



## The Global Partnership for Social Accountability: Theory of Action

### About this Document:

*This document introduces a new iteration of the Global Partnership for Social Accountability's (GPSA) theory of action.<sup>i</sup> It describes the GPSA's role in contributing to change. In 2013, GPSA commissioned its first Monitoring and Evaluation tool. This tool was revised in 2014/2015. Both documents included initial drafts of a "theory of change". Despite the nomenclature, the first document included a results framework and results chain and the second one a results framework and theory of action. The latter tool was by design a living document, establishing a feedback loop by which outputs would "provide feedback to the GPSA during the course of the GPSA's lifetime to inform improvements in the design of both the grant making and knowledge and learning activities" (Tsai and Guertzovich 2015: 5). This new iteration of the theory of action and the associated Results Framework, replace previous documents, builds on lessons from GPSA-supported operations between 2012 and 2019, as well as the growing body of evidence about social accountability, governance and development. Figure 1 summarizes the how the GPSA is designed and set up. and Figure 2 provides additional details to support the adaptive management, monitoring and evaluation of the portfolio and individual activities. This is a living document, which can be updated as new insights from practice and evidence emerge or the conditions change in the environment for social accountability and the GPSA.<sup>ii</sup>*

### Background

Evidence shows public service delivery can be more effective, and public policies can be stronger and more sustainable, when public sector and societies interact to help shape, execute, manage, deliver, monitor, and adjust their policies and service delivery programs (ePact 2016; Waddington et al. 2019).

Yet, carefully designed, sensible public policies are too often not adopted or implemented because of governance<sup>iii</sup> failures. Different individuals and groups in societies fail to commit, cooperate, and coordinate to achieve desirable development goals (World Bank 2017). Lack of collective action, including within society, can undermine policies to address complex development problems, that no single actor can accomplish alone.

Asymmetries of power work against inclusive policy-making and implementation. When states and communities do not see eye to eye, or have mechanisms to reduce mistrust and reach agreements, people are left behind and do not contribute to own public decisions. This can undermine the legitimacy of the state. An added challenge is when citizens and those in the public sector lack previous experiences in solving development problems together, they often do not have the capacities to engage in these kinds of processes (Poli and Guertzovich 2020).

International actors can support rules and provide resources that help bolster collaboration of civil society and public sector institutions to remove obstacles to inclusive development. The Theory of Action of the GPSA is one way the World Bank addresses state-society divides and, where germane, intra-societal divides, that undermine effective development for all.

### **The GPSA's Approach**

The GPSA supports a new generation of collaborative social accountability processes, which engage citizens, communities, civil society groups, and public sector institutions in joint, iterative problem solving to tackle poverty and improve service delivery, sector governance, and accountability (Guerzovich and Poli 2020a).<sup>iv</sup> A key lesson from the GPSA<sup>v</sup> and from global experience is that social accountability is more likely to be effective and scalable when it complements broader government policy and programs, including service delivery systems (Grandvoinnet, et.al. 2015; ePact 2016; Waddington et al. 2019).

By engaging with both civil society partners and the public sector, and leveraging existing service delivery systems (e.g., programs, policies, chains, decision-making arenas as well as in the frontline), the GPSA confronts head on the need for multi-stakeholder collective action and the capacities for it.<sup>vi</sup> GPSA blends (i) flexible funding for civil society-led coalitions to work with public sector institutions to solve problems that local actors have prioritized with (ii) sustained nonfinancial support to meaningful engagements, including implementation support, capacity building, facilitation, and brokering.

The aim is to contribute to country-level governance reforms and improved service delivery through more sustainable and effective civil society organizations that will support collaborative social accountability initiatives for addressing implementation gaps, beginning in the frontline. GPSA-supported coalitions develop capacities to engage meaningfully and collaboratively in policy-making, implementation, and service delivery processes.

To establish civil society-led multistakeholder compacts, civil society groups use GPSA advice and guidance, information about public sector reform efforts and country systems, insights from social accountability practice from relevant contexts, and other resources (Poli and Guerzovich 2020). A key outcome is civil society partnerships and relevant public sector counterparts engaging in collaborative social accountability processes that include people, communities and other groups in society, comprising many who are usually excluded from shaping their own futures and engaging in government.

