



# Making Voice and Accountability Work for the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

A Conceptual Overview of AAWAZ's Prospective Engagement  
with the Sustainable Development Goals

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AAWAZ Programme is funded by the UKAid through the Department for International Development (DFID), AAWAZ was conceived initially as a five-year programme, from 2012 to 2017. Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI) is the Management Organisation (MO) for implementing the AAWAZ programme, while Pakistan's prime civil society organisations: Aurat Foundation (AF), South-Asia Partnership Pakistan (SAP-PK), Strengthening Participatory Organisation (SPO) and Sungi Development Foundation (SF) form the implementation consortium responsible for directly working with communities.

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## Acronyms

CAR	Capability, Accountability, Responsiveness
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CNIC	Computerised National Identity Card
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DANIDA	Danish International Development Assistance
DFID	Department for International Development
DGDC	Director General for Development Cooperation, Belgium
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NSDS	National Sustainable Development Strategy
ODA	Official Development Assistance
RBA	Rights-based Approach
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN DESA	The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
V&A	Voice and Accountability

## Executive Summary

Voice and Accountability programmes, committed to promoting basic freedoms and enhancing key capabilities, have gained prominence on the global development scene. This is particularly since the post-Cold War context is characterised by debates about democracy, democratic governance, and the provision of basic rights. Closely linked to human development, these programmes cover key development themes of sustainable livelihoods, capability enhancement, decent environmental quality, and physical security. The new accountability agenda in particular, calling for the increased role of ordinary citizens and relying on new and innovative methods, has a concern for social justice, inclusion, and empowerment. Donors over the years have devised frameworks to better identify and analyse problems related to marginalisation and disenfranchisement, and support the implementation of programmes centering around Voice and Accountability. Based considerably on the Department for International Development's Capability, Accountability, and Responsiveness framework, AAWAZ – a 5-year project – seeks to empower women and socially excluded groups in Pakistan by strengthening democracy, and challenging restraining norms and practices at multiple levels.

Building linkages, coordinating resources, and harmonising efforts are important steps for strengthening an intervention and providing an improved sense of direction. Aligning AAWAZ's work with the upcoming 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda is a beneficial exercise. The Sustainable Development Goals rest upon a conceptual framework which makes the global goals integrated and indivisible, and balances the three dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic, and environmental. In Pakistan, the federal government, through the Planning Commission, will prepare a framework for the implementation of the goals, while the United Nations Development Programme will be the main facilitator responsible for providing technical and other support. AAWAZ should take note of the policy architecture surrounding the realisation of these goals, and deliberate on ways to proactively engage with a range of stakeholders for synchronising efforts and influencing outcomes.

An analysis of the potential common pathways between the programme and the SDGs suggests, to a vast extent, the presence of common assumptions and deep conceptual linkages. From their focus on improved service delivery for poverty eradication and in education and health, gender equality, and women participation, to reducing inequalities, establishing strong and just institutions, and developing partnerships for implementation as well as empowerment, the SDGs appear to be resonating strongly with all of AAWAZ's outputs. Successfully executing this collaborative effort will hinge upon a variety of factors. Some of the key factors that should be

considered while developing operational plans include evidence-based policy development, linkages with local level planning, multi-stakeholder engagement, partnerships with civil society, addressing data gaps, and participatory monitoring and accountability.

# Making Voice and Accountability Work for the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda: A Conceptual Overview of AAWAZ's Prospective Engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

## Introduction

This paper provides a conceptual overview of AAWAZ's potential engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It has three broad aims. First, it explores Voice and Accountability (V&A) as a thematic and operational domain and seeks to situate it within the larger development agenda. Building on a review and analysis of relevant literature, it discusses the importance of harmonising aid efforts and the convergence of agendas. We look at AAWAZ as a V&A intervention and highlight its relevance for key development outcomes. Second, a case is presented for aligning AAWAZ's work with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda by exploring common pathways and demonstrating the proximity of both in terms of their focuses and mandates. An analysis of relevant goals is provided to achieve this. Third, realising the importance of executing such collaboration, key issues and elements central to operationalising the engagement are discussed.

Voice and Accountability interventions have gained currency among donors for their supposed ability to contribute to democratic governance and support the human development agenda by focusing on issues of powerlessness, inequality, and deprivation. This paper argues that V&A programmes cover a wide range of areas, and owing to their focus on both processes and outcomes, they have the potential to help achieve broad development objectives such as poverty reduction, well-being, and democratic governance. AAWAZ, resting upon the V&A framework, has the elements required to stimulate a change for an open, inclusive, and accountable society in Pakistan. It would be important for the programme to analyse the bigger picture and seek to engage with the efforts resonating with its strategic agenda. Aligning its work with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda specifically would be crucially important for harmonising efforts and streamlining actions to achieve the critical outcome of bringing about a stable, inclusive, and tolerant democracy in Pakistan. The paper further demonstrates that a considerable number of the SDGs are strikingly close to AAWAZ's mandate and objectives and call for deeper and more meaningful engagement. A concerted collaboration between the two will have to take note of a range of issues potentially having a bearing on the execution of such a venture. Some of these include evidence-based policy

development, linkages with local level planning, multi-stakeholder engagement, partnerships with civil society, addressing data gaps, and participatory monitoring and accountability.

## Voice and Accountability: Definitions, Links, and Emerging Trends

With the emergence of the ‘good governance’ agenda in the 1990s, V&A interventions have become increasingly popular with donors. These are considered important means to foster democracy, and constitute a viable strategy to improve service delivery.<sup>1</sup> Conceptually, Voice and Accountability, as a thematic and operational area, falls under the rubric of democratic governance. The number of these interventions increased in the 1990s, partly because of the changed geopolitical environment in the wake of the disintegration of the USSR. Donors considered these programmes fundamental to promoting political liberalisation and democracy in places and regions rife with conflict, military interventions, and civil wars. However, three other important policy trends also precipitated the shift towards these programmes and consolidated their presence on the global development scene. These were: new poverty agenda, good governance agenda and aid effectiveness debate.<sup>2</sup> The new poverty agenda was based on a multidimensional understanding of poverty and sought to focus on the issues of power, voice, and agency to reduce poverty. The good governance agenda, on the other hand, brought, for the first time, political and institutional issues into the purview of governance, and undertook to increase accountability and empowerment through enhanced citizen involvement. Similarly, the debates around aid effectiveness gathered pace around that time and found expression in the Paris Declaration of 2005 which emphasised principles of ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing for results, and mutual accountability. Thus, these broad developments coalesced to give rise to a number of programmes centered around Voice and Accountability.

