Report

Young people's engagement in strengthening accountability for the post-2015 agenda

Anthony Davis, Gina de la Harpe Bergh and Amanda Lundy

September 2014

Cover photo: Plan/Nyani Quarmyne

Report

Young people's engagement in strengthening accountability for the post-2015 agenda

Anthony Davis, Gina de la Harpe Bergh and Amanda Lundy

Key messages

- Strong post-2015 accountability mechanisms that provide effective platforms for meaningful participation of young people, particularly those most marginalised, would strengthen implementation, improve outcomes, and fulfil the right of young people to participate in shaping and monitoring decisions that affect them.
- To ensure meaningful participation of young people, formal and informal post-2015 accountability mechanisms at all levels should put into practice the principles of inclusion, accessibility, collaboration, and responsiveness.
- Accountability processes will be strongest and able to respond directly to young people's engagement at the local and national levels – these should form the foundation of a continuum of accountability reaching from the local to the international with clear roles for young people at all levels and in all countries.

Shaping policy for development   **odi.org**

Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction

'Accountability is essential to assess progress and achieve results. This should happen at the national, regional and global levels. All actors, including governments, the UN system, civil society and the private sector, should be accountable for honouring their commitments. We need an inclusive, robust yet flexible accountability framework.'

UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, 1 May 2014

Much still remains to be negotiated and agreed by United Nations Member States on the post-2015 sustainable development goals, the framework slated to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) when they expire in 2015. But as debates continue to unfold in earnest on the structure and substance of each possible goal area – the '*what*' of the framework – pressing yet unresolved questions remain on '*how*' the framework will be implemented. More specifically, how will the post-2015 goals be effectively implemented and monitored to achieve results? At the heart of this question is the responsibility of all actors to honour post-2015 commitments.

The importance of ensuring effective accountability for the post-2015 framework has been widely acknowledged by a range of actors.[1] There is strong consensus amongst national and international civil society and UN stakeholders alike that monitoring and accountability must be given greater priority than it was for the MDGs.

In fact, the lack of strong accountability mechanisms is seen as one of the main shortfalls of the MDGs and may have contributed to limiting their impact (SG/SM/12789, 2010). It is therefore important that lessons are learnt and measures taken to avoid this with a new global framework.

However, both the 'who' and the 'how' for post-2015 accountability processes are yet to be defined – accountability to whom, by whom, for what, and how? What should this look like in practice at all levels from the local to the international? How can we ensure that modalities for stakeholder engagement in monitoring and accountability mechanisms are in line with human rights principles and standards?

This report argues that young people[2] – young women and young men aged 15 to 24 years[3] – should be an integral part of any post-2015 accountability framework. Young people make up one fifth of the world's population, the majority of whom live in developing countries (UNDESA, 2014). This 'youth bulge' will be the key beneficiaries of, and partners in, the new global framework, which will shape the future for these 1 billion young people. Ensuring that their rights are met in this formative stage of life is fundamental to the achievement of sustainable development in all countries. Recognising this, young people have been particularly vocal and responsive in the post-2015 consultations and fora, both on- and offline from national to international levels.[4]

This paper argues that young people should be included as key stakeholders, not only within the goals and targets of the framework, but also in post-2015 monitoring and accountability mechanisms. It takes as its foundation the understanding that fulfilling young people's right to participate is not only an end in-and-of-itself, but it can also make an important contribution to the relevance and effectiveness of the implementation of the post-2015 framework.

Based on this foundation, we adopt a rights-based approach[5] to propose a set of foundational principles that should be considered when developing the post-2015 accountability framework to ensure that young people

---

1   For instance, an outcome of the Rio+20 conference on Sustainable Development was the resolution that '…to achieve our sustainable development goals, we need institutions at all levels that are effective, transparent, accountable and democratic.' Subsequently the High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda called for 'monitoring and accountability mechanisms involving states, civil society, the private sector, foundations, and the international development community'. Added to this are the persistent and increasingly unequivocal demand from civil society groups for clear pathways of participation and accountability in Sustainable Development Goals.

2   Plan International supports thousands of children to speak about their rights and needs and to demand accountability at the national and international levels, and we believe that this is essential for the success of the post-2015 agenda. We recognise that in most countries, the age of active political participation starts between 18 and 21 years old, which effectively excludes most children and some youth from all forms of formal political participation. Political realities and power dynamics mean that it is even less likely that they are able to participate in accountability processes, despite the fact that their right to do so is protected in international human rights law. However, the role of children in governance and accountability is beyond the scope of this report, which will predominantly focus on the role that youth can play in directly influencing and contributing to the post-2015 agenda, and in strengthening its accompanying accountability mechanisms.

3   In alignment with the UN Secretariat, this report uses the terms 'youth' and 'young people' interchangeably to refer to individuals between 15-24 years of age. http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf

4   For example, over 75% of respondents to the My World Survey are under 30 (as of 28 August 2014).

5   Plan International advocates a post-2015 framework that is universal, rights-based and people-centred. This means that the emerging goals and targets, and government efforts to achieve them, should be consistent with all international human rights standards, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); and be rooted in the human rights principles of universality and inalienability; equality and non-discrimination; indivisibility and interdependence; accountability and rule of law; transparency; inclusion and participation.

are able to participate meaningfully and effectively in strengthening a continuum of accountability from the local to the national, regional and international levels. Finally, we provide insights and recommendations on how these principles could be put into practice post-2015.[6]

Defining accountability

Accountability can take many forms; from the local to the international level and from informal, citizen-led initiatives to formal structures and processes. As a result, there are wide-ranging interpretations and definitions of accountability. Through the rights-based lens of this paper, we apply the definition of duty bearers, primarily governments, taking responsibility for their commitments and actions, answering for them by explaining and justifying them to rights holders, and being subject to a form of sanction where commitments and responsibilities are not fulfilled.