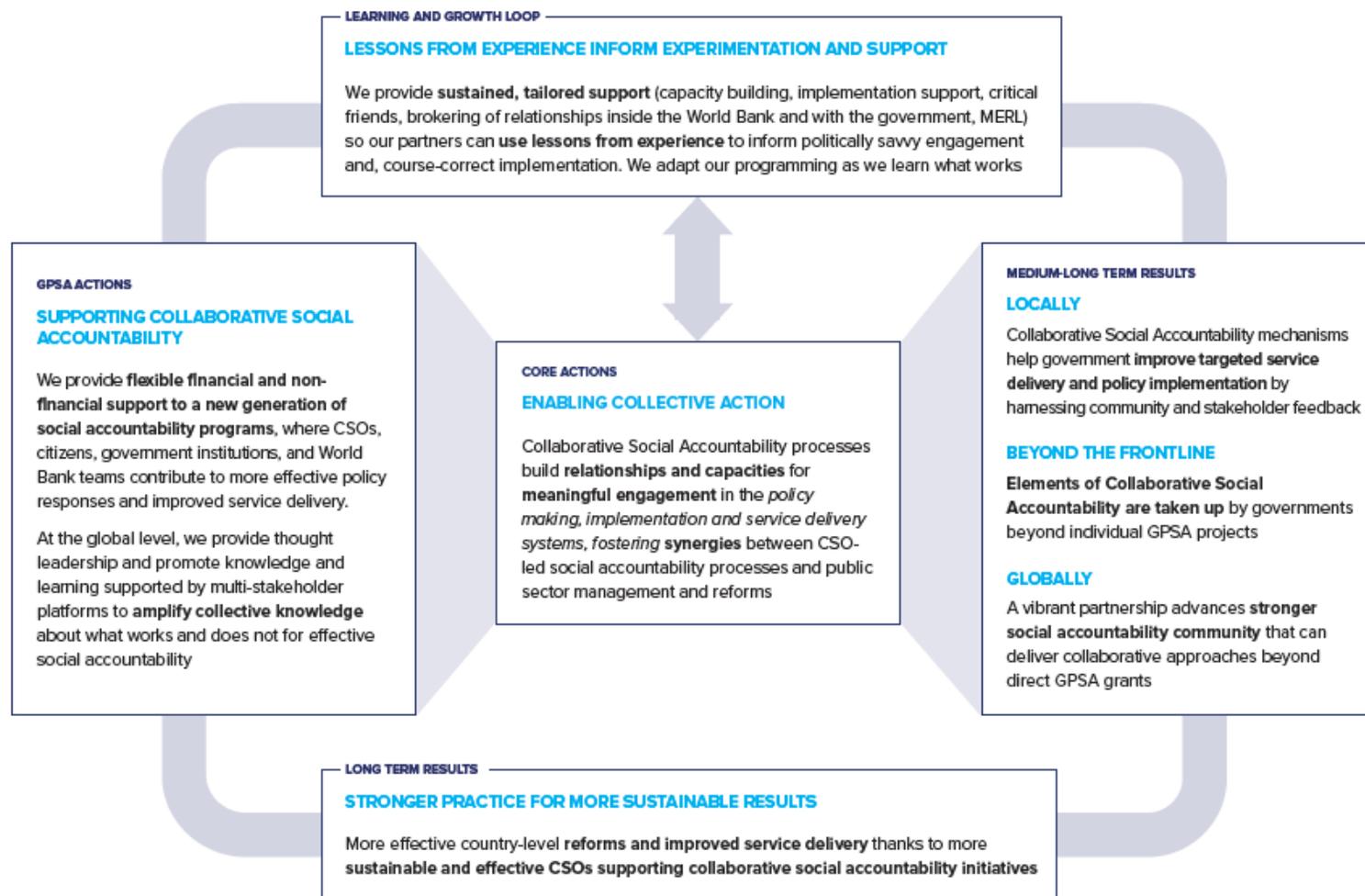
Collaborative social accountability can provide and strengthen platforms for collective action of citizens.<sup>vii</sup> These multistakeholder compacts are a vehicle to strengthen interactions that feed actionable information to decision makers and shift their preferences, incentives and ideas for achieving locally prioritized development goals.

The GPSA expects these compacts to contribute to addressing proximate or systemic causes of pressing local development priorities. They use social accountability mechanisms to address obstacles to improving service delivery for all – whether strengthening systems and/or improving frontline or equality in last mile service provision (Guerzovich and Poli 2020; Guerzovich, Poli, and Fokkelman 2020).

