YOUTH-LED ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE SDGs

A GUIDE TO NATIONAL ACTION

RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT

is the youth-led international development agency, putting young people at the forefront of change and development. We operate in ten countries across Africa, Asia and in the UK and US, with a network across the world. We focus on healthy and safe sexual lives, decent livelihoods, and young people being involved in the decisions that affect their lives. We listen to young people, our work is led by young people, and together we help young people make lasting change in their own communities.

THE COMMONWEALTH

is a voluntary association of 53 independent and equal sovereign states. It is home to 2.2 billion citizens, of which over 60% are under the age of 30. The Commonwealth includes some of the world's largest, smallest, richest and poorest countries, spanning five regions. Thirty-one of its members are small states, many of them island nations.

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Kishva Ambigapathy
Chairperson, Commonwealth Youth Council

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The Commonwealth Youth Council is the recognised representative voice of young people in the Commonwealth, a framework for youth empowerment that integrates young people into the development work of the Commonwealth at national, regional and international levels.

During the 2015 Regional Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meetings in Samoa, India, Antigua and Cameroon, and at the 2015 Commonwealth Youth Forum in Malta preceding the Commonwealth Heads of States and Government Meeting, young leaders across the Commonwealth reiterated our commitment to contribute to the development of our countries and the Commonwealth.

We believe the recent adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has opened up a space for innovative solutions to address the needs and aspirations of young people. Youth-led accountability strengthens the work of the Council, as it focuses on the need to ambitiously embrace youth voices and to prioritise youth-led initiatives that are inclusive, responsive and transparent.

It is vital to expand the enabling environment for young people's engagement in decision-making, and to mainstream youth-led engagement at national and regional levels, using the emerging insights and good practices of successful youth-led initiatives highlighted in this report. The Commonwealth Youth Council will continue its work to foster youth inclusion in the implementation and tracking of the SDGs, and to promote the role of young people in creating more effective and sustainable policies. "

Katherine Ellis
Director, Youth Division, Commonwealth Secretariat

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In the Commonwealth, we see young people as assets who should be empowered and resourced to realise their potential and contribute fully to national development. Our vision is of a Commonwealth where young people are able to deal with the numerous and substantial issues that they face, to utilise their potential for their own fulfilment, and to partner and lead on the betterment of their societies.

Young people must be meaningfully included in the implementation and tracking of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They play an important part in advancing development, democracy and peace, and they also have a crucial role in promoting Commonwealth values of transparency and accountability.

Young people have unique insights and perspectives that can drive more effective policy and programming, and ensure that government commitments are fulfilled. By collecting data, monitoring progress, and taking part in follow-up and review mechanisms, young people can be further engaged in the new global development agenda.

This is particularly relevant for the Commonwealth, where over 60 percent of the population is aged under 30. The Commonwealth Secretariat has a strong focus on the engagement and empowerment of these 1.2 billion young people, and we are pleased to bring you this new report in partnership with Restless Development.

I look forward to working with the whole global youth development sector to ensure that youth-led accountability turns the SDG promise into reality. "

1. INTRODUCTION

THE SDGs: A PLATFORM FOR YOUTH LEADERSHIP

The new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), have set out an ambitious agenda for global development for the next fifteen years, leading up to 2030. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the SDGs are universal and applicable to "developed countries" as much as "developing countries". The Sustainable Development Goals also seek to be exactly that: sustainable. Balancing the social, economic and environmental elements of development; using our resources and capacities for both present and future generations. Informed and influenced by the most open and consultative process in United Nations (UN) history, the SDGs are born out of our collective vision for a more equal, just and fair world.

Made up of 17 Goals and 169 Targets, the SDGs can be understood under five P's:

People: These are goals for everyone, everywhere. Regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexuality or ability - we have promised to leave no one behind in this agenda.

Planet: We have one planet with finite resources, that sustains life for all of us - it is critical that we are good stewards of the earth and take serious action to tackle and reverse climate change.

Peace: There can be no development without peaceful, just communities and countries. The institutions that govern us should be transparent, responsive and accountable.

Prosperity: We need sustainable economic growth and decent livelihoods throughout our lifetimes.

Partnerships: Everyone must work together and bring their best selves to this global agenda in order for it to succeed.

Now is the time to start implementing new people-centred, people-led accountability mechanisms - to fulfil the promise of ambitious and transformative change. In the 2030 Agenda, all governments have signed up to supporting "accountability to our citizens" and promised a follow-up and review framework that is "open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people and will support reporting by all relevant stakeholders".[1] This means building social accountability mechanisms at local, national, regional and global levels where citizens and civil society - particularly the poorest and most marginalised - play a decisive and formal role in the monitoring and accountability system. In doing so, leaders will be giving a voice to those traditionally excluded from development processes whilst strengthening government's own monitoring efforts, especially when addressing gaps in the implementation of policy affecting youth.

> " Children and young women and men are critical agents of change and will find in the new Goals a platform to channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world.[2] "

There are a number of proposals on the table for follow-up, review and accountability for national governments to consider and we have many lessons to learn from the review processes of the MDGs. Empowering young people[3] to hold governments and duty-bearers accountable is one of the most important means of implementation for an agenda that "leaves no one behind". More than half the world is currently under the age of

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30[4] but decision-making processes largely remain in the hands of older generations.[5] Young people, particularly young women, are not adequately represented in formal political processes or institutions - including parliaments, political parties, elections, and public administrations.[6] Young people are also among the hardest hit by the effects of poverty, climate change and inequality.

