

RE-IMAGINING ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH A FEMINIST AND YOUTH LENS:

Recommendations towards a transformative Generation Equality Forum¹

Setting the scene

The Generation Equality Forum (GEF) promises to result in “a permanent acceleration in equality, leadership and opportunity for women and girls worldwide.” With the target of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) only 9 years away and more than 26 years after the ratification of the Beijing Platform for Action, this initiative's main objective is to accelerate the progress on gender equality across the world through a multi-stakeholder process building on all previous commitments. To accelerate the current rate of progress and achieve the SDG targets, it is urgent to ensure that the GEF process is backed by a strong accountability mechanism and resources.

Feminist, youth-led, and other civil society organizations have emphasized the importance of strong built-in, clear, transparent formal accountability mechanisms in the context of the GEF. In order to jointly explore what this accountability would ideally look like, a Civil Society Task Force² (CS TF) convened a series of collective dialogues during the month of June 2021, in advance of the Paris Forum. Through guided discussions, the three-fold series of online dialogues sought to engage civil society, multilateral organizations, philanthropy, private sector, and governments in a meaningful, actionable discussion around accountability within the GEF, including but not limited to Action Coalitions.³ The goal of the dialogues was:

“To support the development of shared, transparent and equitable accountability mechanisms and processes for the GEF Action Coalitions that extend beyond the Paris Forum.”

While the GEF brings a long overdue and welcomed vision, participants of the accountability dialogues noted the negative impact of weak accountability frameworks. An example in this regard was the Beijing Platform for Action, where participants expressed a desire to avoid duplicating the 5-year review process and instead move towards an accountability that centers on overcoming barriers and achieving joint learning. This document outlines the emerging recommendations from these dialogues. The CS TF presents these recommendations to the Core Group of the GEF so they will be taken into consideration, implemented, and further explored as the basis to establish the GEF accountability mechanisms. They will be shared with the Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG), Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committee, Action Coalitions, Youth TaskForce, and the Women, Peace & Security and Humanitarian Compact, in hopes that they be used as a point of departure for their own accountability mechanisms. The expectation is to ensure a shared, robust foundation for accountability. A foundation that is built on intersectional feminism, youth leadership, mutual collaboration, trust, transparency, learning, creativity, and commitment. A foundation that reflects the multistakeholder nature of the GEF. A foundation that will enable the permanent acceleration in equality, leadership and opportunity for all women, girls, and gender non-conforming people worldwide.

Recommendations

Three core recommendations emerged from the dialogues:

1. Ensure principle-based accountability
2. Enable young women, girls, and gender non-conforming people in all their diversity to lead.
3. Participatory development of an interlocking, independent, and sustainable monitoring mechanism of GEF outcomes and processes

1 This report was prepared by Claudia Ahumada, who also served as facilitator of the three dialogues. For questions and comments around the report and its content, please write to lkislinger@ippfwhr.org 2 The CS TF membership includes Aisha Rahamatali and Vanessa Jackson, CARE; Claudia Ahumada, facilitator; Eleanor Blomstrom and Shannon Kowalski, IWHC; Eugenia Lopez, IPPF; Jeevika Shiv, NGLA India /core team, Youth led Accountability Framework; Leila Hessini, Global Fund for Women; Luisa Kislinger and María Victoria Curzel, IPPFWHR; Marieke Koning, ITUC. 3 Dialogue #1 invitations went to civil society only. Dialogue #2 and #3 invitations went to a multi-stakeholder group.

Furthermore, discussions noted the need to distinguish between the accountability of Action Coalition leaders and the accountability of Commitment-makers. Participants of the dialogues also reflected on how different stakeholders have differentiated roles, including as governments, CSOs, feminist movements, youth networks and organizations, UN System agencies, and the private sector, among others. Thus, their accountability should be differentiated, adjusted for their relative power/privilege/resources.



