At this year's Annual Workshop on *November 20 and 21, 2019,* **Accountable Now** brought together over **30 participants** from local civil society organisations (CSOs), international NGOs and donors for a two-day workshop in London UK. The purpose of this workshop was to have an open dialogue on the current barriers that prevent the sector from shifting power to the communities that we serve.

Our aim was to assess the context as participants currently experience it and begin to find solutions for the challenges that the sector is facing in shifting the power in donor-grantee relations. Working collaboratively, participants transformed the issues that they identified into actionable solutions that they can start implementing in their own organisations and sectors.

Why discuss the power shift?

Increasingly, CSOs and donors recognise the importance of implementing methods such as community engagement, beneficiary feedback or advisory committees so that CSOs are accountable to the people they work for and with and not only to donors.

As concerted efforts are undertaken to gradually acknowledge the importance and need for a power-shift, some donors have implemented new processes and approaches that are more flexible and give room for CSOs to adapt their projects and thus involve the people who are impacted by their work. At the same time, CSOs have also started to change their accountability practices so they are not simply top-down. Yet despite this, too often, grantees and donors work in parallel instead of in a partnership.

We need to begin by working on adjusting some of the existing power dynamics between donors and grantees. Spaces for co-creation between donors and grantees are more common but power imbalances continue to permeate our sector. In line with this, the main goal of our workshop was identify concrete solutions to strengthen the relationship and collaboration between donors and grantees.

About this document

We hope that you find this outcome document useful in navigating the questions and themes that we raised during these two days.

By outlining our methodologies and dynamics, we will walk you through the flow of our sessions and thought processes so you can:

Problematize power within donor-grantee relations

Understand the causes and consequences of unequal power relations (i.e. status-quo)

Come up with solutions applicable to your organisation.

In this guide, we also attempt to immerse you in the discussions by sharing what our participants had to say and by presenting the many existing tools and approaches that were showcased by our participating organisations.

If you would like, please feel free to share the solutions that you identify based on problems described in this document. Thank you for your commitment to the power-shift!

Acknowledging power

This session's objective was to have participants think of one word that describes power in an effort for everyone to acknowledge that they have power to shift. Participants were asked to reflect on the following phrase: "**Power is available to everyone, no matter their position or title**" - *what do you think?*

Participants indicated that power is contextual and not static, meaning that it also depends on the environment and how power is perceived by the actors themselves. Given the complexity of the question of power and participants' diverse backgrounds, some tended to say that everyone has access to power but not to the same degree, while others said that power may be unavailable to those in repressed environments and that barriers have to be removed to enable them.

From a conceptual discussion of power, we then moved to consider **what power means for donors and grantees in real life**.

· **For donors**, power was understood as: having access to information and resources (i.e. funding and capacities); an ability to set the agenda and influence other power holders; pick up on trends and have a network/connection with different actors.

· **For grantees**, power came in the form of: representation for individuals and communities; accessibility to stakeholders with an ability to understand where there are knowledge gaps that need to be addressed; language and

communication to explain needs and narratives.

Understanding that power is in many ways elusive, it was still easier for participants to pinpoint where power lies for donors. This was an opportunity for partners to analyse and reflect on their power relations and current power imbalances.

With this understanding of how power works in a partnership, they can be in a position to shift the power in accordance to their shared principles.

The Power Struggle

After an in-depth conversation on power, we heard from 4 participants on their first-hand experiences with the donor-grantee relations and how power imbalances have impacted their work. Moreover, we learned about changes that donors have implemented or wish to implement, the challenges and barriers they face to engage in a more horizontal way with grantees.

Dumi Gatsha from Success Capital NGO shared their organisation's struggles in meeting donor requirements of quantitative measurements when qualitative experiences of queer youth are ones that can encompass story-telling and personal experiences in relationships. They spoke about proximity determining superiority – NGOs that are closer to donors in location, especially in the Global North, are more likely to secure funding.

In the context of the power struggle, they cautioned against these funder practices/assumptions: that there is no capacity in some countries and communities, prescribing narratives and generalising contexts on the African continent, extractive approaches and limiting LGBT funding to HIV.

