




# YOUTH-LED ACCOUNTABILITY IN ACTION

PLACING YOUNG PEOPLE  
AT THE CENTRE OF CHANGE

**HANDBOOK**








*All our hopes for a  
better world rests on  
young people*

*António Guterres,  
Secretary-General of the United Nations*





# WHY YOUTH-LED ACCOUNTABILITY?

Recent global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and regional frame works such as the Africa Union Agenda 2063, promise to achieve universal access to quality education and gender equality, including the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls.

Meaningful youth participation and increased support for youth-led accountability is essential for these commitments to be achieved. Half the world's population is currently under 30 and nine in ten of these young people live in developing countries. Never before has there been such a large generation of young people ready and able to deliver change in their communities. If we are to ensure the policies aimed at changing this are enacted, we must engage and mobilise the enormous potential of the global youth population to make these promises a reality.

## What is Youth-Led Accountability?



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*Enabling young people to hold decision makers accountable for the commitments they have made towards sustainable development, through increased capacity, access and agency.*

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# THE ACCOUNTABILITY CYCLE



The Accountability Cycle is based on three interconnected enablers defined by young people as being critical for impactful youth-led accountability, namely, increased capacity, access, and agency.

The hypothesis behind this approach is simple: Empower young people with data, skills and networks (increased capacity); connect them to meaningful opportunities to participate in review processes and dialogue and engage with decision-makers (access); let them report back on progress and respond to the communities they represent (agency) and in the process, young people will take a lead on holding decision makers to account.

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A dual-purpose model, it serves to engage young people directly in planning their own accountability projects, while also providing a replicable model for development practitioners and government entities on how to run effective youth-led accountability programmes, as guided by young people themselves.

