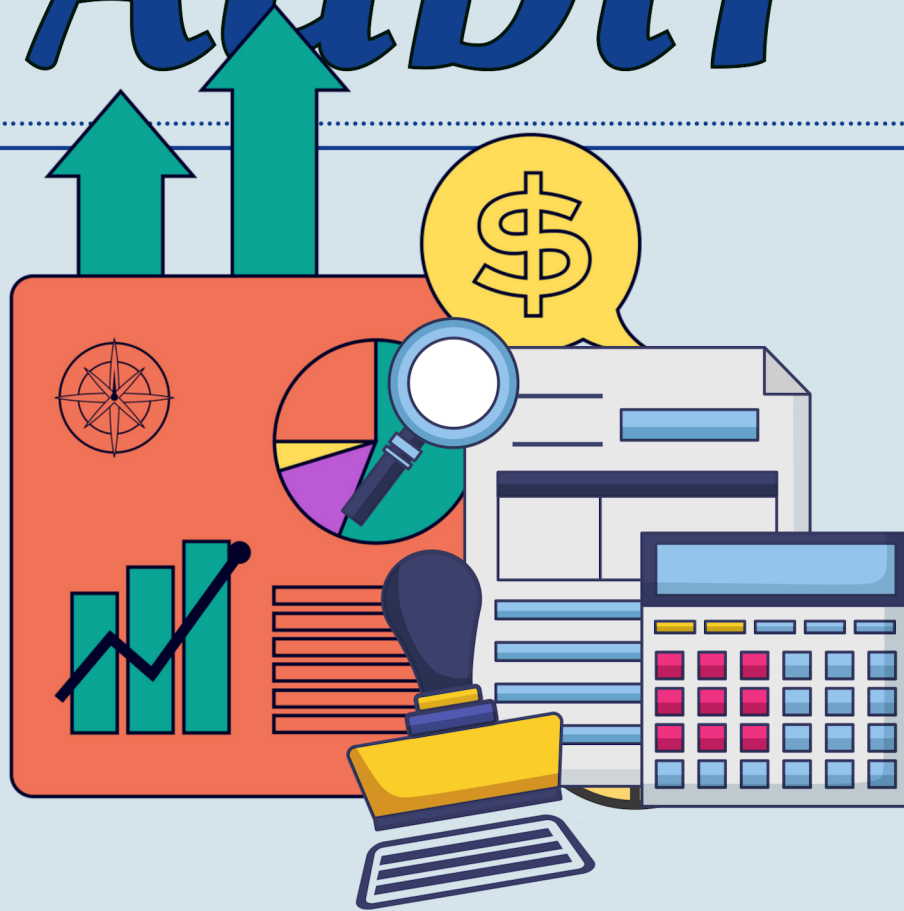


HULAASAA

SOCIAL AUDIT



Do you want to hold public officials accountable?

Do you want to monitor the projects in your community?

Do you want to reduce the risk of corruption within your community?

Social Accountability

There are various actions and tools that can be used by citizens and Civil Society Organizations and communities to hold elected and non-elected public officials accountable.

Social accountability helps in:

- 1. Strengthening democratic legitimacy
- 2. Designing more responsive and informed policies
- 3. Reducing opportunities for corruption and increasing integrity.

Social audits are one such tool which facilitates public participation in the monitoring of government service delivery and spending.

Audits, audits, audits...