Venetia Boon presented on **Comic Relief's** organisational shift in raising funds, their new approach is to work closely with the people instead of structures and processes only to learn more about their individual experiences.

She also shared the difficulties of project-based funding, and their plans for a more long-term funds approach. They also want to ensure they strengthen and maintain trust from their grantees so that they increase their core funding proposal applications.

She discussed the donor's plans to bring in people to share their lived experiences and provide context, given that as a UK-based organisation they rely on public support and donations. This means that they their strategic campaigns need to ensure issue/cause accessibility and a willingness for donations.

Amelia Yeo from **Restless Development**

presented on research by the Development Alternative consortium to inform new ways of working with youth civil society that address power imbalances and re-position youth civil society as credible, accountable actors and equal players in development.

The identified challenges faced by youth civil society are: limited and inconsistent resources, organisational leadership and capacity gaps, ineffective cross-sector coordination, negative perceptions of youth, a restrictive context, and stringent reporting and compliance requirements.

Amelia highlighted that grant applications and funding due diligence requirements limited youth civil society in terms of creativity and innovative ideas. The way that youth civil society is responding is through bettering relationships among youth, government and donors, and by ensuring that there are more networking and knowledge-sharing opportunities among them.

TOWARDS A THRIVING, CREDIBLE, AND SUSTAINABLE YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY

READ THE YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY REPORT BY THE RESTLESS DEVELOPMENT CONSORTIUM.

Presenting on reporting practices at **OSF**, **Megan Colnar** spoke about the piloting of different reporting methods, and each had been recommended by their grantees. The goal of this study was to better understand compliance requirements, how reporting was received by grantee organisations, and how to optimise practices from other partners and grantees that they work with.

Some of the challenges right off the start were that all data collection methods/internal preparation and conversations took time and that a steep learning curve was present with all new reporting methods.

The main reflections were as follows:

WHEN QUESTIONS WERE TURNED TO GRANTEES, THIS REQUEST AND POWER IN ITSELF MADE THEM A BIT UNCOMFORTABLE

WITH COMPLIANCE EVOLVING – DONORS CAN OFFER A MUCH MORE FLEXIBLE AND CUSTOMIZED APPROACH, BUT SETTING CLEAR MINIMUM STANDARDS AND CONVERSATIONS WITH GRANTEES IS STILL REQUIRED;

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT AND JOINT REFLECTION WERE HIGHLY VALUED BY PROGRAM OFFICERS.

Moving forward, OSF's goal is to integrate intersectional equity into grant practices.

With the above experiences shared by grantees and donors who are navigating the power struggle, useful reflection questions were then discussed among the participants:

• *What lessons can we draw from these experiences?*
• *What can we say about power?*
• *Where does it lie in these examples?*
• *Or where have they tried to shift it?*
• *What has been achieved?*

During this Q&A, participants brought up insightful contributions from their sectors on matters such as: why grantees may not feel comfortable taking on opportunities to change relationships, as shown in the reporting practices study example.

Some participants shared that grantees always have to ask how they can get more money to do their 'real work' especially with the lack of investment in Monitoring, Evaluating and Learning (MEL); core funding reporting requirements also produced anxiety in grantees.

One participant found that the indicators and measurement itself was not personalised enough as data had to aggregated to show impact. Other points that were brought up highlighted the importance of donors discussing with their grantees the challenges that they themselves face to encourage both partners to express their successes, challenges, and failures to help balance power.

Dissecting the Power Shift

In this session, participants had to identify the core issues, root causes, and consequences of not shifting the power. In a mixed group of local CSOs, INGOs and donors - participants were provided the following instructions to develop 'problem trees' on the Power Shift:

· The problem (focal problem) is written in the centre of the flip chart and becomes the 'trunk' of the tree. The problem: *Donors, CSOs, and INGOs are not able to shift power to communities.*

· Identify the causes of the focal problem - these become the roots.

· Identify the consequences, which in turn become the branches.

