People-Centred Post-2015 Review & Accountability with Transparency and Citizen Participation at its core

A Policy Paper from the Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) Network

Introduction

For the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to meet the ambition of being truly transformative, the monitoring and accountability framework, spanning from the local to the global levels, must be people-centred, inclusive, transparent and participatory.

An accountability framework has the potential to transcend the weaknesses in follow-up and accountability of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and to improve the credibility, ownership and effectiveness of the Post-2015 agenda. The extensive consultation process undertaken by the United Nations at the global and national levels has informed the conceptualisation and discussion of the SDGs, and provides a solid foundation for an inclusive, transparent and participatory SDG accountability framework.

Lessons learned from the MDG framework highlights the need for the Post-2015 agenda to be accompanied by a sufficiently robust accountability framework to ensure that states and other duty-bearers are held accountable. While experiences vary by country, national monitoring and review processes have not been used systematically to support or actively seek the input, voice, or influence of people living in poverty, including children and marginalized groups. The UN Secretary-General has noted that a lack of accountability is one of the reasons for shortfalls in progress to achieve the MDGs.[1]

This brief highlights why the principles of transparency, accountability and participation (TAP) are critical to effective Post-2015 monitoring and follow-up, and provides recommendations on how these principles can be integrated into a meaningful system of accountability at local, national, regional and international levels.

Accountability

Accountability' is not the same as 'monitoring', 'follow-up' or 'review' – although these are all important components in realizing accountability. Accountability, with transparency and citizen participation as indispensable pre-requisites, has both preventive and corrective functions with three constituent dimensions: responsibility, answerability and enforceability.[2]

- *Responsibility:* The final Post-2015 agenda must delineate clearly who is responsible and for what, so that the actions of duty-bearers and general progress can be assessed transparently. Global and national indicators[3] that effectively capture the ambition of the targets (and are defined through broad and inclusive consultation with national statistical organisations, civil society and other experts) are one important element of this.
- *Answerability:* The Post-2015 agenda must provide multiple forums and channels for review, dialogue and discussion between all the actors and stakeholders involved, where those responsible for implementing the agenda provide information on their progress, setbacks and choices. In order for those responsible for implementing the agenda to be answerable to its 'beneficiaries', formal opportunities and mechanisms for public dialogue and engagement should be established across government and relevant and updated information must be made proactively available in a transparent, comparable, accessible and understandable fashion. Individual citizens, communities and organisations must also have the ability to freely collect data and information themselves, and exercise their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.
- *Enforceability:* Although the SDGs will not be legally binding, there need to be guarantees and incentives that ensure implementation will follow rhetoric. The 'follow-up and review' component of the final post-2015 framework must provide real incentives for States to keep their promises and monitor achievement, and identify concrete processes and mechanisms that can review progress and challenges, and identify the need for corrective action where problems emerge.

Levels of Accountability

The primary accountability relationship is that between a State and its people. Therefore, the Post-2015 accountability architecture should be rooted in inclusive national accountability processes, premised on robust and participatory data-gathering and monitoring – including citizen-generated data. The regional and global levels also provide critical opportunities to enhance accountability.

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[1] UN OHCHR and the Centre for Economic and Social Rights (2013), *Who will be accountable? – Human Rights and the Post-2015 Development Agenda,* and UN Secretary General's press release (2010) SG/SM/12789-GA/10923-DEV/2791)

[2] http://www.cesr.org/downloads/who_will_be_accountable.pdf

[3] Please see the TAP Network's full briefing on indicators http://tapnetwork2015.org/our-work/sdg-goal-16-indicators/

Additional to efforts undertaken at the national level, putting in place robust arrangements for international review and accountability processes will allow for:

a) taking a broader view of progress and trends, and tackling some of the more systemic, cross-border obstacles and setbacks;

b) sharing experiences between countries;

c) providing an extra layer of people-State accountability, which will be especially important to strengthen inclusive participation of marginalized and discriminated groups;

d) fostering mutual accountability between States for their differentiated responsibilities in meeting their commitments.

Processes at the global level should draw clearly on feedback, outcomes and information from local and national levels, including reports and data from civil society and communities.

However, States are not the only duty-bearers in the Post-2015 context. The review and accountability procedures that are agreed upon must have the scope and the mandate to also monitor the impact and actions of other actors, including the private sector, public-private partnerships, International Financial Institutions, UN agencies and civil society. The architecture for follow-up and review of the Post-2015 agenda should, for example, review the private sector's contribution to the SDGs and on the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Such monitoring and review would complement the monitoring of specific measures on private sector responsibility included in the Post-2015 agenda.

The review architecture should not just monitor and track progress towards sustainable development outcomes, but also monitor the means of implementation (MoI), as outlined in the HLPF founding UNGA Resolution 67/290. If we are to ensure a truly transformative Post-2015 agenda, we must learn the lessons from the MDGs – which only include limited commitments under MDG 8. This includes following up on commitments made in the outcome document from the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD), as well as the MoI targets listed under each SDG and under goal 17.

