1. Introduction
This summary of the 2019 Global Partners Forum: Social Accountability and the Challenge of Inclusion is not intended as a complete record or report, but simply to capture selected ‘takeaways’ for participants, GPSA partners and of course interested audiences.

2. About the 6th GPSA Global Partners Forum

“Running a city is like managing a permanent crisis ... Civil society and city government must add up. The quality of their collaboration, and accountability of government to the citizens, are vital to the health of the city.”

These were the words of the keynote speaker of the 2019 GPSA Global Partners Forum, Napoleão Bernardes, two times Mayor of the city of Blumenau in the state of Santa Catarina in Brazil and a former journalist and councilman. Napoleão set the stage for what Forum participants rated as the most successful GPSA Forum ever and whose theme, ‘Social Accountability and the Challenge of Inclusion’, resonated deeply with the cross-section of Forum participants.

The 2019 GPSA Global Partners Forum took place from November 19 to 21 at the World Bank Headquarters in Washington D.C. It is the flagship knowledge exchange event of the GPSA and a pre-eminent global convening for the social accountability field. It was co-sponsored with Open Society Foundations, Public Service Accountability Monitor at Rhodes University, South Africa, and the World Bank’s Human Rights and Development Trust Fund. Their financial, thematic and leadership contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

The Forum’s sessions were co-created with GPSA partners through an open call for session proposals, which were selected from over 80 countries globally. It attracted more than 300 participants, with over 85% coming from civil society, academia, funders and governments, and The World Bank and other multilateral organizations making up the rest. Global audiences joined the Forum virtually by watching the live video stream.

Also speaking at the Forum’s opening, World Bank Managing Director Axel van Trotsenburg and Vice President for Sustainable Development Laura Tuck affirmed the vital role of civil society organizations and GPSA partners in tackling development challenges collaborating with governments, and described the Bank’s partnership with civil society as essential to achievement of its goals. They underscored the Bank’s commitment to the inclusion of marginalized and excluded populations in the development
process and the benefits of economic growth, and to supporting fragile states with weak governance, which they said was foundational to achieving the goals of ending poverty and boosting shared prosperity.

3. Forum Theme
The 2019 GPSA Forum’s theme, ‘Social Accountability and the Challenge of Inclusion’, had the aim to equip GPSA stakeholders to promote, design and implement better social accountability mechanisms that can help solve the challenge of asymmetries of power as they work for more inclusive policy-making and implementation. The Forum’s plenaries and partner-led breakout sessions made for intense reflection, surfacing innovations, knowledge and insight inspired by practitioners and researchers alike.

Keynote and other addresses highlighted the role of collective action in general and collaborative social accountability in particular, in tackling exclusion in all its forms and building more inclusive institutions. As a field-shaping initiative, the Forum reflected on opportunities, challenges and lessons learned on social accountability and inclusion, and how these could inform the actions of governments, donors, civil society groups, and development partners.

The Forum gave a call to action to write the next chapter of social accountability, including collaborative processes that are emerging in practice but are not part of the theories and narratives about the said practice.

The Forum showcased experiences led by GPSA Global Partners as well as those from GPSA-supported initiatives. It provided a unique opportunity to share learning, including on the GPSA’s own evolving theory of action, which is built from the learning harnessed by the civil society coalitions supported by the GPSA over the years, and from an understanding of where the GPSA, as a multi-stakeholder platform\(^1\) anchored in the World Bank, can deliver value.

For example, a presentation of the evaluation of the SEND-Ghana project helped to illustrate the focus on joint learning with GPSA implementing partners. A key insight was that “citizens’ budgets” went further in improving the access and quality of health and education budget allocations when sectoral authorities provided inputs to the process, than when civil society acted alone.

An example from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) showcased how GPSA implementing partners learned to embrace collaboration: it was not by default but actively developed. Collaborative social accountability

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\(^1\) The Steering Committee of the GPSA, the main governance feature, comprises equal representation of three members per constituency of developing country governments, CSOs (one from developed and two from developing countries), and donors (two sovereign donors and one private/foundations).
accountability turned Health Area Development Committees into catalysts for collective action and inspired other development partners to take up lessons in their own programing.

This same dynamic was observed in Moldova and elsewhere: success and sustainability of collaborative social accountability can be supported through different stakeholders’ uptake and adaptation of project lessons. All these insights are now embedded into the GPSA theory of action, which was presented at the Forum.

The Forum was underpinned by a Forum Brief, which set out three key questions which guided the Forum Agenda and which the Forum sought to address in its plenary and breakout sessions, namely:

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?
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?

4. Forum Outcomes

Foundations:

- **Social accountability’s evolution**: CSOs have garnered important learning from social accountability processes of the past 15 years. The field has grown and diversified. Participants showcased the potential gains from emerging social accountability approaches, including, citizen action linked with public sector action to jointly solve problems – sometimes before resorting to ‘teeth’ or enforcing sanctions.