After lengthy discussions (and many problem trees) within and among groups, we wanted to capture the key factors identified by groups per category: causes, problem and consequences. The findings are represented in the graph on the following page. While reviewing the crowd-sourced problem tree below, you can use these questions as a framework for your own reflections:

• *Does this represent the reality? Are the economic, political and socio-cultural dimensions to the problem considered?*
• *What are the most serious consequences? Which are of most concern?*
• *Which causes are easiest/most difficult to address?*
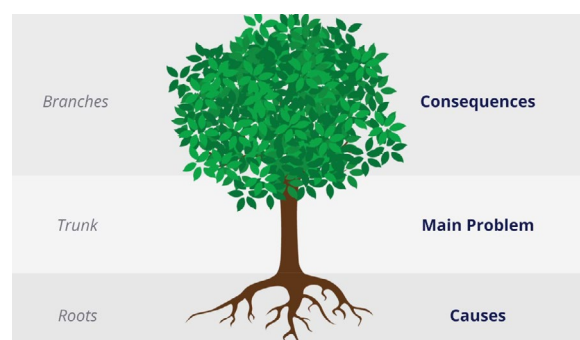
The illustrated flowchart represents the problem trees that participants worked on during the workshop, with key themes that were discussed. Similar to a tree, the causes represented in dark red boxes depict structural and systemic causes as roots that have not allowed the power shift to take place. Groups listed some of the following underlying causes: colonialist thinking and its deep-rooted impacts; societal inequalities and disadvantaged minority groups; status quo and current power relations (between donor-INGO, INGO-local CSO, donor-local CSO); politics, ideologies and political environments that are seeing a rise of populism and shrinking civic space; capitalism; favouritism and broken promises in donor-grantee relations. These structural causes prevent a power shift from taking place, but because of their deep rootedness, it was accepted that this Workshop was not the space to take these conversations further. Yet it was still necessary to acknowledge them.

The Problem Tree

CONSEQUENCES

SURVIVAL OF BIGGER CSOs	LACK OF LOCAL OWNERSHIP & CAPACITY BUILDING	COMPETITION BETWEEN GRANTEES	FRUSTRATION AMONG ALL ACTORS	SAME ORGANISATIONS FUNDED	OVERWORKED STAFF
	UNACCOUNTABILITY OF DONORS; HYPER AC-COUNTABLE GRANTEES		UNRECORDED LOSSES AND FAILURES	LACK OF INVESTMENT IN CSO NETWORKS	SELECTION OF STAFF WITH ENGLISH SKILLS

PROBLEM: NO POWER SHIFT

CAUSES

EXCLUDED STAKEHOLDERS	SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE	RISK AVERSION	SELF-PRESERVATION	LACK OF TRUST	LACK OF RESOURCES

COLONIALISM	PRIVILEGE & ELITISM	SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE	BUY-IN FROM INDI-VIDUAL DONORS	FAVOURITISM IN DONOR/GRANTEE RELATIONSHIP	CAPITALISM

STRUCTURAL/SYSTEMIC CAUSES

As conversations moved forward, practical and organisational challenges were discussed which began to help us identify some key challenges for the civil society sector. The orange boxes above give an overview of some of the most pertinent causes to the failure to shift power: these were identified through a clustering process where we summarised main discussion points.

Taking the conversation further, participants then identified the consequences of their being a lack of shifting power. This helped contextualise the problem to each participants' experience – whether they worked in a donor organisation, INGO or smaller CSO.
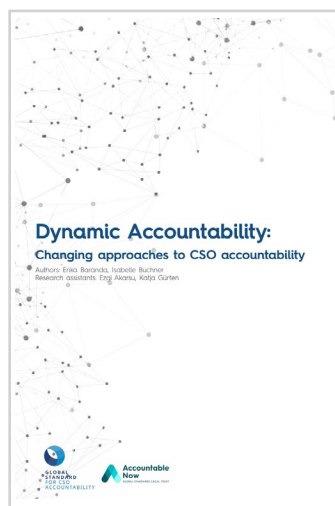
By the end of the first day, we had gained a holistic overview of how the problem of a lack of shifting of power manifests itself in the civil society sector. With the input and perspective of a variety of actors in the sector, the problem trees aimed to reflect the lived experiences of those in the room so that the following day, real, tangible and useful solutions to the problem could be identified.

