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A Social Audit Model for Agro-biotechnology Public-Private Partnerships

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The Challenge of Trust-building in Agro-biotechnology Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

Projects in agro-biotechnology, led by public-private partnerships (PPPs) are advantageous due to their integrated approach to innovation and delivery of agro-biotechnologies (World Bank, 2007), but face public resistance due to issues of trust around genetically engineered crops and the complex nature of the public and private partners' varied interests and priorities. Building trust among project partners, and between the project and the community they aim to serve, can help to mitigate the risks threatening projects' success. The purpose of this brief communication is to explain our Social Audit Model and show its utility in agricultural biotechnology public private partnerships.

Keywords: *Trust, public private partnership, social audit, accountability, stakeholder engagement*

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The Ethical, Social, Cultural, and Commercialization (ESC²) team at the McLaughlin-Rotman Centre for Global Health, of University Health Network and University of Toronto, have developed a Social Audit Model for agro-biotechnology PPPs with humanitarian goals (Ezezika, *et al.*, 2009). The model includes an assessment of project needs and goals, development of social audit tools, engagement of internal and external stakeholders, social auditing service¹, a communications strategy, and provision of feedback to project management, governance and funders, and the public. Implementation of the model can facilitate accountability and transparency in the project, and improve project management, which, in turn, can help build public trust and mitigate risk for the project (Figure 1).

Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda). The 2009 and 2010 Social Audit Reports of the WEMA Project, along with the WEMA management responses to the reports, are available on one of the managing partners' - the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) - website: http://www.aatf-africa.org/wema/audit_reports/2009_social_audit_report/en/. This is the first time a Social Audit Model has been applied to a project of this type and we believe it has great utility for other large-scale, agro-biotechnology and global development initiatives led by PPPs. We believe it can help to align the goals and interests of project partners and the public, and help to build trust to mitigate risk in the project².

How the Model Works

This Social Audit Model has been applied to the Water-Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA) project, a PPP aimed at developing and delivering conventionally bred and genetically modified drought-tolerant maize varieties to small-scale farmers, royalty-free, in five countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Kenya,

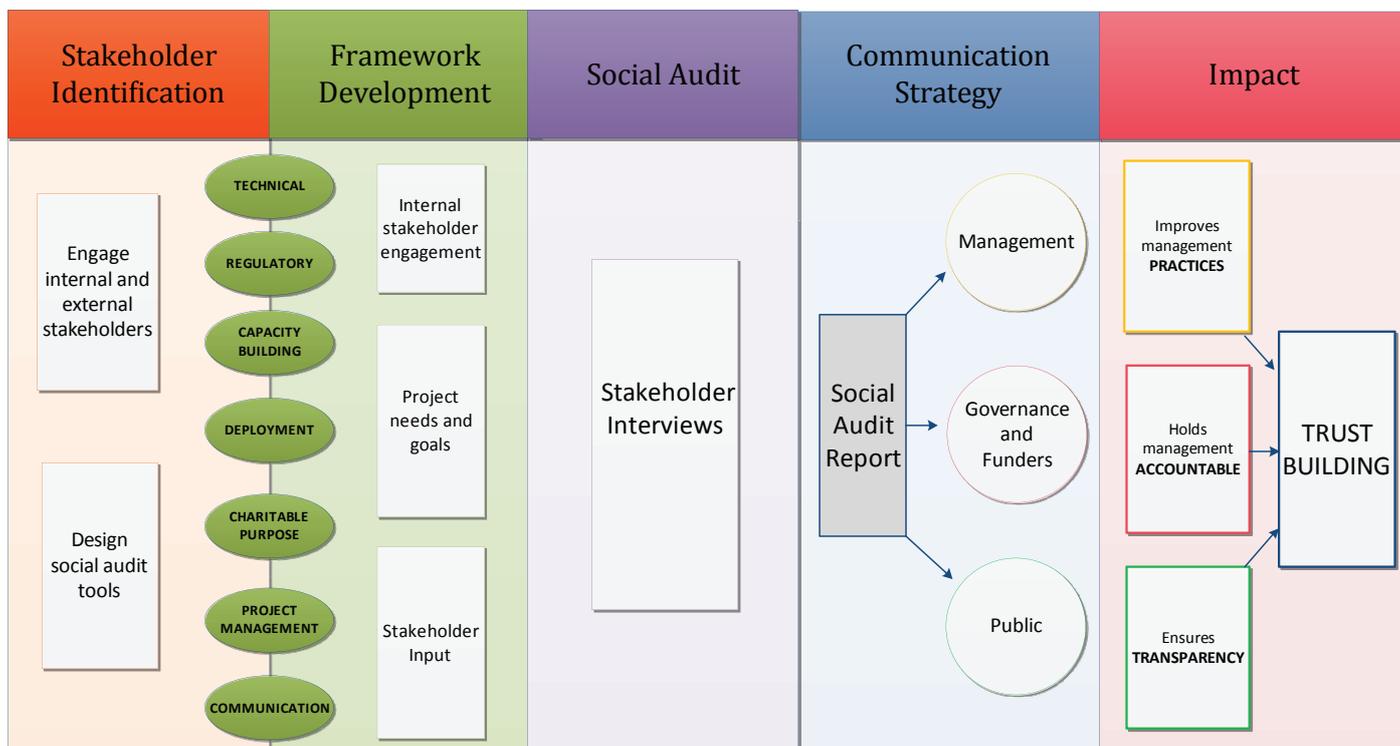


Figure 1: Social Audit Model. The model involves five stages which include stakeholder identification, framework development, social audit, communications strategy, and impact. The first stage is stakeholder identification which involves engagement of internal project stakeholders as well as external stakeholders and the development of social audit tools, including a qualitative semi-structured interview schedule and quantitative questionnaire. Development of a framework for assessing the ESC² issues in the project is the second stage of the model. This framework is developed in line with project needs and goals, which involves further engagement and input from project stakeholders. The framework shown here consists of seven domains critical to most agro-biotechnology PPPs and through which we can examine ESC² issues illuminated through application of the model. Stage three is the social audit of the project during which stakeholders are interviewed using the ESC² interview schedule and questionnaire. The findings from these questionnaires and interviews are analyzed and reported on in the fourth stage of the model – communication strategy. The audit report is presented to and discussed with project management, governance, and funders, and shared publicly with the project stakeholders. In the fifth stage of the model, we see the impact of communicating the Social Audit information. Improved management practices, holding project management accountable to project funders, and ensuring transparency of the project to all stakeholders are the three main envisaged outcomes to help build trust among project partners and between the project and the public.

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¹ Social auditing can be likened to financial auditing. The difference between these processes is that financial auditing deals with financial accounts while social auditing or ESC² is focused on social accounts. It can be defined as a “process whereby an audit team collects, analyses, and interprets descriptive, quantitative and qualitative information from stakeholders to produce an account of a project’s ethical, social, cultural and commercialization performance and impact” (Ezezika, et al., 2009).

² For information on the Social Audit Model, please refer to: http://www.mrcglobal.org/social_audit_model