

## **Policy Brief: Embedding Social Accountability Standards in MBRSG to Advance Inclusive and Transparent Public Policy Education**

**By:** Duaa Mohamed Suliman, MPP (Health)<sup>1</sup>, Immanuel Azaad Moonesar R.D.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Health Policy Researcher, Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government

<sup>2</sup>Professor of Health Policy and Systems Research, Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government (MBRSG)

**Keywords:** social accountability, UAE, public policy, higher education, curriculum, leadership, governance

### **Abstract**

Social accountability (SA) mechanisms driven by citizens and civil society to hold institutions answerable are essential for responsive, inclusive, and transparent governance. Yet, SA remains underdeveloped in higher education curricula across the MENA region, particularly in institutions that shape future policymakers. This policy brief advocates for the integration of structured social accountability standards into the educational framework of the Mohamed Bin Rashid School of Government (MBRSG). The suggested solutions encompass curriculum changes through specific courses and case analyses, organizational methods like utilizing the Institutional Self-Assessment Tool (ISAT), student involvement through civic fellowships and policy discussions, and enhancing faculty capabilities.

### **Introduction**

Social accountability is defined as an approach to building accountability that relies on civic engagement, in which ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability. In a public sector context, social accountability refers to a broad range of actions and mechanisms that citizens, communities, independent media, and civil society organizations can use to hold public officials and public servants accountable (Malena, Forster, and Singh 2004).

Evidence indicates that social accountability is a cornerstone of responsive, inclusive, and transparent public governance. Currently, social accountability is recognized as a crucial mechanism in health system governance that enhances health system performance by engaging citizens in monitoring policy processes and the delivery of health services (Nejatian et al. 2024). However, it remains underdeveloped in higher education curricula across the MENA region, particularly in institutions shaping future policymakers. This policy briefly advocates for the integration of structured social accountability standards into the educational framework of the Mohamed Bin Rashid School of Government (MBRSG). This approach would be in accordance with national goals outlined in UAE Vision 2031 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while also providing future leaders with the essential skills to practice participatory governance.

The brief highlights the shortcomings in existing policy, proposes a potential solution, and provides evidence to support the effectiveness of integrating social accountability principles. It concludes by proposing a step-by-step implementation strategy, beginning with curriculum

design, community involvement, and the development of self-evaluation tools for institutions. In the end, the policy aims to turn MBRSG into a regional example of governance education focused on participation and citizens.

### **Importance of Social Accountability at Mohamed Bin Rashid School of Government (MBRSG)-UAE**

At MBRSG, social accountability is vital for aligning our health and policy education with actual needs and guaranteeing that our academic and research initiatives produce tangible positive outcomes for society. In the UAE, health policies and education should respond to the changing needs of various populations, such as migrants, women, and at-risk communities. MBRSG is dedicated to advancing inclusive policies that address disparities in healthcare access and foster equity in health results, directly supporting the UAE's National Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Incorporating social accountability into our initiatives further enhances our goal of cultivating future leaders who serve as both policymakers and champions of social justice and sustainable development.

### **Problem Statement/Issue**

The UAE, with a population of 9.9 million, has a unique mix of expatriates (88%) and native Emiratis (12%). Migrant workers make up around 90 percent of the workforce in the UAE, with construction workers, domestic workers, and undocumented immigrants being classified as at-risk groups. Like other societies, social inequality exists in the UAE, including disparities in income, gender inequality, healthcare, and social class. Over the last twenty years, the continuous arrival of people from other nations has significantly altered the lifestyles and healthcare requirements of individuals in the UAE (Dash et al. 2022).

In the last twenty-five years, there has been an increased focus on creating public policy, public administration, and public management degree programs at the graduate, doctoral, and executive education levels in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The current global governance landscape emphasizes citizen engagement, transparency, and ethical leadership. However, public policy education in the Arab world—including at prestigious institutions such as MBRSG—has yet to fully institutionalize social accountability as a core framework. The Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government is an educational and research institution based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Established in 2005 as the Dubai School of Government, the institute concentrates on public policy in the Arab region.

Social accountability refers to citizen-led efforts to hold institutions accountable through mechanisms like public hearings, participatory budgeting, social audits, and feedback loops. The lack of training in these tools leads to a knowledge-to-practice gap: graduates may understand policy design but lack exposure to participatory governance processes.

