

POLICY REPORT

**Accountability and
Getting to Zero Violence
against Children**

**Improving information and
accountability for eliminating
violence against children**



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BACKGROUND

Beginning in 2016, the world will embark upon new efforts to eliminate poverty and protect the planet through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As the ambitious commitments begin to guide international development, the world will begin to explore the ways to translate ambition into reality. Few of the goals and targets are as worthy, or as challenging, as those related to the elimination of violence against children. Ensuring that promises become reality in the lives of children will require creativity, persistence and accountability. Yet holding governments accountable for the elimination of violence against children will be challenging for a number of reasons. Without basic staffing or services at the local level, data about the child protection system is typically rare. Services that exist depend on a diverse range of actors with vague responsibilities, often spread across a variety of facilities, institutions and ministries. This further complicates data collection and utilisation for policy development. At the same time, popular mobilisation for accountability also poses challenges. Protection services are often most important to a small, vulnerable and/or politically powerless subset of the population. Taboos and cultural norms can undermine candid public deliberation about this sensitive subject among the broader public. Among the narrower group of service users, confidentiality issues complicate direct user feedback. Overcoming these challenges will be critical to ensure that SDGs deliver on their commitments to eliminate violence against children.

Governments are not the only actors who must be accountable, but they are among the most important. By adapting accountability strategies to address the unique, contextual aspects of child protection, stakeholders can ensure that the post-2015 framework delivers for the vulnerable children who should be at the centre of the new global agenda. This policy brief explores some key dimensions of accountability for the elimination of violence against children and offers some recommendations for ways that civil society can help ensure that commitments endorsed in the SDGs are delivered.

RECOMMENDATION #1: Governments should be held accountable to ensure specific services and enforceable policies that protect children

Too often, governments' ambitious commitments to protect children are diluted by unclear accountabilities and inadequate resources. To deliver on their promise, the SDGs must be different. Goals, targets and indicators will need to be matched by specific commitments to structures and services that will make the goals meaningful in the lives of children. Civil society can help ensure that commitments specify the individuals or institutions that will be accountable for the delivery of protection-related services, the budget upon which they can depend for delivery and the services that the public can expect to receive.

At the local level, protection-related rights and responsibilities can be clarified through the creation of a citizens' charter or similar instrument. Citizens' charters are public agreements between citizens and service-delivery providers that clearly codify expectations and standards in the realm of service delivery.¹ These agreements define the services that a community can expect to receive. In the context of ending violence against children, citizen charters can be extremely effective in helping communities tailor national-level commitments to their local context and budgetary reality. Citizens' charters can also help ensure that communities have specific government commitments to protective services that are easy to monitor.

Apart from the investment in preventive services and structures, SDG implementation will require real progress in the enforcement of laws that outlaw violence against children and harmful traditional practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation. But change at the local level can lag behind. World Vision's experience suggests that local, contextually driven bylaws accompanied by education and awareness campaigns at the community level can have greater impact. These local bylaws are often passed or endorsed by traditional leaders, which reinforces their normative value. (See Box 1.)

¹ See World Bank, *How-To Notes: Citizen Charters: Enhancing Service Delivery through Accountability*, (2014).

Box 1. Local laws help end child marriage in two chiefdoms

As part of WV Sierra Leone's child protection and advocacy (CPA) work, children contributed to a nationwide report on child protection systems called ADAPT (Assessment, Design and Planning Tool). The report reflected its experience that child marriage tended to lead to earlier drop out from school, especially for girls, and to earlier pregnancies.

The group forged partnerships with local community-based organisations and NGOs to influence the 'paramount chiefs' in the chiefdoms of Kpanda Kemoh and Sogbini to outlaw the practice. These chiefs have a great deal of local power and are also members of Parliament. World Vision helped to broker a meeting with the chiefs and their development council. After much debate the council passed bylaws that helped to eliminate child marriage. The laws prohibit parents, and chiefs, from giving their children into child marriages. Fines (US\$80–\$160) were assigned for those found guilty of the practice.

But the children were not satisfied – they established an action plan to monitor the implementation of the new laws which included a series of periodic interviews with key stakeholders. Results of those interviews showed a reduction in the practice within the two chiefdoms.

Today the group is teaching children and youth across West Africa about its experience.

Working in partnership with local leaders, civil society can leverage these bylaws to help nurture positive views about the pursuit of justice in cases of abuse and sustain community-driven accountability of the long term.