This will require an eye to balancing the differentiated responsibilities and capacities of developed and developing countries for financing the agenda, and the universal commitments of fostering an enabling environment for sustainable development. Therefore, the global level of Post-2015 review must have the ability to assess progress, gaps and barriers towards Goal 17 and other MoI targets, the overall state of the global partnership and the contribution of individual countries and multinational organisations, as well as 'policy coherence' and countries' impact on sustainable development beyond their borders (for example through tax, official development assistance, trade and environmental policies).

The High Level Political Forum (HLPF) is slated to be the global platform for Post-2015 follow-up and review, acting as an umbrella to bring together the different strands of Post-2015 accountability. It should review both national and global progress, make recommendations on how to overcome challenges and gaps, encourage action to address gaps in implementation and facilitate sharing of experiences ensuring transparency and participation in all its actions. In line with its mandate from UNGA Resolution 67/290, it must also ensure that civil society has a dedicated role and space to engage. It must also engage civil society to help governments fill gaps in implementation, follow-up and data production and monitoring, and many other issues – both at the global and national levels. If citizen participation is not rooted in the HLPF's review mechanism, we run the very real risk of repeating the shortcomings of the MDG follow-up processes, and squandering a critical opportunity to enhance ownership of the Post-2015 agenda at all levels.

Recommendations

➢ Accountability mechanisms and processes must be established that can monitor all aspects of the Post-2015 framework and other interlinked development commitments – including the SDGs themselves, their means of implementation and the outcome document of the Addis Ababa Accord. All processes, regardless of form or placement within the UN architecture, must be transparent, inclusive and participatory; seeking and taking into account the voices and views of the most marginalized, discriminated and disadvantaged women, men and children. Various barriers that prevent excluded groups and individuals from participating at different levels must be addressed.

➢ The HLPF must foster robust and accessible monitoring and review processes at the global level, and allow for inputs from a wide range of stakeholders and other review processes, to provide for a broader view of progress and challenges. Following the model of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process at the UN Human Rights Council, the HLPF reviews should be based on three sets of inputs: a) national reports by the states, b) information from UN entities, and c) independent reports from civil society and other non-state actors.

➢ These follow-up and review processes and mechanisms should be regular, well-defined and well-resourced with a dedicated and strengthened secretariat and bureau to support the work of the HLPF, and should provide adequate time, capacity and financing to meaningfully monitor and review progress and challenges.

➢ A Post-2015 accountability framework should use, draw on and strengthen existing mechanisms and institutions that play a relevant role in monitoring development, the environment and human rights. This could range from national sustainability councils, parliaments, independent national human rights institutions, to civil society coalitions, UN agencies and Inter-Agency Committees, international human rights monitoring bodies and other (multi-stakeholder) platforms such as the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation.

➢ The close links between the Post-2015 agenda and the Addis Ababa Accord offers significant potential to strengthen monitoring and accountability for sustainable development, particularly in relation to means of implementation. In view of this, and to avoid duplication and a "siloed" approach, strong alignment should be ensured between Post-2015 and FfD accountability mechanisms and processes.

Participation

The process of developing the SDGs has seen unprecedented participation from individuals, civil society organisations, and other sustainable development stakeholders. Consultations, such as those conducted through the World We Want Platform, allowed civil society to provide their perspectives on the Post-2015 sustainable development agenda. Well-coordinated responses by civil society, such as Beyond 2015, the UN Major Groups and the TAP Network, also enhanced participation in the design of the Post-2015 agenda to date.

Public participation should also be prioritized in the Post-2015 review and accountability processes. To ensure a transformative Post-2015 agenda, the process must be inclusive and involve regular and meaningful participation at all levels, including the poorest and most marginalized people. It must also involve a direct channel of communication for people to voice their opinions at the highest level of decision-making. Participation is a core development end in itself, as reflected in SDG targets 5.5 and 16.7 amongst others, that ensures the critical ability for all women, men and children to secure their rights.

Civil society can facilitate public participation and help to bring the most marginalized voices to the table. But without the rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and access to information guaranteed in law and practice, civil society cannot play its part. Commitments expressed in Goal 16, with transparent, participatory and accountable governance and institutions at its centre, is not only essential to support sustainable implementation of Post-2015 goals and targets, but will also be foundational for an

accountability framework that provides meaningful opportunities for engagement by citizens of all ages, genders and social groups.

In addition to being a globally recognized right in itself, the participation of people of all ages – including the most marginalized and vulnerable – in Post-2015 accountability can help states design relevant interventions and allocate resources more effectively. It has the potential to strengthen civic engagement, people's understanding of development and democratic processes and the relationship and trust between a state and its people. Additionally, it has the potential to enhance ownership of the SDGs amongst civil society and the public.

