# Strengthening mutual accountability in partnerships for WASH

## Part 1: Literature review and learning from other sectors

For Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) Partnership

UTS Institute for Sustainable Futures, Stockholm Environment Institute,
IRC WASH and representatives of SWA Research and Learning Constituency

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## About the authors

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The Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) is an international non-profit research and policy organization that tackles environment and development challenges.

IRC WASH is an international think-and-do-tank building strong WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) systems

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# Background

This report shares findings on research that aimed to inform the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) Mutual Accountability Mechanism (MAM). Sanitation and Water for All[1] is a global multi-stakeholder partnership that provides a platform for collective action and change in water, sanitation and hygiene. It mobilises both sector and non-sector actors to ensure achievement of Sustainable Development Goal targets (SDG) 6.1 and 6.2.

In order to inform the MAM this research investigated approaches taken to promote accountability between stakeholders in four multi-stakeholder partnerships across various sectors and in one global accountability mechanism. It also reviewed literature on partnerships and mutual accountability. This led to a conceptual basis for understanding mutual accountability within multi-stakeholder partnerships and provided insights from selected partnerships. It was conducted as Part 1 of a wider study, which also included empirical study of multi-stakeholder collaboration, accountability, MAM implementation and COVID-impacts in WASH in six selected SWA partner countries (Part 2).

The research aimed to inform evolution and refinement of SWA MAM such that it strengthens country processes and contributes to the three objectives of SWA's strategic framework (2020-2030). These three objectives are: (i) To build and sustain the political will to eliminate inequalities in water, sanitation and hygiene; (ii) To champion multi-stakeholder approaches towards achieving universal access to services; (iii) To rally stakeholders to strengthen system performance and attract new investments.

In the context of SWA, mutual accountability to refer to the process by which partners i) work together to build robust, transparent and responsive accountability systems, and ii) agree to be held responsible for commitments they make to each other. Mutual accountability is just one type of accountability amongst those important for ensuring human rights, which also includes social accountability, national legal accountability and other forms of accountability (OHCHR, 2014; p12).

## Research overview

The questions guiding the research focused on key dimensions of mutual accountability within multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) and how have they been operationalised to achieve MSP goals as well as the requisite partnership processes and conditions that make mutual accountability in MSPs effective and impactful. Similar questions were applied to a global human rights accountability mechanism.

We conducted a literature review on mutual accountability in MSPs and selected four partnerships and one global accountability mechanism to investigate through semi-structured interviews: OGP (Open Government Partnership); SUN (Scaling Up Nutrition) Movement; Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) and its commitment to the Independent Accountability Panel (IAP) of the Every Women Every Child (EWEC) initiative; and the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council (UPR).

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[1] Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) is a global partnership of governments, donors, civil society organizations and other development partners working together to coordinate high-level action, improve accountability and use scarce resources more effectively." See https://sanitationandwaterforall.org/

# Research findings

The research identified **five key elements in an effective cycle of mutual accountability** between stakeholders. These five elements were drawn from the literature and explored in the practice of the selected partnerships. This mutual accountability cycle is not an end in itself but rather a catalyst to shift reform and achieve the goals of the relevant partnership.
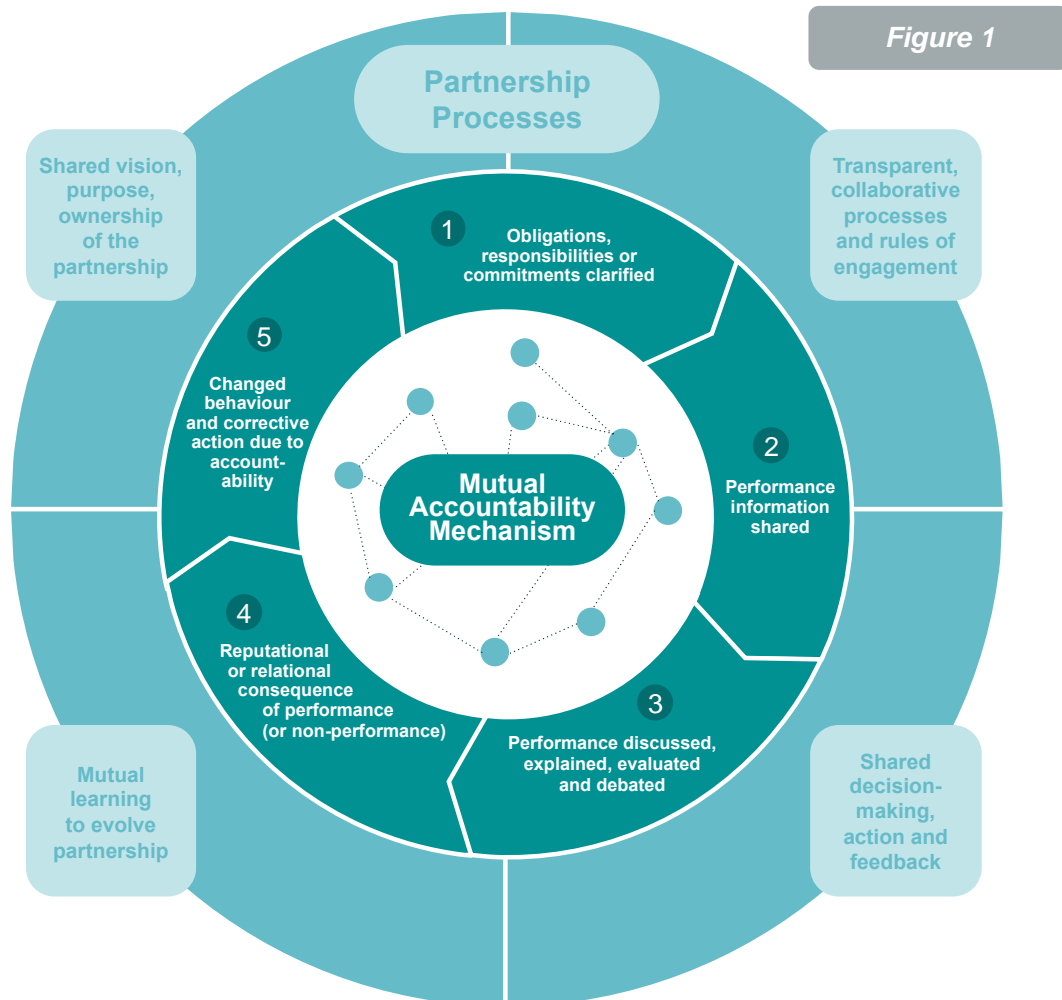
1. **Stakeholder responsibilities, obligations or commitments are clarified and communicated**: OGP, SUN Movement and EWEC partners all make commitments that are reviewed on a periodic basis. The UPR global accountability mechanism develops recommendations against human rights obligations. The content of commitments or recommendations should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) to promote follow-up.

2. **Stakeholders share information with one another on their performance against their responsibilities, obligations or commitments:** The importance of sharing performance information by all stakeholders was demonstrated through UPR (State, UN and other stakeholder reports), OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism assessments of commitment per each action plan cycle,.and SUN Movement's annual joint assessment. Literature promotes criteria of quality, clarity, accessibility, independence and transparency of performance information and a regular timing or cycle for sharing of information.

3. **Performance by each stakeholder is explained, discussed and evaluated amongst the stakeholder group**: At this step in the cycle, stakeholders provide explanation for their performance, promoting 'answerability', and open evaluation and debate on progress or performance of stakeholders facilitates partner engagement and communication. Both formal and informal mechanisms are relevant for discussion and debate on performance. For formal communication mechanisms, literature proposes the importance of effective, high-quality deliberative processes, given that consensus should not be pre-supposed, and there should be expectation of contestation, challenge and creative tension. Different approaches were used to evaluate performance by the different partnerships studied in this research. For example, UPR uses a peer-review mechanism, OGP uses an Independent Reporting Mechanism focused on accountability compliance checks and recommendations for future action plans, and EWEC uses a 10-member independent expert panel to review accountabilities and progress against the EWEC Global Strategy[2].

4. **A reputational or relational consequence (of performance or non-performance) is experienced by participating stakeholders**: Accountability mechanisms generally include an act of enforcement or consequence, which in the case of mutual accountability are generally reputational or relational. The research revealed the importance of a constructive learning orientation and steering away from any formalised sanctions including naming and shaming. Instead 'naming and faming' were seen as more constructive, positive incentives for stakeholders to participate and hold one another accountable. This was particularly true for UPR, OGP and SUN Movement.

5. **Corrective action is undertaken by stakeholders to better achieve partnership goals and strengthen their impact**: The ultimate purpose of an accountability mechanism is to change behaviour through corrective action to address under-performance against commitments or responsibilities, and build on successes towards strengthened action to achieve a partnership purpose. For OGP's IRM the desired changed behaviour is policy reform, enabled through the periodic review process. Follow-up of action and related behaviour change can be challenging, for instance UPR results in as many as 300 recommendations per UN Member State, which can pose an issue for comprehensive follow-up.

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[2] Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016-2030),
https://www.everywomaneverychild.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/EWEC_GSUpdate_Full_EN_2017_web-1.pdf

To support the above five elements of mutual accountability, several broader partnership processes and conditions were found to be important:

- **Effective partnership processes**: Four main areas of partnership processes were identified as important: (i) Shared vision, purpose, ownership of the partnership; (ii) Transparent, collaborative processes and rules of engagement; (iii) Shared decision-making, action and feedback; (iv) Mutual learning to evolve partnership. Of these processes, those of shared decision-making are particularly important to enabling effective evaluation of performance through discussion and debate. OGP and PMNCH have both evolved clear approaches to decision-making, including line of authority, roles and inclusiveness.

The five elements of an effective mutual accountability cycle (inside ring) and these four partnership processes (outside ring) are shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1

Partnership Processes

Shared vision, purpose, ownership of the partnership

Transparent, collaborative processes and rules of engagement

1 Obligations, responsibilities or commitments clarified

5 Changed behaviour and corrective action due to accountability

Mutual Accountability Mechanism

2 Performance information shared

4 Reputational or relational consequence of performance (or non-performance)

3 Performance discussed, explained, evaluated and debated

Mutual learning to evolve partnership

Shared decision-making, action and feedback

Beyond these, to enable a functioning partnership that supports effective mutual accountability, a further set of conditions were found to be important. These are described below and shown in Figure 2 and include partnership foundations, linkage to global level processes, a conducive national context and partnership outcomes and legitimacy.

Figure 2
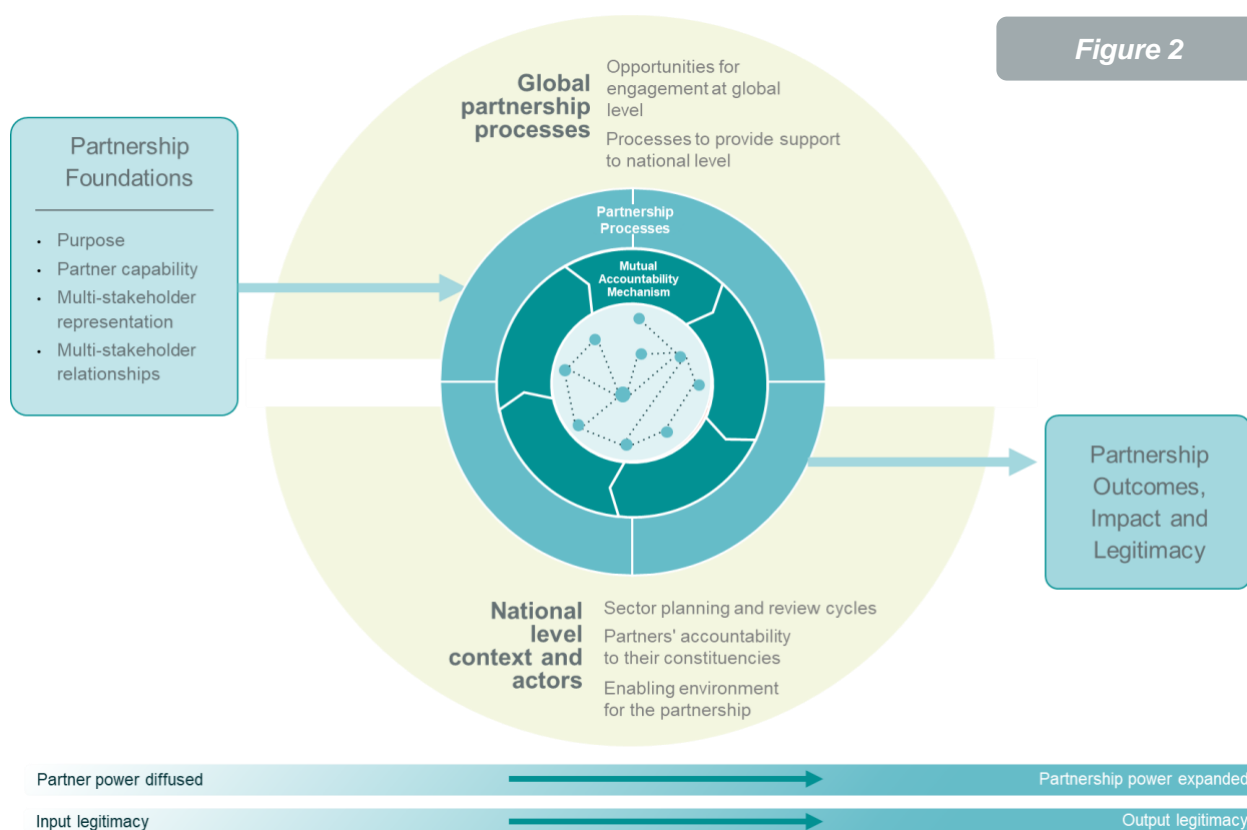
- **Effective partnership foundations**: Established shared purpose, sufficient partner capability to partner, meaningful multi-stakeholder representation, effective multi-stakeholder horizontal and vertical relationships in the partnership structure. Effective partnership foundations build trust amongst partners. Shared purpose was exhibited by OGP and PMNCH, with a focus on contextualising a global purpose at country level. Individuals selected to represent an organisation have an impact on how that organisation participates in mutual accountability mechanisms, and how they influence (or not) changed action. Horizontal stakeholder relationships are considered critical for mutual accountability mechanisms, however vertical relations also inevitably play roles, both in terms of partnership hierarchy and structure, and in relation to hierarchical relationships between different stakeholder groups and should not be discounted.