Before we go on to discuss different issues around voice and accountability and how the two concepts are related to human development and democratic governance in general, it would be important to first define the key terms. Voice refers to “both the capacity of people to express their views and the ways in which they do so through a variety of formal and informal channels and mechanisms,” and thus it is as much about agency as it is about supportive institutions and an enabling environment. Accountability, on the other hand, implies instituting relationships that allow for ‘answerability’ and ‘representativeness’. It exists “when those who set and implement a

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<sup>1</sup> P. Newell and J. Wheeler, “Introduction.” in Newell and Wheeler eds *Rights, Resources and the Politics of Accountability* (London: Zed Books, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Tammie O’Neil, Marta Foresti, and Alan Hudson, “Evaluation of Citizens’ Voice and Accountability: Review of the Literature and Donor Approaches.” *DFID* (London, 2007).

society's rules – politicians and public officials – are answerable to the people who live under those rules.”<sup>3</sup> It is important to mention here that while voice and accountability are interrelated, they are not identical in any way. In fact, theirs is a synergetic relationship, vastly helping both. Those exercising voice strengthen and create necessary conditions for accountability, whereas accountability in turn creates more space for voice and lends credibility to the governance system. However, this relationship is contingent upon a number of crucial factors such as, political context, policy environment, local needs, and ground realities.

‘Answerability’ and ‘enforceability’ are the two basic forms of accountability that initially complete the accountability relationship. Answerability has to do with people wielding power accounting for the actions they are responsible for. Enforceability refers to sanctions faced from those dissatisfied with the actions, or the rationale offered to justify those actions.<sup>4</sup>

Voice and Accountability interventions cover a vast range of areas and themes. They engage with governments over policy, legal frameworks, and reform processes, and collaborate with community organisations around improved service delivery, rights awareness, and civic education. One of the core principles of these interventions is that the practices around capacity building focus not only on technical skills but also on political skills. The rationale that underpins V&A programmes globally, goes like this: Expression of voice will make public institutions more responsive to people’s needs, and accountable for their functions. The synergetic relationship between voice and accountability will (i) bring about results that will support the realisation of broad development agenda and the achievement of outcomes, or (ii) will have a bearing on other factors related to key development objectives like poverty reduction.<sup>5</sup>

Democratic governance is the umbrella under which Voice and Accountability programmes are conceived. It is useful to see how it holds importance for development. Democratic governance is a broad-based area and has an explicit emphasis on, among other issues, people’s basic freedoms and human rights, holding decision-makers accountable, inclusive rules, institutions and practices, women’s equal participation and an environment free from discrimination, and social policies being responsive and focusing on poverty eradication. It is connected with

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> A. Goetz and R. Jenkins, “Voice Accountability and Human Development: A New Agenda’. Background Paper for Human Development Report 2002,” *UNDP* (2002).

<sup>5</sup> A. Rocha Menocal and B. Sharma, “Joint Evaluation of Citizens’ Voice and Accountability: Synthesis Report,” *DFID* (London, 2008).



human development in three distinct ways.<sup>6</sup> First, it undertakes to enhance political freedoms and participation, which are human rights as well as important instrumental and constitutive components of human development. Second, greater representation and democratic rule protect people from calamities like droughts and uncertain security situations. Amartya Sen's seminal work demonstrates that no democracy has ever had a famine, though some did experience acute food shortages at some points, such as Maharashtra in 1973. It was the answerability to the people that made public representatives formulate responses that put people's well-being above expedient criteria or vested economic motives. Third, democratic governance, by giving political freedom, empowers people to stimulate an effective demand for social services and economic opportunities. This sets in motion a virtuous cycle of development, characterised by rewards, incentives, and accountability.

Efforts to improve accountability relations are not solely organised around a governance approach. With the emergence of a rights-based approach to development, donors are increasingly becoming responsive to the rights claimed by the rights holders. A rights-based approach (RBA) calls for the international apparatus of human rights accountability to support development action.<sup>7</sup> It is holistic in nature and deals with all aspects of human well-being. According to Nyambu-Musembi, RBA stands for "an integrated view of sustenance (economic and social rights) and freedom (civil and political rights)."<sup>8</sup> This view of the approach naturally aligns it with a range of broad development objectives. UNDP, in a manual for development practitioners, seeks to develop a conceptual framework for the human rights-based approach and outlines strategies to implement it. Spelling out the basic principles of the approach, the document stresses the importance of focusing on accountability to protect and promote the rights of claim-holders. Accountability, it contends, is central to establishing entitlements and obligations and formulating ways to realise them. To improve accountability relations, it is important that they are strengthened instead of substituted, for this is how the capacities of both claim-holders and duty-bearers can be developed. But capacity development initiatives and clearly defined roles alone are not sufficient. Accountability, in order to be effective, needs to be demanded. It is the inclusion of civil society oversight mechanisms that has the potential to stimulate a robust demand for improved accountability.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "Human Development Report 2002: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World," *United Nations Development Programme* (2002).

<sup>7</sup> "What can we do with a rights-based approach to development?" *Overseas Development Institute* (1999). Available at: [www.odi.org.uk/briefing/3\\_99.html](http://www.odi.org.uk/briefing/3_99.html)

<sup>8</sup> C. Nyamu-Musembi, "Towards an actor-oriented perspective on human rights" *IDS Working Paper 169, Institute of Development Studies* (Brighton, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> "A human rights approach to development - Primer for development practitioners," *UNDP* (2003).

