

2021 Annual Workshop

Outcomes and Takeaways

Dynamic Accountability as a Systemic Change Enabler



**Accountable
Now**

GLOBAL STANDARDS LOCAL TRUST



INTRODUCTION

Accountable Now's 2021 annual workshop convened international and local civil society organisations (CSOs), donors, and other change makers to discuss dynamic accountability as a systemic change enabler.

The **dynamic accountability** approach that Accountable Now promotes, takes a systemic approach towards accountability that puts meaningful, inclusive and locally-led engagement with stakeholders at the forefront.

Throughout our **previous workshops** we have learnt that:

- Most of the sector acknowledges there is a need for systemic change, however progress towards realising systemic change is still limited.
- Actors in the Global South need more space and prominence to ensure balanced and meaningful discussions can take place.
- Accountability can and should play an important role in any systemic change processes.

In this context of mounting interest and acknowledgement of the need for systemic change, Accountable Now and a group of interested organisations and individuals co-designed our 2021 Annual Workshop.

We discussed how the civil society sector applies a dynamic accountability approach to address the challenges that individuals, organisations, and the sector as a whole face when it comes to creating systemic change, and what are some of the practical steps that ICSSOs and other actors can take to start shifting the power.

This outcome document aims to provide a summary of the workshop sessions, and key insights and reflections in accountability and systemic change. We are also sharing the feedback from participants on the event.

The workshop was held online from the **23 - 24 of November**. Facilitated by **Chilande Kuloba-Warria (Warande Advisory Centre)**, and with sessions led by contributors from **World YWCA** and **Connor Advisory, CIVICUS, Restless Development**, and with **Sarah Rose (Independent Consultant)**, who brought along four panellists.

WHERE DO WE, AS INDIVIDUALS, START THE DYNAMIC ACCOUNTABILITY JOURNEY?

The Mission or Me?: Intention, Mindset, Behaviour & Practice

Talking about accountability normally triggers us to think about others' accountability, or about accountability systems and processes. The first session challenged participants to reflect on their **individual** role within their organisations and how a very human trait might hinder our individual abilities to realise systemic change.

Leaders in organisations and their leadership practices can and do influence their ability to establish and reinforce accountability systems within organisations. The presenters of this session challenged participants with thought-provoking questions and reflections, insights and recommendations on how we can all do better. At the end of the session, participants were asked to:

1 Always filter their decisions and actions with the lens of 'is this serving me, or my mission' and to do so authentically, with intentions to always ensure that the right actions that serve the populations we seek to serve are taken.

2 Reinforce the practice of leading accountable practice in the organisation by:

- Establishing the right culture that creates safe spaces for authentic reflections and course correction.
- Align our governance structures with accountable practices and values.
- Reinforce the culture with appropriate policies; whistleblower policies,

safe from harm procedures etc.

- Ensure we hire the right people - not just those who are talented and experienced, but also those that have the soft skills needed to be accountable.

3 Recognise that all human beings are inherently prone to the 'me before the mission' mindset and we should be prepared to take bold actions through:

- Awareness of the patterns that put us in a position where we could put ourselves first.
- Urgency created to correct the negative actions/patterns.
- Acknowledgement of what is missing in order for change to happen. Recruitment should intentionally look for 'mission before me' traits. Systems ensuring individual accountability are crucial.
- Action taken which could include leaders holding themselves accountable for their actions.

Resources

- **What Comes First, the Mission or Me?**
This paper by Conner Advisory delves into the topic of the session, by providing real life examples and recommendations for leaders.

DYNAMIC ACCOUNTABILITY IN CRUCIAL PROGRAMMATIC PROCESSES

Key accountability moments: Insights and innovations in effective and meaningful constituent engagement

The best results of any intervention are achieved when the solutions are co-created, constituent led, and strategically aligned to a specific programmatic stages: **i)** design and implementation **ii)** grantee selection and **iii)** learning and evaluation stage.

The **CIVICUS** team presented three initiatives: Grassroots Solidarity Campaign, the CIVICUS solidarity fund and the Youth Action Lab as a case study of each key moment, showing how putting constituents in the driving seat of their work inspired new ways of working within the organisation and for their members.