- **Supportive global partnership and accountability processes**: Peer-pressure from global level can be an important element in ensuring reputational or relational consequences for performance against commitments and represents an important linkage between national and global level. Provision of opportunity for national actors to present and/or directly report to global level and in some partnerships be independently evaluated can legitimise and add weight to country accountability processes. This research demonstrated how links to global level legitimises country-level action, as shown through SUN movement and EWEC's IAP. In addition, provision of guidance, capacity building, training and data from global level to countries is important and beneficial. UPR, OGP, SUN and PMNCH all provide support and guidance to enable effective country-level partnership processes as well as specific support to the relevant accountability mechanisms and their operationalisation.

- **Conducive national context**: An effective mutual accountability mechanism has linkages to wider sector processes and planning cycles and is supported by accountability of stakeholders to their relevant constituencies and enabling environment for partnership. Explicit links in commitments to other accountability mechanisms is considered helpful, and similarly to existing or planned policies and programs.

**STRENGTHENING MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN PARTNERSHIPS FOR WASH:**
PART 1 – LITERATURE REVIEW AND LEARNING FROM OTHER SECTORS

6

- **Building partnership legitimacy**: Legitimacy of a partnership is critical for a partnership's success, such that stakeholders voluntarily join and remain in the partnership and participate in mutual accountability activities. Input legitimacy concerns the balance of representation of different groups in the partnership and the relevant governance processes that guide the partnership, which in the case of OGP specifically involves both government and civil society leadership in the form of co-chairs. Output legitimacy comes from the demonstration of partnership outcomes, and hence is strongly linked to effectiveness of accountability mechanisms in changing partner behaviour. Monitoring and evaluation of this change, such as undertaken through SUN movement, or academic research such as has been undertaken on UPR can be strategies to help demonstrate legitimacy.

- **Equalising power relationships is important for effective mutual accountability**: It is inevitable that there will be power differentials within a multi-stakeholder partnership and these affect how stakeholders engage in mutual accountability. Literature suggests that clear 'rules of engagement' can help equalise power, and indeed the overall concept of mutual accountability processes, where every stakeholder makes commitments, can support this equalisation of power. Some partnerships have explicit strategies to equalise and diffuse power, for instance OGP Steering Committee of the partnership has equal number of civil society and government representatives, and PMNCH provide opportunities for CSOs to have several chairs in the Board to facilitate their collective voice.

## Implications for SWA

Seeing a mutual accountability mechanism as described in other partnerships as a 'disciplined way to achieve goals together' requires a core focus on processes of stakeholder interaction such that the mutual accountability serves to catalyse collective stakeholder action to achieve partnership goals. There are three main implications for SWA, all of which are process related. These include:

a) Careful management global-national dynamics of mutual accountability mechanism in a global partnership

b) Support for co-design of mutual accountability at national level

c) Create the necessary pre-conditions for a successful MAM at national level, in the form of sound country-level SWA partnership foundations and processes.

National-level focus in the mutual accountability between national stakeholders is critical, and global level accountability processes need to add legitimacy to the national level mutual accountability processes, whilst avoiding drawing attention away from national level.

National partners ideally need to co-create the rules of how mutual accountability will operate in a given country as this research showed that mechanisms need to be contextualized. National stakeholder co-design of the MAM using the five key elements of effective mutual accountability identified in this research would provide local ownership. Overwhelmingly, other partnerships have found that a focus on learning rather than harsh punishments are more conducive for effecting change in the context of mutual accountability, hence this should be central to the design, as well as looking to purposefully reinforce and complement other existing accountability mechanisms.

Lastly, the research showed a common set of conditions for success for mutual accountability, and these relate primarily to effective surrounding partnership processes and legitimacy at national level (foundations, ownership, mutual commitment, 'rules of engagement', visible outcomes etc.), which need to account for power and influence to promote horizontal relationships, and need to ensure the right participants are at the table, especially as regards government, including both the right ministries and the right individuals.

# Contents

# Introduction

The purpose of this report is to share findings on research to inform the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) Mutual Accountability Mechanism (MAM). In line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17, a multi-stakeholder approach to the SDGs is required across all sectors, which in turn relies on strong partnership processes and development of effective mutual accountability mechanisms.[3]

This research investigated approaches taken to accountability in multi-stakeholder partnerships of other sectors beyond water, sanitation and hygiene, but also in global accountability mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human rights Council to support evolution of the SWA MAM and the way it can strengthen country WASH sector processes, as mutual accountability is a new area for the water, sanitation and hygiene sector. Such accountability is particularly important in the WASH sector, which tends to be a fragmented sector across public and private organisations and involving multiple government ministries and departments. The research was conducted during September-December 2020.

The overall research project was an initiative of the R&L Constituency supported by selected partners who formed a MAM Study Working Group (see acknowledgements for details). This research component was led by University of Technology Sydney's Institute for Sustainable Futures (UTS-ISF). The Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) played a support role in the research as did IRC, and other organisations in the broader MAM Study Working Group provided feedback and input at key points, as did a Project Reference Group (see acknowledgements for details). This research was funded through the Sanitation and Water for All partnership's Secretariat.

This document is structured to first provide background information on SWA, its accountability mechanism and an overview of the research and its methods. We then provide a conceptual framework developed through the research, and present the findings in relation to the elements of this framework. The document concludes with a discussion on implications for SWA and an agenda for further research.

> " In the context of the SDGs, accountability should be understood as mutual accountability….[…].
> Mutual accountability refers to a set of commitments voluntarily made by two or more implementing partners..[…].. As active participants in the implementation of the SDGs and in respect of the principle of mutual accountability, [as well as States] non-state actors should also be subject to a review process, which ensures their activities are supportive of achieving the SDGs"
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> *Espey et al., 2015*

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[3] See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2193SDSN-Follow-up-and-Review-Paper.pdf authored by Jessica Espey, Karolina Walęcik and Martina Kühner

# Background to SWA, SWA MAM and this research

## SWA partnership

Sanitation and Water for All[4] is a global UN-hosted, multi-stakeholder partnership that provides a global platform for collective action and change in water, sanitation and hygiene under national government's leadership. It mobilises all actors to ensure achievement of Sustainable Development Goal targets (SDG) 6.1 and 6.2. Priorities for action are linked to political engagement, financing and strengthening governance and institutions.

At the country level, SWA activities seek to strengthen national processes and institutions. These national processes are government-led but involve a wide range of partners from civil society, the private sector, research and learning institutions and External Support Agencies, including UN agencies and International Financial Institutions (IFIs).

The three objectives of SWA's strategic framework 2020-2030 are: (i) To build and sustain the political will to eliminate inequalities in water, sanitation and hygiene; (ii) To champion multi-stakeholder approaches towards achieving universal access to services; (iii) To rally stakeholders to strengthen system performance and attract new investments.

The partnership will address the first objective by holding high-level multi-stakeholder political dialogues and sustaining their impact, strengthening connections between the SWA partnership and broader sustainable development agendas and by facilitating and encouraging the closing of data gaps and using existing and new evidence for effective policy advocacy to support decision-making.

SWA intends to achieve the second objective on multi-stakeholder approaches by: promoting and supporting government-led multi-stakeholder platforms; by demonstrating and supporting multi-sector, multi-stakeholder approaches and; by building a culture of mutual accountability for results.

Lastly, to achieve the third objective on system performance and investment, SWA will focus on developing an efficient, credit-worthy sector, by advocating for increased investment, by supporting the development of national and sub-sector financing strategies, by identifying new sources of finance and making existing sources more efficient and by expanding SWA and sector knowledge, expertise and capacity.

SWA's commitment to mutual accountability is anchored in its strategic framework including the Guiding Principles (see ):

- Multi-stakeholder efforts, sustainability of services and actions, leaving no-on behind, transparency and accountability, evidence-based decision-making, human rights to water and sanitation for all, international collaboration and effectiveness

- Building Blocks: sector policy strategy; institutional arrangements; sector financing; planning, monitoring and review; and capacity development

- Collaborative Behaviours: strengthening and working with national systems: emphasizing government leadership, use of country systems, agreed national data and strengthening sustainable financing

- Mutual Accountability Mechanism (MAM).

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[4] Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) is a global partnership of governments, donors, civil society organizations and other development partners working together to coordinate high-level action, improve accountability and use scarce resources more effectively." See https://sanitationandwaterforall.org/

## SWA Framework

### THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The values partners have in common and that guide all joint action.

| Multi-stakeholders efforts | Sustainability of service and actions | Leaving no-one behind | Transparency and accountability | Evidence-based desicion-making | Human Rights to water and sanitation | International collaboravion and aid effectiveness |

### THE COLLABORATIVE BEHAVIOURS

How partners work together to put in place the Building Blocks.

- Enhance government leadership of sector planning processes
- Strengthen and use country systems
- Use one information and mutual accountability platform
- Build sustainable water and sanitation sector financing strategies

### THE BUILDING BLOCKS

What partners are jointly putting in place to achieve an effective sector.

- Sector Policy / Strategy
- Institutional arrangements
- Sector Financing
- Planning, monitoring, and review
- Capacity development

### THE ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISM

Joint initiative that grounds the Framework in specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely actions.

It re-enforces multi-stakeholder decision-making and mutual accountability among partners at national, regional and global level.

**Figure 2: SWA framework of principles, behaviours, building blocks and the mutual accountability mechanism**

# Mutual accountability in SWA

SWA partners understand mutual accountability to refer to the process by which partners agree to be held responsible for commitments they make to each other.

Further information on the MAM is provided in Box 1.

**Box 1: SWA MAM**

The Mutual Accountability Mechanism is a process for governments and other stakeholders to make commitments together on specific actions each actor will take to achieve their targets set in the short- to medium-term on the road to reaching the SDGs.

The MAM recognises that government leadership is essential to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 and sanitation and water for all, always and everywhere. Commitments for the MAM are drawn from the plans, strategies, targets and milestones developed by governments and other actors through multi-stakeholder planning and review processes. The SWA partnership expects all SWA partners to collaborate in the making of commitments, and to report back on their actions to achieve these commitments.

The MAM aims to reinforce multi-stakeholder decision-making and mutual accountability among partners at national, regional and global level, with a predominant focus at national level, and the way in which it can either establish or strengthen existing accountability mechanisms in a given country.

**National-level MAM processes**: National commitments are expected to be informed through an evidence based multi-stakeholder government- led process that assesses water, sanitation and hygiene progress and identifies gaps and weaknesses to be prioritised. The government in collaboration with the sector stakeholders develop the commitments to be achieved over the subsequent years. The commitments should be incorporated into the government's national plan, or contribute to its development, and feed into overarching country planning and budgeting processes. Through the same process of assessment and review, commitments by other SWA Partners with a presence in the country should also be identified, to support and complement the commitments made by government.
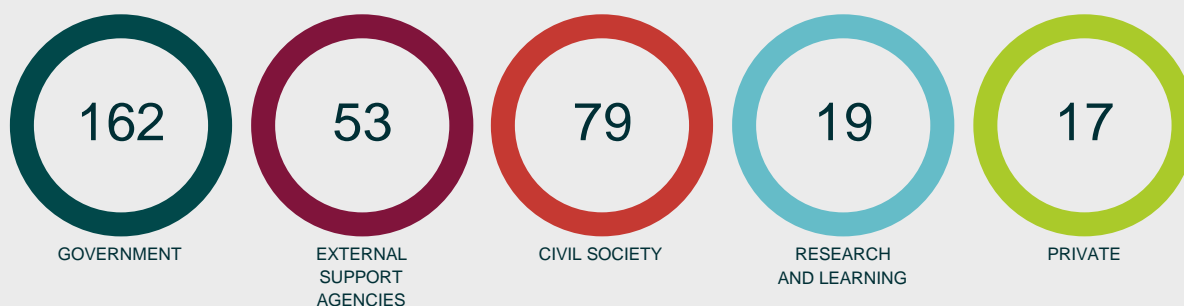
Progress against commitments should be regularly assessed and discussed through a government-led, multi-stakeholder process, culminating in an annual or biannual review of progress against commitments made the previous year(s). The monitoring and review of commitments must be anchored in the national cycle of planning- monitoring and review processes, with indicators identified to follow up on targets and specific commitments, along with their other nationally agreed targets and plans. To facilitate accountability, planning and review processes should be clearly documented and made available to all sector stakeholders. These processes are critical to ensuring partners are held accountable for commitments made, and - where things are not working - provide space to identify required adjustments and corrective actions to address causes of under-performance.

*↓ box continues*

**Global level MAM processes**: SWA partners can present and report on commitments at SWA's global High-level Meetings. SWA will also make use of the opportunities provided by regional water and sanitation meetings such as **SACOSAN, LatinoSan and Africa Water Week** to convene sessions relevant to the partners active in the region. By providing space for high level political discussion and accountability on sector progress at High-Level meetings, SWA elevates mutual accountability for sector progress to a global level and aiming to reinforce country level accountability processes.

**The SWA MAM in practice**: The MAM was launched in mid-2018, and prior to the Sector Ministers Meeting in April 2019, nearly 50 governments submitted commitments and over 40 partners from SWA's other constituencies did the same. Since then, the uptake of the commitment-making process has been rapid. As of July 2020, the MAM database contains a total of 317 commitments, from over 120 partners (across all constituencies). Since February 2020, partners have started to review and report on the commitments that they have made.[5] Numbers below are from December 2020.

**Commitments**

| 162 | 53 | 79 | 19 | 17 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| GOVERNMENT | EXTERNAL SUPPORT AGENCIES | CIVIL SOCIETY | RESEARCH AND LEARNING | PRIVATE |

Every three years the SWA Secretariat will produce a global report on the progress reflected by the MAM, and on the extent to which partners have achieved the commitments made in the previous three years, with a first global report expected in 2021.

## Why this research

Whilst accountability has always been central to the SWA partnership, the MAM is a relatively new tool for the partnership, and more broadly mutual accountability is an unexplored area in the water, sanitation and hygiene sectors. Hence there is value in examining literature on accountability in multi-stakeholder partnerships in general, and in reviewing how accountability is achieved in other multi-stakeholder partnerships or global bodies in other sectors to inform the evolution of the MAM and provide new inspiration for potential new directions. In particular, an area of interest was how to navigate the implementation of a mechanism that crosses global and national levels and aims to strengthen both.

This research was designed to investigate selected partnerships and a global accountability mechanism and develop a strengthened conceptual basis to understand mutual accountability within multi-stakeholder partnerships.

