

## Public Oversight

This section covers a range of mechanisms and tools that involve citizens and/or independent agencies in performing an oversight or watchdog role vis-à-vis government in order to help curb corruption, build public trust in government and foster greater public transparency and accountability.

Many of the tools covered in this section are public complaint mechanisms, implemented by external, independent institutions that handle complaints by the public and help citizens to protect and defend their rights. Whilst some, such as Ombudsman and Public Litigation are formal institutions that function under the auspices of government, others such as Citizen Advisors and Citizen Oversight Committees are civil society driven and voluntary.

Some of the tools in this section are designed to improve transparency and accountability in a specific sector or activity like for example, Integrity Pacts that are designed to tackle corruption in public procurement and contracting. While others are not sector-specific and can be used to enhance citizen information and oversight across various sectors and in relation to public services, budgets, expenditures, decision-making processes and/or the general performance or behaviour of public actors or institutions.

### Public oversight tools

The Public Oversight Category includes eight tools:

- **Democracy Assessment** tools allow ordinary citizens to evaluate the quality of governance processes and institutions at the local, state or national level.
- **Local Governance Barometer (LGB)** offers a participatory means of determining which capacities of governing authorities need to be strengthened to achieve good governance by focusing on six attributes of good governance viz. effectiveness and efficiency, rule of law, accountability, participation, and equity. The LGB makes governance at the local level more concrete, tangible and measurable and as a result of which stakeholders can discuss the quality of governance, then plan and implement measures to improve the situation.
- **Citizen Advisors** provide citizens with information about their rights and entitlements, provide free and independent advice to citizens and advocate for and defend citizen's rights.
- **Ombudsmen**, particularly when they function in partnership with civil society organisations, can play a key role in defending citizen rights and providing public oversight.

- **Citizen Oversight Committees** can be created at any level of government (but are most frequently formed at the community or municipal level) to guide and oversee government activities or to act as a watchdog over public services.
- **Social Contracts for Political Accountability**, championed in the Phillipines, are covenant-type agreements between citizens and elected officials (or candidates), to promote transparent and accountable governance.
- **Integrity Pacts**, developed by Transparency International to help prevent corruption in public contracting, involve a government or government department and all bidders for a public contract agreeing to abide by certain principles of transparency, accountability and equity.
- **Public Litigation** involves citizen groups taking legal action against government actors or institutions for violations of rights or other illegal acts or misdeeds.

## Benefits

Curbing corruption and thereby checking spillage and abuse of public money is perhaps the most direct benefit of public oversight. A unique advantage of public oversight is that it enhances transparency and accountability of not only the public sector but also the private sector. By improving the credibility and performance of public institutions, oversight mechanisms contribute to increased public faith in democratic governance. Public oversight also provides space for civil society participation in governance processes thus increasing cooperation and synergy between the state and civil society. In specific geo-political contexts, independent public oversight helps maintain a high level of observance of and adherence to human rights and fundamental freedoms.

## Challenges and lessons

Effective public oversight is dependent on some degree of freedom of information in order to access relevant government data and documents and freedom of expression in order to publicly disseminate findings and concerns. It is important that public oversight mechanisms are accessible, independent and enjoy the confidence of the general public. Therefore, the integrity and public credibility of non state actors involved in oversight mechanisms is a crucial prerequisite. Oversight mechanisms are most effective when findings are made public and there are provisions for these to feed into processes of official public service evaluation and reform. It is also essential that ordinary citizens and “whistleblowers” are protected from retribution.

## Key resources and organizations

[Corruption Fighters' Tool Kit](http://www.transparency.org/tools/e_toolkit), by Transparency International

[http://www.transparency.org/tools/e\\_toolkit](http://www.transparency.org/tools/e_toolkit)

- ☞ A compendium of practical civil society anti-corruption experiences implemented by Transparency International and other civil society organisations from around the world.

FAQs: Corruption and possible cures: Government oversight and control bodies, U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, Norway..

<http://www.u4.no/helpdesk/faq/faqs2b.cfm>

- ☞ This document outlines the role of various government oversight and control bodies.

Impact Alliance: Local Government Barometer

[http://www.impactalliance.org/ev\\_en.php?ID=12698\\_201&ID2=DO\\_TOPIC](http://www.impactalliance.org/ev_en.php?ID=12698_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC)

- ☞ The Impact Alliance is a global action and learning network committed to strengthening the capacity of individuals and organizations to generate deep impact within the communities they serve. Their website gives links to useful resources on local government strengthening.

"Models of Public Oversight of Government and Industry":Richard Steiner

[http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/citizens\\_advisory\\_councils\\_rick\\_steiner.pdf](http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/citizens_advisory_councils_rick_steiner.pdf)

- ☞ In this chapter, Richard Steiner provides an overview of different models of public oversight of government.

Oil Revenue – Under Public Oversight, Kazhakstan

<http://www.publicoversight.kz/?swl=3>

- ☞ Kazakhstan Non-Governmental Organizations Coalition, "Oil Revenue – Under Public Oversight!" is part of a World Bank initiative called, "The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative" (EITI) which supports improved governance in resource-rich countries through the verification and full publication of company payments and government revenues from oil, gas, and mining. The essence of this initiative is to provide technical and financial assistance to the countries that are committed to ensure transparency of all the processes related to generating and managing extractive industry revenues (from granting subsoil use permissions to investing extractive sectors revenue).

Project on Government Oversight (Pogo), USA

[www.pogo.org](http://www.pogo.org)

- ☞ Pogo is an independent non-profit organization based in the United States of America that investigates and exposes corruption and other misconduct to achieve a more honest, open, and accountable federal government.

Public Oversight of the Security Sector: A Handbook for Civil Society Organizations. UNDP, Bratislava. Edited by Cole E., Eppert K., Kinzelbach K. (2008)

[http://www.ssrnetwork.net/document\\_library/detail/4414/public-oversight-of-the-security-sector-a-handbook-for-civil-society-organizations](http://www.ssrnetwork.net/document_library/detail/4414/public-oversight-of-the-security-sector-a-handbook-for-civil-society-organizations)

☞ This UNDP handbook provides guidance on how CSOs can plan, structure and implement activities to support public oversight of the security sector. Areas of focus include monitoring, budget analysis, legal assistance, legal reform and work with the media and others to improve access to information on security issues.