Financial audits

Social audits

Compare documents to independently check the financial statements of the institution and provides an independent opinion on whether the financial statements are accurate, complete and fairly presented

Compare documents to monitor the quality and quantity of public services, policies and programs and provide recommendations to improve

Conducted by financial audit and accounting functions and bodies, and does not involve citizens

Conducted by citizens, CSOs and NGOs as well as stakeholder in cooperation with public institutions

Reports and verifies the reliability and integrity of financial information and compliance with policies, procedures, laws and regulations in place and efficient use of resources

Reports on practices to prevent corruption and reduce irregularities, increase transparency and accountability, including vertical and horizontal accountability and recommendations are used to improve public processes and policies

Principles of social audit

Community Led:

Social Audits are Led by the Community

Rights-Driven:

Social Audits Help to realise Constitutional Rights and Build Community Power

Advocacy:

Social Audits Should be Part of a Broader Advocacy Campaign

Evidence-Based:

Social Audits Gather Evidence and legitimise Community Experience

Audit Government Documents:

Social Audits Examine and Verify Government Documents

Accountability:

Social Audits Hold Government Accountable Through Public Hearings and Follow up

Non-Partisan:

Social Audits have political implications but are Non-Partisan

A Community-led social audit can be run by a group of individuals in a society or by a group of CSOs. As organizers they lead the process by recruiting and training volunteers and coordinating citizens to participate in the process.

Do you want to run a community-led Social Audit? Here is how..

The steps of conducting social audit is based on the Social Audit Guide published by Transparency International which includes 20 steps. The 20 steps would be detailed in the final report published on social audit- "Accountability In Practice: Social audit case studies from Fuvahmulah City, Addu City, Laamu Gan, Kulhudhuffushi City". For the purpose of the bulletin, the following is a summary of the steps.

Phase 1: Planning and preparing for a social audit

Step1- Establish legitimacy

To counter any resistance and ensure credibility of the findings of the social audit it is important to engage or form alliances with the public officials and community. By informing these groups it helps future engagements as well as to ensure access to relevant documents and information.

Step2- Identify a focus for the social audit

Before initiating a social audit, a theory of change needs to be developed. A theory of change describes approaches which enable articulation of the desired change, identify the outcomes and strategize activities in way to achieve the desired goals. The theory of change has 4 levels which are outputs, short-term outcomes, mid-term outcomes, and long-term outcomes. Mapping these helps in planning required interventions at different stages.

Once the output and outcomes are identified, choose a project/service or a component of a project/service for audit. To determine the objective, you can focus on an issue that is already concerning within the community or have grievances on. While conducting an audit, it will be beneficial to focus on one component of a larger project or service; for effective advocacy. For example, an audit can be run to determine whether a hospital's doctor schedule is the most efficient for patients rather than evaluating all the services provided by the hospital.

Step3- Identify and obtain relevant government documents

- Identify which institution or ministry is responsible for implementing the project/service.
- Understand the decision-making process of the government/institution. Here it is important to identify how and who makes the ultimate decisions related to the project/service.
- Gather related documents (laws and regulations, actions plan, related announcements, bid documents, proposals, award letters, Environment Impact Assessment, Agreements etc). This information can be obtained through official requests to institutions, websites, public domains and through Right to Information.

Case study 1- Construction of Gn. Fuvahmulah City Quran Centre

This project was awarded to Riser Private Limited on 22 February 2022 and the contract was signed in March 2022 by the client Ministry of Islamic Affairs. The project cost MVR 12,036,084.19 and was contracted to be completed within 365 days. Various documents related to the project was obtained from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs including the project agreement, Drawings and BOQ, Technical specifications, Work Schedule, Bid Announcement.

Through an online form TM and ACC opened to find volunteers who would join the social audit training and to monitor this project. The facilitating team travelled to Fuvahmulah city to conduct the training from 29th –31st May 2023. While preparing for the social audit Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Fuvahmulah City Council and Contractor were contacted.

Step4- Prepare logistics for social audit

- Form a group of core organizers and mobilize participants/volunteers. Local NGOs and CSOs can be possible allies.
- Organize logistics and secure funding.
- Engage with other relevant stakeholders and form alliances. This can include councils and citizens.
- Inform as many people as possible in the community about the social audit and its objectives and plan community participation.

Step5- Host a meeting and establish a Mandate

The purpose of this is to inform as many people as possible in the community where audits are conducted about the social audit and the objectives. This helps in ensuring that the citizens and community leaders are clear on the aims of conducting the social audit and to plan the community participation in the audit process.