Accountability has a corrective function, making it possible to address grievances and provide remedies. Accountability also has a responsive function, helping to determine how policy or service delivery can be improved or adjusted to make it more effective (OHCHR and CESR, 2013). Effective accountability can strengthen and sustain policy efforts and lead to improvements in outcomes (Thu Phuong Nguyen, 2013). Lastly, accountability that

is achieved through inclusive participation in indirect (i.e. through consultations) or direct mechanisms (i.e. parliaments) can also serve as a tool for empowerment – building the capacity of individuals, including young people, to engage in processes to claim their rights and engage as active citizens. This should also be seen as an end in and of itself as fundamental for peaceful and democratic societies.

'Accountability is essential. It contributes to ensuring that all partners honour their commitments, demonstrates how actions and investment translate into tangible results and better long-term outcomes, and tells us what works and what needs to be improved.'[7]

---

6   It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore and propose specific modalities for post-2015 accountability mechanisms. More work is needed to identify which modalities would best allow the achievement of the principles proposed here.

7   Commission on information and accountability for Women's and Children's Health (2011) Keeping promises, measuring results. New York: Every Woman Every Child.

Why focus on young people?

The aspiration and promises made in the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs have not been realised for many of the world's 1 billion young people, approximately 85% of whom live in developing countries (UNDESA, 2014). They face significant challenges in realising their rights. Globally, 126 million young people lack basic reading and writing skills, over 60% of whom are young women (UN, 2014). In sub-Saharan Africa, just 39% of young men and 28% of young women had a comprehensive understanding of HIV (UN, 2014). And an estimated 75 million young people are unemployed worldwide (ILO, 2014). These statistics are linked to persistent challenges across a number of countries, such as conflict and fragility, climate change, poor governance,[8] economic and social inequality, discriminatory social norms, and human rights violations. Young people are experiencing these challenges in a crucial period of their lives that will help to shape and define their futures. The post-2015 agenda will ultimately fail to achieve its aims unless it explicitly recognises the unique challenges that young people face and their role in actively participating in their development.

Yet many countries offer few opportunities for young people to participate in political processes[9] or in the design of programmes and policies that aim to address these issues. Just one in three countries worldwide have consulted young people when developing their national poverty reduction strategies (UNFPA, 2013), and just over half have national youth policies designed to meet the unique needs of young people (Youth Policy Press, 2014). Political participation as a key pathway of formal accountability is often limited for young people due to a number of factors, which also include voting age limits and political disillusionment. Results from a survey conducted by the Inter-Agency Network on Youth and Development in August 2012 found 'a lack of opportunity for meaningful participation in decision-making processes' to be one of the main challenges for a majority of the 13,000 respondents from 186 countries (UNDP, 2014). Programme documentation from Plan (2009) reinforces this finding, highlighting the exclusion and lack of recognition that young people face in decision-making.

The lack of widespread meaningful participation of young people is a great cause for concern from both rights-based and instrumental perspectives. Young people's rights to access information and participate individually and collectively in decision-making are guaranteed across the international human rights treaties, including in Articles 12, 13, 15, and 17 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the most widely ratified human rights treaty, and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Furthermore, participation in development 'of the entire population and all individuals' is a theme of the 1986 UN Declaration on the Right to Development.

Additionally, as will be outlined in evidence and case studies from social accountability approaches below, services and outcomes in health, nutrition, and education can improve when young people and institutions engage collaboratively to improve quality, transparency and accountability for results. Such participation can also form a foundation for active citizenship, enabling and empowering young people to increasingly participate in, and contribute to, the governance[10] of their communities and countries, both now and in the future. As well as having intrinsic value, therefore, upholding broad citizen participation – including from young people – in accountability has strong potential to strengthen the effectiveness of future progress on the ground for the post-2015 goals and targets. It is also crucial that the post-2015 framework is responsive to youth in particular, given the size and scope of the challenges faced by over 1 billion young people today.

Moving towards an accountable post-2015 framework

Learning from the MDG experience

When they were defined, the MDGs were not accompanied by clear accountability processes and did not explicitly provide for civil society engagement in implementation and monitoring of results. Although some pathways for exercising accountability did arise over the course of the framework, primarily through periodic national reporting,[11] these were ad hoc, did not involve all key

---

8 The paper defines governance as the way a community or country is run. It refers to the processes by which governments and public officials exercise power and make decisions as well as the relationship between citizens, civil society and the state. Effective governance is where state-citizen relationships are transparent, accountable and responsive to the needs of all citizens.

9 For example, the average age of a Parliamentarian globally is 53 years (see: http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/parliamentary_development/the-global-parliamentary-report)

10 Governance is the way a community or country is run. It refers to the processes by which governments and public officials exercise power and make decisions as well as the relationship between citizens, civil society and the state. Effective governance is where state-citizen relationships are transparent, accountable and responsive to the needs of all citizens.

11 The main formal monitoring mechanism during the MDGs has been the monitoring of progress against the goals through periodic country reporting. MDG country reports collect nationally derived evidence on MDG progress, highlighting the main areas of progress as well as the challenges behind progress gaps.

stakeholders and did not require governments to justify their progress. International agreements such as the MDGs tend to be voluntary and not legally binding, and hence they do not provide a means of redress if commitments are not met. Most formal MDG monitoring has taken the form of peer reviews between States without clear or adequate pathways for civil society, and particularly young people, to engage.[12] Now, 14 years into their implementation, the UN Secretary-General himself has recognised that one of the biggest shortfalls in achieving the MDGs was a lack of strong accountability at both national and international levels (SG/SM/12789, 2010).

Although the MDGs lacked robust formal accountability mechanisms, the goals themselves did serve as a useful informal tool for those wishing to hold governments to account. Their clear aims and measurable targets represented a yardstick around which national and international civil society could demand and measure results.

