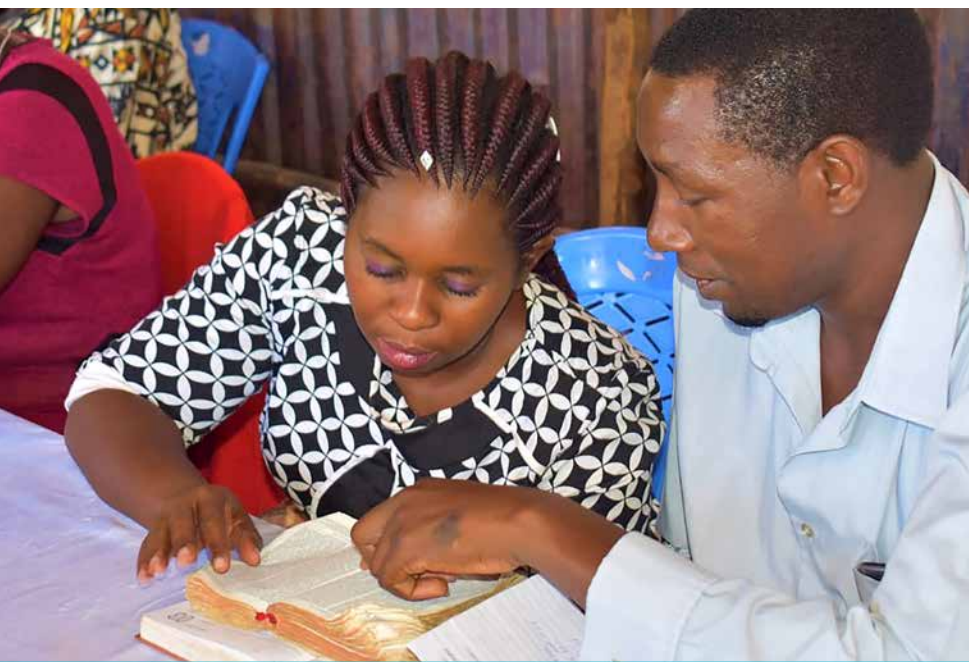*act:onaid*

Champions and change-makers:

Young people holding their governments accountable for SDG commitments

Young Nigerians at the National Day of Action demanding the passage of the #NTYTR Bill.
PHOTO: IBRAHIM FAROUK

Contents

List of Abbreviations

7NDP   Seventh National Development Plan (Zambia)

AAAZ   Alliance for Accountability Advocates Zambia

APFSD   Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

HLPF   High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

SDGs   Sustainable Development Goals

TYVA   Tanzania Youth Vision Association

UNESCAP   United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

UNFPA   United Nations Population Fund

Glossary

Activista ActionAid's global youth campaigning network. It comprises ActionAid country members, and local and national organisations of young people and partners. Activista focuses on young people's campaigning through mobilisation and engagement of young people at local, national and international levels. This is just one way that ActionAid works with young people – some countries engage with grassroots youth groups and the organisation also works with youth social movements.

Global Platforms A Global Platform can either be a physical space for capacity-building where young people live and learn together, a youth hub for young people to convene and strategise, or an online community focusing on peer-to-peer learning. These Global Platforms:
- Provide innovative, creative and quality-based capacity-building for young people to lead social, political and economic change.
- Support dynamic and democratic youth hub spaces where global and local young people can network, share visions, act and develop together.
- Connect local and global struggles.

Reflection-Action Reflection-Action is a harmonised participatory methodology based on the practice of Paulo Freire. It uses a range of participatory tools to help create an open, democratic environment in which everyone is able to contribute. Participants work together to analyse their situation, identify rights violations and bring about change. Where appropriate, Reflection-Action can also be used to support literacy, numeracy and language learning. For more information see:
ActionAid Networked Toolbox, http://www.networkedtoolbox.com/pages/about-reflection-action/

Activista members at the Bangladesh Youth Conference.
PHOTO: ANNE DRONG/ACTIONAID

Introduction

With the adoption of the 2030 *Agenda for Sustainable Development* **in September 2015,[1] the world faced an enormous dual challenge and opportunity – to sustainably end poverty and reduce gender, economic, political and social inequality by 2030.**

The 2030 Agenda established a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), incorporating 169 targets, which aim to address poverty, inequality and environmental degradation, and strengthen peace and justice by 2030. The SDGs have been adopted by almost every country in the world, with states bearing the primary responsibility for their implementation. The vision and preamble of the 2030 Agenda recognise the *"supremely ambitious and transformational"* nature of this commitment and note: *"We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind."*[2]

Given the scale of their ambition, the SDGs cannot be achieved without change to the economic and governance systems that drive poverty, and without the inclusion of those who have previously been left behind, including young people. However, after more than three years, despite 140 governments announcing and/or presenting Voluntary National Reviews, the transformative promise of Agenda 2030 is being diluted.[3] The current economic paradigm, which reduces states' resources and capacity to respect, protect and fulfil rights, redistribute wealth and power and ensure people are resilient from shocks, undermines Agenda 2030.