Voice and accountability are closely tied with human development through different strands. One valuable feature of V&A programmes, at least theoretically, is their endorsement of the multidimensional nature of human development. These programmes normally carry prescriptions for various important components of human development and seek to strengthen the accountability mechanisms associated with them. Human development itself is a holistic concept and covers different aspects of well-being. Sustainable livelihoods, capability enhancing services, decent environmental quality, and physical security are the four broad components that human development revolves around. Literature on V&A shows that all these areas figure prominently in the new accountability agenda.<sup>10</sup>

The links between V&A and the broad development agenda have already been well established. During the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Voice and Accountability programmes internationally undertook to contribute towards the achievement of the goals by influencing processes and strengthening results.<sup>11</sup> V&A interventions, both directly and indirectly, contribute towards the realisation of the higher end of human development: promoting the freedom, well-being, and dignity of people. The developmental impact of these interventions is considered to have instrumental impact on broader goals. The underlying assumption is that such programmes not only strengthen voice and accountability but also deliver specific development-related outputs. Integrating this dimension into the programme logic for any project ensures that concerns for larger developmental outcomes are echoed in key project documents.<sup>12</sup>

The value of Voice and Accountability programmes for development does not end here. In addition to supporting major elements of the global development agenda, they also help achieve specific outcomes such as poverty reduction and sustainable livelihoods. Voice and accountability can be linked to alleviating poverty in two distinct ways. First, enhanced voice and accountability reduces powerlessness, which is an aspect of poverty. Second, voice and accountability can strengthen the sectors – social or economic – critical to reducing poverty.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the issue of sustainable livelihoods is intimately linked to the quality of accountability institutions. Economic policies overlooking the roles and contributions of the poor or those employed in the informal sector fail

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<sup>10</sup>Goetz and Jenkins, “Voice Accountability and Human Development”.

<sup>11</sup> Rocha Menocal and Sharma, “Joint Evaluation of Citizens’ Voice and Accountability”.

<sup>12</sup> “UNDP Human Development Report 2002”.

<sup>13</sup> O’Neil, et. al. “Evaluation of Citizens’ Voice and Accountability”

to create wealth for low-income groups. Pro-poor outcomes are achieved in a policy and operational environment in which accountability institutions are responsive and not biased towards the rich.<sup>14</sup>

Donors rolling out Voice and Accountability programmes explicitly link them to their core objectives and strategic agendas. To them, largely, these programmes are both a means to an end, and ends in themselves. A cursory look at their mandates and the contribution of voice and accountability to those mandates highlights the linkages between the two. Tammie O'Neil, Marta Foresti, and Alan Hudson, in their evaluation of the subject, present an assessment of the development agenda of a set of six donors and demonstrate that voice and accountability are intimately tied to the realization of this agenda.<sup>15</sup> Discussing the mandate of DANIDA, DFID, DGDC, NORAD, SDC, and CIDA, they show that the initiatives around citizen voice and accountability eventually either directly or indirectly support the core objectives of poverty reduction, sustainable development, and attainment of the SDGs. Their direct support to the objective of poverty reduction is directed toward addressing the causes and experiences of poverty. Powerlessness and the concomitant issue of voicelessness are important aspects of poverty in a multidimensional view of the problem. A push for enhanced voice and accountability results in taking into account the experience of poverty and one of its root causes. It also empowers marginalised and socially excluded groups such as women, and ethnic or religious minorities. The indirect contribution of these programmes, contend O'Neil, Foresti, and Hudson, pertains to their importance in terms of influencing other key objectives crucial to poverty reduction, such as improved governance and institutional performance, and promotion of democracy and human rights. Governance is improved or 'good governance' ensured when citizens participate in public and political processes in an optimum manner. Similarly, efforts around promoting democracy and protecting human rights are bolstered when there is an enhanced emphasis on accountability, mainly political accountability, and when an ordinary citizen is able to exercise his or her agency.

An emphasis on V&A is also said to have positive bearing on aid effectiveness, which, among other factors, depends on the generation of local ownership. Projects and interventions detached from ground realities and overlooking local demands generally fail to achieve specific and critical outcomes. Voice and accountability processes, through their strategic focus on the local, have the potential to elicit constructive involvement from the community and secure ownership for the intervention.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Goetz and Jenkins, "Voice Accountability and Human Development".

<sup>15</sup> O'Neill, et. al., "Evaluation of Citizens' Voice and Accountability

<sup>16</sup> See for instance, The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), and The Accra Agenda for Action (2008).

However, for programmes focusing on increased voice exercise and enhanced accountability, it is important that they are aware of the elements that support successful programme implementation. The ongoing practice of V&A suggests that donor programmes tend to target five key preconditions for achieving critical objectives.<sup>17</sup> These include: an enabling environment, channels, institutional framework, state institutions, and donor activities. An enabling environment is associated with an emphasis on empowerment, equality and non-discrimination, democratic values, and structural conditions. Channels normally include civil society organisations, NGOs, trade unions, cooperatives, faith groups, women’s groups, youth groups, free and independent media, parliament, electoral processes, and political parties. Institutional framework, also known as ‘rules of the game,’ has to do with democratic structures, legal and regulatory frameworks, rule of law, and respect for human rights. State institutions mainly refer to parliaments, independent judicial system, impartial police force, public sector, local government, audit institutions, and human rights institutions. And finally, donor activities are about civic education, capacity building, financial support, training, political dialogue, and electoral observation and monitoring.

Exercising voice effectively is significantly dependent upon personal and institutional capacities as well as legal and policy frameworks in place. Citizenship as a conceptual category is central to realising voice and accountability outcomes. In places with serious vertical hierarchies and structural limitations to participation, exercising voice and enhancing accountability become difficult propositions. Therefore, it is quite important that accountability claims enjoy an enabling legal and institutional framework and a set of rights and entitlements.<sup>18</sup>

One important lesson learnt over the years is that focusing on building the capacity of public officials alone may prove to be counterproductive. A Voice and Accountability programme, therefore, must also establish sufficiently strong roles for the citizens or bodies representing them. Voice without due answerability and enforcement is disillusioning.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, measuring change and evaluating practices in V&A work is a challenging task, for often it involves intangible shifts in power dynamics. Thus, a wealth of material suggests that indicators and mechanisms developed to assess this should take into account local social and political factors.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> O’Neill, et. al., “Evaluation of Citizens’ Voice and Accountability”.

<sup>18</sup> A. M. Goetz and J. Gaventa, “Bringing Citizen Voice and Client Focus into Service Delivery,” *IDS Working Paper no. 138*, Brighton, Institute for Development Studies (Brighton, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> A. M. Goetz and R. Jenkins, “Voice and Accountability in Service Delivery,” *Development Outreach* Vol. 6 No. 1 (March 2004).

<sup>20</sup> J. Holland, A. Thirkell, E. Trepanier, and L. Early, “Measuring Change and Results in Voice and Accountability Work,” *Social Development Direct, Working Paper 34*, Department for International Development (2009).

