



Rights in Principle and Accountable in Practice:

Child Rights and Social Accountability in the Post-2015 World

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I. CRC@25: ACCOUNTABILITY FOR WHAT?

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WORKSHOP REPORT

Nearly 25 years ago, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the most comprehensive human rights treaty and legal instrument for the promotion and protection of children's rights: the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). With this, the world made a commitment to all children: That we would do everything in our power to protect and promote their rights – to survive and thrive, to learn and grow, to freedom from violence, to make their voices heard and to reach their full potential without discrimination.

Data show that tremendous progress has been made during the past few decades. For example, about 90 million children who would have died if mortality rates had stuck at their 1990 level have, instead, lived past the age of 5.¹ Further, primary school enrolment has increased, even in the least developed countries: Whereas in 1990 only 53 per cent of children in those countries gained school admission, by 2011 the rate had improved to 81 per cent.²

While this progress is remarkable, the work is far from finished. Every year between 500 million and 1.5 billion children worldwide endure some form of violence.³ It should be unacceptable that some 6.6 million children under 5 years of age died in 2012,⁴ mostly from preventable causes, their fundamental right to survive and develop unrealized. Eleven per cent of girls are married before they turn 15,⁵ jeopardizing their rights to health, education and protection. Even where progress is being made, the gains are not evenly distributed with, for example, the world's poorest children being three times less likely than the richest ones to have a skilled attendant at their birth.⁶



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In light of these inequities, the 25th anniversary of the CRC is a significant moment to focus on the urgent changes needed to bridge the gaps that are now more evident than ever, and to highlight innovative approaches and new ways of working that can transform the lives and realize the rights of all children, everywhere. In addition, the Post-2015 Framework provides the opportunity - now and in the coming years - to address the implementation gap between universal children's rights and hitherto inequitable results, including through addressing issues of governance, policy formulation, and service provision.

¹ United Nations Children's Fund, *Committing to Child Survival: A Promise Renewed*, Progress Report 2013, UNICEF, New York, 2013, p. 14.

² Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization, A/68/1, United Nations, New York, 2013, p. 34.

³ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, *Toward a World Free from Violence - Global Survey on Violence against Children*, New York, 2013, p. 1.

⁴ United Nations Children's Fund, *State of the World's Children 2014: Every Child Counts*, UNICEF, New York, 2014, p.18.

⁵ Ibid, p. 4. Figure excludes China.

⁶ Ibid, p. 3.

II. SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR AND WITH CHILDREN: EMPOWERING CHILDREN & THEIR COMMUNITIES TO DEMAND RESULTS

If we are to enhance support to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, then we must develop innovative solutions and creative ideas that help to equip children, their communities and civil society to **mobilize demand for accountability for the realization of children's rights**. An enhanced focus on accountability is particularly opportune in light of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) making available and providing access to real-time information that people can use and act upon, in addition to changing the way people connect to each other via increased networking, interconnectivity and social interaction.

More specifically, weaknesses in achieving effective progress can be addressed by bringing innovations in citizen participation, social mobilization and communication to bear on advocacy for and monitoring of the realization of children's rights. Social (or citizen-led) accountability⁷ initiatives that engage citizens, including children themselves, and/or civil society organizations, that are demand-driven and operate from the bottom-up,⁸ are of particular relevance in this respect. They have the potential to remove barriers to service access and quality, and thus serve to extend the opportunities for rights-fulfilling services to groups of children and families who may otherwise have been excluded.⁹

Social accountability initiatives aim to improve the quality of governance (especially by exposing corruption), to increase the effectiveness of development (particularly by enhancing transparency in the delivery of public services), and to empower poor people with information on their rights and an increase in their voice in the management of public affairs.¹⁰ Social accountability initiatives benefiting and/or involving children involve a range of instruments, from citizen report and community score cards, to citizen budget monitoring and expenditure tracking, and pressure from the media, for example. While more work needs to be done to build the evidence that benefits gained through social accountability initiatives translate into better or more equitable outcomes for children (such as lower under-five child mortality and less abuse), efficiency gains from social accountability, in extending better services to marginalised populations, have been shown to increase opportunities for the most disadvantaged children, and thus advance equity.

