

Helpdesk Research Report

Post-2015 accountability mechanisms

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Question

Identify literature on accountability mechanisms for tracking progress on development after the Millennium Development Goals expire in 2015. Where possible, identify how these have been received by governments, civil society and businesses.

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1. Overview

The Post-2015 Development Agenda refers to a currently ongoing process of defining the future global development framework, which will succeed the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The details and wording are yet to be agreed, but there are, however, a significant number of proposals for goals and targets, and with them descriptions, in some cases, of accountability mechanisms. Research for this report finds little in the way of commonly agreed accountability mechanisms across the available literature. This is likely due to goals and targets not being agreed yet, and a tendency for organisations to highlight their own capacities and strengths in their proposals.

Post-2015 literature mainly covers potential goals and targets, with arguments in favour of them. The scarce material on concrete accountability mechanisms seems to be primarily from international and supranational organisations rather than from national government or civil society organisations. Most of this material argues for **strengthening and unifying existing accountability mechanisms**, and in particular strengthening national processes and statistical systems. Although there is material which explores the existing proposals' goals and targets, there is little literature which evaluates the accountability mechanisms within these proposals. Research for this report was unable to provide a comprehensive overview of the relevant literature but presents some notable examples.

The UN High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons outlined three proposals for implementing the post-2015 agenda (UN, 2013):

- **Unifying global goals with National Plans for Development.** International partners can help by harmonising their efforts with national plans, operating through the government budget and collaborating with others.
- **Global monitoring and peer review** with a single locus of accountability (including a single consolidated report); a global forum at a high political level; and regional reporting, and peer-review.
- **Global, multi-stakeholder partnerships** focused on a specific goal, sector, or theme.

The Panel also made three proposals for holding partners to account:

- **A Global Partnership on Development Data** to mobilise a ‘new data revolution’.
- **Using existing international fora**, such as the G20 or the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, to provide political leadership and practical suggestions for working in cooperation.
- **Constructive engagement with UN Member States** and their affiliated groupings to build political consensus.

The UN General Assembly’s Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals made a number of recommendations, specifically for governance and accountability in relation to the goal of sustainable cities and human settlements (Cornforth et al., 2014). These were **participatory mechanisms, greater coordination between all levels of government and agencies, monitoring and ending discrimination and inequalities**, and to **guarantee the participation of sub-national and local authorities**.

The OECD paper series on post-2015 goals outlines some mechanisms for accountability: **strengthening national statistical systems** to monitor global goals through PARIS21 (the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century) (OECD, 2013b); enduring effective development co-operation through the **Paris Declaration and the survey on monitoring it** (OECD, 2013c); and **improving and expanding the OECD’s capability to measure and monitor external development finance** (OECD, 2013d).

The All Africa Parliamentary Group notes that parliamentarians can enable laws, provide oversight, scrutinise budgets, and provide representation and leadership for the post-2015 agenda (Dyfan, 2012). The structures and mechanisms for this are: the **plenary session of parliament; parliamentary committees**, both existing sector/thematic committees, but also MDG/goal-focused committees; and **complementary structures**, such as cross-party caucuses.

In relation to human rights in the post-2015 agenda, the Center for Economic and Social Rights argues that national human rights institutions (NHRIs) can periodically **review progress, facilitate community participation** and submit their own ‘**shadow**’ reports (Corkery, 2013). In some cases, the NHRIs can use their **quasi-judicial complaint mandates** and **investigative capabilities** to enforce accountability. They can also help strengthen other enforcement mechanisms through **training and guidance**.

The Overseas Development Institute argues that accountability should be built on **existing domestic or regional mechanisms** such as local budget monitoring, citizens’ scorecards, human rights reporting, and the African Peer Review Mechanism (Bergh et al., 2012).

2. International and supranational organisations

2.1 United Nations High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 development agenda

In July 2012, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed 27 civil society, private sector, and government leaders from all regions of the world to a High Level Panel (HLP) to advise on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. On 30 May 2013, the HLP released a report which sets out a post-2015 agenda (UN, 2013). In this report the Panel calls for the new post-2015 goals to drive five big transformative shifts. The fifth shift, to forge a new global partnership, seems the most relevant for accountability. In particular the report calls for a new spirit of solidarity, cooperation, and mutual accountability to underpin the post-2015 agenda (UN, 2013, executive summary). The report argues that this accountability framework should involve governments but also people living in poverty, those with disabilities, women, civil society and indigenous and local communities, traditionally marginalised groups, multilateral institutions, local and national government, the business community, academia and private philanthropy.