Lessons learned from interventions and evaluations over the years have led to the development of a new accountability agenda. It was coming to the fore that a mere focus on ‘voices of the poor’ did not yield desired results and was later on regarded as tokenism. Critics argued for shifting the focus from capturing the voices of poor to holding the powerful accountable. As the arena of Voice and Accountability went through further experimentation, it grew more complex and new sets of actors were brought in. The Human Development Report of 2002, entitled “Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World,” centers on democracy and democratic governance, and links them to human development. The background paper of the report provides a detailed commentary on the link between voice, accountability, and human development, and outlines the main features of the ‘new accountability agenda,’ which is characterised by a manifest preference for the increased role of ordinary citizens, inclusion of new jurisdictions, reliance on new and innovative methods, and a concern for social justice.<sup>21</sup>

The new accountability agenda is not merely concerned with accountability processes but also has a normative preference. It is, at heart, inclined towards the ideals of social justice, and endeavours to bolster support for pro-poor initiatives and outcomes. The chief aim is to ensure substantive freedoms for the poor, not just to ritualistically hold the actors accountable. In line with this, a range of methods is evolving to engage new sets of actors in both horizontal and vertical accountability relationships. Civil society responses too are taking new forms and addressing issues, which in the past were not dealt with in the public domain. Highlighting gaps between government commitments and reported actuals is one of the ways in which civil society organisations and citizens are asserting their right to hold public officials accountable and introduce democratic practices in accountability.

## AAWAZ: Voice and Accountability in Practice

Achieving voice and accountability objectives and outcomes requires developing frameworks to support programming and implementation. The DFID’s 2006 white paper on governance – in the context of international development – places governance at the heart of the poverty reduction agenda and stresses upon the importance of improving state capability, responsiveness, and accountability while working with a range of state and non-state actors. It considers accountability a key feature of governance and delineates its usefulness for the pro-poor agenda and desired poverty outcomes. The paper defines accountability as “the ability of citizens, civil society and the private sector to scrutinise public institutions and governments and hold them to account.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Goetz and Jenkins, “Voice Accountability and Human Development.”

<sup>22</sup> “Making Governance Work for the Poor,” *DFID* (London, 2006).

The DFID published a briefing note on the heels of the white paper that introduced the Capability, Accountability, and Responsiveness (CAR) framework,<sup>23</sup> which provides analytical rigour to DFID’s governance related work and outlines guidelines to make effective interventions centered around governance, voice, accountability, and responsiveness. In a working paper by the DFID, the three elements of the framework are further defined. Capability refers to the formal and informal institutions that are instrumental in creating an enabling environment for ‘effective voice and accountability’. Formal institutions consist of policies, laws, political freedoms, and implementation and oversight structures. Informal institutions, on the other hand, include socio-cultural norms, attitudes, and interactions that have a bearing on accountability relations. The element of accountability in the CAR framework pertains to demand-side accountability, which enables citizens to exercise their agency and voice to interact with public officials to realise their rights. Broadly, there are two forms of accountability, namely vertical accountability and horizontal accountability. Vertical accountability is the direct engagement between citizens and citizen groups on one side, and state officials and institutions on the other, based on democratic political processes and use of voice. Horizontal accountability involves different state institutions holding each other accountable within defined jurisdictions to keep a check on excesses in power. Corresponding to accountability is the element of responsiveness, which completes the supply-side of accountability relations. Vertical responsiveness is about the response of duty-bearers to the claims made by rights-holders. Horizontal responsiveness entails state officials being responsive to oversight processes and mechanisms designed to ensure the realisation of citizens’ rights.

The CAR Framework now informs a number of governance and V&A interventions in different parts of the world. It also underpins the operations of AAWAZ – a Voice and Accountability programme – being implemented in Pakistan by the DFID. The programme is centered around empowering women and socially excluded groups to strengthen democracy and challenge restraining norms and practices at multiple levels. Its empowerment strategy is embedded in the assumption that holding the elite and the state accountable is the key to the realisation of people’s rights, freedoms, and entitlements. As maintained in AAWAZ’s ‘Theory of Change,’<sup>24</sup> the programme reflects the UK government’s commitments “articulated in “Peace Building State Building Framework in Fragile States” (2010), the “Capability, Accountability and Responsiveness” (CAR) framework, and the UK’s objective of ‘[building] the strong communities and institutions [in Pakistan] upon which democracy rests’.”

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<sup>23</sup> “Accountability Briefing Note,” *DFID* (London, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> “AAWAZ: Theory of Change,” *AAWAZ*, February 15, 2015. Available at: <http://www.aawaz.org.pk/AAWAZ%20TOC%202014-02-17.pdf>

Being a Voice and Accountability programme, AAWAZ also appears to borrow from a number of documents, such as the aforementioned ‘Evaluation of Citizens’ Voice and Accountability: Review of the Literature and Donor Approaches’ published by the DFID in 2007, imparting a conceptual understanding of the theme at hand. The programme aims to address formal and informal barriers to a stable, inclusive democracy in Pakistan. These barriers include “discriminatory policies and laws, political patronage, weak oversight mechanisms, and socio-cultural norms, behaviours and attitudes.” Believing that “democratic processes in Pakistan will become more open, inclusive and accountable to citizens,” AAWAZ rests its strategy upon four outputs:

1. Women better able to participate safely in politics and in public spaces at federal, provincial, and local levels in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab.
2. Citizens and communities better able to resolve disputes peacefully, and work together for common solutions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab.
3. Women and other excluded groups better able to demand improved delivery of services in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab.
4. Improved evidence generated, synthesised, and communicated/championed to political leaders/elites in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab.

The programme is designed to achieve these outputs by effecting tangible change in the individual, social, political, and legal spheres.

Achieving outputs and objectives and making an impact is considerably dependent upon being able to take cognizance of the overall context and the policy environment a programme operates in. Building linkages, coordinating resources, and harmonising efforts all play a part in strengthening the intervention and providing an improved sense of direction. Of crucial importance is taking stock of policy proposals and initiatives that are directly or indirectly related to the mandate of the programme. This avoids activity overlaps and creates synergy. The current aid and architecture also supports harmonising aid through coordinated efforts and pulling resources together. Both The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) lay emphasis on aligning practices and harmonising aid. There are five principles of the declaration that lend support to the goal of “improving the quality of aid and its impact on development.” These are: ownership, alignment, harmonisation, results, and mutual accountability. Together they provide a framework to donor and host countries to make aid more effective and achieve strategic development objectives like the MDGs.