During the MDG era, informal mechanisms and processes for accountability grew increasingly common. These include social audits, citizen scorecards, and participatory budgeting. The MDGs have also directed government investment in collecting and accessing data on particular issues, which enabled greater peer-to-peer comparisons of performance and a better understanding of achievable rates of progress toward targets (Malena et al., 2004). The resulting informal pathways for accountability led to highly varied levels of engagement from civil society, including young people, at local and national levels in different contexts and goal areas. All of this provides a rich basis of experience and evidence from which to construct a broader and more robust accountability framework for new goals.
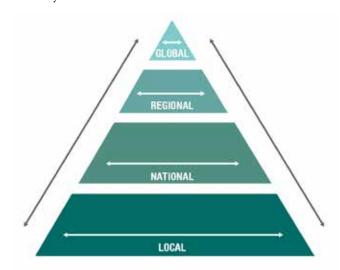
A Continuum of accountability post-2015

Like the MDGs, the post-2015 goals will likely be a voluntary, non-binding framework without sanctions for failure to deliver on commitments. Yet, as with the MDG experience, the framework could be used by a variety of stakeholders, including young people, to engage in the process, monitor progress, and demand accountability for results. In order to go beyond this limited, informal system of accountability for the post-2015 goals, however, it will be essential that clear and mutually reinforcing pathways of accountability are established at all levels at the outset.

While the framework will be international in nature, it is at the national level that policy is made and that governments are legally required to meet their obligations to their citizens, as set out in national and international law. Formal, institutional accountability mechanisms,

such as parliaments, will have an important role to play in monitoring the legislative, administrative, economic, policy and other measures taken towards realising commitments made in the post-2015 framework.

However, given that young people often face specific barriers in accessing some formal mechanisms, a range of formal (including Ombudspersons or youth parliaments) and informal mechanisms and processes (such as social audits and community score cards) should be strengthened and promoted as important pathways for young people's engagement in post-2015 accountability. Not all such mechanisms prove useful, and these will need to be continually assessed for their effectiveness.

The national level is also where the greatest number of citizens will be most likely to access accountability mechanisms directly without the financial, linguistic, and other barriers that often bar many from accessing international and regional fora. This is increasingly true as countries move to create devolved power structures through a process of decentralisation (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2006). For young people, many of whom face multiple, overlapping exclusions, it is the local and national levels where they are most able to participate meaningfully and effectively in both formal and informal accountability processes. It is therefore essential that the post-2015 agenda builds an effective accountability framework from the 'bottom up', grounded at the local and national levels, and that a robust 'continuum of accountability' is established to link the local to the national, regional, and international levels.

A robust continuum of accountability would be firmly rooted in local and national processes and would transparently identify the linkages between these and the regional and international levels. Strong information

---

12 Other examples include the African Peer Review Mechanism, the OECD Development Assistance Committee Peer Review, and the Universal Periodic Review.

and feedback loops will need to be established to link the horizontal – accountability mechanisms operating within levels of political authority – and the vertical – accountability mechanisms across multiple levels of political authority. This is crucial not only from a rights-based perspective, but also to ensure that accurate, timely information on realities within countries can support national, regional, and international recommendations and action for strengthened or different approaches to achieving the goals and targets in local contexts. Such systems already exist in some countries or sectors, but in others will need to be built up from existing mechanisms.

As we have argued, young people will be an essential voice within post-2015 accountability processes at all of these levels. Below we set out a range of principles that can help to guide discussions on the post-2015 accountability framework in order to ensure meaningful youth engagement.

Principles to guide effective and inclusive accountability

In this section, we build upon the experience of Plan and others in promoting the active citizenship[14] of girls, boys, young women and young men to hold public officials to account in order to usefully inform the emerging system of accountability for the post-2015 framework. Plan International's Child-Centred Community Development

---

13 Some targets within Goal 16: 'Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels' in the proposed Sustainable Development Goals from the Open Working Group touch on governance issues, however this was contentious within the negotiations. See http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html

14 This paper uses the definition of active citizenship involving individuals or groups taking action to ensure civil, political, social and economic rights are upheld.

(CCCD) approach provides a rights-based framework for all of Plan's work with children and young people at the centre. Drawing on the experience of working through this approach during the MDGs, we identify a range of key principles that could be applied to strengthen post-2015 accountability mechanisms, particularly if these are to effectively build in the principle of meaningful participation for civil society and for young people in particular.

Here, we outline the importance of key principles for formal and informal post-2015 accountability mechanisms at the local, national and international levels: participatory, inclusive, accessible, collaborative, and responsive to young people and other marginalised and excluded groups.

Meaningful participation

Participation can be seen on a spectrum from merely listening and observing to consultation to influencing decisions. It can be consultative, where the views of young people are voiced and heard in monitoring processes. It can be youth-led, where young people organise and lead their own engagement in processes at the community or national level. Finally, it can be collaborative, where young people are regularly and meaningfully engaged in monitoring and accountability processes and mechanisms, working with others to hold duty bearers to account for their commitments.

Meaningful participation[15] is where young people are not considered merely 'beneficiaries' of public policies, but as active participants and implementing partners who are fully consulted and informed. It necessitates that the voices of young people are heard and respected equally to those of adults and therefore requires ways of working that recognise the different starting points of young people in their evolving capacities. Working with young people and valuing their input is crucial if development policies are to be truly inclusive and relevant to those they are intended to serve.

This is evident even in particularly complex processes such as budget setting, planning and monitoring. The participation of children and young people, particularly those from marginalised and excluded groups, has been shown to improve the relevance of budget utilisation and increase accountability. For example, the Municipality of Rosario in Argentina undertakes an annual participatory youth budget, engaging around 1,000 youth from across its six districts to decide upon budget allocations for youth services each year. This process was initiated in response to the recognition that service priorities set by adults may not always reflect the rights, needs and interests of young people, and that funds were being used inefficiently. Among a number of outcomes were the identification and rectification of funding and service gaps for young people (DfID-CSO Children and Youth Network, 2010).

