2019 Africa Forum on Managing for Development Results

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This paper is a knowledge product of the African Community of Practice on Managing for Development Results (AfCoP-MfDR) which aims to develop and promote a results culture in Africa to contribute to the Africa transformation agenda. The paper describes the status of accountability and partnership for results and the related options available to better address Africa’s development challenges. The key messages are outlined in this synopsis.

1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

African governments are increasingly challenged to be transparent and demonstrate results.

Governments are challenged to respond to the urgency of their citizens’ needs and to be more accountable to them. This, combined with an increasingly demanding public, is putting governments under pressure to show that they are providing good value for money. The issue is particularly relevant to Africa where the problem of accountability remains stark. Indeed, there is still a long way to go to establish a strong culture of accountability and partnership in Africa. For instance, institutions that can ensure effective and strong accountability are still lacking in some countries and where they exist, they have limited independence and capacities to operate. In addition, most countries have low capacities to establish genuine partnerships by, for example, aligning donor priorities to national systems, strategies and policies. This has become even more relevant since 2015 that African countries have started implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) alongside the African Union Agenda 2063 for which there is a consensus that accountability and partnership should be led by local and national mechanisms.
There is need to redefine the focus of accountability and partnership in African countries. Accountability is recognized as a determining factor in achieving development results. For instance, it is axiomatic that an accountable government is inherently good. In fact, governments which account for the manner in which they allocate and spend public resources, make public policy and take decisions, are more inclined towards higher effectiveness. Accountability is therefore needed to ensure fairness, equality and equity in public decision-making because without accountability, governments cannot respond effectively to the needs of the people or set national agendas that are relevant to national priorities and on which donor priorities may align. However, practice and evidence on the ground show that African countries are more likely to be accountable to their donors than to their own citizens, resulting in urgent calls to redefine the focus of national accountability and partnership mechanisms. In response to the commitment of African countries to adopt the principles and practices of MfDR to create sustainable change in the lives of their populations, AfCoP has therefore committed to address this knowledge gap. The objective is to inform African policies on the right way to use accountability and partnership mechanisms for the structural transformation of the continent.

A transdisciplinary approach was used to grasp the complexity of the issue and link abstract and case-specific knowledge to better inform policies. The study adopted a transdisciplinary approach to achieve its objective. This approach combined academic knowledge and key informants’ knowledge to create a common knowledge base for providing clear and impactful recommendations. The approach was developed in two steps. First, a thorough literature review was performed to deeply analyse the studies which have been conducted so far on accountability and partnership, especially in Africa. The review also permitted the analysis of case studies to delve into specific mechanisms implemented in African countries to analyse what have worked so far, what are the challenges, and how African countries can improve their accountability and partnership mechanisms. Second, an online discussion was moderated on the AfCoP platform for three weeks to exchange and gather insights from the MfDR community on how African countries were dealing with accountability and partnership especially, with the emerging development priorities. Responses were used to augment the analysis of the findings and make informed policy recommendations.
2. KEY FINDINGS OF THE ASSESSMENT OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND PARTNERSHIP AGAINST AFRICA’S CONTEXT AND CURRENT DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

Finding 1: A number of challenges have to be tackled to improve government accountability.

These challenges are discussed as they relate to civil society actors, state actors and the relationships between these two groups. Civil society actors face four categories of challenges as follows: the lack of capacities and skills to implement accountability measures, the dependence on donor funding, the weak ability to organize and mobilize people at the grassroots level and the proof of credibility and accountability within their organizations. Similarly, state actors also face four main challenges in their willingness to disclose information and to listen to, engage with, and account to citizens as follows: the democratic obligation of government to account to the people and the fundamental political right of citizens to demand public accountability, patronage, political will and leadership, and the necessity to build state capacities to engage in and respond to accountability initiatives. Besides, there are three challenges that may affect the nature of relations between civil society actors and government actors in implementing accountability initiatives as follows: suspicion or distrust, weak mechanisms for formal and systematic exchange between civil society and the state, and lack of inclusiveness to account for marginal voices in particular the voices of women, youth and other traditionally marginalized groups.

Finding 2: Accountability and partnership mechanisms that are aligned with national systems are important to support Africa’s socio-economic transformation.

Africa is experiencing a major transformation today with its sustained growth and its policies to alleviate poverty. To sustain the achievements, socio-economic transformation has become the focus of African countries at continental, regional, and national levels as espoused in Agenda 2063, Agenda 2030 and AfDB’s High Five. However, these agendas put a weak highlight on...
how to make national accountability and partnership systems work to ensure that governments are held accountable to the results. For this to happen, there is need to align development priorities with national systems and open the way to a harmonized strategy to reinforce partnerships of African countries.

Finding 3: It is crucial to include civil society and mainstream accountability and partnership mechanisms in development plans at early stage.

