



DEVELOPMENT
ALTERNATIVE

COOKBOOK FOR YOUTH-LED ACCOUNTABILITY



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PARTNERS



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INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is about how to design and implement youth-led accountability initiatives. In 2019, we launched the *Development Alternative*, a consortium of youth and international development organisations that came together to strengthen young people's voice and agency in development. As part of that, the consortium co-designed and tested a 'model for change'. This model placed young people at the heart of an accountability process which aimed to improve the design and implementation of development projects. The model for change was piloted in Uganda and Madagascar during 2020 and 2021. Although the programme was curtailed in 2021 due to funding cuts, we captured some of the emerging lessons from the approach about what works.

This book captures some of what we learnt about how to design and run a youth-led accountability initiative. It is based on research, evidence and learning we documented during the *Development Alternative*, and seeks to make it useful for practitioners. We have tried to boil down what we have learnt about the key ingredients for youth-led accountability, and how they can be combined.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is intended for youth-led organisations, and those working with young people who may be planning a youth-led accountability project. We do not think of it as a toolkit or 'best practice' guide, as there

are many ways for young people to hold development actors to account. Instead, we think of it as a cookbook. It describes six core ingredients of youth-led accountability, and what we learnt about each ingredient through piloting the model for change. Each of the key ingredients has a chapter of its own.

6 core ingredients for youth-led accountability:

-  Youth leadership
-  Transparency and access to information
-  Community awareness and engagement
-  Mechanisms to listen and gather feedback
-  Building trust and collaboration with development actors
-  Supporting development actors to respond to feedback

Our cookbook finishes with our recipe – the model for change – and some tips for 'cooking' with youth-led accountability ingredients. While we did not get the chance to scale and sustain our own recipe for youth-led accountability, we hope that this book inspires others to design and implement different recipes for youth-led accountability.



SOME TERMS WE USE

Accountability	<p>A simple way of explaining accountability is that when an organisation makes promises to people, people are empowered to see that those promises are kept. For an organisation to be accountable, we should expect it to do three things. It should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>Give an account</i> of what it is doing. This means being transparent about its activities and taking active steps to inform members of the community about its work and the standards they should expect.2. <i>Take into account</i> the views of those who may be impacted by its activities. This means listening to those who may be positively or negatively affected by a project or programme, and that decisions are informed by the views of the community.3. <i>Be held to account</i> by those it affects or intends to serve. This means providing mechanisms by which communities can exercise limited powers over an organisation to ensure it keeps its promises and fixes things when they go wrong.
Community	<p>Those living in a local area who may be affected by development projects. Some people may be direct users of a particular project, while others may not. Communities do not always have the same experience: women, young people, those living with disabilities, those from minority ethnic groups or religions, and those with different sexual orientations may have different experiences.</p>
Development projects	<p>Projects that aim to improve economic, social, or human development in an area. These may be implemented by a range of different development actors, and could be anything from infrastructure (for example road building), services (for example healthcare) or other reforms that aim to contribute to development.</p>
Development actors	<p>Organisations and institutions that are implementing development projects in local communities. These may include government, private sector bodies, local or national civil society organisations, international non-governmental organisations, and multilateral bodies such as the UN or the World Bank.</p>
Donors	<p>Those funding development projects. In low-income countries, funding often comes from overseas, and through complex chains of organisations, making accountability more difficult.</p>
Youth / young people	<p>There is no fixed international definition of 'youth'. For the purposes of data collection, the UN defines youth as 15-24 years old, but other countries and organisations use different definitions.</p>

THE CASE OF YOUTH-LED ACCOUNTABILITY

While this book focuses on how young people can hold development actors to account, it is helpful to briefly define what youth-led accountability is and why it is a useful approach.

WHAT IS YOUTH-LED ACCOUNTABILITY?

Put simply, youth-led accountability means that young people are involved in supporting development actors to *give account* of their work, to *take into account* the views of the communities and young people, and to *be held to account* to ensure projects align with the needs and wishes of communities.

Young people can do this by:

Helping
communities
understand
development
projects that
affect them

Gathering
feedback from
communities
about their
priorities and
their views
about projects
that affect them

Advocating
for community
priorities with
development
actors

Facilitating
dialogue
between
development
actors and
communities to
solve problems

Young people can play a variety of roles in this process and undertake some or all these tasks.



WHY PURSUE YOUTH-LED ACCOUNTABILITY?

The recipes in this book address two key challenges that young people and marginalised communities often face when development projects are being designed and implemented in their community.

01 // Lack of accountability can cause development projects to fail

The first challenge is that development projects often do not work as well as they could for people and communities. Projects are often designed or implemented without enough consideration to the specific local needs of people they are intended to benefit. They can also do harm and deepen injustice if the needs of people, or impacts of a project on certain groups are overlooked. That means that projects can fail to reach expectations or deliver positive outcomes for everyone.

One key reason for design and implementation failures is that projects lack accountability to those they serve. Lack of engagement with communities at the design stage can lead to projects that are inappropriately designed for those they are intended to serve. During implementation, lack of monitoring or opportunities for communities to give feedback about the project can lead to cutting corners or problems being overlooked. Where projects are accountable – people are consulted during their design, people are listened to during their implementation and actions are taken to resolve problems identified by those they are supposed to benefit - they are more effective. However, accountability is often absent, or given a low priority by development actors.

02// Young people's agency and power to make change is frequently overlooked

A second challenge is that even when accountability takes place, young people are often overlooked, and their voices are not heard in decisions about development. When development actors consult with communities, they often focus on existing 'leaders' or 'gatekeepers'. These are often elders in the community (and very likely to be men with existing positions of power), reflecting patriarchal social norms that under-value young people's (and women's) views and perspectives.

At the same time, young people are a significant proportion of the population in many contexts. Decisions about development projects are being made without representation from many of those who may live with the consequences. Yet we know young people have agency and power to make a significant contribution to development projects.

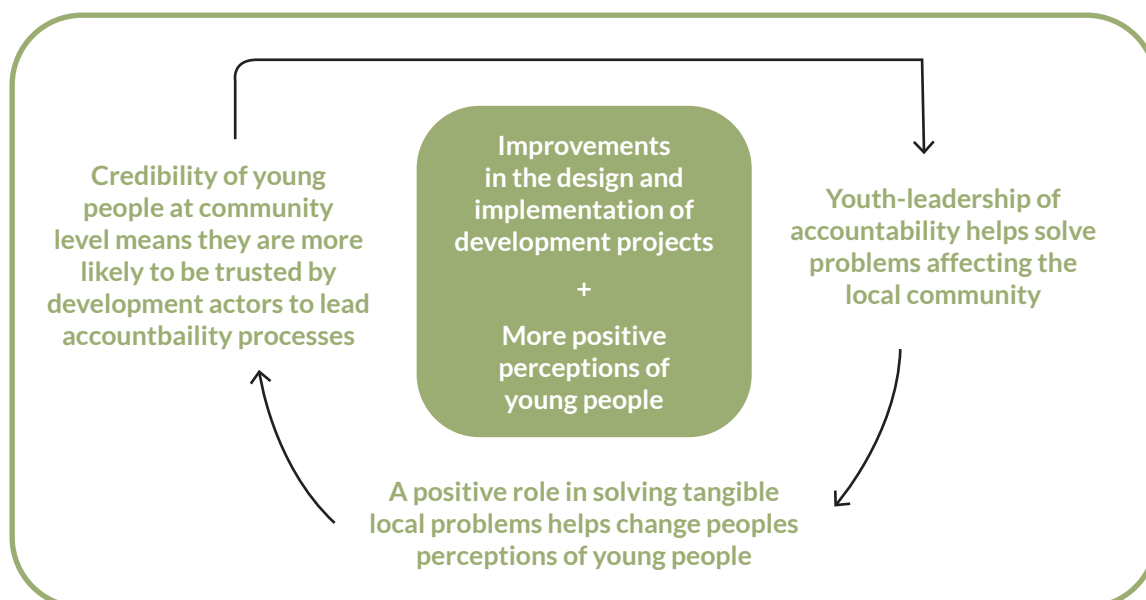
HOW WE THINK CHANGE HAPPENS

Many development agencies and civil society organisations have worked to address these challenges to significant success. However, this book focusses on addressing both youth leadership and accountability challenges together. This is because we saw challenges with existing initiatives to strengthen youth leadership and accountability:

- Efforts by development actors to seek input and feedback from communities can improve design and delivery of projects. Such initiatives often foster positive engagement between development actors and communities because community members see tangible action, and development actors build the trust of communities. However, these initiatives can often overlook the potential of young people to lead change and may reinforce the social norms that exclude young people from decisions.
- Youth-led advocacy around development issues can amplify young people’s voices and help get key issues on the agenda. However, in many societies when young people speak-up this can be seen in a negative way. Undertaking youth-led advocacy without engaging the wider community can unintentionally reinforce social norms that cast ‘active’ young people troublemakers.
- Other initiatives focus on engaging youth-leaders on issues that affect young people (for example, education or sexual and reproductive health). While these are valuable and are especially important for young people to engage with, youth remain side-lined when it comes to broader development issues.

