*pocket*

A Guide to Conducting

# SOCIAL
# AUDITS

## in South Africa

"In many countries, there is an increased emphasis on words such as participation, transparency, and accountability in governance – social audits bring these words to life."

*Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey*
*Founder members of*
*Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan*

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# SOCIAL AUDITS

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# Contents

# WHAT IS A SOCIAL AUDIT?

A social audit is a community-led process that facilitates public participation in the monitoring of government service delivery and expenditure.

During the social audit process, communities study government documents and compare them to their experiences as recipients of a public service.

Evidence and experiences are collected, presented, and then discussed with government officials.

# THE
# PRINCIPLES
## OF SOCIAL AUDITS

## Social Audits are Led by the Community

Social audits are conducted by residents living in a community and focus on issues identified by that community. They are conducted in the language of residents and are inclusive processes in which everybody, especially women and young people, can participate.

# Social Audits Help to Realise Constitutional Rights and Build Community Power

Social audits promote active citizenship, and help those who are most vulnerable to exercise their constitutional rights. In a highly unequal society, where many live without access to basic services, social audits create opportunities for communities to organise themselves and build community power. They are a way for the marginalised to make themselves heard.

In the face of unfulfilled promises of justice and equality, social audits allow communities to claim their constitutional right to participate in governance, and to improve government accountability and performance.

In this way, community-led social audits can help poor and working-class people contribute to deepening democracy and improving the lives of all people.



# Social Audits Should be Part of a Broader Advocacy Campaign

Social audits are typically carried out as part of a broader advocacy campaign, not as an isolated strategy for social change. Social change takes time and single events seldom make a significant and lasting impact. Social audits are most effective when used alongside other advocacy tactics, to draw attention to problems and to build legitimacy for demands.

## Social Audits Gather Evidence and Legitimise Community Experience

Social audits aim to legitimise the experiences and knowledge of community members as forms of evidence. Personal stories and testimonies are central to the evidence base of a social audit.

They challenge the hegemonic and technocratic approach of government administrations, by placing community experience and knowledge at the centre of participation and deliberation.

This is an important element of community empowerment which lies at the heart of the social audit methodology. It is also one of the key differences between a survey of a community by outsiders, and a community-led social audit.

## Social Audits Examine and Verify Government Documents

Social audits require access to official government documents. This may include budgets and reported expenditure, tenders and contracts, invoices and receipts, as well as supporting laws, reports, policies, plans, and norms and standards.

By gathering evidence and forming an understanding of what government has committed to deliver, communities can verify official obligations and commitments against their own experiences of a particular service. Verification of official records includes interviews with community members about their experiences of a particular service and direct observations of infrastructure and service delivery.

This process can require a significant investment of time and resources from community organisations and community members.

# Social Audits Hold Government Accountable Through Public Engagements and Follow up

Social audits include a public engagement where community members can present their findings and experiences, and where government officials have an opportunity to respond.

This creates a forum for residents to openly raise, and deliberate on, the issues that affect their everyday lives in the presence of the government officials who are responsible for service delivery.

This process can promote government accountability and bring about justice for people whose rights have been violated. This should be a space for community and government stakeholders to engage constructively about issues and come up with solutions.

Government officials are asked to make commitments to take remedial action and to report back to residents within a specified timeframe. This often requires follow up strategies to ensure that officials are held to these commitments and that those who took part in the process are regularly informed of progress.

# Social Audits are Non-partisan

Social audits may be political but are explicitly not based on party politics. They should facilitate broad public scrutiny of local, provincial, and national government irrespective of which party is in power. Being nonpartisan is crucial if the social audits and public engagements are to be open spaces that are free of coercion.

Being open and clear about this will also help to counter claims by political leaders that the social audit process is driven by organisations with political party affiliations or agendas.

