Participatory Monitoring and Accountability: A Means of Implementation for the Post-2015 Agenda

The *Field Hearings* Participatory Monitoring for Accountability Platform: Utilizing Initiative for Equality's "Equity & Sustainability Field Hearings" network to help achieve more equitable and sustainable development

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Table of Contents

Section I. Introduction and Overview

In order to meet the urgent and interconnected challenges of poverty and inequality, food security, climate change, resource depletion, migration and conflict, it is essential to bring *everyone* to the table in the development, implementation and monitoring of solutions. Sustainable development solutions planned and implemented by relatively small groups of experts, special interests and advocates, however well-intentioned, will never be sufficient to build the global consensus and commitment needed to successfully meet humanity's greatest challenges.

It is especially necessary to incorporate the perspectives and participation of poor, socially excluded or otherwise marginalized communities – those with the most to lose but the least power to influence development programs and policies. These communities have an intimate understanding of their own circumstances and urgent need for sustainable development. Yet existing mechanisms for setting priorities, making decisions and implementing programs are often inaccessible to people without the know-how, resources or connections to participate effectively. The result is that such communities are often sidelined in decision-making, implementation and monitoring processes. This often leads to poor outcomes and lack of public sector accountability to the very communities intended to be served by development programs and policies.

To succeed, the Post-2015 Agenda will require broad participation in setting priorities, and "people-led monitoring" in order to ensure full participation, empowerment and accountability during implementation. *Initiative for Equality* (IfE) is building a global platform – the *Equity & Sustainability Field Hearings* Network– to bring marginalized communities into engagement with national and global sustainable development decision-making and implementation processes. Our goal is to empower the world's least connected communities to clearly articulate their preferred solutions and work effectively towards their implementation. Through our carefully constructed network of partnerships, we are creating opportunities to bring these communities to the table: joining the global dialogue on sustainable development, monitoring progress from their own perspectives, and finding ways to actively address their own communities' problems.

Our unique structure links these local communities and constituencies with decision-makers and well-connected stakeholders through a series of partnerships. IfE first reaches out to local civil society and academic partners. These local partners are key to the project, serving as go-betweens to bring in community participation. They are able to communicate effectively with community members because they understand the local language, culture and circumstances. At the same time, they are also able to communicate with our network of national and regional coordinators – who in turn communicate with each other, with the global coordinator and with decision-makers. All the coordinators form a global Steering Committee for the network, ensuring that decision-making and leadership for the project reflect on-the-ground knowledge

and experience. Finally, a number of high-level partners sit on a global Advisory Committee to bring in various international and institutional perspectives.

To date, the Field Hearings network has successfully brought the voices of these communities and civil society partners into the UN's Rio+20 and Sustainable Development Goals discussions. Through a series of oral presentations and written statements, we have effectively advocated for a UN focus on overcoming social, economic and political inequalities, and for a stand-alone goal and specific targets on reducing inequalities in the new Sustainable Development Goals.

But this global network has the power to do much more. With the help of local partners, the network is being expanded to include more countries, communities, decision-making processes and follow-up monitoring. We are linking all partners using the means of communications that works best for them (facebook, email, skype, mobile phone, or word of mouth) so that they can share information, give feedback, propose solutions and develop joint strategies for influencing outcomes, both nationally and globally. Our focus is on empowering the least connected and influential communities. We are creating opportunities to bring these communities to the table, so they can join the global dialogue on the urgent problems facing humanity. In short, we are embodying a new commitment to equity – full participation by all, throughout the entire sustainable development process.

This report is structured around concepts, approaches and outcomes, as follows:
- Section II explains and critiques the methodology of the Field Hearings network.
- Section IIIdescribes how the Field Hearings network was built, and explains its governance structure.
- Section IV summarizes what we have learned from community members to date, and refers readers to a more detailed results section in the Annex.
- Section Vassesses which aspects of the project have worked well andwhich require adjustments, and explains how the project is unique.
- Section VI recommends an expanded Field Hearings PMA Platform that could serve as a global monitoring network for a variety of purposes, and discusses the potential role of technology in monitoring and feedback.
- Section VII explains how we can monitor and evaluate our own activities and impacts, utilizing the sameprinciples of equitable participation.

In addition, most sections contain a critical discussion of the issues and principles involved, thus setting our actions in the context of current understandings of participatory assessments and theories of change.

Section II. Methodology of the Field Hearings Network

Our global network of over 250 Equity & Sustainability Field Hearings partners, now organized inover 75 countries, works through local civil society to engage with community members in cash-poor, socially excluded or marginalized communities. We monitor what is happening on the ground in these communities, learn what community members think about the causes of their problems and potential solutions, and facilitate their engagement in discussions, decision-making, local initiatives, implementation and monitoring of equitable and sustainable development solutions. In the remainder of this section, we describe why and how we developed the methodology used by our network, and address common critiques of the participatory monitoring approach.

A. Objectives

Our primary objective in developing the Field Hearings methodology was to find ways to bring poor, socially excluded or otherwisemarginalized communities and individuals into the global dialogue on sustainable development. This meant that we needed to find ways to communicate effectively across great socio-economic divides. This was a tremendously difficult task because it required us to contend directly with the consequences and mechanisms of poverty and social exclusion which form the barriers to communication and participation. These include differences in world view and perspectives, language, education and types of knowledge, literacy, access to communications technology (mobile and internet), discrimination, mistrust, and other barriers to free and open communication and participation.

We decided to attempt to bridge these communication gaps by forming a network of partners at different geographic and institutional levels, reaching all the way from the community members themselves to the upper echelons of global organizations and institutions. In this way, each partner would be able to communicate with neighboring partners – thus forming a series of bridges across the barriers mentioned above.Partners included committed individuals, small informal civil society groups, local academic research groups (often working together with civil society groups), local community institutions such as hospitals, in-country government officials, national-level NGOs, and international NGOs. The central requirement for all partners was a willingness and commitment to communicate with – and listen to – others in the network. While we could have expanded the network to include more types of communities, we wanted to retain our focus on bringing poor, socially excluded andmarginalized communities and individuals into the global dialogue. Therefore, we decided to work with partners who were committed to this objective.

A word about our use of the term "communities": we are not referring to all the inhabitants of a village or city. Instead, we mean groups of people with something important in common, which could be socio-economic status, sector of the economy, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, abilities, age, legal and migration status, or any other human attribute central to

identity within society. These groups of people often live together in the same neighborhood, village or city, but not always.

B. Critiques of Participatory Monitoring Methods and the Role of NGOs
In recent decades, participatory methods have become popular in poverty analysis and assessments initiated by development NGOs, governments and multinational agencies, and have occupied the mainstream of development practice to some degree. While this family of loosely defined approaches has enabled local people to share, enhance and analyze their knowledge, and to plan and act, they have only partially succeeded in giving voice to those in poverty. Any meaningful participatory engagement requires as a success factor a *complete reversal in attitude by the researcher*, moving away from the 'cult of expertise' that reproduces social inequalities. The emphasis in participatory arrangements is on how to create communicative arenas open to all stakeholders, and particularly to powerless lay-members of local communities, in order to arrive at collective and mutual understanding (Meppem and Gill 1998). Collaborative actions are generated through engagement with all aspects of the research, from problem structuring to reporting (Balázset al. 2005). Therefore, involvement of local stakeholders in deciding how success will be measured is also a prerequisite for success.

