



Global Partners Forum Brief 2019¹

Social Accountability and the Challenge of Inclusion

November 19 – 21, 2019, Preston Auditorium, World Bank Headquarters, Washington, DC

The Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) will once again convene its partners, a global network of practitioners and thought leaders from across civil society, governments, academia, foundations and business, alongside World Bank professionals to put the spotlight on the power of collaborative social accountability in addressing governance challenges and improving development outcomes. Now in its sixth year and hosted at the World Bank in Washington DC, the Global Partners Forum has become the convening event for the social accountability field, for taking stock of opportunities and challenges and pushing for even greater impact. Join us in shaping and advancing the social accountability agenda for the next years.

The 2019 GPSA Forum will focus on the role of social accountability in meeting the challenge of inclusion in public governance. New dynamics as well as continued evolution of the field, unpacked in the next section of this brief, call for social accountability practitioners, researchers and development partners to challenge themselves and think about what the **foundation** of their task is today and how the **frontiers** of social accountability are evolving. The aim of the 2019 GPSA Global Partners Forum is to equip GPSA stakeholders to promote, design and implement better social accountability mechanisms that can help to solve the challenge of asymmetries of power through more inclusive policy-making and implementation, building on social accountability's foundations but with an eye toward its frontiers.

The Forum will, in plenary discussions, highlight innovations and build shared perspectives; in partner-led breakout sessions, break new ground through knowledge sharing and capacity building; and, in key speeches, underscore the imperative of collective action to tackle exclusion in all its forms and build more inclusive governance. As a field-shaping initiative, the Forum will assess what opportunities social accountability processes have created thus far, where the challenges towards using social accountability for more inclusive and effective development lie, and, thus aim to inform the actions of governments, donors, civil society groups, and development partners. The Forum will prominently showcase experiences led by GPSA Global Partners and the GPSA's own initiatives.

The key questions this Forum thus seeks to address are:

1. What are we learning from the foundations of social accountability practice, and how it contributes to more inclusive governance processes and beneficial development outcomes for all?
2. What opportunities and challenges are there in the operating environment for social accountability and how are practitioners navigating them in order to make policy-making and delivery of services more inclusive?

¹ This Brief was authored by Florencia Guertzovich and Emilie Fokkelman, with inputs from others in the GPSA Team based on a review of recent literature. For a full list of readings beyond those hyperlinked in the text, please see the GPSA Forum 2019 web page at: <https://www.thegpsa.org/forum/forum-2019>



3. What are the emerging frontiers of social accountability that practitioners and development partners are exploring to deliver on its potential for supporting inclusive governance and development?

The annual Forum is actively co-created with the GPSA's [Global Partners](#), who share a concern for elevating the role of citizens and civil society, working together with public authorities, in making governments more accountable and effective in serving the public good. This year, we come together specifically to address inclusion as a cross-cutting theme and development priority relevant to the diverse interests and aims of GPSA Partners. In the spirit of inclusion, the agenda for the Forum will be based on an open call for session proposals and speakers. We are looking for people from different fields, sectors and regions from around the world to exchange ideas and share knowledge to build better, more inclusive interventions.

Background: Foundations and Frontiers of Social Accountability for Inclusion

Recent years have seen many countries making progress towards reducing poverty and improving shared prosperity. However, many people are still unable to reap the benefits of this growth to the full extent. As the [World Development Report 2017](#) argues: power imbalances that lead to exclusion, capture and clientelism within societies cause public policies to fail and development outcomes to fall short.

Exclusion can mean that citizens are denied their right to participate in decision making that affects their lives; that citizens do not have access to material resources or services and cannot exercise their voice. Lack of participation affects the quality and sustainability of public policy implementation. It may lead to feelings of alienation and inferiority. And while the expansion of digital tools and platforms has generated new opportunities and channels for engagement between governments and citizens, they have also created new challenges in the exclusion of some citizens from public deliberation spaces.

The challenge of inclusion is multi-faceted. A solution, WDR 2017 proposes, lies in fostering better commitment, cooperation and coordination among state and nonstate actors. To address the barriers marginalized people face in accessing markets, services, and spaces, the empowerment and participation of all people in the governance process as well as integration of their voices in shaping and implementing public programs are crucial. This is central to the thinking about 'inclusive institutions' (Sustainable Development Goal 16), and more broadly to the commitment states made in the 2030 Agenda to "Leave No One Behind", which are underpinned by human rights conventions.

Those often left behind are people living in poverty and other vulnerable situations, including children, youth, persons with disabilities, older persons, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, LGBT+, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants. Efforts are needed to ensure that their voices are heard, and their active participation as agents of change needs to be promoted. For the World Bank, building capable, inclusive institutions that promote effective service delivery for all, facilitate private sector growth and earn the confidence of citizens is at the core of its work.



Civil society organizations play a critical role in ensuring that individuals overcome collective action challenges to effectively engage the state and participate in the policymaking process. Through social accountability processes, civil society groups are addressing asymmetries of power in ways that [strengthen both policy-making and service delivery systems](#) to reach all. The involvement of citizens in public decision-making and in holding government accountable for its actions in the management of public resources is a foundation of all these efforts.

