Supporting Social Accountability Campaigns with Sample-Based Observation

National Democratic Institute

Laura Grace 2021



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Executive Summary

Around the world, social accountability campaigns use citizen oversight and voice to increase the effectiveness of public-interest processes and the responsiveness of government. In these efforts, advocacy organizations and grassroots movements promote better governance using a range of tools from direct complaint and redress mechanisms, to citizen monitoring, to participatory budgeting.

Social accountability campaigns use evidence collected through citizen engagement to drive responsive reforms. Evidence can bolster advocacy efforts by pinpointing demands, making recommendations more actionable, and compelling key stakeholders to act, though practice shows that data — on its own — is often not powerful enough to spark change. The most successful campaigns use evidence in service of a broader social accountability strategy that seeks to engage citizens, incentivize decision-makers and take advantage of existing inroads or momentum for reform.

This guide focuses on one method to collect evidence for social accountability campaigns: sample-based observation (SBO).¹ Sample-based observation relies on citizen volunteers to collect statistically reliable data that accurately demonstrates the nature, scope, and scale of problems within a process. Around the world, civil society organizations use SBO to monitor elections, providing objective and accurate assessments, giving hundreds of thousands of citizens oversight of their democracy, and amplifying citizen calls for reform.²

Drawing lessons from election SBOs, this guide explores how SBO can be integrated into social accountability campaigns addressing a range of issues

¹ Sample-based observation also includes Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT), which uses a reliable statistical sample to monitor voting and counting and project election results.

² Many election observer organizations that utilize the SBO and PVT methodologies are members of the Global Network for Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM). GNDEM is a global network of nonpartisan election monitoring organizations spanning more than 85 countries and territories on five continents.

from public health to education to access to justice. SBO has many benefits, including accurately measuring problems, illuminating solutions, framing messaging, and building citizen voice and organizational capacities. But it is not appropriate for all strategies, campaigns, or organizations. *Critically, SBO is only applicable to processes that can be independently observed, can be objectively measured, and are large enough in scale to be sampled.* SBO requires significant organizational resources as well as statistical and subject-matter expertise. And as with any tool, SBO is ineffective if it does not serve a broader advocacy strategy and does not support targeted, motivating, and actionable calls for reform.

This guide is designed to support social accountability advocates in determining when and how an SBO might be applicable. It outlines key considerations, including: best fit with the campaign strategy; preconditions; working in partnership; sampling methodology; data collection and analysis; and volunteer management. The guide also explores effective advocacy and communication planning, such as early engagement with public officials and impacted community members, building a tailored outreach plan, and dynamic uses of SBO findings. It also explores lessons from social accountability SBOs conducted in Serbia and Tunisia. The considerations, strategies, and lessons in this guide aim to make social accountability SBOs more effective and impactful in supporting citizen calls for change.

1

Introduction: The Strategic Use of Evidence in Social Accountability Campaigns

Social accountability campaigns use citizen oversight and voice to increase the effectiveness of public-interest processes and the responsiveness of government. Watchdogs, advocacy organizations, grassroots movements, and others organize such efforts to drive reforms central to citizens' lives. These campaigns employ a range of tools and approaches, from direct complaint and redress mechanisms, to citizen monitoring, to participatory budgeting and more.

Social accountability initiatives use evidence collected through citizen engagement — whether structured data, first-hand accounts, or direct service complaints — to drive responsive reforms. As social accountability studies have found, evidence can boost an advocacy strategy by "exposing and naming previously invisible problems, reframing public debates, garnering mainstream media coverage, identifying 'smoking guns' with specific perpetrators, producing a 'killer statistic' with the potential to go viral, or including national and international politicians or technocrats who are receptive to evidence."³ As an additional benefit, when citizens gather and present evidence, it deepens their engagement in governance issues, reinforces their right to oversight, and underscores their expectation of responsive reforms.

However, while evidence can help illuminate problems and inform the nature of reforms, the power of evidence alone to spark change is limited. Social accountability projects that over-focus on the power of evidence often find that data, on its own, does not motivate decision-makers. On the other hand, datadriven efforts that flow from strategic, citizen-led action that includes other diverse tactics have shown greater success in incentivizing decision-makers and creating accountability. Well-thought strategies that evaluate the drivers of government responsiveness and make use of entry points for reform are much more successful.⁴ In these more strategic approaches, evidence is used when it is actionable and as it supports advocacy that influences decision-makers' incentives.

Considering Evidence as Part of a Social Accountability Strategy

The success of a social accountability campaign may depend on tangible evidence that will inform and influence decision-makers (or other key actors)

³ Fox, J. (2016) <u>Scaling accountability through vertically integrated civil society policy monitoring and advocacy</u>, Brighton: IDS, Page 19

and add momentum to a change effort. Determining the need for evidence and the type of evidence is a critical step to take before investing in a data collection method. Consider the following questions to determine what type(s) of evidence would be impactful and feasible as part of a broader advocacy effort:

- 1. What, exactly, are you trying to change? What are the barriers to making that change? (For example: Disagreement on a problem's cause? Entrenched political interests? Lack of public demand? Lack of actionable information for reformers?) Would evidence help overcome these barriers?
- 2. What are the natural inroads for reform? Are there periods during the governance cycle when legal, procedural or budgetary changes are most likely? What about the broader political or electoral context may create or limit opportunity for reform? Can you collect evidence, communicate and advocate in a way that leverages these opportunities?
- 3. What type of evidence will give weight or bring attention to your issue? What type of evidence will fortify your organization's credibility on the topic? What evidence would empower reformers to act?
- 4. What type of evidence will best motivate your audience? Will they be more persuaded by systematic evidence or human-based story-telling (or both)?
- 5. What type of data best illustrates the problem? The efficiency or equity of a process? Resource allocation? Public perception? Accounts of impacted individuals?
- 6. Do you (or your target audience) fully understand the scope of the problem? Would systematic data help you to better define the problem and identify a solution?
- 7. What types of evidence collection will best engage citizens in the process? What approaches will build upon existing movements? What approaches will create longer-term opportunities for citizen action?
- 8. Do you have the necessary resources, skills, funding, staff/volunteers and capacity to collect the evidence you need? Do you also have the necessary

⁴ Fox, J. (2015) "Social accountability: What does the evidence really say?" *World Development* Vol. 72: 346–361.

resources, skills, funding, staff/volunteers and capacity to drive a targeted communication plan? Are there coalition partners that can share the work?

Working through the above questions can clarify the role of evidence in an advocacy strategy. Some groups may find that systematic evidence collection can help them craft actionable recommendations and motivate key stakeholders. Others may determine that evidence of the problem or preferred solution already exists, or that anecdotal evidence would be more powerful.

Types of Evidence: Sample-Based Observation and Other Approaches

This guide will focus on one method to collect evidence for social accountability campaigns: sample-based observation (SBO). Sample-based observation — a methodology frequently used in nonpartisan election monitoring — relies on citizen volunteers to systematically collect statistically reliable data that demonstrates the precise nature, scope and scale of problems within a process. As described in the sections below, SBO can be a powerful social accountability tool, if quantifiable data is needed to understand a problem and craft informed, actionable recommendations, as a part of a robust and strategic campaign. Do not expect SBO data alone to prompt action by decision-makers.

This guide is intended to help organizations determine whether or not samplebased observation could be an appropriate tool for their campaign (and, if so, how to design and implement it effectively). Depending on the context, some organizations may decide that SBO provides the concrete and objective evidence their campaign needs. Others may determine that the strong statistics from SBO will be most impactful alongside other forms of evidence, such as first-hand accounts by citizens. Other times, SBO may not be feasible or strategic to employ, due to the nature of the issue, time constraints or costs. If SBO is not the right approach — or if SBO data should be presented alongside other types of evidence — different methods should be considered, including:

- Surveys or other forms of public-opinion research, which can measure citizen perceptions and experiences with government services;
- Official performance or "Campaign Promise" trackers, which can measure commitments and action by elected representatives;

- Citizen monitoring, which can help gather data or bear witness to significant trends or problems in public processes (Note: Like SBO, citizen monitoring uses citizens to gather data, but does not employ samples or produce rigorous statistics);
- Randomized controlled trials, which can test and demonstrate the effectiveness of proposed reforms or interventions;
- Desk-research or analysis of publicly-available data, which can bring overlooked problems to light;
- Investigation or whistle-blowing, which can uncover "smoking guns" or other proof of problems; or
- Crowd-sourced/first-hand accounts or complaints from impacted individuals, which can put a human face to an otherwise abstract or denied problem.