Participatory monitoring and evaluation also carries normative expectations. Most frequently practitioners describe participatory monitoring as empowering, cost-effective, more accurate, relevant and holistic. However, less is known about how these methods actually succeed in giving voice to those in poverty, and what the dangers or challenges may be.

Participatory monitoring draws on a wide variety of methods for generating and using information. According to Estrella andGaventa (1998) the generalizable functions of such practices include:
- Participation: inclusive processes for those most directly affected and powerless and/or voiceless in implementation
- Negotiation: commitment to working through different views with the potential for conflict and disagreement about what the evaluation should focus on, how it should be conducted and used, and what actions should result
- Learning: among all participants which when shared, leads to corrective action and program improvement
- Flexibility: because of the changing circumstances, people and skills available for the process

Criticisms of participatory arrangements most often point to the lack of principled theory, which implies that practitioners do what they believe will work in various contexts. Structural inequalities and existing institutional and power relations are often blamed, because local realities cannot be readily reconciled with the ideal of broad and equal participation(Bodorkós and Pataki 2009). According to Pretty (1995), in such arrangements participation must be considered a right – not a tool to achieve research goals. Participation builds on self-mobilization, and results in participatory learning processes where groups take control over local decisions, determining how resources are used or how they can have a stake in

maintaining practices.

A central criticism of participatory arrangements relates to the role of research itself, and to the defined role of researcher.At some point it is they who must inevitably implement the value-laden process of problem structuration and synthesis of the research. According to Bodorkós and Pataki (2009), hindrances in creating communicative spaces equally open to all can be traced back to the difficulties of changing historically-rooted, paternalistic relationships between local people and local establishments.It may also stem from a lack of sense of self-efficacy and self-confidence of marginalized people in expressing their wants(Bodorkós and Pataki 2009).

The role of NGOs has also been the subject of criticism. By the 2000s, many NGOs were starting to suffer from a crisis of legitimacy sparked by accusations that they were not pursuing the interests of their intended beneficiaries, but were instead pursuing their own agendas (Bello 2002; Mohan 2002). This led to calls for greater accountability, and many NGOs increasingly incorporated participation and empowerment into their values (Kuhl 2009). The process of legitimacy with beneficiaries emphasizes the need for "downward accountability," which empowers beneficiaries to monitorthe NGOs with which they work.

It is widely accepted by development scholars that NGOs bear a moral duty to meet the needs of their beneficiaries (Kilby 2006; Andrews 2014). Institutionalizing participation can enrich the development process with input from otherwise marginalized groups or individuals, and provide NGOs with insight into local situations (Corus and Ozanne 2012). However, in practice this approach is complex. Although NGOs may be able to take into account the interests of multiple stakeholders, these interests may be in conflict. If so, this fact couldhighlightpower imbalancesthat have the potential to constrain participatory monitoring and accountability.

Proponents of the "resource dependence" theory suggest that the operations of an organization which depends on external resources will be controlled by attempting to meet objectives of the external funder (Brown 2008). This leads to "upward accountability" and could constrain the ability of the NGOs to pursue their internal values or to deliver on the expectations of the beneficiaries (Hearn 2007; Bebbington 2005).

Some scholars have shown that the influence of donors could be negotiated by the NGOs (Ebrahim 2003), and even mitigated by beneficiaries (Ganz 2000; Alvarez 2009). The role of participatory monitoring and accountability is particularly important in this regard. Beneficiaries can withhold information or refuse to cooperate with NGOs who are not accountable to them. Furthermore, an NGO's ability to gain legitimacy from beneficiaries plays an important role in building its reputation and attracting funding (Brown 2008; Hannan 2012).In addition to economic dependence, the internal values of NGOs also have the potential to constrain participation where they do not prioritize downward accountability. Conversely, NGOs which are closer to the beneficiaries, smaller and more readily influenced by horizontal pressure, appear to be more flexible and ready to adopt participatory monitoring and accountability (Andrews 2014).

C. Priorities for Monitoring

Our objective in developing priorities for monitoring was to enable local partners and community members to focus on the issues they felt were most important. This is a central feature of participatory monitoring and participatory action research. It makes sense because the local partners and community members are the ones who are most familiar with on-the-ground circumstances, problems and politics. At the same time, the dialogues and processes for engagement related to sustainable development have their own logic and priority issues. In order to effectively speak to national and global decision-making processes, it is necessary to address priority issues at all levels. For these reasons, we agreed on a semi-standardized set of questions and prompts that covered a wide range of topics – wide enough to allow community members to identify and focus on their concerns, yet also comprehensive enough to address issues of global priority in the ongoing sustainable development dialogue.

Another major question for the project was whether to approach the Field Hearings as "research" or as "community organizing." There are, of course, benefits and drawbacks to each choice. As research, our findings might give more comparable data concerningwhat community members in very poor, socially excluded or otherwise marginalized communities around the world are experiencing and thinking. This could result in enhanced acceptance, credibility and influence of the resultswithin decision-making processes. On the other hand, engaging in research imposes strict limitations on the numbers and types of partners, communities and questions that can be incorporated into the process, as issues of statistically sound sampling and consistent research methodologies become paramount.

Moreover, conducting research with human subjects requires a lengthy and difficult permissions process. After several in-depth discussions within the Steering Committee and the Advisory Committee, we decided to conduct the Field Hearings within the framework of community organizing and global networking, as our primary intention was to empower local partners and community members to participate effectively in national and global sustainable development decision-making, implementation and monitoring processes. At the same time, we agreed to follow best research practices designed to protect the privacy and security of community members who participate and to ensure reliability of our findings.

In order to stimulate discussion between local partners and community members, we developed a series of prompts that we called, for the sake of simplicity, a "Questionnaire." This was not really a questionnaire because it was not used to collect data. Rather, it was used to stimulate discussion, and to ensure that a wide variety of topics were covered so that community members could focus on the items of greatest interest to themselves. The "Questionnaire" was designed in two phases, both with several cycles of feedback and revision. In Phase One of the Field Hearings, the Questionnaire was drafted and revised by members of the global Steering Committee until everyone felt satisfied that it was easy to use and understand, and would bring out a wide variety of ideas of relevance to community members

and to the sustainable development dialogue. Once the Questionnaire was agreed to, it was used for the duration of the Phase One Field Hearings without further revision (other than that by local partners for understandability).

