



Civic Action Team Consultation in Nepal  
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## Accountability Lab's Civic Action Teams



**'A citizen-driven engagement initiative that aims to close the feedback loop on community challenges between communities and their leaders'**

*Tinotenda Chishiri, Accountability Labs CivAcTs Team Zimbabwe (from the [Dynamic Accountability VLOG series](#))*

Accountability Lab's Civic Action Platform (CivAcTs) is a multi-country program and a pioneering platform for citizen feedback, dialogue, and community voice, bridging the gap between local community members and power holders. It is designed to foster a two-way exchange of information between communities and power holders, creating an environment conducive to collaboration by building mutual trust.

The primary aim is to promote community engagement and locally led development through a transparent and inclusive process, helping to (re)build trust between communities and power holders. Responding to the underrepresentation of community voices in governance spaces, or the often extractive processes used to gather information, CivAcTs works to ensure that development activities are informed by community input. It also keeps communities informed about the timing and nature of development initiatives, enabling them to hold power holders accountable. Finally, the platform serves to inform authorities and other power holders so that decisions can be made effectively.

The platform was first established by Accountability Lab in Nepal in response to the 2015 earthquake, 'as a mechanism to collect and disseminate information related to the relief process in the worst affected districts' ([CivAcTs website](#)). CivAcTs formed a core component of the disaster recovery effort and the information collected through the platform was used regularly by the reconstruction authority and donor organizations to inform decision-making. Since its inception, CivAcTs has promoted a culture of feedback on issues related to accountability in disaster relief processes, foreign labor migration, gender equality, open government through fiscal transparency, and more in programme countries around the world.



Visit the [Civic Action Teams website](#)





## How it works

**Community Frontline Associates (CFAs)** are at the heart of the programme. These are community-selected volunteers that help to bridge the gap between communities and power holders. CFAs collect community feedback through monthly surveys from communities about local issues and needs and then share this information with the Accountability Labs teams. This information is then fed to local and national power holders, who often lack the information needed to carry out their activities effectively. In this way, **community members are able to help shape the local development activities that are being carried out.**

In addition to their role in facilitating community led development, the CFAs also play a role in **helping communities to hold power holders to account.** By sharing validated information about the development activities that are or will be taking place, CFAs can ensure that communities are informed and that the work being carried out reflects their needs and priorities. Accessible and engaging information sharing is key - that is why the Accountability Labs use a variety of online and offline sources such as community meetings, radio shows, and music. The information and method of sharing information is adapted to the context and in local languages.

The final step in the CivActs process is **closing the feedback loop**, by bringing together community members and local government for conversations about the information collected through the community surveys, and to collaborate on creating solutions to address local challenges. The process, an innovative community voice platform, is centred on adaptive learning and closing feedback loops between citizens, governments, the media, and the private sector. The result is not only better outcomes for local development activities through co-created solutions, but the process also helps to **build trust between communities and power holders**, as well as **promotes self-advocacy and rights awareness within communities.**

Currently, CivActs teams are active in (Nepal, Pakistan, Liberia, Mali, and Zimbabwe), working on a variety of challenges such as accountability in disaster relief processes, forced labour migration, inclusion in local government processes, and open government and transparency. The process has been adapted in different contexts, such as the tools used for disseminating information to communities.

In Zimbabwe, CivActs teams have employed a variety of offline and online methods including listening sessions and Whatsapp to collect citizen data - with a focus on reaching women and young people in order to position them as allies to support local leaders in co-creating solutions to fight corruption. In Pakistan, the team trained CFAs to identify and mitigate mis- and disinformation related to the COVID-19 and public health issues. Learn more about CivActs in practice by reading about the Gov-HER-nance campaign in Nepal (*next page*).

## Lessons Learned

Ensure communities are driving the work that impacts them. Engage people with lived experience that are closest to the issues to drive the solutions. Not only will this help to build trust between communities and power holders, but also ensure greater community buy-in and ownership of development activities.

Community engagement must be continuous. In this way, decisions can be made in real time and adaptation or course correction can ensure that activities are carried out efficiently - and ultimately better meeting the needs of the communities that they aim to serve.

'Naming and shaming' or 'finger-pointing' builds negativity and distrust between different stakeholders. Use positive mechanisms and processes to build a culture of feedback among stakeholders which ultimately fosters trust and an environment conducive to collaboration between citizens, government and other stakeholders.





## CIVIC ACTION TEAMS IN ACTION: The Gov-HER-nance Campaign in Nepal



The 'Gov-HER-nance: Building democracy from the bottom-up with women' campaign was created by Accountability Lab Nepal (ALN), in collaboration with female representatives from local government in Nepal's Dhangadhi sub-metropolitan city. The campaign aimed to make the city more gender-friendly and ensure greater inclusion of socially marginalised groups in the local development

process - particularly women and members of the LGBTQI+ community that have historically been excluded from decision-making processes within Nepal's largely patriarchal society - .by providing a platform for community feedback and for identifying solutions for local issues. **Some of the activities carried out within the scope of the program were:**

- Training and supporting 'Inclusive Fellows' to engage with a variety of communities and advocate for gender inclusion
- Working with government representatives to find creative ways to disseminate information to community members about services they have access to, to promote gender equality and social inclusion, and to combat rumours about gender issues
- Holding community meetings, town halls, youth camps (for leadership, campaign and advocacy skills), and stakeholders consultation meetings, conducted with a diverse group of participants from different backgrounds (LGBT+community, housewives, single women and others), government representatives and ALN were able to collect feedback about the various issues affecting gender-disadvantaged communities

By providing a platform for civic engagement, the Gov-HER-nance program was integral in developing a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy for the region, co-created by government representatives and community members. In their role as facilitators between power holders and communities, Inclusive Fellows have played a role in ensuring the inclusion of minority community members in participatory community-level budgeting. The Inclusive Fellows have also helped to establish greater trust by engaging meaningfully with a diverse group of community members, including members from vulnerable communities, through continuous dialogue.

**[Learn more about the Gov-HER-nance campaign here](#)**

### Hear from a Community Frontline Associate



*This image was originally published on Accountability Lab's blog [here](#)*

'There were lots of local and international NGOs which came with a list of activities predetermined in their proposal, but we soon realized the CivActs approach was different. We were consulted from the beginning and our feedback was incorporated to identify what issues to prioritize and how to engage with local communities and authorities.'

*Dinesh Gautam, CFA from Birendranagar, Surkhet.*

## Want to learn more about CivAcTs? Check out these articles:



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**Accountability Lab** is a global translocal network that makes governance work for people by supporting active citizens, responsible leaders and accountable institutions. Their goal is a world in which resources are used wisely, decisions benefit everyone fairly, and people lead secure lives.



The Dynamic Accountability Guidebook is practical guide for organisations on their journey towards becoming more dynamically accountable - no matter their starting point. It offers a simple introduction to dynamic accountability – what is it and why organisations should practice it – plus a series of case studies demonstrating how different organisations are putting dynamic accountability into practice.



Accountable Now is a global membership platform that supports civil society organisations to be more transparent, responsive, impact-focused, and community-led. For more than 15 years, we have been working to shift power, champion equity, and embed dynamic accountability into everyday practices.

Our work focuses on supporting civil society organisations to continuously reflect, learn, and adapt to strengthen or embed new ways of working grounded in processes of inclusive, participatory and meaningful engagement with all stakeholders. It goes beyond monitoring & evaluation, due-diligence and compliance, driving accountability as a dynamic process that centres communities' voices, feedback, and preferences.

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