Once established, these bylaws can underpin accountability for implementation of the laws. Local bylaws can help assign enforcement duties and establish penalties (often monetary) for the violation of the bylaws. Fines can benefit child protection services at the local level and create incentives for enforcement. To facilitate the spread of such pledges and norms, civil society should consider creating context-specific libraries of model local legislation, pledges and norms against harmful practices. These examples can help communities accelerate change and learn from one another.

RECOMMENDATION #2: Health, education and other relevant sectors should be held accountable for preventing and addressing violence at community levels

Within the state, protecting children from violence is not just the responsibility of ministries of social welfare. Rather, a range of ministries, covering a variety of sectors, provide services that must include protective elements. Schools, for example, must keep children safe.² Civil society can help ensure that schools implement policies against corporal punishment and peer-to-peer violence, provide safe sanitary facilities, follow reporting procedures and ensure structural safety. Likewise, health systems must ensure that health workers are equipped to appropriately detect and report abuse. Similarly, as civil society monitors health, water, sanitation and agricultural services, care should be taken to ensure that these services are also delivered in ways that protect children. Toward this end, child protection specialists will need to work closely with other sectors to identify the most critical opportunities for these services to help eliminate violence.

Social accountability tools can contribute in two ways. First, social accountability tools equip citizens to monitor and improve services at the schools, clinics and other places where they are delivered. For example, civil society groups have used tools such World Vision's Citizen Voice and Action (CVA)³ (see Box 2), social audits and community score cards to help assess school regulations meant to protect children. These tools can be adapted to include measurement of the contribution of these services to protecting children.

Secondly, these data generated by the social accountability tools can be aggregated to identify broader patterns. By working together, civil society can better illustrate the performance of the child protection system across sectors and larger geographic areas. Ultimately, this aggregated, citizen-driven data can help drive dialogue at the national level about the best ways to eliminate violence against children.

² For example, this will be critical for advancing SDG Target 4(a): Stakeholders commit to 'build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all'.

³ See citizenvoiceandaction.org.

Box 2. Citizen Voice and Action

Citizen Voice and Action (CVA) is World Vision's social accountability model, currently applied in more than 600 programmes in 45 countries. As part of the CVA work in Ugandan primary schools, CVA practitioners routinely address school safety. Toilets are one of the most common places for sexual assault to occur, according to researchers. But even though each school is required to have sufficient toilet facilities under Ugandan law, many schools have only a single toilet, which is typically dirty and insecure. By using the CVA tools, dozens of communities across Uganda have persuaded government to construct sufficient toilet facilities. In 2013, for example, 14 schools acquired new toilet facilities as required by law. In the context of these monitoring exercises, new candid discussions have arisen about sexual violence more generally. According to one local police chief, 'The relationship between police and the community during community policing got improved. It is a good thing which should be continuous'. Today, World Vision is seeking new ways further to incorporate child protection into its social accountability work around the world.

**RECOMMENDATION #3:
Governments are accountable for
accessibility and performance of secondary
and tertiary child protection services**

At the most basic level, governments should be accountable for ensuring that people can access support services that assist a subset of the population that is vulnerable to violence against children. But these services – such as counselling for at-risk youth, cash transfer schemes or removal of a child – are useful only if they reach clients at the local level. Hence, governments, at minimum, need to ensure that reporting and referral mechanisms, often required by national law, actually exist at the community level and are effectively linked with support services. These services must be not only accessible but also effective. Civil-society organisations (CSOs) might help governments by verifying the existence and effectiveness of the reporting and referral mechanisms, especially as many jurisdictions currently lack the capacity to collect even basic case-management data about the support services provided to vulnerable children.

At the district or provincial level, specialised CSOs might help governments develop simple case-management systems or create hotlines that serve the needs of frontline workers as well as provide reliable data. When designing these systems, CSOs play an important role in helping government maintain a balance between transparency and confidentiality. In some cases, direct user

feedback, facilitated by civil society, might be possible. For example, users of less sensitive secondary services might contribute crucial information about how the system has served them, perhaps through participatory tools that maintain confidentiality within a group. By combining this user-generated data with case-management data, a fuller picture of a system's performance can emerge and underpin accountability.

Legal remedies should also be available to help victims and their advocates lodge formal complaints if the state fails to fulfil its protective duties. Stakeholders should invest in community-level legal services that help victims and vulnerable groups bring administrative cases to the attention of ombuds offices, human rights offices and audit institutions. Civil society groups at the local level can serve as important partners to help citizens connect to legal advocates.

