

Social Audit



To collect and present evidence about a programme or service.

The Social Audit process uses participatory methods to investigate whether government services or projects have been implemented as planned. Social audits look at whether there are differences between the plan and what was actually delivered, at who was involved in implementing a project and what they got paid for, etc. The process culminates in a public hearing, where the responsible politicians and government officials are expected to ask questions based on evidence presented by community members. Finally all the stakeholders work together to develop a joint plan to improve the service/project in the future.

Steps in the Process

1. Set up your civil society social audit team. The process should be led by community members but will require some technical assistance and facilitation so make sure that you have the appropriate skills within your team.
2. Agree the objectives of your social audit based on community needs and draw up a detailed plan for the process.
3. Collect key project documents such as those linked to the procurement of materials, use of labor, quality checks, sign off for completed work, etc. Check whether any key documents are missing. Make sure that you also have access to relevant policy documents related to the service or project you are looking at.
4. Analyze the project documents to check for any errors in dates, amounts of money, quantities of materials, missing signatures, etc. Check whether signatures or dates are missing.

5. Draw up a checklist of issues and details which you will then check through your field visit. This might include:
 - Check that a planned building, road or water supply point has actually been built and that it has been built to specifications.
 - Check a building site to monitor work-in-progress and check how far it is from completion.
 - Measure, count or quality-test a building, bridge or other structure. For example, quality of cement, number of windows, thickness of roofing sheets.
 - Check with managers or workers to establish whether actual wages correspond with payroll figures.
 - Check with people who will use the project whether it benefits them as planned.
6. Carry out field visit/s using the checklist you have developed and record any evidence, either in writing or using photos, etc.
7. Present the evidence at a public hearing including the relevant government officials. Outline what changes and commitments you want from them.
8. Develop a joint plan to ensure that the service/project is developed as agreed.
9. Follow up and make sure that any promises and commitments made by officials at the public hearings are carried out.

Suggestions for Use

- The social audit process builds capacity within communities to claim their rights holding decision-makers and project implementers to account. It empowers community members to voice their concerns with new confidence, as they can back up their claims with solid evidence.
- Social audits work well when the government service or project being monitored can be linked very clearly to a particular elected leader or to ring-fenced public funds.
- Social audits can create demand for greater access to public records. If social audits are repeated at regular intervals, transparency and participation can become permanent features of local governance.
- If government stakeholders are receptive, social audits can contribute to positive change in the management and performance of agencies that are implementing projects.

Challenges

- In the social audit process you are likely to need to challenge power holders or service providers but it's important to avoid unnecessary conflict. Try to engage the relevant government officials from the start to get their buy in.
- It may be difficult to get copies of primary project documents and government records. In countries with freedom of information laws, formal channels can be used to gain access to such documents. Where no right of access to public information is recognized, CSOs will need to rely on their networks and relationships with those in government who may be prepared to help them.
- If there are mistakes in the data and your findings cannot be backed up with facts, your campaign will lose credibility. Make sure that all your claims are well substantiated and that facts are checked carefully.
- Social audit processes run the risk of getting personal, especially if a well-known official is exposed through the process. It is wise to focus on the conduct and performance, rather than the personality, of those involved.

References

- Accountability: Quality and Equity in Public Service Provision. Just and Democratic Local Governance series, ActionAid, 2011, p. 32-36.