After each session, participants were asked to reflect on their own experiences by discussing key questions around how they define success, how they facilitated constituent-led design and implementation processes, and what good practice they would wish funding mechanisms to prioritise. Key points from the conversation revolved around:

- Involvement of stakeholders 'before, during and after' increases ownership and trust.
- Flexibility with the 'way we engage' is crucial to allow more voices to be heard, especially those that traditionally do not have the opportunity to, e.g. youth and actors at the grassroots level.
- Co-created solutions are more relevant and durable, and make for better outcomes.

ter outcomes.

- Sometimes challenging traditional approaches to measuring success and using more innovative approaches e.g. storytelling and outcomes harvesting, can provide powerful learnings.
- Flexibility in terms of engagement and relationships with the people we strive to support.
- Documenting experiences, learnings and challenges helps in the self-reflection process, and allows for identification of solutions, and innovations as we go.
- Creating spaces for collective reflection and learning sharing. These allow us to gain insights into unintended outcomes and on how to improve.

Resources

- End of session participants' reflections
- Presentation slides

Links to the initiatives presented:

- Grassroots Solidarity Revolution
- CIVICUS Solidarity Fund
- Youth Action Lab

DYNAMIC ACCOUNTABILITY APPROACH TO GOVERNANCE AND REPRESENTATION

An open conversation on the risk of tokenism and the pursuit of true voice in governance and leadership

This session, led by **Restless Development**, shared successes and failures on governance and leadership from the **Development Alternative**. The facilitators honed in on how strong leadership is integral to identifying 'pockets of power', thus avoiding tokenism and ensuring that 'true voice' can be expressed.

Avoiding tokenism in governance spaces

- Recruitment process and engagement needs to build their capacity, confidence and security to contribute, such as through a youth SC member buddy system or prep meetings.
- Build a concrete role around their specific expertise / interest, and not just their lived experience as young people, to help ground their contribution and fulfill a concrete role, in addition to providing general advice.
- Create a good environment for youth voice to be heard and feel equal - Pay attention to internal member power dynamics, for example putting a partner youth staff member and CEOs on the SC.
- Don't be tokenistic! If you want youth voice, you need to create the conditions for it to be heard, and doing this well takes time and resources.

Findings from the Development Alternative

Some of the key learnings shared emphasised:

- The importance of paying attention to cultural norms, including different perceptions of time, and to Global north vs. global south organisational power dynamics. Allowing smaller group discussions can go a long way in getting voices heard.
- Build a concrete role around specific expertise and interest, and not just lived experience as part of whatever minority group, to help ground their contribution and fulfill a concrete role, in addition to providing general advice.

— It is not enough 'getting people at the table'. Capacity, confidence and security to contribute should be enabled, including creating a welcoming environment.

— Language and lack of online connectivity is an equity issue that deserves to be properly staffed and resourced.

— Efficiency and Inclusion need to be balanced: 'efficiency' is a global north value. We should balance consent vs protocol decision making.

Participants engaged in small group conversations reflecting on the intricacies of accountability, power and leadership in fostering and/or (unintentionally) undermining power shift.

Resources

- **Development Alternative presentation:** The presentation gives an overview of the Development Alternative, and major learnings from the core team.
- **Feedback double loop:** This tool supports deeper learning and reflection from successes and failures.

LISTENING INSIGHTS FROM FOUR DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

What difference does listening make to the accountability processes?

In the final session, participants explored how listening contributes to dynamic accountability and greater impact. Four panellists from different organisations that focus on youth presented examples on the difference 'deep listening' makes to equitable relationships and power shifts, to changing internal culture, and to impact. Our panellists challenged us to think about the assumptions our organisations make about direction and strategy, how we can be better at listening, and who is responsible.

Ashley Green-Thompson, presented how **Act Ubumbano** originated from deep listening exercises by Civil Society actors in Southern Africa. As they challenged predefined rigid logframes, they started walking the path together with flexible outcomes to develop new forms of action for social justice that contribute to the transformation of structures of injustice and inequality by accompanying and supporting communities in their struggles.