In this context, and informed by the accountability framework developed by the Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health¹¹, UNICEF, in collaboration with the UK National Committee for UNICEF, convened a two-day workshop in London on 3-4 March 2014, bringing together

⁷ Social Accountability: The engagement of citizen groups, children and their representatives in overseeing government conduct and is the central feature of social accountability: "Social accountability can be defined as an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e., in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organisations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability. Mechanisms of social accountability can be initiated and supported by the state, citizens or both, but very often they are demand-driven and operate from the bottom-up." (Malena, C. with Forster, R. and Singh, J. (2004) Social Accountability: An Introduction to the Concept and Emerging Practice, Social Development Paper 76, World Bank, Washington DC, p. 3)

⁸ Malena, C. with Forster, R. and Singh, J. (2004) Social Accountability: An Introduction to the Concept and Emerging Practice, Social Development Paper 76, World Bank: Washington DC, p. 3.

⁹ Gibbons, Elizabeth D. (2014) Accountability Initiatives (internal UNICEF working paper), p.4.

¹⁰ Malena et al. 2004, in McGee, R. and Gaventa, J. (2011) Shifting Power? Assessing the Impact of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives, IDS Working Paper, Volume 2011, No. 383, November 2011: Brighton, UK, p. 13.

¹¹ Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health, Keeping Promises, Measuring Results, Final report of the Commission, p. 6.

a diverse group of over 40 social accountability researchers, practitioners and child rights experts to discuss how civil society engagement can help accelerate results for children by holding governments accountable. The workshop culminated in the creation of a **global community of practice and knowledge on child rights and social accountability**, consisting of likeminded partners who commit to collectively exploring and contributing to the existing evidence around the impact of social accountability on the lives of children, further translating the concept into programmatic action in the field, and generating advocacy on including social accountability in the Post-2015 Framework and beyond.

Guided by a [background paper](#)¹² participants discussed the various ways in which social accountability can contribute to better outcomes for children, and addressed challenging questions, such as whether meaningful child participation in social accountability initiatives leads to long-term systemic change and future citizenship. Discussions also focused on how ICTs can add value to social accountability initiatives and lead to concrete results for children. In a separate challenge session on the first day of the workshop, participants looked more deeply into the essential pre-conditions for a social accountability initiative for child rights to function, as well as programme implementation of social accountability initiatives for children's rights. On day two, participants explored a future social accountability agenda for children, defining vision, purpose and desired short- and long-term results.

The following presents summary conclusions. All workshop documents can be accessed [here](#).

1. Advancing equity for children through social accountability initiatives

Social accountability initiatives were identified as a tool with which to make certain that the principle of accountability is alive in the day-to-day experience of children and their communities

by creating the necessary dialogue between citizens and the state, which is needed to support sustainable change. It was agreed that, rather than being reactive, social accountability is about creating a culture of citizen engagement and has the potential to prevent governments from failing in delivering upon their human rights obligations. In particular, meeting participants agreed that it has the potential to extend the opportunities for rights-fulfilling services to groups of children and families who may otherwise have been excluded, and thus advance equity, while also recognising that more research is required in this area.

It was agreed that social accountability initiatives can be more effective if they are linked back to formal accountability mechanisms, and that more research is required to determine the extent to which close engagement of government is a prerequisite for social accountability initiatives to achieve results for children. Further, participants acknowledged the difficulty in isolating the impact of social accountability mechanisms from other dynamics at play, and agreed that such impact is often uneven and heavily context-specific. It was thus decided that a key area for further work is gathering evidence on the impact of social accountability on development outcomes for children, including outcomes that relate to children's empowerment and realization of their civil rights; for impact to be properly attributed and evaluated, a practice of preparing a theory of change underlying the implementation of social accountability initiatives also needs to be developed and promoted. Participants moreover expressed concern about the problematic nature of relying on the voices of 'the community' both because of difficulties in uncovering power-relations among the community voices represented, and because community social norms may, in and of themselves, contribute to violations of children's rights.

The aforementioned challenge session on the first day of the workshop provided participants the opportunity to develop a 'zero draft' framework on child rights and social accountability. Participants agreed that the role of private sector accountability within the emerging framework would need to be further discussed.

2. The role of ICTs

Several speakers emphasized the role innovative ICTs can play in empowering people, both by providing vital information regarding their rights, and by increasing their voice in public affairs and monitoring state action. The pitfalls were also discussed, with participants highlighting the risk of advocating for social service data collection, if the information produced is not used to demand accountability for results in the form of better services and outcomes for children. Other concerns with using ICTs for accountability related to ensuring information privacy, whether these technologies could be accessed, particularly by the most excluded and marginalized, and their potential to be perceived as threatening by service providers and other duty-bearers.