Social accountability initiatives in Uganda also show that participatory monitoring approaches can lead to effective outcomes, particularly where budget allocations are adjusted following discussions between citizens and local government officials (World Vision, 2011). These provide additional pathways to accountability for individuals, including young people, which might not exist through formal mechanisms. However, these case studies also suggest that, even for informal mechanisms, meaningful participation is dependent in part on the commitment and buy-in from governments to ensure responsive action; this principle of 'collaboration' is further elaborated below.

Inclusive

Both the formal politics of a town, province, country or region, and informal politics of families, schools and neighbourhoods, profoundly affect young women and young men's ability to realise their rights and to participate in governance and accountability processes. In many contexts, inherent power imbalances, often favouring adult males, may lead to resistance or discouragement of youth participation in political process, including governance and accountability. Even when formal structures for youth engagement are set up, such as youth parliaments, evidence from Plan's programmes and wider literature suggests that these can actually replicate class structures and serve to exclude the most marginalised. An accountability framework that actively sought to engage marginalised groups, including youth, would help to promote social and political inclusion of young people.

In addition to overcoming the (age-based) discrimination that young people experience as a group, the accountability framework will also have to address and respond to other forms of discrimination that can lead to multiple intersecting forms of discrimination. Beyond the broad exclusion of youth, there are groups of young people who are more disadvantaged, including young women; young people living in rural or remote areas; young people belonging to minority groups; young people with disabilities, young people living on the street, urban poor, stateless, refugees, displaced and migrant young people (DFID-CSO Children and Youth Network, 2010). The space and ability for girls and young women to participate can be further constrained by social and physical barriers, including time-poverty barriers at the household level (as a result of household chores, for example), and

---

15 'Step Change' a 2014 publication by UNICEF, Plan, Save the Children, and Working Children identifies the key criteria for child participation in monitoring to be: transparent and informative; voluntary; respectful; relevant; youth friendly; inclusive; supported by training to adults; safe and sensitive to risk; and accountable.

discriminatory social norms at the community level (Walker et al., 2014).

An inclusive, human rights-based post-2015 accountability framework will therefore require governments to be particularly responsive to the most marginalised groups. This means that marginalised young people are empowered to engage with formal and informal accountability mechanisms and are able to demand the realisation of their rights. Plan Tanzania, for example, in coalition with the Tanzanian Child Rights Forum, worked with over 1,000 children in the preparation of their NGO report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, to ensure that the direct voices of children, including the most marginalised, were facilitated to input directly to the Committee. Ensuring that the hardest to reach have the same opportunities to engage in accountability processes as the most privileged will require governments to adopt and resource specific strategies and specialised interventions. This might mean that, rather than establishing parallel structures, governments could work with existing community-based and youth-led civil society groups. Without taking these realities into account, even the best-designed mechanisms at the local and national levels will only be accessible to the most privileged groups, such as better-educated local leaders, rather than those most targeted by post-2015 goals and targets (DLGN and IDS, 2014).

Accessible

Local level accountability and collaboration is impeded when government policies or review processes are difficult to access, interpret, or communicate. Conversely, open and transparent governance structures that are accessible to citizens, including youth, have the potential to greatly improve outcomes. Furthermore, some evidence suggests that community engagement in monitoring service provision significantly improved when communities had access to information about their rights and entitlements in the form of their local district and national performance standards (World Vision, 2011).

However, access to information is only one part of the picture. Consideration needs to be given to the types of information made available and how it is presented. This means that information should be provided in a language and format that is accessible and easy to understand by young people. For example, evidence from Zambia found that the National Youth Policy (NYP), as well as other policy documents, was inaccessible to many young people, particularly those with low literacy, meaning that any monitoring or advocacy on the issues contained in the NYP was challenging. The NYP could have provided a catalyst for youth mobilisation if it had been presented in a more interactive format; creative use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) such as the internet and mobile phones can be a useful aspect of such an approach (Restless Development, 2012).

Plan Uganda: Student Councils tackling teacher attendance by texting

Despite increased enrolment in primary education in Uganda, significant numbers of children are failing to learn whilst at school. One of the biggest factors contributing to this is the high rate of teacher absenteeism. Around 20–30% of teachers can be absent at any one time in each district, with one school reporting a teacher absence rate of 62%. This, in turn, contributes to irregular pupil attendance, with 27% of children in Uganda not in school at any given time.

In response, Plan Uganda, together with Nokia, developed an SMS-based system to tackle the problem. Plan worked with student councils from five schools on a pilot project introducing mobile phone reporting to monitor teacher and student attendance. Each school received two phones for this purpose, giving them the possibility to send free SMS reports on their missing teachers to district education authorities, who subsequently followed up on the reports. The scheme, which has now been running for two and a half years, has resulted in the near elimination of teacher absenteeism and an almost 80% reduction in pupil absenteeism.

This demonstrates that effective programmes might not only support young women and young men to understand, collect, analyse and use information (on rights, quality of services, political processes, policies and budgets) in order to effectively monitor and influence public officials, but also support them to generate and access information in new ways. The findings presented from Zambia above show that there is significant opportunity to engage young people in monitoring and accountability through the use of ICT, where mobile and internet platforms are used to monitor and provide real-time information, as the Uganda case study below demonstrates. Using technology in this way may be more likely to resonate with young people and provide them with new ways to engage with accountability mechanisms and processes.

Beyond accessibility of information, the locations and environments in which feedback is shared will impact on young people's ability to participate. Where possible, young people should be able to engage within locations they already know and access, such as schools or local community centres, which are less likely to require additional funds or time to reach. This can also help to mitigate risks, including protection risks, which can arise from individually sharing feedback on the actions of local leaders or on socially sensitive subjects (Thu Phuong Nguyen, 2013).

Youth participation in post-2015 accountability mechanisms is only possible if these processes, and information about them, are physically and financially accessible, with information provided in a format to suit

the needs of different audiences. This will require time, money, capacity-building, and training at all levels to ensure transparent and effective spaces for engagement. Finally, it will require investment in the provision of open and transparent access to quality and timely and age-appropriate information which provides the basis for young people to monitor the performance of governments. The evidence above suggests that these investments can be beneficial by both improving outcomes and enabling constructive engagement from citizens, including young people.

