

The Role of Civil Society in Tracking FP2020 Commitments and Promoting Accountability: Discussion Paper



When governments make Family Planning 2020 (FP2020) commitments, what mechanism exists to hold them accountable? What is the role of civil society in monitoring these commitments and collaborating with governments to accelerate their implementation? Is civil society being engaged meaningfully in the process of creating and tracking government commitments? Is the civil society perspective being systematically captured in the annual country reporting process? Looking ahead to the next iteration of the FP2020 partnership, lessons and recommendations from this paper will help to shape an accountability framework for 2020-2030 commitments.



Introduction

Countries join the FP2020 partnership through formal commitments: financial, political, programmatic, and policy-related pledges to deliver rights-based family planning interventions for women, men, adolescents, and youth. FP2020 employs a mutual accountability approach, in which a government is obligated to deliver on the commitments it has made, and citizens are engaged to monitor their government's progress.¹

As FP2020 prepares to embark on the next phase of the initiative (in alignment with the 2030 Agenda), the partnership seeks to understand how civil society can play a larger role in accountability and how a civil society-led accountability framework can serve to comprehensively track 2020–2030 government commitments. FP2020 partnered with PAI to document successes and lessons to date in promoting accountability at the country level, specifically examining the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in tracking their government's FP2020 commitments.

This paper reports the findings from these investigations and provides recommendations to elevate CSO-led accountability mechanisms for the next phase of the FP2020 partnership.

As part of this effort, the authors reached out to 50 stakeholders, including FP2020 country focal points, the FP2020 Core Conveners,² and other partners who provided their input via survey or through telephone interviews. A desk review of civil society-led approaches to

accountability for sexual and reproductive health was also conducted to complement the feedback provided by respondents and to capture the depth and breadth of accountability initiatives for family planning. This paper reports the findings from these investigations and provides recommendations to elevate CSO-led accountability mechanisms for the next phase of the FP2020 partnership.

¹ All FP2020 partners make commitments, but this paper focuses on the accountability role of civil society with regard to government commitments.

² The FP2020 Core Conveners are the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the UK Department for International Development, the United Nations Population Fund, and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Why civil society-led accountability?

At its most fundamental level, accountability is defined in terms of answerability: duty bearers must answer to their constituents for the decisions they make and the actions they take.³ The duty of constituents to hold governments accountable for their actions is implicit within that definition. Respondents defined accountability as a way of ensuring that laws, policies, programs, and services meet and fulfill the needs and rights of intended beneficiaries and do no harm.

In the FP2020 view, accountability mechanisms are most effective when they are understood as a joint collaborative endeavor.⁴ A well-constructed accountability mechanism is an opportunity for dialogue and cooperation, enabling governments to achieve their goals and serve their constituents in the most effective way possible. CSOs are ideally situated to partner with governments in this type of mutual accountability relationship. CSO-led accountability mechanisms create a platform for citizens to help shape government commitments, participate directly in the implementation of programs, monitor progress in real time, and insist that their needs be met and their rights upheld.⁵

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However, the ability of civil society to engage governments and hold them accountable varies greatly between countries, and even within countries. Key to any commitment-making process should be an understanding on the part of government that civil society must be partners in all aspects of the commitment-making process—from conception to execution to tracking. True accountability cannot happen without civil society.

The accountability ecosystem of the FP2020 partnership

While governments are responsible for delivering on the commitments they make, they cannot do it alone. The FP2020 Secretariat works with governments to ensure that commitments are rights—and evidence—based and shares information on country progress through annual reports and country updates. International nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) and other partners implement programs consistent with national commitments and priorities; donors support the commitments through financial or technical assistance; and civil society drives accountability at the national level by working in collaboration with other stakeholders to advocate for action.

3 Brinkerhoff, Derick. *Accountability and Health Systems: Overview, Framework, and Strategies*. January 2003.

4 *Family Planning 2020. FP2020 2018 Annual Progress Report*.

5 *Family Planning 2020. FP2020 2019 Annual Progress Report*.

