



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ENGENDERING ACCOUNTABILITY:

Upholding Commitments to
Maternal and Newborn Health

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Build from the
grassroots
and know
your context

02

Create diverse
coalitions

03

Develop and
disseminate
the evidence

04

Engage with
partners and
create space
for meaningful
change



Global Health
Visions



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The report does not provide a full review of theories, interventions, data, or findings related to MNH accountability efforts. It relied heavily on contributions of interviewees and, as a result, may include generalizations or differences of opinion. Any mistakes or discrepancies are the sole responsibility of the authors.

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Executive Summary

Over the past decade, impressive strides have been made to improve the health of women, children, and newborns across the globe. Accessible and affordable healthcare is on the rise and communities are increasingly demanding that governments fulfill their promises to citizens.

The shift towards more equitable and available services highlights the need for additional accountability through both government systems and civil society engagement in the planning, review, and implementation of health services. Improved policies and programming on the part of government does not guarantee effective implementation, nor does it ensure that adequate resources – both human and financial – are allocated to deliver on these commitments.

Transparency and accountability initiatives play an important role in providing input and oversight to government programs, particularly when citizens and civil society participate in the monitoring and measurement of achievements. Without listening to the populace and understanding the real barriers to effective implementation, successful outcomes will remain elusive. Through citizen engagement, civil society advocacy, and strategic accountability mechanisms, the most vulnerable can have a voice and communities can be empowered to drive government action.

With the rise in global attention and the need to further accelerate progress on maternal and newborn health (MNH), and reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health (RMNCH) writ large, the international community has become increasingly focused on accountability to ensure that commitments by all stakeholders are realized. At the same time, global,



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regional, and national landscapes have become cluttered with various accountability approaches that are often disjointed or incomplete.

To better understand the landscape of MNH accountability programs, this report reviews key global and regional programs and processes and describes potential intervention models that are currently being utilized at the national and sub-national levels in India, Nigeria, and Uganda. With a particular focus on civil society-led accountability approaches, this paper outlines the role that citizens, civil society, and government can play in building partnerships and programs that encourage health system accountability.



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Global Mechanisms

Global accountability mechanisms provide a foundation for RMNCH accountability efforts at the regional, national, and sub-national levels. These initiatives provide a roadmap for local and global partners to develop accountability systems that clearly define government commitments and measure progress against these promises.

From the **Sustainable Development Goals** to the **Every Newborn Action Plan**, global initiatives can enhance in-country government processes by

lending support and creating an enabling environment for civil society to push for improved accountability.

The number of global initiatives across the RMNCH continuum of care is extensive. While they provide a sound and comprehensive initial platform for effective country-led accountability, these mechanisms have critical limitations that impede progress for national and sub-national efforts. Global mechanisms provide a framework for government officials to make country commitments, yet these commitments are often not translated into policies and, in many cases, are unknown among citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) who work to improve health services and hold governments to account. A lack of follow-up and limited linkages to country-level action creates further challenges to successful implementation and uptake. In addition, these mechanisms, which are intended to be country-driven, often do not adequately include or address in-country priorities and community needs.

Some of the most promising advancements in the global sphere come from improved consultation processes under the **Sustainable Development Goals**, which fully embrace the value of accountability. **A Promise Renewed** has also made concerted efforts to ensure that program plans are grounded in country ownership and are linked with successful initiatives, such as **African Leaders Malaria Alliance**, which develops **RMNCH Scorecards** that include actionable indicators to link state, national, and international reporting. The **International Health Partnership** has placed country governments in a leading role, coordinating partners and integrating efforts across health, including sub-national reporting. And new methods

for enhancing civil society engagement are being implemented under the umbrella of **Every Woman Every Child** with the advent of Citizens' Hearings that elevate citizens' voices to the national and global levels.

Despite this, however, more coherent and collaborative actions are needed to increase understanding, reduce the reporting burden, and maximize the attainment and effectiveness of international commitments in country. These commitments need to be communicated beyond high-level officials at the national level, and global indicators need to be reviewed by government and civil society and then integrated into systems that are already in place. Evaluation of global actors – including donors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector – must move beyond self-reporting to institutionalizing transparency and accountability into their own procedures and making this information available to partners. This, linked with in-country enforcement mechanisms, will help pave the way for improved transparency, governance, and advocacy for maternal and newborn health.