3. Children's participation in social accountability initiatives

On a number of occasions participants stressed that one important limitation of using social accountability to advance the rights of children related to the fact that children, in many cases, depend on adult intermediaries and thus are deprived from direct participation in most public processes of accountability. Nevertheless, participants felt strongly that children should be empowered to participate in social accountability initiatives, and that building their citizenship was an outcome in and of itself. At the same time, there was broad recognition that children's participation in social accountability should not expose them to protection risks. Participants expressed concern about the problematic nature of relying on the voices of 'the community' and assuming that they correlate to children's priorities and day-to-day experiences. Participants noted that within this already-challenging process lies a greater challenge: ensuring that the voices of marginalized children are adequately represented. Managing the risks to children related to their participation and identifying channels for their meaningful participation in social accountability mechanisms was noted as a priority implementation challenge.

4. Action points

As previously noted, the workshop culminated in the creation of a global community of practice and knowledge (CoPK) on child rights and social accountability. This community will consist of three interlinked components: Research and Innovation; Knowledge Dissemination and Exchange; and Advocacy for Application of Evidence and Innovation (more details on pages 6-7). Participants agreed that the CoPK will take the following three immediate steps: a) develop a think piece on the definition of social accountability for and with children; b) map member organizations' existing social accountability experiences as a first step towards deepening understanding, and developing a 'bank' of good programming practices; and c) map opportunities for advocacy on including social accountability for and with children in the Post-2015 Framework.

III. GLOBAL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE AND KNOWLEDGE ON CHILD RIGHTS AND SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Participants considered the development of a global community of practice and knowledge (CoPK) to be of considerable importance so as to ensure that children obtain a more prominent place on the global agenda for social accountability, and to enhance research and exchange experiences on how social accountability can help improve outcomes for children. This was considered to be particularly timely in light of the availability of innovative ICTs and hyper-connectivity with demonstrated potential to increasing demand for transparency and accountability for children's rights. Further, it was emphasized that the CoPK aims to support all children, including marginalized children and their communities, in exercising their civil rights, and thus considers child and community participation/engagement a goal in itself, as well as a means through which to improve the delivery and quality of services. The accountability framework developed by the Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health will reinforce and underscore the Community's work.

Three components

The Community involves three interlinked components:

Component 1: Research and Innovation

As outlined above, participants identified a number of questions that require further research and discussion. A priority will therefore be to launch a common research agenda, focused on identifying the pre-conditions, mechanisms, instruments, activities, remedies and outcomes of social accountability for children. It was further suggested that the CoPK lead the development of an M&E framework for child rights and social accountability, including a potential database

of indicators and methodology for elaborating theories of change. It was also discussed that the conditions under which such initiatives are and can be brought to scale needed further research as many of the social accountability experiences, especially those concerning children, take place in a very specific community context.

Component 2: Knowledge Dissemination and Exchange

The overall goal of this component is to connect child rights advocates and social accountability practitioners (i.e., the diverse actors who participated in the London meeting and beyond as appropriate), and provide them with the opportunity to dialogue and collaborate in problem-solving to ultimately achieve concrete results for children. Linked to the aforementioned component on research and innovation, the main tool for this will be a virtual platform for knowledge exchange. Through this platform Community members will be encouraged to share information and experiences on a wide range of issues: on what works and what doesn't, cost, unintended consequences/impacts, child participation (particularly of marginalized groups), the linkages between formal (government) and informal (CSO) accountability mechanisms, etc. A systematisation of a programming approach to social accountability for children's rights could be an outcome of Component 2.

Component 3: Advocacy for Application of Evidence and Innovation

The Community shall serve as a platform for joint advocacy for child-focused social accountability and the application of evidence and innovation in this area. The Community will serve both for joint



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international and joint national advocacy for social accountability as a means to realise children's rights. In light of the ongoing negotiations on the Post-2015 Framework, the Community will, in the immediate future, focus its efforts on:

- a. sharing information on the Post-2015 Framework process, identifying pivotal points of influence;
- b. defining key asks regarding what robust social accountability for children should look like in the new development framework;
- c. developing a strategy for engagement in the post-2015 agenda: tabulating opportunities, alternative avenues for influence, tapping into existing initiatives (e.g. youth conference in Sri Lanka, CRC@25 activities), etc.

The CoPK should eventually convene a forum with government officials to discuss and demonstrate

the benefits of social accountability, as well as launch a public debate with youth on social accountability.