To deliver the goals and targets effectively and democratically, there is a need for pro-poor systemic economic and social mechanisms, such as universal publicly financed, publicly owned and delivered social protection and public services, access to decent (non-precarious) work, redistributing women's unpaid care and domestic work, and action and finance for climate justice. To achieve this systemic change, it is critical that new ideas and political alternatives can be developed and listened to, which cannot happen unless diverse voices – including those of young people, particularly young women or marginalised young people – are part of the conversation.

▶▶ The challenge facing youth movements

With more than 40% of the world's population under 25 years of age,[4] and 89% of people aged 10-24 living in the Global South,[5] young people[6] play a pivotal role in transforming and shaping a more just, equitable and sustainable society. Despite this, young people are often denied positions of power and responsibility. Young people under 30 make up just over 2% of the world's parliamentarians (less than 1.5% in Africa and Asia), and less than half of that number are women.[7]

Young people are also living in a world of rising inequality. Since 1980, while the poorest half of the population have seen rising incomes and deteriorating living standards, the top 1% richest individuals in the world have captured twice as much growth as the bottom 50%.[8] Growing up in an increasingly unequal world, young people face high rates of unemployment: 60% of young people aged 15-24 are jobless.[9]

Many young people, particularly those in rural areas, lack access to safe, affordable, quality and gender-responsive public services such as education, healthcare and vocational training. As well as being a violation of their rights, lack of employment and access to public services hampers young people's full participation in society. Young people are not a homogenous group, and many experience compounding and intersecting inequalities as a result of their age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, sexuality, origin, religion, economic or other status.

We are also seeing shrinking civil society spaces in many countries, with state protections of freedom of speech and association being eroded, stricter regulations on civil society organisations, and crackdowns on public debate and protest.[10] In many cases it is youth movements leading the fight for civic space, with young people creatively working within and outside the system to push for just and equitable policies and greater participation of young people in governance.

▶▶ Young people's innovative practices in creating change

Young people's exclusion from the democratic governance processes that drive implementation of the SDGs is a threat to their achievement. Young people were actively involved in the development of the SDGs (formally, through the UN Major Group of Children and Youth, and informally, through grassroots coalitions such as action/2015), and are key actors in ensuring that policies to implement the SDGs remain true to this vision.[11] The inclusion of progressive young people and their movements in democratic governance is an important part of the transformation that is needed if the SDGs are to be achieved. As well as championing accountability, young people and youth movements are part of shaping the alternative solutions that are needed to move past "business as usual", for example by pushing for more inclusive policies and laws, fighting for better working conditions and public services, and mobilising citizens around climate change.

This compilation of case studies highlights the work of young people and civil society working with or supported by ActionAid. Using the tools at their disposal – from social media to community consultations to political party manifestos – the young change-makers profiled here are expanding the space for youth participation in

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governance, and fighting for inclusion of those who are marginalised due to their age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, sexuality, origin, religion, economic or other status. Many of these case studies are on a small scale, and changes made may seem far from the broader transformative economic and social changes needed to implement the SDGs. However, they serve to highlight why it is necessary to include the voices of young people and youth-led civil society in the larger project of SDG implementation, and they show the critical role young people can play in holding governments to account for the SDG commitments.

Who is this document for?

This document compiles case studies from 7 ActionAid and partner programmes – Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, Myanmar, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia – all working on governance processes related to the SDGs, particularly 5 (gender), 8 (economic growth and decent work), 10 (inequality), 16 (peace, justice and democratic institutions) and 17 (partnership for the goals). The case studies in this publication highlight a range of strategies that young people are using to ensure their equal rights are fulfilled and they have a stronger voice in the decisions that affect them.

Reflections with the young activists involved – documented in annual reports and through interviews, highlight a number of learnings for those hoping to support young people. This report makes available the lessons emerging across countries. We hope that ActionAid staff, partners and other civil society groups can use this knowledge to lobby other organisations, donors and international organisations looking to support youth-led initiatives in ways that are empowering and impactful. We also hope the knowledge and examples can be used to influence those government officials looking to engage young people in governance processes.

The case studies are clustered thematically, followed by reflections emerging from practice. These are not definitive, but are intended to spark further thinking and discussion among young people, their allies and accountable duty bearers.

Emerging issues for discussion and questions:

- **How to build in an intersectional feminist analysis?** As civil society organisations explore new interventions and understand the impacts of youth interventions, it is important to use an intersectional feminist approach and be mindful of *differential impacts* of interventions on young people related to their intersecting identifies. Interventions will fail unless they ensure that the most marginalised young people can actively participate, and in order to do that they acknowledge the impact of power and go some way to breaking down the power structures that prevent participation.