Regional Mechanisms

Regional accountability mechanisms, such as the **Campaign on Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa (CARMMA)** and the **Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW)**, have made progress in legitimizing the importance of country collaboration and governance and have the potential to facilitate country to global linkages. African governments and partners have called upon the **African Leaders Malaria Alliance (ALMA)** to provide technical assistance in monitoring and evaluating health services and outcomes, and the **African Health Budget**

Network aims to create linkages between CSOs and governments while promoting budget advocacy and transparency.

Through regional mechanisms, global-, national-, and state-level players could find ways to better coordinate, but the activities of these organizations will need to expand outside mutual learning and information exchange to providing capacity strengthening, regional dialogue, and country oversight.

Country Mechanisms

Country accountability mechanisms are essential to improving MNH outcomes, prompting transparency, empowering citizens, supporting good governance, and fostering democracy. ***Civil society must be placed at the heart of accountability campaigns to achieve these goals, and they must be resourced and supported to play this important role.***

Civil society-led campaigns raise citizen awareness of their rights and entitlements, motivate civic participation, support mutually beneficial citizen-state partnerships, construct common ground for voice and empowerment, and create the future change agents of tomorrow.

Photo: Liz Gillbert/Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation



GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESSFUL CIVIL SOCIETY-LED ACCOUNTABILITY CAMPAIGNS

Six guiding principles should inform the development of successful accountability campaigns. These principles contribute to informed, impactful, and sustainable accountability movements at the country level.

1) Build from the grassroots and know your context.

Start local and build linkages to sub-national, national, global. Understand the political, economic, and stakeholder landscapes.

2) Create diverse coalitions.

Partnerships and alliances can help reinforce internal and external organizational transparency.

3) Develop and disseminate the evidence.

Gather data that are meaningful to civil society, useable by government, and accessible to citizens.

4) Engage with partners and create space for meaningful dialogue.

Build off of systems that are already in place for public input into government

processes or community-based platforms or create new spaces for citizen engagement and advocacy.

5) Strengthen oversight.

Rewarding accountable behavior and sanctioning unaccountable behavior can help enforce government recommendations and response to civil society campaigns.

6) Communicate and follow-up.

Recognize that accountability is a continual process.



India

From engaging the legal system, the media, and elected representatives, MNH accountability efforts in India have pursued numerous avenues to improve the health and wellbeing of communities. Research, monitoring, budget analysis, and advocacy are just some of the tools that have been employed by civil society and government partners. And while accountability for MNH is still in a nascent phase, it has much to draw from India's long history of civil society activism.

Government-led initiatives, such as **Community Action for Health**, implemented under the **National Health Mission**, provide a unique opportunity to engage citizens in monitoring and evaluating health services through state supported programs. Specifically, they create a mechanism in which citizen complaints can be heard at the village level and then moved up the 'accountability chain' to the primary health center and on to the block, district, and state administration, as needed. However, one drawback is that these government-led programs place the majority of responsibility on citizens to identify, evaluate, and respond to issues. To truly make community action a fruitful accountability endeavor, the government needs to offer more support for citizen and community engagement.

The majority of the MNH civil society-led accountability work in India has been at the level of community mobilization, focusing primarily on social accountability strategies. National level alliances, including the **White Ribbon Alliance India (WRAI)** and **Commonhealth**, have facilitated advocacy campaigns and supported collective action in pushing for policy change. Various organizations working at the state level have helped raise awareness,

highlighted the voices and experience of women, strengthened citizen capacity, and engaged with government at the local level. While these efforts have brought change at the block or district level, collaboration among civil society actors across districts and states is limited.

These localized accountability activities take time and consistent effort. They require that coordinated local to national action be matched with government responses that adequately address societal demands. Judiciary action can bring about concrete action and legal empowerment, as seen through the **Human Rights Law Network's (HRLN) Reproductive Rights Initiative (RRI)**. HRLN uses the legal system to combat violations of reproductive rights, ensure implementation of reproductive rights schemes, and demand accountability where implementation is left wanting. Legal cases, however, can be long and arduous.

Nigeria

The state of accountability efforts in Nigeria reflects a system that is drawing on global initiatives to develop country mechanisms, engaging multiple partners as an essential component to success, and utilizing a variety of tools and tactics that are effective and provide important checks and balances.

