

The strength of partnerships

African institutions for public accountability

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Africans are not recognised for the work they do to promote social accountability in their countries. A new pan-African platform allows them to share their experiences, learn new techniques and disseminate information, and encourages new initiatives.

Weak democratic processes in many African countries have contributed to low public expectations and a culture of impunity. Civil society has started to hold governments accountable for failing to deliver even the most basic services.

The World Bank and the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) of South Africa wanted to build on existing initiatives, accelerate their growth and encourage new developments in social accountability. To this end they launched the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in Africa (ANSA-Africa) in August 2006. ANSA-Africa has begun networking with concerned partners across Africa to develop a wide-ranging programme that involves community-based organisations, NGOs, advocacy groups and individuals. The primary medium for sharing relevant information is the web portal through which they link African civil society and community groups across the continent to support and encourage new initiatives.

The methodology

The programme includes capacity building courses, seminars, workshops and discussion groups, as well as advocacy campaigns to inform Africans of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Through its network, ANSA-Africa works in three main ways.

- Providing technical and leveraged financial assistance for the design, implementation and evaluation of quality social accountability initiatives. Through collaboration, the network transmits effective tools and incubates innovative new approaches.
- Promoting capacity development through training programmes to encourage the use and adaptation of techniques for citizens to demand accountable governance. These programmes are delivered regionally to generate the greatest impact. ANSA, through its partners, designs and delivers training programmes across Africa.
- Undertaking research and disseminating the findings. The main goal is to apply creativity and rigor to assessing, refining and developing social accountability tools and to use electronic media in innovative ways in order to promote a wide access to knowledge.

The primary target audience is the civil society groups that are active with policy monitoring processes. However, ANSA-Africa hopes that eventually the business community, NGOs, rate payers' associations and other concerned individuals will also be influenced by the network's activities.

Examples of existing initiatives

- The Municipal Development Partnership for Eastern and Southern Africa (MDP-ESA) has developed a web-based course and training companion in participatory budgeting Africa with the support of the World Bank and UN-Habitat respectively. The course describes the process necessary for effective monitoring and community advocacy work.
- The City of Johannesburg has incorporated participatory budgeting processes in its legal framework for several years now. A typical campaign takes three months and includes an extensive publicity campaign, needs assessment, and analysis of various project proposals, including their priority within the community and cost. The participatory budgeting process has resulted, for instance, in the provision of free water and electricity for low-income earners. It has also increased public support for paying tariffs, reduced vandalism of council property, and enhanced revenue generation and collection.

Future plans

The documentation of these and many other case studies is a key feature of the ANSA-Africa web portal. The intention is to 'pull' information from as many sources as possible and disseminate it to ANSA partners, government officials, politicians and stakeholder organisations. ANSA-Africa plans to distribute such information in more dynamic formats, such as editorial features, advocacy campaigns, newsletters, policy and budget briefs, radio and television programmes, and seminars and workshops. It is critical that findings and reports are disseminated to government and citizens alike, to emphasise their partnership.

Training programmes will focus on methodological aspects of social accountability, in formats that can be adapted to different languages, cultures and literacy levels. New approaches to social accountability emphasise the importance of working with government agencies in the public expenditure cycle: budget formulation, execution, accounting and reporting, and external audit and oversight. This will be an important focus for capacity building.

Social accountability stakeholders will play an active role in defining ANSA-Africa's scope and activities. The strength of partnerships across the continent – among different organisations, community bodies and government entities, across different languages, cultures, and national and regional barriers – will be the ultimate determinant of ANSA-Africa's success.

Links

[ANSA-Africa portal](#)

[Municipal Development Partnership for Eastern and Southern Africa \(MDP-ESA\)](#)

[Online Course on Participatory Budgeting in Africa and the training companion.](#)

[Global Development Network \(GDN\) toolkit, Disseminating Research Online](#), provides tips and practical suggestions for communicating academic research using the internet.