- **How to balance competing interests when resources are limited?** Where civil society organisations and youth movements have complementary goals, opportunities for partnership and collaboration can bring mutual benefits. However, youth movements and organisations have limited resources to engage in social change initiatives. How can civil society organisations engage young people in their work without depleting young people's resources for their own work? How can civil society organisations best support young people's priorities where these diverge from the organisation's priorities?

- **How to build positive partnerships?** Young people's movements will be challenged to fundraise – and will have to make decisions around the type of funds they accept. For example, how can young people's movements maintain their own identity rather than be subsumed by business interests or the aims of others outside their movements? In practical terms, how can civil society organisations support youth movements with resources without requiring such movements to formalise?

- **How to operate politically whilst being non-partisan?** Non-partisanship is a key component of many civil society organisations' core values, and is key to their ability to work constructively with governments. At the same time, young politicians and parliamentarians play a vital role in opening up spaces for youth participation in democracy. How can civil society groups continue to support young leaders in political spaces while retaining independence from party politics?

Young partners advocating for gender and youth respective public services.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

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Young people holding their governments accountable for SDG commitments

The SDGs' promise of ending poverty while reducing inequality relies on state delivery of the social protection and public services needed to fulfil rights to education, health and sexual and reproductive services, water and sanitation, childcare, transport, bodily integrity and many more. Accountability mechanisms are essential to monitor governments' performance in delivering the goals, and national governments have employed a range of accountability mechanisms on the SDGs, with mixed levels of effectiveness in engaging civil society.[12] Youth-led development agency Restless Development has noted that, while almost all of the follow-up and review mechanisms relating to the SDGs either mandate for youth involvement and/or have invited young individuals to participate, none have involved young people in a systematic and sustained way (although youth engagement is increasing).[13]

The six case studies below highlight the work of young people in holding governments accountable for their performance on delivery of their SDG commitments – either directly, or through monitoring the delivery of public services and programmes essential to achieve the SDGs. The case studies from Kenya and Zambia, and the multi-country inequality research, demonstrate the use of research tools such as surveys and community scorecards to understand citizens' views on specific SDGs and present them to government. In Myanmar, communities captured their development priorities in Village Books, while in Tanzania, young people shared their demands directly with government through social media. In Bangladesh, young people worked with the national society coalition on the SDGs to hold political parties and government officials accountable through a national conference.

Kenya: young citizens lead on monitoring the SDGs at community-level

In 2016, the Government of Kenya launched a road map for implementation of the SDGs,[14] committing to embed the SDGs into county and national development plans, engage stakeholders and build capacity to implement the SDGs at local level. This roadmap requires county-level governments to integrate SDGs into their local plans. However, most community members – particularly young people – have little awareness of these commitments or whether their county governments are implementing them.

To address this issue, during 2017 and 2018, communities in three counties: Baringo, Kilifi and Migori, monitored public service delivery and implementation of selected targets under SDGs 5 (gender equality), 8 (decent work and economic growth) and 16 (peace, justice and democratic institutions). Communities employed an accountability methodology known as the Six Steps Methodology[15] to build skills and understanding – especially of women and young people – on citizens' roles in monitoring delivery of the SDGs. Citizens then used different social accountability tools such as citizens' report cards, score cards and Citizens' Charters of Demand to assess public services and deliver the community's demands to government.

▶▶ Community demands leading to government action

In Kilifi County, in the coastal region of Kenya, the Kilifi Citizens' Forum led a community scorecard assessment focused on SDG 16. The scorecard findings confirmed that most citizens have a basic but limited awareness of what the SDGs represent. Scorecards also found issues with corruption and accessibility of public services – for example, 27% of those surveyed said they had been forced to give a bribe to access public services. The majority of those surveyed wanted public participation institutionalised in revenue collection and expenditures, as well as making budget information public and funds used for their intended purposes. The analysis of the scorecard also showed that women's inclusion and participation in governance processes is still minimal.[16]

Armed with the findings above, the Kilifi Citizens' Forum developed a Citizens' Charter of Demands with a number of clear recommendations to the county government, handing this to government officials in February 2018. To date, the Kilifi County government has implemented approximately 70% of the recommendations.[17] For example, the county assembly has enacted the Public Participation Bill, responding to a demand in the Charter. The Charter also called for enhanced public awareness on the SDGs, as well as improved coordination around SDG monitoring, and greater involvement of citizens in decision-making. The county government has established a Monitoring and Evaluation Unit and developed monitoring tools in collaboration with Kilifi Citizens' Forum. Following a dialogue forum convened by the national government monitoring unit in the county, there is a push towards collaborative monitoring processes with greater citizen participation. ActionAid's experience suggests citizens' engagement in defining clear areas of change and tracking government progress towards the change is important to ensure no one is left behind.