Despite these barriers to participation in formal or conventional spaces, young people are frequently at the forefront of change and development, such as mass citizen and digital activism. Where traditional structures are failing to include them, young people are finding new ways to engage. Youth have driven many of the high impact social movements of recent years (e.g. on climate change and inequality) characterised by self-organising and the innovative use of new technologies. Youth-led action can help governments fill gaps in implementation, follow-up and monitoring, as well as programmes and policy.[7]

Young people are often more likely to speak freely on newly emerging issues, rather than refraining from 'non-negotiable demands and being a more ambitious voice'.[8] We saw this in the post-2015 consultations, as young people around the world called for more transparent and responsive governments and effective governance and accountability systems.[9] Goal 16 ("Promote peaceful and inclusive societies [...] and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels") is a testament to young people's efforts. Youth-led accountability mechanisms are going to be vital for ensuring the success of the SDGs.

" With half the world currently under 30, who better to be at the heart of this accountability process than young people? [10] "

YOUTH AND THE COMMONWEALTH

With over 60% of its population of 2.3 billion people below the age of 30, the Commonwealth Secretariat views young people as assets and works to enhance their contribution to, and participation in, the social, political and economic development of their countries. The Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) works to engage and empower youth in the Commonwealth through capacity building, advocacy and building partnerships. Grounded within a rights-based approach, the CYP mission is anchored in the belief that young people are a force for peace, democracy and equality - an essential resource for sustainable development and poverty reduction. It advocates the effective participation and engagement of young women and men at all levels of decision-making, including follow-up and review processes and youth-led accountability. The CYP is further involved in the creation of opportunities and platforms, alternatives and pathways that facilitate participation in decision-making and are well-structured, transparent, democratic and accountable. To support this work, the Commonwealth commissioned Restless Development to undertake research to develop practical recommendations for youth-led accountabilityin the SDGs.

THE SCOPE OF THIS STUDY

Restless Development has been championing the role of young people in implementation and accountability mechanisms throughout the post-2015 process. In recent months, development sector players have been sharing their proposals for the accountability architecture of the SDGs.

There is a lot of rhetoric around harnessing citizens' role in formal review and accountability processes, but few practical suggestions on what this could look like on a long term and sustained basis. Together with the Commonwealth Secretariat, Restless Development has seized this moment to assess the options for the role of young people in these proposals, learning from young people's experiences of formal and informal accountability mechanisms to date.

This report builds on Restless Development's paper, *"Follow-Up and Review: How to Scale Up Ambition on Youth-Led Accountability for the SDGs"*[11], which outlines three sets of recommendations on an increasing scale of ambition, (see figure 1). Each proposal is intended to guide government officials, parliamentarians and youth advocates who are engaged in developing inclusive, transparent, collaborative and responsive review mechanisms for the SDGs that includes accountability to citizens, especially young people.

The present report focuses exclusively on the national and subnational recommendations and looks at how youth-led accountability can be implemented and operationalised across the Commonwealth context. For a full methodology, theoretical framework of this report, and recommendations focused on action at the global level, please see the "Follow-Up and Review: How to Scale Up Ambition on Youth-Led Accountability for SDGs" report in full.

SCALE OF AMBITION

Figure 1

Most ambitious
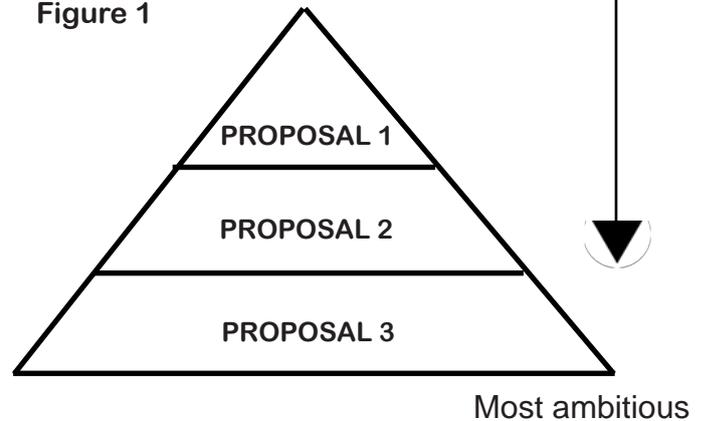
Proposal 1: "Youth Representatives Invited to Monitor the Goals"

Proposal 2: "Young People create their own Spaces, Mechanisms and Evidence to Hold Governments Accountable"

Proposal 3: "Youth-Led Paradigm Shift on Accountability"

KEY PRINCIPLES TO ENABLE YOUTH-LED ACCOUNTABILITY: INCLUSION, RESPONSIVENESS, COLLABORATION, TRANSPARENCY

Our recommendations have been guided by **four key principles for accountability mechanisms** drawn from previous work by the Overseas Development Institute, Plan International[12] and New York University School of Law.[13]

Inclusion: Actively engaging the most marginalised young people to promote social and political inclusion and ensuring effective opportunities and resources (information, capacities) to participate in the accountability processes.

Responsiveness: Government officials listening, responding to and acting upon the inputs of young people.

Collaboration: Governments and stakeholders working *actively with* young people through mechanisms and structures that encourage interaction and discourse.

Transparency: Young people having access to government data relevant to their policy focus areas. Political processes are widely publicised and communicated.

2. YOUTH-LED ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE SDGs: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIONAL ACTION

In line with the key principles that enable youth-led accountability, and building on emerging themes from the research, the recommendations in this report are grouped under four themes. Firstly, strengthening **youth participation in review and accountability mechanisms** - which examines and highlights processes that meaningfully include youth already, and lessons we can learn. Secondly, **data for monitoring and review**. Without accessible, open data and information, we cannot build a full picture of what is happening, and how it may differ from government commitments. Thirdly, **transparency and access to information** that goes beyond mere open information, but includes publishing accessible and usable information as part of accountability. Fourthly, **emerging accountability approaches and practices**. Whilst many of these recommendations synthesise and pull out the best existing practices, in "emerging accountability approaches and practices", we examine innovative programmes being piloted around the world, looking to what might be adopted as "mainstream" accountability practices as we approach 2030.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth participation in review and accountability mechanisms:
    A. Assess and strengthen spaces for institutionalising youth participation
    B. Develop co-management structures for national and local accountability platforms
    C. Implement regular dialogues and action planning with young constituents
    D. Create official roles for youth at the national and regional levels

