

Accountability Times

STOCKHOLM, 26th AUGUST - 2nd SEPTEMBER 2018

NATIONAL EXPERTS SAY NO SDG 6 WITHOUT ACCOUNTABILITY

By: Vera van der Grift and Dechan Dalrymple

Where do we stand as a global community on progress towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) almost three years since the world agreed on them? Unfortunately, not as far as we would like to be. It turns out that agreeing on a set of aspirations which promise to build a more equitable and sustainable world is the easy part—monitoring progress and ensuring that deliberate steps are being made to achieve those ambitions is however, not as straightforward. But it does not have to be this way.

“If failed government accountability is the problem, effective accountability mechanisms are part of the solution”

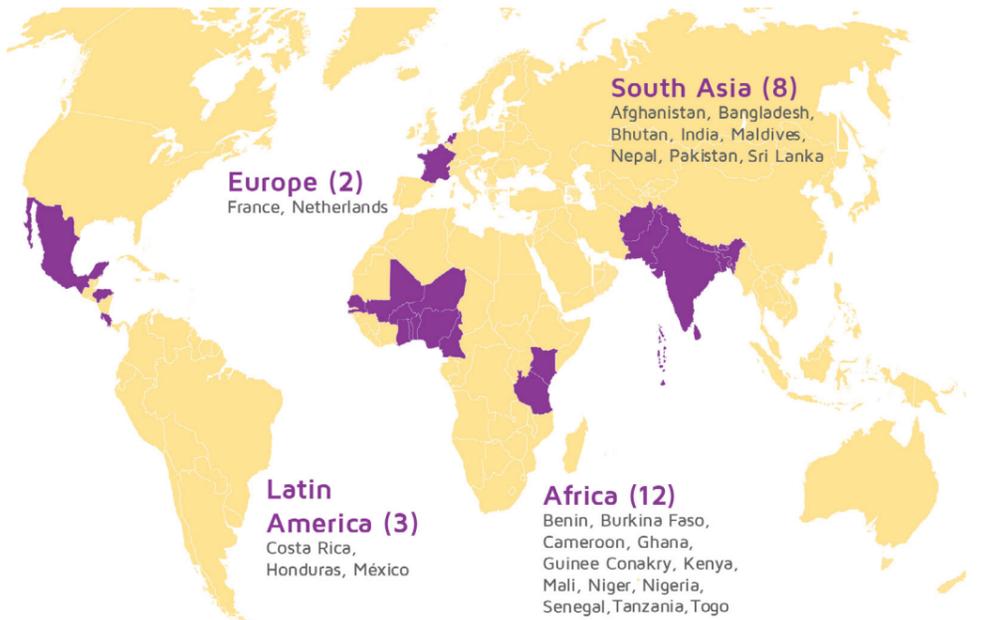
Accountability means that those who are responsible must accept responsibility for their actions and omissions, that they are called upon to give an account for why and how they have acted or failed to act.

The *Global Review of National Accountability Mechanisms for SDG6* study was born out of the fundamental understanding that governments must be held accountable for their formal commitments under SDG6. The report found that there is a clear gap in what needs to be done to see the scale and speed of change required to meet the targets by the 2030 deadline. Currently formal agreements are being treated as voluntary rather than binding,

responsibilities are fragmented and processes obscure—all of which paint a dismal outlook for the future.

Strong and resilient monitoring and reporting mechanisms need to be in place to ensure that governments follow through with their promises.

If failed government accountability is the problem, effective accountability mechanisms are part of the solution. Accountability mechanisms are transparent processes that engage a diversity of stakeholders, facilitate and encourage critical reflection of progress and are responsive to issues addressed by stakeholders. Conferences, advocacy events, shadow



Countries participating in the Global Review of Accountability Mechanisms for SDG6

reporting, auditing exercises—guided and informed by a systematic open-participation approach—are all tools in civil society’s arsenal. And studies indicate that they can contribute to real change. Accountability mechanisms with high levels of participation have been shown to increase political attention and funding for SDG 6 and can even lead to capacity building within the government for its implementation.