Step6- Prepare and organize the Participant Groups

Introduce the method of social audit, discuss the issues related to the project/service being audited to the participants/volunteers. This also helps to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all participants/volunteers during different audit processes including site visits.

Step7- Train the Participant group and test the Social Audit Questionnaire

Introduce the broader methodology in an engaging and participatory way to the participants/volunteers. This opens a platform for the participants to explore the audit process in depth and understand what they might experience during conducting a social audit. Furthermore, this gives the opportunity for the participants to learn more about the project/service and understand the relevant documents obtained. Moreover, participants will be able to test the questionnaires and other tools developed for the social audit and adapt the questionnaire as required.

Phase 2: Conducting a social audit

Step8- Gather evidence

Collect more information about the project/service from all relevant stakeholders (such as contractor, ministry, project recipients etc.). This can be done through a set of questionnaires. This process helps in identifying red flags or issues. The evidence gathered can be validated through site visits.

Case study 2 - Construction of 12 classroom projects at S. Hithadhoo Nooraanee School

The project was awarded to Nooradheen Investment Pvt Ltd, and the contract was signed on 29th December 2022, with the client Ministry of Education through restrictive bidding. Project related documents were obtained from the ministry such as Bid announcement and documents, proposal by awarded party, award letter and agreement. To analyze and cross check the documents, sets of interview questionnaires were prepared by the organizing team which are directed to the client ministry, contractor, monitoring body (often council). A survey questionnaire was also prepared to collect the public perception and knowledge regarding the specific project.

For this project interviews were conducted with the Education Ministry (Client), Nooradheen Investment (contractor), Addu City Council (Monitoring body). Interview with the council revealed that the city council had no monitoring function assigned by the Education Ministry for said project. From these interviews Nooraanee School was identified as the body tasked for monitoring the project.

And so additional interviews were arranged and conducted with the representative who submitted monitoring documents from Nooraanee School and the Southern Education Coordinator who was overlooking the progress of the project.

Step9- Carry out field visits

This scrutinizes the project/service beyond the documentation and assesses the validity of the information. Moreover, the information gathered from interviews can be verified. For example, volunteers can check the site and determine whether the project is running on track or rate the quality of service.

Case study 3- Construction of Gn. Fuvahmulah City Quran Centre

For the field visit, participants were given a checklist of things that would be observed at the site. The checklist helps the participants to observe and compare the information from the previously obtained documents and the interviews conducted with the relevant parties. From the site visit to the City Quran Centre location participants observed that:

- Project was not completed within the agreement period of 365 days from commencement date. During the contractor interview Riser Private Limited emphasized that the project is set to be completed by August 2023. However, on-site visit participants found that the level of progress was slower than stated by the contractor.
- The site was not secured and was open, which could lead to potential loss and damage to equipment, works and materials. There was also no information board installed on the site which needed to include the details of the project and contractor information.

Step10- Community experience for public hearing

Through this you can capture the experience and testimony of the community in a structured and detailed way. This can also help in analyzing the space citizens have for participation in various decision-making levels. Furthermore, awareness of citizens can be raised on tools such as Right to Information and social audit.

Case study 4- L. Design and Build Gan Coastal Protection

Maldives Transport & Contracting Company (MTCC) was contracted by the Ministry of National Planning, Housing, and Infrastructure to design and build the shore protection project of L. Gan on 24th November 2021. This project was a direct award and is to be completed within 180 days. Under this project, 3 sand filled groynes and revetment is to be built to tackle coastal erosion, costing MVR 11,527,669.60.

A survey questionnaire was prepared to collect the public perception and knowledge regarding this specific project. The participants who were trained collected 20 responses from the island using the questionnaire.

The responses showed that 95% of the responders were unaware of the coastal protection project and stated that they were not given any information regarding the project. Moreover, 65% of the responders also stated that they were not aware whether the responsible ministry sought public opinion prior to the commencement of project.