Before the Phase Two Field Hearings, we had a year to assess lessons learned and revise our approach to the Questionnaire. Steering Committee members – themselves experienced Field Hearings partners – considered what they had learned through the process of conducting the Phase One Field Hearings. They then revised the Questionnaire based on an attempt to balance the following (sometimes competing) considerations and objectives:

- questions understood by community members
- clarity and comparability of answers
- ability of community members to answer from within their own worldview and framework of understanding
- relevance to the community members
- relevance to the sustainable development decision-making, implementation and monitoring processes
- understanding how community members really experience and think about their problems and potential solutions
- not wishing to put community members in a dangerous position, where answering a question publicly could result in social censure, arrest, or worse

Balancing the above considerations led to a revised Questionnaire consisting mainly of prompts and open-ended questions, but with two sections that required rating a list of issues. The full Questionnaire can be seen here:
https://www.initiativeforequality.org/images/FieldHearingsQuestionnaireMarch2013.pdf

The Questionnaire includes prompts and questions on the following matters:

Assess Trends: are things getting better, worse, or staying the same in a number of important dimensions of life, including health, education, economy, political, conflict, families, circumstances for women, and happiness?

Speculate About Causes:to what do you attribute these trends?

Changes Needed for Sustainable Societies:what is needed in order to develop a good life for your family and community, that can last into the future?

Perceptions of Privilege and Deprivation:how are privilege and deprivation experienced in your community? in which group do you consider yourself?

Articulate Wishes for the Future:what do you want for the future of your family and community?

The development of the basic Questionnaire in English was only the first step, however. Each partner was encouraged to translate the Questionnaire into the local language and to make modifications as needed in order to ensure the questionswould be understood by local community members. While this undoubtedly introduced elements of variability into the methodology, making it difficult to obtain statistically significant comparisons between communities, it also made possible a meaningful and well-accepted implementation of the Field Hearings process around the world. For a detailed discussion of how the Field Hearings were implemented, see Section IV below.

D. Problem-solving and Accountability
The main problem with developing the Questionnaire was achieving a balance between the various considerations discussed in parts A, B and C above. In the end, the resolution was to make the Questionnaire a little longer than we had initially intended, so that all the objectives could be met.

Another matteraboutwhich we received feedback from local partners during the Phase One Field Hearingswasthat the concept of "sustainability" was not understood by community members. In the Phase Two Questionnaire, we added the following note for partners at the beginning of questions related to sustainability, and talked with local partners about explaining meanings and answering questions from community members:

> *Note: "Sustainable Societies" are societies that meet people's needs without harming the communities and environment over the long term. "Sustainable Development" means improving the circumstances and capabilities of poor nations without harming the people, communities and environment over the long term.*

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***In short, the methodology of the Field Hearings was developed through the collective experience of all the partners involved in the Phase One Field Hearings. However, the success or failure of the project hinged not only on the underlying methodology but also on the implementation of the project, as discussed in Section III below.***

## Section III. Building and Implementing the Field Hearings Network

**A. Recruitment of Partners**

We began recruiting partners into the Field Hearings network in late 2011. Partners were solicited using global and regional email lists and listserves that members of network coordinator *Initiative for Equality* had access to, including Climate-L, Sustainable Development-L, Africa SD-L, WASH, and other large lists. During Phase One of the project (2012), we put together an initial set of 18 partner groups (11 civil society, 6 academic, and 1 governmental) who were willing and able to participate at their own expense. These partners conducted Field Hearings in a total of 34 communities with whom they had established relationships. The Field Hearings were held primarily in Africa (Malawi, Mauritius, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda) and Asia (Bangladesh, China, India, Kyrgyzstan, Philippines), but with several in Europe (Hungary, Scotland).The full list of Phase One countries, communities and partners can be seen in our Preliminary Report, which can be downloaded here:
https://www.initiativeforequality.org/images/wtbh_link_page.pdf

After the Phase One Field Hearings had been conducted, the partners collectively decided to revise the process, expand the network and conduct Phase Two Field Hearings. New and continuing partners were recruited beginning in early 2013 using the same lists and listserves plus others. A snowball effect took over in mid-2013, when partners who had already signed on were asked to recruit more partners from their own country and neighboring countries. As a result, we went from 18 partners to over 250 partners and from 12 countries to over 75 countries during a period of 8 months. Again the partners represented a mixture of types, including about 2/3 civil society groups, 1/3 academic researchers, with a very small number of businesses (consultants) and government agencies. Some 70 new Field Hearings have already been conducted during Phase Two by partners who were able to participate at their own expense, thus totaling over 100 Field Hearings to date. A google doc on which numbers of partners and countries are tallied can be seen at:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0At7GX8ljP3tbdFEyOFJObUZYaHpVaINKeG51Y W9OX1E&usp=sharing

In addition to expanding, the network was restructured during Phase Two to make communications and coordination possible over such a large group of partners and communities. From among our local partners, we appointed Regional Coordinators for East and SE Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East and North Africa, Western Africa, Central Africa, Eastern Africa, Southern Africa and Latin America. These Regional Coordinators then appointed Country Coordinators for countries with many local partners. In addition, a number of the countries have set up Country Coordinating Committees consisting of local partners who meet and discuss how to best enable engagement of local communities into national-level political decision-making processes. See a list of these coordinators and committees (appointments from June 2013 – June 2014) here:
https://www.initiativeforequality.org/images/FieldHearingsGovernanceCoordination1.pdf

To further ensure a functional network on this larger scale, we asked each partner to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with *Initiative for Equality*, specifying clearly the roles and responsibilities of each party, including Field Hearings, reporting and reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses. The terms of the MOA are only triggered once the partner is able to go ahead with their Field Hearing, either as a volunteer or with funding that has been received. Reimbursements are made after completed and verified reports are turned in along with valid documentation of expenses.

**B. Governance and funding**

**Governance**
One of the keys to the success of the Field Hearings network is our dispersed and participatory governance model. Rather than following the centralized decision-making and implementation model of some NGOs, decisions are made and implemented at many levels, and always by those with hands-on involvement in the project and a stake in the outcome. The principles governing this approach can be summarized as follows:

* At the most basic level, local community members themselves decide whether, when and how to participate in the Field Hearings, and set the priorities for discussion.

* Local partners have great decision-making authority in determining which communities to work with, how to approach these communities and how to conduct their Field Hearings. This is discussed in detail in Subsection C below.

* At the national level, committees of partners decide whether and how to work with local communities towards meaningful engagement in decision-making processes.

* At the regional level, regional coordinators and their country coordinatorsdecide together how to approach recruitment of new partners, coordination of current partners and joint fundraising.

At the global level, the project is governed with input from four directions, as listed below:

(1) First and foremost, a global Field Hearings Steering Committeeconsisting of all the Regional Coordinators and several experienced local partners makes key decisions about the structural framework and operating principles of the project. The Steering Committee also resolves any disputes that cannot be worked out between the parties involved.

(2) A Global Coordinator – Deborah S. Rogers of *Initiative for Equality* – managesthe daily implementation of the project under this guidance, and works with the Regional and Country Coordinators to make sure things are going smoothly and to trouble-shoot as needed.

(3) A global Advisory Committeeconsisting of representatives of large global organizations and regional networks watches over the project and gives input twice a year.
(4) Last but not least, the *Initiative for Equality* Board of Directors authorizes the project and makes decisions about financial and legal accountability, fundraising, and standards of reliability for any publications or public statements.