Dynamic Accountability:
Changing approaches to CSO accountability
Authors: Erika Baranda, Isabelle Buchner
Research assistants: Ezgi Akarsu, Katja Gürten

READ THE APPLIED RESEARCH PAPER HERE.

We then got a glimpse of Dynamic Accountability in action with **Biljana Spaskova from FemPlatz**. Through CIVICUS' Resilient Roots project, FemPlatz have been piloting a variety of accountability mechanisms increase engagement with their primary constituents, i.e. those they work for and with. In the context of Serbia, where organisations advocating for and strengthening women's rights are facing the pressures of fierce shrinking civic space, organisation's need to find new, innovative ways to work effectively with their stakeholders.

FemPlatz is a great example of how engaging with primary constituents led to a transformation of their organisation's work that better met the needs of women in Serbia. This of course came with many challenges: with a lack of resources, and the need for dedication and flexibility to adapt to new approaches to accountability, the situation was not conducive to easy change. Yet through adaptation and integration of Dynamic Accountability, what resulted was organisaitonal legitimacy and empowerment of FemPlatz's primary constituents.

DAY TWO

On day two, it was time to focus on the solutions. Before diving straight into the question of how to solve the problem trees that were drawn the previous day, participants heard from a range of new presenters the different tools and approaches currently being used in different organisation's that aim to address and accelerate shifting power.

Elisa Lopez from Accountable Now presented Dynamic Accountability: an approach to accountability that pushes CSOs to engage meaningfully with stakeholders to form mutual partnerships.

The bottom-up approach of Dynamic Accountability helps organisations listen to and work with those stakeholders who they may not often be accountable to. Find out more about this approach in our applied research paper!

Rachel Smith from Global Giving presented how Global Giving is transforming the aid and philanthropy community to accelerate community-led change through technology. Their online platform takes a different approach to philanthropic giving. Featuring community-led projects and initiatives, donors are more aware of the thousands of projects that exist around the world and have the opportunity to fund projects that aim to truly change communities.

We then got taken into the world of grant-making processes with **Inga Ingulfsen from Candid**. With the development of a guide, Candid helps grant makers share knowledge that improves participatory and inclusive processes. The guide emphasizes the importance of transparency and value-based roles to ensure that grantmakers are confident in knowing that their grant leads to equitable and inclusive outcomes.
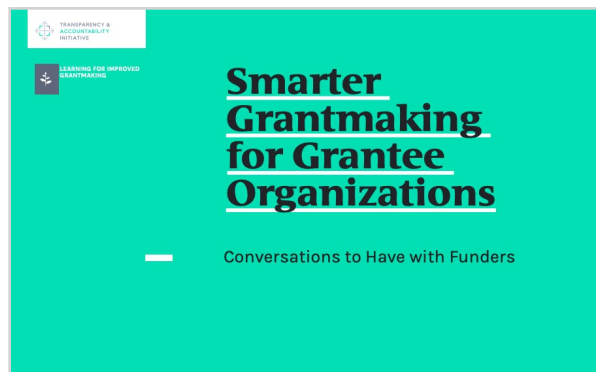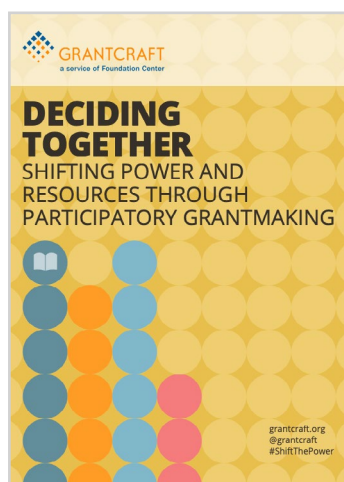
From Problems to Solutions

We ended the day with an extensive conversation on the solutions to our problem trees. To facilitate this conversation for participants, we flipped the problem trees around: collating all of the identified causes into overarching categories and their sub-causes, participants used this Master Problem Tree to identify specific solutions for each identified cause.

