

Africa CSO Working Group – Accountability Framework on Post 2015 Agenda

The present document aims to consolidate the contributions presented by the members of the African CSO WG on Post 2015 that participated to the HLC/AU Meeting on “Building an Accountability Framework for CAP/Post-2015 Development Agenda in Africa” which took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on Aug 21-22, 2014. It also reflects the contributions of the other CSO representatives who attended the meeting although it does not necessarily capture all suggestions and concerns voiced during the discussion.

Africa CSO Working Group is a platform that facilitates the emergence of common concerns by African CSOs regarding the Post 2015 agenda and channels them to relevant institutions. It took shape during the HLP process and had a seat on President Helen Johnson Sirleaf’s Secretariat in order to facilitate a collective and coherent African CSO input.

While addressing the entire meeting discussion, these notes are particularly focused on how to possibly enhance the role of non-governmental stakeholders in the post 2015 accountability framework.

Context:

- While the negotiations on the new agenda are not yet completed, the level of ambition is significantly higher and the implementation will certainly involve huge challenges to meet the raised level of expectations. Despite the celebratory tones on past progress, there is an urgent need for profound transformation in the way all development actors operate;
- Status quo is therefore the greatest enemy. A new partnership framework based on honesty and mutual accountability could contribute to raising the level of energy that is required to change the “business as usual” approach and fight easy complacency. The accountability framework should therefore be seen as a key pillar of such new partnership approach;
- It must be noted though that there are increasing levels of tension within many African society with significant erosion of media freedom and attempts to regulate PBOs in ways that might shrink the democratic space and limit their capacity to engage in development delivery, policy engagement and advocacy;
- Governance is really about citizenship though the draft agenda continues to fail to recognize the centrality of the civic space and does not adequately value the social capital and the web of social relations and institutions that mediate civic action.

Premises, principles and proposed mechanisms:

- The accountability framework should be located in the broader context of deepening and strengthening the relations among the state, citizens and their various forms of association and organization, the private sector and other stakeholders. As much as these relations may go through periodic milestones, they are fundamentally continuous in nature. The issue is therefore that of establishing mechanisms for ongoing assessment with continuous and systematic data collection and citizens’ based feedback mechanisms;
- Accountability needs to be **centred on citizens** as a key dimension of the social contract between them and their governments. The accountability process cannot therefore be led by those in power, as it is part of the checks and balances that ensures the proper administration of political power. It therefore requires a shift from government-centred mutual accountability systems to mechanisms centred on the

empowerment of citizens. It should therefore engage with local knowledge, strengthen people's voices and enable citizens to influence decisions that deeply affect their lives. In this respect, citizens' engagement should start with the development of the framework itself;

- The basis of the process and the first step of the accountability framework should be the **embodiment of the CAP/post-2015 agenda into national development visions, plans and budget allocations**. The localization of the agenda within national priorities should therefore be clearly included as the first pillar of the framework;
- On the basis of such "localization", the overall objective of the framework would then be that of reviewing progress on the commonly agreed objectives and priorities and ensure adequate planning reassessment. In this respect, the **accountability cycle** will be based on (1) develop **evidence** and knowledge on progress made in active dialogues with those directly affected; (2) open spaces for **communication and dialogue** over progress or lack of it; (3) offer opportunities to **corrective action** and planning adjustment. The focus should therefore be on learning and partnership rather than on punishment, though it must be understood that "hard talk" maybe an inherent part of the process should implementation lag behind;
- While the primary locus for accountability should be the national space (where development action primarily takes place), the accountability framework should be designed as a **multi-layered system** that includes the sub-regional and regional levels and integrate closely with the global accountability framework. Existing processes and mechanisms should then be reviewed and integrated with the view of building on good practices but also addressing people's expectations for more participatory systems. This review should be conducting with the direct engagement of the citizens, their representatives and the organizations that express their key interests and agency. In this respect, a bottom-up approach is therefore urged with the AU and other regional bodies to play a facilitating role while the bulk of the responsibility being maintained at the national level. Spaces for citizen's agency and engagement should be opened at all these levels;
- The centrality of citizens in the accountability framework can be provided by placing **Parliaments** (national, sub-regional, pan-African) at the core of the system. CSO/PBO can then engage with these institutions to provide their support and perspectives and catalyse/mediate civic engagement in the process. Some would probably highlight the lack of capacity in engagement in such function. However, rather than constantly reinventing institutions because of their current dysfunctional characters, the emphasis should be in demanding that institutions perform and deliver their roles;
- Being the direct expression of citizens' concerns and agency, CSOs/PBOs can play a critical role across the entire accountability cycle: localization of the agenda, development of progress evidence, communication and dialogues, corrective actions and planning reassessment. In this respect, they contribute to bridging the democratic/participatory deficit and their contribution should therefore be valued with this understanding rather than being seen as an act of benevolence by the other stakeholders. However, there is a need to realize that citizens' based accountability will require significant capacity building;
- While often centred on governments given their lead function in the implementation of the new agenda, the accountability framework should also address the performance of media, PBOs/CSOs and the private sector.

The centrality of evidence in assessing progress and reassess strategies and plans:

- The discussion on the “data challenge/revolution” might sometimes become an attempt to de-politicize the agenda and could become a paralyzing and disempowering argument because of the current limitations of African statistical capacities;
- Despite this, **evidence-based policy is essential** though data is not the only path to knowledge and there is a fundamental difference between data, information and knowledge. The magnitude of some of the African challenges allows visual navigation and requires much more foresight than historical assessment;
- **CSOs have a great role to play in supporting data gathering** (by supporting traditional supply-driven data collection as well as offering demand-driven data) and in transforming data into information and knowledge. However, **CSOs can also catalyse the engagement of people’s direct knowledge** on their developmental circumstances and options. It is therefore essential to value the direct engagement of citizens and communities as a critically important source of knowledge that should directly influence operational development planning as well as review progress in implementation. The accountability framework should therefore establish clear mechanism to promote the direct participation of those primarily affected by the development challenges that the new agenda intends to tackle;
- Civic access to information and greater “latitude” of statistical commissions/offices (including the decrease of donor project that reduce the capacity to deliver on statutory obligations) are essential elements of the “evidence-based” system. This might require clear “transparency and access to information” policies as well as administrative reforms that provide greater autonomy of statistical offices from the executive power with accountability to Parliaments and multi-stakeholder oversight bodies. The ratification of the African Charter on Statistics and supportive legislative changes need to be championed;
- Despite all this, the data challenge of the new agenda will be enormous. It will be virtually impossible to build accuracy across the region on all indicators. It might therefore be necessary to identify a subset of key indicators that provide critical information on the extent of the Africa transformation process on which to focus coherent and synchronous efforts at both national and regional level. In this respect, the extension of CRVS should be prioritized as a key pre-condition of the data revolution;
- An **African Partnership for Development Data** could potentially offer a viable platform for multi-stakeholder engagement, skills development, technology transfer and dissemination across all actors working on Africa's development agenda. It would also make it possible for open data to become institutionalised at both continental and national levels.