In Baringo County, a similar citizen-led process saw the county government restructuring its procurement department, recruiting new employees and enhancing its project monitoring and evaluation. The county has also digitised its system for some fees and levies, reducing opportunities for corruption.

▶▶ Focusing on young people and women

In Migori County, the Activista network and the Kuria Social Accountability Network (KUSAN) conducted sensitisation sessions in 27 locations and surveyed women and young people on their experiences of service delivery and their participation in public affairs. The surveys found gaps in public participation – for example, of those who had participated in the development of the County Integrated Development Plan, only 35% were women and only 20% were young people.[18] Young people also reported lower levels of access to services and interaction with their leaders than older people. Activista and KUSAN convened the Migori County government, civil society organisations and wider stakeholders and shared these findings – which were acknowledged as useful by government representatives. The county government has since activated its website and increased its use of community radio stations, notice boards and service charters to pass important information to citizens.

In Nairobi and Laikipia Counties, Activista members from tertiary institutions and grassroots communities replicated the youth-led accountability and monitoring processes, preparing their own Charters of Demand. Stella Mwangi, a member of Activista Nairobi who participated in the process, articulated one of the groups' key demands: *"I would tell people in power to listen to our ideas and take us seriously! Stop ignoring us! Appreciate the young people: we know more than you think we do"*.

Young partners at a workshop on citizen led accountability.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

Myanmar: from Village Books to Citizens' Charters

In Myanmar, a legacy of centrally-controlled government services and top-down governance has created barriers to citizens' participation in local-level decision making. Traditionally, citizens had little information on the workings of government, and few opportunities to have a say in local development priorities. With moves towards democratisation beginning in 2011 and Myanmar's first democratic elections in 50 years taking place in 2015, new opportunities for civic engagement are emerging. To take up these opportunities, it is critical that citizens are informed about their rights and entitlements, and equipped to hold their government to account for local service delivery.

▶▶ The Village Book

Since 2006, ActionAid has provided support to a network of 846 Fellows – young volunteer change-makers elected to facilitate participatory development processes. Fellows receive training in participatory rural appraisal techniques and other methods to guide and support community discussion, resource mapping and decision-making. Using these tools, Fellows have facilitated participatory discussions and debates within their villages on how public services are funded and allocated. In villages across 11 regions, these discussions have culminated in the production of a Village Book – a documentation of the community's resources, needs and priorities for development. Since 2012, 1,189 Village Books have been produced. As well as providing a mechanism for building community consensus, the Village Books have been shared with local township governments, leading to visible improvements in local-level services.

Young people are at the centre of developing the Village Book, bringing others in the community together and playing a key facilitation role. In doing so, they have not only built their own skills and confidence, but have also helped to change attitudes about what young people can and cannot do. The process has also helped to demonstrate the value of bottom-up development planning, something that has coincided with moves towards decentralisation at the government level. *"In the past I did not feel I had much value. Now I can see I am valuable for the village. My father always wanted his village to develop. I wish he could see how I am working on that now,"* said Hnin Pan Phyu, a Youth Fellow and leader of the Village Book process in Tha Yat Gwa Village of Myaing Township.

▶▶ Going beyond the village

Since 2016, this participatory citizen engagement in local governance has been strengthened through development of a key information resource. In late 2015, changes at national level led to a transition in management of the General Administration Department from military control to administration by the civilian government. Taking advantage of this opportunity, ActionAid supported the Township Administration Department in Pyapone District in the Irrawaddy region to develop a Citizens' Charter. The Citizens' Charter provides citizens with the information they need to access essential government services, and help government officials connect to each other more efficiently. The Charter maps public services that citizens are entitled to, including education, health and immigration services, providing information on how and where these services can be accessed. Young people, including Fellows, have been active in disseminating the Citizens' Charter in their respective communities, as well as building community understanding on the Charter and how to use it. This information allows communities to target their advocacy on the right service providers, and understand what their entitlements are so they can advocate for them.

An example of the impact of the Citizens' Charter is the effect it has had on people's ability to obtain identity cards. SDG Target 16.9 provides that by 2030, governments will provide legal identity for all people, including birth registration. In Myanmar, the national ID card is integral to many aspects of civic participation and inclusion, such

as voter registration and digital banking. However, in many parts of Myanmar getting an ID card is a daunting task, sometimes requiring people to travel for miles across difficult terrain to the nearest immigration department office, often to be turned away for lacking the necessary documents.

Following implementation of the Citizens' Charter in Pyapone, this situation dramatically improved. The government had planned an outreach visit to communities to support citizens to get ID cards – a process that usually results in around 150 new ID cards issued per visit. According to interviews in Pyapone, armed with the information in the Citizens' Charter, Fellows and volunteers worked with communities to ensure they understood what documents were needed to obtain ID cards, and also negotiated for government representatives to come to the community for a longer time than planned. As a result, government officers were able to issue a total of 1,600 cards over four days in communities in Pyapone. These citizens now enjoy greater freedom of movement, the ability to purchase property and other fundamental civic rights.

