

## LET THEM LEAD



Enabling Children and Young People to Positively Impact the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda Through Social Accountability Processes



# Position Paper

## 2015

# Executive summary of key recommendations

- *The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can only have an impact if citizens, including children and young people, are involved in the monitoring and follow up of SDG goals and targets at local, national, regional and global level.*
- *Children and young people, including the most marginalised, should be empowered and prioritised as key stakeholders in order to ensure an inclusive and universal sustainable development agenda. Particular attention should be given to girls and young women.*
- *In order to ensure a solid accountability framework for the SDGs that can deliver results, investment in social accountability approaches based on participatory and inclusive processes must take place.*

## Introduction

2015 has been an outstanding year for development: it represents the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals, agreed in 2000, and is the starting point for the international community's agreement on a future global framework for poverty eradication and sustainable development, through the Sustainable Development Goals. As the focus of the international community turns to implementation and monitoring of the SDGs, it is crucial to identify the key elements without which sustainable development will not be achieved.

There is growing evidence that children and young people, more than any other group, are utilising data and new forms of social activism to hold governments and businesses to account. However, insufficient official attention has been paid to how to engage children and young people in accountability processes and facilitate their unique engagement with data to support the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. The importance of participatory monitoring and citizen-generated data have been acknowledged in various official post-2015 reports and consultations<sup>i</sup>, and have been supported by different donors throughout their programmes. However, official discussions have not yet focused on securing the role of social accountability in the overall accountability framework, in the agreed targets, or in the ongoing discussions around indicators and means of measuring progress.

## Background

This paper was jointly developed by DSW, Restless Development and World Vision. It builds upon the experience of these organisations and other agencies<sup>1</sup> in implementing social accountability programmes with a focus on children and young people. Some of the recommendations of this paper are also a direct outcome of a joint side-event organised during the European Development Days entitled 'Accountability Advocates: Youth Voices at the Heart of SDG Implementation'



## Why is it worth investing in social accountability?

### Direct benefits

A growing body of evidence has shown that, when undertaken strategically, social accountability approaches improve development outcomes<sup>ii</sup> such as increasing education test scores or reducing levels of child mortality. They also promote development effectiveness and enable those less likely to become active participants, such as children and young people<sup>iii</sup>, to have space and capacity to do so. The investment in social accountability therefore brings multiple benefits, as not only it empowers citizens, namely those mostly marginalised, but it also improves participatory legislative and funding processes<sup>iv</sup>.

### Matter of rights

Citizens are entitled to demand accountability and responsibility from their state with respect to obligations to promote and protect their rights, including access to basic social services and to a standard of living adequate for individual well-being.

To enable these rights, civil society organisations (CSOs) have a key role to play. When CSOs act as participants in inclusive civic processes, they can enhance meaningful public participation, including that of children and young people, and can ensure that social policies, including for example health and education, are pro-poor, and ultimately improve governance and accountability.



*“We empower young people to voice their needs towards the governments”*

*Manka Kway, Impact Coordinator, DSW*

## Why are children and young people key stakeholders in SDG accountability systems?

Today's world has the largest generation of children and young people in history; over 3.5 billion people are under 30<sup>vi</sup> and by 2050, one out of every three young people in the world will be African<sup>vii</sup>. It is essential to recognise the potential and power of young people, and the need to empower this cohort, as partners and leaders in development. They are the main stakeholders of the SDGs - while the final goals and targets are set, it is today's children and young people who will implement, monitor and experience the impact of the SDGs.<sup>viii</sup>

Given their stage of development, children and young people are well placed to voice collective demands in relation to inequality in, for example, access to education, health, livelihoods etc.

## How can their engagement in relevant accountability processes be facilitated?

In order to promote the meaningful leadership of children and young people in social accountability, including the most marginalised and with particular attention to girls and young women, all stakeholders (local, national, regional, global) should:

- integrate children and young people in the process of developing, implementing and reviewing national policies that address their social, economic and environmental interests;
- ensure that all citizens, including children and young people, are involved in the planning and review of local services and the monitoring of related national and global goals and targets;
- recognise and support children and young people, and ensure their participation in formal and informal local, national and global processes to enable them to make meaningful contributions to decision-making and accountability systems<sup>ix</sup>. For example, during international conferences and forums, children and young people's representation and participation should be facilitated and their needs and concerns listened to and acknowledged by individual countries and subsequently acted upon;
- strengthen the capacity of public officials to listen and respond to children and young people<sup>x</sup> and develop the capacity of government institutions to meaningfully engage with them (eg by providing the necessary software and related training to allow them to interact through online media)<sup>xi</sup>.



*“September 2015 saw World leaders promise a bright future through the adoption of an ambitious 2030 agenda for sustainable development and it is today's children and young people who will live it. Spaces must be created at local, subnational, national, regional and even global level for the meaningful participation and voice of children and young people in ensuring accountability for the delivery of these goals.”*

*Besinati Mpepo, Technical Director,  
Local Advocacy, World Vision  
International*

## How can the role and impact of accountability processes led by children and young people be strengthened?

The SDGs should act as a catalyst for a new universal understanding of sustainable development and what it entails, based on an agenda that is common and shared by all. Hence children and young people from both Global South and North should be given the space to participate in the SDGs agenda, while monitoring their implementation and seeking accountability.