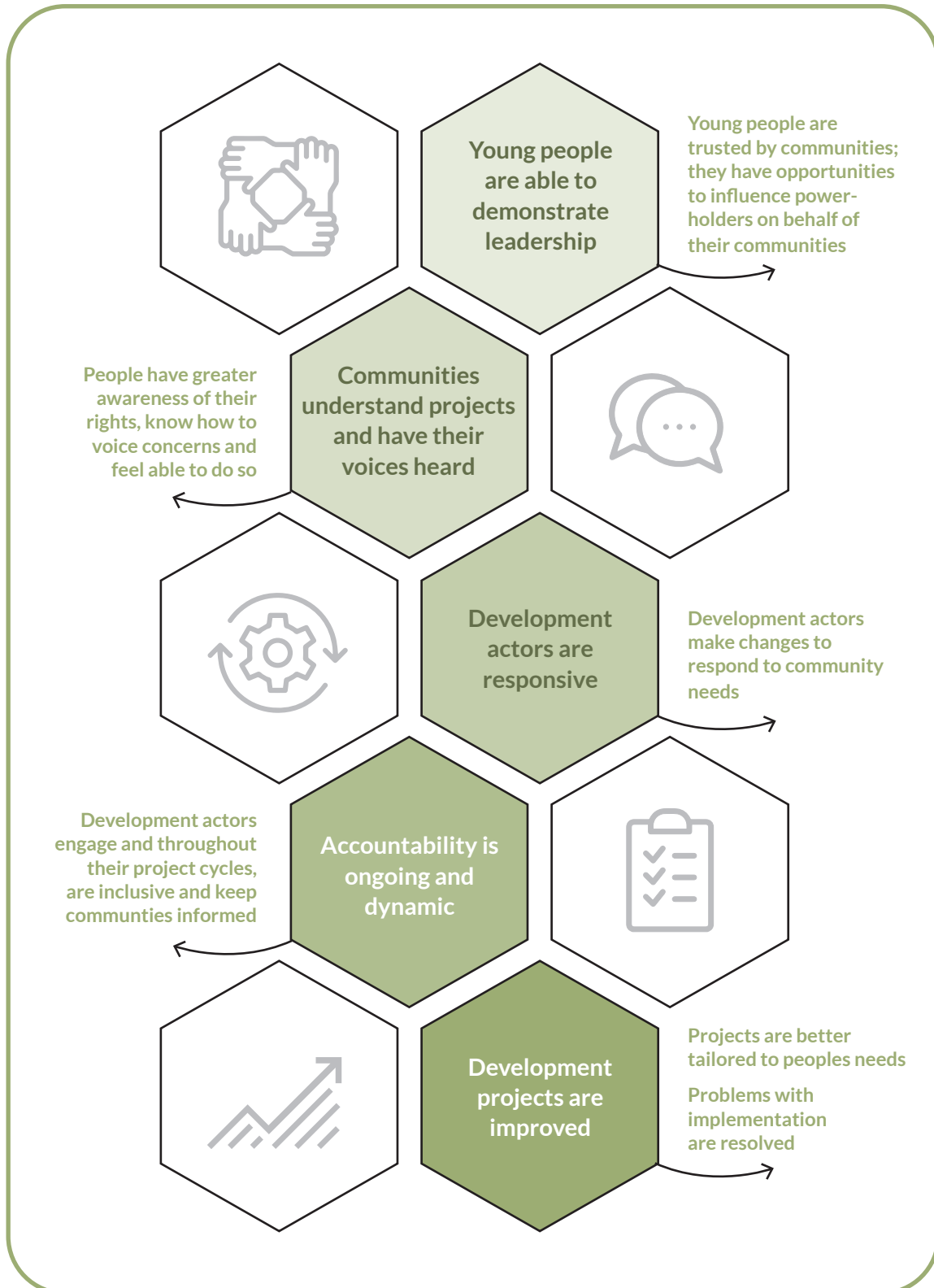
To address these gaps and challenges, youth-led accountability means **finding a way for young people to lead accountability processes that engages the wider community in a positive way, and brings about tangible benefits at a local level.** The idea at the core of youth-led accountability work is that negative social norms that exclude young people can be overcome if young people are seen to play a role in bringing about real, positive change for their communities.

A virtuous circle: How accountability can improve perceptions of young people by demonstrating and facilitating tangible improvement on the ground



WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

The ultimate aim of youth-led accountability is to improve development projects and facilitate broader inclusion of young people's voices. It works through a complex set of inter-related outcomes:



01 YOUTH LEADERSHIP

A journey that young people embark on, developing the confidence and skills to lead change in their communities





WHAT IS IT?

We use the term 'youth leadership' to refer to young people's capacity to lead change in their communities.

For *young people*, it means developing the confidence and skills to lead change. For *communities and local stakeholders*, it means listening and trusting young people to work on more 'serious' issues that affect the community. For *development actors*, including NGOs and donors, it means moving from working with young people as 'beneficiaries' (receiving development aid) and 'partners' (delivering development aid, for example through volunteering) to working with them as leaders of development.¹ Youth-led accountability is one of the ways in which young people can show leadership and engage on equal terms in development processes.

Youth leadership is best thought of as a journey that young people embark on. Young leaders are diverse, and it is not possible to prescribe in detail the characteristics of youth leaders. However, there are qualities that young people possess that can be developed, as well as barriers in wider society to be overcome.

Some qualities of a young leader:²

- **Lived experience** of the issues affecting young people and often of different types of exclusion
- **Social capital** and the ability to inspire and persuade their peers
- **Creativity, energy**, and a willingness to use participatory methods
- A blend of **passion and professionalism**
- An **openness to learn**, with few constraints on their thinking
- **Innovation and entrepreneurialism**
- An **ability to take advantage of new technology** and social media to change behaviour, access information or organise more effectively
- **Different norms**, that can be more progressive, shared with a generational 'cohort', and taken into later life
- A capacity to **take formative youth leadership experiences into life as an adult** - including when they take on decision-making roles

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?



For youth-led accountability to be effective, it needs to harness young people's capacity to lead change. Accountability processes require young people to build trust and credibility with both communities and development actors. Developing leadership capacity of young people also has intrinsic value. Youth leaders are important for facilitating young people's engagement in development and mobilising other young people to play a role in their communities. Leadership skills can also be deployed in other areas of young people's lives, benefitting individuals as well as wider society.

Did you know?

What counts as "youth" is culturally specific. In some societies, particularly those with very young populations, those aged 30 years may be considered an adult. In others, 30-year-olds may be thought of as still in the transition to adulthood. There is therefore no standard age-range: applying, for example, the UN statistical definition may exclude those who are regarded and regard themselves as youth in specific contexts. Nevertheless, there may be specific issues to consider when working with younger people, who may be legally classed children.



STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING YOUTH LEADERSHIP

It is easy to assume that leadership rests solely with the leader. However, it is helpful to consider ways of supporting young people to develop as leaders, as well as strategies for tackling some of the barriers young people face in using their leadership skills in their communities.

Enabling leadership

It can be helpful to think about leadership in terms of a journey. This journey may include personal development (such as confidence or self-awareness), specific leadership skills (such as mobilising others and negotiation) as well as knowledge and skills that will support a lifelong leadership journey.

Goal setting and journaling. Encouraging young people to set personal leadership goals and supporting them to regularly reflect on progress towards those goals can support individuals to identify their own motivations as well as challenges.

Training. Leadership is learned, often through experience, rather than taught in a classroom. However, training can be an important component of supporting a young person's leadership journey. Specific training topics should ideally be identified together with young people, and it is helpful to begin with topics relevant to facilitating broader social change, rather than those specific to project cycle or programme management. Practical tasks and real-life scenarios can support youth leaders to learn.

Mentoring. Having a mentor can be valuable for young people in progressing through their leadership journey. Mentoring is a skill in itself. It is therefore important that mentors themselves are supported to play their role effectively through training and quality assurance of mentoring.

Peer learning and support. Peer learning can be a powerful tool for supporting youth leaders as a group. Organising in pairs, or triads (3 people) with some simple tools or prompting questions to guide reflections and discussions, can support young people in understanding their progress as leaders and help overcome challenges. Like mentoring, it is important to begin the process with training that provides a structure and core principles for the peer learning process.

Addressing barriers

It can be harder to think about ways of addressing social barriers to youth leadership. However, it is important to consider how youth leaders can be supported to overcome barriers.

Community engagement and awareness raising. Where negative social norms about young people are less strong, simple engagement and awareness-raising such as community meetings or one-to-one conversations conducted by young people can help reassure people.

Encouraging visible roles for young people. Encouraging, as far as possible, young people to conduct community-based work in a visible manner can promote people's understanding of youth leadership and help those who hold negative views to see youth leadership as non-threatening and positive. Where advocacy and organising is involved, it is important that other parts of the leadership role are visible as well.

Action-reflection. Action-reflection is an approach to social change that encourages change-makers and leaders to reflect on change processes and adapt their approaches. It is usually supported by regular, facilitated meetings to reflect on what's changed, what challenges leaders are facing, and how to adapt work. It can be helpful in supporting young people to find their own solutions to challenges, as well as to navigate more stubborn problems.



CHOOSING A STRATEGY

It can be helpful to think about leadership in terms of a journey: different people may start at different points and may face different challenges along the way. There is therefore no 'standard' approach that will be suitable for supporting everyone.

Strategies for youth-leadership will primarily depend on:

- Young people themselves. Different young people start from different places in their leadership journey and may already possess many leadership skills and qualities.
- Considering other forms of marginalisation. Among young people, women, those with disabilities and those from minority groups face even greater barriers, including from their peers. It is important that support for youth leadership is tailored to enable more marginalised groups to realise their leadership journeys alongside others.
- Prevailing social norms and attitudes. Where barriers to youth leadership are strong, it can be helpful to start small, and encourage simple acts of participation and leadership that are visible and have clear benefits to the community. These can help build legitimacy for young people to take on leadership roles.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

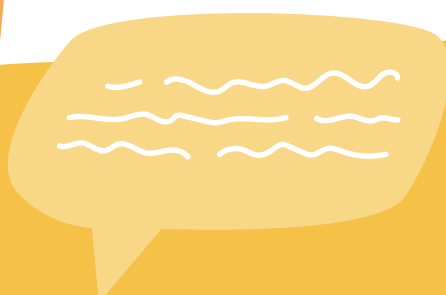
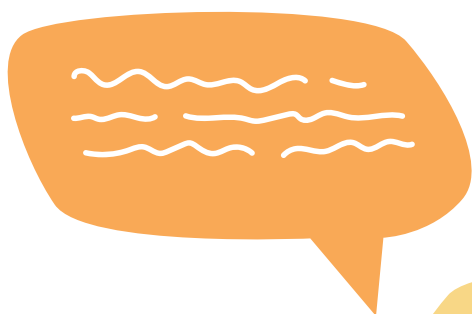


When designing a youth-led accountability project

- How are young people normally engaged in decisions by communities and by development actors?
- What are the social norms or narratives around young people (including those held by young people themselves)?
- How does the profile of young people affect design choices (e.g., literacy, familiarity with technology)?

When monitoring a youth-led accountability project

- Are attitudes towards young people, or narratives about young people, changing?
- Are young people becoming more confident in applying their skills?
- Are there gaps or specific challenges that young people are experiencing?
- Are community members becoming more involved in the project?





WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Young people have the capacity to engage with large and complex development projects. Young people are excluded from decisions about many development projects, but once supported in a youth-led accountability programme, they rapidly build trust to work on multi-million-dollar projects and engage on 'serious' issues such as infrastructure and land-reform.

Social norms and narratives shape perceptions of young people, rather than people's direct experience. On the one hand, prevailing attitudes cast young people who speak up as 'trouble-makers'. This means that young people may face discrimination or exclusion. However, such attitudes are usually not based on experience, and can change quite quickly once they see young people making a difference.

Social norms and narratives affect young people too. In some contexts, young people themselves can hold negative attitudes towards 'youth', perceiving themselves or their peers as lacking maturity or capacity for leadership. The same is true of gender and disability stereotypes and leadership journeys can actively challenge such norms.

Don't assume capacities of young people. It is easy to fall back on generalisations and stereotypes when designing programmes. For example, while young people often get to grips with technology faster than their parents' generation, not all have had opportunities to use technologies such as smartphones and may require extra support for tech-based approaches.

Practical and hands-on experience may be more valuable than training. While it is helpful to have basic orientation on issues around accountability and development, young people's leadership journeys are best progressed through getting 'stuck in' to work in their community and engaging with development actors.