The **Nigeria Independent Accountability Mechanism (NIAM)**, which falls under the umbrella of **Accountability for Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health in Nigeria (AMHiN)**, with support from **MamaYe: Evidence for Action (E4A)**, is a valuable platform to assess a country's ability to make global commitments a reality. Designed as a process to review progress against national commitments and those under the Global Strategy for Women and



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Children's Health, NIAM has created a multi-stakeholder platform for connecting voices, experts, partners, and leaders from across states to influence and accelerate progress in maternal, newborn, and child health. As a result, the government is more receptive to CSOs' involvement in accountability and citizens are demanding more from their governments. Other organizations and partnerships, such as **White Ribbon Alliance Nigeria (WRAN)**, **the Partnership to Revive Routine Immunization in Northern Nigeria/ Maternal Newborn and Child Health (PRRINN-MNCH)**, **the Association for the Advancement of Family Planning (AAFP)**, **Advocacy Nigeria**, and **The Free Maternal and Child Health Partnership**, have a strong focus on advocating for supportive maternal and newborn health programs and policies.

In contrast to national efforts, state-level civil society-led accountability efforts for RMNCH in Nigeria have historically been more scattered and less successful. However, a number of CSOs and CSO-led programs are promoting dialogue between state actors, health-care providers, and citizens in order to

improve governance, involve the media, and strengthen the evidence-base to advance accountability for RMNCH. These include **Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARD C)**, **Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Center (CISLAC)**, **Development Communications Network (DevComs)**, **Advocacy Nigeria**, **Community Health and Research Initiative (CHR)**, and the **UK's Department for International Development (DFID)-funded MNCH2** and **Partnership for Transforming Health Systems Phase II (PATHS2)**.

The **Know Your Budget Partnership (KYB)**, a CSO network engaged in budget analysis and advocacy, has been able to expand their understanding of a country's political economy and enhance engagement with government and media, with support from the **State Accountability and Voice Initiative (SAVI)**. KYB was built on local priorities and has utilized creative multi-media strategies such as public forums, radio, and TV discussion programs to reach elected representatives and key members of the state government and successfully advocate for budget reforms and accountability.

Nigeria has particularly excelled in connecting global and national accountability efforts, and there are some strong state-level accountability efforts; however, the connection from national to state (and vice versa) remains weak and citizen-level accountability mechanisms could be strengthened.

Uganda

In Uganda, maternal and newborn health accountability programs have worked to implement decentralization policies across the country, both through government programs and civil society partnerships.

A number of functions that were once performed by the central government, including the provision of health services, are now performed by districts. As a result, citizens are engaging through various government avenues, and CSOs and state partners are working to develop and implement interventions that address key gaps in maternal and newborn healthcare.

Government partners that work through national channels include the **Health Sector Management Working Group**, **Budget Monitoring and Accountability Unit (BMAU)** within the **Ministry of Finance**, **Office of the Auditor General**, **Ministry of Public Service**, **Office of the Inspectorate General of Government**, **Ministry of Local Government**, **Office of the Prime Minister**, **Parliament Public Accounts Committees**, and the **Joint Assistance Framework**. These partners work to monitor, collect, and analyze data on spending and performance (among others), and incorporate citizen views through sector planning and budgeting processes that engage with civil society and impact government programs. **Barazas**, an initiative of the **Government of Uganda** that is coordinated by the **Office of the Prime Minister**, creates space for public dialogue for citizens' voices to influence planning, monitoring, and evaluation of government services.

Ugandan civil society accountability players and programs, including the **White Ribbon Alliance Uganda**, **World Vision Uganda's Child Health Now! (CHN)**, **Centre for Health, Human Rights, and Development (CEHURD)**, **Coalition for Health Promotion and Social Development (HEPS)**, **Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group (CSBAG)**, and **Reproductive Health Uganda (RHU)** are tracking resources, monitoring performance, engaging with

media, and conducting advocacy and awareness-raising activities.

White Ribbon Alliance Uganda (WRAU) launched a campaign, *'Act Now to Save Mothers,'* to hold the government accountable to its commitment to provide basic and comprehensive emergency obstetric and newborn care. Using data from participatory health facility assessments, WRAU conducted evidenced-based advocacy to ensure government promises were fulfilled. Monitoring and follow-up was conducted through community and district health team scorecards, which were discussed, recorded, and responded to during citizen hearings. The **Uganda Debt Network** has conducted similar activities focused on implementing a **Community Based Monitoring and Evaluation System (CBMES)** that utilizes a variety of tools to improve service delivery and quality of care. **Village Budget Clubs**, organized by the **Forum for Women in Democracy**

Photo: UNHCR / F. Noy



(FOWODE), develop budget literacy at the grassroots level by training community members to monitor the expenditure of public resources, identify potential corruption among public officials, and ensure the delivery of quality services.

