International IDEA — INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY AND ELECTORAL ASSISTANCE

Background

The UN General Assembly intergovernmental process will address the issue of follow-up and review mechanisms for monitoring progress on the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals will depend on a translation of the agreed goals into national and sub-national strategies.

Alongside the primary role of national and local governments, the engagement of a wide range of actors and stakeholders will be of critical importance, both for the implementation of strategies and for monitoring progress on their achievements.

Multi-stakeholders partnerships can play a crucial role in striving to build robust and transparent monitoring mechanisms to ensure accountability and inclusiveness of development policies and their implementation.

The capacity to work collectively is crucial, which is why strategic alliances between the various groups engaged in resolving remaining challenges are so important, be they parliamentarians, ombudsman offices, human rights activists, or men and women using public services.

About International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with a mission to support sustainable democracy worldwide.

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Democratic Accountability in Service Delivery within the Post-2015 Development Agenda

The agenda-setting process for the post-2015 framework has been characterized by an unprecedented global conversation involving a wide range of state and non-state actors. The intergovernmental negotiations will culminate in the adoption in September 2015 of a new and hopefully ambitious development agenda. Negotiators should listen to the call from parliamentarians, social movements and interest groups in civil society, and people from all over the world for inclusive, responsive, representative, and participatory decision-making and accountability mechanisms.

The inclusive multi-stakeholder process within the UN General Assembly's Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has, to some extent, taken this call into account. The results could be enhanced, however, by a balanced assessment of the political sensitivities that have weakened the democratic governance dimensions of the proposed draft SDG framework.

Accountability is a fundamental cross-cutting dimension of the SDG framework. The most explicit reference to accountability at the goal level is grounded in the language on the quality of institutions in SDG 16, which commits UN member states to 'promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels'. Thus government accountability in their responsibilities as service providers (or regulators of service provision) is a crucial element of the SDGs. Accountability also features at the target level, as in the cluster on 'Data for monitoring and accountability' in SDG 17, in SDG 5 on gender equality, and in SDG 10 on reducing inequality within and among countries.

During the negotiation process on the post-2015 people-centred development agenda, some UN member states expressed concern about the potential misuse of accountability mechanisms, especially at the international level, to introduce new conditionalities into the development discourse. Yet accountability should be considered an enabling dimension of the SDG framework at the sub-national, national, regional and global levels. The negotiations will soon address how to review the implementation of the new framework and ensure follow-up. Firm agreement on accountability mechanisms would constitute a strong commitment to implementing the new agenda.

This policy brief will be followed-up by a more detailed policy paper in July 2015.

What is accountability?

Accountability can be defined as an obligation to account for one's activities, accept responsibility

Mongolia adopted its own national **Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 9 on democracy and human rights**. Its approach demonstrates the importance of citizen-led processes to translate international commitments into action. More critically, it shows that it is possible to build a country's ownership of international commitments beyond the executive level by engaging the legislature and civil society using inclusive, participatory and highly interactive mechanisms (International IDEA 2014a).

Albania's initiative on localizing MDGs demonstrates how sub-national policy frameworks can help translate national development policies and a state's international commitments into concrete actions that respond to local needs and improve daily life (UNDP 2008).

for them, and disclose and justify the results. It involves making officials answerable to the people through elections, parliamentary committees, judicial processes and supreme audit institutions, as well as investigative journalism. New forms of accountability mechanisms have emerged that encourage people to engage more directly in monitoring public funds and services.

To ensure that accountability mechanisms are real drivers of change, it is necessary to promote transparency and the right to information, and give people the skills and opportunities to participate in (and exercise influence over) decisions.

What is democratic accountability?

Accountability is not exclusive to democracies, but the success of efforts to attain sustainable development is related to the quality (and representativeness) of the institutions responsible for its achievement.

Participatory, transparent, effective, and accountable political institutions and processes are best placed to promote inclusive and sustainable development.

Democratic accountability refers to the many ways in which people, political parties, parliaments, media, civil society and other actors provide feedback to, reward or sanction officials responsible for setting and enacting public policy (International IDEA 2014b). It is therefore a crucial enabler of human rights, and provides the necessary monitoring framework for their meaningful implementation. There can be no sustainable development without respect for democracy and human rights.

How democratic accountability can make a difference

1. It is people centred and participatory

The UN Secretary-General notes in *The Road to Dignity by 2030* that 'effective governance for sustainable development

The **African Peer Review Mechanism** allows member states to self-monitor all aspects of their governance and socio-economic development. The review process provides a national space for dialogue and the opportunity to build consensus on the path to good governance and sustainable socio-economic development. The **Universal Periodic Review** provides an opportunity for each state to declare what actions it has taken to improve its human rights situation and fulfil its human rights obligations.

demands that public institutions in all countries and at all levels are *inclusive, participatory and accountable to the people'*. In International IDEA's view, free and fair electoral processes; democratic political parties; popularly elected parliaments with legislative, oversight, budgetary, representative and conflict management functions; ombudsman offices; and supreme

audit institutions all contribute to comprehensive representation and human rights. Social movements and interest groups provide further opportunities for people to participate in and influence the democratic process. The media also serves the critical roles of information provider, arena for public debate and watchdog. These elements are encapsulated in UN and regional jurisprudence on all five continents, confirming UN member states' almost unanimous commitment to ensuring the 'effective participation of citizens in democratic and development processes and in governance of public affairs' (African Union, African Charter on Peace and Democracy, Elections and Governance, ACDEG).