Box 3. World Vision, local authorities and sugar producers collaborate to eliminate child labour in the Philippines

ABK (Pag-Aaral ng Bata para sa Kinabukasan or Education for the Children's Future), a 12-year intervention in the Philippines funded by the US Department of Labor, has provided direct services to over 115,000 children engaged or at high risk of being engaged in child labour, especially in the sugar industry. The project approach combines education and livelihood support to provide solutions for those trapped in child labour.

In addition to demonstrating solutions, the project has helped improve the local enforcement of child labour laws. By working closely with stakeholders at the local level, the project has also been able to ensure local-level compliance with national child labour regulations. In particular, the project worked with local authorities to pass 36 policies and 101 ordinances, such as the Children's Welfare Code. These new laws covered 34 cities and municipalities. Yet, without the viable alternatives provided by the project, these laws would have gone largely unenforced.

The project has also helped to ensure that the private sector is accountable for keeping children safe. One of the most important successes of the project was to persuade the five largest sugar federations to sign a voluntary code of conduct in the three main sugar-producing provinces. The ABK project was instrumental in the drafting and agreement of this code. Over 50 local planters' associations have spent their own funds to promote the code of conduct, print flyers and convene meetings to raise awareness about child labour laws. Taken together, practical alternatives and local regulations have ensured compliance with national law and international agreements.

RECOMMENDATION #4: Seek 'partnerships' where accountability is not initially appropriate

In many contexts child protection is not a top priority for government. The obstacles may derive from financial constraints, lack of capacity or the political value of the issue. Ministries of social welfare tend to be underfunded, understaffed and underappreciated in the political realm. While there is an accountability dimension to these problems, World Vision's experience suggest that solutions tend to result from a constructive rather than adversarial process that builds relationships with often disempowered government entities. These approaches might be better framed in terms of partnership rather than accountability. Once government has taken a more proactive role in addressing these problems, civil society can reposition itself to ensure accountability and quality.

By working constructively, civil society, government and the private sector can test interventions, document their impact and work with government allies to scale the best-performing solutions. The broader child protection community can help by sharing promising practices and working constructively to scale them across geographic regions.

RECOMMENDATION #5: Vertically integrate accountability work at the local level in order to ensure sustainable, systemic change

There is growing agreement among researchers and practitioners that accountability is more likely when advocates 'vertically integrate'⁴ their advocacy by linking their local monitoring to higher-level policy influence. Given the complex political dynamics at stake in the context of ending violence against children, stakeholders will need to pay special attention to the ways that vertical integration can help actors overcome political obstacles:

I. Governments should ensure a nationally coordinated strategy for accountability. Given the vast diversity of actors and roles in a child protection system, strong coordination mechanisms at the national level will be crucial to the elimination of violence against children. Most important, stakeholders will need to agree upon key

⁴ See Jonathan Fox, *Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?* World Bank (2015); Brendan Halloran and Walter Flores, *Mobilizing Accountability: Citizens, Movements and the State* (2015); Joseph Wales and Leni Wild, *CARE's Experience with Community Score Cards: What works and Why?* ODI (2015); and Jonathan Fox, 'Vertically Integrated Policy Monitoring: A Tool for Civil Society Policy Advocacy', *Non-Profit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* (2001).

strategic objectives while leaving the majority of the work open to local contextualisation.

- 2. Civil society should combine constructive and more adversarial approaches.** Literature suggests that accountability requires both constructive engagement and the threat of sanction or shame.⁵ By honestly recognising the distinctly valuable roles that actors can play, civil society can simultaneously build constructive partnerships and speak courageously in the face of injustice.
- 3. Civil society and government should create multi-level partnerships to apply pressure for accountability from above and below.** Accountability is more likely when civil society pro-accountability actors at the local level align with pro-accountability actors at the district, provincial and national levels.⁶ Civil society can help convene these actors and squeeze out actors who obstruct reform.
- 4. Ensure that national campaigns include a robust and citizen-driven monitoring component.** Accountability often depends upon reliable data about the performance of government services. By equipping citizens to collect and own this data, stakeholders can ensure that accountability campaigns retain an authentic, organic nature. Quantitative, headline-grabbing evidence from social audits, community score cards and citizen report cards can help ensure media and governmental attention at higher levels.
- 5. Deploy multiple tactics.** Several decades of social accountability practice show that accountability is not the result of the application of some tool. Rather, practitioners should begin by identifying their goals and the strategy that is most likely to advance them. Tools and tactics should then be matched to the goals.

⁵ See Jonathan Fox, *Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?* World Bank (2015); Brendan Halloran and Walter Flores, *Mobilizing Accountability: Citizens, Movements and the State* (2015)

⁶ Ibid.

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