Nick Deychakiwsky from the Mott Foundation then gave us an insight into community foundations where he shared his experiences of local resources being used for local needs.

Community foundations are locally established and governed, and receive resources to distribute to their communities. They rely on a diverse range of local funding sources to sustain local civil society. This helps facilitate a power shift in the civil society sector: community foundations are not centralized in larger cities, but instead work in and among smaller, local communities where horizontal relationships are encouraged to create fair and effective donor-grantee relationships.

Lastly, **Alison Miranda from Transparency and Accountability Initiative** (TAI) presented TAI'S smart grant-making guide. This short but insightful document gives organisation's some starter questions to ask themselves to raise awareness on how foundations and CSOs can encourage smarter grantmaking, and thereby a power shift in the civil society sector.

Take a look at the diagram on the next page to see some brief solutions that were identified for each main cause. But don't worry, this is not all we have to say. We are currently developing a quick guide on how to improve the donor-grantee relationship so as to promote a power shift in the civil society sector which will include a more extensive account and analysis of proposed solutions.

Using the problem and solution trees created during our two day workshop, we will have a easy-to-use guide ready in 2020 that we hope kicks-start conversations in the sector on how and why the power shift needs to take place.
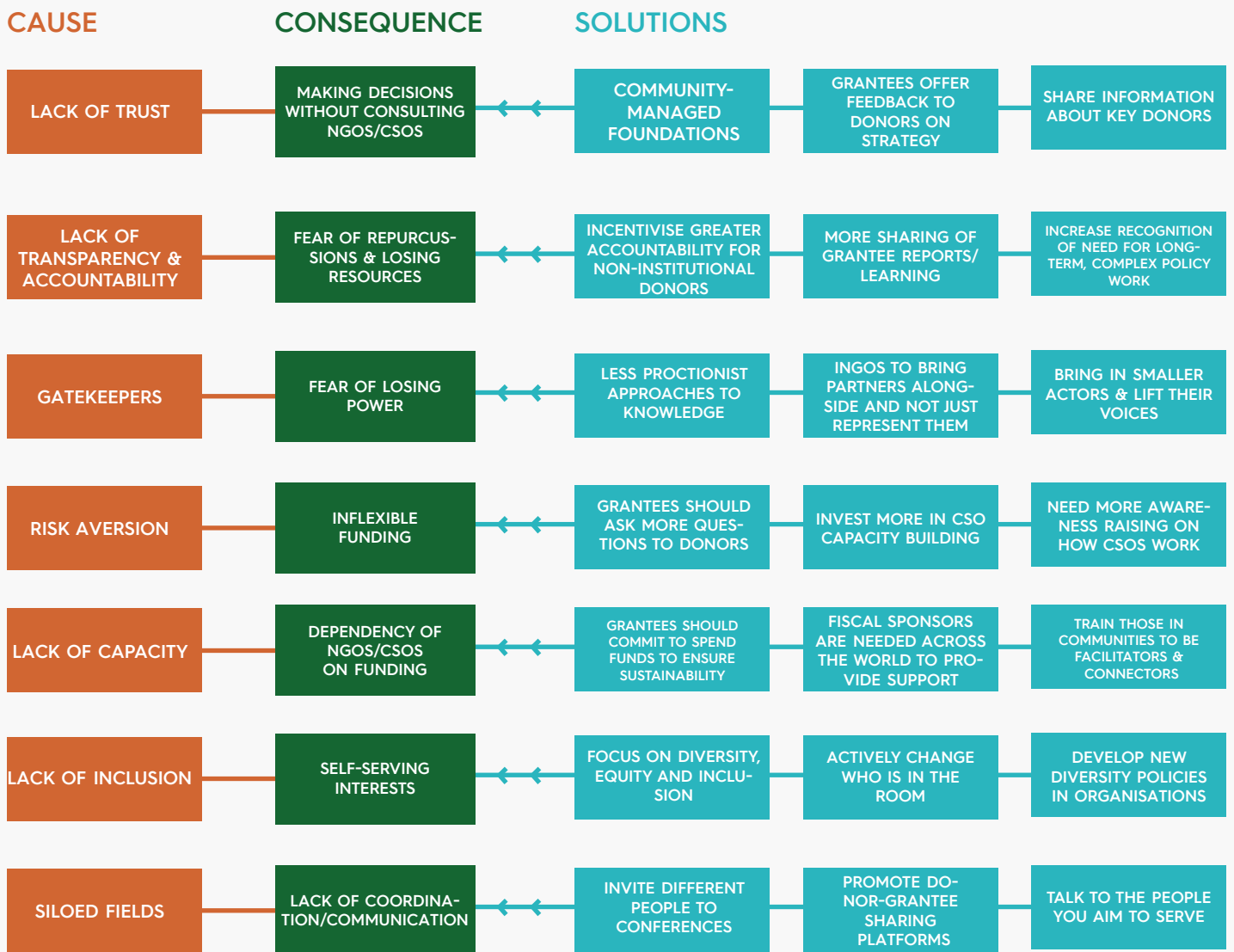
The Solutions to our Problem Trees