Collaborative

As demonstrated in many of the case studies in this report, a collaborative approach – where governments and other stakeholders[16] work actively *with* young people – tends to be the most successful. When rights-holders engage with bureaucrats and politicians in an informed, organised, constructive and collaborative manner, this can lead to improvements in the quality of governance, lead to empowerment, and contribute to development effectiveness (Malena et al. 2004). Conversely, confrontational approaches to governance and accountability can be counter-productive, particularly where power imbalances or religious or cultural sensitivities are being challenged.

A review of Plan's experience indicates that influencing public authority figures to support social accountability initiatives is an important strategy to mobilise and sustain both citizens' and public officials' engagement. The involvement of government officials can be critical to ensuring that feedback from citizens is taken on board by authorities and generates change (Conrad et al., 2014). In El Salvador, Plan supported the development and advocacy of ADESQUITOS (youth community development organisations) who have conducted successful advocacy on child protection at the municipal level. ADESQUITOS' undertook situations analyses with adults and jointly developed recommendations for a new Municipal Child Rights Code and a new Child and Adolescent Rights law. These policies were approved in a large number of municipalities, and a significant number also allocated budgetary resources to support policy implementation. Successful collaboration and joint analysis between youth and adults were key factors in this success.

Another good example of collaborative and participatory monitoring is World Vision's Citizen Voice and Action (CVA) approach to social accountability. CVA works by equipping citizens, governments, and service providers to work collaboratively in order to improve

Save the Children in Tanzania: supporting children to undertake budget analysis and monitoring

In Tanzania, Save the Children has supported children in seven districts to come together in more than 900 Children's Councils. These Children's Councils have advocated for better planning and budgeting for children both at district and national levels. As part of these activities the children have met with district officials to present their priorities to be integrated into district council plans and budgets. As a result, six out of the seven district councils planned for increased resource allocation to activities directly related to children in 2011/12 budgets. These budgetary allocations enabled 455,000 pupils in Arusha and Same districts to benefit from school feeding programmes and contributed to increased school attendance from 70% to 84% in just one year in Same district. In Ruangwa 1,750 girls and 2,600 boys enjoy better quality of education thanks to the recruitment of 52 additional teachers. Dialogue between children and local government officials has also contributed to establishing sustainable mechanisms for children to influence local governance processes.

services. Under CVA, civic education is provided about tangible rights to services under local law as well as national standards in education, health and other sectors. Communities then work collaboratively with government and service providers to compare these national standards – which may differ from country to country – to the reality that exists in individual primary schools and health clinics. Evaluations of this approach show strong improvements in a number of areas. One study of 50 Ugandan communities using the CVA approach showed a 33% drop in under-five mortality; a 20% increase in the utilisation of outpatient services; a 58% increase in the number of deliveries by skilled birth attendant deliveries; and a 19% increase in the number of patients seeking antenatal care (Bjorkman and Svensson, 2009).

Experiences such as these suggest that when young people and government officials work collaboratively through mechanisms and structures that encourage interaction, it can support consensus-building and improve outcomes (Alvares-Reyes, 2012). The key element of success in these initiatives lies in opening up spaces for improved dialogue between community members, service providers, and local governments. In the context

---

16 It is important to recognise that many of the barriers to including children and youth in collaborative participatory approaches lie at the household or community level, meaning that adults and parents may need to be included from the beginning.

of post-2015 accountability mechanisms, the improved outcomes demonstrated by participatory, collaborative approaches suggest that this principle is critical as governments are considering how to ensure greater success in local and national level accountability mechanisms.

Responsive

Governments can only be said to be accountable for the post-2015 agenda if they are responsive: if they listen and respond to the needs and concerns of citizens, and explain what steps they have taken to this effect. This could include measures for redress (rectifying service failures, providing alternatives, new social services) or providing a guarantee of non-repetition through, for example, legislative reform or a shift in public planning. This principle is strongly linked with 'collaborative' in that it concerns the commitment of governments to engage with young people and with accountability mechanisms overall.

We have argued throughout this paper that ensuring space for young people's participation in decision-making and monitoring processes can lead to improved outcomes in policy and programme. However, the ability of young people to have a voice and express their views and interests is only a valid exercise if those voices are heard and acted upon – if governments support attempts to improve accountability, are open to the influence of young people, and respond to their concerns. If this does not happen, then young people are likely to become disillusioned with processes that purport to encourage 'youth engagement' but do not respond to their inputs. Several have argued that low voter turnout among young people is linked to this feeling of disillusionment (Bergh et al., 2014).

Ensuring responsiveness will require strengthening the capacity of governments at all levels to engage with young people in formal spaces – such as parliamentary hearings and school councils – and informal spaces – such as through social media or community meetings. This could be challenging in contexts where young people are expected to offer adults in power unquestioning deference (Alvares-Reyes, 2012). Though primary responsibility for accountability rests with governments, whose motivations and incentives to engage with young people are varied and complex, there is also a need for investment in the 'demand side' of the accountability equation to strengthen the capacity of young people and communities to effectively voice their concerns. A crucial piece of this is investment in formal and non-formal educational and training opportunities to foster active citizenship amongst young people.

Evaluations from Plan's child participatory media work in South America, West Africa and Asia have also demonstrated that adult attitudes toward young people's participation can be positively influenced when young people have

The use of community scorecards in Malawi

A scorecard is a participatory tool that provides feedback to service providers on how various services are perceived by the community. Scorecards are versatile and can be employed individually (citizen score cards) or collectively (community or school score cards). In Malawi, for example, Plan worked with other NGOs to support communities, student and children's groups to use scorecards to evaluate over 200 service facilities in education, water and sanitation, health and agriculture. The scorecards gathered information on people's perceptions of services, and assessed their performance according to locally agreed standards of quality, efficiency and transparency.