The survey was also used to identify what projects the community thought was most needed. The results from the 20 respondents include:

- Protection against sand coastal erosion
- Need for Housing
- Need for Sanitation system and better roads
- More opportunities for tourism in the island

Step11- Agree on findings and organize evidence

Sort out the information collected from all stakeholders and analyze the information to produce a report. You must ensure that the evidence and testimony collected support the main findings and the findings are agreed upon. This information can be then presented to the audited institution for feedback.

Case Study 5- Hdh. Kulhuduffushi Regional Hospital Upgrading- ICU component

Following interview with the Ministry of Health, organizers found that there are 3 main projects commenced for Kulhuduffushi Regional Hospital.

- Upgrading of Kulhuduffushi Regional Hospital initiated with the “Renovation of Kulhuduffushi project” in October 2019 and was awarded to MTCC under Public Procurement (10.27 a) which included renovation of 30 bed ward block.
- Following this, the Ministry of Health awarded upgrading of the hospital with a full-fledged 6 bed ICU to MTCC under single source procurement (Public procurement 10.25, Raa (3) on 4 March 2021. The ICU project costs MVR 16,962,416.14 and was to be completed in 60 days.
- Renovation of the Outpatient Department (OPD), development of a walkway and renovation of laboratory services under Public Procurement (10.27 a) awarded on 9 September 2021 to MTCC.

For the purpose of this social audit, organizers focused only on the ICU component. The primary objective of this project was to increase the capacity of the hospital in catering more emergency patients and reduce the number of patients that are transferred to Male’.

Following the meetings with the Ministry of Health, Kulhuduffushi Regional Hospital, MTCC and Kulhuduffushi City Council, concerns were highlighted and shared.

- For instance, concerns raised by the regional hospital due to rainwater leaking into the building where ICU is located were shared with the Ministry.
- The participants also shared the concerns highlighted from the community survey with the regional hospital. This included concerns regarding doctor schedules, difficulty in navigating around the hospital due to lack of signage boards (especially for patients who come from other islands).

Information can be presented to the relevant stakeholders before compiling the report. This enables participants of social audit to become a link between service provider and beneficiaries and support them to bring changes to processes or reverse irregularities in practice and pave the way for oversight bodies to conduct audits themselves. Once the report is compiled, it can be used to advocate on the recommendations at policy level.

Step12- Hold the Public hearing

Through a public hearing or press conference, findings, evidence and demands/recommendations of the social audit can be present to the observers, community, public officials and media.

Step13- Reflect and follow up

Advocate for policy change based on the social audit findings and ensure that the institution meets the demands. A follow up by the community is also important to reflect whether there are any changes to the process and level of community engagement. This can also aid in creating a continuous engagement between community and state.

In this step, the findings of the social audit, the progress made, and the lessons learnt should be reflected. Through this, changes can be made and further improve the social audit process.

Things to keep in mind when conducting a social audit**1 . Barriers to obtaining relevant documents from the government**

It is important to gather all the available information on the chosen project/service before initiating a social audit. However, required information (such as contracts, internal policies, bid documents, other records related to project etc.) is often unavailable on public domains/websites due to lack of transparency. Furthermore, if the institution is not receptive to working with you, there may be delays in responding to requests and rejection to obtaining certain information such as contracts.

In such cases, you can limit the scope of the audit to information that is available online or focus on monitoring the implementation of the project/service. It is also useful to use tools such as Right to Information to obtain this information if it is not provided upon official requests.

It could also be useful to form a relationship with the institution through memorandum of understanding to have access to the required information.

2 . Citizen engagement

A social audit will usually revolve around an issue that concerns citizens. To get the participation of the community in a social audit, it is important to inform them of the concept of a social audit, how it is conducted and areas where they can support in the process (such as monitoring of project beyond social audit, or to get support from experts in analyzing documents and findings especially if they are not directly involved in the social audit process).

