

Accountability and the Post-2015 Agenda

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Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

IISD welcomes the interest of UN Member States, through ECOSOC, the HLPF and the DCF in exploring the characteristics of a mutual accountability framework for the post-2015 agenda. Among the characteristics of mutual accountability is that review mechanisms are robust, credible, impartial and evidence-based, as well as transparent.

IISD does not regard accountability and monitoring as extraneous instruments to measure progress after substantive work is done in goal setting. Instead, they are integral and substantive policy instruments themselves that are critical in supporting effective implementation. Surveys by governments done by the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) consistently conclude that implementation remains a key challenge for developed and developing countries alike. A recurring impediment to policy implementation is the establishment of coherent and coordinated programs.

Hence the design challenge for an accountability framework is making the framework itself be coherent and coordinated, in a way that clear roles and responsibilities—in essence who is accountable for what—are identified before actual monitoring begins.

Here, the WTO Trade Policy Review Mechanism, highlighted in the Note for this meeting, provides a useful example. That mechanism actually comprises three different levels of monitoring that support one another. Reviews of individual member country programs and performance measured against trade policy reform targets are done in partnership with the WTO Secretariat and member countries themselves. The review mechanism sets out clear methodologies that are replicated in each country review, so as to allow comparison across member countries.

The second feature is global reporting. These comprehensive reports comprise the annual global state of trade report and the UNDP report, which does an overall review of MDG 8 as well as an examination and synthesis of country-specific performance. These two main elements—country assessments based on coherent methods, measurement criteria and data—allow cross-country comparisons, while the global assessments provide a single global umbrella under which common impediments as well as breakthroughs can be reported. The purpose of these reviews has not been to isolate or criticize countries and pinpoint shortcomings that can be used in formal dispute settlement process. Instead, they are intended to identify ways in which performance may be improved.

With this overarching objective of building a review mechanism that is coherent and coordinated, I wanted to comment briefly on three areas suggested by the President of the General Assembly:

- First, incentives;
- Second, capacity building in the specific context of an accountability mechanism; and
- Third, the role of multistakeholders in this emerging framework.

Turning first to **incentives**, as a framing concept, international accountability only works if its intent is to galvanize support.

Permit me to give an example from the international environmental regime. The Montreal Protocol has rightly been called one of the most successful international environmental treaties. When adopted more than 25 years ago, it broke new ground in a number of ways: it set out mandatory data reporting with defined and comparable data in order to track progress. It set out new and specific areas of cooperation, from the exchange of scientific information, to technology transfer, to the creation of a highly innovative funding mechanism designed to support national implementation.

In those rare cases in which ongoing monitoring led to the conclusion that non-compliance was occurring, then specific capacity building was increased—including through accessing support through the dedicated fund as well as the Global Environment Facility, with the goal of helping the member country struggling move as quickly as possible back into compliance. The overarching principle here is not that non-compliance—or, more broadly, non-attainment—triggers punitive actions. Quite the opposite: reviews of country performance helped countries with focused technical and financial assistance.

This leads to the second area—that of **capacity building** and specifically, capacity support needed in the area of information, data, indicators and statistics.

The most effective reviews tend to yield quantitative conclusions. Numbers capture the attention of Ministers, the public and the international community. Building an effective review mechanism that generates quantitative observations requires as its starting point sound data that is generated at the national level, and that is comparable among countries in order to track comparative progress among countries.

Monitoring systems can only work if there is a clear reference point: that is, a clear set of baseline reference points that accurately mirrors current circumstances, from rates of poverty and inequality, to access to adequate nutrition, to pollution indices. It is against these baselines that review mechanisms and monitoring proceed. Experience from national statistical offices shows that baselines are adjusted as new methods or data sources come into play, but these adjustments must be done in a clear and transparent way or else credibility in the reference baseline quickly evaporates.

Establishing both robust and comprehensive data that go through quality assurance tests and are built up over time to meet the threshold of a national statistic is complicated and costly. We know that some 40 countries still lack sufficient data to track their national performance against MDG One. When we move to more complex goals that address sustainable development, countries will need capacity-building support to collect and organize data as the main reference point to measure progress.

There is no scarcity of data—on the contrary, there are hundreds of data and indicator sets, and the amount of data being generated daily is mushrooming. The clustering of data sets into indicators that are accessible to the public in showing conditions and trends is an important opportunity for the post-2015 agenda to bridge data with broader public engagement. Our experience at IISD in working on indicators at the country and regional levels is that an optimal number of indicators to track sustainable development trends is roughly 30, ideally organized into a kind of “dashboard” arrangement.

This work is complex and painstaking, and marks an important challenge to coordinate capacity-building challenges through national statistical offices.

Finally, with your permission I'll mention **multistakeholder partnerships**.

Accountability rests with national governments, accountable for their actions and explaining the value for money delivered to national and sub-federal congresses or parliaments. UN organizations have accountability mechanisms in place to ensure robust financial controls, but challenges remain in measuring value for money in program performance delivery.

There is an opportunity to identify how Civil Society Organizations can provide invaluable information to complement monitoring. One example is the use by the ILO of information from trade unions in the compilation of information. Other examples are the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which reviews hundreds of data sets and information sets and models generated by researchers, governments, non-governmental organizations, WIPO and its Innovation Index and the ITU, both of which use data from private and other sources in different measurement systems.

Let me close by mentioning two additional areas. The first is so-called citizen science: we have seen a remarkable expansion of data from mobile phones. The challenge isn't the supply of information. Instead, it is the capacity of national governments and international organizations to make use of this information to complement their national statistics or observations. We view this explosion of citizen generated-data as an important opportunity. But it needs to be thought through carefully, and there are now examples from government agencies—for example the United States Environmental Protection Agency—in structuring citizen data.

The second is how to frame data and indicators that reflect the linkages inherent in sustainable development. We suggest framing such information under the rubric of emerging systems of or well-being statistical frameworks that show different kinds of values that we cherish.

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