There is a need to identify what investment exists at the local, national, regional, and global level. In parallel, significant resources should be allocated to these processes, to track them, and to measure the impact of social accountability approaches led by children and young people. Mechanisms that can potentially be supported include:

- Linking up existing school councils, students unions and youth councils, and grassroots movements of children and young people in order to strengthen their voices and to facilitate them to work together to ensure the universal, sustainable and inclusive participation of children and young people in SDG national-level design, implementation, monitoring and review processes;
- Establish forums in the Global South similar to young decision-makers forums in European countries (eg youth parliaments or the European Youth Forum) and promote learning and exchange visits between children and young people from Europe and other regions of the world;
- Seek the commitment and recognition by government everywhere of youth councils and forums as platforms that facilitate discussions and channel children and young people's issues into district, national, international and global policies and agendas;
- Tackle financial, social, linguistic, physical and other barriers that limit and constrain children's and young people's engagement with decision-making and accountability processes<sup>xii</sup>, by investing in access to relevant, age-appropriate information in a language children and young people can understand and in formats they can access;
- Facilitate children and young people's creativity and innovation through use of social media such as facebook, instagram, twitter, etc and establish children and young people e-learning platforms to promote exchange of information, education and learning between Global South and North;
- Integrate and strengthen social accountability approaches led by children and young people across donor programming aimed at addressing the underlying causes of chronic poverty;



*"We need youth-led accountability to make sure that we as young people are not being forgotten in the "active" part of saving the world and have opportunities to hold our governments accountable for the decisions they will make."*

*Nazzy Amin, Big Idea Accountability Advocate, Restless Development*

## Conclusion

Children and young people's positive contribution to decision-making processes can no longer be questioned. As they will be the generation on whom the new Sustainable Development Goals will impact most, decision makers must ensure their participation through social accountability and other inclusive and participatory accountability processes. The success or otherwise of the implementation of the new SDG framework will in part depend on the willingness of states and governments to include the most marginalised, including girls and young women, in the process of developing, implementing and reviewing related national policies which address their needs. Where SDG implementation is concerned it is also critically important that sufficient resources are allocated to scale up, and to measure the impact of social accountability approaches led by children and young people.



From left to right: Manka Kway, Impact Coordinator from DSW, 'Nazzy Amin, Big Idea Accountability Advocate from Restless Development and Besinati Mpepo, Technical Director, Local Advocacy from World Vision International. These three organizations organized a joint side-event during the European Development Days entitled 'Accountability Advocates: Youth Voices at the Heart of SDG Implementation'.

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> World We Want consultation on participatory monitoring for accountability; report of the Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for sustainable development; the United Nations Economic and Social Council regional commissions consultations on monitoring and accountability, the May UN level Intergovernmental Negotiations on Follow Up and Review.

<sup>ii</sup> Abigail Barr, Frederick Mugisha, Pieter Serneels and Andrew Zeitlin, *Information and Collective Action in Community-based Monitoring of Schools: Field and Lab Experimental Evidence from Uganda* (Forthcoming, 2015); Martina Bjorkman, Damien de Walque and Jakob Svensson, *Information Is Power: Experimental Evidence of the Long Run Impact of Community Based Monitoring*, World Bank, Policy research working paper 7015 (January 2014). Jonathan Fox, *Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?* Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) Working Paper No. 1 (September 2014).

<sup>iii</sup> World Vision, *Grassroots to Global, Seven Steps to Citizen-Driven Accountability for the Sustainable Development Goals*, Policy Report, May 2015; UNICEF, *Ureport, Voice matters*, [www.ureport.ug/](http://www.ureport.ug/) 2010-2015.

<sup>iv</sup> DSW, *Decentralisation, social accountability and family planning services. The cases of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania*, 2011; DSW, *Actionable Policy and Budget Monitoring Methodology*, 2014.

<sup>v</sup> *Child sensitive accountability and the post-2015 agenda*, 2015, <https://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/484877>.

<sup>vi</sup> UNESCO, *Statistics on Youth*, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/prizes-and-celebrations/celebrations/international-days/world-radio-day-2013/statistics-on-youth/>

<sup>vii</sup> *Concise Report on the World Population Situation 2014*, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/trends/concise-report2014.shtml>

<sup>viii</sup> *Child sensitive accountability and the post-2015 agenda*, 2015, <https://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/484877>.

<sup>ix</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>x</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>xi</sup> ODI, Restless Development, Plan, *Partners for change: Young people and governance in a post-2015 world*, in <http://restlessdevelopment.org/file/partners-for-change-young-people-and-governance-in-a-post-2015-world-pdf> 2014.

<sup>xii</sup> *Child sensitive accountability and the post-2015 agenda*, 2015, [http://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/484877](https://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/484877).