Data for monitoring and review:
    E. Empower a generation of SDG infomediaries
    F. Develop 'shadow' indicators grounded in lived experiences

Transparency and access to information:
    G. Ensure open access to information for young people on the SDGs and state-led reviews

Emerging accountability approaches and practices:
    H. Develop communities of practice on data-driven social accountability
    I. Put ground level panels and platforms at the forefront of accountability
    J. Embed review in everyday life and popular culture

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN REVIEW AND ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

A. Assess and strengthen spaces for institutionalising youth participation
At the earliest opportunity, each of the key structures and processes including the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and the preceding Commonwealth Youth Forum, UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF), regional peer review and learning mechanisms and governments' own national mechanisms should undergo a **youth participation audit.** Delivered in partnership with youth-led organisations and networks themselves, this would assess readiness for youth engagement and participation, and become a benchmark for tracking improvements in youth engagement over time. Youth-led organisations and networks should also be commissioned to provide **capacity building** (e.g. toolkits, training, coaching) to effectively engage youth in the work of **Secretariats, national/regional bodies, parliamentary reviews and to respond to youth inputs during reviews.** This includes training for government officials on how

to create safe spaces for open dialogue. Inter-governmental institutions, UN Development Group teams and UN Country Teams should connect the international youth sector with national governments, helping to channel capacity building as part of the UN's Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) strategy to supporting national-level SDG implementation.[14]

B. Develop co-management structures for national and local accountability platforms

The creation or relaunch of **National Councils for Sustainable Development** (NCSDs) as multi-stakeholder platforms with representatives from government, civil society and academia, would ensure a visible and clear coordination body for countries' sustainable development policies. NCSDs should implement a **co-management structure;** ensuring young people have permanent executive seats on the Council, as practised by the Council of Europe.[15] Self-organising youth and youth-led organisations should be encouraged to **provide formal inputs** to national and district NCSDs processes, including public consultations, community scorecards, participatory budgeting and the compiling/sharing of annual progress reports. The NCSD secretariat must also provide information on how these inputs will be used and be clear on the level of follow-up (feedback or updates) that young people should expect. Further guidance on NCSDs can be found at the Global Network of NCSDs online.

C. Implement regular dialogues and action planning with young constituents

Members of Parliament (MPs) should **organise regular youth dialogues** in their constituencies, where MPs provide feedback on actions taken in response to previous youth inputs and where young people provide information and insights into the local implementation of SDG related targets. This should include spaces for discussion on areas of concern and commitments that are not being fulfilled, in order to develop mutual accountability action plans to address challenges. 'Send off' events ahead of regional and global government conferences can also be an opportunity for young people to put pressure on their governments, especially when commitments are not met despite available resources.[16]

D. Create official roles for youth at all levels

In addition to the role of the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, the creation of a **Special Representative for Youth or Future Generations** (acting also as an Ombudsperson) would also greatly strengthen the visibility and access for youth during high level meetings, and potentially provide an element of enforceability and transparency, leading to greater accountability.[17] For example, Burkina Faso appointed a prominent youth leader to take on such a role during the SDG development and localisation process, directly reporting to the Prime Minister. Young people should also be included **in government delegations** to thematic, regional and global reviews, including the HLPF.[18] Recruited nationally, youth delegates should remain in their role for up to two years and have access to official meetings and documents. Delegates in these roles can continue the conversations with governments in the corridors, provide access to lived experiences from their communities and provide feedback on the process to young people back home.[19] Official youth delegates should be active members of the **Major Group of Children and Youth (MGCY),** feeding back regularly to strengthen information sharing, coordination and influencing.

SPOTLIGHT:
LOMBE TEMBO, YOUTH GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY TASK TEAM

"I am a 26 year old Zambian woman passionate about development and creating a better world. Being young, female and leading on governance and accountability work in Zambia has its fair share of challenges. However, working with other like-minded young people from across the world as part of the Youth Governance and Accountability Task Team (an international network of youth advocates working towards increased civic participation and accountability), I have overcome many of these obstacles, and increased my knowledge and confidence at the same time. Working with young people always brings me great joy, but it gives me a greater sense of satisfaction when I can empower them to get into spaces where they can actually interact and engage with decision-makers.

I believe that youth-led accountability for the Global Goals is important because it allows young people to be meaningfully engaged in this new development framework. During this time, the people who are going to be the most affected by the decisions being made are the young people and, as a result, we should be the ones leading on this. We need to be able to work hand-in-hand with decision-makers, and find ways to engage with them that will challenge the negative perceptions that currently exist about young active citizens. My experience so far has allowed me to interact with more young females who are challenging social norms and are stepping up to get involved with the development of their country.

It is important to remember that we are the largest young generation in history and, instead of seeing this as a negative, we can instead harness all the positive energy that young people bring. This paper outlines the important ways we can harness this positive energy for change, and make the space for young people to lead accountability for the Sustainable Development Goals. I really look forward to seeing all of this come to fruition, knowing that I was a part of the process right from the beginning and with the hope that I will be there in 2030, looking back at the tremendous results of youth-led accountability."

DATA FOR MONITORING AND REVIEW

E. Empower a generation of SDG Infomediaries
Young people should be empowered to **generate, curate and disseminate data/information** for accountability to government bodies, citizens and other stakeholders. There are programmes already running - including Restless Development's Big Idea and ACT!2015's "Tracking Progress Towards 2030" - which are leading the way in youth-led accountability, rooted in local experience and perspectives. With technical support from data specialists, young people can play a unique role as **infomediaries**; making data meaningful and delivering this information to citizens and decision-makers in an understandable way. This requires the development of **data literacy skills** among youth - including digging, collecting, cleaning, analysing, visualising and communicating data to the public and decision-makers. This training could be provided at '**data camps' run by private sector** organisations, data specialists and/or civil society. Importantly, young people also need support to apply these skills to **monitoring and tracking service delivery and government commitments** to sustainable development. This includes support to understand relevant policies, processes and power relations. This will then inform effective advocacy asks and produce citizen friendly media, reports and resources to raise awareness of pressing issues.