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[5] All commitments are available on the SWA website: https://www.sanitationandwaterforall.org/about/our-work/mutual-accountability-mechanism

# Research approach

## Research questions

Three research questions guided the research:

1. What are the key dimensions of mutual accountability within selected multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) and accountability mechanisms and how have they been operationalised?
2. What conditions are required to make mutual accountability effective and impactful?
3. What are the implications of research findings for strengthening the SWA MAM?

## Methods and approach

The research design comprised a literature review and selection and investigation of four multi-stakeholder partnerships and one global accountability mechanism. As no pre-existing definition or framework for accountability in multi-stakeholder partnerships was identified in initial literature searches, we iteratively developed the framework that guides the structure of this paper.

The literature review covered the topics of accountability, multi-stakeholder partnerships, partnership principles and the intersection of these three areas of literature. We searched Scopus, Web of Science and Google scholar, various conference websites and the knowledge platforms of key stakeholder websites (for details including search strings, see **Error! Reference source not found.**). An annotated bibliography was p repared and used to form the basis for the framework and this report.

We selected accountability mechanisms on the basis of four criteria: (i) Partnerships or global bodies that featured some form of accountability mechanism between stakeholders, that has operated for >3 years; (ii) Partnerships or global bodies that included global and national level interaction and engagement; (iii) Partnerships or global bodies that covered diverse sectors; (iv) Partnerships or global bodies that had an objective to achieve a clear outcome (standard setting, targets etc.).

A 'long' list of 49 partnerships and global bodies was developed with input from the MAM Study Working Group and PRG, and using the criteria, five selected for investigation:

- OGP (Open Government Partnership)

- SUN (Scaling Up Nutrition) Movement

- Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the United Nations Human Rights Council

- Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH)

- Independent Accountability Panel (IAP) of Every Women Every Child movement (EWEC)

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with representatives well-informed of the accountability mechanisms, and additional published academic literature consulted where possible.

The MAM study group was engaged at several points in the process: input to initial list of partnerships; input on selection criteria; review and discussion of the emerging framework; review of this report.

The main limitation to this research relates to the depth of information and perspectives included for the selected partnerships. Due to time and resource considerations, it was possible only to interview one or two people for a given partnership or accountability mechanism, and we were primarily reliant on their secretariat perspectives. It is likely that further interviews with other partners would have yielded different and broader insights about how their mechanisms work in practice.

# Overview of Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framing presented below was informed by literature review and subsequently evolved through insights gained from interviews undertaken with the selected partnerships and accountability mechanism. In this section we provide an overview of the framework as orientation. Within the findings section, we elaborate on the key relevant literature sources for its different elements and provide illustrations from the selected partnerships which helps to explain key terms within the conceptual framing from a practical basis.

Mutual accountability between stakeholders is connected to and interacts with **other forms of accountability**, including state accountability, where citizens elect their government, which is then responsible for progress against the SDGs and satisfaction of human rights (long-route accountability), or social accountability (short-route accountability) where rights-holders negotiate directly with service providers (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).
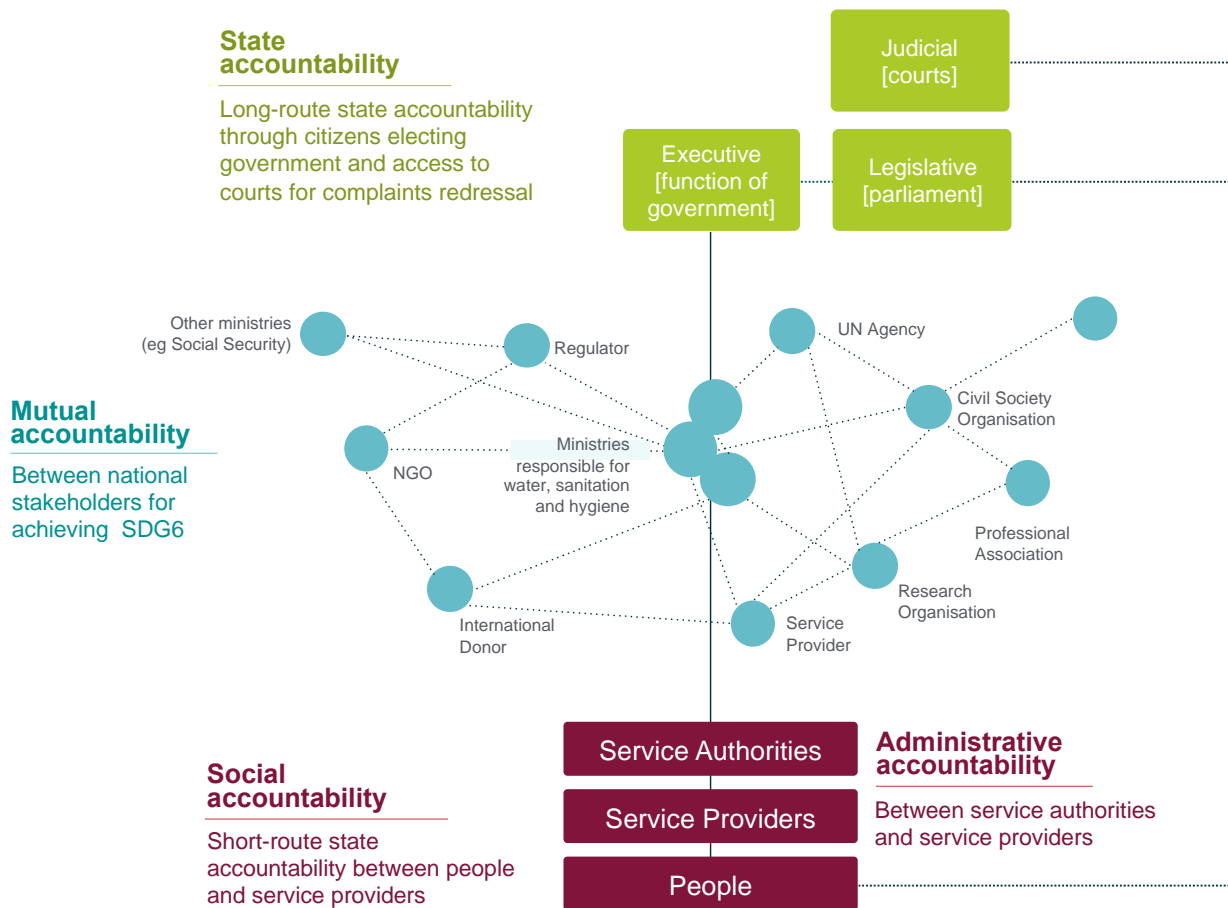


Figure 4: Differentiation and interactions between mutual accountability between stakeholders and other accountability relationships (Source: Authors)

Our conceptual framing places **mutual accountability between national stakeholders and the relevant partnership** within a wider context of:

Interactions with **global level partnership processes**:

- Types of opportunities for national actors to engage at international level
- Processes to provide support from international level (eg from a partnership secretariat and external support agencies (donors, UN agencies, civil society and R&L) to national level actors

Interactions with other **national level actors, processes and context:** These include:

- Partners' accountability to their own in-country constituencies
- Engagement with wider sector SDG6 processes, including reporting to the High-level Political forum, to the Universal Periodic Review, to UN Treaty Bodies, to the UNFCCC (through the mechanism of NDCs), commitments to the Human Right to Water and Sanitation and associated overall national planning and review cycles
- Enabling environment for the partnership
- Links to other national accountability mechanisms including 'state accountability' in terms of the obligations of governments to rights-holders including citizens, and 'social accountability', seen as the dynamic between users of public services and service providers.

**Partnership foundations** provide the basis for mutual accountability and the partnership, and **partnership outcomes and legitimacy** are seen as the results of mutual accountability and the partnership at large. The conceptual framing emphasizes that partnership foundations strengthen accountability mechanisms and accountability. In turn process and outcomes of accountability further strengthen the partnership.

Through partnership processes and mutual accountability, the power of individual partners is diffused and the **collective power of a diverse set of multi stakeholders working together in partnership is expanded.** Equally, the credibility of the partnership with established rules of engagement and expectations of membership (input legitimacy) strengthens the credibility and worth of the partnership for both members and also external actors (output legitimacy). These terms are explained and described later in this document.
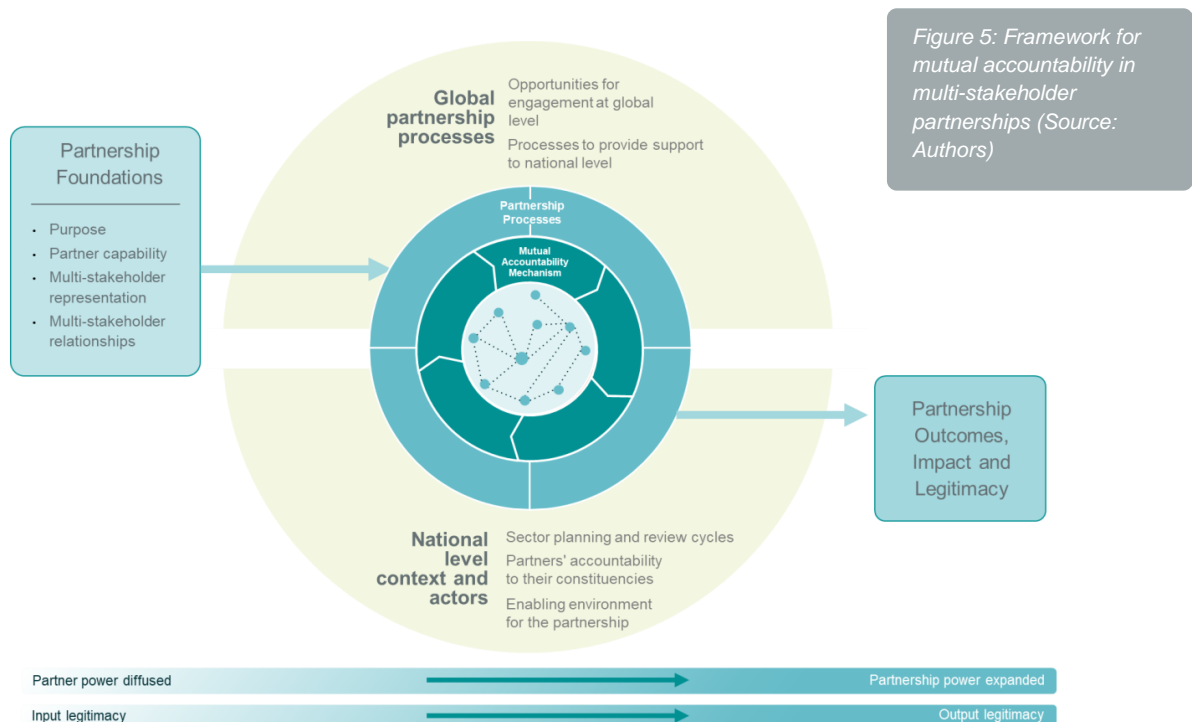


*Figure 5: Framework for mutual accountability in multi-stakeholder partnerships (Source: Authors)*

Within the framework shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**, focusing in on **key dimensions of a m utual accountability mechanism** and relevant **partnership processes** we elaborate these two levels of the framework (see Figure 6 our framework both provides a structure to understand the factors that influence if and how mutual accountability is realised in multi-stakeholder partnerships.
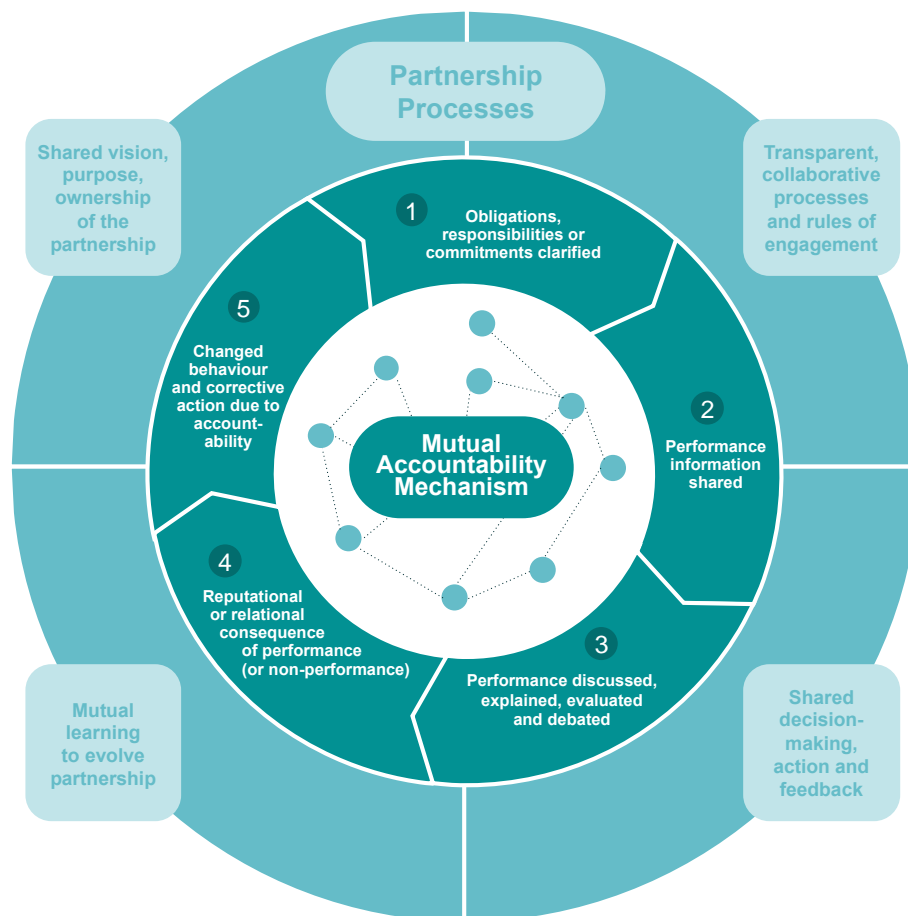


Figure 6: Five key dimensions of mutual accountability in the centre and key influential partnership processes (Source: Authors)

We identified **five key elements in a mutual accountability cycle** from the literature:

1. Obligations, responsibilities or commitments clarified

2. Information on performance shared

3. Performance discussed, explained, evaluated and debated

4. Reputational or relational consequence of performance or non-performance

5. Changed behaviour and corrective action due to accountability

Such accountability mechanisms are situated within wider **partnership processes** and improvement cycles, which include the following:

• Shared vision, purpose, ownership of the partnership

• Transparent, collaborative processes and rules of engagement

• Shared decision-making, action and feedback

• Mutual learning to evolve partnership

# Background on selected partnerships and accountability mechanisms

This section provides brief background to the four partnerships and one global accountability mechanism studied in this research. Further details about the partnerships and accountability mechanisms are provided in the subsequent findings section.