Findings and Recommendations

Through partnership, citizens, government representatives, and health officials can work together to monitor, evaluate, and overcome the tough issues that communities face when accessing government programs and services. By developing citizen-centered, strategic accountability mechanisms, civil society organizations can capitalize on the ‘accountability toolbox,’ selecting the approaches that best fit their goals and reflect the environment they are hoping to influence.

Situation analysis, including stakeholder mapping and analyzing the political economy, can help identify potential allies and opponents and understand the way power and wealth is distributed within society; **maternal death reviews** and scorecards can help evaluate and improve service delivery and policy implementation; **budget tracking** can assess resource efficiencies and priority setting; **public hearings and dialogues** can empower and elevate citizen voices; **policy and political advocacy** can push governments to fulfill commitments; **legal empowerment** can reinforce judiciary actions; and **strategic media engagement** can support feedback loops between government, civil society, and its citizens. While government partners may have good intentions, what is measured and evaluated is more likely to be done, and evidence must be used to drive and strengthen accountability and enhance transparency of results.

Yet scorecards, public hearings, and other tools are only as strong as the

data and information they contain, and government and citizen awareness doesn’t guarantee action. Collaboration and confrontation must be weighed against the country’s political and social context. Capacity strengthening of organizations and individuals must be matched with robust goals and objectives. Support to established CSOs must be complimented with outreach to new and non-traditional partners. Power dynamics must be assessed and adequately addressed. Accountability mechanisms must be institutionalized with continual follow-up and action, as well as sufficient and sustained funding, in order to embed accountability at the country level. Sub-national accountability efforts are at the crux of successful campaigns, but challenges remain in strengthening these mechanisms. While some countries have strong national and global linkages, others fail to move beyond local government. In many settings, there is a disconnect between grassroots accountability programs and district and state accountability systems and, in turn, with national mechanisms. This gap is a critical challenge facing program implementers at the country level.

The report recommendations summarized on the next page provide concrete steps that can be taken to help bridge this gap and support civil society and government actors in promoting accountability.

Together, citizens, civil society, and government can support ongoing efforts to comprehensively address maternal and newborn health through citizen action, civil society advocacy and monitoring, government oversight, and global support. By creating context-specific strategies, partners can leverage one another’s comparative advantage to develop coordinated and deliberate collective action.

Now, more than ever, accountability mechanisms must be strengthened to not only sustain the progress that has been made, but to also advance maternal

and newborn health, empower the state and citizens to act, increase government effectiveness, and strengthen democracy.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS: CONCRETE ACTIONS TOWARD DESIGNING EFFECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

Data, Transparency, and Governance

1. Invest in **governance** and **transparency** writ large.
2. Improve the quality and availability of both ‘imperfect’ and ‘perfect’ **MNH data**.
3. Develop **MNH indicators** in partnership with countries and include significant input from civil society actors.
4. Combat government restrictions to **citizen voice and action**.

Multi-stakeholder Partnership and Civil Society Leadership

5. Build strong **partnerships** between government, civil society, and other key stakeholders
6. Engage, strengthen, and collaborate with **parliamentarians**.
7. Ensure **state-based institutions** have the support they need to be effective.
8. Support and amplify **civil society voices**.

Capacity Strengthening

9. Support strategic, needs-based **capacity building programs** that address both civil society and state needs.

Strategy, Tools, and Tactics

10. Invest in a strategic and multi-faceted approach to accountability, with **civil society** at its core.
11. Strengthen RMNCH **budget monitoring and accountability** and align with other budget accountability efforts.
12. Leverage **ICT platforms** and build on the experience of partners across a range of issue areas.

Global Initiatives and Actors

13. Go beyond **commitment tracking and performance targets**.
14. **Align global processes** in-country, including developing common data sets and reporting processes and creating fiscal incentives for collaboration at the country level.

15. Support comprehensive

reviews of existing in-country accountability mechanisms to identify institutions, organizations, and partners both internal and external to the state.

16. Establish **global linkages** from the bottom-up.

Donor Engagement

17. Create flexible, sustainable **funding opportunities** for CSOs that increase financial, institutional, and capacity support for accountability efforts.

Mutual Accountability

18. Empower civil society to drive **mutual accountability** efforts, including donor accountability processes.

Concepts and Research

19. Invest in **research** to strengthen the evidence base and catch-up with current practices.
20. Learn, partner, and capitalize on experience from accountability efforts **beyond RMNCH** to create innovative programs that go to scale.

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