1. Principle-based accountability

1. Principle-based accountability A principal outcome of the dialogues was the importance of ensuring that any approach to accountability in the context of the GEF must be principle-based. Traditional approaches to accountability have fallen short of holding communities at the center, advancing diversity and equality. Though processes such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Voluntary National Reviews (VNR), and some joint accountability mechanisms have innovative aspects, participants noted that in their experiences, those existing approaches to accountability are insufficient. This goes hand-in-hand with the fact that there is a substantial lack of data on the lived experiences, opinions and perspectives of women and gender-diverse people. The connection between a lack of data on women, and consequential unreliability of funding and policy initiatives to advance women's equality is evident: only 1% of gender focused aid went to women-led organizations in 2016/2017. That meagre 1% is made even less effective by the fact that the bulk of it remained in "donor countries" and did not reach those in need on a local level. It is imperative that we challenge ourselves to ensure that the way in which accountability is both envisioned and exercised is principle-based, embodying the transformation we seek to achieve in the world. In other words, as the GEF seeks to achieve a permanent acceleration of equality, leadership and opportunity for all women and girls in all their diversity, so must the accountability mechanisms measuring progress represent these core values. The principles that make up these values should include, at minimum, the following:

- An intersectional feminist lens, which holds at the center the voice of those experiencing overlapping, concurrent forms of oppression, while meaningfully examining and responding to the intersection of sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity, race, class, age, ethnicity, indigeneity, caste, HIV status and abilities. Re-imagining accountability through a feminist and youth lens: Recommendations towards a transformative Generation Equality Forum 3
- Transparency, which requires the regular public reporting of progress and challenges; as well as the timely and full disclosure of information upon request, taking into account the necessary privacy and safeguarding measures.
- Measuring what matters to women, girls, trans, non-binary and intersex people, through both quantitative and qualitative data, beyond the use of traditional, static indicators, with sex, gender, age, and disability disaggregated data being a minimum requirement. Dialogue participants noted the inadequacies of current indicators which are unable to capture the depth and fluidity of change within communities and gender norms. Through measuring impact and using storytelling, the complexity of the expected transformative change via GEF actions can be better captured. Participants reflected on how accountability mechanisms should consider how the lives of the rights holders have changed because of the intervention and not just measure completion of a task or results achieved. Partnering with feminist organizations, networks, and movements, including those that are youth-led, must be at the heart of monitoring progress. Furthermore, dialogue participants proposed the use of Feminist Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, as well as to elaborate on horizontal and participatory processes of defining what impact means, on what indicators the process would center and how the data would be collected, systematized, analyzed, and communicated.
- Local to global: participants of the dialogues reflected on the need to ensure the accountability mechanisms are driven from the local, community level, to the global level, and that they deliver opportunities to connect, cooperate, and network at different levels. These accountability mechanisms should include well-articulated, clear, and accessible systems and procedures.

Central to principle-based accountability is measuring not only what actors achieve or do not achieve, but also, how do they get there. Are the paths and actions taken coherent with what is being called for? If not, what must be done differently? Reframing accountability out of a patriarchal approach is needed, reflected dialogue participants, if we are to achieve the changes sought. This requires being more forthcoming about our failures and challenges, moving from a punitive lens, to one that sees failure as an opportunity to achieve deep and long-lasting learning. Participants reflected that this could be done, for example, by calling for reports focused on lessons learned from failures and missteps to make transformative change.

2. Enable youth in all their diversity to lead

There was clear agreement that adolescents and young people should have a meaningful say in designing GEF accountability mechanisms, noting that this should be seen as the bare minimum. Dialogue participants agreed that going beyond youth participation is needed, moving towards enabling and achieving youth leadership and ensuring that young people, especially those most marginalized, have decision-making power across multiple levels. In doing so, a focus on the diversity of young people and intersectionality must be at the forefront. Youth activists are often asked to engage and give their expertise on a voluntary basis, but participants identified the need to change that practice and to have GEF actors commit to fund youth-led organizations. Participants highlighted the need to commit to recognizing youth leadership by using the [Young Feminist Manifesto](#) along with the [letter from girls](#) as the framework from which an accountability scorecard could be developed. Adequate, sustained, and flexible funding of youth-led organizations and movements is critical to ensure they are set up to succeed in this leadership role and to do so sustainably.