## Case 1: OGP (Open Government Partnership)

**Background**: The Open Government Partnership (OGP) was established in 2011 to promote transparent, participatory, inclusive and accountable governance. In 2021, it has has 78 country members, across Europe, Asia-Pacific, Americas, Africa.

To join OGP, governments commit to upholding the principles of open and transparent government and endorse the Open Government Declaration. A lead ministry or government agency is identified to take responsibility for coordinating the OGP process and activities. Since 2016 OGP has also encouraged membership from local or sub-national governments.

**Participation**: Civil society participation is essential to OGP. Country/local government members are mandated to ensure pathways for civil society engagement through the global community, the government's own OGP dialogue mechanism, or both.

Government and civil society, in partnership, define two-year action plans with concrete steps and commitments across a broad range of issues. Inclusive processes for developing the action plans are described in the OGP Handbook and these action plans are expected to make ambitious commitments to foster transparency, accountability and inclusion.

**Accountability**: The partnership has several mechanisms in place to promote accountability among its members. During the two-year action plan cycle, governments are required to produce an end of term self-assessment report. The co-creation and participation standards encourage self-assessment reports to be conducted in consultation with civil society. An Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM). assesses the design and implementation of the commitments adopted by OGP members in their country action plans. The IRM also assess compliance against OGP's Co Creation and Participation Standards in every action plan cycle. To safeguard the independence of the IRM, an International Experts Panel (IEP) oversees the IRM. The IRM has a dual role, one is to hold OGP members accountable for their action plans and to inform subsequent action plans through technical policy recommendations..

A country's participation in OGP may be reviewed if it acts contrary to OGP process or contrary to OGP principles. For example,

| | |
|---|---|
| **Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM)** | The IRM is an independent body guided by but not directly accountable to, the Steering Committee of the Open Government Partnership. An International Experts Panel (IEP) directly oversees the IRM. The IRM produces reports that assess the design and implementation of the commitments adopted by OGP participating governments in their country action plans. |
| **Member Self-Assessments** | During the two-year action plan cycle, governments will produce yearly Self-Assessment Reports in consultation with civil society. The Self-Assessment Reports are a key element of the Independent Report Mechanism, OGP's accountability arm and the main means of tracking progress in participating countries. The national IRM researchers use the government Self-Assessment Reports as a key part of their desk research. Other OGP stakeholders use the Self-Assessment Reports to gain an understanding of the government's perspective on the OGP process and results achieved over the course of the year. |
| **Compliance with Regulations** | A country's participation in OGP may be reviewed if it acts contrary to OGP process or contrary to OGP principles. |

a procedural review can be issued to a member informed by results of IRM findings in the case a member does not comply with minimum participation requirements for two consecutively action plan cycles. Also, the Partnership has a response policy which can be utilised by civil society in the case that open government core values are not observed by OGP member countries.

Sources: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/mission-and-strategy/ and https://www.opengovpartnership.org/process/accountability/

# Case 2: SUN (Scaling Up Nutrition) Movement

**Background**: The Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) Movement has been active since 2010 in a collective effort to achieve a world free of malnutrition in all its forms. There are 62 country members of the SUN movement (described as SUN countries) across Africa, Asia, and Americas. The multi-stakeholder platform works across sectors to embrace nutrition-sensitive approaches to tackle the underlying causes of malnutrition as well as nutrition-specific interventions to tackle its direct manifestations.

Any country that is developing, updating or implementing policies, strategies and plans of action to scale up nutrition can participate. SUN countries nominate a SUN Government Focal Point and a SUN Donor Convenor and establish other networks (civil society and UN). The SUN Government Goal Point acts as a convenor of a national multi-stakeholder platform which can include representatives of civil society, donor and United Nations agencies, business and the technical community.

**Participation**: SUN Countries are supported by four networks: Civil Society Network; Donor Network; Business Network; United Nations Network. Each SUN Network is coordinated at the global level by a Network Facilitator and various leadership and coordination arrangements. Their primary objective is to mobilise and align efforts globally and regionally to scale up efforts in country. The SUN Movement Secretariat works to foster the sharing and learning of experiences across the Movement between SUN Countries and SUN Networks.

The SUN Movement is linked to global initiatives and stated commitments to nutrition. Linkages are stated with the Sustainable Development Goals and the World Health Assembly targets set for 2025. Periodic strategies are set for the SUN Movement and the current strategy. Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement Strategy 3.0, sets out the strategy for 2021-2025.

**Accountability**: Governance and operations and accountability relationships are set out in SUN Movement members and structures. A key shift from SUN 2.0 to SUN 3.0, the third iteration of the partnership, will be the establishment of a Unified Accountability Framework underpinned by a Mutual Accountability Mechanism and a SUN Results Framework (under development at time of this research). During SUN 2.0, key reporting processes sought to strengthen accountability of SUN Movement members. These included a suite of initiatives described within the SUN Movement Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL). Joint annual assessments informed country databases; Networks' Annual Assessments; National Budget Analysis; Stakeholder and Action Mapping and National Nutrition action plan reviews. The Sun Movement also produces Annual Progress Reports which track achievements and barriers and enablers to improved nutrition.

> **Accountability within the SUN Movement:**
>
> Accountability for the SUN movement relies on the ability to "account" for commitments, responsibilities and actions, and is facilitated by clear expectations, data and measurements. This builds on one of the SUN Movement's fundamental principles of engagement, "**mutual accountability**", whereby all stakeholders feel responsible for and are held collectively accountable to joint commitments. This means, as the SUN Strategy points out, that "hard" forms of accountability, such as formal inquiries, legal action or censure, would rarely, if ever, be resorted to, as they would be largely incompatible with the spirit and ethos of the Movement, and arguably be of limited use for the Movement's purposes. Rather the SUN focuses more on consensus-based mechanisms, generating shared agreements across nutrition stakeholders to take actions to put things right where responsibilities are not yet being fulfilled.
>
> The SUN Movement 2016-2020 Strategy outlines six important elements for accountability: i) **aligning** on goals, objectives and respective contributions; ii) Building and strengthening the systems that provide **feedback** on progress; iii) Transparently **sharing progress**; iv) **Celebrating** successes and examining how to share, scale and replicate them; v) Agreeing how to course correct when actions are not happening or not having the desired outcomes; and vi) Working largely by **encouragement and support, and with a shared responsibility** for the commitments made in the overall strategy and work plans of the Movement.

**For more information:** http://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Accountability-Think-Piece.pdf

# Case 3: Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

**Background**: The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) was created by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006, under the auspices of the Human Rights Council. It is a unique, UN hosted, state-driven peer review mechanism whereby the human rights record of all member states of the UN is reviewed every four and a half years, on equal footing, by fellow States during an inter-governmental meeting of the Human Rights Council Working Group on the UPR in Geneva. All UN members States, without exception, are engaged actively in reviewing the human rights record of their peers and in making recommendations to them.

**Participation**: Civil society is not directly represented in the formal meeting of the peer review but contributes to the lead up to the review (among others, through information submitted to a summary report compiling the views o stakeholders). It can, however, take the floor and commenton the outcome when the latter is adopted by a plenary session of the Human Rights Council. It also plays key roles in monitoring and review. UN agencies submit information to the UPR process also, either jointly or individually. They also play a key role in supporting states to implement recommendations. The work of independent expert human rights mechanisms – treaty bodies and special procedures – also form the basis for the review. Hence the UPR is State-led that complements the independent review undertaken though other human rights mechanisms.

**Accountability**: During each review, the Government first presents its national report, followed by questions and recommendations from other States. The State under review then has opportunity to make preliminary comments on the recommendations, choosing to either "accept" (support) or "note" them. The final report of the review is adopted three months later, after the State has indicated its position on every recommendation, at a plenary session of the Human Rights Council, and made available on the UPR website.



Source: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/UPR-Review-banner2.pdf and https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/UPR_pre-review_docs.pdf

# Case 4: Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH)

**Background**: The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (PMNCH) was launched in September 2005 and has currently 1,000 partner organizations across 192 countries. It is a multi-constituency partnership hosted by the World Health Organization (WHO). PMNCH seeks to achieve universal access to comprehensive, high-quality reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health care.

PMNCH has a five-year strategy for 2021-2025 and to deliver on its objectives PMNCH has a core function of advocacy, supported by three approaches: knowledge synthesis and application; partner engagement, alignment and empowerment; and execution of campaigns and accountability for outcomes.

**Participation**: The PMNCH provides a multi-stakeholder platform of 10 constituencies (Academic, Research and Training Institutes; Adolescents and Youth; Donors and Foundations; Global Financing Mechanisms; Healthcare Professional Associations; Inter-Governmental Organizations; Non-Governmental Organizations; Partner Governments; Private Sector; and United Nations Agencies).

**Accountability**: The PMNCH is linked to and supports several different accountability mechanisms though it does not operate its own mutual accountability mechanism. The Partnership supports the WHO Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health, enabling civil society organizations to engage in the Global Financing Facility. It also supports Every Women Every Child (EWEC) movement. EWEC includes a Unified Accountability Framework (UAF) supported by PMNCH, with key functions: to:

- Facilitate tracking of resources, results and rights, including through multi-stakeholder commitments and multi-sector action, to achieve the Global Strategy objectives and the SDGs

- Promote alignment of national, regional and global investments and initiatives in support of the country accountability system and plans, and improve multi-stakeholder engagement at all levels

- Contribute to national and SDG monitoring through the Global Strategy indicator and monitoring framework that covers 9 SDGs and prioritizes 60 indicators

- Support the critical independent review function by hosting the Independent Accountability Panel (IAP). (see further information below on EWEC and IAP)

- Harmonize with other accountability initiatives, such as the Health Data Collaborative (HDC), the Countdown to 2030 and others; including to strengthen country information systems as required and support reporting for national planning and on progress towards the Global Strategy and SDGs



Source: https://www.who.int/pmnch/activities/accountability/framework.pdf

**STRENGTHENING MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN PARTNERSHIPS FOR WASH:**
PART 1 – LITERATURE REVIEW AND LEARNING FROM OTHER SECTORS

**21**

## Case 5: Independent Accountability Panel (IAP) of Every Women Every Child movement (EWEC)

**Background**: Every Woman Every Child (EWEC) is a multi-stakeholder movement created to implement the 2016- 2030 Global Strategy for SDGs.

**Accountability**: As described above, EWEC leads a unified accountability framework, one part of which is the Independent Accountability Panel (IAP). The IAP is comprised of distinguished panellists from diverse regions and backgrounds that range from human rights experts to humanitarian leaders to statisticians. IAP provides an independent review of progress on the implementation of the Global Strategy and identifies the necessary actions to accelerate achievement of its goals from an accountability perspective. The IAP uses the Global Strategy's Indicator and Monitoring Framework and its work supports the strengthening of national and sub-national accountability mechanisms.

The IAP defines accountability as a means to connect commitments to progress in a justifiable and constructive way. It is based on four pillars: Commit, Justify, Implement and Progress.[6] Partners of the EWEC may contribute to the EWEC movement by making and delivering on a commitment that helps to fulfil the aims of the Global Strategy. A wide range of stakeholders can make commitments, including governments, civil society, business, philanthropy and funders.

The IAP's niche lies in its role in assessing and strengthening accountability for critical issues of health and rights, through its reports and recommendations, and by showcasing promising emerging practices as well as identifying key areas in need of improvement:

• What meaningful accountability mechanisms are being developed, with whom, for whom and on what?

• Who is being left behind, why and by whom?

• What are the critical accountability gaps in need of redress, intensified policy attention and investments?

• What course can be taken to improve institutional and collective accountabilities?

The IAP conceptual framework is to monitor, review, remedy and act. Remedy goes beyond data monitoring and review processes, to encourage action to tackle underlying causes, generate deeper transformations, structural and policy change and prevent recurrences when rights to health have been neglected or violated.



Source (a): https://iapewec.org/news/media-and-social-media/ (b): https://iapewec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/IAP-Consultation.pdf

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[6] 2020 Report. Caught in the COVID-19 storm: women's, children's, and adolescents' health in the context of UHC and the SDGs, https://iapewec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/IAP-2020-Report_web-sp.pdf

# Research Findings

Informed by literature review and investigations of multi-stakeholder partnerships this section sets out findings in relation to the dimensions of the conceptual framing research to inform the Sanitation and water for All (SWA) Mutual Accountability Mechanism (MAM). We start with a focus on mutual accountability mechanisms themselves, and then build up a picture of the many influences on these mechanisms that arise from partnership foundations and processes, global and national partnership context and the resultant partnership outcomes and legitimacy.

## Mutual accountability mechanisms
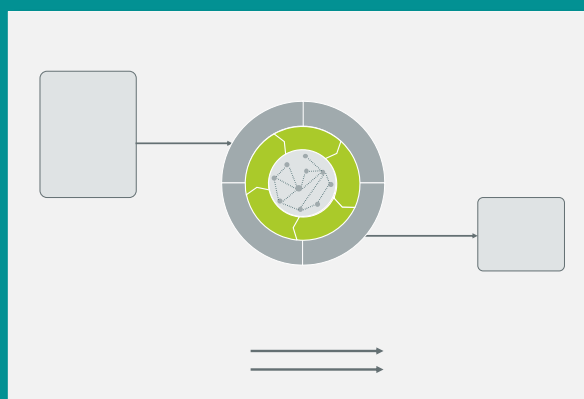


**Mutual accountability mechanisms** are situated within a broader context of partnership processes at the national and international levels.

A mutual accountability mechanism is represented by a five-part cycle.