Membership

Currently membership ranges from INGOs and NGOs to UN agencies, UN human rights officials, academic research organizations, national human rights institutions and others. Participants emphasised that, similar to the London meeting, the CoPK should consist of a diverse membership and include non-traditional partners. Children will need to be represented as well as particularly marginalized and excluded groups. Stakeholders to be invited to join the CoPK include: the Global Partnership on Social Accountability, World We Want, the network of ombudspersons on child rights, CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) groups, transparency groups, women's rights groups, academic institutions, governments, the private sector, and donors.

IV. NEXT STEPS

Continue fostering interaction between child rights experts and social accountability practitioners by formalizing the emerging Community of Practice and Knowledge on Child Rights and Social Accountability



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Action Plan

While the workshop helped participants identify a rough outline of the emerging Community's purpose, members of the CoPK must, in the immediate future, work to deepen their understanding of what they as a group wish to achieve. Based on the draft purpose outlined above, the CoPK will develop an action plan through which it intends to achieve its goals.

Membership

The CoPK will carry out a stakeholder mapping, define the organizing principles of the CoPK, and convene partners.

Communication

Developing a mechanism for internal communication and interaction within the CoPK was identified as a priority action.

Focus on Quick Wins

As previously noted, participants agreed that the CoPK will take the following three immediate steps (within 3 months):

- develop a think piece on how the Community defines social accountability for and with children;
- conduct a mapping of member organizations' existing experiences as a first step towards deepening understanding, and developing a 'bank' of good programming practices;
- agree on a set of Community 'asks', map out opportunities and agree on responsibilities for advocacy on including social accountability for and with children in the Post-2015 Framework.

Activities identified for the 3-6 month period focused on pursuing the agreed Post-2015 advocacy agenda, setting up Components 2 and 3, and using shared Community resources to initiate Component 1 by developing a more extensive, meta-analysis of existing literature on achieving results for children through social accountability initiatives, assessing evidence of both failures and successes in this area, and identifying the gaps in research. From this stock-taking effort the Community will develop a shared research proposal, to fill identified gaps, to pursue answers to the many questions participants raised and document evidence of social accountability initiatives' results for the realisation of children's rights.

During the 6-12 month period the Community will act collectively to identify the internal and external (donor) resources needed to fund the research proposal. The 12-18 month timeframe included rolling out and consolidating Components 1, 2 and 3, each of which will be monitored against a set of Community-agreed time-bound goals. Participants agreed that for internal accountability, the Community's progress should be reviewed in one year's time.

Name	Title, Organization
1. Albuquerque, Catarina de	UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation
2. Anicama, Cecilia	Programme Specialist, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children
3. Anthony, David	Chief, Policy Advocacy and Coordination, UNICEF
4. Aslam, Abid	Editor, The State of the World's Children, UNICEF
5. Bissell, Susan	Chief, Child Protection, UNICEF
6. Brandt, Nicola	Human Rights Specialist, UNICEF
7. Bull, David	Executive Director, UK National Committee for UNICEF
8. Cavanagh, Mara	Consultant
9. Chai, Jingqing	Chief, Public Finance and Local Governance for Children, UNICEF
10. Chassy, Stephanie de	Head of Gender, Governance & Social Development Team, Oxfam GB
11. Conrad, Stefanie	Global Technical Adviser for Citizenship and Governance, Plan International
12. Dettori, Elizabeth	Executive Manager, Office of the Executive Director, UNICEF
13. Geary, Patrick	Corporate Social Responsibility Specialist, UNICEF
14. Gibbons, Elizabeth	Child Rights Expert, FXB Center for Health and Human Rights (Harvard University)
15. Grant, Jennifer	Deputy Director, Child Rights Governance Initiative, Save the Children
16. Gwynedd, Elin	Head of Empowering Children & Young People, Welsh Government
17. Hall, Jeff	Director, Local Advocacy, World Vision International
18. Hunt, Paul	Professor (University of Essex), former Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health
19. Lansdown, Gerison	co-Director of CRED-PRO
20. Martinez, Liza	Philippine Coalition on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
21. Mawson, Andrew	Chief, Child Protection (IRC), UNICEF
22. Mokate, Lindiwe	Commissioner, South African Human Rights Commission
23. Morgan, Richard	Senior Advisor to the Executive Director, Post-2015 Development Agenda, UNICEF
24. Murthy, Jaya	Chief of Communication, UNICEF Uganda
25. Nikyèma, Théophane	Executive Director, The African Child Policy Forum

