

# Part I. Introduction

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## 1.1 DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability of public officials is the cornerstone of good government and a prerequisite for an effective democracy. The World Bank and other international donors are paying increasing attention to accountability and transparency of public institutions in their development policies, strategies, and programs. Efforts to enhance government accountability have concentrated on improving so-called “horizontal” mechanisms of accountability between governmental actors and institutions. These include: 1) political mechanisms such as constitutional constraints, separation of powers, the legislature, and legislative investigative commissions; 2) fiscal instruments such as formal systems of auditing and financial accounting; 3) administrative mechanisms such as hierarchical reporting, norms of public sector probity, public service codes of conduct, and rules and procedures regarding transparency and public oversight, and 4) legal mechanisms such as corruption control agencies, ombudsmen, and the judiciary (Goetz and Gaventa 2001).

Recently, efforts to improve governance have focused on the “vertical” mechanisms of accountability to encourage the participation of citizens, especially impoverished citizens, in promoting accountability and responsiveness among public officials and service providers. Such forms of accountability, commonly referred to as social accountability, promote transparency and responsiveness in public policy making and implementation and are increasingly regarded as an important means to improve governance and develop effectiveness.<sup>3</sup> While this approach to accountability empowers citizens,<sup>4</sup> it can also promote inclusive and accountable institutions and enhance the political legitimacy and stability of a government, thereby strengthening social cohesion and capacity for socioeconomic development.<sup>5</sup>

Social accountability, as used in this study, refers to 1) the broad range of actions and mechanisms, including but not limited to voting, that citizens can use to hold public officials to account, as well as 2) actions on the part of government, civil society, media, and other societal actors that promote or facilitate these efforts. Traditionally, citizen or civil society-led efforts to hold public officials accountable have included actions such as public demonstrations, protests, advocacy campaigns, investigative journalism, and public interest lawsuits. In more recent years, the expanded use of participatory data collection and analysis tools, combined with enhanced opportunities for civic engagement with the state, have led to a new generation of social accountability practices that emphasize a solid evidence base for direct dialogue and negotiation with public officials.<sup>6</sup> These include participatory public policy making, participatory budgeting, public expenditure tracking, and citizen monitoring and evaluation of public service delivery. They also include efforts to enhance citizen knowledge and use of conventional mechanisms of accountability through public education about legal rights and services; and efforts to improve the effectiveness of “internal” accountability mechanisms through activities such as citizen involvement in public commissions and hearings, citizen advisory boards and oversight committees (Malena 2005).

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<sup>3</sup> John Ackerman defines social accountability as “society’s role in improving government accountability” (Ackerman 2004a). On the conceptualization of social accountability and its applicability to economic and political development, see also Dennis Arroyo (2004) and Carmen Malena, et al. (2004).

<sup>4</sup> The World Development Report 2001 (World Bank 2001d) and the World Bank’s empowerment framework, *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction, A Sourcebook* (World Bank 2002a) also recognize accountability as an integral component of empowerment.

<sup>5</sup> Inclusion, cohesion, and accountability are the three principles prioritized in the World Bank’s Social Development Strategy (2005b).

<sup>6</sup> A well-cited example of this is the “citizen report card” survey pioneered by the Public Affairs Center in Bangalore (India) that assesses the quality and effectiveness of public services in the city.

## 1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is: 1) to analyze the conditions that influence the ability of citizens and their organizations to promote accountability; 2) to identify priority areas for policy, legal, regulatory, and institutional reforms to improve these conditions; and 3) to identify areas in which capacity building of civil society organizations and the Government of Mongolia may be promoted to enhance social accountability for improved governance, social and economic development, and poverty reduction.

The role of civil society actors in promoting social accountability is particularly relevant to Mongolia because of the emphasis the GoM and its development partners place on good governance to enhance social and economic development. Social accountability mechanisms—which strengthen links between the state and citizens—form a critical foundation for Mongolia’s ongoing effort to develop effective and accountable democratic institutions. These accountability mechanisms check corruption—increasingly acknowledged by all stakeholders<sup>7</sup> as a challenge in Mongolia. Furthermore, both public governance and civic engagement are constrained by sociopolitical legacies of the socialist regime that accustomed Mongolians to a top-down approach to governance and ensured their passive acquiescence to the state. Consequently, one of the greatest challenges to the consolidation of Mongolia’s transition to an open political and economic system is that public officials and citizens must gain a greater understanding of the role of citizens in promoting social accountability, as well as the knowledge to effectively incorporate citizen contributions into governance and development.