▶▶ Inspiring greater change

As well as improving accessibility of government services, both the Village Book and Citizens' Charter processes have improved civic awareness of young people and other citizens, thereby strengthening accountability at the local level. Citizens have developed a greater understanding of how their taxes are spent, what services they are entitled to, and to what standard.

Thanks to the learning process of making a Citizens' Charter in Pyapone, other local areas are starting to develop their own. For example, Meiktila District recently launched a Charter in hard copy and as an android app. The General Administration Department is also considering implementing this initiative nationally to help guide citizens through the process of accessing government services.

Fellows from Kayin State at the National Conference.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

Watch: Video *Our Village Book: realising our dream:*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rm3viJh7Xfw&t=64s

Watch: Video *The change-maker:*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldPoFSQcPLQ

Download: Meiktila Citizens' Charter app on Google Play
https://bit.ly/2YVURvR

Tanzania: holding governments to account through social media

In Tanzania, ActionAid and Tanzania Youth Vision Association (TYVA)[19] have been working together to support youths to demand their rights. Through this partnership, TYVA organised a social media campaign on reducing inequality through providing gender-responsive public services. The campaign involved citizens across the country sharing the context of basic services in their respective areas and demanding improvements, and duty bearers responded to some of the demands. The hashtag #HudumaBoraZaJamii (quality public and social services) had 176 people actively participating and over 2,600 tweets and re-tweets of campaign messages. Starting with a group of 20 committed volunteers, the campaign eventually reached four million people, with 21 million impressions across Facebook and Twitter. Using social media, TYVA was able to reach a significantly greater number of citizens with its campaign than it could have done in-person, with very limited resources and only a small number of people.

In recent years, Tanzania's shrinking civil society space has led to limitations on freedom of expression and posed challenges for traditional forms of public mobilisation. In this context, social media is growing in importance as an instrument for citizens to share their concerns directly with government and to hold government representatives accountable. TYVA leader Alfred Kiwuyo commented that, *"due to limited participation in governance issues, young people in Tanzania have found it very useful to engage with decision-makers on social media, and government institutions are opening social accounts to engage and find information about the perceptions of young people of the government's work. Many MPs are opening and running social media accounts because it is easy and fast to access youths on social media."*

The #HudumaBoraZaJamii campaign kept supporters engaged by focusing on a different service each day, and encouraging people to come up with their own solutions to shared problems. Topics covered included education, health, infrastructure, industries and clean water. Young people did not just share their concerns – they also tagged MPs and government officials, bringing them directly into the discussion. In one exchange during the campaign, young people advocated for reconstruction of a bridge that had been damaged, and the MP for the relevant area responded by committing to provide resources.

TYVA has been encouraged that citizens have continued to use the #HudumaBoraZaJamii hashtag to demand delivery of social services. They are now looking at refining the campaign to focus on health, education and infrastructure – the three areas that generated the most discussion during the 2018 campaign. TYVA is planning to repeat and broaden the initiative in 2019, focusing on these three sectors and specifically targeting the ministers responsible.

Young partners at a advocacy training.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

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Uganda, Ghana, Zambia and Kenya: youth-led inequality research

In 2018, a group of 15 committed and talented young researchers from Uganda, Ghana, Zambia and Kenya came together to undertake a research project on inequality. The project used a youth-led research methodology, in which young people design research and generate and analyse data through taking the lead on key research activities. The project was based on toolkits developed by ActionAid and Restless Development that identify ways to put the principle of youth participation into practice in research.[20] The aim was to test approaches to strengthen young people's capacity to document, analyse and research issues in their own contexts, create new knowledge and use evidence for advocacy.

Capacity development training with young partners.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

▶▶ Building research skills and networks

The young researchers participated in two-week training in Uganda, during which time they strengthened their research skills, selected the research theme (one aspect of inequality to investigate), and developed the research design. They formed three research sub-teams focusing on economic inequality, political inequality and gender inequality. Each team included representatives of different countries. During the two-week period, the researchers also carried out field research in the Apac District in northern Uganda, using focus group discussion, observations and individual interviews.

After analysing the results, the team prepared an advocacy report and conducted a validation meeting to allow the local community to give feedback on the research findings. Based on this, they developed their calls for action – highlighting the community's proposed solutions and demands for economic, political and gender equality. Key demands covered measures needed to ensure young people's political participation, policies and programmes to create decent employment and economic opportunities for young people (such as more transparent recruitment processes), and policies and programmes to promote gender equality (such as women's land ownership).

▶▶ Sharing learning and conducting advocacy

The young researchers used what they had learned to share knowledge with other young people, facilitating step-down training, conducting further research in their communities, and using findings for advocacy.

