

Local government accountability

Tool

Purpose:

This tool describes ways to help rural citizens to bring local authorities to account. It is written for change agents in rural locations. It raises community expectations about the quality of service provision – and describes a set of steps to install improvements. It flags the important role that communities can have in improving their own situation.

Activities:

This tool heats up local communities. It broadens what they might expect from local authorities. We designed the tool from experience in decentralisation of forestry in Malawi. Our concern is to improve the use of delegated power where there has been insufficient thought about the roles and capacities at local level. Mobilising rural communities can challenge newly empowered local authorities to deliver better services.

Two key ingredients in this mobilisation process are:

- ① A set of expectations about what local forest governance should involve
- ② A series of demand-driven steps to bring it about

Expectation 1 - Greater involvement in local governance.

Communities need not be passive recipients of centralised thinking. They can play a role as active customers of improved services. Use community meetings, participatory resource assessment and the establishment of credible village level structures to build awareness.

Keep in Mind

★ New community expectations can fuel change by themselves – but it is often necessary for an NGO to kick-start the process.

★ High expectations can boil over into conflict if not carefully managed. It is often best to start cautiously. Lobby through official channels and through peaceful means where possible.

★ Information on roles and finances can be hard to come by. Finding an ally within government can be useful.



Expectation 2 - Strong leadership.

Key individuals should not be able to avoid their duties to improve community life. Demand that leaders have agreed roles and responsibilities. Call for performance standards, access to reporting and frequent opportunities to express community concerns.

Expectation 3 – Clear strategies for resource use.

Don't accept inaccessible or muddled plans. Demand transparency and clear links between community concerns and service provision. Ensure that communities have access and can make inputs to local strategies, implementations plans and monitoring processes.

Expectation 4 – Sufficient technical and financial resources.

Political promises should count for something – so use them to your advantage. Lobby for published local financial information based on stated policies. Fight to reorient government bodies away from enforcement towards service.

Expectation 5 – High quality service provision.

Words should mean something in practice. Set up a regular process to check delivery against stated roles and resources.

★ Different people will have different ideas about what communities can expect. Be prepared for the long haul – most change does not come about overnight.

Further information

Find full tool and other related tools and resources at:
www.policy-powertools.org

or contact:

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