Adapting Strategy and the Use of Evidence: Lessons from Guatemala

Over the course of a decade, the Centro de Estudios para la Equidad y la Gobernanza de los Sistemas de Salud (the Center for the Study of Equity and Governance in Health Systems, or CEGSS) adapted their use of evidence to better meet the goals of their advocacy strategy. Initially, CEGSS exclusively used statistical data collected through sample-based observation as part of their advocacy campaign. However, they soon learned that targeted decision-makers were not responsive to statistics alone. In fact, lawmakers would dismiss findings through technical arguments and refuse to act. Over time, CEGGS employed various methods of gathering evidence that were progressively less academically-complex and more inclusive of community members. An evaluation of the program found that direct citizen reporting and documentation generated the most government responsiveness, and that statistics alone generated the least. These findings showed that high-quality evidence on its own was not sufficient to influence government action, and suggests that approaches which involve citizens in generating and presenting evidence, facilitate collective action, and consider the political and social context are more likely to be effective.

2 Sample-Based Observation for Social Accountability

Sample-based observation (SBO) gathers evidence by deploying trained citizens to complete a statistical sample where they observe and report back data about a process. That data is analyzed to produce a highly accurate and representative picture of the process as a whole — demonstrating positive and negative aspects, and areas for improvement. Around the world, SBO has given hundreds of thousands of citizens ownership and oversight of their election processes and has, in turn, amplified the voices of citizens and civil society in calling for electoral reforms. Drawing on key lessons from election SBOs and other accountability projects, this guide explores how SBO can be used for social accountability campaigns tied to other governing processes.

Sample-Based Observation in Elections and Beyond

For more than 30 years, citizen organizations have used statistical methods to provide accurate, impartial findings in election observation. These samplebased observation projects (sometimes called parallel vote tabulation [PVT]), involve deploying observers to a random and representative statistical sample of polling stations where they observe, record and report back information about voting and counting.⁵ Through SBO, election monitors take collective action to citizen oversight of a democratic process and show objective evidence of problems. In turn, this helps build public confidence in elections and influences electoral reforms.

Beyond elections, sample-based observation can be used in other social accountability efforts to bolster advocacy campaigns with precise evidence.

⁵ To learn more about Parallel Vote Tabulations, see <u>https://www.ndi.org/pvt</u> or *The Quick Count and Election Observation: An NDI Guide for Civic Organizations and Political Parties*, National Democratic Institute (2002), <u>https://www.ndi.org/node/24021</u>.

SBO can measure a process before reforms have taken place (to identify which aspects of the process should be improved), or after reforms have taken place (to measure compliance and effectiveness of new procedures). A series of SBOs can be used to measure change over time, offer periodic snapshots of certain processes, and/or show the impact of — or need for — reforms.

Sample-based observation in social accountability campaigns involves training and deploying volunteers to observe a random, representative sample, where they monitor the same process, collect the same type of data using standardized questionnaires (often referred to as "forms" or "checklists"), and report it to a central hub for analysis (often using rapid reporting technologies). However, not all processes are suitable for SBO. To use the methodology, processes must be:

- **Observable:** The process is accessible and can be consistently and objectively witnessed, or otherwise confirmed by citizens.
- *Measurable:* There are clear indicators about the quality of the process that can be quantified, qualified and documented. [Note that SBO does not rely on second-hand information, including citizen perception or opinions. Public opinions are better measured through public opinion surveys, which use a different methodology and serve a different advocacy purpose].
- Sampleable: The process or issue under investigation is so large in scale typically, in the hundreds, if not thousands that a statistically reliable sample can be drawn.⁶ The part of the process to be sampled and observed (called the "unit of analysis") could be a process (like vaccine distribution), a location (like a classroom), an instance (like a police complaint), or time period (like a single date within a long term process).

Below is an illustrative list of types of public-interest issues where SBO could be used to collect actionable evidence:

• *Education.* This could include resource or supply dissemination, testing, and academic processes, among other topics. In the Philippines, NAMFREL

⁶ If the universe is NOT large enough for a sample, SBO is not an appropriate methodology and another form of evidence should be considered as described in Section 1.

monitored the distribution of textbooks. In Ukraine, OPORA monitored higher education standardized testing.

- *Healthcare.* Citizen groups including Mourakiboun in Tunisia, the Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA) in Serbia, and the Centro de Estudios para la Equidad y la Gobernanza de los Sistemas de Salud (the Center for the Study of Equity and Governance in Health Systems, or CEGSS) in Guatemala deployed citizen monitors to health centers to measure the quality of medical facilities and services. NAMFREL monitored the procurement, delivery, and inventory of medicine in hospitals across the Philippines. In 2021 and beyond, access to COVID testing as well as the distribution, safe storage and/or access to COVID vaccines could be monitored.
- *Infrastructure.* Often a source of corruption, high-budget public works projects and other expenditures can be monitored, and some may be appropriate for SBO. In Peru, a civil society coalition called Observatorio de Integridad is monitoring the publicly-funded rebuilding of schools, housing, sanitation, health facilities, and other infrastructure in regions most impacted by a disastrous 2017 flood. In some cases, SBO could be applied if a unit of analysis were large enough: for example, sampling dates of construction during a defined, years-long period of public work projects. In cases with a smaller "universe", other evidence-gathering methods (listed in Section 1) should be considered.
- **Public safety.** Sampling and monitoring the processing of criminal complaints may lead to helpful evidence for reform. For example, election organizations may track the status of public safety-related complaints during the election period, including complaints of violence against women. However, complaint cases would need to be very large in number in order to be reliably sampled as part of an SBO.
- Access to justice. SBO of court cases or sentences within the judicial system could provide useful data for a rule of law campaign. Reliable data about trends on sentencing or fines assigned for certain crimes could reveal discrepancies in how certain groups and citizens are treated by the judicial system.
- Access to information. Civil society groups could monitor how government bodies make information publicly available to citizens at the local level.

Considering SBO as part of an Advocacy Campaign

Sample-based observation can be a helpful methodology to create evidence as part of a social accountability campaign, but SBO is not a "silver bullet." There are benefits and limitations that should be carefully considered.

What are the benefits of SBO?

- SBO detects and defines the scope of problems. Advocates, the public, lawmakers or bureaucrats, may be aware of problems in a system, but may not fully understand the nature, scope or scale. Other times, anecdotal information may misrepresent a problem. A well-designed SBO can identify what is working and what is not, pushing beyond common assumptions that can stand in the way of change.
- *SBO informs advocacy positions.* By pinpointing problems in a process, SBO can help advocates better define their policy demands and create actionable, relevant, and evidence-based recommendations.
- **SBO can propel advocacy messaging.** SBO data is highly accurate and objective, and often unveils compelling facts. If targeted strategically, findings from SBO may help sway public opinion, motivate decision-makers or compel other allies, such as civil society or international organizations, or the media to join calls for change.
- SBO creates space for citizen engagement and oversight. By its nature, SBO requires the participation of citizens by the hundreds or thousands. This not only builds the capacity and confidence of the individuals involved, but also builds citizen oversight including in sectors where social accountability is new.
- **SBO builds capacity.** Use of statistics, volunteer management, and targeted messaging are valuable skills for an organization or coalition. SBO can build (or maintain) these capacities to enable new approaches in future projects.

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SBO can also build new partnerships between civic groups with different skill sets and advocacy approaches.

What are the drawbacks of SBO?

- SBO requires technical expertise and strong organizing. Sample-based projects must be statistically sound in their design, data collection, and analysis. This requires statistical and subject-matter expertise, as well as strong project and volunteer management. Organizations with SBO experience in one field (like elections), may struggle to apply statistics, subject expertise, and project management in a new area.
- **SBO can be demanding of volunteers.** SBO requires a strict methodology and the lack of flexibility may deter some volunteers. These obstacles can be overcome by recruiting volunteers with an interest in the subject, improving training, designing (and testing) easy-to-use data collection tools, and emphasizing the value of objective evidence to solve a social problem.
- SBO requires resources, time and effort. SBOs are resource intensive and take several months or longer to design and implement. They require sufficient funding, technical expertise and/or assistance, and a large pool of committed volunteers and staff to manage them. Further resources are required for advocacy after the SBO is completed. Some groups find that SBO requires so much effort that it detracts from their main objective: advocating for change.
- **SBO on its own is not impactful.** Simply conducting an SBO and having evidence-based findings will not lead to change. To be impactful, SBO must be part of a strong advocacy strategy that motivates relevant stakeholders with dynamic and compelling messages, and that takes advantage of existing inroads for reform.

What Types of Organizations do Sample-Based Observation?

As discussed above, effective sample-based observation requires statistical and subject expertise, project management, AND an issue-advocacy strategy. *Few organizations are well positioned to combine issue advocacy and SBO, so partnerships, resource-sharing and other forms of cooperation may be required to*

ensure the viability and value of an SBO for social accountability.