See the list of 2013 – 2014 appointees here:
https://www.initiativeforequality.org/images/FieldHearingsGovernanceCoordination1.pdf

**Funding**
The Field Hearings project began as a volunteer effort to ensure input by communities and local civil society groups into the Rio+20 and Sustainable Development Goals discussions and decision-making processes. In 2012-2013 the contribution of in-kind donations of time and out-of-pocket expenses for the project totaled $310,000.  As the project grew in size and influence, the need for funding to cover expenses of coordination and local implementation became apparent. The actual global budget for the project going forward will depend on both the number of countries and partners, and on the variety of monitoring and accountability tasks taken on by the network. Funders and partners at all levels are being sought to ensure that the network can continue to bring the voices of marginalized communities into the sustainable development decision-making and implementation process.

**C. Implementing the Field Hearings**

**Objectives:** It was essential to implement the project and conduct the Field Hearings in a way that was attractive and accessible to local partners. These local civil society groups, researchers and others are the mainstay of the project. Without their ability to bridge the communications gap, it would not be possible to reach the communities effectively. It was also necessary to arrange and conduct the Field Hearings in a way that was attractive and accessible to local community members themselves. Without their participation and understanding, the exercise would be pointless.

As mentioned earlier, we wanted to enable local partners and community members to focus on the issues they felt were most important. This was not only a matter of how questions and prompts were selected, but also of how the process was implemented.Within socially excluded or marginalized communities, just as in other settings, there are internal power dynamics that make it more difficult for some community members to speak out or have influence. We wanted to ensure that all these voices were heard.

Another objective of the project was to empower local partners and community members to engage effectively and have an impact on decision-making, implementation and accountability in global and national decision-making processes concerning sustainable development. For this to happen, the information and insights generated through the participatory monitoring process needed to be presented clearly, effectively and on a timely basis.

Last but not least, we needed to minimize expenses for all concerned. The sheer magnitude of the project means that a savings of just $100 per community translates into a savings of $50,000 or more globally. It could also make the difference between voluntary participation by a local partner versus the need to wait for expenses to be reimbursed. Of course, it remains necessary to achieve a balance between minimizing expenses and meeting our overarching objectives.

**Implementation:** As described above, local partners were viewed as integral decision-makers in the project. Partners selected the communities to engage with, understanding that community members would provide perspectives of marginalized groups. They were also asked to go into communities with whom they already had an established relationship, either directly or through a collaborator. Where there were sufficient numbers of partners within one country, Country or Regional Coordinators reviewed lists of proposed communities to ensure that efforts would not be duplicated and that good coverage of the country was obtained.Where necessary, they asked partners to suggest modified lists of communities.

In order to make arrangements for the Field Hearings, key community members already known to the partner groups were contacted in person or by mobile phone, and asked to help arrange the Field Hearings. These were generally people in official or informal positions of influence, but not always. These helpful community members had a large influence on the location and manner in which the Field Hearings were conducted. This includedissues such as whether the Field Hearing would be conducted as a public meeting, focus group or personal interviews; how to invite community members; and whether it would be necessary to provide refreshments. Sometimes a nominal honorary fee was paid to these persons to thank them for their help.

Partners were given the task of ensuring that the questions and prompts provided on the Questionnaire were both linguistically and culturally appropriate for their own communities. This included translating Questionnaires into local languages, as well as making any other necessary modifications to ensure that questions were appropriate to the target community's own lives and circumstances. In a few cases, this meant leaving out certain questions because they were deemed too sensitive.

Partners were also given wide latitude over the format of their Field Hearings. Methods used included one-on-one interviews, focus group discussions with 7 to 15 people, or public meetings of 20 to several hundred attendees. After talking with their key community member, each partner chose a method that they felt would work best in thatcommunity. Some used different methods in different communities, depending on the nature of the community. Other partners used more than one method within the same community, in order to get a good cross-section of local voices.

After conducting their Field Hearings, each partner submitted a report using a standard reporting format. In keeping with our decision that this project was not "research," no data sheets were turned in to the Regional or Global Coordinators, although they were viewed briefly if necessary to verify a given Field Hearing. Instead, each Field Hearing Report described

the motivation and approach taken by that partner, the nature of the community or communities, a summary of the community members' responses, and some perspective on potential reasons for differences within these responses. The standard reporting format can be seen here: https://www.initiativeforequality.org/images/StandardFormatForReport2013-2015.pdf

## D. Problem-solving and accountability

Problems encountered in building and implementing the Field Hearings network can be placed into three categories: recruitment difficulties, implementation difficulties, and difficulties related to lack of funding.

**Recruitment-related difficulties:**
* Language barriers: we decided to use English as a *lingua franca* to ensure that most partners and coordinators could communicate with one another. Some partners could not communicate effectively in English, and thus worked through their country or regional coordinators using another language. While this approach worked well in Africa, Asia, Europe and North America, it did not work as well in Latin America. We eventually found a Regional Coordinator for Latin America who is fluent in Spanish, Portuguese and English. He and other native speakers translated the recruitment emails into Spanish and Portuguese, and communicate with partners in one of those two languages.

* Framing the purpose of the Field Hearings: the goal of establishing a large network seeking to influence global decision-making processes concerning sustainable development was attractive to potential partners in Africa and Asia, and brought in many partners. However, it resonated less well with potential partners in Europe and North America. After numerous discussions with partners in the global North, we reframed our recruitment materials to focus less on UN processes and more on developing a network of partners and communities who can work together to influence the national and regional circumstances and policies that lock people into social, economic or political marginalization.

* Sincerity of partners: in several instances we were approached by potential partners who turned out to be insincere in their stated interest. These appeared to be individuals or small organizations looking for opportunities to make money without contributing productively. Our system of regional and country coordinators has been very successful in checking all potential partners by local reputation and past activities, to ensure that we only enter into agreements with those who sincerely intend to carry out the activities of the network, and are capable of doing so. Furthermore, because no money changes hands until all the work has been completed and verified, and receipts received, there is no reason to worry that funds will be illegitimately used.

**Implementation-related difficulties:**
* Ensuring women's voices: in certain communities, women were unwilling or unable to speak up in group meetings which included men. Partners who encountered this problem resolved it

for the time being by splitting the groups into one for men and one for women, so that women could feel free to speak openly. In the future, other solutions to this problem will be discussed and tried, for example assigning responsibilities to each gender for conveying certain information.

* Privacy considerations: It is well-known in social sciences research that interviews of individual people can uncover sensitive information, and thus the identities of these interviewees must be kept private. In the US, there are many laws that govern privacy in the context of research. Although this was not an academic or scientific research project, but was instead a way of amplifying the voices of individuals and communities in decision-making processes, we still wanted to follow the best practices available in order to protect the privacy of the respondents. This was accomplished in several ways:

1. No individual was questioned, photographed or filmed unless they first agreed to it.

2. No individual names were turned over to the coordinating office for the Field Hearings Project (*Initiative for Equality*).

3. No Field Hearings community with a population of less than several hundred was identified in our reports, with the exception of one group of university students. This is because it is far too easy to guess who someone is in a small community, based on their responses.