Recommendations

Other UN review frameworks, including the UPR[4], provide some guidance on how to ensure that the views and recommendations of individual citizens, communities, organised civil society and other non-state actors are considered by accountability mechanisms for the Post-2015 agenda. Building on lessons from these review frameworks at national, regional and international levels, participation in the review of the Post-2015 agenda should include the following characteristics:

➢ **In-person participation**: People's participation should be institutionalized at all levels.
   - *National*: Regular in-person national consultations between civil society, the private sector, international agencies and national governments will allow people to provide specific feedback and share experiences to advance the implementation of the Post-2015 agenda. The consultations will conclude with concrete recommendations by civil society to national governments; and these civil society reports should also form part of global reviews.
      - *Regional*: National accountability can be complemented by regional dialogue and monitoring in coordination with and making use of UN Regional Commissions. Civil society engagement at this level will be critical to contribute knowledge-sharing, learning and identification of good practices, and in generating solutions and mutual support.
      - *Global*: To fully realize the provisions in the UNGA Resolution 67/290 establishing the HLPF, the annual meetings of the HLPF should include time for civil society organisations (with and without ECOSOC status) to present and engage in interactive dialogue, including review of individual state's progress. A trust fund should be established to support travel to HLPF meetings for civil society organisations. Resolutions regarding the future implementation of the HLPF must include explicit language outlining and securing the meaningful participation of civil society at all levels – including global, regional, and national – in follow-up and review processes.
➢ **Remote participation**: National consultations and HLPF meetings should be webcast, and all reports available publicly and in accessible formats, to improve transparency and increase civil society participation. Civil society should have the opportunity to provide written statements and recommendations and present remotely through webcast or through other online platforms. Consultations should aim to attain highest levels of interactivity between on-site and remote participants.
➢ **Reporting:** Building on the model of civil society engagement in the UPR process – where the UN summarizes written submissions by NGOs and other non-state actors into an official "Summary of Stakeholders Information" that are considered during the review of a State's human rights record – a similar process of independent stakeholder reporting should be a key component of Post-2015 monitoring and review.

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[4] www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRMain.aspx

➢ **Capacity building for data collection and monitoring:** Advances in technology have led to a dramatic increase in the types and volume of data available. However, many citizens, especially marginalized groups have not had the resources, knowledge and capacity necessary to use this data. Financial support and resources should be put towards building the capacity of civil society and local government staff, including communities and individual women, men and children, to collect, access, and use data for decision making. This will empower civil society to provide specific recommendations in Post-2015 reports and consultations and to monitor progress.

Transparency

Citizen participation without full transparency and comparability of data and information will have limited impact. As a prerequisite for meaningful participation, citizens need access to timely, shareable and disaggregated public data and information that can be used and understood by everyone. Transparency allows for better coordination and real-time information to support strategic decision-making and make mechanisms and resources as effective as possible for development outcomes. Transparent, accessible, comparable data are critical for all stakeholders, including governments at all levels, civil society, communities and individual citizens to participate meaningfully in the design, implementation, and monitoring of SDGs, targets and indicators.

Recommendations

➢ Modalities, mandates and roles for monitoring, follow-up and review need to be clear and transparent. Governments at all levels should provide information in a timely, accurate, comprehensive, understandable and accessible manner.
➢ In line with international human right standards on access to information, all data on public matters and/or publicly funded data, including those produced by the private sector, should be made public and "open by default". This means that government information and documents and publicly-funded research should be made available in a timely manner to all in accessible and machine-readable formats, free of charge, and without restrictions on their use and re-use.
➢ Existing global open data standards for sharing information, such as the International Aid Transparency Initiative, should be strengthened.
➢ The HLPF must facilitate the dissemination of relevant information collected by various national governments and of Post-2015 reviews, and enable civil society to contribute and identify areas where lack of information and data is a hindrance to implementation.

Conclusions

This paper has argued that participation and transparency are key principles for robust, effective, and inclusive accountability mechanisms for the Post-2015 framework at all levels – from the local through to the global. If we have meaningful participation and transparency in place, then the Post-2015 'follow-up and review' mechanisms should be able to deliver real *accountability* for the SDGs.

Indeed, rigorous review and accountability processes are absolutely crucial to ensure the transformative potential of the Post-2015 agenda can be realized, to make the commitments credible, and to increase country and community ownership over the goals and targets.

The TAP Network stands ready to help Member States ensure that this architecture is sufficiently fit for purpose – for true accountability for an ambitious Post-2015 agenda.

For more information about the work of the [TAP Network](#) or this position paper, please contact John Romano, Coordinator of the TAP Network at romano@wfuna.org or visit http://tapnetwork2015.org/our-work/review-monitoring-accountability/