Organizations with subject-matter expertise (e.g., public health policy) and advocacy capacity will need to secure certain resources, including a large number of volunteers and the capacity to manage, train, and deploy them. They will also need statistical expertise — whether internally or through an outside advisor — to lead the sample design, data collection methods and statistical analysis of data. Technology tools and capacity are also important to make SBO more efficient.

In some cases, organizations with SBO experience may consider applying it in new areas. Election monitoring groups, in particular, may be well suited to undertake social accountability SBOs given their methodological and logistical experience, as well as their large volunteer networks. However, election monitors should recognize their limitations — especially regarding their subject-matter expertise, the interest of their volunteers, and their ability to successfully advocate for reforms outside election processes. Election groups with a broader focus in anti-corruption, transparency, or rule of law may be positioned to apply SBO in those areas. Nonetheless, campaigning on issues where an election group has no prior expertise, experience, or "stake" invites challenges to strategy, methodology, implementation and advocacy. As such, working in partnership with subject matter experts that understand an issue area and have keen interest in advocacy is critical.

One successful model is a partnership involving expert or advocacy organizations working with election monitoring or social science research organizations. The advantage of this approach is that it allows different organizations to come together using their respective strengths to advance social accountability goals. In Serbia, for example, CRTA (an experienced election monitoring organization), teamed up with Law Scanner (a health rights protection organization), to conduct an SBO of healthcare facilities, develop evidence-based policy recommendations, and advocate for reforms. (For more information, see case study below).

Putting a Social Accountability SBO into Practice

Sampling Methodology for Social Accountability Projects

Sound project planning and statistical design is critical to the success and accuracy of an SBO. First, define the central issue the social accountability SBO will investigate, then consider methodology details. This includes:

Selecting a Unit of Analysis

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The "unit of analysis" refers to the precise object that will be investigated. It could be a process, a location, an instance, or a period of time. Ideally, a unit of analysis would balance the needs of the advocacy strategy, practical and resource considerations, and a basic level of statistical accuracy. Consider what kind of data will best illuminate the problem and provide compelling, actionable data. Next, identify a unit of analysis that is:

- **Observable.** Monitors must have unfettered access. While most election observers have access to polling stations through formal accreditation, such legally-protected levels of access are rare in other areas. Some processes may be publicly accessible and easily witnessed. But many subjects will require approval from responsible authorities and others may be completely off-limits. Some organizations develop agreements with authorities to secure necessary access. (As a bonus, this cooperation can also build buy-in for advocacy later on). Some organizations may use Right to Information laws to secure access for citizen monitoring and oversight.
- *Measurable.* Consider units of analysis that can be measured and quantified with a reasonable level of effort. Consider practical implications, including what data volunteers can understand and record, without relying on opinions or second-hand information.
- *Sampleable.* SBO requires units with a large total (called a "universe" or population). Seek a unit of analysis that numbers in the thousands (or

hundreds), as the larger the universe, the more valid the SBO findings will be. SBOs can measure the smallest unit within the universe (for example: a classroom) or a larger aggregate of units (a school). If one particular universe is not large enough, consider smaller sub-units or another aspect of the process. Importantly, to be able to select a sample of units, the total universe must be available (or compileable) as a dataset — ideally in a machinereadable format.

Sampling

Once a unit of analysis is identified and the full dataset is acquired, a sample of the full dataset will need to be created. The sample must be representative and randomly selected from the entire data set. An experienced statistician or SBO expert should select a sampling approach, determine an ideal sample size, and draw a reliable, representative and random sample.⁸ The sample size should be large enough to have a reasonable confidence level (usually 95%) to retain accuracy and enable advocates to clearly identify trends. For most subjects, this will require a margin of error in the range of 2%-5%.⁹ Adjusting the sample size to meet available resources, while maintaining a responsible confidence level and margin of error, will keep the operation inexpensive and feasible.

⁸ Depending on the subject being sampled, as well as public perception and practical considerations, statisticians may advise: a general random sample, a stratified random sample, or a cluster sample. The critical point is that the sampling method remains random and representative in a way that can be effectively explained to stakeholders.

⁹ Note that most social accountability campaigns will not demand the same level of precision as election SBOs or PVTs, which typically have a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error as small as 1%. For more information on calculating an ideal sample size, see Appendix I or NDI's <u>Quick</u> <u>Count Guide</u>, Page 65.

Illustrative Sampling Process for Social Accountability SBO

Step	Explanation	Example				
1 Define Social Accountability Issue	What is the central issue you wish to investigate?	Reliability and fairness of COVID vaccine distribution				
2 Select Unit of Analysis	What is the precise object you	Units considered				
	 will examine to investigate your issue? This could be a: (1) Process, (2) Location, (3) Instance, or (4) Time unit. Remember! A unit of analysis must be: Observable. Observers have unfettered access to the unit. Measurable. Process can be 	Potential unit: Individual citizensAssessment: Not ideal unitReason: Relies on personal opinion.Potential unit: Vaccine dosesAssessment: Not ideal unitReason: Doesn't address advocacy issues(fairness/reliability). Cannot access. Nodataset.Potential unit: Vaccination DaysAssessment: Not ideal unitReason: Universe too small. Only 22dates planned.				
	 documented. Does not rely on opinion or second-hand information. Sampleable. Total number in the hundreds or thousands. Available as a complete and 					
	<i>accurate dataset.</i> This could include a pre-existing dataset or a dataset that can be compiled by the organization.	 Potential unit: Vaccination Sites Assessment: Ideal unit Reason: Large number (960 sites countrywide) Dataset/List of all sites publicly available Accessible: process in plain sight to public; Health Ministry supports SBO Observers can directly measure data about target issues (storage, queues, etc.) 				
3 Determine reliable sample size	For most SBOs, 95% confidence level with margin of error of +/- 2%-5%, depending on the need for precision/available resources. Remember to consult a statistician!	Unit of Analysis: Vaccination Sites Total Universe/Population: 960 Desired confidence level: 95% Desired margin of error: +/- 3% Sample size: 506				
4 Randomly select sample points	Once the sample size is clear, have a statistician or SBO expert randomly select the sample from the entire universe. Remember: No units may be excluded as a possible sample point. No sampled unit may be replaced for a more convenient unit. Either of these actions would bias the sample.	Sample frame/Dataset: List of 960 vaccination sites Sample points: 506 vaccination sites Sampling strategy: General Random Sample* *Note that any representative and random sampling approach may be used. See footnote 8 above and Appendix 1 below.				

Implementing Sample-Based Observation

In addition to a sound sampling approach, SBO requires a strong project management plan. SBO relies heavily on the accuracy of data and needs a higher degree of quality control and contingency planning than other activities.¹⁰ As such, ensuring objective, committed volunteers, high-quality training, effective date collection and careful analysis are paramount.

Designing Data Collection

To ensure standardized and complete data collection, develop standardized forms for all volunteers to report their observations. Designing forms and instructing volunteers to focus on priority data will save resources and ensure higher data quality.

Data is collected in:											
Health Center (1)	Branch	of the		Health Station (3)		3)		Health Clinic (4)			
	Health Ce	enter (2)						╋		
Is there public transportation to the health facility?			Yes (1)				No (2)				
What time does the health facility open? (1)			8:00 (2)	9:00 After 9 p.r hou (4) rs (3)		After 9 p.m (4)	ı. It is not open at all (5)				
Is the healthcare facility adapted for disabled people (ramps)?			Yes (1)				No (2)				
Is there a prominent way to schedule an appointment?		Yes (1)				No (2)					
Does the healthcare fac	lity Yes -	- radiato	rs	Yes -	- Heaters	Yes - ovens / stoves		/ens / stoves		No	
have heating? (1)		(2) (3)					(4)	+			
Do healthcare professionals treat all patients equally ?			Yes (1)				No (2)				
Are healthcare professionals unkind to any of the following peop			ving people?						T		
Roma						Yes (1)				No (2)	T
People with disabilities				Yes (1)			No (2)		T		
Older people				Yes (1)			No (2)		T		
To women					Yes (1)		No (2)		T		
Is there a pharmacy within the facility where the health facility is located?			Yes (1)		No (2)						
If the health facility doe	s not have its	own ph	arma	cy, h	ow far is the ne	are	est pha	rmacy?			
Between 50 Betwee	tween 50 Between 100 and Between 200 and		Mo	e than 500m	About 1 km		Does not have		Τ		
and 100m 200m (1) (2)	300 (3)	m		(4)		(5)			(6)	

Figure 1

Excerpted questions from "Assessment of the Right to Health Care in Serbia" SBO project by CRTA

¹⁰ See also, *Systematic Methods for Advancing Election Observation*, NDI (2014), available at <u>ndi.org/sites/</u> <u>default/files/Systematic%20Methods%20for%20Advancing%20Election%20Observation_WAEON</u> <u>EN.pdf</u>. While the document centers on election SBOs, the best practices discussed are applicable to non-election SBOs.