Therefore, we argue for aligning AAWAZ's strategy with the upcoming 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. This agenda is ambitious, cross-cutting, and indivisible, and many of its components resonate strongly with AAWAZ's activities and objectives. Alignment between the two would be mutually beneficial and would lend support to the broader development objectives of democratic governance and poverty reduction. It would also be quite important for more coordinated, streamlined, and harmonised actions. To see how such collaboration might come about, we first need to cast a glance at the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and how they are going to be implemented in Pakistan.

## 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda: An Overview

Learning from what the MDGs lacked, the SDGs rest upon a conceptual framework making global goals integrated and indivisible, and balances the three dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic, and environmental. The 2030 agenda further revolves around the three components of People, Planet, and Prosperity. Consisting of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (see Box 1) and 169 targets, it builds on the MDGs and seeks to 'complete what they could not achieve'. These goals and targets, including the means of implementation, 'are universal, indivisible and interlinked' and set out to achieve a range of social, economic, and environmental objectives as well as more peaceful and inclusive societies by 2030. Realising the importance of harmonising efforts and creating synergies to achieve global development goals, the universal agenda unveils a 'revitalized global partnership,' identifying stakeholders, emphasising inter-linkages, and outlining means of implementation.<sup>25</sup>

The agenda is holistic in scope and covers all possible dimensions of development and human well-being. In addition to addressing the basic social and economic indicators of development, it also shows a strong concern for peace, justice, inclusivity, and human rights. The declaration affirms that gender equality, equality of opportunity, non-discrimination, and the rule of law are indispensable to creating an open, just, tolerant, and socially inclusive society. The new agenda also highlights the importance of engaging men and boys in ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women.

The global implementation strategy largely relies on Member States. Each national government will take the lead on the SDGs in its respective country. Since the Sustainable Development Declaration is signed by each national government, it will be responsible for developing national indicators, evolving a national policy framework and incorporating the goals and targets into national plans, policies, and practices. Periodic reviews

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<sup>25</sup> "Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," *United Nations*.



and follow-ups to measure progress against goals will be based on a set of global indicators. These will be reinforced with indicators at regional and national levels developed by Member States. The global indicator framework is yet to be formulated and will be announced by the Statistical Commission in March 2016. Later on, it will be adopted by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. Member States will periodically publish national reports, which will help review and track progress, and analyse and identify issues at regional and national levels. Furthermore, national governments will be encouraged to conduct reviews at the subnational level as well to capture potential regional variations.

Section No. 57 of the Sustainable Development Declaration recognises the unavailability of data on different themes and issues across many parts of the world. It urges regional, national, and local partners to make efforts to collect data to support the measurement of progress. Therefore, a great deal of focus will be on generating evidence and bridging data gaps.

#### **Box 1: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

**NO POVERTY:** End poverty in all its forms everywhere

**ZERO HUNGER:** Zero hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

**GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING:** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

**QUALITY EDUCATION:** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

**GENDER EQUALITY:** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

**CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION:** Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

**AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY:** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

**DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH:** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

**INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE:** Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

**REDUCED INEQUALITIES:** Reduce inequality within and among countries

**SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES:** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

**RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION:** Ensure sustainable consumption and patterns

**CLIMATE ACTION:** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

**LIFE BELOW WATER:** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

**LIFE ON LAND:** Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

**PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS:** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

**PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS:** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

## Sustainable Development Goals in Pakistan

Though the SDGs have come into effect since January 1, 2016, a full-blown national strategy by the government will be announced in March. The government of Pakistan, through the Planning Commission, will take the lead in preparing a framework for the implementation of the goals while the UNDP will be the main facilitator responsible for providing technical and other requisite support. It will be the responsibility of the concerned ministries and line agencies at different tiers to implement the goals. The Planning Commission of Pakistan is currently in the middle of laying the foundation for the execution of the global agenda and it has yet to unveil anything concrete to introduce a roadmap or conceptual framework vis-à-vis the SDGs in the context of Pakistan. The UNDP is also currently short of showcasing any strategy document around it. However, our interaction with key officials in both the Planning Commission and UNDP provide insights into some of the main elements around which a country strategy will be built. Taking note of these elements is important to articulate a response to the government's plans to implement and monitor the global goals in Pakistan.

Pakistan's Sustainable Development strategy will take into account building coordination mechanisms between federal and provincial levels to harmonise efforts and implement the agenda. This will take place through SDG Monitoring and Coordination Units that will be set up at different levels. Coordination and reporting mechanisms between district and provincial levels will also be developed to further embed the efforts in the grassroots. A detailed mapping of SDG targets and indicators will be done to formulate responses, and identify and mobilise resources. Similarly, indicators will be translated to the district level too. These indicators will then be communicated to the ministries and other relevant departments and organs. The Planning Commission sets out to gain perspective and fill data gaps by recommending baseline surveys and eliciting opinions from a range of stakeholders through dialogues and consultations. The capacities of various private and public agencies will be strengthened to facilitate surveys, data collection, computation, and data reporting. Stakeholder reviews will also include consultations with civil society organisations and representatives at different levels.

The UNDP will also play its part in designing and consolidating the framework for the SDGs. A national project will be conceived to oversee this. A series of provincial-level consultations will be conducted to prioritise responses and solicit views from a variety of stakeholders. Sectoral strategies will also be examined to better align with the SDGs. Workshops on data will be run to identify gaps and suggest ways to fill those gaps. Both the Planning Commission and the UNDP will develop elaborate reporting procedures to periodically monitor progress on the goals. No reporting mechanism has been decided as yet. In addition to the measures discussed here, the

country response will also have to take into account the elements featured in the main Sustainable Development Declaration. These elements make the global goals interdependent, indivisible, open, and inclusive.

## AAWAZ and the SDGs: Exploring Common Pathways

Links between AAWAZ's mandate and strategy and the SDGs are strong and numerous. AAWAZ, being a Voice and Accountability programme, cuts across a considerable number of sustainable development goals and targets. The SDGs also encompass the broad development agenda that corresponds to different dimensions of well-being and prosperity. It is instructive to see how the two are inter-linked and what the potential intersections could be. This will help build analysis for further alignment and collaboration. We undertake to do this by looking across the SDGs and their targets that are closely or partly related to AAWAZ's main outputs. Goals having no relevance to the programme's objectives are not considered.