This information fed into the budgeting process and formed a basis for holding service providers to account. In education, for example, the process assessed teacher numbers and teacher-pupil ratios, which highlighted teacher shortages in rural areas. Local government responded by increasing numbers of teachers assigned to schools, and making an action plan for resolving the other shortcomings identified by communities.

Key to the success of this approach is that it encourages community members to engage in dialogue with planners and policy makers to agree on how various services can be improved. Evaluations found that the programme contributed to powerful changes in how communities approach local service blockages, shifts in resources and evidence of greater responsiveness from some public officials (Harris and Wild, 2011). Information generated through the scorecard exercises is increasingly being utilised in district-based planning and human resource allocation in the health and education sectors (Gallagher, 2012).

the power and opportunity to analyse their environment and to effectively communicate on issues that concern them (Plan International, 2009). The evidence presented in this section suggests that initiatives to strengthen young people's life skills and abilities to participate have an important impact on government responsiveness. The principle of responsiveness should be built into the accountability framework of the post-2015 agenda and safeguarded through continuous accessible, inclusive and non-discriminatory feedback mechanisms and effective follow-up processes, as a means of verifying that an effective accountability system is in place (Clippinger et al., 2014).

Emerging accountabilities for the post-2015 framework

Short pocket history: accountability and post-2015

Accountability as a principle both within and for the post-2015 framework has been emphasised in a number of formal, UN-led processes on the SDGs. Public consultations conducted by the UN Development Group (2013) to inform SDG negotiations demonstrated widespread demand for 'a participatory framework for monitoring to ensure accountability during implementation'. The High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013) also highlighted the importance of 'monitoring and accountability mechanisms involving states, civil society, the private sector, foundations, and the international development community.'

Additionally, following a May 2014 General Assembly Interactive Dialogue on 'Elements for an Accountability Framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda', the UN Secretary-General requested a set of consultations, led by UN Regional Commissions, on accountability at the regional level and its links to international mechanisms. Despite this momentum, however, the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals failed to address accountability. Its proposal of goals only includes one mention of 'accountability' in a heading at the end of goal 17 on 'Means of Implementation' and not at all in any targets or in the chapeau.

We have detailed a number of principles that would help to ensure that post-2015 accountability mechanisms can effectively listen and respond to the voices of young people. We have also argued that a strong enabling environment, reinforced by relevant targets in the emerging post-2015 framework, is a crucial pre-condition for any effective and inclusive accountability in practice.

Most fundamental to linking these arguments to the post-2015 accountability mechanisms, we have argued that accountability will be strongest where rights, duties and responsibilities are clearly defined, and where citizens have direct access to governments: at the local and national levels. It is at these levels, and through strong links between them, that governments can most effectively be assessed against their policy and budgetary efforts towards achieving sustainable development outcomes through collaborative, inclusive, accessible and responsive monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

However, power and authority is held across the local, national, regional, and international levels, and decisions are made through networks of actors. Development is influenced, advanced and held back at all of these levels. Therefore, it is essential that accountabilities for post-2015 goals function in an integrated way across all levels in a continuum of accountability with assessment and monitoring at the international level clearly drawing on evidence from the local and national level, including through the participation of young people.

We argue that the litmus test for accountability processes at all levels is how and whether it reflects and builds in the key principles that have been central to this paper. In short, how effectively the voices of individuals, including young people, particularly the most marginalised, are heard and responded to within local, national, regional and international formal and informal processes.

Yet, with negotiations soon to kick off in earnest, the state of discussions on monitoring mechanisms, currently only focused on formal international processes, is somewhat opaque. The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), which has emerged as the formal monitoring and accountability mechanism for post-2015 goals at international level, will ensure high-level political engagement on the post-2015 goals. Meeting through annual and 4-yearly summits under the auspices of ECOSOC and the UN General Assembly respectively, it is expected to largely function as a voluntary peer-review model (A/RES/67/290, 2013).

The potential for young people to be part of the HLPF mechanism is inevitably bound with the prospects of meaningful civil society participation overall. The Ministerial Declaration on the second meeting of the HLPF in July 2014 reaffirmed a commitment to involving all stakeholders, stating that the HLPF intergovernmental process 'will include inputs from all stakeholders, including civil society, scientific and knowledge institutions, parliaments, local authorities and the private sector' (E/2014/L.22–E/HLPF/2014/L.3, 2014). This statement is a step in the right direction in that it acknowledges a central role for broader stakeholder engagement, including the already established Major Group on Children and Youth[17].

Yet civil society groups have remained concerned about the specific modalities for their participation in the HLPF, stating that open and effective space for the participation of non-state actors has thus far been limited and inadequate[18]. Given the limited period of time that

---

17 Nine 'Major Groups' of stakeholders were established by Agenda 21 and recognised by UNGA resolution A/RES/47/190 in 1992 to reflect the desire of non-state actors to participate in issues related to sustainable development. These are Business and Industry; Children and Youth; Farmers; Indigenous Peoples; Local Authorities; NGOs; Scientific & Technological Community; Women; and Workers and Trade Unions.

18 See, for example, a letter to the President of ECOSOC on behalf of Organising Partners of the Major Groups and GCAP (June 2014) at: http://worldviewmission.nl/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/WM-MG-letter-to-ECOSOC-President-09June-1.pdf.

the HLPF is mandated to meet each year, it is unlikely that it will be able to monitor progress in meeting the post-2015 goals and targets in any detail. As the only formally identified monitoring body for the post-2015 goals to date, weak stakeholder engagement sets a concerning precedent as its modalities will ultimately shape the quality of official international level post-2015 accountability overall.

In its current form, the HLPF is unlikely to provide an effective, accessible, inclusive and responsive avenue for the meaningful participation of young people at the international level. Therefore, opportunities to clearly and effectively link any post-2015 monitoring to already established international monitoring mechanisms, such as human rights treaty monitoring bodies, Special Procedures and the UPR process, should be explored. Such an approach could also help to limit the reporting burden on governments, which is especially important for those with limited capacity and resources. In addition, these processes already provide avenues for the participation of girls, boys, young women and men at the international level, which could provide additional learning.