FP2020 ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

FP2020 is a completely voluntary partnership; there are no legal or financial mechanisms to enforce compliance. Nevertheless, the FP2020 platform provides an accountability framework for tracking and promoting progress, both globally and for each individual commitment-maker. Accountability mechanisms in the FP2020 framework function on two separate but linked levels (see graphic):

- **Outcome tracking** focuses on ultimate results: Are the family planning needs of women and girls being met? The FP2020 Core Indicators—a suite of 18 quantitative metrics estimated and compiled annually by [Track20](#) and in-country Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Officers—provide data on various dimensions of family planning usage and availability in the 69 FP2020 focus countries. The Core Indicators thus serve to gauge whether family planning outcomes are improving, globally and in each country.
- **Commitment tracking** focuses on the specific commitments made by FP2020 partners to support, expand, and fund rights-based family planning. Are the programs being implemented? Are the funds being disbursed? Are the policy changes being enacted? And, importantly, do the goals and objectives need to be revised to ensure that partners are investing in the most cost-effective programs and responding to the real needs of women and girls?

Outcome tracking and commitment tracking both cycle through a monitor-review-act-share sequence.⁶ The two accountability levels also function together in a feedback loop. Data on outcomes guide the work on commitments; progress on commitments is in turn reflected in improved outcomes.

⁶ The FP2020 accountability framework builds on the monitor-review-act framework used for the *Every Woman Every Child* Global Strategy. FP2020 extends the framework to include a fourth process—share—to capture the way in which the partnership promotes transparency and collaboration.



For outcome tracking, the cycle revolves around the annual process of developing the FP2020 Core Indicator estimates. (The FP2020 website [describes this process in detail](#).) Commitment tracking is more varied, encompassing a wide range of activities undertaken to monitor, analyze, and report on the extent to which FP2020 partners are delivering on specific pledges.

STAKEHOLDER ROLES IN ADVANCING ACCOUNTABILITY

The FP2020 Secretariat plays a crucial role in synthesizing progress and disseminating findings at the global level. The annual FP2020 report has been an effective tool

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for promoting the visibility and transparency of the initiative's progress toward the global goal of reaching 120 million additional users of modern contraception. The annual report also publishes Core Indicator data for every FP2020 focus country, while the narrative section of the report typically highlights key objectives achieved by countries in the past year (such as the passage of important laws or the implementation of new programs).

The Secretariat is also instrumental in convening the diverse range of stakeholders engaged in the partnership. Through the establishment of the FP2020 country focal point system, the Secretariat has created a mechanism that links major stakeholders, fosters dialogue, and promotes the sharing of information, resources, and solutions at the global, regional, and country levels.

INGOs and other implementers facilitate accountability by directly providing the services and resources called for in-country commitments, ideally in close collaboration with the government. Implementing partners are often better able to generate the data and evidence necessary for governments to make informed decisions, while filling critical service delivery gaps where resources are limited.

Donors play a major role in providing the financial and technical assistance that governments need to act on their commitments. If donors were to additionally prioritize funding for CSO-led accountability, it would help furnish the information needed to determine if these financial investments are being properly allocated and disbursed. It could also foster greater political will at the national level for governments to regularly increase their domestic financial investment in family planning.

CSOs are valuable partners in piloting innovations and scaling up proven programs. They are also well positioned to determine whether governments are effectively using available data, and to advocate for remedial actions when efforts fall short. CSOs can facilitate candid discussion of progress among all key stakeholders, with special attention to ensuring that efforts remain rights-based and are client-centered in their approaches.

Gaps in FP2020 accountability

Governments collect and analyze a wide range of data to evaluate and adapt family planning programming, including the FP2020 Core Indicators. However, the extent to which governments use that data effectively varies considerably. As citizen advocates

FP2020 ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

SECRETARIAT ROLE: MONITOR, REVIEW, ACT, SHARE



This diagram highlights the elements of the FP2020 accountability framework that are tracked, undertaken, or supported by the FP2020 Secretariat. Many if not all of the Secretariat's efforts to advance transparency and accountability are implemented in partnership with others in the family planning community, including experts on measurement and resource tracking. The full FP2020 accountability framework also includes in-country processes, donor and partner processes, and other mechanisms not shown on this diagram.

FP2020's accountability framework is in support of the broader SRMNCAH agenda and contributes to the Secretary-General's Global Strategy on Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health.



and community representatives, CSOs have an important role to play in urging governments to make data-based decisions and create family planning programming that is in line with the needs of their citizens.

While the FP2020 Core Indicators have been instrumental in enabling governments and the global community to track family planning progress across several key dimensions, they are limited to measuring quantitative outcomes. Critical aspects of FP2020 country commitments are qualitative in nature, which makes them challenging to track or monitor. These more qualitative aspects include pledges to foster an enabling environment or enhance women's agency in making family planning decisions.