### *SDG 1: No poverty*

Though poverty eradication is not an AAWAZ objective, it is an area of intervention intimately linked to good governance. The multidimensional nature of poverty calls for addressing non-financial and social aspects of well-being such as education, health, and empowerment as well. AAWAZ, seeking to promote a tolerant and inclusive democracy in Pakistan, is mindful of the importance of extending voice and accountability to service delivery, which has direct bearing on the presence or absence of poverty. Output No. 3 specifically focuses on demand for improved service delivery, particularly by women and other excluded groups. This is in line with Target 1.5 of SDG 1, which among other things, pushes for access to basic services for the poor and vulnerable. This gives AAWAZ an opportunity to contribute to the achievement of Goal 1 by sharpening the focus on Output 3 and mobilising responses and forging partnerships to bring about an effective demand for improved delivery.

### *SDG3: Good health and well-being*

SDG 3 as such is not directly related to any of the AAWAZ outputs. However, Target 3.8 is closely tied with AAWAZ Output 3. Target 3.8 seeks to 'achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.' This corresponds compellingly to AAWAZ's objective to create an effective demand for service delivery. The emphasis on universal health coverage and the provision of basic health facilities also came to the fore in the recently published AAWAZ District Human Development reports, which partly explored the issue of out-

of-pocket health costs. The reports showed that communities, particularly those that are vulnerable, demonstrated dissatisfaction with the current state of public health facilities and the services they offered. Thus, aligning output 3 with SDG 3.8 is of crucial importance.

#### *SDG 4: Quality education*

SDG 4 also feeds into AAWAZ Output 3. Education is one of the main social services the community has a strong need for. Its importance in terms of enhancing freedoms and capabilities is significant and has been realized by AAWAZ forums on multiple levels. AAWAZ district human development reports also reported on the problem of out of school children and analysed barriers to universal primary education. The findings of the reports are startling and point towards huge gaps characterising the education sector in both Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. By enhancing focus on Output 3, a concerted effort can be made to contribute meaningfully to the achievement of SDG 3. Considering the cross-cutting importance of education, it can serve to have a positive bearing on other components and outputs of the programme as well, such as peaceful resolution of conflicts, increased tolerance, awareness about violence against women, and women's enhanced participation in the public sphere.

#### *SDG 5: Gender equality*

SDG 5 – achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls – resonates strongly with AAWAZ Output 1 and also cuts across the rest of the outputs. There is a lot that AAWAZ can contribute to this goal in the two provinces through its normative framework, thematic focus, and programme strategy and activities. Target 5.1 affirms ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere. This has parallels with a key component of AAWAZ Output 1, which targets discrimination against women and challenges discriminatory norms and practices at the individual, household, community, and national levels. Similarly, Target 5.2 aims to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls – a theme that recurs throughout the project manuals and AAWAZ's Theory of Change. The programme is clear in its analysis that gender based violence or threat thereof is not only bad in itself but also a tool to disempower women, marginalise them, damage their self-esteem, and restrict their participation in public spaces.

Target 5.5 sets out to “ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.” Again, this reflects the main thrust

of the AAWAZ Output 1 and promises to enhance women’s participation in politics and in public spaces. Output 1 offers a number of promising change pathways, actions, and activities devoted to increasing women’s participation in the public sphere. Through its unique focus on apex forums, youth conventions and women’s assemblies at the union council, tehsil, district, and provincial levels, an enabling environment is created for women to exercise their voice and influence critical outcomes.

Targets 5.a and 5.c, encompassing a push for granting women equal rights to owning and controlling economic and natural resources, and undertaking requisite legislation for the promotion of gender equality respectively, are also in sync with various AAWAZ objectives and key targets. AAWAZ’s philosophy and programmatic focus underscore the importance of empowering women economically as well as creating spaces where debates on gender based legislation can be facilitated and where meaningful legislative initiatives can be supported and undertaken.

#### *SDG 10: Reduced inequalities*

SDG 10 endeavours to ‘reduce inequality within and among countries’. Target 10.2 is about empowering and promoting the social, economic, and political inclusion of all – a milestone closely linked to the fundamental outcome of the AAWAZ project. The project, as mentioned earlier on, strives to achieve a stable, inclusive, and tolerant democracy in Pakistan. Arguably, by aligning this outcome with Target 10.2, the programme can further add value to its vision and boost the activities being carried out to achieve its main objective. Target 10.3, moreover, aims to “ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices”. This target, essentially, deals with equality of opportunity and fairness in processes, and seeks to create a just and enabling environment for all by articulating responses in legal, policy, and administrative spaces. Equality of opportunity and outcome pertains to capabilities and has implications for a range of development indicators and stable scenarios. It would bolster AAWAZ’s progress if it directed its attention to this crosscutting theme which resonates with at least two of its outputs (Outputs 1 and 3), and which could potentially significantly contribute to their achievement through focused efforts.

#### *SDG 16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions*

SDG 16 focuses on peace, justice, and strong institutions, and promotes peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable, and inclusive

institutions at all levels. Its narrative and most of its targets intimately correspond to AAWAZ's overall objectives, change pathways, actions, outcomes, and impact. In fact, it is a peaceful and inclusive society with strong, just, and accountable institutions that will create an enabling framework for women's political participation, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and facilitation of a demand for improved service delivery – elements strongly featuring in AAWAZ outputs. Considering SDG 16 as an enabler, several of its targets appear to give support to a number of programme activities and outcomes. Targets 16.1 and 16.2 deal with the reduction of all forms of violence, and promotion of the rule of law respectively. Target 16.6 focuses on developing accountable and transparent institutions, while Target 16.7 is about ensuring inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels. This commitment is mirrored in “AAWAZ Utha,” a campaign by the AAWAZ consortium partners to strengthen the local government system in the country. The campaign is a step towards supporting the establishment of accountable and representative institutions at the local level by introducing legislative amendments and ensuring that decision-makers recognise local government as a primary tier of governance.

Target 16.9, importantly, emphasises providing legal identity to all, including the provision of birth registration. This is connected with AAWAZ Outputs 1 and 3, which are concerned with women's formal recognition in decision-making processes, and women and social excluded group being able to articulate a demand for improved service, respectively. Undeniably, without an established legal identity or Computerised National Identity Cards (CNICs) – in the context of AAWAZ – women and socially excluded groups cannot participate in decisions and processes that affect them directly or indirectly, and this has implications for their basic freedoms and capabilities. Target 16.b, by committing to promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies, serves to reduce barriers to the creation of an open, peaceful, and inclusive society. AAWAZ can use this particular target as a standard-bearer for further reinvigorating its work on challenging non-discriminatory laws, and facilitating progressive legislation.