Furthermore, it is the need to link the HLPF to national and local accountability mechanisms that remains pressing in light of the findings of this report. It is at the national and local level that policies are made which affect young people's lives, and where change ultimately happens. There are few concrete references in documents or discussions on the emerging post-2015 accountability framework detailing how the HLPF will link to and reinforce existing or new accountability mechanisms at the international, regional, national, and local levels. The most promising exception is a record of key messages from the 2014 General Assembly Interactive Dialogue on accountability for the post-2015 framework which advocates "a multi-layered approach, including engagement with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the HLPF at the global level, peer-review mechanisms at the regional level and parliaments at the national level."

This record of discussions suggests an encouraging interest in reinforcing linkages to regional and national level mechanisms, but does not detail how this might function, nor is such a sentiment captured in the Ministerial Declaration of the HLPF July 2014 session. It will be essential that stakeholders in the post-2015 negotiations clearly define pathways and linkages for vertical and horizontal accountability at the international, regional, national and local levels. Not only should robust links be made between these levels, but this should be done with explicit reference to the role of young people, as well as marginalised groups, in light of the findings of this report. Commitments to this end can be captured both within the goals framework itself, and in the mandate of the forums arising to carry out the monitoring of post-2015 goals.

Conclusion

The experience and analysis reflected in this report suggests that enabling stakeholders, especially young people, to participate meaningfully in monitoring and accountability processes can be an important contributor to the transformative change that the post-2015 goals are expected to aim to achieve. The experience of young people's engagement in development efforts during the MDGs suggests that in order to effectively address global challenges, the post-2015 framework should be underpinned by effective accountability mechanisms at all levels – from local through to global – that respond to the rights and needs of those most affected and take into account their views and voices. Young people can play a critical role throughout policy cycles, including in contributing to effective accountability, by being involved in the decisions that affect them, and by contributing to the monitoring of results on the ground. Perhaps most importantly, young people can play a role in helping to ensure that any new set of commitments is fulfilled by governments and all others who will contribute toward achieving the post-2015 agenda.

Yet an assessment of emerging accountability mechanisms for post-2015 goals indicates that there is a need for greater clarity on how these will be structured and on how these will work in practice. Predefined and predictable pathways of engagement are particularly important to enable young people to meaningfully participate in line with the principles of inclusivity, accessibility, collaboration and responsiveness in spite of the on-going resource, capacity and other barriers to participation that they face.

At the global and regional levels, this calls for clearly defined modes of engagement in the HLPF review process, and in any regional review mechanisms that encompass post-2015 goals. In order to serve a robust accountability process these would specify, for example, guaranteed adequate space for stakeholder engagement and inputs at formal review meetings and in the on-going monitoring and review process; the consideration of alternative civil society reports including from youth groups; and consideration of civil society inputs on formal review meeting agendas. Moreover, it will be important that such modes of engagement are sensitive to young people's rights and needs, for example, by ensuring information is presented in accessible formats and by providing additional support and funding to enable the participation of the most marginalised.

At the national and local levels young people can play a crucial collaborative role in helping governments to deliver on sustainable development objectives, for example, by participating in monitoring of the relevance and quality of essential services. At these levels it is equally important to establish clear pathways for accountability reliant on clearly defined modes of participatory engagement, including in the monitoring of data on progress, local consultations on the relevance and quality of services, parliamentary review processes and other relevant review mechanisms, such as those related to national human rights instruments. This report points to two key priorities for strengthening national and local level forms of accountability in line with the principles of inclusivity, accessibility, collaboration, and responsiveness:

1) Engage with young people in **bottom-up approaches** to development, in recognition of their right to be involved in decision-making that affects them, and of the importance of their engagement in co-defining transformative sustainable development pathways. This will require working with young people and existing youth-led organisations to support and amplify youth-led monitoring and accountability, and clearly linking these initiatives to post-2015 monitoring mechanisms and processes.

2) Create an **enabling environment** that facilitates open, inclusive, participatory and accountable governance. A key element of this is ensuring that governments uphold fundamental rights and freedoms at national and local levels and are open and proactive to listen to and engage with young people. The substance of the post-2015 framework itself can play an important role in supporting this by including robust targets and indicators on an enabling environment: addressing transparency of data and access to information, stakeholder engagement, and civil and political rights. However, establishing an enabling environment also requires fostering a culture of youth participation and ensuring that political actors and public officials are willing to listen and respond, e.g. offering

explanations of the steps taken towards fulfilling their commitments, or giving reasons for and acting on those that are not fulfilled. This is a question of political will, but also requires strengthening the capacities of public officials to engage and respond to young people's inputs and concerns.

Resource and capacity constrains represent a recurring barrier to effective and inclusive participation of young people, in addition to the existing and intersecting forms of marginalisation that they face as a group. These constraints to participation cut across all levels from local through to global, and therefore need to be addressed at all levels of post-2015 monitoring and accountability arrangements. This will require assessment of the barriers to participation that youth face at different levels, and commitment to respond to these by investing resources, strengthening capacity, and developing appropriate systems to overcome these barriers. In particular that post-2015 accountability mechanisms and processes, and information about them, must be physically and financially accessible, with information and data collected in a timely and transparent manner and provided in a format that is accessible to young people.

Finally, ensuring effective accountabilities for the post-2015 framework will require forging an integrated accountability framework. This means that accountability mechanisms at the local and national level are effectively linked with those at international and regional levels, including the HLPF. In this way the accountability process at each level can be effective in its own right, but also contributes to a mutually reinforcing and robust system of accountability overall. In conclusion, as world leaders continue to focus their energies on preparing negotiating positions on the content, or the 'what', of post-2015 goals at the United Nations, it will be critical that they do not fail to commit to equally defined plans for 'how' these promises will be fulfilled for the world's youth – the main beneficiaries of any plans for the future.

References

Alvares-Reyes, R. (2012) *Looking outside Plan: A Review of external good practice, Citizenship & Governance programming*. London: Plan UK.