The report outlines three proposals for implementing the post-2015 agenda (UN, 2013, pp. 21-23):

Unifying Global Goals with National Plans for Development:

The Panel argues that through their national planning processes each government could choose an appropriate level of ambition for each post-2015 target. They could take account of the country's starting point, its capacity and the resources it can expect to command in reaching the target. Each government could receive input on what is realistic and achievable in each target area from citizens, officials, businesses and civil society in villages, towns, cities, provinces and communities. International partners and agencies can assist by **harmonising their efforts with national plans, operating through the government budget** where practicable, and **collaborating with each other** to ensure the maximum impact for the least effort.

Global Monitoring and Peer Review

There should be improved co-ordination to deliver on a single, integrated sustainable development agenda, including building on positive recent steps to improve collaboration between the UN's agencies, funds and programmes, and with the international financial institutions. The Panel has three specific suggestions:

1. The UN should identify **a single locus of accountability** for the post-2015 agenda. It would be responsible for consolidating the multiple reports on development into one review, a single Global Sustainable Development Outlook, which would monitor trends and results, identify risks that threaten the achievement of the targets, and provide recommendations to improve programme implementation.
2. The UN should periodically convene **a global forum at a high political level** to review progress and challenges ahead. An independent advisory committee should give advice and recommendations as background for this forum.
3. **Reporting and peer-review at the regional level** could complement global monitoring. The UN's five regional commissions, with regional development banks, member governments and regional organisations, could form regional co-ordinating mechanisms to meet and discuss in advance of each global forum.

Stakeholders Partnering by Theme

The Panel suggests that the concept of goal- or sector-specific, global, **multi-stakeholder partnerships** should be a central part of the new development agenda. These should aim for a high standard of transparency, evaluation and monitoring, and involve business, civil society, philanthropic organisations, international organisations and governments.

The report also outlines three proposals for holding partners to account are (UN, 2013, pp. 23-25):

A New Data Revolution

The Panel recommends establishing a **Global Partnership on Development Data** that brings together government statistical offices, international organisations, CSOs, foundations and the private sector. This partnership would help develop a global strategy to fill critical gaps, expand data accessibility, and galvanise international efforts to ensure a baseline for post-2015 targets is in place by January 2016. The Panel proposes that, in future – at latest by 2030 – all large businesses should be reporting on their environmental and social impact – or explain why if they are not doing so. Governments should adopt the UN’s System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, along with the Wealth Accounting and the Valuation of Ecosystem Services (WAVES) introduced by the World Bank, with help provided to those who need it.

Working in Cooperation with Others

Existing international fora are actively promoting sustainable development. These groups may be informal, but they can make an important contribution to the post-2015 development agenda in **providing political leadership and practical suggestions** to sustain the post-2015 agenda respective forums. Examples include:

- The g7+ which have drawn attention to the special challenges faced by fragile states in defining country-owned and country-led plans to move from conflict to peaceful and sustainably developing societies.
- The G20 which have worked to address global bottlenecks in food and energy security, financial stability and inclusion, and infrastructure.
- The BRICS which are working to develop a large new bank for financing sustainable infrastructure projects.
- The Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation established in Busan in 2011, which is working to help countries and thematic groups establish effective partnerships involving many different stakeholders.
- Regional platforms in Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Europe which are working on regional concerns and unified approaches towards trade, climate adaptation and mitigation, finance, infrastructure and other cross-border issues.

Building Political Consensus

The Panel calls for the **continued constructive engagement of UN Member States and their affiliated groupings**, to reach international agreement on a single, universal agenda to succeed the MDGs. The agreement should be reached within a timescale that enables a smooth transition from the MDGs to a new development agenda. The Panel argues that courage and personal commitment of political leaders will be needed to reconcile myriad national views, and to embrace useful insights from others.

2.2 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The UN General Assembly's Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was mandated by Member States at Rio+20 to propose a set of SDGs by September 2014. Ahead of the OWG's ninth session in early March 2014, the Co-Chairs produced a guiding document with 19 focus areas summarising the issues for consideration in its ongoing consensus building work. In order to inform discussions, the Stakeholder Forum has, for each of the 19 focus areas, compiled a number of goals and corresponding targets from stakeholder proposals within the SDGs e-Inventory (Cornforth et al. 2014). The SDGs e-Inventory contains a range of proposals from a variety of stakeholders across all global regions and is designed to be an interactive online tool to enable stakeholders to outline their visions for new post-2015 global goals and search existing proposals.