The Core Indicators also do not adequately measure the contextual factors that govern the national family planning landscape and affect a country's ability to increase contraceptive use. The National Composite Index on Family Planning was created to help fill this gap, assessing progress across five dimensions of family planning policies and programs: strategy, data, quality, equity, and accountability. Of the five dimensions, accountability scored the lowest in 2014 and again in 2017. Improvement on this measure will require the development and implementation of comprehensive strategies that are grounded at the country level and prioritize the involvement of civil society, including youth-led organizations (YLOs). As more countries trend toward decentralization (albeit in varying degrees), we must ensure that comprehensive strategies to improve accountability are established and implemented at both the national and subnational levels.

Greater emphasis on civil society engagement in accountability can result in a more holistic understanding of country progress toward commitments and better engagement across sectors. It can also lead to actions that are evidence-based and contextually relevant. The need to move beyond high-level tracking of global goals to a stronger focus on country-level developments was emphasized by several respondents. As one respondent put it, "Accountability does not mean just tracking, it means going the next step and working with those who made commitments to make changes and act on improvements."

CSO-led accountability in the FP2020 Secretariat's processes

The Secretariat has taken steps to better engage CSOs at both levels of the FP2020 accountability framework (outcome tracking and commitment tracking). CSO representatives participate in the Performance, Monitoring & Evidence (PME)

Working Group, which focuses on the Core Indicators and related methodology. Within countries, CSO and YLO representatives have been incorporated into the focal point structure, and regional workshops now include two days set aside for CSO capacity building and participation.

CSOs and YLOs are also represented on the FP2020 Reference Group (the body responsible for the strategic direction of the partnership), and their participation has resulted in greater transparency. Reference Group meeting agendas and reports, for example, are now available on the FP2020 website as the result of a direct request by a youth focal point.

Nevertheless, representation within these mechanisms does not always translate to meaningful engagement of civil society beyond FP2020 structures. The annual self-reports submitted by countries, which are used by the FP2020 Secretariat as a key tool for tracking progress on commitments, are a case in point. CSO focal points do contribute to these self-reports, but participation by the wider CSO community in discussing and reviewing the reports is inconsistent. A consultative review of a government's self-reporting should include external validation and accountability. If the reports are not externally validated or widely discussed at the country level before submission to FP2020, they are likely to present a limited—and even skewed—view of progress.

Prioritizing inclusive structures at both the global and national levels will be critical going forward. Greater inclusion often leads to greater transparency, an essential aspect of accountability. The Secretariat can model inclusivity and transparency by creating, promoting, and supporting mechanisms in which civil society, including YLOs, participates in tracking commitments.

Post-2020 recommendations

A robust accountability framework will be critical for achieving the 2030 Agenda and the next phase of FP2020 commitments, and this will require CSO-driven accountability mechanisms that work with governments at the local, national, and global levels. To ensure that governments are able to move from commitments to progress, civil society's role in ensuring accountability should be elevated and supported with technical and financial resources, including organizational capacity building.

While FP2020's current accountability framework is strong at the global level, accountability processes and structures within countries have enjoyed limited success. We offer the following recommendations to improve national accountability efforts and strengthen civil society engagement, which in turn will lead to more effective and sustainable outcomes.

SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT OF ACTIONABLE COMMITMENTS

FP2020 should collaborate with civil society partners to support governments in creating clear and actionable 2030 commitments. Although FP2020 commitments have evolved over time to be more precise and measurable, guidance is needed to advise governments on how to approach the commitment-making process. A guidance document should

be developed that includes instructions and recommendations for producing specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely (SMART) commitments as well as steps that a government should consider undertaking, within the country's specific context, to ensure inclusivity when developing commitments. One priority step should be the formation of a commitment development and review committee that includes civil society and YLOs to draft the commitments.

DEVELOP MINIMUM STANDARDS TO ENSURE TRANSPARENT COMMITMENTS

FP2020 should work closely with governments and civil society partners to develop a set of minimum standards to which all commitment-making countries must adhere, as well as standards and guidelines for those governments whose commitments exceed the minimum standards. This will ensure that all commitments are reviewed according to a minimum set of standards while accounting for different types of governmental structures, current political context, etc. Minimum standards will help to mitigate ambiguity around the purpose of a family planning commitment, foster adherence to the Rights and Empowerment Principles FP2020 seeks to promote, and encourage the inclusion of civil society and YLOs in the commitment-making process.