This is where we all have a role to play. If civil society is empowered to speak, those in power are compelled to listen. We must however, first ensure that governments, civil society organisations, development partners

and United Nations agencies work in synchrony to ensure that civil society not only has a place at the table, but the financial and institutional support to contribute effectively.

The commitment made by countries to achieve universal access to water and sanitation, although laudable, is simply not enough. We need to act now. It is time to shine a light on the system and empower civil society to hold those in power to account.

POINT THE FINGER BUT ALSO THE THUMB

By: Sara Ollé Navarro

The Global Review of National Accountability Mechanisms for SDG6 evaluates the nature of existing national accountability mechanisms as well as the challenges and opportunities, identifying gaps and making specific recommendations to different stakeholders such as Governments, CSOs, development partners and UN agencies.

In doing so, it helps stakeholders to understand what others must do, as well as what they themselves must do – pointing the finger and the thumb.

For instance, governments are accountable for their formal commitments under SDG6 and must realise the human rights to water and sanitation. Firstly, they must take the lead and ensure transparent allocation of roles and responsibilities

for disaggregated data collection, monitoring and reporting. Secondly, they should invest in effective national accountability mechanisms and be inclusive by ensuring the representation of excluded groups.

Civil society, WASH sector organisations and human rights organisations, on their behalf, have been invited to create strong partnerships among the sector, to actively involve grassroots and isolated groups and document the evidence to share this often-unwritten knowledge.

Financing water governance is as important as financing infrastructure. Therefore, development partners have a key role to play beyond one-off multi-stakeholder workshops. They should increase accountability on the use of their own funds while ensuring

disaggregated data on progress towards reaching the most marginalised people. In addition, United Nations agencies recognise the important role that CSOs play in assisting with effective SDG implementation, as well as providing reliable information on progress vulnerable persons on the ground, who traditionally have no voice in the implementation of SDG6.

In sum, all stakeholders should continue to use the study’s findings to gain a better insight into existing accountability mechanisms—particularly at country level—and into how these mechanisms operate by assessing their opportunities and limitations. To do so, the study sponsors and participants encourage wide sharing and use of the recommendations, and welcome feedback.

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A GLOBAL REVIEW OF ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS REPORT



WE SHALL OVERCOME!

By: David Trouba

**“Stones in the road?
I save every single one, and
one day I’ll build a castle.”**
- Fernando Pessoa

The Portuguese poet’s oft-cited line is appropriate for the WASH sector. While there might be many challenges to achieving true and total accountability, the potential benefits outweigh the costs of achieving them.

In other words, the current accountability weaknesses are also opportunities. The study noted, “The

good news is that opportunities exist to turn these challenges into strengths! Almost all CSOs and government officials consulted agreed that participation in accountability mechanisms for SDG 6 have a positive impact when carried out in an effective, meaningful way.”

To reach these opportunities, it is helpful to understand what accountability constraints exist. Analysis from the study’s 25 national-level investigations revealed many.

Accountability mechanisms are fundamentally not systematic, regular, inclusive and meaningful. They do not hold governments accountable to

their SDG6 commitments. One reason is the lack of a legal basis for existing mechanisms, the irregularity of the accountability processes and the limited extent of follow-up of outcomes from such processes.

As well, while governments openly commit to SDG 6 at the national level only, the commitments are not being implemented and monitored at the local level. Furthermore, CSOs and other organisations such as academia, private sector or the media are not invited to key meetings, relevant information for participation is not shared or is hard to find, there are unequal opportunities to participate in accountability mechanisms and in a few countries

the space for engagement between governments and CSOs is limited. It is possible that this lack of broader engagement reflects government’s own lack of coordination and unclear allocation of roles and responsibilities on accountability for Goal 6 at the national level. CSOs have challenges here, too. They often fail to be transparent, share information and to adequately represent voices from grassroots levels.