Young people from all walks of life can lead change. While having an advanced education may support some aspects of leadership, young people without advanced education are equally able to engage with communities. Similarly, in some cases youth-leaders being local to the community is helpful, while in others being an 'outsider' can help in cultivating a sense of objectivity.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

An important component to hold development partners to account for projects or development activities





WHAT IS IT?

To hold development partners to account for projects or development activities they are implementing, it is vital to know what they can be held to account for.

In other words: *Who is responsible for a particular project? What have they promised to do or provide?* This means that members of the community need access to information about development partners' activities and the projects they are running. It is also important that people are aware of their wider economic and political rights when development projects are being implemented.

Useful information might include:

- The budget of the project
- The agreed timeframe and 'milestones'
- Agreed 'deliverables' and quality standards
- What steps have been taken to ensure people's rights (e.g., land rights) are upheld?
- What steps have been taken to ensure the project is accessible to communities and vulnerable groups?
- Other promises made about the project

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?



Without access to information, particularly information about what has been promised for specific projects, it can be more difficult to understand and find solutions for problems or issues experienced by communities. For example, if poor quality materials for road construction are observed, that may be something that was planned (because of limited budget) or the result of contractors "cutting corners" by using lower cost materials.

While it is possible to gather feedback from communities without access to information from development actors, it is harder to hold development actors accountable if communities do not have access to information.



STRATEGIES FOR TRANSPARENCY

Transparency and access to information is a good thing in itself. If key information is not already available, the ideal situation is if development actors can be persuaded to share information about the project themselves. Once trust has been established (see chapter 5), they may be more willing to share information about projects with communities and young people.

If it is not possible to access information directly, it may be possible to use publicly available information from other sources. For example, many projects backed by external donors, such as the foreign aid agencies or multi-lateral institutions, have publicly available information about projects they fund and standards they promise to uphold. Where Freedom of Information (FOI) laws exist, it may be possible to use these laws to mandate information disclosure. However, using FOI laws to access information may jeopardise further cooperation.

Finally, without information it is still possible to monitor development projects by comparing what is being provided to:

01 // Community expectations – does the project fall below people's usual expectations (for example, expectations regarding the behaviour of staff or contractors)?

02// Legal rights – does a project meet standards set in national legislation or regulation (for example, an entitlement that primary medical care is free, or regulations that set standards for construction projects)?

03 // Human rights or Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – a human rights-based approach (HRBA) to accountability uses global rights frameworks or conventions as a standard for accountability. These can be used, even where national legislation may not reflect international standards. In this case, monitoring may become more of an advocacy tool.



CHOOSING A STRATEGY

The choice of strategy really depends on how easy it is to get access to information, and whether demands for information might cause a development actor to cooperate less. For those development actors that are reluctant to share information, it may be better to focus on building trust initially and demonstrate that accountability has positive benefits for development partners and communities, before pushing for greater transparency.

Where there is a “supply chain” for projects, things are more complicated, and some actors may be reluctant to disclose information. Those working at the frontline may fear being penalised by those higher up for sharing information. Sometimes development actors lack information themselves about the performance of services. In these cases, community-level monitoring and feedback may help development actors understand their projects/services better.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

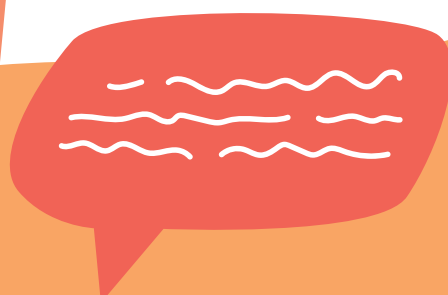
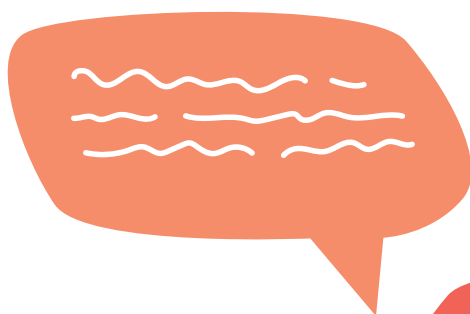


When designing a youth-led accountability project

- What information is already communicated to communities about a project or service?
- What do people in the community already know about the project and where do they get their information?
- Who is involved in the delivery of a project i.e., the supply chain?

When monitoring a youth-led accountability project

- How willing are development actors to share information about their work?
- Is information being shared regularly and in an accessible way?
- Are community members concerned about corruption or misuse of resources?





WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Improving transparency requires trust. Some development actors we engaged with were reluctant to provide information about their projects at the beginning. Once trust was built and development actors understood the accountability approach, they were more willing to share. In contexts where transparency is low, it can take time to build trust (see chapter 5).

Financial information can be harder to access. Development actors may be particularly reluctant to share financial information. Corruption is a fact of life in many countries, and even where there is no wrong-doing, financial information can be regarded as sensitive.

Don't assume people are aware of development projects in their areas. We found that at the start of an accountability programme, many people in the community were not aware of development projects in their area. Youth-led accountability can be an opportunity to make people more aware of projects that affect them.

Complex 'supply chains' can make it harder to access information. Where multiple stakeholders are involved in a project, it can be more difficult to access information about the project. For large and complex projects, it can be difficult to know who is ultimately responsible for fulfilling promises and partners may be reluctant to share information that relates to parts of a project they are not responsible for.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT

*Sensitising and engaging
community members and
users to accountability
mechanisms*





WHAT IS IT?

Engaging with those affected by development projects or development issues lies at the very heart of accountability.

While community engagement is integral to accountability processes, people are often not aware of their right to give feedback, or how they can do it. They also may not be convinced of the value of giving feedback or have the confidence to speak up. For an accountability project to work, intended users need to know about it, how to use it, and have confidence to provide feedback. Community engagement is particularly important at the start of a project when members of the community are not aware of or familiar with the project. As projects progress, and people become more familiar with them, and start to give feedback, awareness and confidence can grow organically. However, it is helpful to have a plan for engagement with community members throughout an accountability project, to provide continuous reassurance.

There are three basic elements to community engagement:

- 01 //** Identifying affected groups and community members
- 02 //** Raising awareness about accountability processes
- 03 //** Building confidence to take part in accountability processes

An important first step is to understand who may be affected by a development project or issue. This may include direct service users, those intended to benefit who are not users, and those who may be negatively affected. The second step is to raise awareness about accountability mechanisms with these identified groups. Finally deeper engagement is required to build people's confidence to take part in accountability processes.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?



The aim of accountability projects is to establish or strengthen channels through which those responsible for development projects give an account of their work, take into account the views of community members or service users, and are held to account by the community.

Engagement has two main purposes:

- 01 //** First, to make community members aware of how they can provide feedback or make complaints about a project or service. People need to know how, and to whom, they can give feedback about particular projects or issues.
- 02 //** Second, to build the confidence of community members to provide feedback. Accountability can build trust and understanding between community members of development partners, but trust is often low at the start of a project and needs to be actively encouraged.



STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Some development projects may benefit a whole community, or particular groups within a community. Others might have specific service users (for example, those receiving training, or those accessing particular healthcare services).

01

Identifying affected groups

Possible sources include:

- Beneficiary lists
- Discussions with development actors
- Observing and engaging with those accessing services (e.g. clinics, bore holes)
- Community surveys
- Discussions with community members

02

Mass communication: to raise awareness

Possible mass communication strategies include:

- Radio slots
- Posters and advertisements
- Public meetings (local government, community or religious leaders)
- Social media
- SMS messages

03

Deeper engagement: to build the confidence

Possible engagement strategies include:

- Community meetings
- At point of service (e.g. a clinic)
- Outreach through volunteer networks or trusted community members
- Outreach through community or religious leaders



CHOOSING A STRATEGY

Choosing a strategy for raising awareness and engaging community members depends on both the kind of projects being monitored and the context.

Strategies for mass communication, and the priority you give to it, may depend on the size of the target group, as well as the accessibility of different communication methods to the target groups:

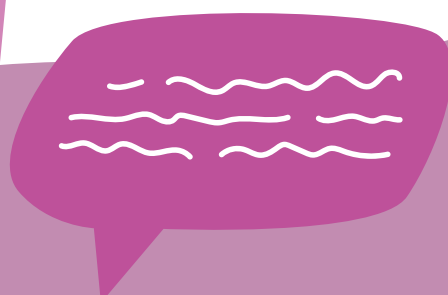
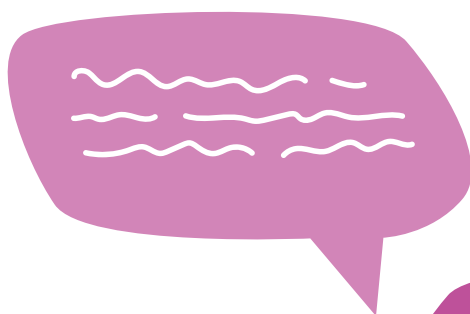
- literacy (this may vary between genders or age groups)
- access to a mobile-phones (this is often gendered)
- peoples usual and trusted sources of information

Strategies also depend on the context:

- Do they fear reprisal if they raise a concern?
- Do they fear being labelled a trouble-maker if they raise concerns?

It will also depend on your organisational resources and capacity:

- Relationships with others that can support awareness raising (e.g. media, local government, community or religious leaders)
- Your existing ways and opportunities of engaging with community (e.g. regular meetings, networks of volunteers)



QUESTIONS TO ASK



When designing a youth-led accountability project

- Who is intended to benefit from the development project? Are there others that might be affected by a development project or issue?
- What are the ways community members already providing feedback or make complaints about a project or service?
- How confident are people to raise concerns about a project or services?
- How do community members typically get information about projects (e.g., community meetings)?

When monitoring a youth-led accountability project

- Who is using accountability mechanisms and who is not?
- What is people's awareness of their right to give feedback or make complaints, and knowledge about ways in which they can do that?
- What is people's confidence to provide feedback or make complaints?
- What are people's reasons for not giving feedback if they have a concern or an issue with a project?



WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Check what's there already. It is helpful to understand existing mechanisms and communication channels, as well as people's experience of those. Prior experiences shape people's expectations and concerns about a new project, so anticipating these and addressing them early on is helpful. There are often accountability mechanisms in place already, and people may have positive or negative experiences of these. Simple mechanisms such as suggestion boxes are common, but often under-utilised. People are often unclear about who opens them, who reads the feedback and whether any action is taken or not. Community meetings often provide fora for raising issues, and community leaders tasked with following up. However, in practice such meetings often exclude or marginalise the voices of some groups (e.g., women or young people), can be dominated by more powerful individuals, or focus too narrowly on the interests of certain groups.

Craft your messages carefully. The purpose of accountability projects can be difficult to communicate. People often expect a project to provide direct benefits. Accountability projects don't do that, so it is important to consider how to best communicate the potential benefits of accountability projects. It is also easy for people to become confused about who is responsible for a development project and seek redress from monitors or volunteers rather than the project itself.

