Our Members at a Glance

Interview with Ephrem Tadesse Gebre [*]

In this interview, Ephrem tells us about his time as the Regional Program Manager for Democracy and Governance with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) based in Pretoria South Africa, and about SDC's support to Social Accountability in Africa. Prior to SDC, he worked with CIVICUS and OXFAM among other international development organisations.

The Regional Program Southern Africa is a regional cooperation strategy of SDC, which started in 2005 and is now in its second phase. Since the first phase, support to democracy and governance initiatives has been a prominent aspect of the regional program. Over the last 10 years, the governance domain contributed to democratization, civil society development and the promotion of justice and human rights in the region, both in terms of broader issues of political governance and specific governance issues within the sectoral areas of Health (HIV/AIDS) and Agriculture (Food Security).

In 2006, SDC started its support to social accountability in Southern Africa through a partnership with the Public Services Accountability Monitor (PSAM) at Rhodes University in South Africa. At the time, PSAM was involved in social accountability work in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa and was monitoring public resources management within the provincial departments of health, education, social welfare and housing. Impressed by PSAM's work in the province, SDC identified social accountability and public resources management as a *regional public good* that may have high relevance to other African countries as well, and invited PSAM to engage in a regional learning program to promote social accountability in six countries of Southern Africa, i.e. Tanzania, Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, South Africa and Zimbabwe, through a Rhodes University Accredited *Fundamentals Course on Social Accountability* and in-country training and mentorship in the aforementioned countries to adapt the PSAM social accountability model into their county contexts. These in-country partnerships bear fruits with the application of social accountability to monitor public resources management in various areas of public service delivery.
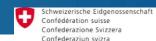
According to Ephrem, social accountability, following PSAM's logic, essentially refers to citizens' right to demand explanations and justifications on the utilization of public resources to progressively realize people's socio-economic rights in accordance with international and constitutional obligations of states. In many ways, it complements political accountability that enables citizens to elect and recall their governments periodically. It enables citizens to regularly monitor the performance of government when it comes to public services delivery by focusing on public resources management. Within the framework of social accountability, the PSAM model identifies five processes that constitute the major aspects of a socially accountable state: (1) strategic planning and resources allocation; (2) expenditure management; (3) performance management; (4) public integrity; and, (5) oversight. An effective state is accordingly characterized by the capability of state institutions to properly implement these public resources management processes complemented by effective oversight by parliaments and the watchdog roles of CSOs. Improved public resources management in turn is expected to lead to a more efficient public service delivery.

---

[*] This interview was done by Marine Perron, Coordinator of the GPSA Knowledge Platform, at Fundar, Centre for Analysis and Research, in December 2015.

The work done by PSAM with the support of SDC and other development partners demonstrated the importance of social accountability in public resources management and public service delivery. Social accountability linked with the five processes of public resources management provides a clear strategy to monitor the proper utilization of public resources in order to provide effective and efficient public services and ensure the progressive realization of citizens' socio-economic rights.

Based on the lessons learned of the Regional Program, SDC recently mandated a consortium led by Action Aid International to develop and implement a project on *''Strengthening Social Accountability and Oversight Capacity for Rights-based Public Resources Management in Health and Agriculture in Southern Africa.''* The development goal of this project is the improvement of rights-based public resources management in health and agriculture by strengthening the oversight and social accountability roles of selected parliamentary committees, issue-based civil society organizations, smallholder famers' organizations, media and relevant government departments in Southern Africa. By the end of the project, it is envisaged that adoption and contextualization of social accountability monitoring by national and regional actor enhances the quality of decisions and actions of government departments on public resources management related to health and agriculture with tangible results to demonstrate success.

For more information on the projects mentioned in this interview, Ephrem Tadesse Gebre can be reached through the GPSA Knowledge Platform.