This deficiency has ethical and practical consequences. Without training in accountability standards, future public sector leaders may perpetuate top-down governance, weakening public trust. In the UAE and wider region, this gap undermines efforts to build inclusive, sustainable, and citizen-responsive institutions. Future public sector leaders lacking training in accountability standards may reinforce top-down governance, undermining public trust. In the UAE and the surrounding area, this deficit weakens attempts to create inclusive,

sustainable, and citizen-oriented institutions. Data from the Eastern Mediterranean area highlights that social accountability in education is unevenly implemented and does not have quantifiable frameworks (Taha et al., 2023). Conversely, international standards in medical and policy education emphasize incorporating accountability into leadership training.

The consequences are particularly significant for marginalized groups, whose requirements are frequently overlooked in policy development. Incorporating social accountability standards fosters fair access to services, boosts policy results, and strengthens democratic governance.

### **Current Policy/Law**

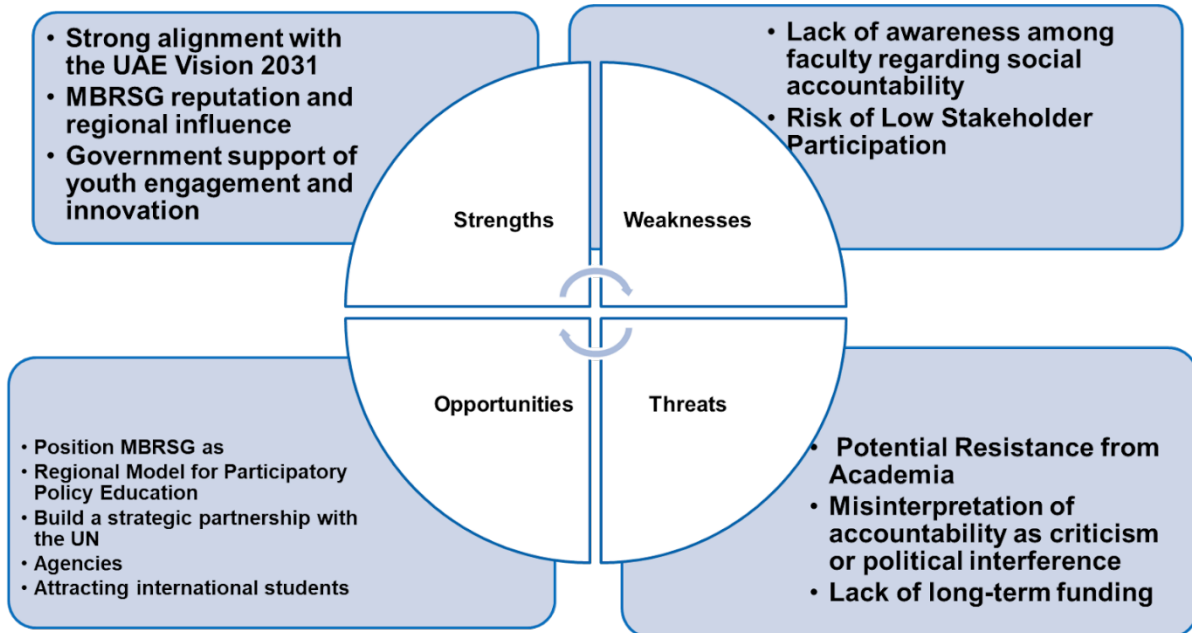
On a national scale, the UAE's Centennial 2071, National Strategy for Higher Education 2030, and quality standards set by the Ministry of Education highlight civic values, ethics, and innovative approaches in education. The UAE's Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) provides criteria for institutional accreditation focused on academic rigor, quality assurance, infrastructure, and governance. However, the CAA does not currently require institutions to demonstrate their social accountability or civic impact.

Within MBRSG, efforts such as public policy forums, community-focused research, and youth inclusion initiatives reflect a commitment to societal engagement. Yet, without formal accreditation mechanisms evaluating this impact, these efforts remain unquantified in institutional assessments. While the Gulf Medical University and select regional actors in the UAE have piloted the Institutional Self-Assessment for Social Accountability (ISAT), such instruments are mostly lacking in public policy education (GMU, 2024). In the absence of policy mandates or accreditation standards, institutions like MBRSG lack significant structural motivation to emphasize accountability frameworks, even though they are crucial.