CAUSE	CONSEQUENCE	SOLUTIONS		
LACK OF TRUST	MAKING DECISIONS WITHOUT CONSULTING NGOS/CSOS	COMMUNITY-MANAGED FOUNDATIONS	GRANTEES OFFER FEEDBACK TO DONORS ON STRATEGY	SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT KEY DONORS
LACK OF TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY	FEAR OF REPURCUS-SIONS & LOSING RESOURCES	INCENTIVISE GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY FOR NON-INSTITUTIONAL DONORS	MORE SHARING OF GRANTEE REPORTS/ LEARNING	INCREASE RECOGNITION OF NEED FOR LONG-TERM, COMPLEX POLICY WORK
GATEKEEPERS	FEAR OF LOSING POWER	LESS PROCTIONIST APPROACHES TO KNOWLEDGE	INGOS TO BRING PARTNERS ALONG-SIDE AND NOT JUST REPRESENT THEM	BRING IN SMALLER ACTORS & LIFT THEIR VOICES
RISK AVERSION	INFLEXIBLE FUNDING	GRANTEES SHOULD ASK MORE QUES-TIONS TO DONORS	INVEST MORE IN CSO CAPACITY BUILDING	NEED MORE AWARE-NESS RAISING ON HOW CSOS WORK
LACK OF CAPACITY	DEPENDENCY OF NGOS/CSOS ON FUNDING	GRANTEES SHOULD COMMIT TO SPEND FUNDS TO ENSURE SUSTAINABILITY	FISCAL SPONSORS ARE NEEDED ACROSS THE WORLD TO PRO-VIDE SUPPORT	TRAIN THOSE IN COMMUNITIES TO BE FACILITATORS & CONNECTORS
LACK OF INCLUSION	SELF-SERVING INTERESTS	FOCUS ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLU-SION	ACTIVELY CHANGE WHO IS IN THE ROOM	DEVELOP NEW DIVERSITY POLICIES IN ORGANISATIONS
SILOED FIELDS	LACK OF COORDINA-TION/COMMUNICATION	INVITE DIFFERENT PEOPLE TO CONFERENCES	PROMOTE DO-NOR-GRANTEE SHARING PLATFORMS	TALK TO THE PEOPLE YOU AIM TO SERVE

The diagram above aims to give an overview of the main problems and solutions discussed during the second day of our workshop. But we will go further. There is more to extract from the conversations had, so keep an eye on our guide for 2020 that will give actionable solutions for donors, grantees and other actors in the civil society sector to overcome the problems that face them when trying to shift power.

For any questions on our workshop experience or if you want to get in touch with us to find more about the power shift in the civil society sector, get in touch with Rocio Moreno Lopez, Executive Director at rmlopez@accountablenow.org.