For there to be effective mutual accountability between stakeholders in a multi-stakeholder partnership, we identified five elements from the literature:

1.  Obligations, responsibilities or commitments clarified

2.  Information on performance shared

3.  Performance discussed, explained, evaluated and debated

4.  Reputational or relational consequence of performance or non-performance

5.  Changed behaviour and corrective action due to accountability to achieve the goals of the partnership

These five elements broadly correspond to the 5 R's put forward by the *Accountability for Water* programme[7] (rules, responsibilities, reporting, review and reaction) and to the "virtuous cycle of participation, information disclosure, and accountability" noted in a review of multi-stakeholder partnerships (Brockmyer and Fox, 2015). These elements also align to recent literature on SDGs which propose three pillars to support accountability: commitments; self-reporting by commitment-makers; and stakeholder participation to monitor and hold commitment makers accountable for follow through (Guy 2014). Equally, a model of 'collaborative accountability' proposed by Droop (2008) includes: evidence on performance; debate through both formal and informal mechanisms; and behaviour change as a result of sanctions for non-compliance. Lastly, some authors suggest to 'measure' the accountability between stakeholders by considering three key dimensions:

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[7] See Hepworth, N.D., Brown, B.D. and Brewer, T. 2020. Accountability and advocacy interventions in the water sector: a review of global evidence. Part 1. Overview and Summary Results. Water Witness International, Edinburgh, UK. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f4e5fb147d4e15989533988/t/5f8ecbf5dc353a0176f8e8e6/1603193854127/Accountability+for+Water_Global+Evidence+Review.pdf (Page 19)

(i) information (little - a lot); (ii) discussion (non-intensive – intensive); (iii) consequence/sanctions (few – many) (Brandsma and Schillemans, 2013).

Below we elaborate on each of these five elements, including illustrations from the selected partnerships and how aspects of their accountability mechanisms were operationalised.

## Obligations, responsibilities or commitments clarified

Many authors point out the importance of **clarifying responsibilities or obligations as the basis for accountability**. In the context of human rights, 'responsibility' is a core dimension of accountability. In the context of mutual accountability between stakeholders, the relevant responsibility is usually in the form of a voluntary commitment, and therefore differs from traditional principal-agent models of accountability, where responsibilities are governed by specific contract, professional or legal standard, whereas for mutual accountability responsibilities are negotiated by partners themselves (Deloffre, 2016). In the context of the state and human rights, it is not just a responsibility or commitment, but also a legal obligation.

Examples of voluntary commitments in MSPs include collaborative platforms set up in public health in England and the Netherlands, based on a belief that such mechanisms were better than regulation to encourage business and civil society to take more responsibility for improving health alongside government (Bekker et al., 2018).

Commitments that are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely), are thought to be most useful as they enable follow-up (Guy, 2014). For instance, the UPR Secretariat provides training to make SMART recommendations, and Every Woman Every Child movement (supported by PMNCH). OGP and the SUN Movement also demonstrate the value of member commitments which are then used as the basis for periodic member reviews by the partnership. Assessment of commitments provides the means to ensure that partnership processes and values are adhered to and partnership objectives are realised. Beyond being SMARTcommitments should only include commitments that are part of an existing policy or plan, since otherwise there is no clear basis for follow-through.

## Information on performance is shared

**Sharing of information on performance** against ascribed responsibilities or commitments is the second key element of mutual accountability, and much of the literature refers to the importance of transparency and communication. For instance, in discussing collaborative accountability, Droop (2008) suggests that technical credibility of an accountability mechanism should be based on the quality, clarity, independence and transparency of performance information (which is seen as the "currency" of accountability). This is because information and monitoring allow for effective scrutiny of performance. Information sharing can be in the form of joint measurement systems or joint reports, or individual organisational reports, which as a minimum must be shared with other stakeholder for effective mutual accountability, but may also be shared more widely (for instance through partnership websites),

Amongst the partnerships studied:

- **Documentation includes contribution from all stakeholder groups**: In the UPR, the peer-review is based on three documents, (1) the report from the State under review, (2) the summary of UN human rights mechanisms and inputs from UN entities, and (3) the summary of submissions from other stakeholders including national human rights institutions, NGOs and regional bodies, including regional human rights mechanisms:

  *"Our office has the mandate to prepare the documentation, and there is intense advocacy and pre-sessions etc. to offer opportunity for other stakeholders to contribute to the draft recommendations that get put forward." (UPR interviewee)*

- **Documentation is shared regularly and publicly to ensure mutual accountability and adherence to the partnership objectives:** For example, for OGP, all IRM assessments are publicly available on the OGP website and opportunities are provided to country stakeholders to comment on and offer feedback during the review process, as well as a public comment period for every IRM assessment.

- **Documentation of mutual accountability and progress of partnership objectives unifies partnership members:** The annual Joint-Assessment provides an opportunity for countries to assess their own performance at country level with relevant multi-stakeholder groups.

- **Performance information should focus on key areas that support assessment of progress towards partnership goals:** For instance in EWEC, a key information need noted in a recent survey was identified to be the amount budgeted for commitments and how much was actually spent

- **Accessible presentation of data is important:** Ensuring data is shared in formats that are accessible to those who might wish to access them is a key consideration in sharing performance information, this was noted in EWEC and also in the other partnerships.

## Performance is evaluated, discussed and explained

A core tenet of accountability is answerability, the idea that a given actor should be asked to **provide explanation for progress or performance**. In the context of mutual accountability, it takes the form of some kind of evaluation, discussion and debate about progress or performance in which explanation is provided. In describing collaborative accountability, Droop (2008) focuses on 'debate' and the extent to which mechanisms stimulate informed debate and ensure parties provide clear reasoning for their performance.

Importantly, such debate about performance is seen to occur through both formal and informal mechanisms. Pointing to the importance of both informal and formal dynamics, Sorsa and Johanson (2014) discuss 'institutional logics' which refers to the rules, norms, discourses and shared dispositions framing the varied practices of collecting and assessing information on organization's activities, ways of communicating between accountors and account-holders, and ways of sanctioning, steering and re-regulating the accountor's activities.

The value of assessing performance as a means to create an opportunity for reflection and learning is also relevant to partnerships studied. During interviews, respondents noted the assessment process is not an end in itself but rather a catalyst to shift reform and country level commitments.

The characteristics of the debate or discussion are also important. Droop (2008) suggests that we should not presuppose consensus between participants, and rather, there should be expectation of a process of ongoing contestation, challenge and creative tension among the different stakeholders and stakeholder groups. Milewicz and Goodwin (2016), in describing the UPR accountability mechanisms have suggested quality criteria for deliberation (see Figure 3) which could be considered.

| For high-quality deliberation | **Inclusiveness**: Deliberation is open to (and inclusive of) all interested parties. |
| --- | --- |
| | **Authenticity**: Deliberation evokes authentic expressions of the points of view of interested parties. |
| | **Public space**: There is an open arena in which parties can come together (physically or virtually) to discuss matters of common concern, to identify problems and/or find solutions |
| | **Effective communication**[8]: Within that forum, there are mechanisms to ensure that participants engage in non-coercive, sustained, considered, mutually responsive communicative engagement with one another's views |

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[8] Milewicz and Goodwin named this 'discursive discipline', however for the audience of this report, such language is not sufficiently accessible

| For deliberation with effect | **Empowered space**: There is an arena in which decisions are made that may be formally binding or have practical effects in more informal ways |
| --- | --- |
| | **Transmission**: There is some mechanism by which public space can formally or informally influence empowered space |
| | **Feedback loop**: There is some mechanism by which empowered space reports back to, and is (formally or informally) held accountable by, the deliberating parties in the original public space. This is instrumental in ensuring that the effects of the process are indeed those intended |

Figure 3: Adapted criteria for high-quality deliberation (Source: Milewicz and Goodwin, 2018; drawing on Dryzek (2009) and Habermas (1996).

Insights from the selected partnerships included the following:

- **Peer-review as an approach to evaluate performance holds both strengths and weaknesses**: The UPR uses a peer-review mechanism whereby each State is peer-reviewed. A benefit of this system is the learning opportunity and experience provided by being in the position of 'peer-reviewer', which also can motivate States to improve their own practices in their own State.

*"Some States with pretty poor human rights records, they come, here they are in the UPR, and they make fantastic recommendations. And sometimes it goes a step further. They make recommendations about something they should do themselves at home. Suddenly, progress can be made, this is why the peer-review process is valuable."* (UPR interviewee)

A potential disadvantage is that States may be tempted to give each other an easy time in the hope that they also might be given an easy time, though in practice this hasn't been widely experienced. And many States are highly principled, such that 'they will make recommendations no matter who is in front of them'

- **Catalysing reform through the evaluation process**: Country level assessments are not used simply as a means of accountability, but to catalyse policy reform. In the case of OGP, the IRM is used to inform future action and importantly understand how change can happen within local contexts.

- **An independent panel that undertakes external review can bring credibility to accountability:** The Independent Accountability Panel (IAP) of the EWEC is a 10 person panel mandated to review independently progress and accountabilities to advance progress for the 2016-2030 Global Strategy. This places accountability at a special level making it a process of its own and giving it more credibility. Partners are aware that this panel will provide recommendations.

*"You cannot judge your own homework  (as per NASA experience)[9] and you need the accountiability mechanism to include independent review for it to have credibilty among the partners."* (IAP interviewee).

Evaluation of performance can take place at country-level or global level or both. This issue is discussed further below under the heading of 'global partnership processes', which points to the potential for global processes to reinforce national level mutual accountability processes. Reputational or relational consequence of performance (or non-performance). In the context of mutual accountability, there is usually some form of consequence for not meeting or following through on responsibilities or commitments, however its form is generally mild and differs from legally based accountability and enforcement approaches. In the context of mutual or collaborative accountability, actor's reputation and 'social-standing' is at stake in the event of non-compliance, and equally reputation is enhanced by good performance. In that way, consequences or sanctions tend to be social, political, reputational and relational (Droop, 2008). They can be

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[9] Saunders M, Ortiz J. Nobody's perfect: the benefits of independent review. NASA;
Ask Magazine, Issue 36, Fall 2009

relevant either amongst national level actors, or, as discussed below, can also include links to global level, where reputational consequence may be more significant to certain actors.

The literature notes that for mutual accountability, it is internal mechanisms (e.g. self-assessment, peers) rather than external compulsion that are central to ensuring compliance (Droop, 2008). Reputation and relational sanctions have been found to support voluntary compliance, and need to be accompanied by trust building and social learning to support the process (Deloffre, 2016). In line with these views, Steets (2004) argues that with mutual accountability, the "challenge is not simply to make partnership more accountable, but to find the right level of accountability." Consequences that are too strict or severe are likely to erode trust and result in avoidance or poor engagement rather than the desired results.

Interpersonal dynamics and combinations of formal and informal accountabilities, both vertical and horizontal, have been found to influence how sanctions or consequences work (Romzek, 2013) Their study of accountability mechanisms revealed the importance of shared norms, facilitative behaviours, as well as informal rewards and sanctions, and they note the potential for tensions to arise between the concurrent operation of formal and informal accountability systems (Romzek, 2013).

The selected partnerships and mechanisms provide an understanding of the careful balance that needs to be struck in mutual accountability around relational and reputational consequences and compliance:

- **Learning rather than naming and shaming**: The UPR review mechanism works on the basis of learning rather than on actual naming and shaming, though clearly having other States peer review a country's status on human rights has an element of reputational risk etc. that is part of what can promote action. Academic literature supports this, with Carraro (2019) noting that: "the UPR is deemed particularly strong in generating peer and public pressure on States". The IAP has also observed the importance of a constructive approach: "Accountability˝ at its best˝ is not naming and shaming˝ but rather a mechanism to connect commitments to progress in a justifiable and constructive way"[10]. OGP also suggests a focus on learning:

  *"Rules and compliance exist to keep countries in check but what you want to be sensitive to is growth, learning and improvement because that's where your end goal is". (OGP interviewee)*

- **Within a constructive, learning focus, there should also be some 'bite' to trigger corrective actions**: The EWEC IAP have also found that "there needs to be an adequate action taken toward the party responsible for fulfilling a commitment˝especially if they are not on track to fulfil it", pointing to the need for relational or reputational consequence to trigger corrective action

- **Opportunity to accept or reject recommendations for corrective action**: In the UPR, an important aspect of accountability and enforcement is that in the adoption of the report with the recommendations, a State can choose to support or to note any of the recommendations. This is a strength of the mechanism as if a state has actively accepted a recommendation, then they have made a commitment to it.

- **The power of relational sanctions**: For the UPR, the recommendations come from the States that give them (notably not a UN organisation) and this holds political weight since it is a bilateral commitment made between the countries, and therefore pertains to the relationship between those two states: "Each and every recommendation has next to it in parentheses the country that made it" (Carraro 2019)

- **Focus on action and response:** The OGP's IRM recognises that main focus of the assessment process is not 'the accountability moment' but the action and response that comes after and the opportunity for reform and change. The assessment process provides evidence for the partnership more broadly to respond.

- **Speak of accountability as in everyone's interest to improve things:** The IAP of the EWEC noted that the term 'to hold someone accountable' can have a negative connotation, and can sometimes be

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[10] See https://iapewec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/IAP-Consultation.pdf referencing the IAP 2020 report for the accountability framework.

perceived as threatening, especially to governments. Therefore, accountability overall should be seen as a disciplined way of achieving goals quicker, rather than a process that will bring negative consequences to the partners.

Relational and reputational consequences may be more significant, particularly for governments, in the global arena, and hence the importance of linkage to global level, discussed further below in the section on 'global partnership processes.'

## Behaviour change or corrective action to better achieve partnership goals

The purpose of mutual accountability is to prompt behaviour change amongst the relevant actors, towards more effectively achieving the aims of the relevant partnership or accountability mechanism. Behaviour change is the adjusted actions arising from an effective consequence, sanction or compliance mechanism. In Accountability for Water's conceptualisation, this last step of the accountability cycle is focused on 'reaction', which is described as: "an appropriate and effective reaction, through improved practice, reformed policy, or imposition of new incentives, sanctions or enforcement", pointing to not just behaviour change to improve contribution to sector progress, but also improve the settings within the accountability mechanism.

The following points concerning behaviour change were raised through the selected partnerships:

- **Opportunities and challenges in monitoring behaviour change**: For the UPR, the Secretariat prepares all pre and post documentation and all is available on the website, however in practice not all recommendations are monitored. This is not surprising since for one State there can be as many as 300 recommendations. Any organisation can use the recommendations as leverage to follow-up. The OHCHR field operations follow up some recommendations in line with their strategic focus, and the Secretariat provides letters and advice on what can be done to follow-up to other interested organisations. In terms of results, Carraro (2019) study shows that UPR is successful at providing political pressure when there is not willingness to implement human rights.

- **Recognition of contextual factors influencing partner actions and behaviour change:** The OGP's IRM has increasingly sought to increase engagement in regional dimensions of partner members. This is in recognition that there is no one-size-fits all for enactment of the OGP principles. Increased outreach by regional leads has strengthened the way in which member countries are encouraged to engage with recommendations and findings from the IRM.