Through this process, young people can perform key functions for increasing accountability and **feed into formal review mechanisms**. This could include young people gathering data relevant to the SDGs including the **'baseline' for the Goals** and/or social development indicators from tools such as the Human Development Index, the Commonwealth Youth Development Index and the Ibrahim Index of African Governance. In addition, young people should also be supported as infomediaries for national and global SDG indicators prioritised by young people themselves. This should be combined with youth-led community-level research to 'sense-check' against lived experiences and double check findings. **National data validation events,** used as part of the African Peer Review Mechanism, have been identified as an important layer of answerability in South Africa and other countries. Playing such a central role in these processes early on would also strengthen citizen understanding and support, particularly for future generations.

F. Develop 'shadow' indicators grounded in lived experiences
Governments should develop national level frameworks with targets and indicators for monitoring the SDGs that engage a range of stakeholders, including young people. However, it is likely that the 'official' global and national indicators may not go far enough to measure progress for young people specifically. Young people are well placed to track progress within their communities where they have access to, and are able to provide, **data relating to particular groups that national reporting might miss.**[20] Youth-led organisations and youth advocates can develop complementary data, or so-called 'shadow' indicators, which could provide **early warning for off-track SDGs**, and support citizens' efforts for change. Restless Development is already piloting a step-by-step process led by young people across seven countries for transforming statements on **what success means from their perspectives** into indicators that they can track themselves. **Community scorecards and youth-led research in communities** can promote responsiveness from government as part of wider accountability processes.

CASE STUDY:

ACCOUNTABILITY ADVOCATES

At the local level, young Accountability Advocates from Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, the UK and Zambia are leading the process of developing national accountability frameworks. These are multi-stakeholder action plans for monitoring, reviewing and seeking accountability for implementation of SDG targets prioritised by young people nationally.[21] In this pilot project, advocates are (1) monitoring and reviewing service delivery and commitments to sustainable development, in addition to producing reports and citizen-friendly resources to raise awareness of pressing issues; (2) convening national stakeholders on areas of concern and developing joint action plans for off track commitments; and (3) lobbying for citizen participation in accountability mechanisms through evidence- based advocacy. For example, the UK team has decided to focus on two areas which young people in the UK have said are most important to them: violence against women, including female-genital mutilation, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. The advocates will track commitments made by the UK Government on those two priorities, and seek to hold the government accountable for its actions.[22]

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

G. Ensure open access to information for young people on the SDGs and state-led reviews

Youth ministries should take the lead on behalf of national government in convening the youth sector and ensuring that government is communicating information on national policy and review processes to the local youth sector. An online platform such as the **Youth Gateway** (launched in January 2016 by the UN Special Envoy on Youth), should provide a central point for young people to access information on the SDGs and state-led follow-up and review processes at all levels, and to connect with other young people tracking the implementation of the goals.[23] Support for young people attending formal meetings would be further strengthened with a **smart-phone app** that provides user friendly references to relevant resolutions, language, documents and advice for young people tracking the agenda.[24] All inter-governmental meetings should be accessible on platforms like the UN Web TV, whilst member state reports and interventions should be widely available online in regional languages.

EMERGING ACCOUNTABILITY APPROACHES AND PRACTICES

H. Develop communities of practice on data-driven social accountability

Each country could establish an **Accountability Hub** – a space where young people, community-based organisations, data and technology specialists and government experts can exchange knowledge and learning on social accountability. This could be connected to a global platform providing online support, advice and resources to youth-led accountability initiatives. Although an online platform can be useful for visibility, signposting and sharing resources, our focus should be the development of offline communities of practice from local to global levels. As far as possible, communities of practice should connect with global initiatives - such as the **Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data** and the **Statistical Commission Friends of the Chair Group on Broader Measures of Progress (FOC)**. These can serve as a bridge between countries and within the development sector. Stocktaking of good practices by the global bodies should include civil society initiatives, particularly those that are engaging, or led by, young people.[25]

SPOTLIGHT:
THE DATA REVOLUTION

A key debate in the post-2015 process is focused on harnessing data for better monitoring of the SDGs. Advances in technology have led to a rapid increase in the types and use of data, but there remains a lack of official data available on young people's lives. Many citizens, and even governments, have not had the resources, knowledge and capacity necessary to use data. Data in itself is not meaningful; we need data users in order for it to transform accountability. The Data Revolution must include support of good quality, citizen generated and curated data to change the power dynamics that enable citizen/youth-led accountability.[26] Young people, more than any other demographic group, are using technology to create new and exciting real time data. When applying this skill set to the social accountability sphere, young people are uniquely placed to play the role of information intermediaries (infomediaries) between official data owners and data users - the citizens, activists, media, civil society organisations, and decision-makers who require access to information.

SPOTLIGHT:
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INDEX

Filling in a key "data gap", in 2013, the Commonwealth successfully launched a global Youth Development Index (YDI), tracking youth development in more than 160 countries. [27] The 2013 YDI represented the world's first attempt at capturing the multidimensional properties that indicate progress in youth development at country level. Three years on, the Commonwealth is developing a second iteration of the YDI, updating the methodology and providing a snapshot of the progress in youth development based on the latest available data. This iteration offers a cross-country comparison of the environment for young people, aged 15 to 29, in 177 countries across five key domains: education, health, employment, civic participation, and political participation. The index is designed to help governments, decision-makers and stakeholders identify and learn from areas of success, pinpoint priority areas for policy intervention and track progress over time.

One of the best ways to achieve long term impact on building policy focus on youth development is embedding data collection techniques and YDI projects at the national level. The Human Development Report Office has guided many national statistical offices and civil society organisations on the development of national human development indices. These efforts have driven the agendas for greater focus at a national level and have also helped build statistical capacity in national statistical offices.

