or implementation of basic public services, nor in the monitoring of their quality, accessibility and equity standards. Only 28 percent of citizens had access to quality agriculture services and 17 percent were satisfied with their access to agricultural inputs [2].



"The [Machakel] woreda has become a model for East Gojjam zone, because it is making agriculture services equitable, effective, efficient, responsive and accountable. Many NGOs usually come up with cash and give us something in terms of a handout which is consumable. This project is changing the attitude and raising the awareness of the community and the awareness of service providers, which goes a long way."

Ato Tariku Tadesse, Machakel District Finance Head and SAC secretary

Lessons learned



Farmers in Machakel district visiting the Improved Farmer Training Centre (ESAP)

The social accountability process in Machakel started in 2015 by teaching citizens and service providers in the agriculture sector about the government's service standards. Several focus group discussions involving women, people with disabilities, youth, vulnerable groups and poor people revealed that the Development Agents and the Farmer Training Centre (FTC) were not providing adequate support to farmers. Seeds and fertilizers were distributed with delay and without consideration for the specific conditions of the highlands, causing declines in productivity. At an ensuing interface meeting in 2016, the community and district agricultural bureau agreed on the following improvements:

- To give farmers access to FTC land with the purpose of testing the suitability and productivity of different seeds and fertilizers before planting them on their own land;
- To address the lack of a veterinary clinic. The district authority agreed to appoint a veterinarian and purchase drugs, while the community agreed to contribute in cash and labour to set up a clinic.

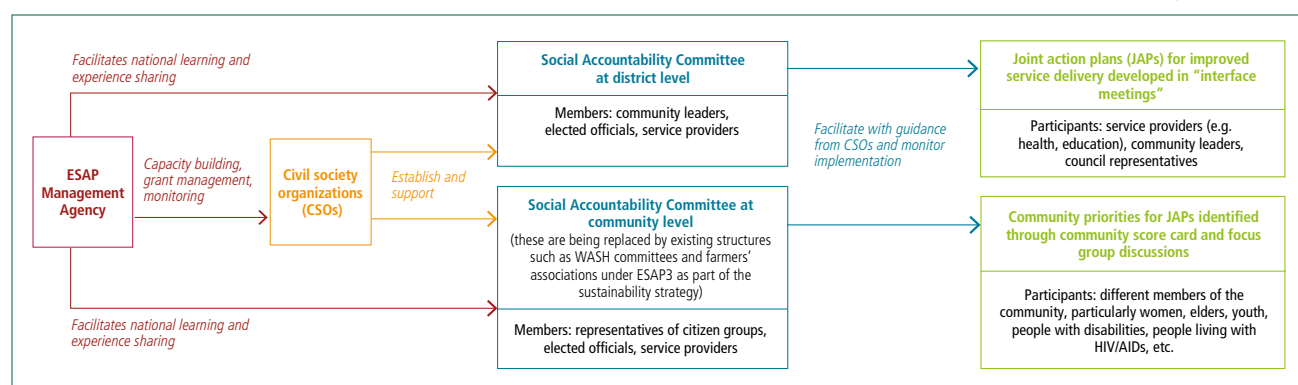
These participatory processes helped to empower citizens and resulted in improvements in basic service delivery. The existence of the programme seems to have altered how local governments provide basic services, although there is as yet no conclusive evidence that these improvements can be exclusively attributed to social accountability activities. Now, communities generally report greater satisfaction in the functioning of services, and people perceive fewer frontline service delivery problems, such as availability of textbooks in schools, timely provision of select seeds and fertilizers, medicines in health care and timely access to nurses and doctors. ESAP's most significant achievement is the establishment of platforms for citizens and public officials to have constructive dialogue about issues that matter to them.

- Fostering social accountability through citizen engagement helps to improve services. This means paving the way for citizens to influence local decision-making by engaging them in planning, implementation and monitoring. Collecting their feedback throughout this process is vital.
- Excluded and vulnerable community groups, such as people with disabilities, must be represented in the social accountability process and their needs taken into account in decision-making.
- For social accountability to be sustainable, it needs to involve existing structures such as parent-teacher-student associations, WASH committees and farmer associations. ESAP3 is setting the stage for this by shifting from using parallel structures to working with existing structures that will continue to exist without the need for external support.

Ethiopia Social Accountability Program (ESAP)

ESAP started in 2006 as a pilot and is in its third phase (ESAP3, 2019–2023), reaching citizens and local government in 317 woredas (districts). It is supported by a multidonor trust fund administered by the World Bank, based on an agreement between the government of Ethiopia and the European Union, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Austria and Sweden. ESAP is managed by a management agency that oversees implementation by local civil society organizations.

Figure 1. Process to assess and improve social service delivery through involving different stakeholders at the community and district levels



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Note: URLs were last checked on 23 September 2020

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