- **Mutual accountability as evidence to inform behaviour change:** The OGP's IRM has sought to use periodic reporting to influence behaviour change amongst its members. Rather than simply a 'moment of accountability' for its members, accountability reporting is used as an evidence base resource to inform conversations about policy reform of governments who are members of OGP. Over time the focus of the IRM within the OGP shifting to more real time input during key moments of the action plan cycle and ongoing engagement to disseminate findings

# Partnership foundations
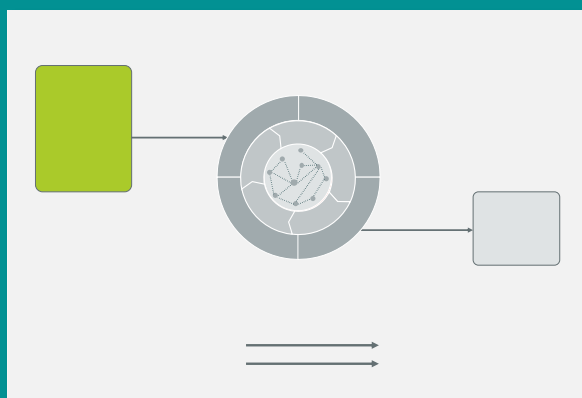


**Partnership foundations** are the an important basis to establish trustful partnerships that can support an effective mutual accountability mechanism.

A broad set of partnership foundations are necessary to support mutual accountability, as evidenced through review of literature and also confirmed through interviews. Key elements of the foundations include:

- Establishing shared purpose
- Partner capability to partner
- Multi-stakeholder representation
- Multi-stakeholder relationships

Partner capacity, multi-stakeholder representation and relationships are not equally evident in all global partnerships. Schaaf (2015) notes that a partnership is a cooperative relationship underpinned by a set of values (trust, transparency, accountability, reciprocity and respect) that evolves over time through mutual learning, voluntary participation and commitment, with a view to achieving mutually agreed goals. Though in the relationship of diverse actors the aspiration of partnership as a meeting place is often the basis or the starting point for continued action.

In some partnerships the state has a primary membership, with civil society as observers or providers of additional or supplementary reporting. In other partnerships state and non-state actors have more equal membership. Though it's important to acknowledge that by virtue of their primary obligation to uphold global commitments, the State is the primary focus of partnerships to ensure achievement of agreed global standards and commitments. The role of civil society members and other development partners of the partnership is often to contribute to formal processes and to monitor review and inform accountability process. Thom and Cope (2016) describe a shared understanding as a means of establishing a partnership. Beisheim and Simon (2016) refer to the establishment of 'process management' as necessary and foundational to partnership processes.

Common themes related to partnership foundations from document review and interviews include the following.

## Establishing shared purpose

The importance of clear purpose and processes through which members engage in a partnership was described by Dobb (2015) in a review of MSPs: "Having a clear, well defined and easily understood objective was crucial: people could easily relate to it, and feel ownership because its thematic approach was clear and logical…and with a clear and well-defined purpose and objective monitoring and evaluation became possible, was not cumbersome to execute, and with a reasonable time-line, evaluation and monitoring could lead to adjustments – when and if needed". (p.10).

**STRENGTHENING MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN PARTNERSHIPS FOR WASH:**
PART 1 – LITERATURE REVIEW AND LEARNING FROM OTHER SECTORS

**29**

The selected partnerships for this research also provided insights to the value of a shared purpose and commitment.

- **Purpose is universally shared but locally contextualised:** Membership of the OGP and member commitments are informed by the historical, political and social contexts of each member.

  *"There is a universal understanding of what the open government principles are but how those are applied or how they are used depend on how each member decides to leverage the OGP platform" (OGP interviewee).*

- **Objectives of the partnership are clear but actions in country are defined by partners:** Partners of the PMNCH are the ones that define the actions to be undertaken in country in order to achieve the objectives of the partnership as they are the ones that understand the needs of the country towards achieving the overall objectives of the partnership. The PMNCH provides them with the necessary tools and training to undertake these actions.

## Partner capability to partner

It should not be assumed that all partners have inherent capability to partner. Thom and Cope (2016) note limited capability to partner, and point out the importance of appropriate skills and time to partner effectively. Issues raised included the need to have difficult or uncomfortable conversations that explore what might go wrong and prepare for such scenarios; the need to invest time and resources to building capability on all sides – to understand each other, to negotiate etc. (p.8). MacDonald et al. (2019) highlights that partnership capacity is strengthened through the practice of the MSP: "collaborative decision-making has an indirect and positive impact on partnership capacity through systems that keep partners informed, coordinate partner interactions, and facilitate ongoing learning…partnership capacity is contingent on the design of decision-making processes, as well as internal mechanisms that coordinate and monitor collaborative activities". (p.409)

Points concerning partner capability were raised through the selected partnerships:

- **Multi-stakeholder partnerships do not necessarily come naturally and efforts to break down silos are needed:** The OGP has been intentional to strengthen partner capability and relations between government and civil society partner members.

  **"**The OGP leadership and chairs have made an intentional effort to build a cohesive body. While there are moments that merit specific government or civil society action this doesn't affect intention to operate as a group. Guiding principles, strategy, how to support OGP members, these are collective discussions and decisions" (OGP interviewee).*

## Multi stakeholder representation

Representation within the partnership relates firstly to who is designated to represent an organisation in a partnership. This representation is especially important for State representation. The level of seniority and the part of government a staff member represents are critical to the role and mandate of the partnership and to the influence of the partnership on government's actions.

- **Importance of who represents a partner organisation**: The extent to which a government representative is connected across other parts of governments also influences how the platform of the partnership is used at national level.

  *"Commitments are dependent on who is at the table when discussions happen, which sectors, which institutions, the scope and mandate of government institutions who are at the table. This influences how the commitment is shaped and how it is implementedd" (OGP interview).*

A second aspect of representation is the specific combination of actors involved in the partnership. Diversity of representation in a partnership strengthens the legitimacy of a partnership (Backstrand 2006). In addition, making specific allocations for particular stakeholder groups can help ensure balanced representation.

- **Representation in terms of numbers affects voice in a partnership**: In the PMNCH, specific efforts are made to provide space to civil society organisations:

  *"We try to make equal footing for all partners by giving more seats on the Board to NGO´s. This gives them, in terms of number, the ability to speak more." (PMNCH interviewee)*

## Multi-stakeholder relationships

Multi-stakeholder relationships include both horizontal and vertical structures. Horizontal structures are those that bring together different stakeholder groups. Vertical structures connect national to regional to global levels of a partnership. These structures are also inclusive of governance arrangements such as executive or steering committees representing members, secretariats' who support partnership activities and also linkages to other global entities such as UN agencies and leadership. There is no uniform practice of what these structures and relationships look like in different partnerships, however they significantly affect how partners relate to one another and such dynamics affect how any accountability mechanism will work.

### Horizontal relationships:

The literature on partnerships highlights the important value of horizontal relationships. As noted by Cowan and Billaud (2015) these types of relationships promote an 'equal playing field' for members established through clear protocols and expectations of participation. Partnerships with horizontal structure can support accountability to a broad range of affected stakeholders, such as NGOs, the media, governments, donors and multilateral organizations (Backstrand 2006) since partners are engaged together with shared vision and transparent commitments dependent on stakeholder group

Sometimes structures of partnerships include homogenous stakeholder groups working horizontally side by side which are connected through horizontal relationships. For example, the networks within the SUN Movement are structured based on specific types of members (governments; donors; civil society: private sector) which then connect horizontally and linked vertically to the higher-level executive of the SUN Movement. Another type of horizontal relationship is the OGP where government and civil society representatives work side by side in various sub-committees of the governance structures of the partnership.

### Vertical relationships:

Vertical structures are inclusive of both formal and informal accountability arrangements, and whilst different terms or names are used, there are similarities across different partnerships studied for this research. Vertical structures are inclusive of member countries and regional and global level secretariat support, partnership committees, sub-committees and networks, executive councils or steering committees, with oversight of boards. It is through communications within these various vertical relationships that the functions of the partnership are enabled and operationalised. Clear and transparent communications enable the partnership functions to connect and work holistically and connect accountability of national level members to a global partnership level. This vertical connection in turn strengthens the output legitimacy of the partnership and members participation and their contributions.

Increasingly global partnerships are adding regional (vertical) level structures to support partnership activities particularly to support and engage in accountability mechanisms. For example, the OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism has increasingly emphasized regional roles to support the assessments within national contexts. This includes regional consultants to carry out the independent assessment of country action plans and also outreach by regional leads of the OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism staff to encourage and support uptake of assessment findings. Regional roles ensure that input is more relevant to local historical, political and social contexts of given countries. The regional-level engagement and support connects more easily to national level focal points (government representatives) and civil society, due to time zones and better understanding of local regional contexts.

# Partnership processes
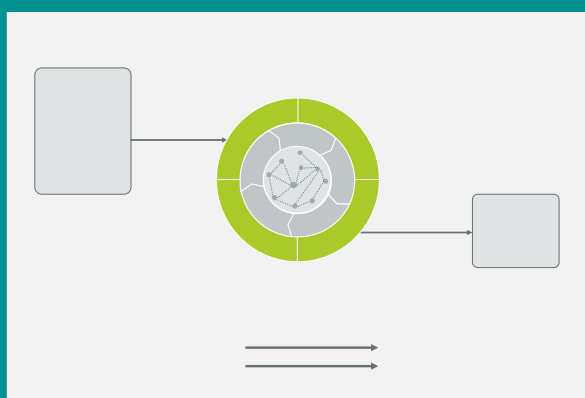


**Partnership processes** are represented by an outer ring within the centre of the diagram, providing a conducive context for an effective mutual accountability mechanism. Partnership processes include four main dimensions.

Partnership processes provide the basis to support mutual accountability mechanisms, key dimensions of the conceptual framing include:

- Shared vision, purpose, ownership of the partnership

- Transparent, collaborative processes and rules of engagement

- Shared decision-making, action and feedback

- Mutual learning to evolve the partnership

## Shared vision, purpose, ownership of the partnership

Ownership and commitment was noted by Droop (2008) as a key condition required for collaborative accountability processes to be effective. So whilst shared purpose is established as part of the foundation of a partnership, this needs to translate to shared ownership of the partnership. This includes ownership of agreed standards or processes such that they value their reputational standing in the partnership, and see this standing as being at stake if they were not to perform as agreed (Droop, 2008).

## Transparent, collaborative processes and rules of engagement

Agreed 'rules of engagement' and a common process for partnering are key to effective multi-stakeholder partnerships (Thom and Cope 2016). This includes in relation to accountability mechanisms, for instance Van de Lande and Fonseca (2018) emphasise the value of transparent accountability mechanisms and that "results of accountability mechanisms must be made publicly available" (p.16).

All partnerships studied for this research had established mechanisms for reporting and monitoring commitments and other processes as relevant. There are established approaches to scheduling of events such as those to express commitments, to monitor and to report on commitments. There are also clear processes for transparently communicating monitoring and assessments both to actors within and outside to the partnerships.

Specific insights from partnerships studied in this research include:

- **Ensuring following rules does not become more important than results:** This has been a key insight arising from the experience of the OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism, and has implications for results-oriented 'rules' rather than purely 'process' oriented rules.

  *"It is important to not just have compliance focus - checklist focus - this incentivises rule following, not meaningful engagement. Let's be careful not to prescribe rules for the purpose of accountability, otherwise we will lose the meaning of co-creation and miss the the ability to learn versus following the rules. Some countries are following the rules, but they are not delivering results. Sometimes you can*

**STRENGTHENING MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN PARTNERSHIPS FOR WASH:**
PART 1 – LITERATURE REVIEW AND LEARNING FROM OTHER SECTORS

32

*give a recipe, people can follow, but doesn't mean the cake is going to taste as good" (OGP interviewee).*

- **Partnership members meet regularly through a range of different forums and governance structures:** Across all the partners studied, there are both large scale periodic all-member inclusive events as well as more routine monthly / quarterly partnership committee processes to deliver on strategic initiatives and workplans.

## Shared decision-making, action and feedback

Partnership processes for decision-making, action and feedback have a strong influence on the effectiveness of the third element in accountability mechanisms ('Performance is evaluated, discussed and explained'). MacDonald (2019) notes that partnership capacity is contingent on the design of decision-making processes, as well as internal mechanisms that coordinate and monitor collaborative activities. A study of MSPs also concludes that "collaborative decision-making has an indirect and positive impact on partnership capacity through systems that keep partners informed, coordinate partner interactions, and facilitate ongoing learning" (p.409).

Consideration of decision-making processes in the partnerships studied highlighted that:

- **Clear partnership structures are essential to enable agreed actions to be planned and carried out and decision-making processes to function.** Partnerships have different and unique structures to operationalise their own objectives and connect multi stakeholder members. For example, OGP has structures which bring together civil society and government in dialogue and joint decision-making which aligns with intent and seeks to 'mirror' the interest of OGP to have government and civil society engage at national levels.

    *"OGP has civil society, gov. co-chairs act as mirror to how partnership members are to operate at the national level" (OGP interviewee)*

For example, the SUN Movement has a range of different global level networks who are connected via secretariats of these networks to other sector networks at global the global level. At the national level similarly a network of donors, civil society, UN and private business are set up. This is in turn mirrored at regional levels and then connects back to the global level"

*"The secretariats of the networks (four networks [at the global level]) connect with the secretariat – we work together – we didn't always work well together [before the four networks were not well connected and work in silos] – but going forward we are going to have a joint work plan at the global level – as joined global support system. Its either horizontal coordination or vertical coordination with regions and all the countries under them – its quite challenging" (SUN Movement Interviewee)*

- **Hierarchical decision-making processes are central to the functioning of partnerships:** Across the different partnerships we studied, they varied in terms of the extent to which structures were hierarchical and connected to global mechanisms. Some hierarchy was required to provide clarity of authority and roles in the partnership, but must be balanced with inclusiveness. Partnerships studied had clear structures and processes to establish decision-making with oversight from boards and as well as more operational executive / steering committees. The PMNCH has evolved to have clear processes for decision-making:

    *Board and and an executive Committee (EC) which have the highest level of decision making. If the working groups produce an strategic paper with government recommendations then it needs to go to the EC level. The EC meets once a month and the Board only meets twice a year, which means that the EC level makes the decissions when the board doesnt meet. – PMNCH*

## Mutual learning to evolve partnership

Mutual learning is a key to evolving and strengthening a partnership, and as described earlier, is also a key aspect of mutual accountability mechanisms in enabling improvements in partner activities to achieve the

aims of the partnership. Schaaf (2015) notes that a partnership evolves over time through mutual learning, voluntary participation and commitment, with a view to achieving mutually agreed goals.