Cognisant of the importance of country-level youth data, the Commonwealth Secretariat, in addition to the global Youth Development Index, has developed a national YDI toolkit. This toolkit provides opportunity for building local, national or regional level YDIs, and can be enriched with additional relevant and available sub-national data. It provides key conceptual and definitional guidelines to national statistical offices, civil society organisations, and independent researchers with an interest in developing national YDIs. Additionally, the Commonwealth Secretariat has also piloted National YDI projects in Australia and Barbados.

I. Put ground level panels and platforms at the forefront of accountability

This emphasises local action for local results: devolving accountability mechanisms outside of bureaucratic spaces. Here, consultations on progress of the SDGs do not happen in a hotel in the capital city, but in communities. **Ground level panels** involving young people, other citizens and decision-makers - as convened during the post-2015 consultation period - would meet and discuss progress of the SDGs focusing on gaps in services and change at the very local level.[28] Decision makers and citizens would sit together at the grassroots as equals, to identify problems and solutions. Panellists would **share their personal knowledge and experience in a safe and open community environment.**[29]

Rooted in local experience and perspectives, ground level panels would determine their own structure and form, seeking accountability and action specific at the local level. This mechanism draws inspiration from the spirit of the **Gacaca courts** that were traditionally used to quickly settle local disputes. In Rwanda, after the genocide in the 1990s, revived Gacaca courts supported community reconciliation and devolved power to the local level to process the large numbers of people awaiting trial.[30] "Gacaca" has been defined as **"justice on the grass"**, or "umugaca" referring to a plant so soft, people would gather there for discussions.[31] This is one of the most inclusive, transparent and collaborative ways to ensure ownership and action is driven and rooted at the local level. **NCSDs** could crucially provide overarching guidelines **that can be adapted in an informal, citizen-led and open manner to suit local context and needs.** NCSDs could also play an **overseer and arbiter role** for panels that are not functioning in an inclusive and transparent manner, particularly where ground levels panels may be more susceptible to "political capture".[32] However, this risk will be greatly reduced in **high-functioning democracies** where governance processes are transparent, inclusive and citizens have access to information and knowledge of their civil rights.

J. Embed review in everyday life and popular culture

Review should be embedded as part of the fabric of people's day-to-day life in order to enter a new paradigm of civic engagement. Youth participation would be high - both in terms of the numbers of young people involved in creating and gathering data, and the quality and diversity of engagement. Feedback on policy implementation and service delivery would be captured through big data[33]

where young people actually *"are"*, rather than relying on formal spaces to *"do"* accountability, (whilst understanding it as an organic process that involves continuous and real-time feedback). **Social media reporting and online platforms could build on the My World survey**. For example, policy makers and civil society advocates participating in high level spaces could access summaries of citizen feedback - including verbal and visual testimonies - via mobile phone apps. Governments could follow in the footsteps of business in providing timely public responses to citizen inputs. The approach to ratings and stars on **Google and Facebook** could be replicated and used throughout government services, (providing big data that could be interpreted and collated by young citizens to feed into official reporting for the SDGs).

Platforms like **Infomex** in Mexico already keep records of citizens' requests as a way to track authorities' responsiveness.[34] Similarly, governments have endorsed initiatives such as **FixMyStreet (UK), TXT CSC (Philippines) and Trac FM (Uganda)** which use the internet, SMS or radio technology to gather information to feed into government institutions and officials.[35] We are already seeing big data and citizen-led tracking through Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) in a number of initiatives worldwide. For example, **HarassMap (Egypt), Ushahidi (global) and "I Paid a Bribe" (12 countries globally)**, collect and track information on street harassment, election violence and petty corruption respectively. These initiatives are created and owned by citizens or civil society and use open data to track and measure what is important to them. Larger sample sizes of information allow for better data disaggregation. Citizens write the narrative that accompanies the data and can better drive the change they want to see, leading to more effective policy interventions.

This type of review and accountability **avoids "consultation fatigue"** as it is built into everyday life and activities. Whilst widespread uptake of these big data initiatives may seem radical now, we believe that many countries could move towards this by 2030. Particularly countries involved in the Open Government Partnership (formally launched by 8 founding governments in 2011), and through ambitious civil society initiatives such as The Data Shift, (founded by CIVICUS in early 2014).

CASE STUDY:
PAINTING THE NATIONAL PICTURE IN BARBADOS

Moving from the global to the national, the Commonwealth has supported the development of a number of national youth development indices, to build a fuller picture of youth development at the subnational level. Building on the success of the global Youth Development Index, (YDI), the Youth Affairs ministry in Barbados has established a national youth development index. The National YDI in Barbados is looking at the variations in development across different regions in the country. The rationale for sub-national data is important because of the variations in development from region to region, and the differing policies and programmatic actions that are implemented within any given country. Sub-national data on youth can help at least with the following:

- Better evidence, leading to better-informed and better-designed policy, and improved targeting and allocation of resources.
- Identification of drivers of youth development and positive youth perceptions at the national level.
- Building the evidence to show policy impact over time.
- Complementing of other leading metrics.
- Encourage the production of quality statistics for the youth cohort.

Using a range of administrative data from different Ministries and youth sector agencies alongside survey data, the Barbados YDI aims to support the strategic youth policies and programme design whilst measuring over time local youth development priorities.

