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FACTSHEET: GENDER ACCOUNTABILITY

Introduction

How can women and men have equal access to and control over the resources and services in their environment? How can we ensure that women's health problems are recognised and treated in the village clinic? How can women control the number of children they have and gain access to family planning? How do we get more girls to go to school and tailor education to their needs? How can women and girls claim their right to equal access to resources and basic services? And how can we ensure that these services address gender issues? In this factsheet, we explain what donors can do to achieve gender accountability.

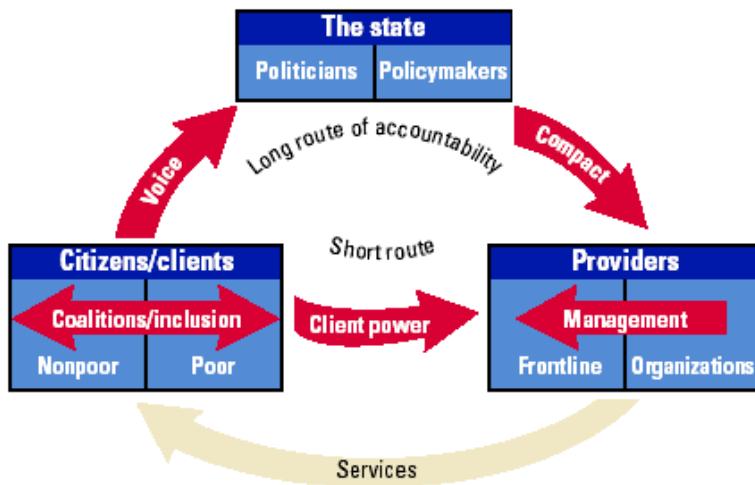
As a result of the new aid modalities, with their emphasis on budget support and focus on the macro level, it is difficult for donors to determine whether their funds are actually going to poverty alleviation and gender equality. Donors today have less direct contact with the poor than they used to. They are more dependent on politicians and providers to reach the poor and on ways in which the poor can hold the powerful accountable. Important issues for donors, then, are promoting accountability on the part of those with power and enabling the poor and disempowered to hold them accountable.

Accountability is defined as: accounting for services delivered by policymakers and providers to clients, and a stronger voice of poor men and women towards policymakers and providers in return for the delegation of tasks, power or resources to policymakers and providers. (*Lawsen & Rackner*).

Services in social sectors such as education, health and water often fail to reach poor people. What can be done to make service delivery work? According to the World Bank's World Development Report (WDR), 'successful services for poor people

emerge from institutional relationships in which the actors are accountable to each other'.

The WDR depicts accountability relationships between the three main actors as a triangle: citizens/clients (patients, students, parents, voters); politicians/policymakers (prime ministers, presidents, parliamentarians, mayors, ministers of finance, health, education); and providers (organisations like health departments, education departments, water and sanitation departments, and frontline professionals like doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers).



Source: *World Development Report 2004*.

Involvement by a fourth actor is necessary in order to address gender accountability: civil society, especially women's organisations. Donors play an important role in strengthening all these relationships.

The basis for gender accountability

The problems of poor women are not new or unknown. They are addressed by many international instruments. Nearly every country has ratified international conventions on equal rights for women and girls. Gender equality is also an important aim of the Millennium Development Goals. By signing these conventions, governments agree to remove discriminatory laws and other obstacles to equality, to promote equality through affirmative action, and to eliminate discriminatory attitudes, conduct, prejudices and practices.

Another important basis for gender accountability is provided by the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005). By endorsing this international agreement, partner countries and donors have committed themselves to continuing to increase efforts in harmonisation, alignment and managing aid for results with a set of assessable actions and indicators. Mutual accountability is one of the principles of this declaration.

Key issues

Gender accountability is not only about tackling elites unwilling to reach the poor, it concerns gender relations and power differences at all levels, and the lack of knowledge among politicians and providers regarding the specific situation, position and demands of women. Girls and women encounter specific problems when dealing with public services that make it especially difficult for them to hold service providers or authorities accountable. These problems concern women's access to services, the extent to which women are visible and esteemed, and providers' knowledge of and conduct towards women.

Successful service delivery for poor people, and especially poor women, can only emerge from institutional relationships in which actors are accountable to each other; whether by the empowerment of poor people, or by the social inclusion of poor people by service providers. These actions fall under the 'short route' of accountability: a direct route between clients and providers or government. The long route requires parliamentarians to fulfil an oversight role in participative planning and budgeting processes, and hold providers accountable for their services to citizens/clients. Donors and civil society can both contribute by supporting the poor to make themselves heard and hold the powerful accountable.