To ensure meaningful citizen participation it is important to explore potential Civil Society Organizations within the community who can act as allies. CSOs who have experience in mobilizing communities can play a key role in increasing citizen involvement in civic space and mobilizing volunteers for the social audit process.

By involving citizens in the process, you can also identify complaints beyond the audited project where you can act as a mediator between citizens and public institutions. If you are conducting the exercise with other Civil Society Organizations, they may also be able to support in advocating such issues to related parties.

3 . Work in coalitions

Building alliances between citizens and government/service provider is crucial when conducting a social audit and to work together for change. A successful social audit process needs commitment from public officials, for example to respond to information requests, provide information, and to act on the findings of the social audit. Therefore, prior engagement with them would lead to creating better relations for a long-term commitment, especially if they are already informed of the objectives of conducting a social audit. It is important for the institution to understand that the organizer of the social audit provides key information crucial to them which is evidence based.

Forming such an alliance would also give more credibility to the report of social audit, as the institution would be a key participant in providing and validating information.

4 . Identify Entry points

If there is reluctance from public institutions to support the social audit process, it is important to determine whether the institution is refusing to collaborate due to lack of willingness/lack of political will or is strongly opposing reform. It is important for the organizers to be flexible when strategizing to overcome any changes or opposition that could arise.

In case of opposition from an institution, you can identify and approach a more responsive public official who is willing to support reform. They may not always be from the highest level of government and can include civil service workers or political advisors.

5 . Framing and communication

As the social audit process leads to reform, communication is key for successful advocacy. It is important to align with the interest of state institutions and show how a social audit can provide evidence-based information that can highlight loopholes and ways to strengthen processes. Framing this is a way to show the mutual benefits to the citizens (which is to increase accountability of public officials) and for institutions to be able to cater more closely to the public needs which in turn can be favorable for them, will be strategic.

It is also extremely important to communicate with respect when dealing with stakeholders and to provide evidence-based information wherever possible.

6 . Conducting Questionnaires and Surveys

As you conduct surveys it is important to be mindful of research ethics. This includes explaining the purpose of the interview, getting consent from responders, being respectful in asking questions, being impartial and accurate in collecting responses.

There is also no one way of conducting a survey. To reach the larger community, it may be helpful to conduct it in various ways such as online forms, one-to-one interviews, and focus group discussions. While conducting interviews it is necessary to target different gender (men and women), age groups (youth, elderly), people of different employment backgrounds (public, private, own work) to collect variety of opinions.

Questionnaires may also not be standard to audit all projects. Depending on the implementation stage of the service or project, there could be slight differences in the questions. For instance, auditing a construction project at the early stages of implementation cannot focus on site visit results but must focus more on the documentation process. And for a project that has been completed, audit could focus on the result, such as monitoring whether objectives of the projects stated in the documents are met.

7 . Identify good practices and bad practices

The final objective of conducting a social audit is not to publish a report. As this process requires building relationships with other institutions and stakeholders it is important to highlight any good practices identified along with the red flags and recommendations. This type of presentation would reassure that a social audit not only focuses on finding irregularities and criticism of an institution but provides balanced feedback and allows for constructive feedback for reform.

8 . Continuous Advocacy

A social audit may not always uncover corruption or other illegal activities. Since it may uncover irregularities such as administrative deficiencies or loopholes that increase risk of corruption, continuous monitoring and advocacy is important to close these gaps. Through a long-term effort, this can strengthen the relationship between citizens and institutions to impact policy decisions and to form more meaningful vertical engagement. This can be not only done through traditional reports, but also through visualization of main findings and recommendations and media.