3. ASSESSING YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT IN FORMAL REVIEW AND ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

Many of the above recommendations emerged from the literature review and key informant interviews as incremental steps to supporting and ensuring youth-led accountability for development. Recommendations around youth participation seek to ensure meaningful youth engagement and participation in follow-up and review processes. However there are still limitations, and it will be up to decision-makers and young people to build on these and adapt them to context. Below we outline some of the limitations, and set out considerations to be more ambitious.
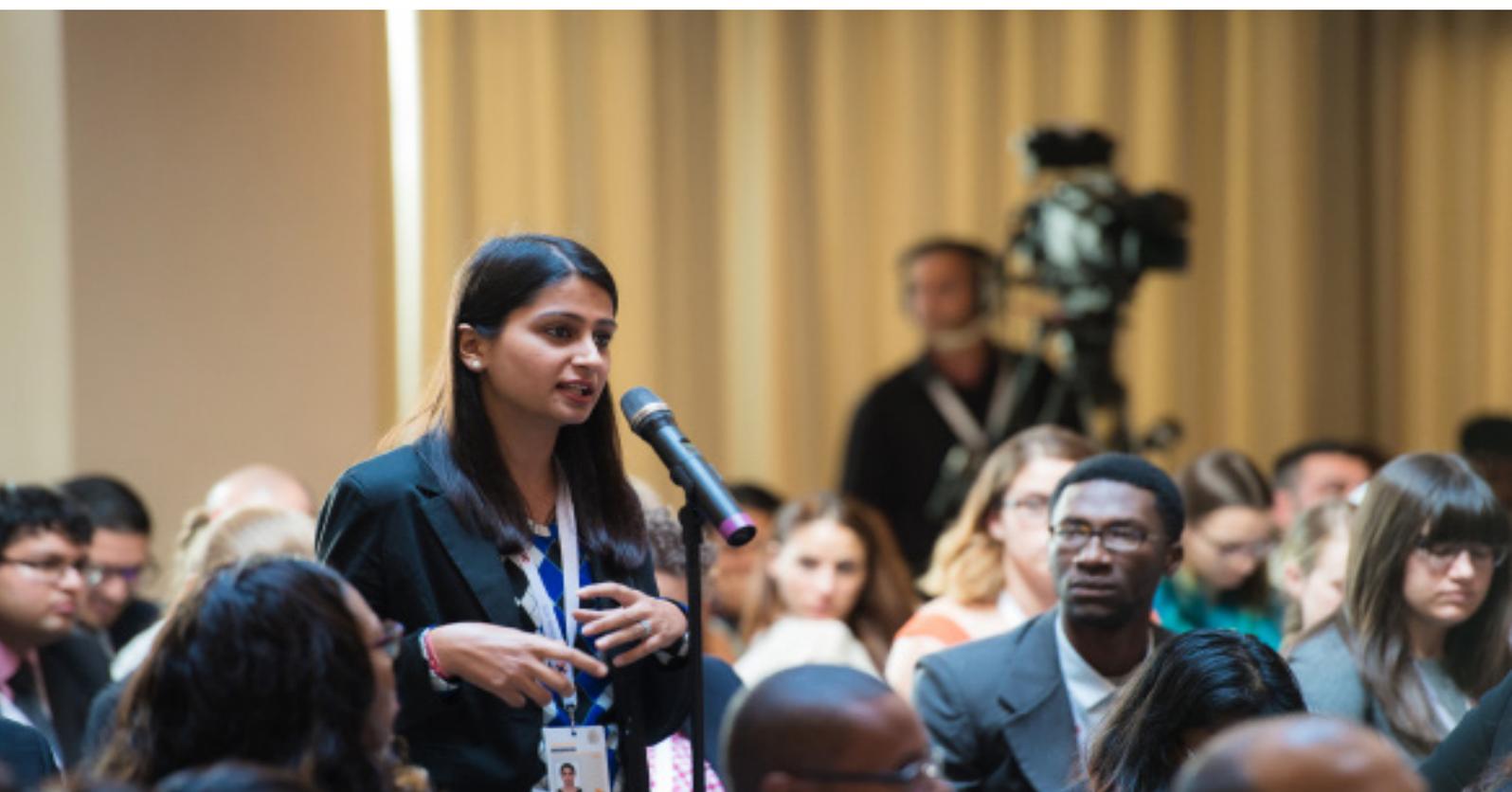
YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN REVIEW

Some elements of youth participation are less about young people holding decision-makers accountable and more about young people being invited to take part as 'representatives', acting as 'monitors' or 'watchdogs' in state-led mechanisms.[36] Implementing these recommendations would greatly expand the formal and high level opportunities that are available for youth input and engagement but looking back at our theoretical framework, we identify the following limitations:

"Youth representatives have an important but limited role"
The focus on individual youth representatives will hinder diversity because the opportunity is typically only accessible to a small range of people with greater resources and power. Formal structures for youth participation, such as the Major Group for Children and Youth, have worked to become more inclusive and broaden membership, but they tend to operate with very limited resources and rely on young people volunteering their time, unless they are employed by an NGO. Representatives are rarely supported to build and connect with a broader youth constituency that reaches the sub-national level and more marginalised youth.

"There are no repercussions if I suggest something and they don't include it"[37]

Youth inputs are largely report-based, with some opportunity for prepared interventions or statements. Interaction, especially between states and youth, can be very limited, reducing the potential for new kinds of collaboration. These state-led processes are without systematic feedback loops to citizens on how inputs have been used - one of the most frequently cited criticisms of the African Peer Review Mechanism.[38] In order to feel participation is meaningful, young people want to know which audience has read the inputs and what action will be taken as a result. Expanding the **"space to produce a counter narrative"[39]** and **"platforms for dialogue and feedback, not just progress"[40],** is where there is most appetite to connect and bolster the overall accountability architecture.