Ashley delved on how Act Ubumbano created a deliberate space to challenge exiting power dynamics, how actors were asked to look inwards to gain insights into their own internal complicity, how the journey started without predetermined outcomes, and the creation of new language on impact that speaks to the communities' struggles rather than to logframes.

Drew Miller from the UK youth organisation, **Leap Confronting Conflict**, presented how youth is involved in the organisation's work from recruitment to programmes development. Leap Confronting Conflict goes beyond consultation processes, and works in partnership with young people to enable them to participate in decision making.

Drew focused on the lessons learned and the culture change undergone. Some of the crucial points shared were:

- Including youth from the very beginning in co-creation processes.
- Planning and factoring for time and resources that innovative and smart risk taking approaches to meaningful discussions require.
- MEL our work to maintain the youth voices.
- Support youth to be able to meaningfully participate, increasing their confidence.
- The need for spaces for the organization staff to reflect on the cultural change driven by the co-production approach.
- Bring your authentic self that you expect from other stakeholders.

Muthoni Thuo-Ngunjiri, presented the grantee-centered approach of the **Segal Family Foundation** to grant making. Muthoni emphasised the enhanced trust that the relationship has built over the years with grantees has brought, and has prompted, grantees to be more prone to give feedback.

Muthoni explained how the trust-based relationships are built and how grantees organisations are supported where and when they are needed. Segal Family Foundation understands that these organisations know better what the challenges are in the communities they work.

Raquel Alvarez and **Gabriella Rusk** presented **SOS Children's Village International's** work on improving 'leaving care processes' and what the experience of this is for the young people who participate.

Lived experience from young people was a fundamental piece of input for the decision making of the project. Listening made a big difference and ensured the work was relevant. Youth participants were compensated for their time and given support for participation to share their lived experiences. The preparation required for meaningful participation was highlighted.

Resources

- [Act Ubumbano Outcome Report](#)
- [Let's Talk Conflict podcast](#)

What Next...

Thank you to all participants and facilitators for joining us for two days of challenging and insightful sessions. We would like to continue conversations on the themes discussed. If you have a comment or suggestion, or if you would like to share an idea of how we can support initiatives to advance dynamic accountability in the CSO sector, please contact **Hector Payo** at hpayo@accountablenow.org.

Other ways to stay involved:

Join the **Dynamic Accountability Community of Practice**.

Share your 'business card' and connect with other participants you met with on [this jamboard](#).

Subscribe to the Accountable Now newsletter on [our website](#).

Add/view shared resources [here](#).

Accountability and Systemic Change

abling those affected by decisions to contribute to have the final say. The idea of 'Going beyond consultation'.

Key areas we must work deliberately to improve include:

2 Relationship building: Trust based relationships and the ideas of 'deep listening' being fundamental to successful relationships. Invest time to build these relationships.

3 Appropriate role designations: ensure you bring the right people to the table making the decisions around intentions/vision, resources and resource allocation and final decision making. Avoiding tokenism and recognising and elevating community expertise.

4 Participative Governance: which calls for ensuring inclusivity and deliberate effort to bring 'true' voices to the table in terms of representation and abilities.

5 Shared decision making: going beyond asking for input and instead en-

hard conversation
business
efficiency
community
constituents
first step
courage
lot of example
inspiration
key starting point
limitations
factors
challenge power position
position of donor
self
talk
tough questions
love-
eye
voice of grassroots
best practice
remote action
temptation
solidarity
production
personal opinion
listening
voice
number
decision making
profound honesty
message
inclusion
tokenism
based work
beneficiaries
mission
philosophy
space
trust
impact
meaningful way
lot of patience

An average of **35 individuals** participated throughout the annual workshop. **17 participants** have filled out the survey and the overall feedback has been **very positive**. **Areas for improvement** are around **too much content for the limited time** in some of the sessions, and the **need for more guidance on what was expected from participants during the small breakout rooms**. Please find more on [this dashboard](#).



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c/o MACHWERK in der ALTen Münze
Am Krögel 2
10179 Berlin