Figure 1: The GPSA's Theory of Action at a Glance



## THEORY OF ACTION

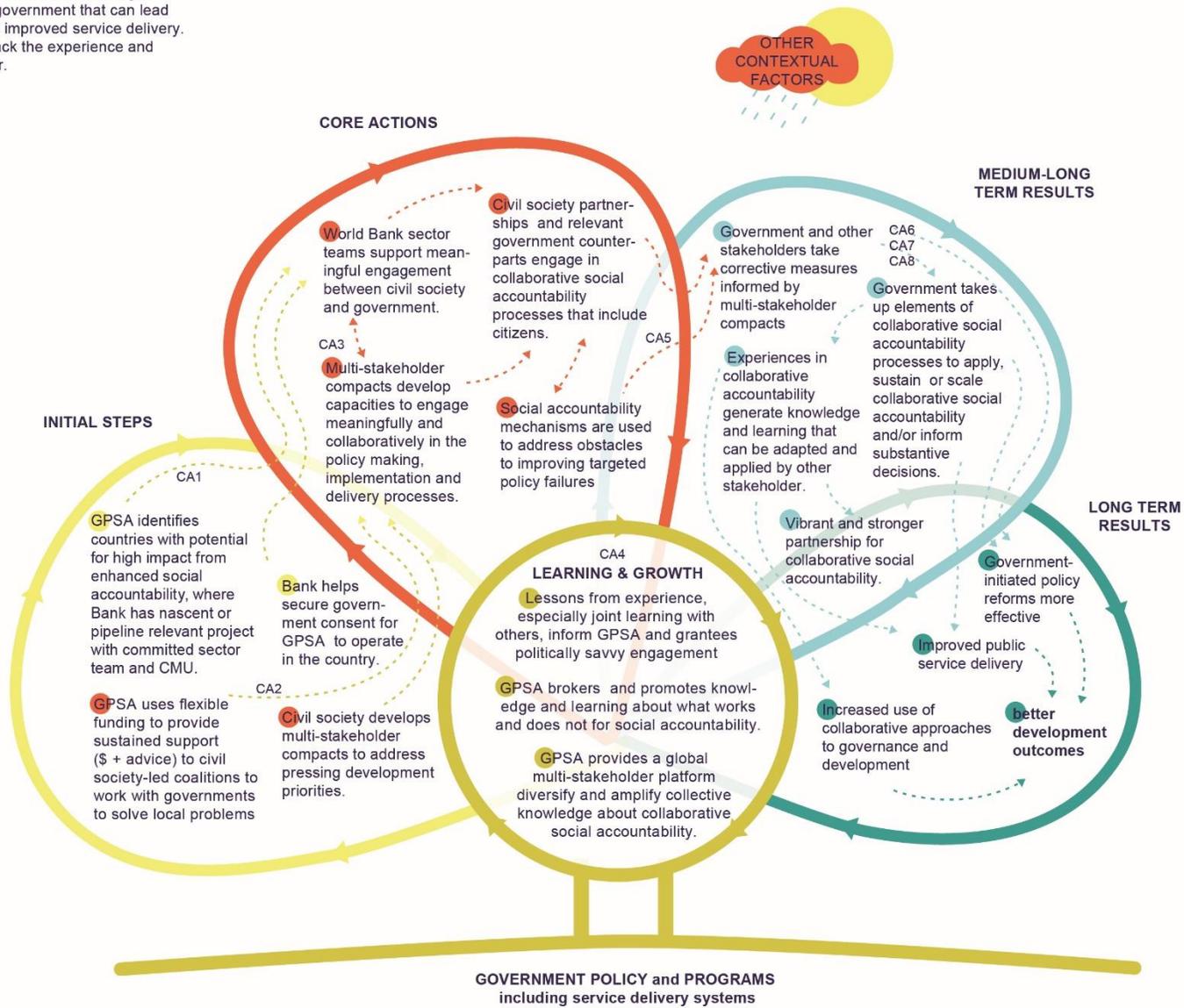


**Figure 2: The GPSA’s Theory of Action in Detail**

**PROBLEM**

Government processes in many countries lack meaningful engagement between citizens and government that can lead to more effective policy reforms and improved service delivery. Both government and civil society lack the experience and capacity to problem-solving together.

- Critical Assumption 1:** World Bank staff embrace approach to development that includes civil society and social accountability.
- Critical Assumption 2:** GPSA Secretariat maintains capacity and funding to provide ongoing support to its active portfolio.
- Critical Assumption 3:** Civil society and government capacity and willingness are key obstacles to collaborative social accountability.
- Critical Assumption 4:** GPSA grantees use adaptive management to manage their programs.
- Critical Assumption 5 :** When social accountability is complementary of broader government policy and programs, including service delivery systems, implementing agencies get better results in service delivery.
- Critical Assumption 6:** Governments have the capacity and commitment to integrate inputs from civil society into policy choices.
- Critical Assumption 7:** Engaging with citizen groups during policy-making leads to greater ownership and commitment, making reforms more sustainable.
- Critical Assumption 8:** Coalitions within government and Bank sector teams, recognize legitimacy and value conferred by social accountability processes and find opportunities to scale up approach to more programs and country systems.