A friendly face helps. Engaging with community members face-to-face is often the most effective form of communication. While it is labour intensive, it can build connection and understanding in ways that other forms of communication cannot. Once connection has been established, other communication may be more efficient.

Diversify communication channels to include more people. If reaching more marginalised or excluded members of the community is important, using multiple and different communication channels can be helpful.

Be patient. It takes time for people's awareness and understanding of accountability mechanisms to grow. It is not realistic to expect a lot of people to start using a mechanism straight away. If you are planning an accountability project, it is helpful to adopt lower ambitions for early milestones in the project, and higher ambition later on as awareness builds.

Consider timing. While awareness raising before the launch of accountability is helpful, it is also important to avoid a long gap. Raising awareness and implementation of accountability mechanisms in parallel can actually be quite efficient.

MECHANISMS TO LISTEN AND GATHER FEEDBACK

Gathering and receiving people's views, paying attention, and making sense of it to improve projects





WHAT IS IT?

A core part of accountability involves organisations listening to the views of community members about a project or development issue, and then taking those views into account when making decisions about a project.

You may already be familiar with mechanisms where people can provide feedback about projects, for example through community meetings or suggestion boxes. A wide range of mechanisms are available, and each has different advantages and disadvantages.

Listening comprises two distinct elements:

- 01 // Hearing** – gathering and receiving people's views about an issue or project
- 02 // Understanding** – paying attention and making sense of what people tell you

It is often easy to gather a lot of different viewpoints but can be more difficult to properly understand them and what they mean for your project.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?



Mechanisms for development partners to “listen” to those they serve are vital for them to be able to “take into account” people’s views. Listening is important throughout the project cycle: in the design of projects, during their implementation, and as part of an evaluation once activities have been completed. For dynamic accountability, which means improving projects based on community feedback as they are being implemented, listening is particularly important at the design and implementation stages.



STRATEGIES FOR GATHERING FEEDBACK

There are a wider range of mechanisms that can be used to listen and gather feedback on issues or about projects. Different mechanisms have different advantages and disadvantages. The mechanisms that you choose will affect how you engage with different groups within the community and the kinds of feedback that you receive.

Some key questions to ask when considering gathering feedback are:

Will you proactively solicit feedback from particular people at particular points in time, or provide mechanisms that allow people to provide feedback when they choose to?

Solicited vs. unsolicited



Solicited feedback is where organisations pro-actively seek the views of particular people at particular times.

- Solicited feedback can be planned and therefore useful in the design of a project.
- If you solicit feedback, you have control over who is engaged (which can make it more or less inclusive or representative).



Unsolicited feedback is where feedback or views can be provided at any time, by anyone and has not been explicitly sought.

- Unsolicited feedback is accessible to all but may not be provided by all. However, it allows those who may not be directly targeted by a project to raise issues.
- Unsolicited feedback is less predictable and can be more useful during implementation, when adaptations to projects may be made on an ongoing basis.

Will you seek open feedback on any issue or topic, or ask closed questions?

Open vs. closed





Open feedback allows people to raise any kind of issue or concern of their choosing and thus allows unexpected issues to be identified. However, open feedback can be time consuming to deal with, and may not address key decisions that organisations are planning to take.





Closed feedback asks pre-determined questions about a project and therefore constrains the types of issues that people can raise. It is easier to analyse and can therefore be used to take account of the views of a large number of people.











Will you provide channels that allow anonymous feedback, or will those submitting feedback be identifiable?

<p>Anonymous vs. identifiable</p>	 <p>Anonymous feedback allows people to provide feedback without anyone knowing who has provided it. It can be helpful if a project involves sensitive issues (e.g. sexual and reproductive health) or if there are particular fears about providing feedback within the community. It also helps marginalised groups to share their feedback.</p>	 <p>Identifiable feedback is where the gathering of feedback is not anonymous. This is a necessary feature of many face-to-face mechanisms which allow deeper conversations, but can also be useful when it is important to be able to re-contact people that have provided feedback.</p>
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Are feedback mechanisms one-way or two-way dialogues?

<p>One-way vs. two-way</p>	 <p>One-way mechanisms gather information, but do not provide a way to feed back to those who have raised issues or concerns.</p>	 <p>Two-way mechanisms provide opportunities for dialogue and responding directly to those that provide feedback. These mechanisms provide ways to 'close the feedback loop' once an issue or problem has been resolved.</p>
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Feedback methods

<p>Suggestion box – members of the community or service users can write any comments or problems and put them anonymously in a physical box.</p> <p><i>Suggestion boxes are most suitable where literacy is high and those affected can physically easily access the box. Closed question forms can be used as well as open suggestions. Suggestion boxes can appear impersonal, and people may feel their suggestions may be ignored. This can be mitigated by pairing the box with a noticeboard.</i></p>	 Unsolicited  Open or closed  Can be anonymous  One-way
<p>Telephone hotline – members of the community can call in to provide feedback or discuss issues directly.</p> <p><i>Hotlines work best when they are toll-free, and in contexts where mobile phone ownership and coverage is high. While feedback can be anonymous, in smaller communities, people may be concerned they are identifiable. People can feel heard, and there are opportunities to reassure or clarify concerns.</i></p>	 Unsolicited  Open  Anonymous or identifiable  One-way



<p>Interviews or focus group discussions – members of the community may be invited to take part in a one-to-one interview, or a group discussion. These are facilitated by an interviewer or moderator using a questionnaire or topic guide.</p> <p><i>Interviews or focus group discussions are pre-planned and those taking part are pre-selected. They are labour intensive, so it is difficult to include a large number of people. However, through careful selection, it is also possible for more marginalised or vulnerable groups to be purposefully included. They are not anonymous, unless facilitated by a third party.</i></p>	  Solicited   Open   Identifiable   One-way
<p>Household or telephone surveys – structured questionnaires administered by a researcher (sometimes called an enumerator) who visits or calls a respondent and reads out the questions.</p> <p><i>Surveys tend to focus on closed questions, but a small number of open questions may be included. Because they include many people, and can be designed to be representative, they are a good way of gathering views that represent the community as a whole. They are usually large, costly and require planning so cannot be undertaken frequently.</i></p>	  Solicited   Closed   Anonymous or identifiable   One-way
<p>Self-completed surveys – structured questionnaires given or sent to people to complete themselves. For example, satisfaction surveys or feedback forms after a training.</p> <p><i>Self-completed surveys (e.g., paper forms, online or app-based surveys) are less costly to administer, but often provide lower quality data than a household or telephone survey because questions may be interpreted in different ways and response rates can be poor.</i></p>	  Solicited   Open or closed   Anonymous   One-way
<p>Outreach conversations – open feedback gathered through one-to-one conversations with project staff, youth leaders or volunteers.</p> <p><i>Outreach conversations can take many forms but are generally open discussions either initiated by outreach workers or volunteers or community members themselves. They can build trust, but it can be more difficult to systematically compile and respond to feedback for large projects.</i></p>	  Solicited or unsolicited   Open   Identifiable   Two-way
<p>Community meetings – specific meetings arranged to discuss a project, or discussion of a development project as one part of a regular community meeting.</p> <p><i>Community meetings can be very useful opportunities to gather feedback and discuss pressing issues. They allow for dialogue and feedback to communities. However, they often reflect existing power dynamics, so those from more marginalised groups (women, young people, and other minorities) may be less likely to speak up.</i></p>	  Solicited or unsolicited   Open or closed   Anonymous or identifiable   One-way or two-way



<p>Participatory methods (e.g., community mapping) – a way of facilitating focus group discussions to encourage active discussion of all participants and support deeper reflection around specific issues.</p> <p><i>Participatory methods tend to work in group settings and are a variation of a focus group discussion. They allow for greater inclusion and highlight issues that affect more marginalised groups and individuals. Participatory methods can be useful to uncover issues that remain 'unspoken' in the community.</i></p>	  Solicited or unsolicited   Open or closed   Anonymous or identifiable   One-way or two-way
<p>Community media – many local media outlets, for example local radio or TV stations, seek community views on topical issues. People can submit concerns or call in to a topical discussion programme.</p> <p><i>Community media can reach a large number of people and is often a trusted source of information. This makes it a good platform for soliciting feedback.</i></p>	  Solicited   Open   Identifiable   One-way or two-way
<p>SMS or app-based feedback – SMS or smartphone apps allow users to submit feedback directly from their mobile phones. Feedback is usually limited in detail.</p> <p><i>SMS or app-based approaches vary, but all require users to have a mobile phone and coverage. It can be more difficult to make these toll-free.</i></p>	  Solicited or unsolicited   Open or closed   Anonymous or identifiable   One-way or two-way



CHOOSING A STRATEGY

Choosing mechanisms for feedback can be one of the most difficult parts of designing an accountability project. Different mechanisms suit different stages of the project cycle, and different kinds of users. Each method also provides varying kinds of information. For this reason, it is unlikely that one mechanism can satisfy requirements of all users, at all stages of the project. Often, a combination of different approaches is needed.

Thinking about the project cycle

Different sorts of information are useful at different stages of the project cycle:

- **Design** - At the design stage, development actors should solicit the views of community members (including all those who may be positively or negatively affected) regarding their priorities about *what* the project will achieve, their needs in terms of *how* it will be implemented, and *who* should be engaged in the delivery. This generally requires feedback that is solicited, open, and one-way.
- **Implementation** - During implementation, development actors should provide mechanisms that allow community members (including all those who may be positively or negatively affected) to provide feedback on whether they are receiving what was promised, whether the project is meeting their expectations, and whether it is meeting people's needs. This requires solicited and unsolicited, open and closed, and two-way feedback mechanisms.
- **Evaluation** - Once a project has ended, organisations should solicit views on whether the project has made a difference. This can be achieved through solicited, open and closed, and two-way feedback mechanisms.

Thinking about the needs of those using mechanisms

The needs of users are very important when deciding on the mechanisms that will be most appropriate. Three things to consider are:

- 01 // Accessibility and inclusivity.** Different users have different needs. Some mechanisms can only be accessed by those with literacy skills and can exclude those who have had less opportunity for education. Others require access to technology (e.g., mobile phones) – those on lower incomes, women and those in more remote areas can be excluded by mechanisms that rely on technology.
- 02 // Levels of trust.** Where trust in organisations and institutions is relatively high, a wider range of mechanisms may be appropriate, and people may be more comfortable with sharing their feedback openly. Where trust is low, people may fear reprisal for providing feedback. In this case, being able to provide feedback anonymously is important.
- 03 // Projects being monitored.** Some projects have clear targeted users (e.g., a project providing school meals) while others may benefit a wider range of groups (e.g., a project to improve clean water supply to an area). Likewise, some projects carry risks of negative impacts as well as positive ones. Where target groups and impacts are less predictable, solicited, and closed feedback mechanisms such as surveys may miss issues experienced by some groups.



