Abstract

Accountability is about holding people or agencies responsible for their performance based on prior expectations of such performance. Accountability is not a new concept to development agencies, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) or the World Bank, but issues of accountability are changing as agencies use participatory approaches to development. Accountability relationships that emerged from traditional methods of development can be described as hierarchical where the donor agency was accountable for donor recipients and accountable to the United States government and the American public, as in the case of USAID. Current participatory methods, that are designed to engage and empower local people affected by development projects, create additional horizontal accountability relationships for the agency in addition to those that arise from the traditional approach. A complex web of multiple accountability relationships emerge for the donor agency as a result of increased participation and influence of new and different non-state actors, making the donor agency accountable to the governments and citizens in which they operate, as well as other non-governmental actors with whom they collaborate. This paper explores the tensions for development agencies as they manage accountability relationships and diverse expectations of multiple stakeholders that develop from participatory methods. The case of USAID is included to illustrate such complexities.