The Global Accountability Framework 2011

An introduction to the framework, assessment process, approach to scoring and data collection

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Background

In 2005 the One World Trust published its first full Global Accountability Framework[i], which structured accountability around four key dimensions: transparency, participation, evaluation and complaint and response mechanisms. Based on the experiences from the 2003 pilot report[ii], the consultation with a wide range of global organisations, researchers, and stakeholders identified a set of 68 indicators capturing what constituted good accountability practice at the time.[iii] The indicators allowed the detailed measuring of an organisation's capability to be accountable to its stakeholders with a focus on those who were most affected by an organisation's work and decisions. From 2006 to 2008 the One World Trust implemented and published a full cycle of Global Accountability Reports, assessing close to 100 global organisations from the intergovernmental, non-governmental and corporate business spheres against this framework. Feedback to this project was very positive and many assessed organisations reported the benefits derived from cross-sector learning enabled by the report, and building on its findings initiated and pushed forward a range of critical accountability reform processes.

The dynamics in the field of accountability research, standards and practice however also highlighted the need for an evaluation and review of the assessment framework to ensure that it moved with the dynamics it had itself helped to create. In 2009 and 2010 the One World Trust therefore invited participating organisations, experts and stakeholders to join a broad review process, with workshops held in Washington DC, London and Geneva, an open online survey and a range of individual consultative discussions.

The present paper provides an introduction into the new Global Accountability Framework and accompanying indicators resulting from the consultation. This paper should be read in conjunction with the complete list of indicators outlined in the Revised Indicator List. The forthcoming Pathways to Accountability II report provides insight into the consultation process, comments received, and changes implemented in comparison to the first framework.

Target audience and structure

The paper is intended primarily for use by those who work within the global organisations that are being assessed and those involved in the gathering and communication of relevant data and information to the researchers involved in the exercise. It is also for those in the wider community of research and practice who wish to understand how results are generated and understood in detail.

The paper first provides a brief explanation of the Global Accountability Framework II, and then shows how the indicators are grouped. It then

explains the different data sources used in the research process and outlines the integrated stages of the data collection process. Following this, it identifies how the indicators are scored and weighted, and how results are verified before feeding into final publication.

The Global Accountability Framework II

The One World Trust defines accountability as: "[…] *the process through which an organisation makes a commitment to respond to and balance the needs of stakeholders in its decision-making processes and activities and delivers against this commitment.*"[iv]

This definition emphasises the need for organisations to balance their response to accountability claims and prioritise between different stakeholder groups according to organisational missions and criteria such as influence, responsibility and representation. Importantly, an organisation must do this through a conscious, verifiable, transparent process, which, given the dynamics of external circumstances, needs to be repeated in a cyclical manner.

The new Global Accountability Framework identifies five core accountability dimensions that are critical to managing accountability claims from both internal and external stakeholders.[v]

- **Accountability Strategy** displays the awareness, extent of understandings and commitment to accountability relationships with recognised stakeholders. It provides evidence on the position of an organisation's ability to exercise leadership on accountability and related reforms.
- **Transparency** is the provision of accessible and timely information to stakeholders and the opening up of organisational procedures, structures and processes to their assessment. Doing so enables stakeholders to monitor an organisation's activities and hold it to account for its commitments, actions and decisions. Organisations benefit from transparency by avoiding challenges of secrecy and distrust in view of their public impact.
- **Participation** is the active engagement by an organisation of both internal and external stakeholders in the decisions and activities that affect them. At a minimum, good practice suggests that participation must include opportunities for stakeholders to influence decision making, and not just possibilities for approval or acceptance of a decision or activity. Participation strengthens ownership and buy-in for what organisations do by those they affect.
- **Evaluation** is the process through which an organisation monitors and reviews its progress against goals and objectives, feeds learning from this into future planning and practice and through which it reports on the results of the process. Evaluation ensures that an organisation learns from and is accountable for its performance.
- **Complaint and response mechanisms** are channels developed by organisations that enable internal and external stakeholders to file complaints on issues of non-compliance with the organisation's own policy frameworks or against its substantive decisions and actions, and which ensure that such complaints are properly reviewed and acted upon. Transparency, participation, and evaluation processes are used to minimise the need for complaint mechanisms. Complaint and response mechanisms are accountability processes of last resort but also a test for how serious organisations are about their accountability, and take interest in learning from their own mistakes.