4. No individual interview forms or noteswere provided in any Field Hearings reports.

* Integrity of results:  The question of data integrity is raised in a collaborative project, especially when the direct verification of individual data is difficult. For this project, we did not publish any report unless we were able to view at least two sources of confirmation concerning the validity of the Field Hearing (for example photos, data forms, numeric data or detailed descriptions of individual interviews). A related consideration has been the way in which community member versus partner perspectives were presented in the reports. Some Field Hearings partners wrote reports that clearly distinguished between statements by participants versus opinions of the report authors. Others tended to mix these two voices in their report, making it difficult to tell what represented an actual finding of local community viewpoints. During the editing process, primary authors were asked to clarify whenever this problem was detected. To safeguard against this problem further, the standard reporting format used for the Phase Two Field Hearings reports was explicit about whose opinions were being reported in each section of the report.

**Funding-related difficulties:**
* Inadequate funding has meant that only those partners who are able to bear the cost of conducting Field Hearings voluntarily have been able to proceed. In many cases, this means that the civil society groups that are most closely associated with very poor communities are

unable to proceed with their Field Hearings. Our solution has been to develop a fundraising plan which we are currently implementingat the national, regional and global levels.

* Inadequate funding has limited our communications options throughout the network of partners and coordinators to services that are essentially free. All of our meetings take place by skype, which tends to drop calls on weak internet connections. Our solution when this problem occurs has been to conduct entire 2- or 3-hour meetingsby typing back and forth to one another. A better long-term solution would be to subscribe to an internet meeting software that is more stable for low-bandwidth internet connections and can be used with dial-in mobile phone connections.

* Finally, inadequate funding has limited the scope of the project, both geographically (numbers of countries, partners and communities) and in terms of the activities that the network can engage in (follow-through on monitoring and accountability after initial Field Hearings are conducted). Again, the desired solution is adequate funding.

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***In summary, implementation of the Field Hearings Project has revealed a number of practical problems and considerations. Fortunately, the flexibility and collaborative spirit of all those involved has resulted in successful problem-solving and revised procedures as problems became evident. Adequate funding, however, remains a challenge.***

## Section IV. Preliminary Results

The preliminary results, based on Phase One discussions with over 2,700 individuals, provided a surprisingly uniform view of inequality and how it operates in the lives of the those living in poverty. The gap between wealthy and poor was seen by most Field Hearing participants as increasing. Many expressed concern that growing inequality and costs wipe out any gains made in economic development. Almost every community worried about the growing lack of economic security: jobs are difficult to find and may not last. Economic opportunities are scarce and generally available only to those with connections. Young people do not feel hopeful. The wishes articulated by most respondents were simple, basic and compatible with sustainability. They would like stable incomes and a secure future, with food, healthcare, and education for their children; responsive and accountable governments that work to create opportunities for all, regardless of ethnicity or economic class; and access to opportunities and decision-making.

What did community members have to say about poverty and inequality? Those with wealth are viewed as having access to political decision-making, which they use to create further economic opportunities for themselves. Some cited racial or ethnic discrimination as a root cause of these problems, while others blamed "selfishness" of the rich, or the relationship between political power and business opportunities. Corruption and a lack of accountability and transparency on the part of government officials were said to deprive lower income people of economic opportunities, even when funds have been allocated on their behalf. This is seen as a primary way in which inequality is perpetuated. Furthermore, lack of trust and unity among community members, we were told, blocks the collaboration necessary for effective problem resolution and finding new approaches to development.

To date, the *Field Hearings* network has successfully brought the voices of communities and civil society partners into the UN's Rio+20 and Sustainable Development Goals discussions. Through a series of presentations and joint statements, we have successfully advocated for a focus on overcoming social, economic and political inequalities, and for a stand-alone goal and specific targets on reducing inequalities in the new SDGs. Equally importantly, the Field Hearings have created a space for conversations within the communities about needed solutions and what would be required to empower their own community-led initiatives to succeed.

For a more comprehensive summary of the Phase One Field Hearings results, go to this link: https://www.initiativeforequality.org/images/SummaryofPreliminaryResults.pdf.
To see the full report on the Phase One Field Hearings, go to this link: https://www.initiativeforequality.org/images/wtbh_link_page.pdf.
For brief summaries of the Phase Two Field Hearings that have been completed to date, go to this link – which will be updated monthly as new reports come in: https://www.initiativeforequality.org/images/UploadSummariesofPhaseTwoFieldHearings.pdf.

## Section V. Assessment of Field Hearings Network

In this section we assess what has worked well, what still needs improvement,and what the Field Hearings Network have to offer as a Participatory Monitoring for Accountability Platform.

**A. What has worked well?**
The following aspects of our Field Hearings networkhave worked well to date, and can serve as a model for others:

- Partnership structure and approach makes entire project possible: the project would fail to meet its objectives if it were centrally implemented and not based on the activities of local partners in conjunction with community members
- English as basic language, with translation by partners as needed: without a *lingua franca*, network-wide communications would break down and the values of networking and collaboration would be lost
- Governance structure (local partners, regional & country coordination, global steering committee, high-level advisory committee): this decision-making structure ensures that decisions are made by those who are in the best position to determine needs and constraints at each level, and generates a sense of ownership by all involved
- Civil society as well as academic partners – criteria are commitment, relationship, trust: both types of partners bring important perspectives, as long as they are committed to empowering community members; we have not had enough business and government partners to assess their role
- Flexibility for local partners to conduct Field Hearings as they see fit: this is absolutely essential in order to respect and accommodate variations in local circumstances
- Broad range of questions with open-ended prompts to learn community members' priorities: a more focused questionnaire with fewer open-ended prompts would emphasize the priorities of the conveners at the expense of those of the community members
- No payments to participants; incentive is desire to influence decisions and outcomes: participation will always be based on self-selection; it is better that the motive be desire to speak out so that the comments are genuine
- Taking voices of women through separate women-only discussions (if needed): when this approach was needed and used, the women spoke up; in one Field Hearing where it was needed but not used, the women remained silent
- Hybrid communications network (voice, mobile phone, SMS, internet): allowed everyone to communicate in the way that worked best for them; insistence on SMS or internet would have left many community members out
- Privacy of community members, integrity of results were protected by our policies: policies such as these are essential and effective

**B. Whatstill needs improvement?**

The following aspects of the project require additional attention in order to improve our effectiveness and expand our reach:

- Need adequate funding so coordination andpartner expenses can be reimbursed: although our large volunteer pilot project has proved the value of the concept and approach, it will not be possible to conduct a full-scale project on a volunteer basis
- Need regular follow-up to learn how the Field Hearings process impacted community members and outcomes, and to communicate the results of the project to the communities: these are both ethical obligations and ways to increase the effectiveness of the project
- Need to routinely draw decision-makers and implementing agencies into the process: this has been successfully initiated in several countries,and should be expanded where possible
- Need to find better ways to ensure least empowered members of communities can speak out: this can be facilitated by a clear protocolcommunicated to local partners, and by funding that allows partners to spend more time with the community members
- Need to subscribe to internet software formeetings with local partners and coordinators: certain meetings software is better with low-band-width internet connections
- Need to incorporate evaluation into our process to ensure our own accountability: this will require returning to communities to take feedback

**C. What value could the Field Hearings Network add to the sustainable development process?**
The Field Hearings Network represents a new paradigm of equitable participation and empowerment in sustainable development decision-making and implementation through grassroots partnerships.This concept goeswell beyond the traditional approach of providing aid to overcome poverty by facilitating empowerment to overcome inequalities. As a Participatory Monitoring for Accountability Platform, the Field Hearings Network could add value to the process in the following ways:

**Enablingcommunities to set priorities:** The Field Hearings Network has provided a means for people in marginalized communities to articulate their priorities in the development process. Deprivation has often been perceived as a way of life and taken for granted as a persisting condition, while community members' aspirations are ignored within traditional development metrics. The Field Hearings have brought these issues to the forefront. Through the Field Hearings, individuals may realize that improving their welfare starts with defining issues, assessing their own status and articulating their needs and priorities.