Four key issues need to be addressed in order to promote gender accountability. These are related to the four accountability roles:

- **Citizens/clients: empowerment**

Empowerment means that poor women and men can hold politicians and providers to account and claim their rights for better public services. They can do so by using their voice to influence politics, or by using client power to influence public service providers. It means that women's voices also find expression. Women seeking accountability act as citizens and agents, not as passive beneficiaries of development. They act as agents who can inform priority-setting and decision-making, who can demand answers from policymakers and penalise poor decision-making.

- **Providers: social inclusion of poor people**

In the context of gender accountability, social inclusion means that providers and government/policymakers account for their services to poor women and men. It focuses on public services that take both women's and men's concerns and wishes into account, and involve the point of view of both in local development processes.

- **Politicians/policymakers: supporting women's empowerment and social inclusion**

Parliament should fulfil an oversight role in participative planning and budgeting processes. One of the key accountability mechanisms at national level is a strong parliamentary system to monitor public expenditure, paying special attention to gender inequality and women's status issues. Women parliamentarians also have a role to play in making public services gender aware. Often, they address women's rights more emphatically than their male colleagues, and many are committed to putting new and different social issues on the political agenda, such as monitoring social welfare policies to detect discrimination.

- **Civil society: supporting women's empowerment and social inclusion**

Civil society has an important role in supporting the voices of the poor and holding the powerful accountable. They strengthen the voices of the poor, coordinate coalitions to advocate for women's rights, and demand greater service accountability. They counteract the gender biases in formal institutions and can play a watchdog role.

Mutual accountability

The Paris Declaration emphasises accountability. In signing the Declaration, partner countries have committed themselves to strengthening the role of parliament in national development strategies and/or budgets, by creating parliamentary oversight roles and ensuring broad-based participation in formulating and reviewing national development strategies.

The Paris Declaration also offers new scope for integrating a gender accountability approach. Broad-based participation provides an opportunity for women to play a meaningful role in articulating their needs and seeking responses from policymakers. It allows the quality of government and public services at local level to be assessed, especially with respect to gender issues and relations. Mutual accountability is about holding donors and partners accountable for development results through systems, procedures and capacities, in donor and recipient countries, which measure aid performance. What is needed is specific accountability indicators of the impact, at national and local level, of development spending on gender equality. They could be included in partner countries' accountability mechanisms as well as in reports of donor countries to their own taxpayers.

How Dutch embassies support gender accountability

Dutch embassies have developed various activities to address accountability issues, including education programmes. Examples of accountability in education are school councils that include parent representation and the publication of school grants to a wider public. Attention to the circumstances that promote the education of girls and the

participation of women in school councils are important aspects of gender accountability. Some embassies hold policy dialogues and donor meetings to discuss accountability, or support efforts to strengthen the accountability of service providers. The PRSPs contain some good gender mainstreaming practices.

Several embassies also support women's organisations or other gender-aware civil society organisations, as they have an important role to play in holding governments accountable for realising their national and international commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment.

What else can donors do – some suggestions

- Providing sex-disaggregated data

Provide and require sex-disaggregated data in all documents (research, planning reports, evaluations and so on) in order to make gender biases visible.

- Gender auditing, budgeting and assessments

Promote gender auditing systems and gender budgeting initiatives. Carry out assessments and evaluations to measure outcomes and impact of service delivery as regards gender equality. Communicate information about evaluation and consultation processes by disseminating their results.

- Supporting policymakers/government

Strengthen government bodies (accountability institutions, platforms for women) and parliament so that they can address gender equality issues in national planning and monitoring processes and render account to their constituencies. Build capacity and include gender issues in macroeconomic policy, to enhance gender analyses and to speak the language of planning ministries.

- Supporting civil society

Support civil society, especially women's organisations, through funding and/or capacity building, to safeguard its role in amplifying the voices of the poor, advocating social justice and inclusion, monitoring public policy and promoting accountability, in order to strengthen the voice and client power of women and to counteract gender bias in formal institutions.

- Funding

Establish ‘women’s funds’ or earmark resources for activities directed at women’s empowerment, to ensure women’s involvement in the new aid modalities, and especially to strengthen the role of women’s organisations in building women’s capacity to exercise their voice and client power.

- Strategic alliances

Build strategic alliances between civil society and their constituency of poor women, planning and accountability institutions and government, so that they can support each other in the accountability process. Strategic alliances between civil society organisations in donor countries and governments and civil society in partner countries are also important.

- Harmonisation

Work with other donors to harmonise policies, procedures and practices around gender mainstreaming and gender accountability. Donors, governments and NGOs should share their experiences.

- Mutual accountability

Realise gender accountability, not only in the procedures and processes of partner countries, but make it part of donors’ annual planning and monitoring processes as well. Address gender issues when reporting back to own taxpayers.

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