Bardhan, P. and Mookherjee, D. (2006) 'Decentralization, corruption and government accountability' in S. Rose-Ackerman (ed.), *International handbook on the economics of corruption*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Bergh, G. et al. (2014) What's behind the demand for governance? An assessment of people's views. London: Overseas Development Institute.

Bjorkman, M. and Svensson, J. (2009) 'Power to the People: Evidence from a Randomised Field Experiment on Community Based Monitoring in Uganda,' *Quarterly Journal of Economics*.

Chaudhury, N. et al. (2006) 'Missing in Action: Teacher and Health Worker Absence in Developing Countries.' *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 20(1): 91-116.

Clippinger, E. et al. (2014) *Accountability through Civic Participation in the Post-2015 Development Agenda*. International Organizations Clinic, New York University School of Law (Commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme).

Commission on information and accountability for Women's and Children's Health (2011) *Keeping promises, measuring results. New York: Every Woman Every Child*.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2006) *6th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting: Strategy Papers*.

Conrad, S. et al. (2014) *Participatory Monitoring for Accountability: Principles for involving Children and Young People*. Woking: Plan International.

de Búrca, G. (2013) *International human rights regimes as experimentalist systems: a study of CEDAW and CRC*. cited in Clippinger et al, 2014.

Democratisation, Decentralisation and Local Governance Network and the Institute for Development Studies (2014) Civic engagement in local governance: beyond the usual suspects? Synthesis of facilitated e-discussion by SDC's DLGN and IDS on 7-8 May 2014.

Gallagher, H. (2012) *A Review of good practice in Plan's citizenship & governance programming*. London: Plan UK.

Hanna, R. (2005) 'Monitoring works: Getting teachers to come to school' Working Paper. Cambridge, MA: Department of Economics and Poverty Action Lab, MIT.

Harris, D. and Wild, L. (2011) *The Political Economy of Community Scorecards in Malawi*. London: Overseas Development Institute.

High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013) *A new global partnership: Eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development*.

International Labour Organisation (2014) *Global Employment Trends 2014: The risk of a jobless recovery*.

Joshi, A. (2011) S*ervice Delivery: Review of impact and effectiveness of transparency and accountability initiatives*. Transparency and Accountability Initiative.

King, M. et al. (2012) *Measuring Policy Coherence for Development*. European Centre for Development Policy Management.

Malena, C. et al. (2004) *Social Accountability: An introduction to the concept and emerging practice*. Social Development Paper 76. Washington, DC: World Bank.

McGee, R. and Gaventa, R. (2011) 'Shifting Power - Assessing the impact of transparency and accountability initiatives,' IDS Working Paper 383. Brighton: Institute for Development Studies.

Ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the 2014 session of the Economic and Social Council on the theme 'Addressing ongoing and emerging challenges for meeting the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 and for sustaining development gains in the future' E/2014/L.22–E/HLPF/2014/L.3.

Ministry of Infant and Primary Education (MEMP), Benin (2008) *Étude sur les violences contre les enfants en milieu scolaire au Bénin*.

My World Survey results (http://data.myworld2015.org/). Accessed 5 August 2014

Ocampo, J. and Arteaga N. (2014) *Accountability and effective development cooperation in a post-2015 era*. ECOSOC, UNDESA, and BMZ.

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Center for Economic and Social Rights (2013) *Who will be accountable? Human Rights and the Post-2015 Development Agenda*.

Plan International (2009) *Children as active citizens: Addressing discrimination against children's engagement in political and civil society processes*. Woking: Plan International.

Restless Development (2012) *Evaluation of the Youth Accountability Model for Enhancing Access to Youth Friendly Health Services*. London: Restless Development in partnership with the Zambia Governance Foundation.

Right to Education Project (2009) *Analyzing education budgets through the lens of human rights: a two step process.*

Schedler, A. (1998) 'Conceptualizing Accountability', in Schedler, A., Diamond, L.J., Plattner, M.F., (eds.), *The self-restraining state: power and accountability in new democracies.* Bolder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

'Summary of the key messages of the General Assembly Interactive Dialogue on Elements for an Accountability Framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda' Thursday 1 May 2014, ECOSOC Chamber, UN Headquarters, New York.

Thu Phuong Nguyen, L. (2013) *Child-responsive Accountability: Lessons from Social Accountability.* New York: UNICEF.

UK Department for International Development – Civil Society Organisation Children and Youth Network (2010) *Youth Participation in Development: A Guide for Development Agencies and Policy Makers.*

United Nations (2010) 'Unmet commitments, inadequate resources, lack of accountability hampering achievement of Millennium Development Goals, says Secretary-General,' press release SG/SM/12789, 16 March 2010.

UN DESA, Youth Social Policy and Development Division website, Youth FAQs (http://undesadspd.org/Youth/FAQs.aspx).

UN Development Programme (2014) *Youth Strategy 2014-2017: Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future.*

UN Development Group (2013) People's Voices – Issue Brief to the SDG Open Working Group.

UN Population Fund 2013. Briefing note: Youth empowerment and development.

UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/67/290, 9 July 2013. Format and organisational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/41/128, 4 December 1986. Declaration on the right to development.

UN Secretary General, 1 May 2014, *Secretary-General's remarks at the Interactive Dialogue of the President of the General Assembly on Elements for an Accountability Framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda.*

United Nations (2014) Millennium Development Goals Report 2014.

Waage, J. et al. (2010) *The Millennium Development Goals: a cross-sectoral analysis and principles for goal setting after 2015.* London: The Lancet and London International Development Centre Commission.

Walker, D., Pereznieto, P. and Bergh, G. (2014) *Partners for change: Young people and Governance in a Post-2015 World*

World Vision (2011) *Citizen Voice and Action: Civic demand for better health and education services.*

Youth Policy Press (2014) *State of Youth Policy 2014.*

Cover photo: Plan/Nyani Quarmyne

www.odi.org