Ugandan youth researchers used the research methods and findings to promote transparency and accountability and expose corruption in public institutions. Ugandan participants, working with Activista members, used interview techniques to conduct monitoring visits to government institutions and programmes, and to report corruption cases to the relevant authorities in 17 districts where the Citizens' Actions for Greater Accountability and Improved Public Service Delivery (CAIPS) project is being implemented.[21] The corruption reports by young people triggered further investigation, which led to the interdiction of three government employees in Kapchorwa in the Eastern Region.[22] Young researchers from Uganda also advocated on gender equality by speaking on radio about inequality, petitioning against harmful traditional practices, and engaging with traditional leaders in their community on distribution of land and resources.

Ghanaian young researchers trained five more young people in Ghana and conducted research on economic and gender inequality experienced by young people in Northern Region and in the capital city, Accra. Based on four focus groups with 24 young people and two interviews, the research findings showed – in a small sample – some different youth experiences of inequality between urban and rural communities. The team is now planning to present the research findings and recommendations to the local National Youth Authority to push for revised labour policies and programmes.

Zambian young researchers trained four more young people and conducted research on the political and economic inequalities facing young people in the capital, Lusaka. One of the participants works with youth social movement Youth4Parliament (see case study above) and plans to use the research skills developed to support their work influencing political party manifestos in the lead-up to Zambia's 2021 elections.

Kenyan young researchers trained 10 Activista members in Nairobi and conducted research on political inequality. They engaged about 70 people through focus groups and interviews and gathered young people's experiences in representation in elective bodies, as well as exploring solutions to increase youth representation in elective positions. Solutions that the young people generated included that the government and political parties should:

- adopt a public participation policy that advances young people's and women's participation
- allocate resources to build capacity of young people and women who serve as elected or nominated officials
- enforce compliance with the Electoral Code of Conduct and include a provision relating to gender-based violence
- reform the culture and practices of political parties.

The research findings were used to advocate for youth participation in politics on social media, and for campaign planning.

Each of the research examples given is very small-scale. However, with even these examples we can see the additional transformative impact of research being people-led rather than led by academic researchers; actively leading the reflection-action processes has meant that the young researchers are more able to take action themselves, and are building solidarity networks with others to ensure a movement for change builds momentum.

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Bangladesh: young people convening to demand political action

Although around one-third of Bangladesh's population is between 15 and 35 years old,[23] structures and processes leading to national-level decisions are not designed to involve and accommodate the voices of young people – especially those who are further marginalised due to their age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, sexuality, origin, religion, economic or other status. Since the commencement of the SDGs, with their commitment to partnership and inclusion, civil society in Bangladesh has been promoting inclusion of young people's voices in national SDG implementation through training and skill-sharing among young people, supporting youth-led research and accountability processes, developing platforms for youth leadership, and facilitating marginalised young people's access to decision-makers.

▶▶ The power of alliances

ActionAid is a member of the Bangladesh Citizens' Platform for SDGs – a network of over 90 civil society and private sector organisations working to contribute to SDG implementation and to enhance accountability. Youth champions within the platform worked together to develop plans for the platform's 2018 annual national conference, to be focused on young people. 'Bangladesh and Agenda 2030: Aspirations of the Youth' was held in November 2018 and engaged over 2,000 young people from across the country – including 800 from rural areas. Young people were not just participants – young women and grassroots youth leaders were also pivotal in planning the agenda, organising the event and facilitating sessions. The conference also saw strong interest from government and the media, with 37 government officers and officials and over 100 journalists participating.

Young people and their coalitions advocating for gender equality.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

Young partners meeting duty bearers.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

▶▶ Using electoral processes

The conference was held at a strategically important time – a little over one month before Bangladesh's national elections. In preparing for the conference, a group of young activists from the Activista network reviewed the election manifestos of the major political parties, in order to assess each party's commitment to youth development. The team identified the areas where each party had made commitments, then worked with other young partners in four districts across Bangladesh to interview young people about the achievements and gaps they saw in implementation of these commitments. This information, including the demands and recommendations from young people who were interviewed, was developed into a report for the SDG Platform and the national conference. Many of the young people's demands and recommendations were included in conference's final declaration.[24]

▶▶ Engaging leaders

As well as the political analysis from Activista, the national conference engaged young people in discussions on issues ranging from young people's role in innovation, to how to better include young people in decision-making structures. The conference published 13 policy reports[25] canvassing young people's engagement in the SDGs and national development, as well as a research report on youth employment. The culmination of the conference was a Youth Declaration,[26] in which young people synthesised their key recommendations and demands for policymakers. The Youth Declaration was delivered at the close of the conference to the national government's chief coordinator on the SDGs, who made a commitment to ensure the inclusion of young people in SDG processes.