- **Social accountability’s dichotomies**: There was a call to not reduce social accountability practice (within and beyond the GPSA) to dichotomies, some of the common ones being:
short versus long route, first generation versus second generation, strategic versus tactical, instrumental versus normative, led by nonprofit or civic groups versus social movements. Collaborative social accountability, for instance, is part of our practice, but it is overlooked by these dichotomies.

- **Addressing inequalities through social accountability:** While many governments have made progress in addressing inequality, breaking out of unequally distributed power structures that tend to reinforce exclusion will require CSOs’ engagement, monitoring government commitments to better policies for inclusion, collaborating with them to fulfill those commitments and holding them to account.

- **Social accountability for service delivery:** Collaborative social accountability can help ensure that quality service delivery reaches all – a goal of rights-based approaches, too. Key aspects of the process include prioritizing state-society relationships through trust building processes.

**Opportunities and Challenges:**

- **Cross-sector engagement:** Collaborative social accountability processes should be explicitly linked to public sector delivery chains and ongoing reform efforts. Of significance is, for example, the potential for collaborative social accountability processes to advance sectoral goals such as Universal Health Care which depend on cross-sectoral strategies. This should be prioritized for support by the World Bank and other development partners.

- **Enabling environment:** Concern about the changing and shrinking civic space were widely shared across the spectrum of participants with the expectation that the World Bank and other multilaterals could help mitigate the challenges. It is important to go beyond merely opposing adverse practices. There is an imperative to support mutual endeavor, because trust can dispel assumptions and misunderstandings and help to channel growing citizens’ demands into public sector responsiveness.

- **Measurement of Impact** remains a challenge. The (necessary) focus on outcomes and goals needs to be complemented by attention to relational aspects, e.g. trust-building, that can significantly contribute to the success or failure of interventions and impact over time.
• **Exploring the potential of technology**: Social accountability practitioners can do more to reach and empower communities, parents and teachers through innovative technologies. In education, they are already improving school governance and learning outcomes.

• **‘Money Media’**: Leveraging the media strategically can be vital to the effectiveness of civil society campaigns and social accountability processes. Capture of the various media by the elites threatens civil society group’s ability to harness the power of the media. Civil society practitioners are using traditional communication tools and experimenting with novel approaches to empower citizens and engage authorities.

**Frontiers:**

• **Writing the next chapter of social accountability** calls for adopting an inclusive view of citizen action that is driven by local actors. In the context of lessons learned in the GPSA, the next chapter of civil society-led interventions encompasses synergies with public sector reform efforts. This is how social accountability can be institutionalized and find paths to addressing inequalities at scale.

• **Donor fragmentation**: The GPSA grantmaking model, based on long term, flexible funding is an example for other donors. The GPSA and the World Bank can catalyze collaborative engagement, but more is needed to tap into diverse and emerging opportunities. The ability to adapt to volatile political environments is an important imperative.

• **Environmental and Social Framework (ESF)**: There is an opportunity for CSOs to engage collaborative social accountability in the context of the World Bank’s ESF to support implementation and foster inclusion and integrate transparency, non-discrimination, and public participation.

• **Learning**: CSOs asked for more opportunities and resources for peer learning to identify issues that require further understanding. Not just what participatory tools to be utilized but rather what capacities need to be nurtured to be successful, such as relationship-building, collaborative engagement, conflict prevention and resolution, trust building and others.
5. Conclusion

Three overarching themes seemed to emerge from this year’s Forum. First, as Axel van Trotsenburg put it, we should “act jointly”, calling for collaboration and collective action amongst CSOs, government and international organizations. This means collaborative social accountability approaches, as deliberated at the Forum, can help governments and citizens to solve problems collectively, adaptively and in relationships of trust.

We reflect, again, on the sentiment of the keynote speaker who said: “The voice of a concerned citizen was like a spark that lit a whole fire. Listening to citizens and working with them can transform how we govern. In this case it led to an unimaginable program of inclusion.” The practice of engaging citizens and employing collective action, has been shown to yield good result.

Second, collaborative social accountability processes take time, but by reimagining state-society relationships and building of trust, they can contribute to improving services for all.

Third, social accountability is a diverse and growing area of practice. The Forum’s focus on the challenge of inclusion and its relationship to social accountability suggested that practitioners doing cutting-edge work should be better accounted for in the theoretical debates on social accountability; to remain relevant, the global conversation needs to shift in that direction.

The discussions launched at the Forum and captured in brief this report will be continued through the GPSA Knowledge Platform and sectoral and regional affinity groups that connect 300+ GPSA Global Partners throughout the year.

(Written by the GPSA team based on input collected by Forum rapporteurs)