### *SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals*

SDG 17, which seeks to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development, has more a sort of instrumental focus and undertakes to formulate a partnership strategy for the SDGs. It is aware of the importance of identifying the means and ways to evolve a coherent and practical response to achieving the global goals. Though the notion of partnership in this goal corresponds with situations and actors on a global level, it nonetheless has something useful to offer AAWAZ in terms of mobilising efforts and coordinating responses for catalysing alignment with the goals. Target 17.16, falling under the heading

of ‘systemic issues,’ urges to forge multi-stakeholder partnerships to ‘mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries’. Already relying on and strengthening partnerships, the programme can draw on the partnership principles and strategies featured in Target 17.6 to support the achievement of the SDGs as well as AAWAZ objectives.

Similarly, Target 17.17 promotes fostering partnerships across different sectors such as public, private, and civil society. Responding to this target and further cementing partnership ties, AAWAZ can take the lead, within the ambit of its work, in bringing partners from different sectors together and building momentum for driving change, delivering outcomes, and achieving objectives collaboratively. AAWAZ Output 4 elicits generating improved evidence. Though not directly dealing with evidence for community-based initiatives, Targets 17.18 and 17.19 of the SDGs address the issues of data, monitoring and accountability, and call for better measuring of progress towards sustainable development. Activities around Output 4, if accelerated and given impetus can therefore be credited with feeding into the said targets.

## Realising Engagement between AAWAZ and the SDGs: Key Issues and Elements

Having appraised the links between AAWAZ and the SDGs, it is useful now to examine key issues and elements that are central to implementing the SDGs and are also concerned with aligning the two agendas. These come from a number of sources such as the 2030 SD Agenda, documents supporting the Global Declaration, and literature surrounding the goals. Taking them into account is crucial for the viability and effectiveness of meaningful engagement between AAWAZ and the SDGs. It is important to remember here that concerns and areas featuring below do not provide an exhaustive list of the elements fundamental to the execution of the global goals in different settings around the world. Rather, these are context specific and approach the SDGs from the perspective of a development programme, involving civil society and non-governmental organisations as key implementation partners. Issues like regional and national implementation frameworks, resource generation, particularly ODA, trade, technology, and broad institutional mechanisms, though important, are a concern for big actors like Member States and multilateral and inter-governmental agencies, and are thus not discussed here. However, references have been made to actors and issues at the macro level wherever applicable.



### *Evidence-based policy development*

A Capacity Building Workshop and Expert Group Meeting was held in New York on 27-29 May, 2015 by the Division for Sustainable Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in order to discuss integrated approaches to sustainable development planning and implementation.<sup>26</sup> The consultative activity elicited opinions from delegates representing 40 countries. One of the key capacity needs highlighted by the participants was evidence-based policy-making. It was argued that policy development in certain contexts was devoid of a sound understanding of the problem area and did not rest upon an informed problem analysis. This led to responses lacking evidence and roots in ground reality, and as a result, failed to achieve critical outcomes. Building on Output 4, AAWAZ can stimulate a focus on evidence-based policy development. The programme can collaborate with the government and other key implementing partners on scaling up efforts to generate improved evidence for designing interventions and evolving policy proposals. This will encourage the policy community to look for solutions that are evidence-based and provide a sufficient analysis of the problem.

### *Building linkages with local level planning and decision-making*

One thing distinct about the debates around the SDGs is that calls have been made to localise the agenda. The MDGs were found to be overly concerned with macro concerns and indicators at the national level and as a result were considerably out of sync with development processes at the local level. The Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda, however, seeks to embed the SDGs in local planning and practices. It recognises the critical role local governments can play in linking key stakeholders, fostering democratic accountability, and achieving development results. The United Nations Development Group (UNDG) in 2014 convened a series of dialogues on finding ways to deliver the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda, exploring opportunities at national and local levels.<sup>27</sup> The dialogues, among other things, focused on issues of localising the agenda, capacities and institutions, culture, and participatory monitoring and accountability. In localising the agenda, in addition to suggesting measures to national governments, the dialogues also exhorted civil society to take part in building the capacities of civil society organisations (CSOs) so that they are able to realise their true potential as catalysts of change at the grassroots.

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<sup>26</sup> "Report of the Capacity Building Workshop and Expert Group Meeting on Integrated Approaches to Sustainable Development Planning and Commission," *UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs* (July, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> "Delivering the Post-2015 Development Agenda: Opportunities at the National and Local Levels," *United Nations Development Group* (2014).



Similarly, delegates at the Expert Group Meeting also suggested building linkages with planning and practices at the local level. In a devolved context, local governments are considered torchbearers of service delivery and therefore engaging them in processes surrounding improving key development indicators over different territories and large administrative units will entail tangible and sustainable benefits. AAWAZ should identify opportunities for localising the agenda and proactively participate in debates and initiatives around facilitating local level planning and decision-making. This would be in line with its mandate and main outcomes.

Planning activities and projects at the local level could potentially be issue-specific. Findings from the aforementioned dialogue on localising the agenda demonstrate that women's political and social leadership and full participation are equally important for local development and the implementation of the post-2015 agenda. The push for women's participation in planning, policy, and implementation features prominently not only in the SDGs but also in the means of implementation. AAWAZ forums at the local level, therefore, can capitalise on this assertion and demand women's increased inclusion in furtherance of the local development agenda.

### *Multi-stakeholder engagement*

The current global agenda appears to feel strongly about enhanced partnerships for effective implementation. It proposes fostering multi-stakeholder engagement and bringing a variety of actors together to deepen inter-linkages and integrate a wide range of means of implementation. The declaration supports strengthening ties between different development partners and creating new linkages to further stimulate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Multi-stakeholder engagement also means particularly reaching out to women and girls, and vulnerable and marginalised groups such as ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities as well as the poor, indigenous communities and persons with disabilities. Anticipating that the Government of Pakistan and the lead partner UNDP will consider this push for multi-stakeholder strategy in the National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS), AAWAZ should prepare to innovatively deal with it and chalk out a plan to meaningfully and proactively engage with an array of stakeholders positioned to affect the programme's objectives one way or another. Completing stakeholder mapping or conducting a stakeholder analysis could be an effective means to realise this.