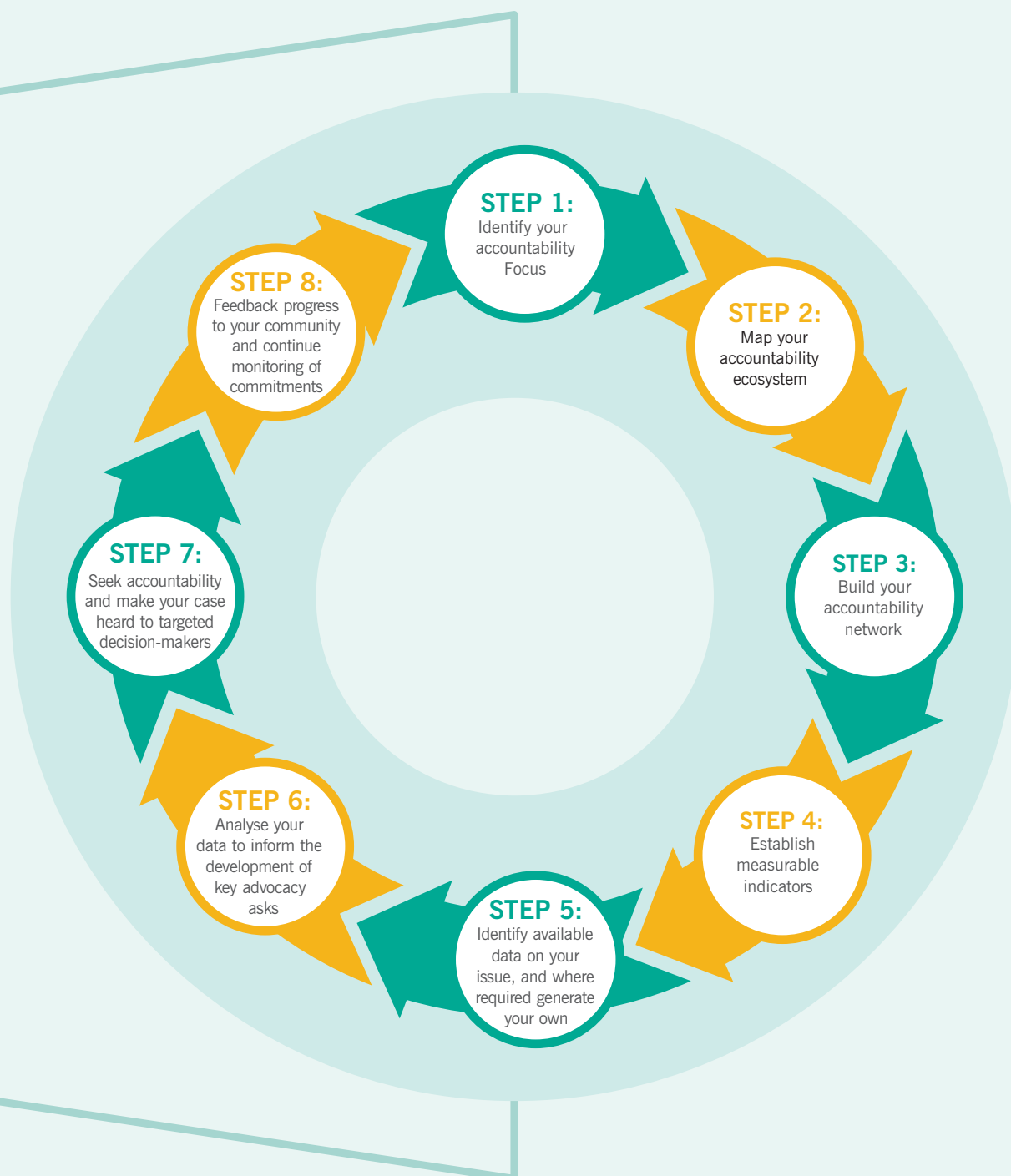


# THE ACCOUNTABILITY CYCLE

## The Model Includes 8 Interconnected Steps:

1. Identify your accountability focus
2. Map your accountability ecosystem
3. Build your accountability network
4. Establish measurable indicators
5. Identify available data on your issue, and where required, generate your own
6. Analyse your data and inform the development of key advocacy messages
7. Seek accountability and make your case heard to targeted decision makers
8. Provide feedback to your community and continue monitoring progress or commitments.

The focus is specifically on delivering national to community level youth-led accountability work, but makes reference to the importance of understanding and (where possible) engaging in relevant regional and global dialogues and commitments as a means of strengthening individual outcomes and enhancing impact across a region.







## Step 1: Identify Your Accountability Focus

As a first step, you will need to choose a commitment that young people and the community have identified as a priority. Top tips from youth experts include:

**Pick your passion:** It's important to choose a focus you personally feel passionate about: Is it an issue you have been working on already? Is it something you have been personally affected by, and would like to change?

**Validate it with the community:** You will have greater representation and buy-in if the priority you have chosen also impacts those you will be working with and representing. Do other young people and the community you represent also feel this is an issue that needs to be addressed? If not, are there ways you can align your initial focus to include a broader community voice? Running a community consultation is a great way to establish this.

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*It's important to choose a personal passion, while also taking responsibility to 'go beyond yourself' and collect data and voices that fully represent the community.*

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## Step 2: Map Your Accountability Ecosystem

An accountability ecosystem looks at the different organisations and individuals who have a stake in the issue you are working on. For some, it may be because they are affected by the decisions relating to the issue, while others in your ecosystem may be making those decisions. Your accountability ecosystem may include: personal contacts, broader civil society stakeholders, institutions and ministries, key decision makers, elected officials and beyond.

### Top tips from youth experts include:

**Your personal network is a great starting point:** We all have a network, however small, that can help get you started with your ecosystem mapping. Reaching out to youth networks and community members can help to point you in the direction of a broader list of relevant stakeholders, including some you hadn't considered.

**Ensure marginalised groups are represented:** When focusing on sexual rights and gender equality issues, it is important to include groups that might not normally be represented. Young women, young people living with disabilities, those living in poverty, are often those most adversely affected by the issues you are seeking to address. Make sure they are included.

**Be creative:** Consider non-traditional role players such as social media influencers, artists and musicians. While they might not be a technical expert on your accountability focus, they can help raise awareness and influence change. It is also important to link up with other youth influencers such as young journalists, researchers, parliamentarians and entrepreneurs to amplify your voice.

**Power mapping and analysis:** It is critical to understand the specific complexities of government institutions and where the power sits, as it is unique to every context. Once you have mapped a broad range of stakeholders, it is important to assess who wields influence over your issue. This could include a range of players, from government departments and civil society organisations to UN institutions, parliamentary portfolio committees on health, population development or women's rights, the private sector, the broader community and beyond.

**Share your ecosystem:** Young people don't always feel they have access to or an understanding of internal politics. Share your ecosystem with others to build on each other's mapping and information gathering.



