



Child sensitive accountability and the post-2015 agenda

To keep the post-2015 agenda on track, give children and young people a voice

The emerging post-2015 agenda is an opportunity for the world to agree on the kind of future we want. The decision-makers who articulate the goals and set the targets are helping to shape that future – but it is today's children and young people who will live it. They need ways to make their voices heard and make governments and other decision makers fulfil their commitments.

Key messages

1. **The success of the post-2015 agenda depends on strong, open, accessible, inclusive and participatory accountability mechanisms** at all levels that allow rights holders to make sure governments and other decision makers fulfil their commitments.
2. **Children and young people, including the most marginalized, need to be engaged in public and social accountability mechanisms** to make the agenda effective, relevant and responsive to their needs and concerns.
3. **Children and young people need clear and pre-defined ways to meaningfully participate** at all levels of all post-2015 processes, and need access to adequate information about these ways to participate.
4. **Accountability requires transparent, disaggregated, timely, user-friendly and relevant public data** on all children and young people.
5. **Open, inclusive and accountable governance** is critical to enabling meaningful engagement in monitoring and accountability and should be emphasized within the post-2015 agenda.

Why post-2015 accountability mechanisms for and with children and young people?

Children and young people are the main stakeholders in the post-2015 agenda, and their rights and interests belong at its centre. Poverty and inequality still deprive millions of children of their human rights, and because poverty perpetuates itself from one generation to the next, the

world's overall development suffers¹. Goals and targets on the post-2015 agenda should be geared towards eradicating poverty and putting in place all the elements children need to survive, thrive and – building on the significant contributions they are making to society today – grow up to become engaged citizens the world needs in order to tackle the challenges of the future.

But setting the right goals and targets is only the beginning. Ensuring that the agenda is put into practice in an effective and sustainable way means keeping tabs on those whose job it is to implement it, and holding them to account for both its outcomes and how they are achieved.²

As the post-2015 agenda takes shape, we have the opportunity to build into it concrete ways to hold decision makers to account. These mechanisms need to be comprehensive, transparent, inclusive, accessible, and participatory – engaging children, young people and adults, including the most marginalized, without discrimination. Citizens' voices need to be heard at all levels, from local to global, in a continuum of accountability.

Most of the action takes place at the national and local levels – that's where people, including the most marginalized and excluded, in their daily lives, encounter the results of their governments' efforts, and also where they tend to have the most say in what actions are taken. The primary focus of accountability must be directed there, with social accountability mechanisms³ having much to offer by equipping citizens, including children and young people, and governments to work constructively together to achieve sustainable outcomes from the post-2015 agenda. But the continuum needs to build up from the local level, reaching all the way to global institutions and fora, where States can be evaluated on how well they are fulfilling their responsibilities – with input from their citizens, including children and young people.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms children's right to be heard and to have their opinions taken into account when adults make decisions that affect them. Involving children in holding decision makers to account puts their civil and political rights into practice.⁴ It enables them to understand democratic processes and strengthen their civic engagement. Participation also helps develop children's cognitive abilities and fosters self-esteem, social skills and respect for others.

Countries benefit from having engaged citizens. Public participation can promote ownership, putting communities in the driver's seat while creating links with public accountability initiatives, and sustainability by building support for political decisions. It helps make societies less vulnerable to economic, political and social instability, and improves public policies, development effectiveness and development outcomes over time. It also spurs collective action – which is necessary to effect the kind of change that leads to sustainable development.

¹ CSDH, *Closing the Gap in a Generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health*, Final Report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health, World Health Organization, Geneva, 2008; Save the Children, *Born Equal: How reducing inequality could give our children a better future*, 2012.

² Definition of accountability: where decision makers take responsibility for their commitments and actions, answer for them by explaining and justifying them to affected rights holders, and are subject to a form of sanction where commitments and responsibilities are not fulfilled.

³ These mechanisms include tools such as score cards, social audits, or public expenditure tracking that help citizens monitor the performance of government and its institutions at different levels in a participatory and empowering manner.