Thinking about the kinds of information needed

Different mechanisms provide different kinds of information and require different levels of resource to make them work. Mechanisms such as surveys can capture data from a large number and range of people in the community but provide limited amounts of detail on specific problems that people experience. In contrast, mechanisms such as outreach conversations can generate much more detailed information, but from a more limited group of people.

When implementing an accountability mechanism, you also need to bear in mind the resources needed to gather and make sense of information. Mechanisms that require face-to-face interaction, and that generate large quantities of qualitative information can generate very high-quality information but can also require a lot of staff or volunteer time to make them work.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

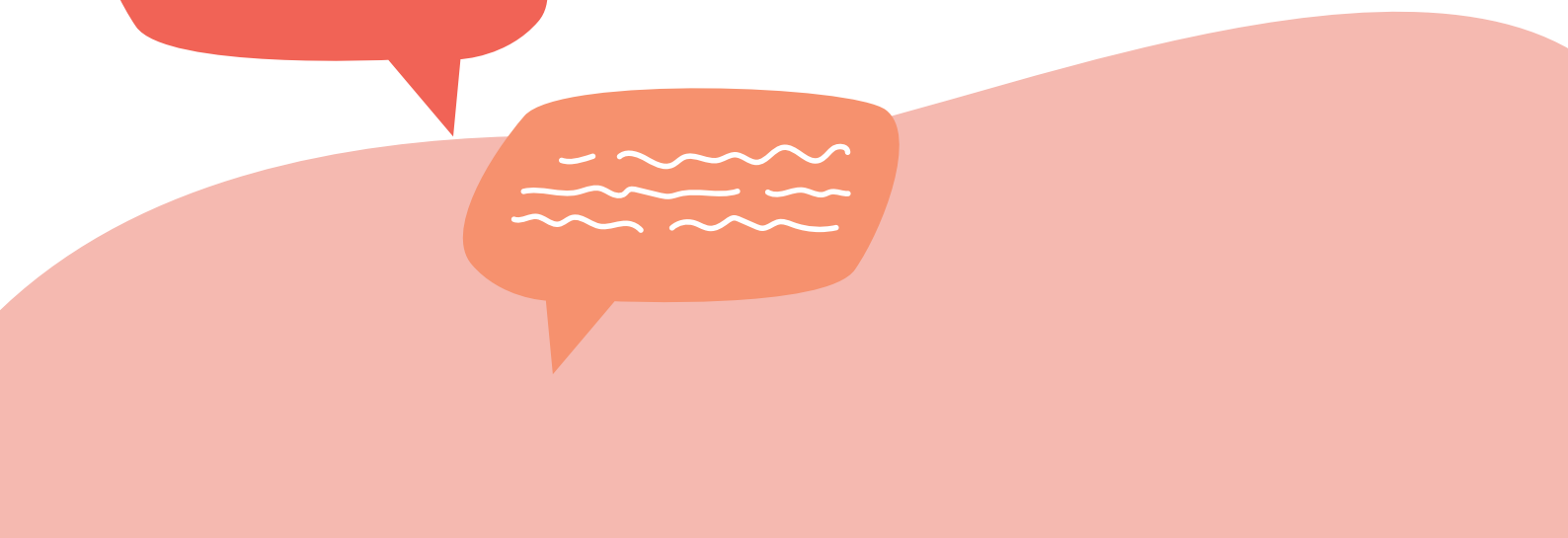
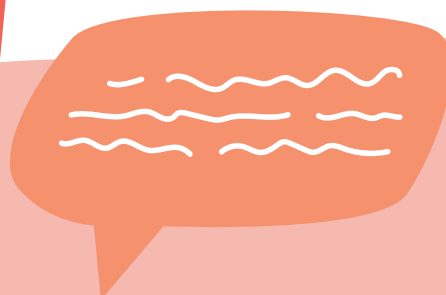
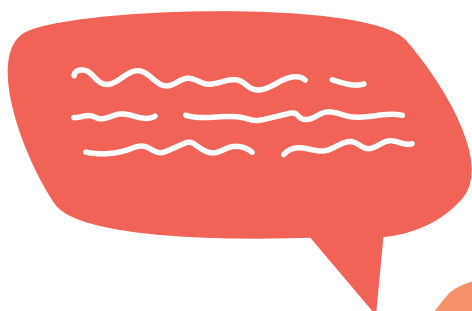


When designing a youth-led accountability project

- Are users or people in the community already giving feedback?
- Are expected users able to read and write?
- Do people have access to mobile phones and coverage?
- What kind of project are we going to monitor?

When monitoring a youth-led accountability project

- Are people using the mechanism?
- Is the mechanism being used by different (relevant) groups?





WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Existing mechanisms shape how new accountability mechanisms are received.

Many development projects and public services already have some kind of feedback channel. Many of these – particularly those that involve impersonal mechanisms such as suggestion boxes – are often poorly used and/or not effective. These are also usually one-way mechanisms, and unless there is also a channel for development actors to communicate back that they have heard people's concerns or taken action, people quickly lose interest in providing feedback.

Community meetings are a common way for people to air issues and concerns

about development projects and issues in the community. Sometimes it can be better to strengthen existing mechanisms, such as regular community meetings. However, it's important to check how young people, women and other marginalised groups' views are taken into account if you plan to build on existing mechanisms. It is also important that such meetings enable feedback from development actors about steps they are taking to resolve an issue.

Providing multiple mechanisms enhances inclusion. Different mechanisms will be preferred by different people. They also generate different kinds of information. By providing different channels, you will be able to include a wider range of people and groups and may identify a wider range of issues. This enhances inclusion in an accountability mechanism.³

People-centred mechanisms help build trust. While face-to-face interactions can be resource intensive, they can rapidly develop people's trust in the process of giving feedback. They also allow volunteers or staff to provide information and feedback from development projects at the same time as gathering people's feedback.

Technology can support people-centred mechanisms. Technology such as mobile apps can make the process of recording and analysing feedback quicker and more transparent. However, in many cases communities may not have sufficient access to technologies to make it a viable primary feedback channel. However, technology can be used to support community outreach, allowing youth leaders or volunteers to log and categorise issues systematically.

Volunteers can act as a bridge between community and development actors.

In some contexts, people fear interacting directly with development actors or voicing their concerns in public fora. At the beginning of an accountability project, volunteers can play a useful role in mediating feedback. However, it is important that accountability processes eventually empower members of the community to raise their voice directly with development actors.

BUILDING TRUST AND COLLABORATION WITH DEVELOPMENT ACTORS

The chicken and egg of youth-led accountability initiatives





WHAT IS IT?

For development projects to work most effectively, and to be inclusive of communities and youth leadership, there needs to be mutual trust and collaboration between development actors, the community and youth leaders.

However, development actors and projects can often appear remote from the communities they serve. Communication about development projects may be infrequent or takes place in ways that communities find difficult to engage with. Members of the community can often point to development projects that have gone wrong, or had negative impacts, which can make people distrust future projects. Development actors can also distrust young people and communities. This may be because people bring up issues or problems they find difficult to resolve, or they simply don't have good ways of communicating with communities or community leaders.

Relationship between trust and collaboration, and accountability



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?



Trust and collaboration with development actors is like the chicken and egg: it is required for youth-led accountability to work, but is also one of the key outcomes of successful youth-led accountability. If there is very low trust and collaboration, it can be hard to initiate accountability projects because stakeholders involved are not willing to take part. Thus, accountability projects should aim to strengthen trust between communities and development actors, but may need to adopt different strategies depending on the initial level of trust.



STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING TRUST AND COLLABORATION

Initial discussions

In all cases, initial discussions with development actors and community leaders are important to ensure the process gets off to a good start. Approaching development actors can be difficult to begin with, and it can be helpful to speak to community leaders and local civil society organisations to understand who to approach, and to be introduced to the various development actors.

Clarifying the role of youth leaders, and what would be expected from development actors in an accountability process is an important first task.

Young people as a bridge

Young people can play a role as a bridge to start the process of youth-led accountability. This is particularly helpful where there is very little trust or collaboration between development actors and communities (or specific groups within the community). In this role, young people act as an intermediary: working with communities, and with development actors separately.

The bridging role can look different in different situations:

- Young people may be community advocates – where community members trust young people but find it difficult to engage development actors, young people may play a role of advocating on behalf of their community.
- Young people as community outreach workers – where development actors trust young people, but struggle to reach or engage community members, young people may support a development actor in their community outreach.

Young people as facilitators

Young people can also act as facilitators. In this role, young people can facilitate more direct relationships between development actors and communities. Rather than advocating on behalf of communities, or listening to communities on behalf of development actors, young people facilitate dialogue more directly. If young people can facilitate more direct connection between development actors and communities, accountability processes may be more likely to be sustainable over the longer-term.



CHOOSING A STRATEGY

Initial discussions with both development actors and community members are usually needed whatever the strategy. Those discussions will help decide what strategy should follow by providing more information on how development actors engage with communities and the level of trust that already exists.

A bridging role is useful where mutual trust is low, or where there are specific issues that are making trust and collaboration more difficult. Where trust is higher, a facilitation role is more likely to be possible. Youth leaders can move from one role to another, or adopt different roles depending on the situation. However, it is always important to be clear about the role youth leaders expect to play.

The nature of projects and needs of specific groups vary and these can also affect how trust and collaboration can be strengthened. When projects that have the potential for negative or unequal impacts for communities or certain groups (for example infrastructure projects), this can weaken trust. A road building project may benefit a community overall but have particular impacts on those whose land it will be built on. In these cases, trust may be low for a particular group, and young people can play a bridging role to enable people's concerns to be taken into account.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

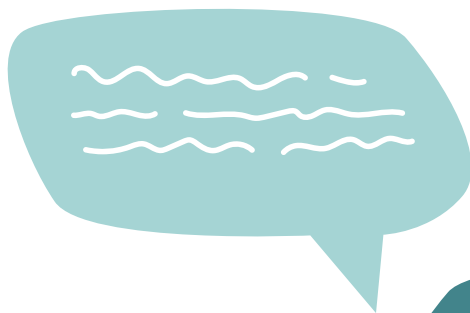


When designing a youth-led accountability project

- Which development actors are involved in a project? Who needs to be engaged if accountability requires strategic decisions?
- To what extent do community members trust development actors?
- What collaboration or engagement takes place already?
- Might the project have negative impacts or affect specific vulnerable groups?

When monitoring a youth-led accountability project

- Do development actors value youth-leaders' inputs and feedback?
- Are there senior decision-makers who are not engaged and causing blockages in accountability projects?
- Is the role that youth-leaders are playing continuing to build trust with both development actors and the community?





WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Initial conversations set expectations. Developing the relationship between youth leaders and volunteers is important to get development actors on board with accountability. Initial conversations take time to initiate and often require a series of meetings to build trust. It is important to build the right connections, including with more senior level decision-makers as they are ultimately deciding on and leading change required based on the gathered feedback.

A clear 'pitch' and written agreements can help development actors understand the purpose of accountability and their role in it. As with communities, it can be difficult to present accountability programmes in a simple way. It can be helpful to emphasise the benefits of stronger connection with communities and support that youth leaders can provide in outreach to the community. Formalising roles in written agreements (such as a memorandum of understanding) can be helpful to secure collaboration with some development actors.

Shifting the 'compliance' mindset. Both development actors and communities can see accountability in a narrow way: as compliance with rules or plans. Compliance is an important part of accountability, but youth leaders can risk being perceived as 'auditors' rather than problem-solvers that can help improve their projects. Initial and ongoing engagement should emphasise the role of young people in bringing ideas for improvement rather than simply pointing out failings.

Existing community leaders (e.g. elders) are often more reluctant to recognise youth leadership. However, once they see the value of accountability, they can be among the more enthusiastic supporters. Initial conversations should encompass local powerholders and those already trusted or respected by the community.

Building trust around bigger more complex projects can be more difficult. Where multiple actors are involved in the delivery of a project, or where projects are large in scale, it can be harder to begin the process of trust building. There may be a lack of trust or communication between some of these actors, and project may touch on politically sensitive issues.

Build trust with all parties. Where youth leaders are playing a "bridging" role between development actors and community, it is important to continue to build trust with all parties. Sometimes youth-leaders may play more of an advocate role on behalf of communities, or sometimes they may play more of an outreach role on behalf of development actors. However, if these bridging roles are taken to extremes, there is a risk that trust is lost with the other party. Youth leaders may be seen as too "political" or alternatively "co-opted", and this makes it harder to engage with parties around accountability issues.

Regular contact is a vital part of trust building. Youth leaders who meet regularly and share updates with development actors and communities build trust more quickly. Regular contact also helps youth leaders solve problems more quickly and understand when there are barriers to resolving an issue.

SUPPORTING DEVELOPMENT ACTORS TO RESPOND TO FEEDBACK

Making sense of feedback, adapting programmes, and closing the feedback loop





WHAT IS IT?

So far, have looked at how young people can engage communities and gather feedback about development issues and projects on behalf of the community. However, changing how development projects are implemented requires action on the side of those responsible for projects. Development actors may need support to acknowledge feedback, adapt their work and communicate back to community members about what they have done to resolve issues.

While making changes to projects can seem simple, in large and bureaucratic organisations, it is often not straightforward. There can be many barriers to making changes: project plans, people's jobs roles, allocation of budgets, and even suppliers for materials can all be difficult to change once a project has started. In recent years some organisations have adopted 'adaptive' or more 'agile' approaches to managing projects and programmes, but this is far from the norm. Thus, while feedback from communities may be valued by development actors, actually making changes requires capacity and willingness from the organisation (and donor).

Did you know?

Ultimately, the goal is to shift the organisation's culture and working practices so that they are more responsive to issues raised by the community. Close collaboration with development actors may support culture change within an organisation, but often leadership is also required. Engagement of senior decisionmakers in understanding what supports their organisation to be responsive, and also what barriers there are, can help with changing working practices.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?



Responding to feedback and adapting projects to the needs of communities is critical if accountability is to work.

There are two main aspects to this part of the accountability process:

01 // Solving problems: responding to people's feedback can improve the relevance of a project to the community, as well as its effectiveness in achieving development outcomes. Sometimes small problems can have large impacts. A broken refrigerator in a clinic, for example, may prevent children from receiving their usual childhood vaccinations, or providing information about a project in only one language or only in written form, may exclude vulnerable groups from understanding their rights and how to access a service.

02 // Showing that people's views have been heard. A second reason is that responses to people's feedback encourages more feedback. If feedback is gathered and then ignored, people will very quickly become dissatisfied with the process and stop providing feedback. It may even damage trust between communities and development actors. However, if people see action being taken or responses back to the community, they may be encouraged to participate further. This is sometimes called "closing the feedback loop".



STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING CAPACITY TO RESPOND

Responding to feedback involves two distinct processes: solving problems, and showing that people's views have been heard. Each of these are important in their own right.

01 // Making sense of feedback

A critical first step for responding to feedback, is making sense of the feedback that is received. Organisations may have capacity to gather and analyse certain types of information, but they may also struggle with making sense of large quantities of feedback that can be generated through a feedback process.

Youth leaders can support development actors to make sense of people's views, by collating feedback, engaging with community members to seek additional information. Sometimes additional consultation may be carried out to validate peoples' concerns or identify solutions that may be acceptable to community members.

02 // Adapting programmes to solving problems

Many organisations already have capacity to solve problems with the delivery of projects. Particularly where issues concern delivery of agreed products or services, or adherence to plans or protocols, organisations may already have processes and structures to solve issues. However, for organisations that work in more traditional top-down manner, some problems are harder to deal with than others. Generally speaking, the bigger and more complex the issue, the more difficult it is to resolve:

Problems that organisations can often deal with more easily	Problems that organisations may struggle to resolve
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not meeting planned targets, agreed quality or standards • Feedback about the performance of a project against agreed objectives • Where the issue is clearly within the organisations remit and responsibility • Solutions that require little or no financial resources to implement • Solutions that only require decisions at local or field level • Issues involving only one stakeholder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not meeting expectations or quality standards from the community perspective • Feedback about the relevance or appropriateness of a projects' objectives • Where it is not clear whose responsibility a problem is • Solutions that require additional financial resources, or re-allocation of resources • Solutions that require decisions at more senior levels • Issues involving multiple stakeholders

Youth leaders cannot change the way an organisation works overnight but can encourage organisations to be more flexible and responsive in a number of ways:

- Engaging with senior-level decision-makers, who may then be more receptive to changes that are presented to them.
- Engaging with “back- donors” so that they can see the rationale for flexibility.
- Supporting frontline staff by producing written reports of feedback and suggested solutions, allowing staff to advocate internally to their seniors.
- Suggesting youth and community-driven solutions to help solve the problem.
- Identifying external referral pathways for issues that are beyond the development actors’ scope or remit.

03 // Closing the feedback loop

Some problems take time to solve, and some may not be solved at all. However, even in these cases, there can be a positive outcome by communicating with communities about the issue. When people understand what efforts have been made, what reasons there are for problems persisting and are kept informed about the time it may take to solve an issue, they are likely to be satisfied.

- It can often be useful to inform a wider group of people, rather than just those that provided feedback, as this helps build trust in an accountability mechanism. Care should be taken to avoid identifying individuals who may wish to remain anonymous when communicating back to a wider group.
- Sometimes problems cannot be solved. Even in these cases, communicating this, and the reasons why, can help build trust with the community.

For people to feel heard by an organisation or agency, an ideal response should include a number of different things:

	<i>For example...</i>
What we were told...	People told us that agency staff usually arrive late to community meetings.
Why this is important...	We recognise that this causes people to feel that the agency doesn’t value their time and opinion.
What we think the problem is...	We see that meetings are being arranged without sufficient thought to travel time.
What we can do to address the problem...	We propose to change the time of meetings to enable sufficient travel time, and remind all staff that they must be on time.
When that will happen and who is responsible...	We propose to do this before the next meeting, and you can contact the project manager if staff continue to be late.

Some mechanisms for gathering feedback also support closing the feedback loop. These include outreach conversations, community meetings, participatory methods, community media or app-based or SMS-based feedback (see chapter 3). Sometimes additional mechanisms may be needed such as community meetings or notice or information boards.



CHOOSING A STRATEGY

Strategies for developing capacity to respond and adapt will depend primarily on:

- What are development actors' existing capacities to respond to issues and communicate with communities?
- How willing development actors are to engage with young people from the outset?

Youth-led advocacy

Where development actors' capacities and willingness to engage with young people are low to begin with, young people can play a role in advocating key issues to development actors and following-up on progress on behalf of the community.

01 // Young people can make sense of feedback on behalf of development actors and provide them with clear messages from the community perspective.

02 // Young people can suggest suitable adaptations to projects, and negotiate with development actors.

03 // Young people can feed back what has been done, or what progress has been made.

Youth-led solutions

Where development actors' capacity is low, but their willingness to engage with young people is high, young people can play a more active role in supporting the development of solutions and representing the community perspectives.

01 // Young people can make sense of feedback together or on behalf of development actors and help them understand community perspectives in more depth.

02 // Young people can work with development actors to identify solutions and discuss these with communities.

03 // Young people can support feedback to communities themselves, or by facilitating engagement with development actors.

QUESTIONS TO ASK



When designing a youth-led accountability project

- What processes (for example M&E) does development actor have for identifying and making sense of problems?
- How flexible is a development actor's approach to managing projects?
- What methods do they already use to communicate progress or changes to projects with the community?

When monitoring a youth-led accountability project

- How many problems or issues have been resolved? How long does it take to resolve issues?
- Are community members aware that problems have been resolved?
- Are community members satisfied with the responses they get from development actors?

Where development actors' capacity to respond to feedback is already high young people may not need to play such an active role in supporting the basic accountability process. However, they may still strengthen accountability by ensuring that the voices of vulnerable groups are equally represented, and that development actors maintain active engagement with community members.



WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Solving small problems can have big impacts. Sometimes small problems result in big impacts. For example, on a land registration project in Madagascar, the lack of information about the progress of farmers' land certification process, was causing distrust among community in the project. Simply providing information on local notice boards addressed this issue.

Development actors often have capacity to respond to operational-level issues. Existing project management and quality assurance processes often provide a basis for resolving operational issues. These do not require decisions from more senior-level decision-makers as they reflect how the project was intended to operate. Young people's role is often in communicating feedback to development actors and closing the feedback loop once action has been taken.

Engagement of more senior-level decision-makers is vital for solving more strategic issues. Issues that require more fundamental changes, for example to the design of projects or the amount of resource or time allocated, often cannot be resolved by staff working at operational level. In these cases, it is helpful for young people to engage with more senior staff to help resolve issues.

Alignment with existing M&E systems can support adaptation. In larger and more complex projects, decisions about implementation may require input by multiple different people or organisations involved. In these cases, providing written reports and aligning feedback to feed into existing decision-making processes can be helpful.

Changing underlying systems and culture can be slow. Accountability mechanisms can generate 'quick wins' in terms of fixes to projects at local level. However, these don't necessarily indicate organisational change. Changing the underlying systems and cultures with respect to how development actors listen and respond to communities they serve is likely to be slow and require more senior-level buy-in.



OUR RECIPE FOR YOUTH-LED ACCOUNTABILITY

This section outlines a recipe for youth-led accountability – the ‘model for change’ – that a consortium of organisations called the Development Alternative led by Restless Development piloted in Uganda and Madagascar. This is one way of combining the key ingredients presented in this book. To conclude this cookbook, we provide some tips for putting ingredients together to create your own models of youth-led accountability.