MBRSG leads in policy innovation and public sector excellence; existing institutional accreditation frameworks in the UAE lack stringent social accountability standards. This creates a void in evaluating if organizations such as MBRSG are effectively addressing societal demands, promoting inclusive education, and generating graduates ready to assist marginalized or at-risk communities.

Increasing demands for fairness and responsiveness in education exacerbate this disconnect between academic programs and national development objectives. MBRSG's mission—"to enhance public policy and governance in the Arab region"—necessitates systems that showcase and assess its social agreement with the community. Integrating social accountability into its quality framework is an ethical, strategic, and reputational necessity.

## SWOT Analysis: Assessing Social Accountability in Public Policy Education at MBRSG"



### Policy Solution

To bridge this gap and the lack of social accountability standards in MBRSG's accreditation process, the suggested policy solution involves incorporating clear criteria for social responsibility and community involvement. This approach includes these techniques:

**a) Curriculum Reform:**

- Introduce a dedicated elective or core course on social accountability in public governance.
- Embed real-world case studies on participatory budgeting, citizen charters, and public service audits.

**b) Institutional Practices:**

- Implement the ISAT tool to assess and improve MBRSG's own social accountability practices.
- Create feedback mechanisms for students and stakeholders to co-shape program content.

**c) Student Engagement:**

- Launch a Civic Engagement Fellowship allowing students to co-design accountability tools with government or civil society partners.
- Host annual student-led policy dialogues focused on community voice and public trust.

**d) Research and Capacity Building:**

- Promote faculty and student research on social accountability in the UAE and wider MENA region.
- Offer professional development certifications for public servants on social accountability practices.

## **Opposition and Considerations**

**Opposition:** Some may argue that social accountability could be politically sensitive or difficult to implement in hierarchical governance settings. Others may express concern about curriculum overload or the potential dilution of technical content.

**Response:** These concerns can be mitigated by:

- Framing the policy as part of collaborative governance and service improvement.
- Integrating accountability themes into existing courses rather than adding new ones.
- Piloting the program gradually, starting with electives and voluntary projects.

Moreover, resistance to transparency often stems from unfamiliarity—not opposition. Training future leaders early instills trust and reform readiness.

## **Conclusion**

In Conclusion, through the integration of social accountability into its framework and ethos, MBRSG can drive a regional shift in public sector education—preparing leaders with not just technical expertise but also the moral direction and civic awareness necessary for inclusive governance.

## References

“Health Strategies, Policies and Laws.” *The Official Portal of the UAE Government*. Last updated June 27, 2024. Accessed August 17, 2025. <https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/health-and-fitness/healthy-policy-and-laws>.

Gulf Medical University. “QA&IE Unit Workshop: Institutional Self-Assessment Social Accountability Tool (ISAT).” *GMU News*. Last modified July 24, 2025. Accessed August 16, 2025. [https://gmu.ac.ae/qa\\_news/qaie-unit-workshop-institutional-self-assessment-social-accountability-tool-isat/](https://gmu.ac.ae/qa_news/qaie-unit-workshop-institutional-self-assessment-social-accountability-tool-isat/).

Malena, Carmen, with Reiner Forster and Janmejy Singh. *Social Accountability: An Introduction to the Concept and Emerging Practice*. Social Development Papers, Participation and Civic Engagement, Paper no. 76. Washington, DC: World Bank, December 2004.

Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government, *Introduction* (MBRSG website), last updated August 1, 2025, accessed August 14, 2025, “The leaders of tomorrow are our focus and the foundation of the future...,” <https://mbrsg.ae/about-us/introduction>.

N. R. Dash, M. H. Taha, S. Shorbagi, and M. E. Abdalla. “Evaluation of the Integration of Social Accountability Values into Medical Education Using a Problem-Based Learning Curriculum.” *BMC Medical Education* 22 (2022): 181. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-022-03245-6>.

Nejatian, Ahmad, Mohamad Arab, Amirhossein Takian, and Kiomars Ashtarian. “Social Accountability in Health System Governance: A Scoping Review.” *Iranian Journal of Public Health* 53, no. 1 (January 2024): 35–47. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC11058377/>.

‘We the UAE 2031’ Vision. *The Official Portal of the UAE Government*. Updated April 22, 2024. Accessed August 17, 2025. *UAE Government Portal*. <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/strategies-plans-and-visions/innovation-and-future-shaping/we-the-uae-2031-vision>