" **The potential is great but [member state] delegates often say 'they're cute'. You don't want that – you want to be thought provoking** [41]

"

"I don't think they take us seriously"[42]

Attending government-led and owned spaces is often the most direct way for a young person to connect with government representatives and senior elected officials, including Presidents and Prime Ministers. However, youth will not necessarily be seen as credible and legitimate stakeholders in these formal spaces. The formalised structures for youth participation can still ultimately be outplayed by the actions of Member States and, in fragile states, youth may even put themselves at risk. As an official Dutch Youth Delegate described: "People didn't really ask what we had to say. You really have to shout out. They all say 'It's so important young people are here' and I think they do think it's important - for the urgency, actions and to keep the pressure on - but I don't think they take us seriously."[43]

In contrast to state-led processes, young people participating in youth-led initiatives can agree the terms of their own engagement and develop platforms that give them more of an equal footing with governments and donors. These platforms can enable more constructive dialogue with government and provide 'safe' spaces to disagree based on evidence and lived experience. However, in many contexts this may not go far enough in **truly challenging existing power dynamics** and we know that policy making is never an **entirely rational process.[44]**

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

"I started to wonder what is happening behind the doors of the delegate rooms"[45]

Selection of youth representatives is often ad hoc and without due openness or transparency. Furthermore, when transcripts and/or recordings of formal meetings are available online it is often in formats difficult to understand for anyone not specialising in governance processes. We know that many of the most important conversations in these processes happen in the corridors and in one-on-one meetings: "As a youth activist without access or a voice in the actual decision-making, I started to wonder what is happening behind the doors of the delegate rooms. I wondered whether these delegates, especially the developing countries, would reflect the real concern of African people in general and young people in particular."[46] Young people have frequently expressed their frustrations during these high level meetings. For example, at the Rio+20 Conference young people initiated a mass unauthorised walk-out and a sit-in in the grounds of the venue, which attracted online media attention.[47]

DATA FOR MONITORING AND REVIEW

Implementing this set of recommendations in full would represent a leap forward in youth empowerment and accountability. It would also capitalise on many of the opportunities presented by the data revolution and the open government movement; driving innovations that can fill the gaps left by formal processes. Restless Development and many other youth organisations are already piloting these new initiatives, but we foresee a number of issues that could limit their impact.

Pilot initiatives to build youth-specific data frequently rely on young people taking on voluntary roles as representatives, infomediaries and advocates. Volunteers can make a significant contribution in the achievements of the SDGs[48], but even so these initiatives will **need to be well resourced in order to be sustainable and high quality.** Large-scale citizen mobilisation may also require financial incentives (e.g. stipends) for long term participation, especially where there is risk of 'consultation fatigue'.

EMERGING APPROACHES AND PRACTICES

By 2030, we should move towards a vision where accountability is led by young people at the local level and upwards, integrating data, culture and everyday spaces. These recommendations seek to include and amplify the most marginalised voices from the very outset.

The balance between formal and informal mechanisms will need to be mindfully navigated. Actors both "inside" and "outside" of formal power structures are needed to seek accountability effectively. Young people - unlike donors or the private sector, who can leverage their financial resources and investments to be taken seriously by governments - need to develop new tools and approaches to ensure they are not ignored.[49] In doing so, youth will change the nature of political conversations and how citizens participate in these spaces. As governments, civil society and youth set about to achieve this paradigm shift on accountability, we must further build the evidence base of what works in which contexts and why. This will contribute to a stronger case for support and build understanding and support from duty-bearers.

4. MAKING IT HAPPEN

Our vision is a multi-layered global review and accountability framework for the SDGs that **makes specific provision for youth leadership and citizen partnership,** and is supported by good quality, representative, open and verified citizen-generated data. For this to happen, there needs to be **increased political, financial and technical support for (and formal recognition of) youth-led accountability** that provides an enabling environment for operationalising the three sets of recommendations in this paper.

From 2016 onwards, Restless Development and our youth networks will be pushing to ensure that conversations on young people's role in review and accountability for the SDGs move beyond rhetoric. Decision-makers and their advisers must begin to **speak more concretely** about how this will happen in practice. We will promote these recommendations through our national, regional and global advocacy; supporting our networks of youth advocates and youth-led organisations to better understand and engage in accountability mechanisms. As the banner carrier for youth-led development and accountability, we will also work with our partners to continue to **pilot these ideas directly** and **develop tools for wider uptake** (e.g. toolkits, data frameworks, audits, training resources, funding proposals, online platforms, briefings, standards). In addition, we will generate evidence on how to best engage young people in data-driven, social accountability, **invite critical feedback** to continue to inform our approach, and share key learnings with young people and the development sector.

As an association of 53 member countries united by the twin values of democracy and development, **the Commonwealth could be uniquely positioned to play a global leadership role** in strengthening the two-way relationship of accountability between citizen and state. In 2015, the Commonwealth theme was 'A Young Commonwealth'. Given the majority of Commonwealth citizens are young there could be no better opportunity for the Commonwealth and its member governments to demonstrate the role young people can play in forging a better future for their world. A young Commonwealth can be realised through engaging youth formally and consistently in the monitoring, follow-up and review of the SDGs. Through promoting better and more accessible data about young people - for example, through the Youth Development Index - and by actively engaging the support of young people in driving and strengthening the work of Ministries of Youth on the SDGs, Commonwealth countries are in an important position to lead by example.

HOW COULD SUPPORT BE BUILT GLOBALLY FOR YOUTH-LED REVIEW AND ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS?

Through this scoping study we have recommended how our vision of youth-led accountability could be achieved from the local to global level.

If you are a policy maker or from government, here is a checklist for how you can use these recommendations:

☐ **Initiate conversations** on citizens' roles in review and accountability around these recommendations, particularly between youth-led organisations and ministers/senior civil servants who have responsibility for SDG implementation, financing and/or youth. These dialogues should also help you understand how many or few of these recommendations are already in place in your country context.

☐ Integrate these recommendations into **your written proposals for SDG review** and accountability mechanisms from the local to global levels. Verbally champion these recommendations **in global partnerships and inter-governmental platforms** whilst supporting youth to directly champion them as panellists and presenters.

☐ Start **putting these recommendations into practice** without delay. This could involve piloting a number of new initiatives or mechanisms in a selected group of countries, constituencies or regions. Share your learnings with other stakeholders nationally and globally and help build the case for what works and why.

If you are a young person or from a youth-focused organisation, here is how you can use these recommendations:

☐ **Integrate the relevant recommendations into your work.** Initiate conversations with decision-makers and other stakeholders on how youth-led accountability of the SDGs can be put into practice in your context. Share the findings of this report.