What the indicators measure

Indicators within each of the dimensions are defined along existing good practice, setting a standard which peer organisations have demonstrated it is possible to reach and work to. The assessment process therefore reviews organisation's accountability capabilities in relation to an evolving practice in their field, rather than against a theoretical 'gold standard'.

This is a conscious choice we have made to ensure that the framework and assessment results provide as much possible support to the setting of realistic targets and practical steps for accountability reform as possible.

In four of the five dimensions, (all except Accountability Strategy) indicators are grouped into two categories: policy and systems, reflecting an organisation's capabilities to enable, support, and foster accountability practice.

Indicators on **policy** check the presence of written documents/policies through which an organisation makes a commitment to the values and principles of each of the five dimensions. Organisational documents/policies on key areas of accountability foster a consistent approach and enables stakeholders to hold organisations to account for stated commitments.

Indicators on **systems** focus on management strategies and resources through which an organisation encourages, enables and supports the implementation of the commitments made in policy or supports the issue more broadly. Indicators in this category capture three cross cutting issues: leadership, training and accessibility.

In the Accountability Strategy dimension, indicators focus on evidence of methods that allow the leadership of the organisations to effectively guide and manage the organisation's approach to accountability.

Scoring system and weighting

A graded scoring system

For all indicators, a graded scoring system is employed which is set out in the indicator list. The basic principle along which the scoring system is built is that an indicator is scored 0 if no evidence for its fulfilment is present, and from 1-3 if relevant evidence is present, but to varying degrees of fulfilment of good practice standards. A score of 3 is attributed when good practice standards are fully met for the indicator.

Weighting of the dimensions

The Global Accountability Framework proposes the five dimensions as mutually reinforcing elements of overall accountability. For the construction of an overall aggregate score each of the dimensions therefore contributes to an equal weight. In each of the five dimensions the scores for each organisation are totalled, and this total enters into the final aggregate accountability score with 20%. In each dimension the scores for the two categories that cut across the dimensions policy and systems, are totalled separately, and enter the score for the accountability dimension equally with 50% each, as both are integral to effective organisational capabilities. This is maintained throughout with the exception of scores for Accountability Strategy, where these two categories do not apply.

In addition, indicators covering both the participation and the complaint & response dimension are subdivided into two sets.

Within the participation dimension, the two areas being assessed are:
- the capabilities of an organisation to engage with and be accountable to external stakeholders, and
- the control members can exercise over the organisation, i.e. accountability mechanisms pointing towards internal stakeholders such as governors, members, shareholders, etc.

Both sub-dimensions are weighted equally and each makes up 50 % of the total dimension score. For external stakeholder engagement, the 50 % is divided equally between policy and systems (25 % each). Scores for internal member control are calculated *en bloc* with no further subdivision, because the management systems category does not apply to this particular area.

In the complaint and response dimension, the two areas being assessed are:
- the capabilities of an organisation to deal with and respond to internal complaints such as from staff, volunteers and also contractors and partners subject to policies and rules that apply in the contracting organisation, and
- complaints from external stakeholders including clients, customers, service users, and other members of the general public.

An equal weight has been given to the policies and systems in both of these areas as responding to both internal and external stakeholder complaints is crucial to an organisation's accountability.

Data collection: sources and process

Data sources used for the assessment
To score the indicators researchers will in the first place use primary and secondary data drawn from the assessed organisations themselves (internal data). Data from external sources will be used to verify interpretation of the internal data and resulting scores, and contextualise scoring and eventual findings. External data may also help researchers to probe and follow up on data provided by organisations in relation to their compliance with their own accountability policies and management systems.

Internal Data comprises both data available in the public domain, such as annual reports, and data not publicly available but provided to the research team by the organisation in the process of data collection, such as in house documents or information provided in interviews.