THE MODEL FOR CHANGE – AN OVERVIEW

Starting in late 2019, the ‘model for change’ initially focused on two locations in each country and sought to identify and hold development projects affecting people’s livelihoods in those locations to account. Restless Development Uganda and YMCA Madagascar began by recruiting a cohort of youth volunteers to facilitate accountability processes. Youth volunteers received an initial orientation and training, and were supported by staff to launch the model for change at community level. Projects for monitoring were initially identified by staff, who also supported youth volunteers to make initial contact and engagement with development actors. However, the ambition was that further projects would be identified by young people through consultation with their communities, and additional cohorts trained and mentored by experienced volunteers.

Some examples of projects monitored included:

- A World Bank funded agriculture and land management project in Antsirabe, Madagascar. A key element of this project was supporting farmers to regularise their titles to farmland.
- A World Bank backed, government project to rehabilitate a key rural road in Madagascar. A road construction project was also monitored in Karamoja, Uganda.
- A municipal government loan scheme to support young people to start businesses and social enterprises in Kampala, Uganda.
- A government project to strengthen youth livelihoods through loans for smallholder farming and agriculture businesses in Karamoja, Uganda.



These projects were monitored by youth volunteers, working in pairs, to engage with the community, verify that key aspects of the project were being delivered, and seek community members' views about the projects. Project monitoring was supported by the use of a digital tool: DevCheck. For each project, a tailored set of monitoring questions were developed and input into the Dev Check app. Using a smartphone, each volunteer used the app to engage with communities about their experiences of each project, record their views and log issues. Using the data generated from visiting the project and community feedback, youth volunteers collaborated with development actors and community members to identify and solve problems.

This video provides an overview of the model for change. The case studies from Uganda and Madagascar show the changes achieved by youth volunteers implementing the model for change.

STRATEGIES USED IN THE MODEL FOR CHANGE



Youth leadership

Young people were recruited by Restless Development Uganda and YMCA Madagascar to be volunteers. Women and those with disabilities were prioritised in the recruitment process. Because recruitment of volunteers happened concurrently with project selection, most of the volunteers were not from communities directly impacted by projects being monitored. Volunteers were provided with a small stipend, and loan of a smartphone to support monitoring. A 'volunteer journey' was developed that outlined personal and skills development goals that aligned with their roles as volunteers. Volunteers received an initial training and were supported by Restless Development Uganda and YMCA Madagascar staff throughout the monitoring process, which included progress journaling. In both contexts, volunteers faced negative perceptions about youth. The model sought to counter these by having a positive and visible role at community level.



Transparency and access to information

Development actors did not volunteer to be part of the programme; instead, they were identified as part of the initial scoping exercise as projects with an impact on local community livelihoods. While some development actors were willing to share information from the start, others were more reluctant and required repeated engagement. Financial information was regarded as particularly sensitive for some actors. Volunteers engaged with development actors to establish the basic activities of the projects, and commitments about what they would deliver and when. For some projects, volunteers played an active 'outreach' role to inform members of the community about their entitlements from the project and how they can engage. At the beginning, awareness within community about many of the projects was very low. Our follow-up survey after a year of implementation of the model for change showed that people's awareness had improved in the wider community, particularly among those who had engaged with youth volunteers.



Community awareness and engagement

Community awareness raising was initially carried out via face-to-face meetings and ad-hoc engagement with the community. In more rural areas where people tend to be dispersed, existing community meetings proved to be useful fora for informing community members about the model for change. Following initial sensitisation meetings, volunteers engaged with community members on an ongoing basis while monitoring the projects. COVID-19 disrupted volunteers' outreach activities considerably. Radio slots were used in Madagascar to continue to raise awareness of the model for change. Once COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, further sensitisation was needed, to refresh people's understanding of the project. Results from our community survey in Uganda showed that where community members had engaged with the volunteers, their perceptions and trust in young people were higher than elsewhere.



Mechanisms to listen and gather feedback

Youth volunteers engaged with members of the community face to face to gather feedback and monitor projects. To support them gather and document feedback, volunteers used a smartphone app (DevCheck), which recorded problems with projects, whether previous problems had been 'fixed', and also the results of short "ask the community" surveys which provided opportunity for community members to provide feedback about the performance of the project. This mechanism provided considerable flexibility:

- Volunteers **solicited** feedback (asking questions about the monitored project) from members of the community but were also available to listen to issues brought up by members of the community **unsolicited**.
- The DevCheck app combined opportunities for recording **open feedback** about issue with projects with '**closed questions**' about specific elements of the project.
- While those submitting feedback were identifiable to volunteers, feedback was **anonymous** to development actors, giving people more confidence to raise concerns.
- Volunteers facilitated **two-way communication** between development actors and the community. When a problem was identified, it would only be marked as 'fixed' once community members had verified this to be the case.

A drawback of relying solely on a face-to-face mechanisms became apparent when COVID-19 restrictions prevented travel and public gatherings. Some volunteers were able to continue engaging with community members if they lived close by, but others needed to adapt their methods of communication, and coordinated with those in the community by phone during the period of restrictions.



Building trust and collaboration with development actors

Young people met with staff from each of the development actors at the outset of the project to explain the model for change, and request their support. In Uganda engagement was initially easier, due to support from local government. In Madagascar, more formal meetings with senior staff were necessary to begin the process. While this took longer and resulted in some initial delays in Madagascar, it proved helpful later on because channels of communication with senior staff were already established. In Uganda, further work was needed to engage senior decision-makers once problems with projects started to be identified. The level of trust and collaboration varied considerably among the development actors. Engaging with senior decision-makers as well as project level staff proved important. Gaining visible support of the community and especially community leaders also helped build trust with development actors.



Supporting development actors to respond to feedback

The use of the DevCheck app provided an incentive for development actors to solve problems. Specific problems and 'fixes' with monitored projects were recorded and published in real-time on the DevCheck platform. The responsiveness of development actors to feedback is captured in a 'fix rate' – calculated as the percentage of problems reported with a project that were verified as successfully resolved by the community. No formal training or support was provided to development actors to help them solve issues. Some problems were straightforward to resolve, while others proved more difficult. Engagement of more senior staff helped resolve problems more swiftly, as well as providing more formal written reports that could be incorporated into a projects M&E. While the approach resolved many of the problems identified through feedback from communities, some remained unsolved. We also saw limited change in the way development actors sought to change their own processes for engaging with communities.



COOKING WITH YOUTH-LED ACCOUNTABILITY

There are many ways to put the ingredients for youth-led accountability together. In the Development Alternative, we broke the process up into a few stages:

01

Designing

- participation of young people and communities
- understanding needs
- developing a prototype

02

Launching

- mobilising young people
- engaging with communities and development actors
- identifying and engaging with other stakeholders

03

Implementing and adapting

- monitoring projects
- identifying problems and solutions
- adapting the mechanism

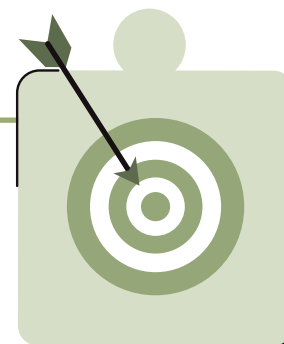
04

Scaling and sustaining

- refining the design
- identifying options
- embedding accountability mechanism



01 // DESIGNING



Making design choices can be difficult. Like any project, it involves thinking about what will work best in the local context, as well as what you and your organisation are able to do with the resources and skills that you have.

Participation of young people and communities.

A youth-led programme should involve young people from the start. It should also engage local communities to understand their needs, and assess different options before creating a 'prototype'. This participation is important, but it can be challenging to get people on board early on during project design. Accountability projects are more complex than other types of projects and can be difficult to communicate in an accessible manner. People may not see the value in accountability projects initially, because it does not provide tangible benefits from the start, or they may also fear it risks damaging relationships (for example communities may fear reprisal from development actors if they give negative feedback).

Some ways to deal with this are:

- Focus on how accountability can make a difference on tangible local issues.
- Avoid starting with very 'political' or 'sensitive' issues. These can be tackled once trust and collaboration with community and development actors has been established.
- Treat 'design' as an ongoing process. Participation can be enhanced once people are more familiar with the purpose and begin to see benefits.

Understanding the needs of those who will use accountability mechanisms is critical to the design stage.

The success of many projects depends on adapting them to people's needs. Youth-led accountability involves engaging with complex relationship: between communities and development actors, between young people and other community members. The chapters earlier in this book give some tips on questions to ask about each of the key ingredients before a project begins.

Answers to these questions may come from:

- Engagement meetings with communities, community leaders and other stakeholders.
- Small scale research, such as surveys or interviews with community members or development actors.
- Experiences from other projects.



Developing a prototype.

A prototype is simply a first version of the accountability process that can be developed and tested once it is launched. Developing a prototype involves making design choices on each of the ingredients, taking account of the needs of users, as well as the feasibility of different choices for your organisation's particular circumstances. In addition to these design choices, a good prototype should:

- Set clear expectations about roles and responsibilities.
- Identify the key processes involved in accountability.
- Be clear on the financial and non-financial resources that will be sought from different stakeholders.

02 // LAUNCHING



Accountability projects usually require some initial activities to get started. These can occupy a lot of time at the beginning but once running, they can be built into routine activities.

Mobilising young people for their leadership journey.

This might include initial orientation and setting up of support and/or mentoring relationships. If young people are involved right from the outset and can undertake some of the activities for launching the accountability project, this can support development of leadership skills.

Engaging with members of the community.

Community engagement and awareness is one of the core ingredients of youth-led accountability and relevant throughout the process, however, the initial engagement with community members is particularly important. The key task at the outset of an accountability project is to build interest and confidence to use accountability mechanisms as well as address any fears people may have. Some key things to communicate are:

- Clarifying the purpose of the accountability mechanism.
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities.
- Agreeing how young people will communicate with community members about their project.
- Addressing concerns or fears they may have.



Engaging with development actors.

An equally important activity during the launch is engaging with development actors to get their support for the project. How this is done depends on the nature of the project, but it is important to tackle potential resistance to accountability through clear and sensitive communication.

Top Tip:

Accountability as solving problems rather than allocating blame

It can be helpful to talk about accountability as a way of jointly solving problems, rather than as a way of blaming development actors for things which may be wrong with the project. Development actors may worry that accountability will lead to bad publicity and pressures on what may already be limited resources or staff time. If young people are seen as partners in finding solutions, rather than an auditor of their mistakes, development actors may be more willing to engage. Experience shows that accountability can in fact reduce 'blame-culture', as it builds trust through more regular communication with the community, ultimately leading to more positive interactions.

Identifying and engaging with other stakeholders.