Conference attendee Atika Khan, an Activista member and undergraduate student at Dhaka University, said: *"The youth conference created scope for young women and men to come together to share their activities, demands and ideas and to build a network. I appreciate the way this conference on young people and SDGs in the context of Bangladesh acknowledged the perception and voices of young persons like myself. This conference gave reorganisation of the youth voice in national policies."*

Find the National Youth SDG Conference papers, reports and other materials here: https://youthconf18.bdplatform4sdgs.net

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Complementing this work, ActionAid co-convened a roundtable with national media outlets to share policy recommendations on the importance of young people's inclusion in political processes and party manifestos. This roundtable resulted in national media coverage, further strengthening the call for young people's inclusion.

Shifting power nationally and globally: bringing young people's voices to different duty bearers

As well as supporting the national conference, ActionAid also facilitated youth engagement in the South Asia Sub Regional Forum on the SDGs, organised by UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) in October 2018. Swarna Moyee Sarka, a young Activista member, has been active on the SDGs since 2017, working with other young people to monitor local-level implementation, and facilitating training for young people on the SDGs and their implementation at local level. Swarna's active participation in the Sub Regional Forum saw her contributions reflected in the final statement, which will ultimately feed into the Asia-Pacific regional report to the High Level Political Forum on the SDGs.

Following this, Nazmul Ahsan, Youth Manager at ActionAid Bangladesh, attended the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) and shared experiences from the Bangladesh situation, particularly issues on SDG 8 and young people's engagement in decent work, as a part of a panel. APFSD is the primary platform in the Asia and Pacific region through which governments and civil society come together to discuss the progress and implementation of the SDGs in the region, and develops a set of recommendations to address in the upcoming High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

▶▶ From action to impact

Following the national conference, the SDG Platform promoted the Youth Declaration among the major political parties in the lead-up to the national election. Several of the demands from young people have now been reflected in these parties' new post-election manifestos and commitments. For example, the current government has committed to seven new youth initiatives, including opening a youth training centre in every *upazila* (sub-district) and developing a national research centre for youth.[27] These commitments represent a significant step forward, and demonstrate the power that alliances of youth and civil society can wield.

Young leaders who are advocating for ending violence against women and girls for a just and equal society.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID

Zambia: youth-led SDG monitoring

Zambia's Seventh National Development Plan (7NDP), launched in 2017, is a key mechanism through which Zambia has domesticated its SDG commitments. Alliance for Accountability Advocates Zambia (AAAZ)[28] has mobilised over 1,000 young people from across the country to engage in accountability and monitoring of both the SDGs and the 7NDP.

During 2017, AAAZ developed the Youth-Led SDG Monitoring Framework through a collaborative process, resulting in a tool that young people can share and use to guide their accountability work. In 2018, AAAZ also created platforms for young people to engage with policymakers on the 7NDP and SDGs, such as convening a roundtable dialogue that included young people, representatives of relevant ministries – including the Ministry of Sports, Youth and Child Development, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Local Government – the National Youth Development Council, UN agencies, NGOs and others. AAAZ has also undertaken training to build young people's capacity to advocate for implementation of the SDGs and 7DNP in their local areas.

Since AAAZ and their young members started this process, the Ministry of National Planning (which coordinates the NDP) has set up formal committees to monitor implementation of the 7NDP, and has involved young people in all the relevant committees. This has represented a significant step forward in youth engagement in this important policy process in Zambia.

AAAZ's work has shown Zambian policymakers that young people have the capacity to run their own agenda and to take the lead from their own platform. ActionAid Youth Coordinator Prisca Sikana puts it succinctly: *"the work of AAAZ shows that the days of adults setting the agenda for young people are past. When young people have the space, they are able to lead, set the agenda and have influence. For the SDGs, young people have started influencing the process early and are setting the agenda for the whole country. Our best role is to support them."*

Lessons learned:

▶▶ Lessons learned from the case studies:

The case studies above highlight some specific lessons for civil society organisations supporting young people's work to hold governments accountable for delivery of the SDGs:

- **Support young people to engage in local governance:** although the SDGs are an international framework, many national governments are linking SDGs to national development plans and priorities, which in turn are implemented by local agencies or governments. Governments should use participatory approaches (planning and budgeting, open budget discussions, etc.) to engage with civil society, with young people as core, and ensure their voices are heard in the implementation process. For young people and the organisations that support them, SDG commitments can be used as a tool to hold local-level duty bearers to account for provision of public services at local level and to demand inclusion of marginalised citizens in governance.

- **Support youth-led processes:** enabling young people to develop the skills and tools to design and lead their own research and accountability projects strengthens their understanding of the issues in their context

and inspires them to develop initiatives (like the youth-led inequality research discussed above) that are fully youth-owned and reflect the concerns most important to young people's lives. This in turn allows young people to develop the evidence base they need to take action and fuel effective lobbying and advocacy for their rights and entitlements.

- **Use multiple approaches:** achieving lasting and systemic change requires persistence, and fighting a battle on multiple fronts. In the case studies in this section, young people and civil society organisations used a wide range of research and accountability tools to gather evidence, and targeted duty bearers through multiple methods at once: lobbying government directly, political parties, media, public mobilisation and engagement in international spaces – with multiple organisations taking up the same demands. Young people used invited spaces (such as official forums and consultations in Bangladesh) as well as claiming their own spaces for action.