Furthermore, being part of the goal-setting process suggests to individuals and communities that they could have a greater stake in decision-making, providing the foundation for community-*driven* rather than merely community-based monitoring (Mansuri and Rao 2004). The Field Hearings underscore the importance of proactive approaches in contrast to being reflective and reactive after decisions have already been made. In other words, the Field Hearings emphasize that individuals are not merely beneficiaries for which development programs are crafted, but rather that they could help to design and drive the process also (Hackmann and St. Clair 2012). It is in this respect that the Field Hearings can be transformative.

**Providing community perspectives through participatory monitoring:** The Field Hearings Network has provided a way for people in marginalized communities to contribute their own thoughts and perspectives, rather than simply generating data for someone else's analysis(Rogers 2012). Existing monitoring systems generally allow people to participate to a limited extent only. A relatively limited number of beneficiaries are occasionally invited to join the monitoring and progress assessment process, primarily to give input on the metrics developed by others. Because they were not engaged in project development or implementation, and have no opportunity to articulate priorities for monitoring, they become passive participants in the monitoring process. The Field Hearings, by contrast, allow participatory monitoring of those locally-relevant development indicators perceived as most important by the community members themselves.

Because of their independence, input contributed through the Field Hearings has brought to light long-standing institutional difficulties, putting public sector performance into perspective. Many development metrics have attempted to operationalize more inclusive measures, yet the prevailing global paradigm has thus farnot led to interventions that truly address widespread inequalities and unsustainable development. Measuring public sector effectiveness in practice is often problematic due to the difficulty inherent in aligning the larger desired public outcomes with the immediate outputs expected of the bureaucracy (OECD 2007). A local hospital, for example, might perform well in attaining efficiency and effectiveness goals but miss the desired societal outcome of a healthier community. The Field Hearings underscore accountability to ultimate societal outcomes.

**Providing real-time feedback and accountability:** The Field Hearings Network could provide a mechanism for people in marginalized communities to give feedback in real time, to help hold duty bearers in the public sector accountable for their performance in the implementation of policies and programs. As a participatory monitoring network designed to empower community members, it is not a data-generating mechanism driven by needs of program funders or administrators, but rather a feedback mechanism driven by the needs of community members.

The Field Hearings PMA network applies the concept of accountability not only to the public sector, but also to local civil society and academic partners, as well as to community members themselves. All network members are accorded defined responsibilities and the means to meet them. They are expected to meet these obligations. Examples include the responsibility to arrange and attend meetings, facilitate discussions, thoughtfully assess problems and progress, provide feedback, listen carefully, provide accurate reports, convey information to others, and engage effectively in the public decision-making process. Holding people accountable for meeting their obligations is another way of being inclusive, because it affirms that everyone's ideas and actions make an important difference.

**Empowering community members to take ownership:** The Field Hearings PMA network encourages and empowers people in marginalized communities to play an active role in public life by engaging them in public dialogue, decision-making, implementation and monitoring processes. Development agendas whichare decided and imposed from the outside can leave

community members more vulnerable than before because they experience unexpected impacts as well as increased dependencies. The key to a successful PMA network is to ensure the participation of community members early in the process, so that they can make determinations about which objectives, projects and policies are of highest priority for their community, and how these can best be implemented to avoid negative impacts and maximize benefits. The experience of participating in these discussions and decisions can generate a new set of expectations and skills which empower community members to engage in further decision-making for development and community-building. Eventually these communities can take ownership of the development process, both through effective interaction without outside institutions and through their own community-initiated projects. The approach of the Field Hearings Network is designed with this as its ultimate goal.

**How is the Field Hearings initiative unique?**
There are other networks and organizations working towards one or more of the four goals described above, including the World Bank's "Voices of the Poor" initiative (Narayan 2000; Narayan et al. 2000; Narayan and Petesch 2002), ATD Fourth World, Participate, and others. The Field Hearings Network can be differentiated from these other initiatives as follows:

* We are a global network of small-scale civil society and other local partners, forming a communications bridge through partnerships in order to reach into poor and marginalized communities to engage their participation in societal dialogues and decision-making processes.

* Our structure emphasizes participatory democratic decision-making so that the people throughout the network are integrally involved in determining our approach and priorities.

* We are not an academic research project (although we have academic partners), and are thus able to be more flexible about the numbers and variety of communities we take input from, and the approaches of the local partners who conduct the Field Hearings.

* Although similarly concerned with extreme poverty, we focus on the engagement of both poor and otherwise marginalized communities (including those who are socially excluded due to discrimination) in dialogues and decision-making processes.

* Our questions go significantly beyond how people experience poverty, discrimination and development; we also ask them for their own analysis – what do they view as the causes of the problems and what do they think should be done?

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*In short, after 2 ½ years of experience, we can conclude that the Field Hearings Network has been effective at meeting its objectives thus far. It has much of value to offer as a Participatory Monitoring for Accountability Platform. However, it could achieve additional objectives if given methodological improvements, adequate funding and expansion of the network.*

## Section VI. Recommendations for Scaling Up the Field Hearings PMA Platform

In this section we recommends steps that could be taken to step up the Field Hearings Network to a full-scale Participatory Monitoring for Accountability Platform.

**A. Recommendations for an expanded Field Hearings PMA Platform**
The Field Hearings Network partnership structure and approach has proved to be effective and popular with local partners and communities, and influential at the global level. It is vital that the needs listed in Section V be addressed in order to improve the project to the maximum extent possible. In addition, the network should be expanded to form a powerful yet flexible global network linking marginalized communities and local civil society groupswith other national, regional and global stakeholders, with the capacity to provide citizen-led monitoring of sustainable development decision-making and implementation. This expanded network will be called the *Field Hearings Participatory Monitoring for Accountability (PMA) Platform*.