Also, World Bank teams support meaningful engagement between civil society and public sector institutions. GPSA-supported civil society coalitions benefit from information about service delivery reform efforts gathered by the GPSA from its calls for proposals aiming to implement collaborative processes to meet specific in-country challenges. These challenges include those associated with social risk management and social equality and social sustainability.

Development partners, including World Bank country teams, help identify service delivery entry points and opportunities for social accountability to improve development outcomes. World Bank sector teams help open the door to engagement with governments by applying their unique experience in sectoral reform efforts. They also can support civil society groups in identifying concrete opportunities for community input in programs, policy and service delivery processes.

With this improved environment for engagement, civil society and public sector institutions implement collaborative social accountability processes that, unlike earlier generations of social accountability, complement public management, service delivery chains, and country systems with community-driven action. It is the synergy between the work of civil society and coalitions within the public sector — which can obtain new information, ideas, knowledge, legitimacy, and resources through joint action — that enables collaborative social accountability processes to contribute toward more effective and sustainable development policies and, in turn, results.

### **Beyond the Frontline:**

The nature of the GPSA's grant-making is to make small experimental investments with the potential for scale-up and sustainability.<sup>viii</sup> When elements and lessons of collaborative social accountability processes inform public sector decisions and actions beyond individual GPSA projects, the GPSA demonstrates success.<sup>ix</sup>

Collaborative social accountability processes are innovative in the way they engage communities and their partners - civil society organizations, public sector reform efforts, and World Bank operations . The GPSA expects elements of these processes and their lessons to be taken up by the public sector beyond individual projects. Over time, and with the benefit of trust and joint experience, civil society, public sector, and development partners will seek to adapt insights from collaborative processes. They might sustain or scale them through programs or policies that can apply them in additional localities or sectors or inform decisions in the policy arena, sometimes beyond the timespan of GPSA's support.

### **Working with and Strengthening the Context<sup>x</sup>:**

Partner countries are identified from among those that could have the highest potential impact from linking collaborative social accountability to specific aspects of public service delivery; where there is government consent and support;<sup>xi</sup> and, typically where the World Bank has a committed sector team with a relevant project early in implementation or in the pipeline.

These conditions increase the likelihood that GPSA-supported collaborative social accountability can be effective in mitigating power imbalances that engender exclusion, capture, and clientelism, which are at the heart of policy failures. They can also foster the development of new capacities and trust to shift the incentives of those in power — reshaping their preferences and ideas in favor of good outcomes and taking into account the interests of previously excluded citizens and groups.

In the most challenging contexts — those of low civil society institutional capacities, where civic space is closing, trust in government is weakening, polarization increasing, social cohesion

decreasing or in fragile, conflict, and violence-affected settings, the critical task is to empower local stakeholders to develop their individual, relational and collective capacities and state-building.

Collaborative social accountability efforts offer significant potential to re-imagine state-society relationships and build trust. They can catalyze collective action around problem-solving that matters for all (Falisse, with Mafuta and Mulongo 2019). That is collaborative social accountability processes have the potential to transform political narratives, incentives, beliefs and behaviors that undermine the social contract (McCullough and Papoulidis 2020).<sup>xii</sup>

This goal can be aided by the process of joint learning-by-doing among stakeholders where reciprocity, information sharing, new ideas and behaviors can be fostered while building trust and capacity to co-produce solutions to shared problems (Poli and Guerzovich 2020; Raynor et al. 2017; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2014; Guerzovich, Mukorombindo, and Eyakuze 2017).

### **Building Stronger Partnerships:**

For social accountability to accelerate positive outcomes in development, the GPSA recognizes that its programmatic work must be complemented by investments in building the social accountability field. The GPSA works to amplify the diversity and collective knowledge of its global partners — a network of relevant stakeholders from civil society, academia, donors, private sector, and governments — which can deliver collaborative approaches beyond direct GPSA grants. It also provides a global platform that enables networking, knowledge exchange, and learning, both online and offline.

Using the experiences of the initiatives it funds, the GPSA contributes to the generation and application of a knowledge base about what works and what does not in social accountability, and increases recognition for the value of collaborative social accountability to governance and development. Knowledge and learning are difficult areas to measure, and little guidance is available on doing this effectively. The GPSA is making every effort and continuing to develop better ways to measure these areas.