Social audits are a powerful tool for communities to engage constructively with government in contexts where formal participation spaces are largely dysfunctional. A community-led social audit is a vehicle for community organisation and empowerment.
It is also a process of serious investigation and participation in govenance. Social audits offer a forum for communities to articulate their demands and turn public participation and democracy into a reality.

# PHASE

# 1

**Preparing and Planning a Social Audit**

# PREPARE

⬇

## Establish legitimacy in the community

Identify and engage with appropriate community structures and leaders

⬇

## Identify a focus

Work with the community to identify an issue to audit

⬇

## Obtain Government documents

Determine who in government is responsible for delivering the service and gather relevant government documents



# PLAN

⬇

- Constitute a core group of organisers

- Mobilise participants

- Engage other relevant stakeholders

- Decide on dates and organise logistics

Organisations that are based
in poor and working class
communities, or those who
have established relationships
with people, networks,
and organisations in these
communities, are best placed
to facilitate social audits.

# PHASE
# 2

## Conducting a Social Audit

Once the necessary planning and preparation is complete, the next phase in the process is to conduct the social audit. This section explains the ten key steps to conducting a social audit.

# STEP 1:

## Holding a Mass Meeting and Establishing a Mandate

**Purpose:** *To inform as many people as possible about the social audit and its objectives, secure a mandate from the meeting to proceed, and plan community participation in the audit process.*

One of the core principles of a social audit is that it is community led. Once you have established legitimacy and links within the relevant community, you then need to establish a specific mandate from that community to conduct a social audit on an agreed upon issue. The best way to do this is through a mass meeting held in collaboration with relevant members of the community.



To establish a mandate, the meeting should ensure that community members are clear on the aim of the social audit, the process for conducting it, and have a chance to ask questions and share their expectations. This then allows you to plan community participation in greater detail.

# STEP 2:

## Preparing & Organising the Participant Group

**Purpose:** *To introduce the method of the social audit to the participant group, discuss the issues related to the service being audited, and visit the site of the forthcoming audit.*

After deciding on the specific service to be audited and the community members who will be directly involved in conducting the social audit, organisers should then prepare the participant group. Partici-pants must be given the chance to get to know each other and understand their individual and collective roles and responsibilities. They should also be given a chance to discuss their experiences of specific problems related to the service being audited.

This discussion can help frame and inform the development of the social audit questionnaire, topics of discussion at the public engagement with officials, and issues for follow up after the social audit is complete.

A site visit can also be a helpful way to orientate the participants in terms of the areas they will be covering during the audit. All this ensures that participants take ownership of the process and feel completely comfortable with what is required of them.

# STEP 3:

## Training the Participant Group

**Purpose:** *To introduce the social audit methodology in a fun, participatory way and to provide an open platform for participants to explore and understand what they might experience during the social audit. It is also useful to learn more about the service and to read and understand government records relevant to the delivery of that service.*

It is likely that only members of the core group will have had previous experience of conducting a social audit. The participants who will carry out the audit will therefore need to be trained so that they can feel confident about what they are doing.

Participants should be given training in two areas. First, training on the social audit method should cover the history, principles, and method of carrying out the audit. Second, training on the relevant government service should cover how to examine the relevant government documents that the core group has managed to obtain.

This training should also include a discussion comparing the government perspective on the service and the lived experience of the community.

# STEP 4:

## Developing and Testing Social Audit Questionnaires

**Purpose:** *To collectively develop the questionnaires and other tools that you will use to gather evidence in the community.*

The development of the questionnaires and other tools for gathering evidence should be done by everyone who is participating in the social audit.

Doing this helps everyone to understand why they are asking certain questions and recording answers in a certain way. It also helps to familiarise people with the tools that they will use. This builds understanding and ownership and will produce more accurate findings.

# STEP 5:

## Gathering Evidence in the Community

**Purpose:** *To gather evidence using the questionnaires.*

Gathering evidence is a central component of a social audit. It can be an extremely challenging and time consuming part of the process. Team leaders play an important role in ensuring that evidence gathering runs smoothly and that groups are well prepared. Strong team leaders can make a big difference to the process so it is important to ensure that they are well prepared and supported in their roles.