Finally, a 2003 Client Survey conducted by the World Bank in Mongolia indicated “that there are two areas where the Bank is seen less positively, and may want to explore in further detail: building capacity at (the) community level and including local communities and civil society in strategy development” (World Bank 2003b:34). This analysis of the enabling environment for civil society participation in social accountability responds to both of these concerns.

## 1.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY’S PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Broadly defined, social accountability is the pursuit of accountability of public institutions, the private sector, or even CSOs to societal actors. Social accountability mechanisms may be initiated or promoted by the state, international agencies, or individual citizens. To be effective, however, social accountability requires the sustained participation of a strong, vibrant, and autonomous civil society that is active in social, economic, and political governance issues.<sup>8</sup> The participation of both civil society actors and ordinary citizens is commonly referred to as civic engagement.

This study focuses on civil society organizations (CSOs) rather than individual citizens because CSOs generally have greater access to resources and represent many citizens who may be seen as a significant voting bloc; thus, they are better placed to promote social accountability. A frequent critique of studies on civil society is that they focus on formally organized and officially recognized NGOs. This study goes

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<sup>7</sup> See Sant Maral Foundation 2005; UNDP 2000; Zorig Foundation 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Although there are many actors in the private sector who may hold a government accountable, such as influential business leaders, this study focused on the role of civil society actors in promoting social accountability. Only when business leaders have banded together to form a CSO, such as through business associations, would their activities come within the parameters of this study.

further and recognizes other types of civil society actors, in particular informal and religious groups. However, while the study is informed by interviews with several Buddhist leaders, as well as by secondary literature on the role of religion in Mongolian society, the team found little evidence of informal civil society actors involved in civic engagement and social accountability, other than the anticorruption movement Healthy Society and several nascent environmental movements.<sup>9</sup> Despite these findings and a general lack of secondary sources on civil society organizations other than NGOs, it is acknowledged that additional research may reveal the less visible participation of informal CSOs and other societal actors in civic engagement and social accountability.<sup>10</sup>

Given Mongolia's recent democratic transition, the study found a diversity of social accountability mechanisms in use by civil society, foreign donors, and, to a lesser extent, the government. For example, various methods used by the CSOs are the subject of detailed case studies for this report. These include legislative advocacy by the National Council Against Violence (annex 1); public expenditure monitoring by the Women for Social Progress-Uvorkhangai (annex 2); petitions to public officials on issues of public interest by the Ongi River Movement (annex 3); and public demonstrations, direct negotiation with government, and information campaigns by all three CSOs. Other examples of social accountability mechanisms include interactive radio talk shows that host public officials; community scorecards, which are a part of the Bank-supported Local Initiatives Fund; and the Public Service Reform Project, which is using citizen report cards to monitor the health sector.

Most of these efforts have been undertaken by conventional NGOs, often with support from foreign donors, including international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) like the Asia Foundation, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and the Open Society, as well as bilateral and multilateral donor agencies. There is also encouraging evidence of interest in social accountability at different levels and branches of government. For example, the Ministry of Finance's Poverty Reduction Group, in collaboration with the World Bank, organized a workshop in February 2005, to introduce social accountability concepts and tools. The audience was diverse, with mid-level officials from the finance, health, education, and social welfare ministries, the state audit agency, the public reform project, and several CSO leaders.

To analyze the successes and failures of social accountability mechanisms, this study applies a civic engagement analytical framework to assess the enabling environment: the components that would permit CSOs to promote public accountability. Within this framework, there are five enabling elements, the ability of citizens to: Associate to further their purposes; mobilize appropriate Resources; exercise their Voice; gain access to Information that is relevant, timely, and accessible; and Negotiate with public officials through established mechanisms and rules of engagement. These elements, represented by the acronym ARVIN, informed the research for this study, exploring factors that contribute to and detract from effective civic engagement for social accountability (civic engagement/social accountability).

After the initial assessment mission, the team decided to concentrate on only three aspects of ARVIN. Association appeared to be straightforward and did not warrant an exhaustive analysis; whereas issues related to Resources were too complex to be fully researched and analyzed in the restricted time. Association-related issues are, nonetheless, discussed in part II, the overview of Mongolian civil society,

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<sup>9</sup> The movement's name, *Eruul Niigmiin Hudulguun* is varyingly translated as either Just or Healthy Society.