Mutual learning was also a key theme described by partnerships studied for this research:

- **Connection between accountability, learning and advancing the partnership agenda:** OGP's IRM has a strong link between its accountability and learning. The importance of learning as an outcome of accountability was described as central to the function of the OGP's IRM.

  *"Yes accountability is key, if from the accountability there is no learning and reflection you are just left with sense of inconsequential accountability. Accountability doesn't always have to be enforcement, negative action. Learning and reflection is also a consequence of accountability" (OGP interviewee)*

- **Using an accountability mechanism as a basis to support learning and reform:** A key theme within both literature (MacDonald et al. 2019; Bekker et al. 2018; Deloffre 2016; Schaaf. 2015) and partnerships studied is the increasing focus on accountability mechanisms to support reflection, learning and progressive change of partnership members.

  *"The accountability moment is not an end in itself but the means to create opportunity for reflection and learning. The point is to not focus just on the report – but to consider what to do as a result of its findings – what action to take.." (OGP interviewee)*

- **Accountability functions need to be institutionalised in order for learning to occur**: The IAP of the EWEC through its accountability framework suggests that core accountability functions such as Monitor-Review-Remedy-Act should be institutionalised and implemented in a constructive way so that they enable learning and progress.

## Global-level partnership processes
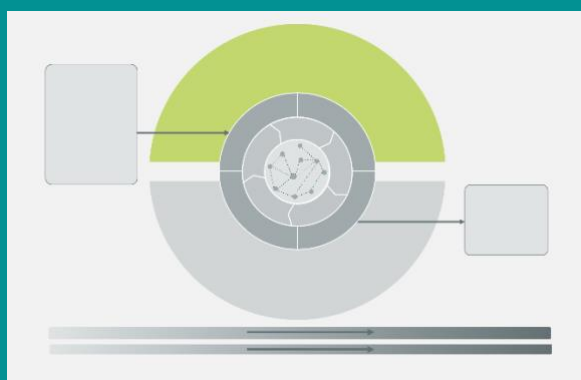


**Global-level partnership processes** comprise the global level interactions between a national level partners and broader global partnership

Multi-stakeholder partnerships that work across global and national levels have specific dynamics across these levels, and ways in which interactions are structured. To ensure effective partnership structures, accountability mechanisms and support from global level, Beisheim & Simon (2016) note the importance of an independent and well-staffed secretariat. A secretariat takes care of process management tasks including ensuring a "clear vision and theory of change, inclusive goal-setting process, precise formulation of roles and responsibilities of partners, transparent communication".

Two main categories of interaction between global and national level relevant to the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms include the following:

- Ways in which accountability at global level influences accountability at national level, through national engagement in global processes

- Ways in which global or regional Secretariats or other stakeholders support national level actors and processes, including tailoring of support to the relevant context and support to the functioning of agreed accountability mechanisms

## National engagement in global accountability processes

Engagement of certain national actors in global accountability processes can serve to support and legitimise national mutual accountability mechanisms. Different global partnerships have developed a range of different structures and mechanisms that support interaction between national and global levels in virtuous cycles to improve accountability and progress towards partnership aims.

The selected partnerships and accountability mechanisms have adopted both similar and different approaches to interactions between national and global processes:

- **Strong expectations for participation in global processes is beneficial:** The UPR is one of the few accountability mechanisms in which every (UN Member) State participates. This universality is viewed as a strength of the mechanism, and provides significant impetus and expectation for every country to participate once every 4.5 years.

- **Links to global processes legitimises and elevates partnership and member country action:** The SUN Movement is linked to the UN through the UN Assistant Secretary-General who is also Coordinator of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement. The Movement is informed and has valuable input from key global leaders including FAO and UNICEF.

- **Global commitments are harmonised and strengthened through joint commitments within partnerships and other global agendas:** For example, Sun Movement (non State) supporters members of the partnership also report to other global forums. The UN [Nutrition] Network (UN Network), officially established in June 2013 by the Principals of FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO, "is responsible for translating and achieving UN nutrition commitments in SUN countries".

## Strategies to provide support from global or regional level to national level actors

For global partnerships, establishment of effective structures, accountability mechanisms and approaches at national level in each relevant country requires considerable support. Literature suggests that country-level processes need to be given context specific support involving support for a: "bottom-up process to develop local ownership and context-specific customized measures, local capacity development for long-term impact, including identifying a business case for local partners" (Beisheim and Simon, 2016). These authors warn that approaches should not be planned top-down on one-size-fits-all blueprints, and the design of any given multi-stakeholder partnership must ensure adaptation to fit local conditions.

The selected partnerships demonstrate a range of approaches to provide support from global/regional level to national level:

- **Guidance documents to orient and support national actors**: A common strategy is to develop common guidance at global level that can be shared to support national actorsThe UPR Secretariat also produces guidance documents[11] to support improved understanding of the peer-review accountability mechanism, as well as how to make recommendations SMART.

- **Follow-up monitoring support**: In some partnerships/mechanisms, follow-up on recommendations is done from regional or national level. For instance, the OHCHR and other UN field operations offices in different regions actively follow up some of the recommendations for countries in their respective regions, however they do not have sufficient resources to follow up all recommendations.

- **Training opportunities for specific stakeholder groups**: The UPR mechanism draws on the role of OHCHR (which acts as its Secretariat), other UN organisations and NGOs such as the UPR-Info (an NGO at global level) to provide training to civil society organisations to help them know what they can do

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[11] For instance, see https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/UPR/UPR_Practical_Guidance.pdf

to leverage the UPR process in their country. They and other NGOs also run pre-session mock sessions where invite member States and CSOs and CSOs put forward ideas for consideration.

- **Stronger flexibility and regional focus**: The OGP's IRM has shifted to a stronger country and regional focus, recognising that there is no one formula for everyone. Regional focus means that outreach and support can be provided in a more tailored and actionable manner to complement country level activities and is more relevant and contextualised than global (generalized) inputs. The IRM has instituted regional leads to both carry out and follow up on the IRM assessments and outreach to OGP members...

- **Engagement of civil society through training and transfer of knowledge**: The PMNCH engages with civil society in country by providing advocacy, knowledge, and accountability training. Furthermore, if a government makes a commitment in a country, the PMNCH funds and provides advocacy training to civil society so they can follow-up on these commitments.

## National actors, processes, context
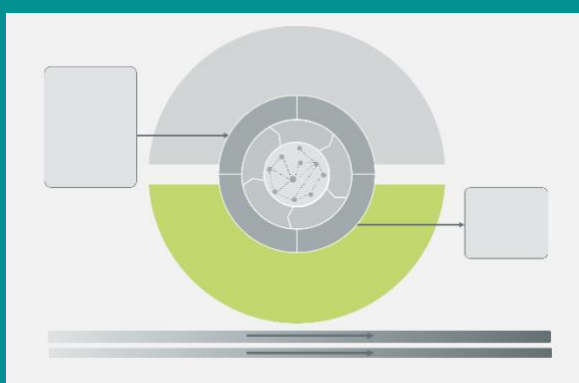


**National actors, process and context** forms the environment in which national partners interact and pursue mutual accountability

The broader national context in which a multi-stakeholder partnership sits in a partner country, can be strongly influential in relation to if and how an accountability mechanism within an MSP is effective. According to review of MSPs, partnership efforts should be complementary and avoid duplication, taking into account the overall national governance architecture. There are at least three important aspects to the national context:

### Wider sector processes, including national planning and review cycles

A mutual accountability mechanism is likely to be more effective if it has clear links to other existing sector processes at national level, such that it can reinforce, complement and support these. In this way, as shown earlier in **Error! Reference source not found.**, mutual accountability between different stakeholders can s upport state accountability as well as administrative and social accountability. In particular this provides links to other systems of accountability including 'state accountability' in terms of the duty of governments to rights-holders including citizens, and 'social accountability', seen as the dynamic between users of public services and service providers.

### Enabling environment for the partnership

A review of MSPs suggested that for effective partnerships and accountability: "[t]here should be an enabling environment and country ownership, as well as incentives to engage for global collective goods, especially in least developed countries (where win-win situations might not exist but need to be created)" (Beishem and Simon, 2016). These authors also note that systemic obstacles such as security problems or lack of infrastructure can inhibit success.

### Consideration of partners' accountability to their own constituencies

Each individual represents their wider partner organisation, and each partner organisation may represent a broader constituency. These loyalties and relationships affect how a given partner engages with a partnership and any mutual accountability mechanism.

Examples of the interactions between our selected partnerships/accountability mechanisms and the wider system of national level actors, processes and context include:

* **Partnership support strengthens national policy and actions:** the SUN Movement has a strong focus on strengthening national government capability to progress nutrition outcomes. The Movement has developed a variety of tools and resources, such as strategy development, financing and monitoring of national level targets. The support of the Movement enables States to achieve nutrition outcomes.

* **Inclusive multi-sector engagement:** the OGP has set out guidance for members to carry out inclusive processes in the development of country action plans. The guidance sets out expectations of government and civil society engagement and criteria by which members will be assessed against during the Independent Reporting-Mechanism. The OGP recognises the important relationship that national civil society have with States and the national processes which promote accountability.

## Partnership outcomes and legitimacy
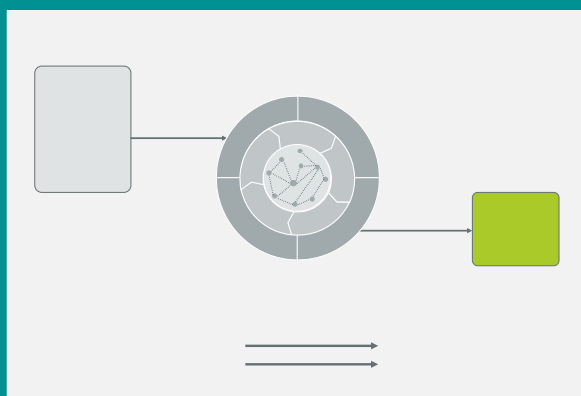


**Partnership outcomes and legitimacy** are the main outputs of the model as illustrated on the right side of the diagram.

A mutual accountability mechanism and accompanying processes are developed in the hope that they catalyse improved partnership outcomes. Different MSPs have different types of goals they are aiming to achieve. For instance, expected outcomes of a multi-stakeholder partnership can be categorised to address different types of gaps. Clarke & Macdonald (2016) identify four types of gaps that partnerships may address:

* regularity gaps (potential to address governance failure, market failure and good intention failure);

* participatory gaps (promotion of inclusiveness, prioritising stakeholder demands, increased diversity of knowledge and potential of synergies and services);

- resource gaps (transfer of tangible resources (finance), transfer of intangible resources (skills, expertise, knowledge); and

- and learning gaps (creation of new knowledge, creation of new rules, practices and technologies).

Mutual accountability mechanisms can address any of these gaps, depending on how it is designed and focused.

Another way of considering outcomes of multi-stakeholder partnerships is short-medium, and long-term outcomes. ECDPM (2019) highlights that focusing on short tangible outputs may bypass learning on medium and long-term impact. They also note that this focus also misses the opportunity to learn about the partnership practice and how this influences change. As discussed earlier in relation to mutual accountability, a key aspect of such mechanisms are stakeholder learning processes about how to improve their progress and effectiveness. Learning about the functioning of the partnership as an outcome, they argue is an important part of assessing a multi-stakeholder partnership.

Partnership outcomes are linked to the external or output legitimacy of a partnership. Brockmyer and Fox (2015) outlined effectiveness and impact of transnational multi-stakeholder initiatives. Through their study, they identified key factors affecting outcomes: "high-level political will, mid-level government expertise, civil society interest, empowerment, and capacity, usage of strategic opportunity points, and goodness of fit with existing public interest constituencies. These factors can be succinctly summarized as 'the right people, at the right time, with the right message'" (p.8).

Insights from the partnerships studied, especially in relation to the mutual accountability highlight:

- **An accountability mechanism is not an outcome of the partnership, but a basis by which to inform efforts to shift practice and catalyse change:** For example, OGP is an example of a partnership that relies on the IRM as an accountability mechanism to capture lessons and evidence that support its direction.

- **Academic research can confirm effectiveness of accountability mechanisms:** Some processes, such as the UPR have been studied extensively through academic research to examine if and how the mechanism is effective, and is one way to build up legitimacy of the mechanism.

# Partnership power
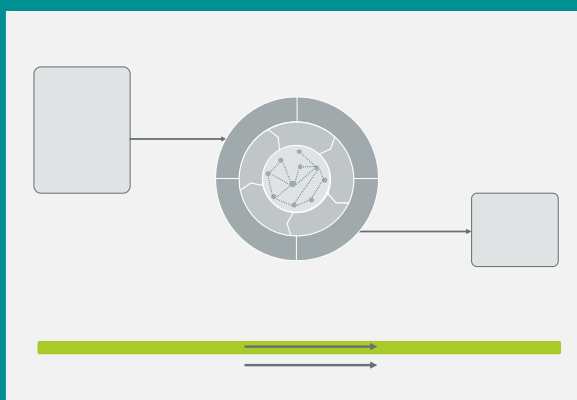


**Partnership power** is the first of two spectrums at the bottom of the model.

Different dimensions of power can be conceived within multiple stakeholder mutual accountability partnerships, and these are important as they influence how partners interact in the partnership, including in relation to mutual accountability. Two important dimensions are: (i) power within a partnership, informed by external contexts and (ii) power related to accountability relationships within a partnership. Within these two aspects both informal and formal types of power are evident.

## Power within a partnership, informed by external contexts

Partnerships bring together different actors that have pre-existing positions in countries and globally, and different levels of influence, as well as existing relationships to others beyond the partnership. These serve to create power dynamics and asymmetries within a partnership.

- **Power within a partnership is influenced by historical relationship of members:** Partnerships are difficult to achieve, particularly between organisations or individuals with historic power differences Schaaf, R. (2015). Equal power of members, as written on paper and as informed by partnership principles is not necessarily realised in practice as colonial legacy remains.

