

Context

Truly sustainable development can only be achieved if citizens have a voice, grounded in knowledge, to shape priorities, air grievances and hold governments to account. As we approach a new set of development goals post-2015, CIVICUS – working with its members and partners across the world – aims to identify how best to support new information technologies and innovative forms of citizen reporting to create innovative ways of monitoring progress and holding governments to account for the promises they make in 2015.

The UN High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda called for the twin “data revolution” and “transparency revolution” to encourage citizen-driven accountability. We want to enable citizens and civil society across the world to harness the power of crowd-sourcing, real-time reporting and fast-evolving new tools to put people at the heart of these new revolutions. This is what we mean by *Promoting People-Powered Accountability Post-2015 and Beyond*.

Opportunities & Challenges

The potential for meaningful connection between people and governments through technological advances in citizen reporting, engagement and monitoring is one of the most important paradigm shifts of the early 21st century. Techniques for aggregating, curating and presenting multi-sourced data present a range of opportunities for collaboration between international actors, citizens and grassroots organizations. These twin trends of facilitated citizen voice and international data curation hold significant promise for improving development accountability and performance. This is especially true in the context of post-2015 development goals, as citizen-generated monitoring data can provide a critical counterpoint to official monitoring data, thereby supporting enhanced performance and accountability at local, national and international levels.

A recent proliferation of projects leveraging technology for people-powered accountability has been driven by ad hoc responses to highly contextual and wildly dissimilar factors. From SMS reports of bribery, to online collections of media coverage, to radio-facilitated citizen forums, to multi-media mapping of public service delivery, national actors are taking the opportunities that new communications provide to develop responses and solutions for specific contexts. From a global accountability perspective, this presents a challenge because it produces data that is heterogeneous in form, focus, type and structure; spotty in terms of coverage; and is being driven by a small number of people, usually based in the Global North. Current initiatives span a vast array of issue areas and political contexts and produce a largely incompatible mix of datasets, which may be useful locally but cannot be compared across countries easily. Further, problems of scale and coverage must be addressed and harmonized data increased in order for such mechanisms to provide rigorous and comparable metrics for monitoring development goals.

A Way Forward

Leveraging opportunities and addressing these shortcomings requires new thinking to promote enhanced monitoring mechanisms for comparing and aggregating citizen monitoring data on the implementation of the post-2015 goals. As a first step, CIVICUS will explore the potential for facilitating the uptake of citizen monitoring efforts by civil society, and harmonizing citizen-generated data streams to facilitate a stronger evidence base at the national level and across country contexts.

By directly addressing the issues of comparability and coverage, CIVICUS aims to better understand the potential and limitations of technology, while also supporting the efforts of national partners to leverage these tools in campaigning for citizen engagement and accountability.

Comparability: Ensuring that methodologies and processes follow a commonly accepted set of principles around data collection and sharing is crucial for a robust, interoperable system. To get there, CIVICUS will pilot harmonization models and strategies in the area of corruption data, as the anti-corruption movement has a long history of measurement, data analytics and nationally sourced data streams.

Coverage: In order to pursue a more systematic and efficient approach to citizen monitoring, CIVICUS will work with a broad, multi-stakeholder platform to develop a blueprint for sharing skills, strategies and technologies. This work will begin by consulting with a selection of CIVICUS members and partners to identify and document existing processes, data gaps and perceived needs.

Campaigning: Increased comparability and coverage of citizen-generated data will open up dramatic potential for campaign and advocacy tools, from the national level to the global level. By focusing on citizens, CIVICUS hopes to contribute to addressing the missing link between the data revolution and the call for greater accountability and transparency. Through the eventual development of collaborative standards and innovative resources, CIVICUS seeks to empower a global landscape of interconnected datasets and organisations to provide evidence-based tools for promoting people-powered accountability.

Collaborative Solutions

Though the final shape of future citizen monitoring and reporting tools depends on ongoing stakeholder consultations, it is clear that a global consensus has emerged on the need to promote accountability in the development framework from 2016. Whether it is a new ‘data exchange’ or a ‘dashboard’ or tools and strategies that we are not yet able to imagine, we are certain that we can find powerful new tools and opportunities for monitoring the post-2015 commitments over their lifetime. If we can support a wider coverage of citizen monitoring data, and develop rigorous methods for comparing and aggregating that data, we will unlock endless possibilities for promoting accountability at the local, national and global levels. The MDGs 2.0 need citizen monitoring 2.0.

To assess the landscape and appetite for coordinated citizen monitoring mechanisms, CIVICUS will engage with a full range of stakeholders to understand the potential and limitations of technology in this arena. Throughout the first quarter of 2014, a series of consultations will achieve three broad objectives among and between various stakeholder groups:

1. Understand the opportunities and challenges of **comparability** between existing forms of citizen monitoring mechanisms
2. Build knowledge on the **coverage** and gaps in citizen monitoring mechanisms as they relate to the post-2015 agenda
3. Discuss opportunities to support efforts of civil society to leverage technology in **campaigning** for citizen accountability

Ultimately, building and promoting people-powered accountability will aim to improve the quality of statistics and information available to citizens and governments. By supporting the development of creative and user-friendly tools to assess and provide feedback on the post-2015 goals, technological innovations and harmonized data will enable civil society to more effectively monitor progress and hold stakeholders to account for their commitments.

But we are deeply aware that we do not need another simplistic, overly-ambitious initiative that fetishizes data and technology as silver bullets. And we certainly do not want to create a digital white elephant. Instead, we want to work with civil society, especially in the Global South, to build familiarity and confidence, so that a new set of actors harness the potential of new technologies. If we can then join the dots – build some basic standards that allow for aggregation and harmonisation – we can start generating new data and as technology evolves and we overcome access issues, we stand to create a new set of accountability tools.

The methodologies and interfaces that will underpin any “data revolution” have great potential to build a more people-centred and planet-sensitive development agenda. In this way, new data-driven vehicles of monitoring will standardise, curate, and present citizen-generated reporting from across the globe to help unleash the democratizing potential of information and *promote people-powered accountability*.