- *Identify necessary data.* Organizers should have deep familiarity with the process being monitored and the relevant data necessary for advocacy purposes. Experts in the related field (whether organizational staff or another partner), should assist in form strategy and development.
- Align deployment to data needs. The decision to keep volunteers as stationary or mobile should be driven by the process being witnessed and the type of data needed. Similarly, consider the dates and hours when data should be collected either on a specific date if the process requires, or within a strict window to make data more reliable and volunteer management easier.
- *Keep forms short.* Forms should be as short as possible so that data can be quickly transmitted and accurately analyzed by the organization. When designing forms, ensure that each question serves an advocacy purpose: capturing data without a clear plan for how to use it wastes limited resources and time.
- *Keep forms easy to use.* Use mostly closed-ended questions that are easy to answer, transmit and analyze. Open ended questions are difficult to analyze en-masse and risk introducing bias, opinion, or misunderstanding. Forms should be well-formatted so that questions are not missed by volunteers. (See a sample SBO form in Figure 1)
- *Test forms before use:* It is a good practice to "test" forms in action to ensure applicability to the process, logic to the users and ease of use. Ideally, ask a volunteer to use the form while observing the real-world process. This can help identify areas of confusion, poorly-conceived questions, or other issues that should be corrected.

For more guidance on developing forms and related training materials, see <u>Materials</u> <u>for Professional Election Observation: Designing Forms, Manuals and Trainings.</u>

Managing Volunteers

Engaged volunteers are critical. Strategic recruitment, training, and management of volunteers can improve the quality and efficiency of the SBO effort.

Recruitment

Consider the following approaches to recruit engaged volunteers and build citizen engagement that can strengthen the SBO and broader advocacy campaign:

- *Ensure diversity.* Social accountability SBOs are excellent opportunities to engage citizens in public oversight. Proactively recruiting all types of volunteers including those diverse in age, gender, ethnicity, religion, physical capability and other demographics ensures that all citizens can hold their government accountable.
- *Require objectivity.* Volunteers must be objective in their observation. When recruiting, require volunteers to be free of any conflicts of interest and to commit to principles of objectivity and honesty. Recruitment criteria should also include other necessities, such as access to a mobile phone, minimum age requirements and literacy.
- *Recruit locally.* Because SBO sample locations cannot be replaced for convenience, wait to recruit volunteers until after a sample is drawn and deployment locations are known. Recruit volunteers from the local area where they will deploy. This will not only save funds by avoiding unnecessary travel, but volunteers from the local community may be more reliable and engaged, and may have better access to observation sites.
- *Foster engagement.* At times, SBO can feel technical and removed from "real issues," especially if it is not a subject that volunteers feel passionate about. To combat this, in recruitment and in training, emphasize the importance of the issue being observed, the critical role of the volunteer, and how the SBO will help the social accountability campaign achieve its goals.
- *Plan for contingencies.* It is a good practice to recruit and train 10-20% more volunteers than required for an SBO. This ensures that an SBO has enough volunteers to collect data from all sample points by having trained back-up volunteers even if some drop out.

Training

SBO data must be collected in an accurate and standardized manner. The following training tips can prepare volunteers to know their duties and to feel more engaged in the process.

- *Keep training numbers small.* Holding trainings with no more than 20-30 volunteers per session can help ensure each volunteer is sufficiently trained and has the opportunity to ask questions, get practice using forms, and receive feedback.
- Standardize trainings. To ensure data is reliably collected, volunteers must have a uniform understanding of forms and other key duties. Consider using a handful of "master trainers" to train all cohorts, if possible. Alternatively, if multiple trainers must be used, limit the number of "step down"/cascade trainings, which can dilute the curriculum. Develop strong written materials including training agendas, and manuals for trainers and for volunteers to promote better and consistent understanding.¹¹
- Use dynamic teaching techniques. Include practical examples and engaging approaches to strengthen volunteer understanding. This includes role play, brainstorm and discussion. Trainings should also include hands-on practice using the form and reporting tools so that any misunderstandings can be corrected at the time of training. This helps avoid problems during observation and improve the quality of collected data.
- *Keep trainings memorable.* Volunteers do not need to become subject-matter experts. Volunteers do need to understand: their role, contribution and assigned tasks; the process they will observe; how to correctly complete and report their form; and what to do if they encounter challenges. Focus trainings on these key areas. Additionally, train volunteers within a few weeks of deployment so content remains fresh.

Deployment

Organizers should support volunteers during deployment to ensure they can collect and return their observation data and overcome any challenges they encounter. Remember to:

• *Give clear guidance on deployment.* SBO requires that data is collected from precisely the sampled unit during a clear time period. Ensure that volunteers

¹¹ See also Materials for Professional Election Observation: Designing Forms, Manuals and Trainings, NDI (2014), at <u>https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Materials%20for%20Professional%20Election%20</u> Observation WAEON EN.pdf

know their assigned location and the time period they should conduct their observation.

- *Plan for security and logistical needs.* Some sampled locations may be difficult to reach or may involve risk. Organizations must be prepared to manage security situations if they arise. To protect volunteers, conduct a thorough assessment of security and logistical needs for difficult locations. Relatedly, some SBO subjects may introduce added risks to volunteers (for example, concerns around COVID). Ensure that volunteers have the support, supplies, and training they need to safely and accurately complete their duties.
- Support volunteers. Some volunteers may need reminders about their duties, while others may encounter unexpected problems. A team of supervisors should be assigned to support a manageable number of volunteers typically between 5-30 people, considering geographic and logistical challenges that may vary from region to region.
- **Troubleshoot as needed.** As with any large-scale project, there may be obstacles during deployment. This may include denial of access to observation locations, volunteer drop-out, communication disruption, among other issues. Staff and supervisors should be prepared to solve problems quickly and creatively to ensure volunteers can observe in their assigned locations and report their data as planned.

Collecting and Analyzing Data

Data reporting and analysis are critical to a successful SBO and many efforts use technology to make these processes more efficient. Organizations with a large budget or with existing IT capacity may be able to adapt existing tools or build customized tools. However, many free or low-cost tools are also available.¹²

• *Streamline reporting.* Volunteers need to quickly and accurately return their data to the organization. Timely reporting allows data to be checked, confirmed and, if necessary, corrected immediately. Consider a reporting

¹² For free organizing technology that can be used to support SBO, see <u>https://www.dem.tools/.</u>

method that is accessible to volunteers and unlikely to introduce errors. Some organizations ask volunteers to submit data to a central call center where their answers are entered by volunteer operators into a master database. Others use automated tools, like SMS or online forms, where volunteers directly submit their answers to a central database.

- Strive for completeness. To guarantee SBO findings are representative and accurate, organizers should ensure that nearly 100% of reports are returned on time. This includes following up with volunteers who have not submitted their data as scheduled or who have not answered all questions in their form.
- Take security and quality control measures. Throughout data collection and analysis, take steps to prevent problems and check data for accuracy. Whether in reporting tools, connectivity networks, or the central database, ensure strong security protocols that mitigate risks of impersonation, hacking, or other malicious attacks. Build in systems to prevent and detect mistakes in volunteer responses or in data entry. Develop a database that flags data omissions, logical errors, or other inconsistencies.
- Analyze data carefully. Once data is reported and entered in a database (and checked and corrected for errors), it is ready for analysis. The data should be reviewed, analyzed and contextualized by a central team that includes a statistician, a subject-matter expert and select advocacy staff. Review data to identify any subjects where a statistically significant percentage of answers deviate from the expected or desired answer. As applicable, the team should consider significant variation between regions, time periods, institutions or other factors. SBO findings should meet all standards of evidence and publicized reports should be transparent about sampling, data collection and analysis methods, and any limitations that may have impacted the data.

For additional tips, see Chapter 6. Data Management and Analysis in NDI's <u>Systematic Methods for Advancing Election Observation.</u>

Using Evidence in Effective Advocacy

Collecting SBO evidence is only part of the work since statistics, alone, typically will not foster change. Data must be integrated with a broader advocacy strategy that leverages the data to incentivize decision-makers and takes advantage of opportunities for reform. A clear advocacy strategy precedes the SBO and ensures the tactical and timely use of the evidence. The strategy itself should be informed through power analysis and a corresponding theory of change.¹³

Laying the Groundwork for Effective Advocacy

To a greater degree than other tactics, SBO requires prior outreach to ensure the methodology is understood by the target audiences and the findings are willingly received. This is particularly important for organizations working on issues where citizen oversight is relatively new or where they do not have preexisting relationships with decision-makers.

