Background

Nearly 25 years ago the United Nations General Assembly adopted the most comprehensive human rights treaty and legal instrument for the promotion and protection of children’s rights: the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). With this, the world made a commitment to all children: That we would do everything in our power to protect and promote their rights – to survive and thrive, to learn and grow, to make their voices heard and to reach their full potential without discrimination. It should therefore be unacceptable that, while fewer children now die before their fifth birthdays, about 18,000 children still died every day in 2012, mostly of preventable causes.\(^1\) Further, nearly 230 million children under five have never been registered\(^2\) and about 31 million girls of primary school age were still out of school in 2011. Even where progress is being made, the gains are not evenly distributed with, for example, the world’s poorest children being three times less likely than the richest ones to have a skilled attendant at their birth.\(^3\)

This year’s 25\(^{th}\) anniversary of the CRC is an opportunity to celebrate what has been achieved for children over the past 25 years. It is also a significant moment to focus on the urgent changes needed to bridge the gaps that are now more evident than ever, and to highlight innovative approaches and new ways of working that can transform the lives and realize the rights of all children, everywhere. In addition, the Post-2015 Framework provides the opportunity - now and in the coming years - to address the implementation gap between universal children’s rights and hitherto inequitable results, including through addressing issues of governance, policy formulation, and service provision.

Weaknesses in achieving effective progress can be addressed by bringing innovations in citizen participation, social mobilization and communication to bear on advocacy for and monitoring of the realization of children’s rights. Social (or citizen-led) accountability initiatives that engage ordinary citizens, including children themselves, and/or civil society organisations, that are demand-driven and operate from the bottom-up,\(^4\) are of particular relevance in this respect. They can help to remove barriers to service access and quality, and thus serve to extend the opportunities for rights-fulfilling services to groups of children and families who may otherwise have been excluded.\(^5\) Social accountability initiatives aim to improve the quality of governance (especially by exposing corruption), to increase the effectiveness of development (particularly by enhancing transparency in the delivery of public services), and to empower poor people with information on their rights and an increase in their voice in the management of public affairs.\(^6\) Social accountability initiatives benefiting and/or involving children involve a range of instruments, from citizen report and community score cards, to citizen budget monitoring and expenditure tracking, and pressure

from the media, for example. While more work needs to be done to build the evidence that benefits gained through social accountability initiatives translate into better or more equitable outcomes for children (such as lower under-five child mortality and less abuse), efficiency gains from social accountability, in extending better services to marginalised populations, have been shown to increase opportunities for children, and thus advance equity.

**Workshop Objective and Rationale**

In this context, UNICEF will convene a two-day workshop with social accountability researchers, practitioners and child rights experts to examine the potential of innovative social accountability initiatives to close implementation gaps affecting children and to achieve more equitable, sustainable progress towards fulfilling their rights.

Looking for pragmatic and strategic ways to influence the Post-2015 Agenda, the meeting will focus on identifying innovative social accountability initiatives around which the child rights community can rally to ensure appropriate inclusion of children’s rights in the Post-2015 process, and to mobilize public opinion and policy makers to do more for children; it will also provide substantive inputs on the role of innovation in the realization of children’s rights, particularly for increased people’s participation and accountability of national duty-bearers in CRC implementation.

The specific objectives of the workshop are to:

1) **Share experiences** in supporting the realisation of children’s rights through social accountability initiatives, and learn about adaptations practitioners have made to ensure that these efforts achieve the best results for children, are sustainable and scalable.

2) **Identify the factors that influence outcomes** (i.e., enabling factors/bottlenecks) of social accountability initiatives benefiting and/or involving children, such as: nature of the state, interaction between state and other social actors (media, civil society, private sector), the role of innovation and information technologies; the capacity of civil society and of children themselves, etc.

3) **Improve understanding of concrete action points to advocate for the inclusion of social accountability and to further mobilize for children’s rights in the Post-2015 Development Framework.**

4) **Discuss and determine how best to generate evidence of the benefits and pitfalls of social accountability initiatives for children’s rights.**

It is hoped that through the above, workshop participants will together take initial steps towards the development of a global community of practice and knowledge on child rights and social accountability.

**Time and Venue**

Organized by UNICEF, the workshop will be held at the main office of the UK National Committee for UNICEF in London, United Kingdom, from 3 to 4 March 2014.