<sup>10</sup> The preliminary CIVICUS report identified 10 different elements in Mongolian civil society, including: NGOs, trade unions, religious organizations, the chamber of commerce, apartment owners' unions, savings and credit cooperatives, nonprofit media, private sector philanthropy, and informal self-help health and leisure or community groups. All of these were analyzed in this report, although not classified in the same manner or given the same attention. The CIVICUS report also included political parties in its definition of civil society, whereas parties are defined here as a part of political society that are nonetheless implicated in social accountability both as an object of and potential proponent of civic engagement.

and Resources-related issues are discussed in various parts of this study, although not as thoroughly as the issues related to Voice, Information, and Negotiation, analyzed in part III.

Since the elements of ARVIN are influenced by factors that are both external and internal to civil society, the impact of these factors is briefly outlined in part II. The analytical framework identifies four principal external factors: the legal and regulatory framework, political factors (including governance), economic issues, and sociocultural characteristics. Internal factors that influence civic engagement/social accountability are grouped into three analytical categories: capital (financial, human, and physical), internal governance, and accountability relationships between CSOs and their constituencies.

## 1.4 DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY

The study draws on both qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure both breadth and depth. The study was conducted in three stages: the assessment mission in Mongolia in February 2005, the field research mission in April/May 2005, and the dissemination mission in February-March 2006. During each of those phases, the team met with government officials, civil society leaders, media workers, parliamentarians, and representatives from INGOs and foreign donors (see Stakeholders' Map, annex 8). The study team set up interviews and focus groups to gain insights into the stakeholders' views on and participation in civic engagement and social accountability. These also provided the team with extensive documentation on government policies and legislation, the mission and activities of CSOs, and the role of media and international actors in supporting civic engagement/social accountability, as well as the legal, political, institutional, and socioeconomic climate in which they operate.<sup>11</sup> The team also reviewed vast secondary sources before and after each mission (see Bibliography). The analysis from these various publications added to the body of information available to the team.

While the focus groups permitted meetings with more stakeholders in a relatively short time, they also permitted the team to observe the dynamics among them and their level of consensus on key issues related to civic engagement and social accountability. Moreover, the six focus groups with CSO leaders permitted follow-up on issues that came out of the CSO Survey and offered an opportunity to pose broader, more open-ended questions (see Survey of CSOs, annex 6). Participants in the CSO focus groups were selected from among the survey respondents, who fell into two categories: a sample of randomly selected NGOs registered with the Ministry of Justice (35) and a list of "active" CSOs (61), identified in consultation with several different NGOs, INGOs, and members of the donor community.<sup>12</sup> The CSO focus groups were held simultaneously. Plenary sessions were conducted before and after the focus groups to present survey findings of the CSO survey and discuss both the key issues and recommendations that participants identified as critical to the enhancement of civic engagement/social accountability.

In addition to basic demographic information and general questions regarding their involvement in civic engagement and social accountability, the CSO survey specifically probed key issues of involvement in social accountability, as well as the enabling environment for voice, information and negotiation as well

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<sup>11</sup> Outside of direct personal requests for documentation, it was surprisingly difficult to gain access to reports on various issues related to the study. An exception to the rule was the impressive Web site maintained by the Open Society Forum, which has a wealth of information.

<sup>12</sup> The difficulties encountered while conducting the random sample of registered NGOs, including difficulties in ascertaining the list from the ministry and locating selected NGOs, are indicative of a number of issues discussed in this report.

as resources.<sup>13</sup> The quantitative component of the research methods was a national opinion poll on the performance of the government and general knowledge about and opinions on the role of CSOs in enhancing the performance and conduct of public officials, that is, social accountability (see annex 7).<sup>14</sup>

As mentioned above, the study's methodology also included four case studies that were selected to provide greater depth and insight into key issues related to civic engagement/social accountability and the World Bank's mission. These experiences offer concrete illustrations of the benefits of and obstacles to civic engagement/social accountability (see annexes 1-4). Another component in the study's methodology is an overview of the vital role of the media in expanding social accountability practices (see annex 5).

The final component of the study was a dissemination mission that involved both bilateral interviews with various stakeholders and another CSO forum. Before the meetings, stakeholders were provided a summary of the studies findings and recommendations so they could provide informed responses and detailed feedback. The analysis presented here reflects their comments and suggestions.

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<sup>13</sup> Although several NGOs in Uvorkhangai responded to our questionnaire, the overwhelming majority of respondents to the CSO survey (93 percent) were based in Ulaanbaatar. This is a reflection of a UB-bias among active CSOs discussed in part II, and a bias toward those registered with the MoJHA.

<sup>14</sup> The CSO survey was conducted by TAF, whereas the opinion poll was contracted to a Mongolian NGO, Sant Maral, which has extensive expertise in conducting nationwide polls.