2. It can protect minorities and disadvantaged groups

Democratic accountability can facilitate the human right of all to access public service on equal terms. Its mechanisms translate human rights commitments and equality goals into action through governance reform that provides public institutions with the incentives and skills to respond to the needs of disadvantaged groups. UN and regional jurisprudence from Africa, the Americas, Europe and South Asia affirms that 'every citizen shall…have access, under general conditions of equality, to the public service of his country' (Organization of American States, American Convention on Human Rights).

3. It builds openness and transparency

Democratic accountability entails the public's right to obtain information

Community monitoring by the Uganda Debt Network has helped improve facilities at the local level. Monitoring by trained community workers led to the identification of 'shoddy work' by contractors in the construction of classrooms and clinics. Community monitoring reports on missing equipment led to its recovery in many cases (Renzio et al. 2006).

on the organization, functioning and decision-making processes of public administration. Greater transparency in government budgets, procurement and spending improves oversight, policy choices and service delivery. Yet it is meaningless without the right to information and an independent and active media. Democratic accountability bolsters the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds. UN and regional jurisprudence demonstrates widespread acceptance of the overarching principle of accountability and of the 'importance of transparent and accountable conduct of administration in public and private, national and international institutions' (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, Social Charter).

4. It includes answerability

This principle measures the extent to which a government carries out its duty to explain and justify its decisions. Answerability is linked to how claims holders articulate their demands, but is also related to officials' capacity and willingness to take responsibility for their actions. In this context, democratic accountability can meaningfully contribute to the promotion of people's right to participate in public affairs while providing the free flow of information necessary for governments to be held accountable by their citizens. In 2001, the Anti-Corruption Initiative for Asia-Pacific under the joint leadership of the Asian Development Bank

The **Mexican Budget Transparency Portal** helped improve decision-making in budgetary processes, as well as the design and implementation of public policies and overall accountability for budgetary decisions. The publication of clear budget information generated commitments from the public administration to make progress on public projects and initiatives that had been neglected, and helped people better understand government decisions. This increased people's confidence in (and the legitimacy of) national leaders and civil servants (OGP ND).

and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development adopted an Anti-Corruption Action Plan for Asia and the Pacific. The plan notes that safeguarding the accountability of public services requires systems for ensuring the availability of information. UN and regional jurisprudence provides firm legal grounds for the 'establishment of the necessary conditions to foster citizen participation, transparency, access to information, freedom of the press and accountability in the management of public affairs' (African Union, ACDEG).

5. It includes responsiveness

This principle is about whether public officials consult with and listen to citizens or their representatives before

In **Indonesia, LAPOR!** ('Report!') is an online service that allows citizens to submit reports on national development work and public services. It has become a strategic tool for meeting the country's commitments in the areas of transparency, public participation and innovation. Using a variety of media, citizens can report anything from corrupt officials to damaged bridges or teacher absenteeism. Such initiatives can improve government and citizen interactions, and how public institutions listen and respond to public demands (OGP 2013).

a policy or law is approved, so that decision-making reflects their views and demands for human rights. The African Charter on Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration commits governments to 'put in place mechanisms for civil society participation and consultation in the management of public service provision'. Democratic accountability mechanisms can help ensure people's right to participate in public affairs and exert influence over the policymaking process while fostering the implementation of principles such as the rule of law, equal access to justice, the proper management of public affairs and property, judicial integrity and transparency.

6. It guarantees enforceability

This principle refers to the formal or informal consequences that duty bearers—government officials being

Gender-responsive planning and budgeting is an accountability tool that provides information and gender-disaggregated performance indicators related to budget allocations.

In **Morocco,** a budgetary analysis of the resources allocated to agricultural extension services in 2004 revealed that only 9 per cent of the beneficiaries of these services were women, even though they represented 39 per cent of those engaged in rural economic activity. The analysis led to a significant budgetary shift in favour of rural women (UNIFEM 2008/2009).

held accountable—might face, as well as their impact. Research by International IDEA suggests that almost all countries with low scores on service delivery have either limited or no provision for effective sanctions, and no credible incentives for politicians to be responsive. Mechanisms for democratic accountability can provide sufficient incentives and sanctions to encourage governments, elected representatives, and public officials and employees to work in the best interests of the people. A number of UN and regional legal instruments recognize the need to promote responsibility among public officials (e.g., the United Nations Convention Against Corruption) using a set of measures to 'create, maintain and strengthen standards of conduct for the correct, honourable and proper fulfilment of public functions as well as mechanisms to enforce those standards' (Southern Africa Development Community, Protocol Against Corruption). ■

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