Name	Title, Organization
26. Obregon, Rafael	Chief, Communication for Development, UNICEF
27. Parafina, Dondon	Executive Director, Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific
28. Parks, Will	Deputy Representative, UNICEF Nepal
29. Peixoto, Tiago	Open Government Specialist, World Bank
30. Poirrier, Caroline	Senior Programme Officer, Results for Development
31. Ponet, David	Partnerships and Parliamentary Specialist, UNICEF
32. Ramafoko, Lebo	Executive Director, Soul City
33. Ray, Carron Basu	Co-ordinator 'My Rights, My Voice' Programme, Oxfam GB
34. Rogers, Katherine	Senior Programme Manager, UNICEF
35. Rossi, Andrea	Social Policy Regional Advisor, South Asia, UNICEF
36. Salazar, Christian	Deputy Director, Programmes, UNICEF
37. Salette Silva, Maria de	Chief of Education, UNICEF Brazil
38. Sandberg, Kirsten	Chairperson, Committee on the Rights of the Child
39. Sapra, Sharad	Principal Adviser and Director, Innovation Center, UNICEF
40. Sedletzki, Vanessa	International Child Rights Expert
41. Sheqem, Yazeed	Director of Business Development Middle East/Africa, Souktel Inc.
42. Sottoli, Susana	Associate Director, Programmes, UNICEF
43. Wolff, Lisa	Director, Advocacy and Education, Canadian National Committee for UNICEF



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What is accountability?

Accountability is in its simplest terms, the ability to ensure that those charged with protecting and fulfilling child rights actually do what they are supposed to do, and if they do not or cannot, children and their representatives have some recourse. By strengthening accountability, in principle, the gap between the supply of services and equitable outcomes for children can be closed, as the demand side of the equation is bolstered. By empowering children, their representatives and citizen groups with information to demand and obtain the services they have a right to expect, accountability shifts the balance toward greater equity in opportunities.

¹³ Source: Gibbons, Elizabeth D. (2014) Accountability Initiatives (internal UNICEF working paper).

What is social accountability?

The engagement of citizen groups, children and their representatives in overseeing government conduct is the central feature of social accountability:

“Social accountability can be defined as an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e., in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability. Mechanisms of social accountability can be initiated and supported by the state, citizens or both, but very often they are demand-driven and operate from the bottom-up.”

(Malena et al. 2004: 3)

Social accountability depends on and is led by citizen participation in monitoring government efforts to fulfil their human rights obligations and their stated commitments; when those efforts fall short, social accountability enables citizens to obtain recourse of some kind. Ideally, citizens and service providers work collaboratively with the shared objective of closing the gap between the supply and demand for quality services, and redressing service failures.

Yet some service failures, if due to corruption, or to violation of the law or code of conduct for public servants, cannot be addressed by collaboration alone. For that reason, social accountability has been found to have more impact when the recourse to performance failures is tied to systems of formal judicial or administrative accountability.¹⁴ Some believe that social accountability best achieves its impact when civil society is able to create alliances and leverage the power of horizontal accountability actors, or internal reformers in the legislative, judicial or executive branches.¹⁵

How does it work?

Social accountability operates through citizen-led, participatory mechanisms; examples include community health committees, community school management committees, WASH management committees, citizen observatories, child protection committees, child councils, budget watchdog groups, etc. While the form of these mechanisms will be very context-specific, the job of their volunteer members is to either establish, or learn, the standard of performance providers are responsible for, gather and interpret data relevant to the standard, judge whether performance meets standards, and manage a set of instruments to make their accountability demands.

¹⁴ Joshi, Anuradha, Review of Impact and Effectiveness of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives: Annex 1, Service Delivery, IDS: Sussex UK, 2010, p. 12; United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights & the Center for Economic and Social Rights, Who Will Be Accountable: Human Rights and the Post-2015 Development Agenda, United Nations, New York and Geneva, 2013; McGee, Rosie, and John Gaventa, Shifting power? Assessing the Impact of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives, IDS Working Paper, Volume 2011, No. 383, November 2011: Brighton, UK, 2011, p. 23.

¹⁵ Fox 2008, in McGee and Gaventa 2011.



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To carry out these accountability functions, participants need to be prepared for civic engagement, and have their capacity developed for building networks and coalitions, for collecting, analysing, using and presenting information, for dialoguing/advocating with government and campaigning for redress. There are a range of instruments which citizens participating in the mechanism employ, singly or in combination, to obtain accountability. These include: Collecting, publishing and disseminating data about duty-bearers' performance (community monitoring); Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS); Participatory budget formulation; Complaints instrument; Citizen Report Cards (similar to consumer satisfaction surveys, can include public opinion polls); and Local Government/Community Score-cards (developed with service providers and standard of performance jointly monitored with them).

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