Virtually, all African countries have good economic and social development plans and have adhered to broader plans both at continental level (Agenda 2063) and global level (Agenda 2030). However, what is missing is how accountability and partnership will be dealt with at the implementation phase of these plans. At the national level, accountability and partnership mechanisms are often limited to official reporting performed by governments as an administrative routine rather than an opportunity to engage stakeholders and reflect about how to improve development outcomes. Moreover, although civil society actors are increasingly playing a central role in demanding accountability especially ‘social accountability’, they are not well involved in government-led accountability. For instance, there has been criticism in the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) process that in many instances civil society involvement was declining. Therefore, it is important that civil society actors are given a stable and rewarding place in all accountability processes and necessary steps should be taken to ensure their participation is not constrained or biased by political inference or financial capacity.
Finding 4: It is now clear that evidence and effective partnerships with development partners may reinforce accountability. It is argued in the case studies that countries with strong think tanks perform better in accountability. This is justified by two reasons. First, to hold government accountable, civil society actors, parliament, and audit institutions need accurate evidence, including data, research findings, and evaluation results to know what has been achieved and how against what was planned. Second, governments also need data and evidence to be able to demonstrate impact and show strong accountability. Therefore, it is important to ensure all the stakeholders have the required evidence to confidently speak out and demand (or supply) accountability. In addition, evidence may help stakeholders specify clearly local needs in partnership agreements with development partners which also have an important role to play in driving accountability in Africa. Important roles for development partners include promotion of enabling environment, supporting capacity building of accountability stakeholders and promotion of demand-driven initiatives. By doing so, they will allow for more independent and country owned accountability and partnership mechanisms to the extent that would be desired by national stakeholders.
3. **ACTIONABLE RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE FOCUS OF THE MFDR AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS IN LINE WITH THE AFRICA’S ASPIRATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES**

The paper made actionable recommendations to inform African policies in improving accountability and partnership mechanisms. These recommendations therefore represent opportunities for AfCoP to support African countries in their structural transformation.

**Recommendation 1: African countries should develop Africa-owned accountability and partnership mechanisms**

Case studies showed that African countries have a good tradition of planning but what is missing is how accountability and partnership will be dealt with at the implementation phase of these plans. External support is important, but collaboration must promote locally driven and owned approaches. In addition, civil society actors (organizations and citizens) could be capacitated to demand more accountability using, for instance, technology. Furthermore, it is important to mainstream the use of evidence into accountability and partnership mechanisms and ensure all stakeholders have the required evidence to confidently speak out and demand (or supply) accountability.

**Recommendation 2: Capacities which are imperative to ensure accountability and partnership mechanisms work in African countries need to be strengthened.**

Accountability is about building an effective and sustainable system-wide mechanism through which a stakeholder demands accountability and the other is able to supply it. In such interaction, capacities of each party can be an enabling or limiting factor. Therefore, and based on lessons learned from case studies, three capacities are imperative to improve accountability and partnership mechanisms: the capacities of governments to share information and demonstrate results, the capacities of civil society actors to demand and hold governments accountable, and the capacities of institutions (legislative, judiciary, audit institutions and Ombudsman) to hold governments accountable.

**Recommendation 3: Given its experience and expertise, AfCoP should position itself as a champion and supporter of accountability and partnership in African countries.**

Learning from the findings and the strategic positioning of AfCoP, there are four concrete proposals about what should be the focus of the MfDR pillar “Accountability and Partnerships” in the African context. First, there is social accountability as a type of
accountability that is relatively new but is spreading. Second, although still infant in the accountability arena, new technologies have shown promises to improve many facets of accountability. Third, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) offers the opportunity for AfCoP to implement actions around an accountability initiative that has the merit to be thought and implemented by and for Africans. Last, mutual accountability, as an emerging phenomenon, has the potential to improve partnership agreements and, hence, accountability and partnership mechanisms in African countries.

Recommendation 4: A fully-fledged capacity building program on accountability and partnership should be developed to strengthen the capacities of all key actors, from governments including the Parliament, the Judiciary and audit institutions to civil society actors.

The paper helped assess the status of accountability and partnership and learned from case studies to propose the new foci of the pillar. To make this happen, a number of recommendations are put forward as follows: propose innovative accountability and partnership mechanisms to countries, mainstream accountability and partnerships in other MfDR pillars, and guide development partners to support the right needs for accountability in Africa. To effectively implement these recommendations, there are two preliminary conditions that should be pursued by AfCoP. First, AfCoP should reinforce its partnership base by establishing and/or enhancing the linkage of its work with other continental institutions including, the APRM, the African Union Development Agency, the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), and the AfDB. Second, AfCoP should be aware that accountability starts at home. Therefore, it should establish exemplary and strong governance rules that demonstrate itself as an institution that is internally driven by high accountable standards and can therefore demand and promote accountability from others.

AfCoP stands ready to help African governments and international partners to use MfDR in designing national accountability and partnership mechanisms. Implementing the recommendations of this paper will be an evolving process that will benefit from monitoring, peer review and exchange of experiences among countries.