- **Asymmetrical member characteristics means that whilst a partnership seeks to equalise power (within the partnership) this is not always the case:** Equal power of members is not necessarily realised as power vested in different sets of members (outside of the partnership) is brought into the partnership, ie donors, multilateral agencies who bring dollars who are members have more voice. This issue is raised in both literature (Menashy 2017) and also through the partnerships studied.

  *"All constituencies have the same rights and number of people. They are all supported in the same way. However, there is a still a power structure, which favors donors and mulitlateral agencies as they tend to have a financial relationship with many of the members of the partnership and this has created a power inbalance" (PMNCH interviewee).*

- **Other forms of accountability beyond a partnership influence accountability within a partnership – 'system of relationships' – within and outside a partnership need to be considered:** As highlighted by partnerships studied, States who are members of a partnership are ultimately not accountable to the partnership, but rather elected officials (governments) are responsible to national governance structures and election cycles within their own country contexts. In addition, governments also sign up to global commitments through commitments to UN resolutions. Weisband (2007) writes: 'accountability relations between actors are complex, dense, and contingent on their context. In practice, accountability has been characterised as a 'political theatre' where institutional structures, power asymmetries and inter-organisational dynamics combine to ensure that "no single form of accountability dominates' (p.6). Similarly, the OGP IRM is viewed as an evidence base through which other actors can engage in an accountability process.

## Power related to accountability relationships within a partnership

Within the literature, and also informed by our study of partnerships, different views are expressed on whether power can be equalised within a partnership, whether equal power matters, and whether a process of accountability can shift power. Some ideas are presented below.

**Setting partnership rules of engagement and standards doesn't necessarily presuppose equality of members but it does bind members to common rules of practice.** Droop (2008) notes that collaborative accountability models "do not presuppose equality between stakeholders. Indeed, they can function as effective mechanisms to bind in more powerful players to common rules, values and behaviour. Nor do they presuppose consensus between participants. Their evolution consists of (and indeed depends on) ongoing contestation, challenge and creative tension among players". (p.17)

**Another view is that accountability requires the underpinning of power distribution on an equal basis.** Kim (2017) notes "accountability mechanisms always remain as a stunted institution unless power is equally distributed across all actors involved in partnerships". (p.334)

**Yet another view within the literature on power is that the process of accountability acts to shift power.** Shorten (2012) notes that "the process of measurement and the publication of results are equally important and are a vital part of improving mutual accountability. In theory, the adoption of a Scorecard approach will help change behavior through peer pressure, public scrutiny and increased transparency of any gap between the rhetoric and practice of aid effectiveness. This should also help shift the balance of power between governments, donors and civil society organisations in ways that will improve alignment, harmonization and health systems strengthening". (p. 11)

**Insights from the partnerships studies include:**

- **Intentional efforts to equalise and diffuse power:** OGP has co-chairs (government and civil society representatives) of its steering committee, as well as equal representation within all sub-committees to power equalise create a multi-stakeholder forum

- **Formal and informal power dynamics operate within partnership:** there are a range of different structures and processes within partnerships such as committees and sub-committees where both formal and informal power is operationalized.

## Input-output legitimacy
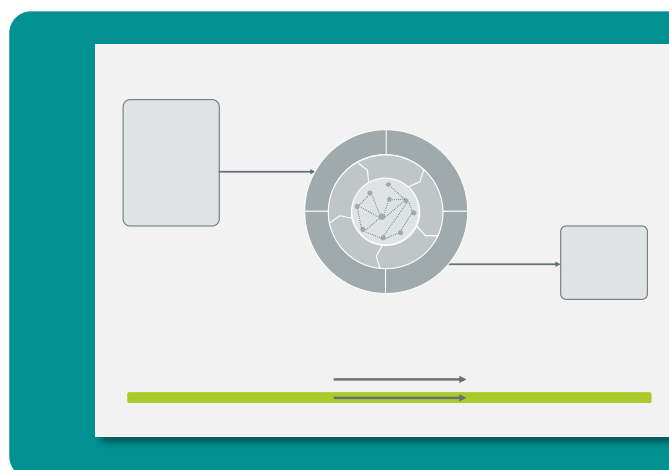


At the bottom of the model is the **input-output legitimacy** spectrum.

A partnership needs to be viewed as trustworthy and fair in order to attract members (input legitimacy) and similarly, the results of the partnership need to be acknowledged by external stakeholders (output legitimacy) to ensure members continue to invest time and resources. This basis which provides integrity of a partnership is also a pre-requisite for a well-functioning accountability mechanism within a partnership.

Partnership *input legitimacy* refers to "whether global governance processes comply with principles of procedural fairness and democratic standards, such as accountability, transparency, participation and representation" (Scholte & Tallberg, 2018 p.4). Backstrand (2006) notes that "input legitimacy in multi-sectoral networks relates to procedural demands such as balanced representation of different stakeholder groups, forum for collaboration and deliberation between government, market and civil society actors, transparency, access, information sharing and accountability and reporting mechanisms" (p.294). Accountability and transparency mechanisms for monitoring effectiveness of partnership networks is central to input legitimacy as described by Backstrand (2006). Members sign up to objectives of partnership and also membership standards. Ways of ensuring these are upheld are central to input legitimacy. Accountability mechanisms to ensure legitimacy of a partnership can be both vertical and horizontal within the partnership and represent pluralistic accountability structures Backstrand (2006). For example, government members are accountable to other government members at a global level as well to constituents within their national contexts, such as civil society, and also at a global level with UN agencies.

Input legitimacy can also be strengthened by the range of different members of a partnership, as Schiedek (2020) notes "legitimacy through the equilibrium of different stakeholder groups" (p.5). Similarly, Backstrand (2006) describes the importance of balanced representation of various stakeholders in the network.

*Output legitimacy*, in the context of multi-sectoral networks, can be formulated as effectiveness of partnership agreements. Effectiveness relates to the problem-solving capacity: does the partnership attain its own goals and targets? (Backstrand (2006, p.295). Partnerships *output legitimacy* depends on partnerships specific functions - from advocacy and awareness raising, to standard setting and implementation (Bull & McNeill 2007). Whether the partnership achieved its expected results and can communicate to stakeholders is key to legitimizing the partnership.

Partnerships studied in this research all had strong input legitimacy:

- **Clear frameworks for member participation, expectations of partnership membership, transparent reporting and accountability mechanisms**: the legitimacy of partnerships is enabled by effective secretariat structures which support executive committees or steering committees.

- **Periodic monitoring and accountability:** expectations that partnership members would comply with standards or criteria of membership or deliver on action plans, pledges or commitments was clear. As described by OGP's IRM, it's origin was a form of 'keeping check' that members are abiding by values and expectations of the partnership.

- **Governance arrangements strengthen legitimacy:** governance arrangements within partnerships included multi-stakeholder platforms which strengthened input legitimacy. For example, OGP has Steering committee led by co-chairs (government and civil society representatives) which legitimizes leadership decisions for its members and also external partners of OGP. The SUN Movement operates through a secretariat that represents different stakeholder groups. Each of the four networks (UN, donor, civil society, business), as well as country members is represented on the secretariat.

- **Legitimacy of accountability mechanism:** the UPR demonstrates strong input legitimacy since all states are involved and is also set up to monitor a UN agreed agenda for human rights.

Partnerships studied in this research had strong output legitimacy, clear frameworks for member setting transparent commitments and being measured against these and communication of monitoring and accountability within the partnership and also externally.

- **Reporting of member actions to progress partnership objectives:** whilst different terminology is used, all partnerships studied had clear objectives and opportunity for partnership members to set commitments, action plans or targets which are then monitored and reported on. Monitoring takes different types of forms including self-reporting; independent reviews, national reports or global assessments. All different forms of periodic reporting maintains the integrity of the partnership objectives and member's commitment to this and demonstrates the effectiveness and results of the partnership

- **Challenge to demonstrate output legitimacy:** it is difficult to determine attribution or even contribution of a global movement to the achievement of national level targets, commitments. Global partnerships such as the SUN Movement have established monitoring and evaluation frameworks in an attempt to demonstrate the output legitimacy of the Movement

- **Necessary follow up of country commitments to ensure output legitimacy:** a challenge for partnerships is to follow up compliance of recommendations provided in periodic monitoring as part of accountability mechanisms. For example, there is no comprehensive mechanism to follow up progress on commitments of EWEC partners.

# Implications for SWA

A key finding that resonates with experience to date with the SWA MAM and its intentions, is to view a mutual accountability mechanism as a 'disciplined way to achieve goals together', therefore as a means to an ends. This requires a core focus on MAM processes of stakeholder interaction (the 'how') rather than the commitments themselves (the 'what'), such that the MAM serves to catalyse collective stakeholder actions to achieve the partnership goals.

There are three main implications of this research, all of which are process-related. These include: (i) managing global-national dynamics of the MAM, (ii) supporting co-design of national level MAMs and (iii) creating the necessary pre-conditions for a successful MAM at national level, in the form of sound country-level SWA partnership foundations and processes.

## Careful management of global-national dynamics

Like the other partnerships and accountability mechanisms investigated in this research, the SWA MAM includes intersecting global and national processes.

The research found that global level accountability processes can add legitimacy to national level mutual accountability processes, and this should be capitalised on. In other partnerships this has been done through harmonisation of global commitments with other global agendas, and by naming and faming at global level, tapping in to reputational and relational drivers of behaviour. Independent review or peer-review amongst countries has also shown value in other partnerships and can add further legitimacy and feedback on quality of commitments.

Equally, the research demonstrated the criticality of strong national interactions and processes in a partnership and mutual accountability mechanism, which can be guided and supported from the global level, but which ultimately need to take place between national level stakeholders.

It is important that accountability to the global level does not draw attention and focus away from the national level. For instance, as a global partnership, many international organisations make SWA commitments at global level, however without also requiring these organisations to make specific country level commitments, accountability may be focused at global rather than national level.

Another final key dimension of global-national dynamics is the provision of clear guidance on processes from global level to countries about how mutual accountability (or other partnership processes) is expected to work. Such guidance, and in some cases training, is well-developed in the other partnerships studied in this research and is a key role for global Secretariats. In other partnerships, there has been growing realisation of the importance of regional level support to countries, providing a bridge between national and global level, and provision of contextualised support. International partners can also play a role, in terms of their own communication with in-country offices, to build understanding and support for national level mutual accountability.

## Supporting design of the MAM at national level

National stakeholder co-design of the MAM would provide local ownership, needs to take a constructive, learning approach to accountability, and to reinforce and complement other accountability mechanisms.

National level co-design of national-level MAM could be undertaken with a focus on the five elements identified in this research as important for effective mutual accountability. National partners ideally need to co-create the rules of how their MAM will operate in a given country as this research showed that mechanisms need to be contextualised. This would require leadership, support and guidance. The five elements could serve as a common language or framework for structuring country-level design of MAM, and

the research findings against each element identified in this research provide a starting point for designing each element effectively.

A key insight from other partnerships was the importance of a focus on learning in the design of a mutual accountability process. A constructive mutual learning focus includes positive reinforcement (naming and faming), only gentle consequences (primarily relational and reputational) for non-performance or lack of progress and instead, attention to corrective action. The mutual learning orientation is important both within the development of national level MAM processes, as well as at the global level and is critical in a system of voluntary commitments.

A second insight was the need to seek complementarity with other existing country accountability systems, such that the MAM serves to support and reinforce those existing systems. An example could be requiring that national policy and plans to form the basis for commitments by governments, such that the MAM then helps support accountability for their execution. In addition, some commitments from organisations could potentially be encouraged to be specifically focused on actions to strengthen other existing accountability mechanisms.

## Creating pre-conditions for national partnership processes

The research showed a common set of conditions for success for mutual accountability, and these relate primarily to effective surrounding partnership processes and legitimacy. Such partnership processes include effective foundations, ownership, mutual commitment, 'rules of engagement' and visible outcomes. Partnership processes need to account for power and influence to promote horizontal relationships, and need to ensure the right participants, especially as regards government (individuals and ministries).

Building a sense of partnership at national level is therefore a pre-requisite to have a functioning mutual accountability mechanism, and ideally the development of both can be mutually reinforcing, in that co-development of a MAM can also be a way to establish ways in which partners agree to work with one another in partnership. Partnership foundations that need attention include clarifying who is represented in the partnership and their relationships and partner's capability to partner. Key partnership processes identified as important included: shared vision, purpose and ownership; transparent collaborative processes and rules of engagement; share action, decision-making and feedback; and mutual learning to evolve the partnership.

National level partnerships need to account for different power and influence of different actors to promote horizontal relationships within the partnership (even if there are concurrent, pre-existing vertical accountability relationships between some sector actors), through clear rules of engagement that equalise power. Mutual accountability itself can also be a means to help equalise power.

A coordination role and resources are required to build an effective national-level partnership among relevant stakeholders. Other partnerships have regional roles to provide support and allocated focal points at country level to assist with such coordination and leadership to bring partners together at country level and to build on existing multi-stakeholder platforms and coordination mechanisms.

Lastly, participation by government in the national level needs to include the most relevant people, those with authority and mandate to take action, and the most relevant ministries. Ensuring commonality between those government staff that participate at global level and those that engage and participate at national level amongst country stakeholders is critical for linking the two levels.

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**Key search terms**

Key search used to search academic and grey literature are presented below.

- "Partner*", "multi-stakeholder partnership*", "inter-governmental partnership*", "public private partnership*", "partnership practice", "multi-sector*", "development partnership*"

- "Accountability", "monitoring", "monitoring mechanisms", "voluntary commitment*", "national targets", "SMART goals", "SMART model", "SMART targets/milestones", "transparency", "mutual accountability mechanism*", "answerability", "Accountable", "social accountability", "Reporting", "enforceability", "duty bearer", "rights holder", "sector monitoring", "responsibilities", "duties", "measuring accountability"

- "Corrective measures", "sanctions", "audit", "social controllership mechanism*"

- "Gender equalit*", "equit*", "leave no one behind", "inequalit*"

**Sources to search**

A number of sources to search for relevant literature, both academic and grey, were investigated. An initial overview of possible sources to search are provided below:

Search engines:

- Google Scholar

- Scopus

- Web of Science

- Conference websites

- Latinosan

- Africasan (AMCOW)

- Africa Water Week (AMCOW)

- Sacosan

- Perhaps World Water Forum? (World Water Council)

- Knowledge platforms and key stakeholder websites:

- OECD-DAC Joint Venture for Managing for Development Results (JV-MfDR)

- AMCOW (African Ministers' Council on Water)

- All website of potential partnership outlined in Google Excel document

- World Water Council

- IWA