ADOPT A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH TO ACCOUNTABILITY

To encourage CSO participation and ownership of commitments at the national level, commitments should be discussed and developed with a diverse range of CSOs and YLOs prior to submission to FP2020. Currently, commitments are typically announced and made public during global convenings, such as the International Conference on Family Planning. This is often the first time CSOs learn about the commitments their governments have made, and frequently, a significant amount of time is lost in tracking down the commitment specifics and ensuring buy-in to mobilize advocacy efforts at the national level. More specifically, substantial effort should be made to engage community-based organizations. Once the commitment has been accepted through this collaborative process, CSOs must then fully participate in all aspects of the monitor, review, act, and share cycle of accountability.

Utilizing the Motion Tracker approach, civil society consistently and regularly convenes stakeholders, monitors commitments, reviews data, advocates for action, and shares results.

The Motion Tracker, which is being implemented in seven commitment-making countries, is an excellent example

of a bottom-up approach to accountability for FP2020 commitments. Utilizing the Motion Tracker approach, civil society consistently and regularly convenes stakeholders, monitors commitments, reviews data, advocates for action, and shares results. Expansion of the Motion Tracker methodology to other commitment-making countries can help to address the current lack of CSO-driven accountability mechanisms at the national level.

In some countries where the Motion Tracker is being implemented, the implementing CSOs have been contacted by FP2020 focal points to assist in completing the country self-reports. In doing so, the focal points were able to have a broader understanding of progress inclusive of the CSO perspective. Country self-reports currently utilized by the Secretariat can also be adapted to promote a bottom-up approach to accountability by requiring that self-reports be shared with CSOs for feedback prior to submission.

INVEST IN CSOS

Given their essential role in achieving the 2030 Agenda and FP2020 commitments, CSOs should be appropriately funded to design, implement, and scale up accountability initiatives. Furthermore, donors should invest in strengthening the organizational effectiveness of CSOs to ensure their sustainability.

REPORT MORE FULLY ON COUNTRY PROGRESS TOWARDS COMMITMENTS

The FP2020 annual report largely focuses on updated estimates for the Core Indicators, progress toward achieving the global goal, partnership-wide developments, and key achievements in countries. In addition, Track20 produces country-specific fact sheets. However, more information is needed to provide insight on the annual progress that individual countries are making toward their commitments and the actions that civil society is undertaking to accelerate progress on meeting these commitments. This could be addressed by a complementary annual report that describes and quantifies civil society efforts, while also providing a much-needed platform to highlight a wide range of voices and perspectives beyond the government.

FOSTER GREATER COMPLIANCE

The existing FP2020 accountability framework clearly emphasizes the importance of evidence-informed action but is largely silent on what should happen if there is a lack of progress or if there are outright violations of sexual and reproductive health and rights. The partnership is understandably limited in its ability to enforce compliance, as there is no legal or financial mechanism to do so. However, the [country pages on the FP2020 website](#) could serve as an excellent platform for the Secretariat to reinforce civil society's call for remedies, significantly bolstering their efforts to enforce accountability when governments fail to act on their commitments. Conversely, the FP2020 website could also be used to highlight the efforts of governments that go above and beyond to advance family planning, especially where the need is greatest—thus inspiring the countries lagging behind to take action.

Conclusion

FP2020 commitments are multidisciplinary and complex, and rightfully require an accountability framework that considers multiple categories of accountability (financial, performance, political, and social).⁷ Articulating the linkages between the mechanisms already in place will make for a more coherent accountability framework, and encourage better coordination, participation, and engagement at the national and global levels between all actors involved in tracking progress on FP2020 commitments.

As the FP2020 partnership looks ahead to the 2020–2030 accountability framework, the recommendations from this paper should serve as a guide for ensuring meaningful, effective civil society engagement at all steps of the process—from initial commitment through performance monitoring and evaluation.

7 Brinkerhoff, Derick. Accountability and Health Systems: Overview, Framework, and Strategies. January 2003.

ABOUT PAI

At PAI, we are motivated by one powerful truth: A woman who is in charge of her reproductive health can change her life and transform her community.

Our mission is to promote universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights through research, advocacy and innovative partnerships. Achieving this will dramatically improve the health and autonomy of women, reduce poverty and strengthen civil society.

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ABOUT FP2020

Family Planning 2020 is a global community of partners working together to advance rights-based family planning. The FP2020 partnership was launched at the 2012 London Summit on Family Planning, with the goal of enabling 120 million additional women and girls in 69 of the world's poorest countries to use voluntary modern contraception by 2020.

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