Methods of evidence gathering can include interviews, physical verification, and photography. Before beginning to gather evidence, you should make sure you identify who is responsible for doing what and when it should be completed by. At the end of each day of evidence gathering it is important to allow participants to discuss their findings and reflect on the day and its challenges.

# STEP 6:

## Capturing Community Experiences and Testimony for the Public Hearing

**Purpose:** *To fully capture the experience and testimony of residents in a structured and detailed way.*

Data gathered through interview questionnaires, physical verification and photographs is not the only form of legitimate evidence. It is most powerful when it is woven into people's everyday experiences. For this reason, you need to collect and document residents' testimony. This evidence should be included with the findings of the social audit and should be shared at the public engagement with officials.

# STEP 7:

## Agreeing on the Main Findings and Organising the Evidence

**Purpose:** *To sort and analyse the evidence, help everyone to understand it, and produce a report. This step is about agreeing on the findings and ensuring that you have evidence and testimony that supports the findings you want to present at the public engagement with officials.*

*This work should involve all the partici-pants of the social audit. It is crucial that everyone involved understands the evidence and findings, even those that are not presenting at the public hearing.*

At this stage, each group will have established findings based on the evidence they have gathered. These findings must be discussed and an agreement reached on the most critical issues to be presented.

You may well need to go through all the evidence that has been collected if there was not enough time to capture and analyse it during the gathering of evidence step.

# STEP 8:

## Preparing for the Public Engagements

**Purpose:** *To finalise logistics and get participants and residents ready to present at the public engagements.*

Having gathered testimonies, finalised your findings, and organised the evidence, you are in a position to start preparing for the public engagements. Decisions need to be made about who will present at the public engagement and these individuals will need to practice before the event.

The community needs to be mobilised to attend, the media need to be briefed to help them understand the social audit process and the purpose of the public engagements, and the logistics need to be planned.

# STEP 9:

## Holding the Public Engagement

**Purpose:** *To present the social audit findings, evidence and recommendations to government officials and observers, and discuss a way forward.*

Having prepared extensively beforehand, the day of the public engagement has finally arrived. Everyone needs to understand the agenda for the day and the rules of engagement, additional information about the process can be included in the agenda. The findings need to be presented in a clear and accessible way and in all necessary languages to ensure that everyone can understand them. It is also important to carefully manage how and when government responds to the findings, to facilitate a productive engagement.

# STEP 10:

## Reflecting and Following up

After the public hearing, it is extremely important to find ways to maintain momentum and to sustain pressure on government to address the issues that emerged during the social audit.

This requires follow up with both the community – to keep them actively involved in the process – and government – to hold them accountable to their commitments. It can also be very valuable to reflect on the process as a whole and consider ways in which the social audit could be refined or improved upon.

*Here are some things that you can think about in your reflections:*

- Who took part and who didn't? Did the social audit have legitimacy?

- Who spoke and who didn't? Was the social audit inclusive?

- Who made decisions and how? Was the social audit community-led?

- What steps didn't work so well?

- Did the social audit achieve what you expected or anything unexpected?

- What would you do differently next time?

The right of all South Africans to participate in the political life of the country is enshrined in the Constitution and is an integral aspect of post-apartheid South African law. Section 195 of the Constitution requires that every sphere of government, organ of state, and public enterprise ensure the following:

- *People's needs must be responded to.*
- *The public must be encouraged to participate in policymaking.*
- *Public administration must be accountable.*
- *Government must be transparent and provide the public with timely, accessible, and accurate information.*

## Social Audit Network
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## Social Justice Coalition
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## International Budget Partnership for South Africa
**www.internationalbudget.org/budget-work-by-country/ibps-work-in-countries/south-africa/**

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## Open Society Foundation for South Africa
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