External Data includes substantiated Information that is relevant to the assessment of an organisation's accountability produced by an external source about the organisation. This could include academic literature, other professional publications, media reporting and information gathered from perspectives of an organisation's external stakeholders and experts on the organisation. While data providing evidence on discrepancies between policy and practice would be relevant data, general data and comments on an organisation's work and performance would not normally be taken into account.

Data collection process
The research process consists of several integrated stages:
1. desk-based research on publicly available documents from and about the organisation;
2. review of internal and external documents about the organisation;
3. interviews with organisations and external experts of organisations;
4. analysis of evidence, preliminary scoring and internal verification;
5. review of feedback from organisations and external experts on the preliminary findings and
6. final analysis and scoring.

Stage 1: Desk based study and review of public documents

In order to build up a general understanding of the organisation and inform the overall research process, the research team will collect and review publicly available data, such as impact reports and CSR reports, and go through the websites of each organisation to search for publicly available policies and statements.

Stage 2: Review of internal documentation from the organisations

On this basis the research team will request further documentation from organisations, both internal and other publicly available information, that is relevant to the scoring of the indicators in the key dimensions of accountability set out in the research framework, such as concerning accountability commitments, disclosure of information or transparency, stakeholder participation, governing articles or regulations, evaluations documents, whistle-blower policies, etc. .

Stage 3: interviews with organisations and external experts

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with contact staff of the organisations and as required external experts to identify accountability commitments such as policies and guidelines, but also mainstreamed operational practices (and evidence thereof) not already identified in the research, fill in any gaps in information and provide organisations with the opportunity to elaborate on their motivations and challenges related to accountability reform.

Stage 4: Preliminary scoring and internal verification

The data gathered in the previous stages will then be translated in an initial scoring of indicators, which are put through a process of internal verification by the research team to ensure consistency of scoring with the guidelines of the framework, across organisations and quality control. The preliminary findings are shared with the organisations and, as appropriate, external experts for verification and comment within a set timeframe. Any information that may be missing but thought helpful and relevant to the scoring of indicators will be requested from organisations at this time.

Stage 5: Review of feedback from the organisations external reviewers

Any additional information received as part of feedback from organisations and experts will be reviewed for relevance to the analysis and scoring of indicators, and where required we will contact the organisation and reviewers for final clarifications.

Stage 6: Final analysis and scoring

Based on the now available data the researchers will proceed to a final scoring which will be verified within the team for quality and consistency. Any changes made by the research team in comparison to the preliminary scoring will be communicated to the organisations. In case that major additional evidence is submitted which cannot be taken into account we will seek to explain and communicate the reasons for our position.