- **Build early support for the SBO project.** As part of the project design process, conduct outreach to key decision-makers, allies and impacted stakeholders. This focuses the SBO on relevant problems, garners support (and potentially better access for observers) and builds early understanding and buy-in for the SBO's findings down the road. Failing to do this advance work, organizations found their SBO and advocacy efforts less impactful and even dismissed as irrelevant.
- *Educate audiences about SBO and statistics.* Most citizens do not knowingly interact with statistics in their daily lives. Even bureaucrats and lawmakers may not understand or trust SBO methodology. When SBOs upset commonly-held assumptions or embarrass those in power, critics attempt to discredit the data by claiming that statistics (or the organization) can't

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¹³ <u>https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Adocacy-Strategy-Framework.pdf</u>

be trusted. SBOs require advanced work to educate targeted stakeholders and the media to better understand how information from a sample can be generalized to a whole process. Refer to examples of how regular people trust samples in their daily lives (a frequent reference: drawing a small amount of — rather than all — blood from the body to diagnose disease). It may also be helpful to refer to examples of successful SBOs to build acceptance of the project.

- *Establish credibility.* Beyond understanding SBO methodology and statistics, it is important to build the organization's credibility on the issue at hand. This is especially key if the organization is working in a new field or using a new approach. Establishing credibility through expertise (whether internal or through partnership), objectivity, and accuracy is important.
- Consider the timing of advocacy. Unlike election SBOs, the timing of social accountability SBOs is more flexible. Determine when findings will be best received and most actionable. The timing of an electoral or legislative cycle may impact how much focus lawmakers and government officials give to an issue or how much power they have to enact reforms. Political trends may create opportunities to push for reforms. Unexpected crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or natural disasters, may temporarily divert attention away from a core issue, or may create a new urgency and opening for reform. Strategically timing the SBO can maximize advocacy efforts.

A Multi-Pronged Approach to Stakeholder Outreach

Once SBO data is analyzed, consider which findings will be most motivating or actionable, and how they should be framed for different stakeholder groups. Targeted stakeholders may fall into the following categories:

• *Reformers:* This includes reform-minded lawmakers, bureaucrats or other institutional leaders who can push forward structural change. While this group may not need to be convinced of the need for change, they do need to be educated and empowered to enact reforms. This group needs evidence that better illuminates the problem and actionable recommendations that can be readily adopted and/or used to measure progress. These allied decision-makers may find detailed SBO data useful and may welcome citizen input.

- **Resistant decision-makers:** Some groups of lawmakers, bureaucrats or professional associations will need to be incentivized to solve problems. Simply handing this group a technical SBO report will not be effective. Consider what additional tactics will most influence these actors, possibly including public pressure, targeted lobbying, shocking statistics, humanized story-telling, or direct constituent complaints.
- *Members of the media:* A public campaign will be more effective if members of the media are well-informed and interested in the issue. Target journalists (including prolific opinion editors or broadcast personalities) who can amplify findings and keep SBO data and advocacy demands at the forefront of public discourse.
- Engaged citizens: Public demand can empower reformers and pressure resistant decision-makers. Since technical SBO data is unlikely to motivate citizens, data must be translated and packaged into something tangible and relevant to citizens' lives. Reach different citizens through varied approaches, including different formats (infographics, videos, audio, opeds, articles), different platforms (radio, TV, newspaper, social media), and different communicators (organizational leaders, fellow citizens, cultural leaders or even social media influencers). Include only the most compelling finding(s) and present ways citizens can engage on the issue to demand reforms.
- Other allies: SBO findings can help to enjoin, educate and empower other allies, including civil society groups, the international community and other special-interest entities. Groups that work closely in the sector may benefit from detailed SBO findings and may even make use of it in their own advocacy. Others can be targeted with findings that will most likely motivate their support or relate to their own priorities. Consider how the SBO can support or ignite opportunities for collective advocacy.

Packaging and Augmenting SBO Findings

As discussed above, presenting SBO data, on its own, will not compel policy action. Even the media, which often flock to press conferences releasing SBO data on elections, may be less interested in statistical data on other issues and processes. Building a strong communications plan can make SBO data more accessible and actionable. SBO data should be packaged and augmented with other information to maximize impact. The following communication assets may be helpful:

- Comprehensive statistical findings report: Primarily intended for internal use, transparency purposes, and (as determined helpful) for dissemination to technical reformers and allies with expertise in the field. To ensure project transparency, the full report should be publicly accessible, including on a website and social media channels.
- *Tailored summary reports:* Intended to inform less technical decision-makers and allies. This should highlight only the most striking findings of the SBO, as well as findings most interesting or most actionable to the particular stakeholder. If appropriate, this could also be augmented with more narrative assets below.
- Compelling story-telling: Intended to engage and persuade new or resistant audiences. Highlight data that best pinpoint problems and augment these findings with engaging content. This could include first-hand narratives that put a human face to the problem or dynamic illustrations, infographics or videos that draw and hold attention. Assets should be packaged as written, audio, graphic and/or video content to be shared on various public platforms, including print media, radio, TV and social media.
- *"Viral" content:* Intended to build broader awareness and momentum for the campaign. Identify the single most striking finding of the SBO be it a shocking statistic, a 'smoking gun', or a surprising finding that challenges widely-held assumptions. Package this finding well with a killer graphic, engaging content or an earned-media stunt. Then solicit volunteers, allies, local leaders, influencers and the media, to amplify the content and garner more interest in the campaign.

Assessing Impact and Adapting Approach

As with any initiative, it's important to actively monitor and honestly assess whether an approach is working. All social accountability campaigns encounter obstacles — either in data collection or in advocacy — and being adaptable and creative is critical to success. Remain responsive to the political context and pivot to new opportunities and inroads for reform.

After conducting targeted outreach to stakeholders and reinforcing key messages through wider communications, reassess. Are stakeholders responding to evidence as expected? If not, what stands in the way of reforms? Does evidence need to be packaged differently? Would other types of evidence or story-telling be more effective? Are there new or different pressure points or inroads for reform to pursue? Recall the example in Section I: Over the course of a decade, CEGSS adapted and applied new tactics to influence decisionmakers as their initial approach failed to create change.

After an initial advocacy push, consider how to repurpose SBO findings. SBO could be used as baseline data to measure new reforms, in service of new advocacy efforts, or to support a new social need. For example, when COVID-19 arrived in Tunisia, Mourakiboun seized an opportunity to revitalize its public health SBO data, which included maps and performance data of health centers, and a list of at-risk institutions. They revisited their data, providing new recommendations on medication, sanitation, and enforcing social distancing in public.

After advocacy efforts wind down, assess whether or not goals were achieved and how the SBO aided those efforts. Consider if SBO data was effective in driving citizen demand, incentivizing decision-makers, or otherwise aiding reforms. Consider whether or not the SBO integrated with or supported a broader advocacy strategy. Consider how citizens engaged with the SBO — as volunteers and as an

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audience — and whether the SBO helped build space for citizens to hold their government accountable. A shown in the case studies below, each SBO offers important lessons to build better social accountability strategies in the future.

7 **Case Studies**

Case 1: Serbia

Background

Starting in 2019, Law Scanner, a health rights protection organization, partnered with the Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA), an election monitoring organization, to conduct an SBO of primary healthcare institutions in Serbia. Through its patient rights protection work, Law Scanner receives direct complaints from citizens about the healthcare system. In the years preceding the SBO, a large number of citizens contacted Law Scanner with complaints about the availability, quality, and efficiency of the primary healthcare system. These citizen complaints foreshadowed issues uncovered and quantified by the SBO and informed Law Scanner's broader advocacy strategy.

What was their advocacy goal? How did SBO support that goal?

Based on citizen complaints and their review of the legal framework, Law Scanner assessed the healthcare context to determine the level where problems existed and to pinpoint their advocacy goal. They decided to use a strategy of cooperation, education and persuasion to compel decision-makers to make necessary reforms. Their goal was to use targeted and systematic findings about the healthcare process, coupled with insights from citizen complaints, to persuade decision-makers to support systematic changes to primary healthcare services.

The SBO was designed to quantify key issues citizens encounter at the primary

healthcare level, as well as to provide actionable recommendations to improve primary healthcare institutions and practices. The SBO focused on primary healthcare facilities, the scope of services they provided, and their compliance with legal regulations. Relating to Law Scanner's mandate and advocacy focus, the SBO also focused special attention on the application of the Law on Patients' Rights and related redress mechanisms, as well as the rights of persons with disabilities to access healthcare.

How did the project use partnerships, coalitions or collective action?