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### Step 3: Build Your Accountability Team

Looking at your accountability ecosystem mapping exercise, you will see that there are some stakeholders in the accountability ecosystem that you will want to work more closely with than others.

These organisations and individuals will form part of your accountability network.

#### Top tips from youth experts include:

**Consider linking up with established networks:** If you are already part of a formal network or you know of one in your area, this could be a great entry point to building your accountability network.

**Networks don't need to be over structured:** If you are building your own network, consider approaches that work best for your environment and young people. Having an active WhatsApp group, and informal meeting spaces can be highly effective, particularly if members are busy and geographically spread out.

**Make your network diverse and assign roles based on expertise:** Having a variety of stakeholders in your network, alongside young people, will bring together a range of experiences and connections. A SWOT analysis of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats will help identify responsibilities and assign roles to members of the network. To develop unity in your network, develop a charter outlining the network's common goals and objectives that you can all work towards.

**Include decision makers in your network:** While they might not have the time to support your day-to-day work, by including decision makers from the outset in key meetings about the project, they are more likely to feel involved, and therefore more committed to ensuring its success. Local government can be a great entry point, as it is often more accessible to communities and can be the bridge to regional and national decision makers.







## Step 4: Establish Measurable Indicators

Indicators act as signals: they are the signposts that tell you whether or not change is happening. For data-driven accountability, it is critical to identify relevant indicators (or develop complementary indicators) to guide the data collection work.

Top tips from youth experts include:

**Start with global and/or regional indicators that already exist:** Examples include the SDG Framework, The Africa Union Agenda 2063 Framework and others. Begin by researching the indicators aligned to the relevant goals and targets you identified when setting your accountability focus.

**Move to national indicators:** Look at your government's existing monitoring frameworks on the corresponding plans of policies you have identified. They will likely have much better knowledge of national indicators. In Ghana, as with several Africa countries, the national development plan, local government medium-term plans, the education strategic plan, and several policies on youth, employment, and gender would come handy.

**Map indicators across your network:** Even if you are monitoring national policies, it is worth noting that local agencies governments and civil society actors may be setting monitoring indicators at the local level where national policies are actually implemented. Reaching out and working with these networks can help you establish robust and context-specific indicators for your work.

**Be focused and develop your own indicators if needed:** Global, regional and national indicators are often deliberately broad. If there aren't enough existing indicators available to capture the information you are looking for, you can develop your own complementary indicators. Work with your network to brainstorm potential indicators and prioritise the ones you think will be most important to measure your progress.

**Ensure community input and validation:** Before finalising your indicators, make sure that your community has input. Set up a meeting to gain consensus.



“Begin by researching the indicators aligned to the relevant goals and targets you identified when setting your accountability focus.”

## Step 5: Identify Available Data on Your Issue, and where Required, Generate Your Own

Collecting evidence is an important step to understanding why commitments linked to your accountability focus may be off track. Begin by researching what data currently exists and assess the quality of that data. Refer to your list of stakeholders and think about who owns - or has access to - the data you need. If there are gaps in the data, you can generate your own.

### Top tips from youth experts include:

**Where data exists, use it:** Look to see what data may already exist on your issue. Your accountability network (see Step 3 above) is a great asset here, and can often help to point you in the right direction. Some sources to consider include relevant government ministries, national statistics bureaux, civil society organisations working on your focus issue, private sector organisations, and international sources such as the IMF, World Bank, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNAIDS, UN Women and WHO.

**Involve young people and marginalised groups in your data collection:** Under-represented groups are likely to be more open to talking to people from the same community or background.

**Be inclusive in your data collection:** Pictures, storytelling, song and oral submissions are all accessible ways of gathering information. These bring vital 'lived experience' to your data collection, and build a better understanding of the reality and root causes that often sit behind the numbers.

**Make advocating for open data part of your work:** Using the data you've collected is a great opportunity to reach out to official primary sources of data such as national statistics bureaux and ask them to open access to their data sets so others can also benefit. If data doesn't exist, or you doubt the accuracy of existing data, then you can always flag this. Using government-supported data collection tools is a great way to generate open data.