At the start of an accountability project, it can be helpful to identify and engage with other relevant stakeholders. It is particularly useful to engage those who already have some role in representing the views of the community, or in making local decisions about development projects, such as:

- Community, religious or traditional leaders
- Local government representatives
- Other community-based groups or civil society organisations.



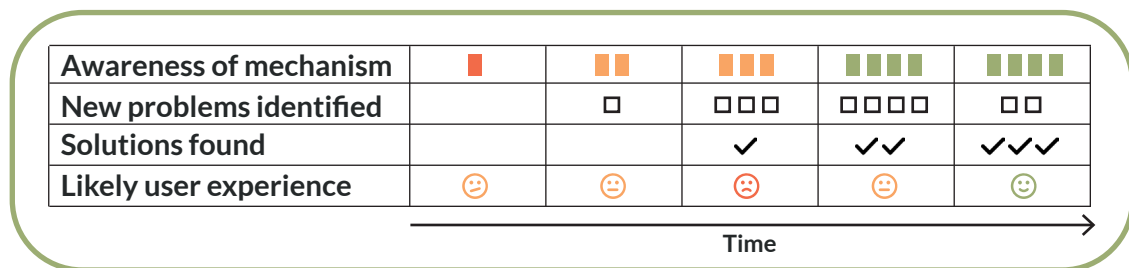
03 // IMPLEMENTING AND ADAPTING



Implementing an accountability project has some distinctive features. It is not a finite project, like building a school, nor is it a regular service like providing healthcare.

Accountability is more like a journey with a start, a middle and a destination. As more people become aware of an accountability project and start to use it, the number of problems identified grows. However, solutions take time to be found, so it is common for users to become disappointed during the middle phase, when a lot of problems have been identified but little action has been taken. It is particularly important that when solutions are found and implemented, community members are made aware of these solutions. We call this: 'closing the feedback loop' and it helps community members to gain confidence in the process.

User experience in the start-up phase



Youth-led adaptation.

Design processes, however well done, rarely result in the perfect solution first time. Like other complex projects, accountability projects benefit from ongoing adaptation. This is another area where youth-leadership can play a key role. Building in processes to reflect on how an accountability project is working, identifies challenges, and plans adaptations is important to ensure that accountability processes continue to respond to users' needs and local conditions.

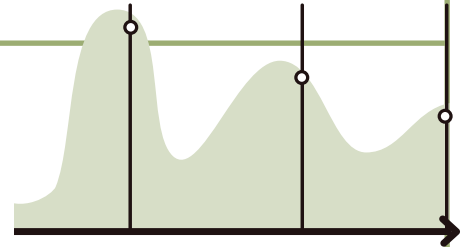
Case study: Youth-led adaptation of accountability processes

In piloting the model for change, the *Development Alternative* organised regular model review workshops with youth volunteers. These sought to gather feedback from those leading and implementing the accountability process, and identify improvements to the approach. Many improvements could be made at local level by volunteers themselves. Issues that could not be addressed at local level (e.g., because they involved resource allocations, or related to more strategic issues) were captured and fed into a consortium-wide strategy review process every 6 months, to allow these more strategic issues to be addressed. Proposals made in the strategy reviews were validated with youth volunteers, mirroring the idea of closing the loop that we expected from development actors.



04 // SCALING AND SUSTAINING

Once accountability mechanisms have been established, you may look to scale-up or find ways of sustaining the process.



Scaling up could include:

- Extending to more communities.
- Working with more development actors or projects.
- Promoting the approach with other organisations.

Sustaining accountability may involve:

- Transferring responsibilities for mechanisms to different actors.
- Institutionalizing processes at community level, and with development actors.
- Identifying ways of 'progressing' youth leaders and onboarding new ones.

For both scale and sustainability, two key questions need to be considered: how accountability mechanisms should adapt to new contexts, and how they can be resourced.

How should accountability mechanisms respond to local contexts?

Scaling up accountability mechanisms in different contexts, with different projects and diverse communities requires adaptation to contexts.

- Development actors may have different expectations, and willingness to commit.
- There may be existing accountability mechanisms.
- Level of literacy or familiarity with technology may differ between different contexts.
- Young people may have different skills or abilities.
- Different groups may be affected or made vulnerable by projects.

It is important that the design is considered and adapted to new contexts, rather than simply 'replicated'.

How will youth-led accountability be resourced?

Scaling up any kind of project requires additional resources, either in terms of financial resources, or people's time.



Did you know?

Some accountability mechanisms may appear to be scalable without much additional cost, for example by using apps or other technology. However, this is rarely the case. Once other factors such as community engagement and supporting development actors are taken into account, the level of financial or human resources needed usually increases with scale.

Sustainability means reducing the reliance of accountability projects on external resources and inputs. This can be achieved assigning more responsibility to those who benefit from accountability processes:

- Young people may continue to give their time to sustain accountability processes. Young people would expect to see benefits for their communities, as well as for themselves: developing skills and experience that can help them progress in their careers. It is important to plan for 'succession' when young people move on to new projects.
- Community members may be willing to volunteer their time, and use of community level resources such as meeting spaces. It is important to continue to think about how marginalised groups within the community can engage and avoid accountability processes being dominated by the 'usual suspects'.
- Development actors may agree to provide financial support to accountability processes or build them into their own monitoring and evaluation or quality assurance systems. In return they would hope see improvements in project performance, community relations and reputation.

For youth and community driven approaches, it is likely that some external financial resources are likely to be required to sustain youth-led accountability. Young people should continue to 'own' accountability processes. This could involve formalising youth leadership by forming a youth civil society organisation. Youth leadership also needs to reflect that "youth" is a period of transition and those involved in the project are likely to change over time. New cohorts of young people may be interested to join, and those engaged earlier in the project may want to transition out. Planning for succession, for example by assigning mentoring roles to young people with more experience, will help sustain and grow youth leadership.

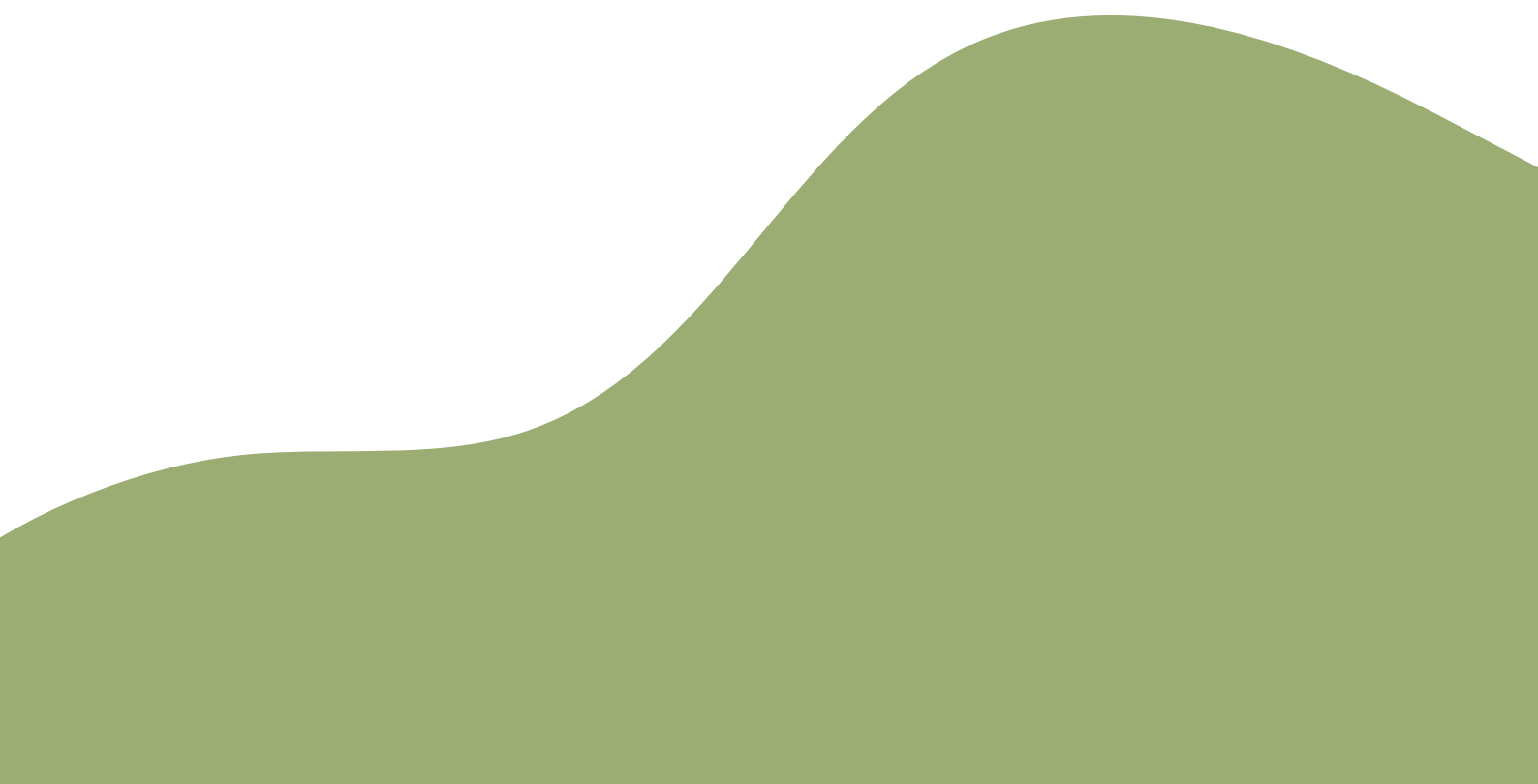
REFERENCES

¹ This distinction draws on the ‘three-lens’ approach to youth participation, developed by the DFID-CSO working group in 2010.

² Nowotny, M. (2021) Youth-Led Development: What Works? An Evidence & Learning Review Of 10 Years of Practice. The Development Alternative.

³ While the Development Alternative trialed one primary mechanism, led by youth volunteers, this has been shown in other studies: see <http://feedbackmechanisms.org> for more information.

SUMMARY OF RESOURCES

- [Development Alternative webpage](#)
 - [Model for change video](#)
 - [Case study Uganda](#)
 - [Case study Madagascar](#)
 - [DevCheck app](#)
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This is a 'cookbook' full of ingredients to design and implement youth-led accountability initiatives. The content is based on research, evidence and learning documented on a programme called the *Development Alternative*, a consortium of youth and international development organisations that came together to strengthen young people's voice and agency in development.

We have tried to boil down what we have learnt about the key ingredients for youth-led accountability - youth leadership, transparency and access to information, community awareness and engagement, mechanisms to gather and listen to feedback, trust and collaboration with development actors, and supporting development partners to respond to feedback - and how these ingredients can be combined into a programme.

We also reflect on 'the model for change', our own model for youth-led accountability implemented as part of the *Development Alternative*.