Finally, financing and budget allocations are often insufficient for the well-functioning of accountability mechanisms, and CSOs struggle to fundraise and remain independent to effectively hold governments accountable to SDG6.

COME TOGETHER!

By: Sara Ollé Navarro

They did! To do the study, a vast, diverse array of stakeholders came together to deepen knowledge, attitudes and practices on accountability for SDG6.

Between October 2017 – March 2018, partners and members of organisations in 25 countries were engaged with the overall support of Coalition Eau, End Water Poverty, Watershed Empowering Citizens Consortium, the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) with the support of Sanitation and Water for All (SWA).

Civil society, WASH sector organisations and human rights organisations had been working alongside each other for a long time without profiting from each other’s expertise. To change that, partners in the WASH sector through this joint study decided to build new bridges, improve coordination among all stakeholders and support existing platforms and networks.

The results of this research are based on more than 1,000 surveys, interviews and validation meetings with governments, NGOs, development partners, UN agencies, research and education institutions, and think-tanks working on water resources and sanitation.

In short, a lot of effort by many engaged actors!

Ultimately, this study has facilitated and will continue to facilitate a much-needed conversation in-country between governmental and non-governmental stakeholders and it has been the first step to build a stronger voice in advocacy and in consultations with national governments.



WHAT DOES ACCOUNTABILITY MEAN TO YOU?

“We might be tempted to believe that accountability is a question of fashion. But far from it. It’s important for us as CSOs to focus on accountability because without control, without the existence of reporting, our public policies are destined to fail.”



Eng. Wilhelmina Malima,
Coordinator, Sanitation and Water Action
and National Coordinator, WSSCC, Tanzania

“Accountability is not an easy thing, it has to come from the true thoughts and actions. And it works when it is a two way from duty bearer and the right holder. Then here comes sustainability. We have role to play.”



Roukiattou Ouedraogo,
Communications and Advocacy Officer,
SPONG

ACCOUNTABILITY IN FOCUS AT JULY HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM; STUDY LAUNCHED

By: David Trouba

The Global Review of National Accountability Mechanisms for SDG6 was launched during a 12 July side event at the High-level Political Forum on sustainable development in New York.

A full room of diverse stakeholders received a crash-course in accountability and heard how increased accountability supports achievement of SDG 6 on Water and Sanitation, and the other goals.

Panellists gave a varied picture of accountability today. Catarina de Albuquerque, Sanitation and Water for All, said the study showed that accountability mechanisms are lacking in many countries and called for raising awareness among governments to ensure that multi-stakeholder mechanisms are effective and participatory in implementing the SDGs. Amrith Rohan Perera, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the UN, noted the importance of partnerships, including with private

sectors, CSOs, and youth.

Snehalatha Mekala, Freshwater Action Network South Asia, noted that effective accountability mechanisms for monitoring progress on SDG6 need a legal basis and regular, transparent, and participatory processes. Irene Gai, Kenya Water for Health Organization, emphasised the need for enhanced inclusivity; increased transparency on budgets; building a stronger voice for CSOs; and improved CSO accountability to citizens.

Norma Munguia Aldaraca, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mexico, said data is always a problem. She said it takes time and knowledge for society to get acquainted with the SDGs and called for more involvement of municipalities and the private sector. Ananda Jayaveera, Regional Sanitation Centre and FANSA, Sri Lanka, emphasised mainstreaming CSO engagement.

Nathalie Seguin, Freshwater Action Network Mexico (FANMEX), called



“Effective accountability mechanisms are important” says Sena Alouka of the African Civil Society Network on Water, a speaker at the HLPF, adding “to know how deep the river is, you have to put two feet inside”.

for the HLPF to consider a better mechanism for CSO participation and to accept CSOs’ shadow reports. Sena Alouka, speaking on behalf of the African Civil Society Network on Water and Sanitation (ANEWS), identified the need for improved NGO governance. And finally, Marianne Kjellén of UNDP said UN agencies should supporting national governments and other institutions on national accountability mechanisms.