### **How we Know Success**

Leveraging multistakeholder collective action calls for moving beyond technical reforms and capacities. It is not known in advance of giving the grant what will happen, but, as more is learned from a project's results and how they are measured, indicators may have to change. Adaptive learning and politically informed action by all stakeholders, including the GPSA, during the lifetime of a particular intervention and, critically, beyond the lifetime of a project, are important for the effectiveness of collaborative social accountability (Tsai and Guerzovich 2015; Poli and Guerzovich 2019; Poli and Guerzovich 2014; Poli, Guerzovich and Fokkelman 2020). This dynamic means adjusting traditional project approaches (Teskey 2017; Bridges and Woolcok 2019; Guerzovich and Poli 2020b).

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<sup>i</sup> This document will be published once consultations have been held and received inputs have been integrated. Once published, this work should be cited as follows: Guerzovich, Maria F., Jeff Thindwa, Ann-Sofie Jespersen, Brett Libresco, Maria Poli, and Emilie Fokkelman. 2020. “Global Partnership for Social Accountability: Theory of Action.” Global Partnership for Social Accountability, Washington, DC. The team is grateful to Gopa Thampi and Saad Meknassi for their comments, Marine Perron for her support, Barbara Rice for editing, and Deniz Ozgur and Claudio Mendonca for the design. The team is especially grateful to Participants in the Seventh Annual Grantees’ Workshop, November 18th, Thursday and Friday, November 21st -22nd, 2019 who provided useful input to validate and improve this document, as well as to Jean Benoit Falisse, Linnea Mills, and other project evaluators who explored the validity of this theory of action in specific projects, as the team developed the document.

<sup>ii</sup> The GPSA is currently working with a group of global partners to specify a “lagged” theory of change, i.e. assumptions about how change happens. This theory building exercise hopes to address blindspots in social accountability research and evaluation that increased the gap between theories and emergent practice.

<sup>iii</sup> Governance “is the process through which state and nonstate actors interact to design and implement policies within a given set of formal and informal rules that shape and are shaped by power” (World Bank 2017).

<sup>iv</sup> The first generation of social accountability, and the research associated with it that builds on the World Development Report 2004 (World Bank 2004), assumes that the main contribution of these processes is for citizen-led interventions to produce information to hold providers to account, improving outcomes. The second generation of transparency and accountability work was identified in Carothers (2016) and has been operationalized in different ways, often as stand-alone civil society strategies. Here, new generation social accountability refers to collaborative social accountability interventions and processes that do not focus only on the provision of information, but seek to contribute to governance and collective action that support policy making and implementation through problem solving as prescribed by the WDR 2017. The processes supported by the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) are focused on the intermediate governance and managerial levels through which policies are implemented and services delivered (see Levy and Walton 2013; Guerzovich and Poli 2019a).

<sup>v</sup> For a discussion of GPSA’s projects, see, for example, Westthorp and Ball (2018).

<sup>vi</sup> Reviewing the GPSA’s portfolio, Poli and Guerzovich (2020) identify four key capacities: adaptability, civic, organizational and operational, and analytical capacities. The importance of these capacities for social accountability practitioners, beyond GPSA grants, is validated by Guerzovich, Mukorombindo, and Eyakuze (2017).

<sup>vii</sup> Burgess, Craig. Suzanne Cant, Dan Irvine, Vicky Boydell and Florencia Guerzovich. “Social Accountability Approaches: Supporting CSOs to realise better UHC health outcomes”. Note prepared on behalf of Gavi, GFATM, GFF, UHC2030 and SUN CSO constituencies of Global Health Initiatives. <https://gpsaknowledge.org/wp-content/uploads/Final-UHC-Social-Accountability-Brief-1-Oct-2019.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> The evidence base in the field and cited throughout this document suggests that this is often the Achilles Hill of participatory approaches that are effective in the frontline, including but not limited to social accountability processes.

<sup>ix</sup> See for example GPSA project evaluations and lessons learned: Falisse, with Mafuta and Mulongo 2019; Mills (2019); Costachi, Cristei, and Terzi-Barbaroşie (2019); Poli, Guerzovich and Fokkelman (2020); Guerzovich and Poli (2020).

<sup>x</sup> In social accountability, context matters, but the literature grapples with specifying which factors matter most at what point of delivery chains. The GPSA is investing in understanding the interactions between context and process. The factors mentioned here have been prioritized for operational and monitoring and evaluation and learning purposes associated with this theory of action, taking into account insights from practice to-date.

<sup>xi</sup> The GPSA makes grants available to CSOs only in countries where governments have consented to ‘opt-in’ to the program.