Within the document, under the goal of sustainable cities and human settlements the issue of governance and accountability is addressed through the following targets (Cornforth et al. 2014):

- By 2030, incorporate **participatory mechanisms** such as spaces of deliberation, citizen audits, participatory budgeting, and community-based data collection in the strategic planning of cities, ensuring the involvement of the most disadvantaged groups, including slum dwellers.
- Achieve **greater co-ordination between all levels of government and agencies** responsible for key public services. Hold all levels of government and governmental agencies accountable against sustainability performance outcomes in regard to environmental protection, economic development, and social equity.
- Across all levels of government, **monitor and end discrimination and inequalities** based on gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, national origin, and social or other status. This is with regard to public service delivery, the respect for the rule of law, access to justice, and participation in political and economic life.
- **Guarantee the participation of sub-national and local authorities** in the decision-making spaces of the Global Governance Framework for the post-2015 Development Agenda.

2.3 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

To support the post-2015 development agenda, the OECD has produced a paper series 'OECD and Post-2015 Reflections'. The series has an overview paper (OECD, 2013a) and 11 elements, each of which focuses on different areas that are considered crucial for the success of the post-2015 development agenda. The elements most appropriate for accountability and monitoring are element 5 on strengthening national statistical systems to monitor global goals (OECD, 2013b), element 10 on effective development co-operation (OECD, 2013c), and element 11 on measuring and monitoring external development finance (OECD, 2013d). The key elements are as follows:

Element 5: Strengthening National Statistical Systems to Monitor Global Goals.

The Element 5 paper (OECD, 2013b) argues that PARIS21 (the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century) offers a ready-made structure on which to found the post-2015 global partnership and co-ordinate and monitor the post-2015 development framework. PARIS21 is a global partnership of statistical producers, users, donors and technical partners, from both developed and developing countries.

OECD (2013b) notes that challenges for the post-2015 agenda include better aligning international monitoring with national data, dealing with conflicting data sources and statistics, and closing further the gap between data needs and supply. For this the Busan Action Plan for Statistics provides a useful framework through which statistical capacities can continue to be developed. The Busan Action Plan for Statistics came out of the HLF-4 held in Busan in 2011 where PARIS21 and the World Bank proposed the Plan to:

1. Fully integrate statistics in decision making: Engaging statisticians in planning, budgeting, and monitoring and evaluation processes and developing capacities to produce data relevant to user priorities.
2. Promote open access to and use of data: Making data widely available to manage for results, enhance government effectiveness, and increase public confidence.
3. Increase resources for statistical systems: Promoting domestic allocations to statistics and integrating and aligning external support to statistics into development assistance programmes.

The plan aims to:

- Strengthen and re-focus national statistical strategies to produce the data that support country-level development priorities.
- Improve accessibility of statistics and implement standards enabling full public access to official statistics.
- Develop programmes to increase the knowledge and skills needed to use statistics.
- Ensure that outcomes of global summits and high-level forums specifically recognise the need for statistical capacity development.
- Ensure that financing for statistical information is robust.

This plan emphasises the role of National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDSs), a strategic approach bringing together and co-ordinating between the different data users and producers. However, the paper notes that NSDSs would need to be backed up with more financial investment so that international efforts support these national statistical systems rather than side-line or undermine them.

Element 10: Effective development co-operation: an important enabler in a post-2015 global development framework

The Element 10 paper (OECD, 2013c) highlights the OECD role in monitoring the effectiveness of development co-operation. The OECD has undertaken three global surveys to monitor the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. The last global Survey on Monitoring the Paris Declaration involved 78 developing countries, covering over three-quarters of global aid. Based on this they have produced ten global indicators of progress to monitor aid effectiveness:

1. Development co-operation is focused on results that meet developing countries' priorities.
2. Civil society operates within an environment that maximises its engagement in and contribution to development.
3. Engagement and contribution of the private sector to development.
4. Transparency: information on development co-operation is publicly available.
5. Development co-operation is more predictable (annual and medium-term).
6. Aid is on budgets which are subject to parliamentary scrutiny.
7. Mutual accountability strengthened through exclusive reviews.
8. Gender equality and women's empowerment.
9. a) Quality of developing country Public Financial Management (PFM) systems; and b) Use of developing country PFM and procurement systems.
10. Aid is untied.

Element 11: Measuring and Monitoring External Development Finance

The Element 11 paper (OECD, 2013d) notes that in addition to traditional aid from public sources, there are now many new sources of finance and financial instruments to choose from: private capital in the form of equity, bonds, non-concessional loans, risk mitigation instruments (including guarantees) and philanthropic funds from foundations and trusts. These play a greater role, and given the potential volumes, could be a transformative source of development finance in the future.

OECD (2013d) argues that any post-2015 strategy will need to be supported by a robust statistical system to measure and monitor financial flows accurately. The paper argues that the OECD DAC work looking to develop a new measure of total official support for development will help maintain the role of DAC statistics in promoting accountability and transparency.