Social audit – Collaboration of TM and ACC

Under the Strengthening Accountability Networks among Civil Society (SANCUS) project, Transparency Maldives and the Anti-corruption Commission of Maldives collaborated on conducting social audit programs during 2023. The main objective of running this program is to develop a tool to monitor government projects including those awarded to SOEs. This tool can also be used to hold public officials accountable and to create a more vigilant community against corruption. Through this program CSOs and citizens from the community monitor government projects as per available information and analyze the data collected to identify irregularities, abuse of power and risks to corruption.

TM and ACC have conducted 4 trainings in Fuvahmulah City, Addu City, Laamu atoll and Kulhuduffushi City. 40 participants from various backgrounds have been trained, this includes participants representing 19 CSOs, 3 councils, 3 government organizations and 1 SOE. TM and ACC piloted the training by choosing an ongoing project in each location, where participants experience the audit process. Projects chosen for social audit are as follows:

- 1 Construction of Gn. Fuvahmulah City Quran Centre (Contractor: Riser Pvt Ltd)
- 2 Construction of 12 classrooms at S. Hithadhoo Nooraanee School (Contractor: Nooradheen Investment)
- 3 L. Gan Coastal Protection Project (Contractor: MTCC)
- 4 Kulhuduffushi Regional Hospital Extension and Renovation Project- ICU Upgrade (Contractor: MTCC)

Some Preliminary key findings & Recommendations from the conducted social audits:

- 1** Monitoring function is loosely handled: It was observed that councils are not often given the full power to monitor the projects unless the client/ministry specifically requests them directly. In such cases, timely information related to the project may not be shared with the council. This leaves a gap in accountability, since the council may not be interested in being involved. However, even when the monitoring component is undertaken by council, they often do not have the technical capacity or manpower to track projects.

The monitored information is directly shared with the client ministry and is not available for public scrutiny. With the lack of information, the public has on the project, there is often no involvement from the public in ensuring accountability or monitoring the projects.

Recommendation:

1. Establish a rule for independent third-party/CSO monitoring of projects.
2. Maintain and publicize the monitoring records and actions taken to identify issues

- 2** Little to no involvement from Council: Councils are not consulted regarding projects if they are not included in the monitoring component. In such cases, councils do not receive enough information regarding the progress of such projects. Some councils also do not proactively obtain information regarding the projects implemented in their communities. Lack of involvement leads to weak accountability from both public officials and citizens.

Recommendation:

1. Projects that are being held in the islands, ensure that the councils are well communicated and informed about the project.

- 3** Poor public participation: The mechanisms and opportunities in place for public participation within institutions are weak. There are restriction in the availability and ease of information reaching the public, poor inclusion of marginalized groups in various levels of decision making and poor political will to support public participation and to create civic space for CSOs and citizens to engage meaningfully. As such the public trust in these institutions are significantly poor.

Recommendation:

1. Ensure timely and proactive disclosure of information on institutions as well as on projects that are at various stages of implementation.
2. Identify specific causes for poor participation in community meetings and communicate with the public to encourage participation and increase public trust.
3. Ensure incorporation of the public perception in the need assessment.
4. Inform the public on the information the council receives on projects including the progress of the projects
5. Establish complaint mechanisms and make the public aware of these avenues.

4

Many projects have irregularities that increase the risk of corruption: Conducting social audits may not always uncover evidence of corruption. However, it can help identify administrative deficiencies and other irregularities. For instance, the social audits conducted in Addu City, Fuvahmulah City, Laamu atoll and Kulhuduffushi City found that citizens are not aware of the projects implemented in their islands especially due to poor communication and lack of transparency. There is also weak public participation in all stages of projects. These eventually lead to designing poor unsustainable projects that do not meet the needs of the community.

Moreover, projects audited in Fuvahmulah city and Laamu atoll had schedule delays and Kulhuduffushi Regional Hospital project had quality issues as the building had water leak issues during rain. Conducting social audits could lead to reducing these irregularities by advocating for oversight bodies to address these loopholes which can lead to corruption.