⁴ Elizabeth D. Gibbons, *Rights in Principle and Accountable in Practice: Child rights and social accountability in the post-2015 world*, UNICEF Background Paper, 2014

What needs to happen to make all children's and young people's engagement possible?

We recommend that all stakeholders, including States, the UN system, and civil society:

- **Set up meaningful, inclusive, accessible, collaborative and responsive ways to engage children and young people at all levels of post-2015 accountability processes, creating a continuum of accountability.** Children and young people, with special attention to the most marginalized, should be active participants and partners who are fully consulted and informed, their voices heard and respected equally to those of adults.
- **Tackle the financial, social, linguistic, physical and other barriers that hamper children's and young people's engagement,** including discriminatory social norms that predispose adults to dismiss children's contributions.
- **Strengthen the capacity of public officials to effectively and respectfully listen and respond to the needs and concerns of children and young people.** Decision makers should be open to the influence of children and young people, and act upon their concerns.
- **Emphasize open, inclusive and accountable governance within the post-2015 agenda.** To play a meaningful role in monitoring the performance of decision makers and holding them to account, people need access to public information; scope for free exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly; and formal opportunities to participate in governance.
- **Promote innovations in technology that support participatory monitoring and accountability, and enable children and young people to collect data.** When children help determine what data is collected and are enabled to collect data themselves, the resulting data can be more responsive to local contexts. In the process, children learn to interpret data and use it to inform action and political engagement.
- **Take precautions to minimize the risk to children and young people** of violence, exploitation, disappointment or any other negative consequence of their participation.

We recommend that national governments:

- **Establish and strengthen formal and informal spaces for children and young people, including the most marginalized, to make a meaningful contribution** to decision-making, accountability and achieving the post-2015 agenda. Embed opportunities for participation in all spaces where children live, play and learn – family, schools, community groups and the internet. Ensure that the most marginalized children and young people have access to these opportunities on an equal basis.
- **Create an enabling environment for civil society,** and link spaces for civic engagement with planning and decision-making mechanisms, including in setting targets, plans and budgets.
- **Support social accountability mechanisms that allow children and young people, to keep track of how their government and its institutions are performing.** These can include mechanisms like child-led reporting on public services and community or school hearings to identify key issues that nurture collective action. These should also encourage collaboration between citizens and government around children's issues and promote

equity by creating safe spaces for marginalized groups, including children,⁵ to engage with those who have power.

- **Strengthen investment and capacity to collect, analyse and disseminate timely, disaggregated data** on progress towards government commitments, with due attention to protecting the children and communities who are being enquired upon against misuse of data, including violations of their right to privacy.
- **Make certain that all children and young people get relevant, age-appropriate information on matters that affect them – in language they can understand and formats they can access.** Children and young people need to know what their governments have committed to, and how they aim to achieve their goals; what they can expect from government institutions and service providers; what opportunities exist to review their performance; and what to do if they are not living up to their commitments.
- **Guarantee the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly as well as the freedom of the media in law and practice – for children as much as for adults,** in line with international standards.

We recommend that civil society, donors and UN agencies:

- **Support the information literacy of children and young people,** including the most marginalized, so they can understand, collect, analyse and use data and information about the post-2015 agenda to promote dialogue with decision makers and hold them to account.
- **Amplify bottom-up, child-led monitoring and accountability,** and clearly link these to post-2015 accountability processes.
- **Build countries' capacity to implement and monitor the post-2015 agenda,** including through social accountability that engages children and young people.

Note

This paper has been emerged out of collaboration amongst various agencies forming a working group on Child Rights, Social Accountability and Post-2015, whose coming together was initiated by a [workshop](#) on child rights and social accountability hosted by UNICEF in London in March 2014. In addition, the group of Child Focused Agencies (CFAs) on Post 2015 started joining up on the issue of social accountability in 2013 when the group came together.

⁵ For instance, children have successfully participated in social accountability processes in education in Uganda with improvements in education outcomes; Andrew Zeitlin, Management and Motivation in Ugandan Primary Schools: Impact evaluation final report, Center for the Study of African Economies, forthcoming.