☐ **Gather evidence and learnings on youth-led accountability**. We need better evidence of what works and what does not, to build on these recommendations in the future, secure financing, and strengthen the case for how youth-led accountability can transform development.

The year 2016 marks an unprecedented opportunity for young people, parliamentarians, decision-makers, data analysts, donors, activists and NGOs to change the way we relate to each other in achieving our common goals. In order to tackle the most pressing issues of our time - extreme poverty, inequality, and climate change - we need to be bold and ensure the commitments behind the SDGs translate into action. Youth-led accountability is key to this, and we know that by putting young people and citizens at the forefront of change and development, the SDGs will become the transformative and ambitious agenda it aims to be.

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Appendix 1: Key Informants Interviewed

We are extremely grateful to everyone who gave their time to take part in the research for this scoping study, including:

Prateek Awasthi - Programme Specialist, UNFPA
Tonu Basu - Civil Society Engagement, Open Governmen Partnership
Savio Carvalho - Senior Advisor, Amnesty International
Hussein ElShafei - (formerly) Community Outreach Manager, HarassMap
Emmanuel Etim - Founder, Pan African Centre for Social Development and Accountablity (PACSDA)
Neva Frecheville - Policy Analyst, Post-2015 CAFOD
Cecilia Garcia - Director, Espolea
Jeffery Huffines - CIVICUS UN Representative
Anastasiia Isakii - Event and Conference Management, AIESEC & member of Major Group of Children and Youth
Christopher Jones - Consultant, Youth Policy
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Alex Kent - UK Director, Restless Development
Aashish Khullar - Children and Youth International
Tania Martinez - HIV Programme Coordinator, Espolea
Diarmaid McDonald - Advocacy Manager, STOPAIDS, and Alternate Board Member for NGOs on UNITAID Board
Gasto Mgomoka - Youth Accountability Advocate
Sushmita Mukherjee - Head of Programme Quality, Restless Development, India
Ben Mwape - ILO (Zambia) and former Restless Development youth peer educator and advocate
John Romano - Coordinator, TAP Network
Lombe Tembo - Youth Governance and Accountability Task Team member - Zambia
Farooq Ullah - Executive Director, Stakeholder Forum
Thomas Wheeler - Conflict and Security Adviser, Saferworld

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All informants were acting in a personal capacity and their views do not necessarily represent the policy of their organisations. Any errors of interpretation, transcription or attribution are the fault of the author alone.

Appendix 2: Restless Development and Commonwealth Team

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Commonwealth Secretariat Leading Team: Rafiullah Kakar, Abhik Sen

Appendix 3: Abbreviations

APRM	AFRICAN PEER REVIEW MECHANISM
CHOGM	THE COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING
CRC	COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD
CSD	COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
CYC	COMMONWEALTH YOUTH COUNCIL
ECOSOC	UN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
FOC	STATISTICAL COMMISSION FRIENDS OF THE CHAIR GROUP ON BROADER MEASURES OF PROGRESS
GPEDC	GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION
HLG	HIGH-LEVEL GROUP FOR PARTNERSHIP, COORDINATION AND CAPACITY-BUILDING FOR POST-2015 MONITORING
HLPF	HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
IANYD	INTER-AGENCY NETWORK ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
MAPS	MAINSTREAMING, ACCELERATION AND POLICY SUPPORT
MDGS	MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS
MGCY	UNITED NATIONS MAJOR GROUP FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH
MP	MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
NCSD	NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
NGOS	NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS
NSO	NATIONAL STATISTICAL OFFICE
OGP	OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP
SDGS	SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
TAP	TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND PARTICIPATION NETWORK
UN	UNITED NATIONS
UNAIDS	JOINT UNITED NATIONS PROGRAMME ON HIV/ AIDS
UNDESA	UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
UNDP	UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES
UNGA	UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
UN HABITAT	UNITED NATIONAL HUMAN SETTLEMENT PROGRAMME
UPR	UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW
YDI	YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INDEX

Appendix 4: Endnotes

1. United Nations (2015) *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* A/RES/70/1, para. 74d

2. Ibid para. 51

3. For the purposes of this study, this is our definition of youth: Youth overlaps with, but is distinct from adolescence, as it extends into adulthood. Here we broadly follow the United Nations is defining youth as persons of 15 to 24 years, but also recognise it as a transition from dependence to independence, childhood to adulthood. Taken from DFID/CSO Youth Working Group (2010) *Youth Participation in Development: A Guide for Development Agencies and Policy Makers* [online]. Available at http://restlessdevelopment.org/file/youth-participation-in-development-pdf [Accessed 20th November 2015]

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21. This project is being coordinated by Restless Development and delivered in partnership with African Monitor, Plan UK and YES Ghana. It is being co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union from 2015 - 2016.

22. Adventures of a Youth Advocate "*Why Do The Global Goals Matter to Me?"* [online]. Available at http://adventuresinyouthadvocacy.blogspot.co.uk/?view=sidebar [Accessed 27/11/2015]

23. The Youth Gateway is an initiative of the Special Envoy for Youth. The digital platform will "link together education, implementation and evaluation of the Sustainable Development Goals ("SDGs") by youth and for youth [...] connecting young people with opportunities to take action for contributing to global development, locally and internationally". http://youthgateway.org/

24. For example, media agency Lucid.Berlin has developed a "Children and Armed Conflict" app used by policy makers at the UN Security Council to quickly reference everything from the legal framework of the agenda, to the CAAC language used in Security Council resolutions" http://lucid.berlin/en/children-and-armed-conflict-workshop. "In addition, users involved in child protection in the field, including un country teams or task forces, and NGOs monitoring and reporting on violations, can use the app offline to quickly access documents and case advice without searching through lengthy reports."

25. For more information on the FOC please see http://unstats.un.org/unsd/broaderprogress/.

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