The project delineated responsibilities between Law Scanner and CRTA, according to their expertise and experience. Law Scanner, with its background in health rights protections, is leading the advocacy campaign and outreach to public officials, healthcare interest groups, and the public. For the SBO project, they served as the subject-matter expert in the project's design, including providing inputs on form design and using SBO findings to draft a report and recommendations on the state of healthcare in Serbia.

CRTA, an experienced election monitoring organization that conducted several electoral SBOs, took the lead on: designing the SBO sampling approach and methodology; recruiting, training and managing SBO volunteers; collecting and analyzing data; and producing a technical findings report to inform Law Scanner's advocacy and recommendations.

Beyond the primary partnership, Law Scanner also shared SBO findings with other health rights interest groups to help inform their advocacy strategy.

How was the SBO structured? What kind of data did it collect?

In late 2019, CRTA recruited and trained a total of 393 observers to monitor healthcare institutions using SBO methodology. Out of a total of 1,773 primary healthcare institutions, a sample of 314 healthcare institutions were selected using two-stage cluster random sampling, stratified by region.

Out of the 314 locations sampled, observers were only able to access 282 healthcare institutions after observers were denied access to 20 institutions and 6 institutions were closed or had moved. CRTA had requested formal approval from the Ministry of Health, but received no response.

A pair of observers visited each sampled center and used questionnaires to collect data about the institution's operations, the healthcare center's work, and the patient experience. Data was reported back to CRTA, which analyzed findings in a technical report for Law Scanner.

In reviewing SBO findings, Law Scanner identified and detailed seven serious problems in primary healthcare, including:

- 1. A lack of accurate, timely, public information about the locations of healthcare centers and the services they offer.
- 2. The absence of an efficient and widely-used system for patients to schedule appointments. [Patients rarely used call centers (only 6% of patients) or online scheduling (only 2% of patients), while 75% still came in person to schedule their appointments.]
- 3. Insufficient accessibility for people with disabilities, including a lack of wheelchair ramps at nearly two-thirds of primary healthcare institutions.
- 4. A lack of transparency and education about patients' rights protections. Only 60% of primary healthcare institutions informed patients of redress mechanisms.
- A lack of information (at institutions and on websites) about mandatory co-payments for certain services and medication.
- 6. A lack of information on the right

Table 3: Overview of Main Deficiencies at Healthcare Institutions in Percentage Points by Region	Belgrade	Western Serbia	Eastern Serbia	Vojvodina
No elevator	20%	34%	43%	30%
No heating	0%	5%	6%	1%
Damp present	14%	14%	29%	18%
No drinking water	4%	20%	16%	40%
No rest rooms designated for persons with disabilities	93%	95%	96%	99%
No toilet bowl handrails for persons with disabilities	92%	100%	97%	97%
No separate rest rooms for ladies and gentlemen	54%	54%	63%	67%
No toilet bowls	7%	14%	33%	7%
No toilet bowl seats	26%	21%	40%	25%
No waiting room chairs/benches	0%	1%	0%	0%
No hot water	65%	55%	77%	57%
No cold water	0%	8%	10%	6%
No soap	59%	36%	43%	42%

to refunds for insurance expenses at more than half of healthcare institutions and nearly all (93%) primary care websites.

7. A serious lack of sanitation supplies, facilities, and equipment

including 23% of institutions
with no drinking water for patients, 63% of facilities with no hot water, and 42% of facilities
with no soap, at the time the SBO was conducted.

What was the approach to advocacy? How was SBO data used?

Drawing from SBO findings, Law Scanner drafted a recommendation report that highlighted their seven central findings and detailed related recommendations. Importantly, their recommendations laid out short- and long-term solutions, as well as necessary changes to laws and regulations. Law Scanner planned to utilize these SBO findings and recommendations to push for systemic change of primary healthcare. Law Scanner analyzed and prioritized target stakeholders for their advocacy and outreach, identifying specific goals, communication strategies and "assets" that highlighted relevant SBO data for each stakeholder.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic (combined with a challenging political context) created significant barriers to the timing, method and manner of advocacy outreach. At the time of writing this guide, Law Scanner had sent their report to the Ministry of Health and was beginning their outreach to relevant government officials. Law Scanner began coordinating with fellow health nongovernmental organizations to share SBO findings and strategize how to leverage findings in joint calls for reform. When the Ministry of Health announced an overhaul of the healthcare system, Law Scanner pivoted to a new inroad for reform, using SBO findings to inform their review and comments for proposed new laws and regulations.

Looking forward, as the COVID-19 pandemic normalizes, Law Scanner plans to revisit their advocacy strategy to include outreach to other civil society groups, trade unions and the public.

Were there any external challenges to the SBO or the broader campaign?

The project met external challenges in both the SBO implementation and the advocacy plan. Although CRTA requested approval from the Ministry of Health for their SBO field work, they never received a response. In practice, when CRTA volunteers deployed to public healthcare centers around Serbia, they were denied access to observe in 26 centers (out of a sample of 314). Staff in those institutions cited a lack of approval from the Ministry of Health or the institution's director when rejecting CRTA volunteers. Although in this case, the sample remained reliable, this level of data loss could have posed a serious risk to the SBO. Additional challenges arose when COVID-19 hit Serbia, just as findings were complete and advocacy set to begin. The entire health system, including the Ministry of Health and most other targeted stakeholders, were suddenly preoccupied with responding to the public health crisis. It was challenging to gain attention for longer-term reforms, and to arrange meetings and outreach as initially planned.

Furthermore, the advocacy plan was impacted by the broader political context. Postponed elections held in June 2020 stalled communications with government officials and longer-term political controversies created more limitations for civil society to engage with government bodies.

Were there any internal challenges to the SBO or the broader campaign?

Thanks to CRTA's prior experience implementing SBO and managing volunteers for elections, many internal challenges common to SBO projects were mitigated through detailed planning, strong project management, and many layers of quality control. Still, CRTA identified areas for improvement, including more streamlined communication between project managers, coordinators, trainers and volunteers; testing volunteers' knowledge after trainings to root out any misunderstanding; strengthening questionnaires; and recruiting more back-up volunteers.

Later in the project, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic created obstacles to work as normal. This led to delays in developing and implementing the advocacy plan.

Were there any internal challenges to the SBO or the broader campaign?

At the time of writing, the advocacy campaign was in its early stages, after a delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, results of the campaign are not yet evident.

What are the top lessons learned from the project?

1. Building relatiwonships with authorities and/or gaining written approval is *important*. Attempting to collect data without official support from national authorities proved challenging, even in open spaces like public health centers. Election observers require "accreditation" to access polling stations

and similar approval may be needed for SBO for accountability projects. Receiving some type of approval from relevant authorities (as required for election observers in most countries) could have removed obstacles to accessing the process unhindered and would have prevented the loss of sampled data points.

- 2. Citizen volunteers feel interested in topics that relate to their own lives. According to CRTA's own volunteers, monitoring healthcare felt more directly connected to their lives than monitoring elections. Individuals felt empowered by working on a project that could directly influence a key part of their daily life: access to healthcare.
- **3.** Advocacy plans often have to adapt. The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the ability of advocates to use known strategies and engage with relevant stakeholders. Though the pandemic is an extreme case, other groups may experience external obstacles as political, cultural or logistical contexts shift. Being prepared to reimagine and adapt advocacy strategies accordingly is important for a project's success.

Case 2: Tunisia

Background

The Association Réseau Mourakiboun (Mourakiboun) has observed elections in Tunisia since the first post-revolution poll in 2011, and took part in the country's first parallel vote tabulation (PVT) in 2014. Through this experience, Mourakiboun gained the respect and trust of Tunisian citizens and public officials, and built a national network of volunteers and coordinators.

Between January 2016 and January 2018, Mourakiboun implemented the Primary Health Care (PHC) Monitoring Initiative to leverage its experience with sample-based observation (SBO) to improve accountability in public healthcare.

What was their advocacy goal? How did SBO support that goal?

By collecting data about the healthcare system, Mourakiboun aimed to provide useful findings for decision-makers and advocates to make evidence-based improvements to the process. In addition, the initiative was intended to expand Mourakiboun's work in broader governance issues, and help maintain and engage their volunteer network between election cycles.

Through the initiative, Mourakiboun planned to observe government-run basic health centers (centres de santé de base, or CSBs) with five specific objectives:

- 1. To improve the availability of information about access to health services delivered by CSBs around the country
- 2. To increase awareness of citizens, media and civil society about CSBs (location, access to services, patients' rights, etc.)
- 3. To contribute to the accessibility of public services by monitoring healthcare services provided by CSBs
- 4. To support evaluation and advocacy efforts to influence different stakeholders in implementing necessary measures or policies for the improvement of CSB services
- 5. To make accountable national, regional and local authorities in the improvement of public services

The initiative was designed to measure performance in different "waves" — first conducting comprehensive monitoring as a baseline, then after one year, conducting an SBO to assess level of improvement.