Today, social accountability practitioners are dealing with opportunities and constraints to meet the challenge of inclusion in policymaking and delivery. On the one hand, complex development challenges are prompting [rethinking](#) as to how social accountability can be part of whole-of-government efforts to improve development outcomes. On the other hand, civic space is [changing](#) (e.g. through new digital activism, the multiplication of large-scale protest movements, as well as more informal forms of activism) and, in many cases, closing. These shifts in civic space affect inclusion, whether by repressive measures, restricting the right to participation, the freedom of association, the right to peaceful assembly or freedom of expression, which are key determinants of civic action.

At the frontiers of the social accountability field, the GPSA and its partners are continually testing and learning how to tap into emerging opportunities and address the constraints in using social accountability to achieve inclusive policies and impact (see a recent review of evidence [here](#)). An important part of these efforts is to help institutionalize participation and more direct engagement of citizens with governments. Tackling exclusion requires the dual efforts of building the capacities of states to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of citizens, and of empowering citizens to be able to claim their rights – including the right to participation.

Civil society groups are [finding new opportunities](#) by moving beyond stand-alone civil society interventions and focusing on addressing specific service delivery bottlenecks or mobilizing the public to ensure that there are sufficient resources to pay for public services. For example, in the Dominican Republic, a social accountability initiative supported by the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) reached out to partner with the Coalition for Education with Dignity and CONADIS, the national disability council, to ensure that disabled students participate in dialogues about school infrastructure, which helped to finally enforce the national mandate for inclusive school buildings. This was part of a [broader civic effort to](#) ensure that the country's growing budget for the education sector was well spent.

Civil society groups are using innovative, collaborative forms of social accountability to build partnerships and dialogue between governments, civil society organizations and private sector towards meaningful and sustainable reforms. In Tajikistan for example, since early 2018, young people in the poor and mountainous Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region are engaging for the first time in direct policy dialogue with government authorities on socio-economic issues that are relevant to them thanks to an initiative supported by the GPSA. Being heard in the newly created national Youth Council not only gives youth confidence and new opportunities to weigh in on addressing the absence of jobs but, most of all, a sense of belonging in society and a concrete way to exercise their right to participate.

Meanwhile, the GPSA is getting ready to support groups in Brazil, Benin and the Caribbean to build multi-stakeholder platforms for addressing locally relevant problems from crime and violence to climate resilience, while harnessing alignment with World Bank operations.



Also at the frontiers of the field, an increasing number of public sector institutions are considering how to effectively build social accountability and other participatory processes into their 21st century policies. There are many reasons for this push towards institutionalization – from the realization that the worldwide problem of persistently low learning outcomes [requires coordinated action](#) from public and private sectors as well as civil society, to the need to invest effectively in human capital to sustain growth, and, [recognition](#) that when citizens are able to engage, they are more committed to pay their taxes.

This move across the state-society divide is at the core of the [explosion of participatory budgeting](#) across the world, [efforts to co-produce accountability](#) that are mobilizing stakeholders in the state and civil society, as well as [other efforts and calls to step up collaborative governance](#) such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency and the Open Government Partnership. It is also visible in recent efforts to improve school-based management reforms in Mongolia and Morocco, social protection programs in Paraguay and frontline health delivery from Indonesia and India to Afghanistan.

[Broad, sectoral reforms](#) such as those aimed at enhancing human capital provide a window of opportunity for social accountability efforts to become part of a bigger whole for meeting the inclusion challenge ([here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)). Civil society groups are instrumental in mobilizing the coalitions and networks that are needed to make reforms effective and re-energize the social contract. Experience shows that when social accountability and participation efforts are focused on the entire public policy chain – from planning, budgeting, management and delivery to monitoring of services – [they are more likely to become institutionalized](#). Building social capital and mobilizing networks, in turn, seem to make social accountability processes more effective in supporting the delivery of improved development outcomes ([here](#) and [here](#)).

Taken together, these new dynamics call for social accountability practitioners, researchers and development partners to challenge themselves and think about what the **foundation** of their task is today and how the **frontiers** of social accountability are evolving. In its 2019 Forum, the Global Partnership for Social Accountability **will provide a platform for these important discussions**.

The Global Partnership for Social Accountability

The Global Partnership for Social Accountability is a Trust Fund program established in 2012 by the World Bank. By engaging with both civil society partners and governments, and leveraging World Bank engagements across sectors, the GPSA works to support collaborative governance and nurture stakeholders' capacities for collaborative social accountability processes. GPSA blends (i) flexible funding for civil society-led coalitions to work with government to solve problems that local actors have prioritized with (ii) sustained non-financial support for meaningful engagement, including implementation support, capacity building, facilitation, and brokering. It aims to build collaborative civil-society government interactions that feed actionable information to decision-makers and shift their preferences and incentives for achieving needed development goals. GPSA-supported civil society coalitions use GPSA advice, information about government reform efforts and country systems, insights from social accountability practice from relevant contexts, and other resources to develop multi-



stakeholder compacts to contribute to addressing immediate or systemic causes of pressing local development priorities.

Annex A. Previous GPSA Forum themes

2018: “Money Matters: Public Finance and Social Accountability for Human Capital”; in partnership with HCP, GIFT, IBP

2017: “Citizen Action for Open, Accountable and Inclusive Societies”; in partnership with OGP and MAVC

2016: “Social Accountability for Development Impact”;

- Sub-themes:
1. Inclusive, transparent and accountable institutions.
 2. State-society collaboration for social accountability: From engagement to co-production.
 3. Learning for Adaptive Management.

2015: “Social Accountability for Citizen-Centric Governance: A Changing Paradigm”

2014: “What Works in Social Accountability?”.