2.4 All Africa Parliamentary Group

In a paper primarily on parliamentary oversight of MDGs, Dyfan (2012) notes that parliaments that can effectively provide accountability for achieving the MDGs will be able to shape, influence and provide accountability and oversight for the post-2015 development agenda. Parliaments' key functions and responsibilities for achieving the MDGs relate to legislation, oversight, budget scrutiny and representation (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Key functions and responsibilities of parliament in achieving MDGs



Source: Dyfan, 2012, p. 2

The report notes that there is overlap and clear links between these four functions. As national legislatures, Parliaments in Africa are key bodies in the law making process. The legislative role of a Parliament can ensure that the necessary **enabling legislation** to make progress towards targets is in place. The oversight role provides a **unique reference point to allow Parliaments to analyse whether the targets are on track** and allows them to hold to account the Government and other stakeholders. In addition, **scrutinising and approving the national budget** allows assessment of whether financial resources are prioritised in the most effective way to make progress towards the targets. The exact **representation role of MPs and of Parliaments can take many forms** in different countries but will usually include ensuring that citizens, different stakeholders and civil society groups have a voice at the national level and are involved in national governance issues. It can also include providing feedback to citizens on achieving the targets.

Dyfan (2012) outlines a number of structures and mechanisms used by Parliaments to increase engagement with the MDGs and provide more effective accountability which could be applicable to post-2015 targets:

- **Parliament plenary session:** The full plenary session of Parliament offers a number of opportunities for Parliamentarians to engage with the MDGs in terms of legislation, oversight and representation. Parliamentarians can question the Government or the proposer of MDG-related legislation on the purpose of the legislation and the likely impact of the draft legislation on progress towards attaining the goals.
- **Parliamentary committees:** Many Parliaments have seen increased use of parliamentary committees as effective mechanisms to improve the legislative process and provide increased accountability and oversight for achieving the MDGs. Parliaments can use **existing Committees** which cover MDG related subject areas such as Health Committees, Education Committees, Environment Committees and so forth. Alternatively Parliaments can create **an MDG Committee**

within the parliament to scrutinise legislation related to the MDGs or to provide oversight of the progress made in achieving the MDGs.

- **Complementary structures:** Another option is creating complementary structures to either existing Portfolio Committees or specific MDG Committees. An example could be a cross-party caucus or interest group in the Parliament which can become a focal point for MDG related activities and can provide co-ordination amongst Parliamentary Committees.

3. Civil society organisations and think tanks

3.1 Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR)

In a blog post, Corkery (2013) outlines the CESR proposals put forward in the 2013 discussion on the way forward for national human rights institutions (NHRIs) in the post-2015 development agenda. CESR suggested four broad proposals for NHRIs to consider: contributing to global decision making on the post-2015 framework; engaging in the process of tailoring goals, targets and indicators nationally; monitoring and reviewing progress on agreed commitments; and enforcing accountability and enabling access to justice and remedies.

In regards to monitoring and reviewing progress on agreed commitments, the proposals are for establishing robust country-owned monitoring mechanisms to **periodically review progress** (or lack of progress) towards agreed goals and targets. Corkery (2013) notes that this kind of periodic review fits well with existing reporting mandates of many NHRIs, and they are well-placed to actively contribute to such mechanisms, for example by **facilitating community participation** or **submitting their own ‘shadow’ reports**. At the international level NHRIs can play a key role, as an independent source of information for any new international monitoring mechanism, and by encouraging greater scrutiny by existing human rights mechanisms such as treaty bodies and special rapporteurs.

In regards to enforcing accountability and enabling access to justice and remedies, NHRI enforcement powers may derive from NHRIs’ **quasi-judicial complaint mandates**, **investigative capabilities** or by **strengthening other enforcement mechanisms through training and guidance**. This can help backstop and reinforce accountability, ensure access to justice for people whose rights are denied because of a failure to meet development commitments.

3.2 Overseas Development Institute

In relation to governance and accountability indicators, Bergh et al. (2012) argues that to maximise both effectiveness and political legitimacy, new processes should seek to **build on existing domestic or regional mechanisms**, especially those emerging from the South. These may include forms of local budget monitoring, citizens’ scorecards, human rights reporting, regional accountability initiatives like the African Peer Review Mechanism, and other transnational processes, including those being developed by the G7+.

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Key websites

- Post2015.org – A hub for ideas, debate and resources on what comes after the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): <http://post2015.org/>
- Beyond2015 – A global civil society campaign, pushing for a strong and legitimate successor framework to the Millennium Development Goals: <http://www.beyond2015.org/>

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