

Strengthening accountability and governance in health-service delivery

Accountability in service delivery may be conceived of as processes through which communities and households can hold providers responsible for the adequacy and effectiveness of the services they offer. For poor and marginalized communities and households, public accountability can be achieved through giving them both voice and suffrage; for policymakers, accountability can be demanded through the social compact in which governments assist, finance and regulate providers of health care, nutrition and environmental health services. When communities are empowered to demand adequate and effective services, families are informed of which services the State has committed to provide and the minimum standards that apply.

Embedding participation in public life and civic education in all maternal, newborn and child survival and development programmes ensures that families are empowered with knowledge of the measures they can take to protect their child's life and enhance the child's early development. Household and community knowledge of available services and the standards of quality required for these services enhance their ability to hold governments and service providers accountable.

Social compacts between governments and providers can also be effective tools for accountability in maternal, newborn and child survival and health when governments make these issues a priority in legislation, budgets, programmes and research – and adequately compensate providers for essential services, while monitoring their performance in delivery.

Strengthening accountability must be tailored to different modes of service delivery. At the primary level of community and family services – including such factors as information and social support for promoting breastfeeding or newborn care services – the ability of households to purchase commodities, access information on services and transform both into better health outcomes is central to increasing demand-side accountability. Community and civil society organizations and commercial networks are often well placed to provide mechanisms for poor and marginalized households that can directly monitor the efficacy of services and exert accountability.

See References, page 108.