In addition to bringingmarginalized communities and individuals into decision-making processes related to development, there are additional objectives that could be achieved through an expanded Field Hearings PMA Platform based on our inclusive Field Hearings partnership approach:

* to serve as a communications and crowd-sourced information platform for implementation of policies and programs and monitoring of outcomes to achieve the new Sustainable Development Goals

* to serve as a peer-to-peer network for sharing experiences with community-initiated sustainable development projects

* to serve as an information-sharing, implementation and  monitoring network for best practices in adaptation to climate change

* to serve as a platform for monitoring human rights abuses, and for organizing effective and coordinated responses

* to serve as a platform for reporting incidents or patterns of discrimination and abuse against people who are targeted by virtue of their identity or personal characteristics, and for organizing effective and coordinated responses

* to serve as a rapid-response network for abuses of governance, including voting fraud, petty and high corruption, failure to enforce or implement policies, and undue use of force

* to serve as a platform for an inclusive global dialogue about the future of the earth and humanity

Regardless of the objectives chosen, several important considerations must take precedence. First, decisions about whether and how to approach these objectives must be made collectively, through the participatory governance structures already in place, so that the participatory nature of the network is not lost.Second, the focus on poor, socially excluded or otherwise marginalized communities must be retained. This is a primary value of the network, but one which could easily be lost if other priorities were imposed.Third, the platform cannot be utilized in a mechanical way to generate data or control outcomes. This is a network of partnerships – ongoing human relationships built on mutual trust and respect. People'sinput and preferencescannot be ignored. Field Hearings community members have consistently told us that they want follow-through. In other words,  they are not interested in being "studied" but instead want to engage in solutions to the problems they identify. Without effective engagement at a human scale, trust will be lost.

**B. Scaling Up the Field Hearings PMA Platform**
In order to address additional objectives, we will need to expand the network and secure additional resources to support and sustain it.An expanded Field Hearings PMA Platform will require several changes,as follows:

**Questions and prompts:** We may need to focus on new questions and prompts in order to gather input and engage local communities and partners on specific topics of interest. Moreover, these questions may vary from country to country, depending on the programs to be monitored. For example, we may need to add questions about water distribution in one country, and about availability of crop-producing seeds in another country.

**Data:** Depending on the needs of any participatory monitoring initiative that may wish to utilize the Field Hearings PMA Platform, we may need to collect data in addition to general reports. This would require great care to obtain needed legal permissions and to avoid privacy violations or breaches of trust with community members.

**Communications:** Our communications approach may need to be altered to meet new objectives. For example, rather than conducting one lengthy Field Hearing to ask a broad range of questions, local partners may need to visit the same community several times per year to check in on how a particular project is going. Or, we may need to utilize a hybrid communications approach consisting of internet, mobile phone and word-of-mouth between various partners(as possible for each) to gather rapid feedback and coordinate responses on some particular problem. See Subsection C below for a full discussion on the use of technology for communications, monitoring, and accountability.

**Feedback from citizens and accountability by governments:** In order to solidify the feedback and accountability loop between citizens and governments or development agencies, we would need to incorporate new questions, procedures and expectations. These would need to be specifically tailored to each country and process in which communities intend to engage. It

would also require the addition of new types of partners. Currently, the network consists of approximately two-thirds civil society groups and one-third academic researchers, with a scattering of government agencies and private consultants. This balance may need to shift in order to meet specific accountability objectives. For example, we might need to add particular government agencies into the network to ensure rapid and clear communication between community members and government officials.

We already have experience in establishing these types of collaborations. In October and November of 2013 we convened Country Coordinating Committees of Field Hearings Partners for Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. In each country, the committees of partners developed a plan to bring community members into engagement with particular governmental decision-making processes. They then approached these government agencies and asked them to sign letters of agreement that they would be willing to engage with the communities, taking input and responding in a timely fashion. While this was a difficult task, we did succeed in obtaining agreements from a number of agencies – one or two in each of the six countries. Thus we are confident that it can be done.

**Expanding the network:** Finally, we will need to expand the network in order to meet the larger set of objectives. The decision-making and communications structure to support a fully global network is already in place. Fortunately, our current partnership and coordination structure lends itself very readily to scaling. We have already organized a matrix of global, regional and national coordinators to work with local partners and communities in over 75 countries. This matrix just needs to be expanded to new regions and countries, and filled in with additional partners and communities as needed to meet specific objectives. Ultimately, we envision the network to be operating in nearly every nation, with over 500 local partners reaching 1000 representative communities.

Additional resources will be required to support and sustain an expanded network. A system of small regional secretariats (one per continent) will be needed, with perhaps 1.5 FTE staff per secretariat to handle the coordination, communications, logistical, training and administrative tasks. It is likely that the process of scaling up the network will require both pilot projects to try out new approaches, and phased-in projects to achieve new objectives or expand into new regions.

## C. Using Technology to Meet Objectives

Internet 2.0-based technologies now give us tools that allow direct sharing of data between actor. Some of the potential advantages of such distributed knowledge creation are evident: there is no self-censorship at the grassroots level as people can give feedback anonymously without antagonizing others on whom they are dependent, and the same data are available to all actors. Other advantages are less immediately visible: the idea that people "at the head" of the system are those who really know what is happening – and thus, who must decide for all – is replaced by the awareness that no individual actor or restricted group really knows what is happening; it is the entire society who collectively knows.

The logical consequence is a shift from conceptualizing a privileged sovereignty to the recognition of knowledge and decision-making as a collective phenomenon. This point of view is not just a matter of justice. Several researchers have shown the immense power of the multitude as a thinking device, compared to the traditional experts-based system. Studies have shown that a multitude thinking freely is more effective inunderstandingcomplex uncertain scenarios – like our collective lives – than systems based on a few experts thinking for the rest (Shirky 2009; Surowiecki 2009).

However, several cautions are in order. First, if we assume that everyone has access and is equally adept at using technology-based means of providing input, we will once again reproduce inequalities of participation and influence. It is thus critically important to provide access and training to all, before launching a technology-based platform with expectations of equitable participation.

Second, by encouraging people to give their input individually (through a tech platform) rather than collectively (through public discussions and joint political strategies), we can have the unintended consequence of reducing collective empowerment. Isolated individuals generally do not have the influence or power to demand accountability or bring about changes in governance, nor do they have the knowledge and analysis, individually, to understand the events in context. It is thus critically important to encourage collective discussions and strategies in addition to providing tech platforms for individual (or collective) feedback.

The knowledge gap is also an issue: economically disadvantaged people don't lack intellectual capacity, but they may lack intermediate information and processing abilities (including literacy) that could allow them to benefit from new technologies and use them to build a fairer world. Another key concern is the internalized image of an asymmetrical world, where those who are marginalized assume they are powerless and cannot affect outcomes. Finally, it is necessary to guard against the inadvertent but very real disempowerment of people by diverting their collective political engagement into an individualistic effort.

In short, gaining the potential advantages of distributed knowledge platforms requires that we address internet or mobile phone access and proficiency as well as the surrounding issues of understanding and empowerment. All of the above considerations lead to the conclusion that use of technology has the potential to greatly empower local communities to contribute to the construction of understandings, the development of ideas and proposals, and monitoring and feedback on policies and programs as implemented, *but only if used in the context of sufficient knowledge, access, proficiency, and collective empowerment*.