### *Partnerships with civil society*

Forging partnerships with civil society is a key element of the global development agenda to foster inclusion, improve progress, and enhance accountability. This was particularly echoed in consultations preceding the announcement of the SDGs. Civil society, owing to its important role in advocacy and mediation, is now considered crucial to the functioning and sustainability of development plans, policies, and projects. The Government of Pakistan, before the development of national indicators and a country-specific strategy, will be holding consultations with civil society representatives in the country. AAWAZ, together with its civil society partners, must proactively participate in these consultative activities to influence the agenda, inform debates, and provide inputs for better accountability and monitoring mechanisms.

### *Forging partnerships with media to raise awareness*

Media institutions are important tools to disseminate information, influence behaviour, spread messages, and raise awareness. With the meteoric rise of social media over the past many years, public spaces have become sites of contestation, and interests around social issues are increasingly articulated and negotiated in the cyber domain. The programme should take full cognizance of the importance of engaging with a range of media to challenge assumptions and raise awareness about issues such as women's political participation, ending gender based violence and social inclusion.

### *Bridging data gaps*

The UNDG sponsored Dialogue on localising the agenda suggested that local-level data are not readily available, which affects the quality and impact of local planning and development.<sup>28</sup> To overcome this, open data are required to accurately assess the needs of the communities and to inform interventions by the government. It would also allow people to evaluate public sector responses to service demand and hold concerned officials to account. AAWAZ, through its wider outreach, facilitated by a unique reliance on apex forums at different levels, can engage with a range of government line departments and ministries to collaborate towards coherently addressing data gaps and generating evidence for policy development. This will be in line with the mandate of Output 4, which is concerned with securing improved evidence.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

### *Fostering participation*

Consultations held with individuals and communities by the United Nations Development Group in more than 100 countries revealed how much people valued participation. They were eager to be partners in an agenda that directly affected their lives. These consultations, comprising different dialogues, as mentioned earlier, stressed the importance of fostering participation. The Dialogue on culture, in particular, emphasised that community participation and ownership are immensely important for development programmes, and especially those that pertain to environmental protection, gender equality, and women's empowerment. Similarly, the Dialogue on participatory monitoring and accountability stressed the importance of treating local actors as co-creators in the development process and not as outsiders or passive recipients of services. The Dialogue on capacities and institutions, on the other hand, highlighted the need to enable people mired in grinding poverty to better exercise their voice in decision-making. The SDGs, in order to deliver in a country like Pakistan fraught with inequalities, have to ensure the participation of a range of groups such as women, children, and socially excluded groups. Only that will ensure that a strategy developed to empower people and ensure their well-being is inclusive.

### *Participatory monitoring and accountability*

Consultations with stakeholders leading up to the announcement of the Sustainable Development Agenda highlighted the importance of participatory monitoring and accountability. It was maintained that the MDGs lacked focus on participatory and local accountability and instead remained more concerned with processes at the national level and national aggregates. This created fissures between activities and initiatives at different tiers and served to largely overlook progress at subnational level. Discussions around the post-2015 development agenda demanded increasing the role of CSOs and grassroots organisations in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of development processes and interventions. It was argued that CSOs are strategically placed to strengthen the voice and influence of women in monitoring and accountability mechanisms. Member states would do well to engage with CSOs from an early stage to establish mechanisms for accountability, dialogue, and conducting assessments. AAWAZ should also strive to further incorporate participatory accountability and monitoring into its strategy.

### *Moving from consultation to accountability*

Debates preceding the announcement of a framework for the SDGs mirrored the sentiments of disenfranchised communities that showed dissatisfaction with the way development initiatives generally unfolded. It was felt that the programmes centering on enhancing accountability, at times, did not go further than consulting people. Local groups and individuals were approached, but no concrete move was made to increase accountability for the outcomes that government officials or other concerned actors were responsible for. This shook people's belief in development and reduced their appetite for further engagement. AAWAZ, being a Voice and Accountability programme, should take into account the pitfalls of such an approach to accountability and work towards improving the effectiveness of interventions focusing on voice and accountability by urging the government and other important partners to add substance to governance-related policy, and introduce results-based management for enhanced accountability outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

Voice and Accountability programmes, committed to promoting basic freedoms and enhancing key capabilities, have gained prominence on the global development scene, particularly in a post-Cold War context, one characterised by debates about democracy, democratic governance, and the provision of basic rights. These programmes, in addition to achieving key development objectives, also serve as a critical link between the new poverty agenda, good governance mantra, and debates about aid effectiveness. As examined above, V&A as a domain is also closely tied to the Human Rights-based approach to development, and engages in rights promotion through an emphasis on participation and empowerment. Learning from lessons learned over the years, practitioners are now advancing the new accountability agenda, which seeks to realise social justice and inclusion. AAWAZ, a voice and accountability project, builds on endeavours in the past and mirrors the basic elements of the CAR framework to achieve stable, inclusive, and tolerant democracy in Pakistan. It is fundamentally important for the programme to forge strategic partnerships and take stock of efforts by other development actors to create synergy. Change processes are best stimulated when those seeking change come together and take concerted and coordinated actions. This calls for starting an engagement with the recently introduced Sustainable Development Goals. SDGs are crosscutting and indivisible and, among other goals, seek to achieve more peaceful and inclusive societies by 2030. Aligning AAWAZ's strategy with the goals would provide the programme with more vigour. An analysis of the potential common pathways between the two suggested, to a vast extent, common assumptions and

deep conceptual linkages. From their focus on improved service delivery for poverty eradication and their focus on education, health, gender equality, and women participation, to reducing inequalities, establishing strong and just institutions, and developing partnerships for implementation as well as empowerment, the SDGs appeared to be resonating strongly with all of AAWAZ's outputs. It is only a matter of a coherent operational plan to align the two in the wake of the announcement of a National Sustainable Development Strategy by the Government of Pakistan. But realising such an alignment will not be an easy task. It will hinge upon a variety of factors crucial to the successful execution of this collaborative effort. As discussed above, evidence-based policy development, linkages with local level planning, multi-stakeholder engagement, partnerships with civil society, addressing data gaps, and participatory monitoring and accountability are the key issues that should be considered while developing operational plans.



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