3. Interlocking, independent, and sustainable accountability mechanism

The dialogues suggested that the accountability mechanism could be comprised of a few interlocking components, rather than a single process or one document. For example, one element could be an annual independent analytical report that consolidates the annual reports submitted by Action Coalition leads and commitment-makers and acts as a 'state of progress report'. This report could be prepared by a respected, independent civil society organization (such as an independent think tank or research institute). The report could be the centerpiece of an inclusive, annual, multi-stakeholder meeting (such as the Commission on the Status of Women) that discusses where progress is being made, where gaps persist and what kinds of course-correction are required to achieve gender equality. UN Women could have a mandate to convene and provide Secretariat support to this kind of annual meeting. The dialogues made clear that there must be an independent monitoring mechanism of the GEF outcomes and processes, understanding independent as a pluralist, collegiate body, not affiliated with any specific GEF stakeholder, that assesses progress towards the commitments by looking at their impact on the lives, experiences and well-being of women, girls, and gender-diverse people. This mechanism could either be led by civil society or by a multi-stakeholder body. Participants expressed the desire to see a collective, participatory, and accessible process in order to design the body, structure, operations, and procedures of such an accountability mechanism. They also noted that such a mechanism should not, however, be led by the United Nations. Dialogue participants highlighted, in particular, that a single collective report from UN Women would not be seen as robust accountability, while also expressing a desire to see the accountability mechanism for the GEF go beyond what existed for Beijing. To ensure the independence and sustainability of the mechanism, adequate and reliable funding must be made available. This requires, at minimum, the adequate funding of civil society, women, community, and youth-led organizations. There must be dedicated resources to improve sex, age, disability, and diversity data, and to encourage accountability and the use of data by all, including civil society and youth. Distinct mechanisms should be developed for monitoring the processes and results of the GEF. To do so, it is relevant to identify good practices used with a view to showcasing and building on these across stakeholders. This should be done both at the broad GEF governance level, and within each Action Coalition, both of which would benefit from Feminist Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning. These mechanisms should, where possible, make use of existing accountability mechanisms and spaces, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, the Universal Periodic Reviews, and the High-Level Political Forum. These can be refined and strengthened, to focus on authentic dialogue, less scripted engagement, and collective learning. In specific cases, there may also be a need to create new accountability mechanisms that would complement existing ones and to draw ideas from existing initiatives, including civil society-led initiatives such as, among others, the [Global Count](#). Dialogue participants also called to make use of non-traditional feminist spaces for accountability, such as trade spaces, internet governance forums, and World Trade Organization's public forums.

Nuts and bolts: areas for further exploration

Accountability of Action Coalition Leaders

Action Coalition leads should be held accountable to both the GEF principles and process. In that regard, they need to be held accountable not only for their actions towards implementation of their GEF commitments, but also for their overall adherence to the GEF principles and objectives, in order to ensure a degree of coherence between their actions and commitments. This means that meaningful engagement across stakeholders must be assessed, as should the AC leads' commitment to gender equality and Re-imagining accountability through a feminist and youth lens:

Recommendations towards a transformative Generation Equality Forum 5 diversity. While Action Coalitions may opt for diverse approaches to accountability, the meaningful involvement of feminist civil society, youth-led organizations and women and gender-diverse people themselves must be at the center of all of them. This includes from the level of conceptualization and design to implementation and review. The challenge, which needs to be further considered, is who follows up with the entities who do not meet their commitments and whether there are any consequences to not doing so.

Accountability of Commitment-makers

All commitment-makers should publicly report on progress and challenges once a year. Distinctions should be made to the way in which diverse commitment makers are held accountable: governments, civil society, youth-led organizations, private sector, and foundations. Differentiated power and resources must be considered when determining the respective stakeholder accountability mechanisms. In line with the principle of transparency, there should be a central place for each commitment maker to report and track progress and challenges, and that can be publicly viewed.



Moving forward: united

The Re-imagining Accountability Dialogues brought together a diversity of participants, from across youth-led and feminist organizations, governments, UN system agencies, foundations, and the private sector. The GEF itself is premised upon these multi-sectorial partnerships because together we are stronger, more impactful, effective, and sustainable. Dialogue participants emphasized the centrality of building collective buy-in across sectors moving forward, ensuring that accountability is not imposed from the top-down, but rather conceptualized, designed, implemented, and championed from the grassroots up and across all sectors. In doing this, accountability will, in effect, be not only re-imagined, but also re-invigorated.