How did the project use partnerships, coalitions or collective action?

Mourakiboun mostly worked independently in the design and implementation of the initiative, but engaged with health-focused partners at discrete points in the project. For example, to ensure the accuracy of their monitoring checklists, they collaborated with medical experts and advocates. After the observation and data analysis, Mourakiboun provided public health-focused CSOs with their findings. In broader advocacy, Mourakiboun directly interfaced with the media, the Ministry of Health and other stakeholders. Shortly after their first research activity, Mourakiboun joined a coalition of civil society that issued a joint call for improved public health services.

How was the SBO structured? What kind of data did it collect?

The initiative entailed a series of monitoring and reporting activities on the

quality of services offered by government-run basic health centers (centres de santé de base, or CSBs). The SBO was the final data collection activity, aimed to compare any changes over the course of the year after baseline data was shared with stakeholders. Prior to the implementation of the projects, Mourakiboun approached the Ministry of Health to seek approval for the project and received the Ministry's agreement. However, the approval was not formalized and subsequent changes to Ministry leadership led to delays in project activities as Mourakiboun awaited re-approval.

The initiative included four distinct activities:

- CSB Mapping: Between January-May 2016, Mourakiboun enlisted 29 coordinators and 57 volunteers to geolocate all 2,104 CSBs in Tunisia. Based on an official list provided by the Ministry, Mourakiboun created the country's first comprehensive map of CSBs.
- 2. Comprehensive Baseline Observation: Mourakiboun enlisted 27 coordinators and 1,121 volunteers to conduct a baseline observation of all operational CSBs, totaling 2,074 out of the initial 2,104 that had been mapped. Between January 9 to 28, 2017, observers deployed to CSBs to capture data about: the CSB's general condition, infrastructure and cleanliness; the conduct of general medical care; the conduct of care by midwives; the administration of vaccines; and the conduct of nursing care.
- **3.** Observation of Emergency Centers: In November 2017, Mourakiboun conducted a comprehensive monitoring of all 139 emergency care centers, with 135 observers.
- 4. Sample-Based Observation (SBO): In order to monitor improvements in CSBs one year after the baseline, Mourakiboun conducted an SBO with a sample of 600 CSBs from January 16 to 19, 2018. A total of 528 observers joined in teams assigned to observe 1-3 CSBs, depending on the selected sample in their assigned locality. Observers answered close-ended questions about the outside and interior conditions of the centers, the different services delivered to citizens, the existence of medical staff, and availability of medicines provided to patients. Volunteers submitted their data through pre-coded SMS messages sent to a centralized database.

The initiative produced key data sets, including:

- GIS locations for all CSBs in the country;
- Comprehensive baseline data on the quality, functionality and scope of care at CSBs;
- Additional data related to emergency care services; and
- Findings from the SBO intended to measure changes since the baseline study.

Based on these findings, Mourakiboun issued preliminary reports and a comprehensive final report. The reporting included a list of "critical" CSBs (those that showed negative performance in five or more "sensitive" criteria), which Mourakiboun hoped would inform decision-makers which CSBs required more support or oversight.

What was the approach to advocacy? How was SBO data used?

Mourakiboun's primary strategy involved sharing findings with key stakeholders and decision-makers to inform health policy reforms. Outreach included: two press conferences (one following the baseline observation in March 2017 and one after the sample-based observation in January 2018); delivering a baseline report to MPs, the Ministry of Health, the Health Commission and other health-sector professionals; screening a video about the baseline observation for MPs and the health commission; holding meetings to inform MPs, the Ministry of Health and the Health Commission about the baseline observation findings; and sending a list of "critical-level" CSBs to the director of the Ministry of Health.

The initiative was covered by national media, including a brief feature of the project airing on broadcast news. For the most part, data from the research was presented on its own, as percentages of findings showing trends and as the list of "critical level" CSBs. In one event, Mourakiboun shared photos of on-the-ground conditions received from volunteers, which stakeholders noted were particularly compelling.

In mid-2017, Mourakiboun joined a civil society coalition called Coalition for

the Defense of Public Health Service and signed a joint call for reform. The Coalition actively engaged with decision-makers about public health, and used the project's findings in advocacy.

Were there any external challenges to the SBO or the broader campaign?

At the start of the project, Mourakiboun secured accreditation for the observation and a list of all CSBs from the Ministry of Health. The former Minister of Health reported that they were initially puzzled that Mourakiboun, whose reputation is synonymous with elections, was interested in public health. Mourakiboun reported that it was difficult to get accreditation and show that they were serious about working in public health. It was also challenging to explain why a random sample was needed, as statistical sampling is relatively new in Tunisia's public sector.

Unfortunately, the Minister of Health passed away after the January 2017 baseline observation. Because there was no formalized accreditation or Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry, Mourakiboun had to go back to the new Minister to get re-approval for the final SBO. By the end of the program, Mourakiboun had worked with three different Ministers of Health, creating delays and disrupting political relationships important to advocacy. At the same time, there was speculation that the change in leadership created more openness to transparency and oversight since any problems discovered could be blamed on a previous Minister.

An additional challenge to the Initiative was a lack of reliable data and standards related to CSBs. Tunisia's official standards for CSBs had not been updated since the 1980s and are now considered obsolete. Since there were no objective standards by which to evaluate CSB performance, Mourakiboun had to work extensively with doctors and public health experts to develop the checklist.

Were there any internal challenges to the SBO or the broader campaign?

Although Mourakiboun had significant experience implementing SBOs and advocacy related to elections, it was challenging to recreate that success in a new field. Unlike their election projects, Mourakiboun had difficulty recruiting volunteers for their healthcare initiative. Mourakiboun sought out volunteers with the same process and criteria used for traditional election observation. However, a significant portion of past volunteers did not join the healthcare initiative due to an expressed lack of interest or availability.

Additionally, Mourakiboun's advocacy efforts were almost exclusively directed at national-level targets, rather than the governorate or municipal level. However, Tunisia is in the midst of decentralization, transitioning from a highly centralized pre-revolution governance structure. In fact, budget allocations for CSBs are made at the governorate level, which has a more direct mandate and ability to improve services at CSBs. The Health Commission and Ministry of Health can have some influence on CSB improvements by increasing the governorate's overall budget, but ultimately it is the governors who decide how resources are directed. A greater understanding of how CSBs are governed and resourced could have strengthened advocacy efforts and engagement with decision-makers.

Ultimately, was the project successful in its advocacy?

After the final press conference in January 2018, Mourakiboun's research and advocacy on the issue slowed significantly. This was in part because program funding ended and in part because healthcare advocacy was not an on-going component of their organizational strategy.

A post-project assessment conducted by NDI in late 2018 determined that elected officials found the geolocated map of CSBs to be particularly useful, since they couldn't create one themselves. Stakeholders indicated that the initiative's data was widely reviewed by national-level health officials, but noted that painting a broad picture of overall CSB performance was less actionable than data disaggregated at the governorate or even individual CSB level would have been. While there were some small improvements following the baseline observation, changes appeared to occur in individual CSBs (perhaps initiated by their own leadership) and not necessarily the result of changes in policy at the local or national level.

However, years after the conclusion of the project, Mourakiboun seized an opportunity to better utilize the data to support public health. In the face of the COVID crisis, findings from the initiative — including the map of health

centers, the in-depth data set, and the list of "critical-level" CSBs — became more actionable to the Ministry of Health and other healthcare advocates. In April 2020, Mourakiboun's president appeared on national television to discuss the organization's health work and invited stakeholders to request and use their data. Mourakiboun revisited their data sets to provide new recommendations on providing medication to the elderly, sanitizing public spaces, and enforcing social distancing. So far, the data has been shared with a variety of stakeholders including the Tunisian Ministry of Human Rights, as well as with various international and national civil society organizations focusing on public health, children's issues, and women's health, among others. The data will inform how response initiatives are rolled out by a wide variety of actors working to combat COVID-19.

What are the top lessons learned from the project?

- 1. Partnerships can build efficiency, credibility, and sustainability. Involving public health-focused CSO partners from the beginning of the project could have benefited the initiative by: increasing engagement in advocacy efforts; linking data priorities and recommendations to a longer term strategy; bolstering credibility and access to decision-makers and authorities; and contributing to a more sustainable social accountability model.
- 2. Formal and complete accreditation is helpful. Compared to the Serbia case study, Mourakiboun observers were able to fully access health centers and collect data thanks in part to approval from the Ministry of Health. However, returning to (rotating) authorities at each phase of the project caused unexpected delays. Securing formalized authorization for multiple rounds of observation or seeking to establish long-term guaranteed citizen access to a process could benefit future projects.
- 3. Strategic methodology makes findings more actionable. When designed to support a specific advocacy goal, SBOs can produce information that plugs into on-going reform efforts. Narrowing down an advocacy goal in advance of methodology design can help make checklists more efficient, data collection easier for volunteers, and findings more digestible for target audiences. A key obstacle to the project's impact was that findings and advocacy outreach were focused on the national level. Targeting data and advocacy at the level where decisions were made (the governorate level), may have led more directly to improvements.