Recommendation:

1. Conduct a needs assessment prior to the project award and in the assessment, include the following but not limited to:
 - Public Perception towards such a project
 - Analysis of demand and identify potential users and land use plans developed by councils
2. Establish a realistic timeline when confirming the project's time frame, potential Geographical preferences for the location of the project

- **TM and ACC have published a report covering in-depth methodology, findings and recommendations derived from the above social audits. We thank all partners and participants who contributed to this successful program.**



Participants who completed the Social Audit training held from 29th may to 1 june 2023 in Fuvahmulah City



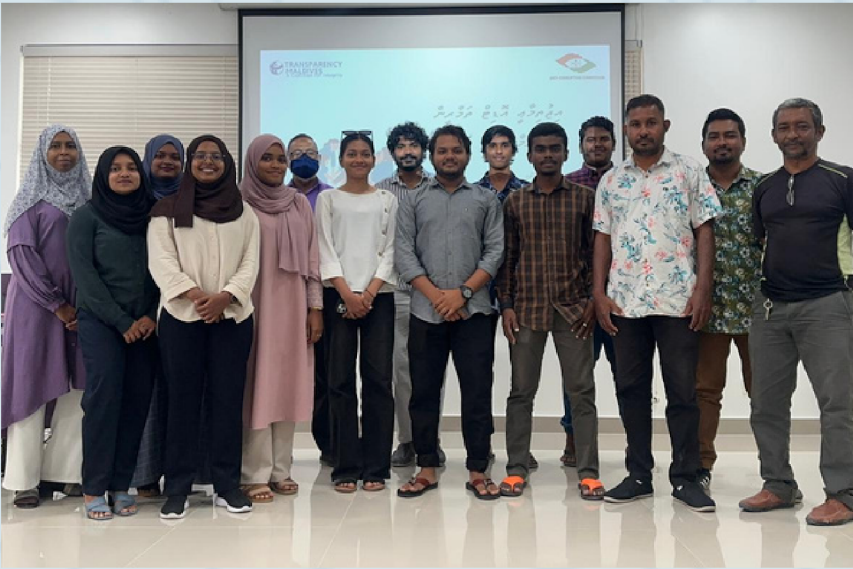
Participants who completed the Social Audit training held from 4th-6th June 2023 in Addu City



Participants of Addu social audit training visited the site of the construction of 12 classroom project at S.Hithadhoo Nooraanee School and made observations



Participants who completed the Social Audit training held from 18th-20th June 2023 in Laamu atoll



Participants who completed the Social Audit training held from 07th-09th August 2023 in Kulhudhuffushi City



Participants from Fuvahmulah City conducted public survey to collect more information



Participants from Fuvahmulah social audit training visited the site of the Fuvahmulah City Quran Centre and made observations



Participants from Kulhudhuffushi social audit training interviewed officials from Kulhudhuffushi City Council and Kulhudhuffushi Regional Hospital to collect more information regarding the Hdh. Kulhuduffushi Regional Hospital Upgrading- ICU component

Strengthening Accountability Network among Civil Society (SANCUS) Project

The Strengthening Accountability Networks among Civil Society (SANCUS) Project is designed to create a groundswell of citizen engagement calling for greater accountability from governments (vertical accountability) and the institutions responsible for overseeing them (horizontal accountability) in 26 countries around the world.

The SANCUS Project in the Maldives, implemented by Transparency Maldives, focuses on strengthening the legal and regulatory framework of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), as well as improve the governance, functions and operations of SOEs.

Main activities of the SANCUS Project focuses on Network Building (Anti-Corruption Conference and multi-stakeholder dialogues), Vertical Accountability (Strategic Action Plan (SAP) monitoring, Social Audit of projects, Trainings on RTI and Whistleblowing, Self-assessment toolkit for SOEs, Toolkit on Public Participation in the Budgetary Process), Horizontal Accountability (Monitoring of Parliament's SOEs Committee, Review of Audit Reports) and Adoption of Digital Tools (GlobaLeaks and Salesforce Case Management System).

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