▶▶ Reflections from broader initiatives

In recent years, a number of organisations have specifically considered the role of young people in official and unofficial SDG accountability mechanisms. For example the UN World Youth Report 2018, *Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, has commented on the need to strengthen the mechanisms that enable young people to engage in policies and initiatives around sustainable development. In particular, the report argues for young people's involvement in national sustainable development coordination councils, policymakers working with national youth councils, expanding opportunities for youth representation, and ensuring young people are contributing to Voluntary National Reviews.[29]

Plan International, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth also argued, in the lead-up to the adoption of Agenda 2030, for strong accountability mechanisms that provide effective platforms for the meaningful participation of young people.[30] Specifically, they recommended two key priorities for strengthening accountability at the national and local level: engaging with young people in bottom-up approaches to development, and creating an enabling environment that facilitates inclusive, participatory and accountable governance.[31] They also identified four principles for accountability mechanisms relating to the SDGs. Mechanisms should be: participatory, inclusive (of diverse young people), accessible (to urban and rural young people and those with low literacy), collaborative and responsive (i.e.: the concerns of young people should be listened to and acted on).

Restless Development has recommended three approaches – on a sliding scale of ambition – to embed young people within formal and informal approaches to monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs:

- Proposal 1: youth representatives are invited to monitor the goals, expanding on current opportunities for youth input into state-led mechanisms.
- Proposal 2: young people create their own spaces, mechanisms and evidence to hold government accountable (a bottom-up approach based on empowering young people and linking citizen-led processes to state processes).
- Proposal 3: youth-led paradigm shift on accountability (building an inclusive and society-wide embedded accountability approach).[32]

▶▶ Endnotes

1. United Nations (2015) *Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development*, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld

2. *Ibid*

3. See commentary by K Donald and M Ramoroka, *Five key takeaways from the 2018 High Level Political Forum*, Centre for Economic and Social Rights, http://www.cesr.org/five-key-takeaways-2018-high-level-political-forum

4. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2017) *World population prospects: 2017 revision, key findings and advance tables*, Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP/248, Table S1, available at: https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2017_KeyFindings.pdf

5. UNFPA (2014) *The power of 1.8 billion: adolescents, youth and the transformation of the future – state of world population*, New York: UNFPA, available at: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN-SWOP14-Report_FINAL-web.pdf

6. ActionAid definition of 'young person' focuses on the socio-political identity of young people who are seeking the rights and independence that adulthood can bring. The age range defined as 'youth' varies between countries and between contexts within those countries. We use the age range 15-30 as a guide only. Throughout this report we use the term 'young person' or 'young people'; although this can face critique for being appearing to be gender blind, we to refer to all those in this group with their multiple different identities (race, ethnicity, disability, religion, economic, class, geography, religion, sexual identity).

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8. F Alvaredo, L Chancel, T Picketty, E Saez, and G. Zucma (2018) *World Inequality Report*. World Inequality Lab, available at: https://wir2018.wid.world/files/download/wir2018-summary-english.pdf at pp. 5-6.

9. *Ibid*, at p. 45.

10. See Civicus (2018) State of *Civil Society Report 2017*, Civicus, available at: https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2018/socs-2018-overview_top-ten-trends.pdf

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12. Restless Development (2015) *Follow up and review: how to scale up ambition on youth-led accountability for the SDGs.* London: Restless Development, at p. 7, available at: http://restlessdevelopment.org/file/follow-up-and-review-how-to-scale-up-ambition-on-youth-led-accountability-for-the-sdgs-pdf

13. See UNDP Kenya, media release, *#LeaveNoOneBehind: Kenya Government Gives Road Map to implementation of SDGs*, 14 September 2016, http://www.ke.undp.org/content/kenya/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2016/leave-no-one-behind--kenya-government-gives-road-map-to-implemen.html

14. For more information on the six-step methodology, see: https://actionaid.digital/sites/default/files/final_-_sdg_report_02_07_2018.pdf

15. Scorecards undertaken by Kilifi Citizens Forum, 2018 (internal)

16. Internal report, *Documenting the community SDG influence in Kenya, prepared for ActionAid Kenya*, 2019

17. *Ibid*

18. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/TYVATanzania/

19. The methodology was based on the youth-led research methodology of Restless Development (restlessdevelopment.org/our-youth-led-research-methodology) and ActionAid's Youth Programming Toolkit (https://actionaid.org/publications/2015/actionaids-approach-youth-programming-fundamental-force-development)

20. See report *The fight against corruption: a sustainable path to Uganda's transformation* (2018) at: https://uganda.actionaid.org/sites/uganda/files/publications/Action%20Aid%202018%20Caravan.pdf

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