4. Seize opportunities for impact and repackage accordingly. Mourakiboun quickly recognized their monitoring data could be an asset to government and civil society efforts to fight the COVID pandemic and support citizens. Revitalizing their findings to meet the moment by highlighting newly actionable data was an important way the project could be impactful years after it was conducted.

Appendix I: Additional Sampling Guidance

The following has been excerpted and adapted from NDI's <u>The Quick Count and</u> <u>Election Observation: An NDI Guide for Civic Organizations and Political Parties</u>, Chapter Five: Statistical Principles and Quick Counts.

Constructing the Sample

The practical business of constructing an SBO sample involves making a combination of judgements. These include:

- identifying the unit of analysis;
- determining the margin of error and confidence levels;
- selecting a random sampling approach

The Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis is the subject of the study and the unit that will be sampled. The goal of statistics is to learn something about the entire universe/ population of the unit of analysis based on a sample. In the case of election SBOs, the unit of analysis for the voting and counting process is the polling station, with the entire universe/population being the list of polling stations. In the Serbia example the unit of analysis was the primary health care facility. In the Tunisia case, the basic health center was the unit of analysis.

Determining the Margin of Error and Confidence Levels

The Margin of Error: The margin of error refers to the precision of a sample's statistical findings. It indicates the range within which the true figure for the entire population must lie. For example, with an SBO for elections, if the margin of error is +/-5% and 75% of sampled polling stations opened on time, then one should be confident that between 70% and 80% of all polling stations in the universe (even ones not observed) must have opened on time.

Confidence Level: The confidence level refers to the probability that the statistical sample accurately reflects the population. No statistics can have 100% confidence because they are based on a sample of an entire population. The only way to have 100% confidence is to collect data on every unit of analysis in the entire population. However, 100% confidence is rarely needed and the savings in terms of cost and time from sampling far outweighs any reduction in the confidence level. For SBOs for elections and in social sciences more broadly, the confidence level is typically set at 95%. This means that the resulting statistics will be accurate 19 times out of 20. If one requires a higher level of certainty, the confidence level can be set to 99% and the resulting statistics will be accurate 99 times out of 100.

Selecting a Random Sampling Approach

Standard Random Samples (SRS) With the standard random sample, units of analysis are randomly selected one at a time from the entire universe/ population. This gives each unit in a population an equal chance of being included in the sample. However, for every unit of analysis to have an equal chance of being included in the sample, there must be an accurate list of all possible units of analysis.

Stratified Random Samples The stratified random sample applies the same principles of randomness as the standard random sample. However, the overall population is first divided into two or more mutually exclusive strata and then a standard random sample is constructed for each strata. For example:

The goal of a project is to use a sample of 1,000 students to generalize about a university population of 20,000 students, half of whom are undergraduate students and half of whom are graduate students. While the general random sample approach randomly selects 1,000 sample points out of the total list of 20,000 students, the stratified sample approach follows two steps. First, it divides the list of all students into two groups (strata), one including all undergraduate students and the other including all graduate students. Next, it selects 500 cases from strata 1 (undergraduates) and another 500 cases from strata 2 (graduates).

In the stratified approach, the selection of each case still satisfies the criteria of randomness: the probability of the selection of each case within each strata

is exactly the same (in the above example, 1 in 20). However, the practice of stratifying means that the end result will produce an overall sample that more closely reflects the distribution of cases in the population as a whole.

Determining Sample Size

To determine the sample size (i.e., how many units should be included in the sample), analysts can apply a formula based on several factors. They identify the size of the entire population [total number of units of analysis]; assume the homogeneity within that population (a value between 0 and 1 that this is typically assumed to be 0.5 or the greatest heterogeneity), and select the desired level of confidence and the margin of error. Next, analysts calculate the sample size as follows:

$$n = \frac{P (1-P)}{\frac{\sum^{2}}{Z_{95\%}^{2}} + \frac{P (1-P)}{N}}$$

n = size of the sample

P = suspected level of homogeneity of the population (between 0 and 1, typically assumed to be 0.5)

 Σ = margin of error (typically between 2% and 5%. For example, if 2% then 0.02)

z95% = level of confidence in the case of normal distribution (typically set at 95% in which case the Z value is 1.96)

N = size of the total population

Selecting the Sample Points

Once the required size of the random sample is known, the sample can be selected from the complete dataset (also called a sample frame). For election SBO, polling stations (the sample points) are selected from the complete list of polling stations (sample frame). Using the example in the Section 4 Text Box, a social accountability SBO of a vaccination program could construct a sample of 506 vaccination sites (sample points) out of a total of 960 total vaccination sites (sample frame) One option to select sample points is *basic random sampling*:

- 1. Assign every unit in the dataset a random number (or put the dataset in a random order, then assign each unit a number). Using the example, all 960 vaccination sites would be assigned a random number.
- 2. Then, use a random number generator to select unique random numbers equal to the sample size. (If the same random number is selected more than once, replace it with another random number). Using the example, 506 unique random numbers would be chosen.
- 3. Select the units associated with the generated unique random numbers as the sample. In the example, select the vaccination sites associated with the 506 unique random numbers.

An equally valid technique is to use *interval or systematic sampling*. This approach is more expedient and often it more intuitively reflects the population's geographic proportions. This approach includes:

- 1. Ordering the dataset according to geographic factors. (For example, ordering units by their region or locality).
- Next, divide the total number of units by the sample size to determine your sampling interval. Using the above example, 960 vaccination sites ÷ 506 sample size = 1.9 (round up to 2). Thus, the sampling interval in this case is 2.
- 3. Now, use a random number generator to select a starting point. For example, select a random number between 1-960. Starting point: 730
- 4. Finally, beginning at the random starting point, select units according to the sampling interval (every nth unit). In our example, we would begin at vaccination site #730 and select every 2nd site after that. When we reach the end of the list, we would loop back to the beginning of the list until we had selected a total of 506 sampled units. Note that due to rounding error the final sample size may be slightly larger or smaller than anticipated, but this will have a negligible effect on its validity or the size of margin of error.

Appendix II: Resources

Sample-Based Observation and Monitoring Resources

National Democratic Institute for International Affairs:

Materials for Professional Election Observation: Designing Forms, Manuals and Trainings (2013).

https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Materials%20for%20 Professional%20Election%20Observation_WAEON_EN.pdf

Systematic Methods for Advancing Election Observation (2013) ndi.org/sites/default/files/Systematic%20Methods%20for%20 Advancing%20Election%20Observation_WAEON_EN.pdf

The Quick Count and Election Observation: An NDI Guide for Civic Organizations and Political Parties (2002), <u>https://www.ndi.org/node/24021</u>

Social Accountability Research

For new and additional research, see resources at: <u>https://accountabilityresearch.org/</u>

Flores, W. (2018). How can evidence bolster citizen action? Learning and adapting for accountable public health in Guatemala." Accountability Research Center, *Accountability Note 2*.

<u>https://accountabilityresearch.org/publication/how-can-evidence-bolster-</u> <u>citizen-action-learning-and-adapting-for-accountable-public-health-in-</u> <u>guatemala/</u>

Fox, J. (2016) Scaling accountability through vertically integrated civil society policy monitoring and advocacy, Brighton: IDS <u>https://accountabilityresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ScalingAccountability_Online4.pdf</u>

Fox, J. (2015). "Social accountability: What does the evidence really say?" *World Development* Vol. 72: 346–361.

Fox, J. & Halloran, B., editors, with Levy, A., Aceron, J, & van Zyl, A. (2016). "Connecting the Dots for Accountability: Civil Society Policy Monitoring and Advocacy Strategies," report from international workshop, June 18-20, 2015, Washington, DC, London: Transparency and Accountability Initiative, School of International Service, American University, International Budget Partnership, Government Watch, SIMLab

https://www.internationalbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/connecting-thedots-for-accountability-2016.pdf

Itad (2017). What Works for Social Accountability: Findings from DFID's Macro Evaluation.

http://www.itad.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/SummaryFindings_ Briefing_2-v7-high-res.pdf

Parkhurst, J. (2017). The Politics of Evidence (Open Access). London: Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781317380870 ISBN: 978-0-9910142-4-8 Copyright © National Democratic Institute 2021

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