# Notes from the January 28, 2015 Consultation on the Updated USAID Office of Food for Peace Strategy Focusing on Social Accountability and Governance

## On the Definition of Social Accountability

What is useful about the definition provided in the handout:

* It mentions the enabling environment
* It discusses supply and demand and how social accountability straddles both
* It is nonjudgmental and comes from a place of partnerships rather than a place of accusations

Areas where the definition could improve/what needs to be added to future iterations of the definition:

* The definition presumes that governments have the ability to be accountable and that citizens would have access to basic public services if they just demanded them, when the government structure might be such that does not permit civic engagement or basic access to services, i.e., the **enabling environment** does not exist or is extremely difficult to create because the government is, e.g., a dictatorship or repressive monarchy
* Focus on the **demand side** is not specific enough; the need for direct citizen participation in governance and the persistent provision of information to citizens on their rights and how to access those rights should be included in the definition
* The definition comes from a negative perspective that assumes that service provision does not exist and no one is satisfied with the way their society/country operates, when this is likely not true and some are perfectly satisfied with the status quo; reframe the definition from a more **positive** perspective using more positive or neutral language
* The main focus should be on the **agency** of individuals/citizens and on governments and donors/projects/PVOs building that agency
* We should consider whether we are only talking about **citizens**, whether we should only be addressing issues facing citizens, and whether the term “citizens” marginalizes those who are not officially citizens (e.g., immigrants, third country nationals, those on visa status who may be working in the country) who also should have the agency to access services and hold their host governments accountable
* The idea of **mutual accountability** should be included; it is not only incumbent on governments/higher authorities to ensure that all people have agency, but individuals have a responsibility to speak up for themselves, demand their own agency, be inquisitive about their rights and how to access them, and hold their governments accountable
* Other terms that came up as potentially important in defining social accountability include: human dignity, local, community-based, commitment, integrity, transparent, responsibility, honesty, non-corruption, ensure coverage, responsiveness, equality, multisectoral, inclusivity

## Barriers/Constraints to Social Accountability and What We Need to Consider When Promoting Social Accountability in Our Programs

* The issue of **time**, in that when people stand up for their own agency and their rights, including participating in community/vocational/interest groups, they give time out of their day that might otherwise go to another important activity, such as being with their families or sleeping
* A lack of **incentives**, including financial, for individuals to be involved in their community
* The **gender, cultural, ethnic, and religious dynamics** and contexts of the specific locality
* How to access and support the most **marginalized populations**, including those who may not have the ability or infrastructure (e.g., where they live is rather isolated from the larger community, they have physical or mental disabilities) to participate in governance
* A **lack of trust**, especially by local populations for their government or even for PVOs/implementers
* Communities might not yet have the **capacity** to advocate for themselves
* Existing **societal schisms** that can easily be exacerbated if not properly examined and managed
* Setting and managing **expectations**, especially of what a program/FFP can provide, considering that programs do not run indefinitely and cannot replace government over the long term
* Systems and service provision often already exist at all levels of government and society; there may be **skepticism or reluctance to change/improve**, especially from individuals at the local level that have been providing services for some time in the absence of government, donor, and/or PVO presence

## Where the Field and Our Programming Should Go from Here

* “Agency” was the buzzword of the consultation, but not just agency—collective agency; we need to focus on ensuring all people have agency to access services, request information and services, be their own advocates when necessary, and meaningfully contribute to their communities
* Analyze (i.e., collect sound data on) the underlying causes behind why people do not have agency, what the power dynamics are, and what the cultural factors at play are; create initiatives that are “grounded in everyday reality”
* Facilitate linkages between the most marginalized individuals/populations and community governance so that those who are marginalized are included in governance decisions and feel that their contributions are valued
* Leverage the strengths of those who are most powerful and vocal in the community, and identify those people who are and could be leaders
* Focus on strengthening the enabling environment from both the supply and demand sides
* Include in all programing initiatives that address the gender, cultural, ethnic, and religious barriers that prevent individuals from having agency, but do it in a culturally sensitive manner, consider the historical context of the location and situation, and don’t force systemic cultural changes
* Invest in all levels of government capacity to engage citizens; support governments to act across agencies/ministries while engaging citizens and provide them practical guidance/training to do this
* Educate individuals on their rights and the social contract they have with each other and their governments, and empower them to perpetually seek out information on those rights; part of this is the coproduction of services, that it’s not just incumbent on citizens to demand from their government; citizens also need to invest in their own development, and the development field needs to help them understand why that is important and how to do it
* Build, support, and use the smaller associations (e.g., hairdressers associations, parent-teacher associations) and community-based organizations, and empower individuals and communities to form and join these types of groups and to use them as modes of agency because they can serve as spaces to learn about and discuss rights, bodies that can advocate for those rights, and a means of “moving up the ladder” of government for maximum message impact; explain to people the capabilities of these types of groups and that they have the power to form and participate in them; focus these groups on issues facing the entire community and on solutions that the entire community can support, not just on the issues facing one or a few individual(s)
* Remember that governments sometimes need advocacy too, and engagement should occur from the top down, not just from the bottom up
* The Citizen Voice in Action (CVA) approach and national and community scorecards were both mentioned as successful tools in promoting systemic change; more information on how they can be used in social accountability programming should be examined
* Frame any changes made or programs created from the perspective of what all parties (i.e., governments and citizens) will gain from them, not what they will lose, keeping in mind the power dynamics at play within the society/country and the amount of change many of these societies already have had to go through in the last few decades; provide incentives for positive change
* Think big, but don’t be afraid to start small because in some successful cases changes began with smaller issues, such as infrastructure, and eventually expanded to include larger, more systemic changes throughout the society/country; “simple incremental steps transform lives over the long term”
* Focus programming on strengthening the private sector, public sector, and civil society, not just one or the other, because without strength in all three, societal transformation cannot occur
* Consider how programming and our roles change as a society moves from emergency to development contexts, especially because governments may and do choose to take more responsibility for change and ownership over programs once their countries are stable
* All donors/service providers/PVOs/etc., not just FFP, need to understand the importance of exit strategies and of returning to a service site years after program closure to measure program impacts, understand the implications of how programming affects/changes/transforms societies, and what was self-sustained

## FFP’s Role in Promoting Social Accountability

* FFP already is well placed to champion social accountability in its programming because of the office’s multi-sectoral, multi-year, community-led approach
* We need to answer: What is FFP’s role in being accountable to not only the American taxpayers but to the populations where it provides services? Where does FFP fit on the supply/demand continuum of social accountability and how does it support either or both sides?
* Liaise across USAID/DCHA offices, especially with the Center of Excellence for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance, to ensure incorporation and implementation of best/promising practices
* More funding and effort needs to be put into determining and measuring what is really happening on the ground and what really works in programming (building the evidence base), then supporting implementers to execute what works to cut down the amount of time wasted in starting up a project; this includes mapping who key community players are (individuals and institutions) ahead of project startup; such research has already begun in the health and education fields and it is promising
* Support programmatic flexibility, i.e., when the context and needs change, support PVOs and existing programs to adjust to meet the new needs