Accountability Assessment Data Collection Process

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                        ┌─────────────────────────┐
                        │   Final Indicator Score  │
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                                    ▲
┌──────────────────┐    ┌─────────────────────────┐    ┌──────────────────┐
│ Feedback from    │◄──►│   Preliminary Findings   │◄──►│ Feedback from    │
│ experts and      │    │                          │    │ assessed         │
│ stakeholders     │    │                          │    │ organisation     │
└──────────────────┘    └─────────────────────────┘    └──────────────────┘
                                    ▲
                        ┌─────────────────────────┐
                        │   Internal Verification  │
                        └─────────────────────────┘
                                    ▲
                        ┌─────────────────────────┐
                        │  Initial Indicator Scoring │
                        └─────────────────────────┘
                                    ▲
┌──────────────────┐    ┌─────────────────────────┐    ┌──────────────────┐
│ External sources │───►│     Data Collection      │◄───│ Expert and       │
│                  │    │                          │    │ stakeholder      │
│                  │    │                          │    │ input            │
└──────────────────┘    └─────────────────────────┘    └──────────────────┘
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                        │ Initial organisation     │
                        │ interviews with          │
                        │ organisational document  │
                        │ analysis                 │
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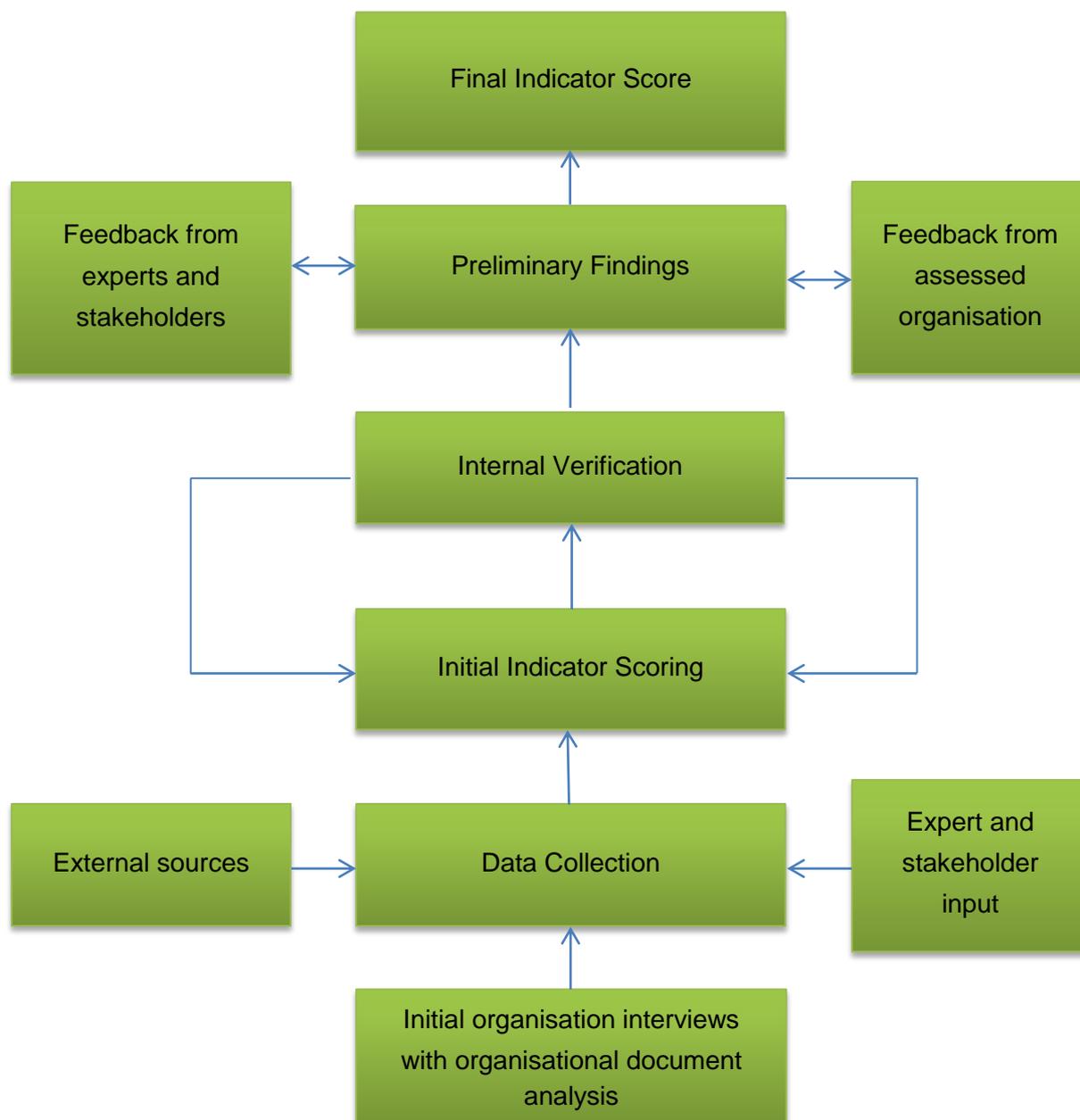
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[i] Pathways to Accountability (2005): The Global Accountability Framework, London, One World Trust.
[ii] Power without Accountability (2003): The Global Accountability Report, London, One World Trust.
[iii] One World Trust (2007): 2007 Global Accountability Indicator List, London, One World Trust.
[iv] Pathways to Accountability (2005): The Global Accountability Framework, London, One World Trust, p. 1.
[v] The 1st Global Accountability Framework worked with four dimensions: transparency, participation, evaluation and complaint and response. The fifth additional dimension of 'accountability strategy' was introduced based on feedback received during the review process to reflect more strongly the key role senior leadership in organisations plays in the achievement and mainstreaming of accountability in an institution.