## Step 6: Analyse Your Data to Inform the Development of Key Advocacy Asks

Once you've collected your data, it is time to analyse it. At this point it is important to refer back to your indicators and map your data findings against them. This will help you to understand how much progress has been made towards achieving a specific commitment, and define what needs to change to accelerate further action.

### Top tips from youth experts include:

**Let the data tell you what needs to change:** We often come at a problem with preconceived notions of how to fix it. Your data might indicate an entirely different barrier to achieving progress and may prove your assumptions wrong. For this reason, it is important to approach your data analysis with an open mind: the data trends you start to see will either reaffirm your assumptions or present new ways to approach the challenge. Turn these into asks you can take to key stakeholders. Essentially: don't look for data to support your theory. Let the data tell its own story.

**Find interactive and accessible ways to present your data analysis:** Storytelling, graphs and infographics are compelling and accessible ways to share data as they help to communicate your message and bring a human-side to the numbers.









## Step 7: Seek Accountability and Make Your Case Heard to Targeted Decision Makers

Using the data you have collected, the key asks you've developed, and the relationships you have built, it is now time to hold decision makers to account.

**There are a range of approaches to seeking accountability, here are some tips from youth experts:**

**Report:** Use your data to feed into official processes and reviews. You can also report unofficially by developing a shadow report. Great examples of this include the Ghana Youth Manifesto and the People National Youth Policy, both produced by the Voices of Youth Coalition in Ghana.

**Mistrust of citizen-generated data:** Be aware that some countries might be less open to citizen-generated data, and in some cases will not accept it as valid. As mentioned in earlier steps, the best way to overcome this is to build strong relationships with decision makers from the outset, particularly local government and national statistics offices with whom you can share your data collection approach. If there is still a challenge, consider asking decision makers to support centralised collection on missing data sets, and the role of young people to support this.

**Consider your context and be creative:** Presenting your findings doesn't have to be boring. Consider your audience and which approaches will work best for them. Community campaigning stunts, petitions, and public hearings with young parliamentarians can be combined with an official report for government. If you want to spread the message beyond your area, consider organising a roadshow with a number of interactive events. For further suggestions, you can refer to the recommendations outlined in **Part 1** on 'leveraging and diversifying resources for youth-led accountability'.

**Ensure representation:** Engage targeted stakeholders in the planning of your accountability activities; that way they will feel part of the process and will be more likely to respond to your asks. Also consider who should be presenting your message - it doesn't always have to be you. If a marginalised group is particularly affected by your issue e.g. young women or someone living with a disability, ask if they would like to be your spokespeople. Ensure safe spaces for women and girls in your planning.

**Connect your recommendations to national, regional and global platforms:** Use the relationships you have developed - from decision makers to grassroots communities - to bring together actors to discuss your findings. Use pre-organised dialogues such as community structures and local government meetings, where they exist. Where they don't, work with your network to set up an event inviting key stakeholders.

**Connect:** Share your unique findings with citizens, the media, on social media and with civil society to support campaigns and grassroots movements to bring new perspective to the work of others.

**Support:** Approach your network and build into your plans any relevant regional and global platforms to target your accountability work. The commitments you will be targeting are often set in regional and global dialogues, bringing together a number of decision makers in one space, which can provide great opportunity to share your message. Governments also play a role in holding each other to account on their joint commitments in these spaces. As a starting point you could use your network to approach national government delegations that may be attending. Appreciating funding and geographical challenges to attend in person, there are often ways to feed into relevant consultation processes online in advance of meetings.



## Step 8: Feedback Progress to Your Community and Continue Monitoring of Commitments

It is critical to provide feedback on the outcomes of your advocacy work to the community, and to be accountable to those you represent. Where commitments have been made by decision makers, you can now use these commitments as new targets to monitor.

Top tips from youth experts include:

**Develop and implement an accountability scorecard for young people:** This can be a scorecard co-developed with the community that highlights key milestones young people or community leaders have agreed to take action on. The scorecard can be used to monitor progress, and as a guide to share feedback on milestones to the community. It can also help the community to work with you to inform your next steps.

**Develop a report on community perspectives:** This is useful to document community feedback, and to share with them as an additional accountability tool.

**Run community events:** To increase awareness on the role of accountability in achieving local and national development goal, young people can also run training sessions with peers and community members on the accountability cycle, outlining the role of community participation.

## NOTES



## NOTES












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**YOTA - Youth Opportunity and Transformation in Africa**

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