As the Field Hearings PMA Network is expanded, we plan to continueusingtechnology judiciously to help local community members share their perspectives and ideas, influence decisions and give feedback on the implementation of policies and programs. Our approach addresses the various concerns raised above, as follows:

**(1) Communications:** The Field Hearings network hasdeveloped a hybrid information network through which information can pass rapidly using internet, mobile phone and word of mouth as needed. In many parts of the world, community members themselves may not have the access or skills (including literacy) to allow their own independent use of the internet. We are committed to capacity-building by introducing the effective use of these tools, where possible. In each community we look for individuals who can function as an information point through some form of access to the internet – if not in their own homes, then perhaps through an internet cafe or an acquaintance with a computer. In the absence of regular internet access, we identify individuals who can function as an information point through use of mobile phones. We use SMS text messaging where literacy allows, and talk by voice where needed. Of course, it is extremely important to ensure that the individuals serving as information points are not using this position as a gatekeeper to restrict information flow. It may be necessary to have multiple information points to ensurethat allsubgroups of the community have access.

**(2) Feedback:** If used appropriately, technology platforms can be a powerful means of crowd-sourcing citizen input and publicizing government actions, public reactions and government responses in real time. They can also be used to monitor crime, corruption, pollution, human rights abuses, weather events, natural disasters and responses, incidents or patterns of discrimination, as well as positive developments such as upcoming meetings, new initiatives, or the development of innovative approaches.

In the future, we plan to develop hybrid voice – SMS – internet platforms to gather information and feedback from community members, designed to meet the specific participatory monitoring objectives we are working towards. This hybrid approach allows those without access, literacy or internet proficiency to participate fully. The system for receiving real time information will be designed to ensure one incident is not accidentally analyzed as several, and also to prevent intentional misuse of the system. Monitoring indicators will be developed and agreed upon together with the communities, since they have inside perspectives on how their community may be impacted for the better or worse.A website "dashboard" for each country may be used to present real-time information to agencies, local partners, and community members who have access to the internet.

As the network continues to expand, we will not rely exclusively on a technology-based platform to gather and disseminate information, but will continue to engage in face-to-face meetings to facilitate community discussions and strategic planning on achieving their objectives. In this way community members will have the opportunity to experience collective thinking and empowerment as a context for their individual contributions to the monitoring and accountability platform.

**(3) Completing the PMA cycle:** Responsible agenciesto whom concerns and proposals have been conveyed must report back to the communities on all actions they have taken in response.This information needs tobe shared with the communities through appropriate channels agreed upon bythe key stakeholders. Cost-effective channels such as internet will be used, but public hearings or other appropriate channels will also be used where necessary to

ensure understanding and dialogue. These activities will help motivate both citizens and governments to engage with one another by establishing relationships, framing relevant questions, facilitating the process and focusing a spotlight on outcomes.

**D. Problem-solving and accountability during the scaling up process**

As the network is expanded, with new objectives and new approaches added, there are several problems that may be encountered:

* Rapid growth of the network may cause temporary delays in communication, training, enforcement of underpinning policies, decision-making and trouble-shooting. We have already established the essential framework and set of policies to resolve these problems, provided adequate funding, staff and communications platforms are in place.

* There may be resistance from existing partners to taking on new objectives for the network, althoughnew partners coming on presumably will be open to the new objectives as clearly articulated in the invitation to participate. If more than a small number of partners expresses reluctance, it will need to be the subject of network-wide discussions and problem-solving. We will discuss the reasons for their concerns, and develop solutions through our global Steering Committee.

* Some governments may want to control information in order to project the image that they are delivering services well. To do this, they may seek to suppress an active citizenryorcriticize information that portrays agencies in a bad light. Three approaches will be taken to overcome this potential challenge: (1) At the heart of all PMA processes will be dialogue, so that stakeholders continue to communicate with one another and seek solutions to challenges that may emerge. (2) Accurate information and analysis will be essential to maintain credibility in the face of criticism. (3) Independence of the information flow and presentation is essential, so that it cannot be captured or distorted by any vested interests.

* Community members may hesitate to get involved and take ownership of their portion of the process. This could result from a lack of trust in the partners and coordination structure, lack of interest in the objectives of the PMA network, or lack of faith in the effectiveness of the process. *Willingness by community members to participate is the most sensitive indicator of whether the structure and process are operating effectively*. Therefore, careful attention to all the potential challenges mentioned throughout this report will be essential to create a process in which community members can place their trust and take ownership. The most important of these will be ensuring that community members play a central role in developing the objectives, the monitoring metrics and the approaches that are meaningful to them.

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In summary, we recommend that the Field Hearings network be scaled up to provide a global Participatory Monitoring for Accountability Platform. Such a platform could address additional issues, incorporate data collection, facilitate ongoing relationships between communities and government and development agencies, create internet-based displays of

citizen demands and agency responses, and utilize technology to ensure that citizens can monitor developments and give feedback in real time.

Section VII. Self-Monitoring and Evaluation

A. Metrics for success
How can we assess whether *Initiative for Equality*'s Field Hearings PMA Platform is responsive to local communities and partners and is achieving its objectives? The most important metrics for success can be organized into three categories, as follows:

(1) pre-determined or top-down metrics which measure the extent to which the project is achieving the tasks and milestones that were laid out for it; these include:
- the network has met its goals for regions covered, countries covered, numbers of partners per country
- decision-makers and implementing agencies are agreeing to take part and to interact with local partners and communities
- coordination of project is taking place effectively at the national, regional and global level, as measured by agreements in place, meetings held, questions answered, reports turned in, levels of satisfaction by local partners, levels of satisfaction by coordinators
- training of coordinators, local partners and community members is taking place as set out, and is effective as described by local partners and community members
- the communications network is in place for each participating partner and community, with each link clearly defined and roles understood
- feedback is being submitted to decision-makers and implementing agencies in real time
- decision-makers and implementing agencies are responding to the feedback on a timely basis
- the privacy and security of community members is protected – no breaches are detected, and individual negative repercussions are not forthcoming
- problem-solving is taking place effectively across all portions of the project
- the project is adequately funded to allow it to function effectively

(2) responsive or bottom-up metrics which indicate the extent to which local civil society and community priorities, approval and ownership of the project are reflected, and meaningful communication is taking place across the network, including:
- communities are agreeing to take part, including the most marginalized communities
- within the communities that take part, the voices of the least powerful are being heard (for example, those of women, elderly, youth, disabled, and any other segments of society that are discriminated against even within that community)
- the communities take ownership of the process as evidenced by the fact that they not only meet responsibilities reliably, but also help to extend the network, and propose new approaches and metrics
- each community expresses clear priority issues, solutions, approaches and metrics of most interest to them

- these priorities are heard by others across the network, and are reflected in decisions that are made by others
- decision-makers and implementing agencies are responsive to feedback, and periodically alter their activities in a meaningful response
- dialogue is taking place within communities, and between community members and other communities, local partners and decision-makers at the targeted levels
- learning is taking place, as evidenced by the fact that partners throughout the network begin to discuss ideas brought forward by partners in another part of the network

(3) long-term or goal-oriented metrics which address the global impact of the Field Hearings PMA Platform, as follows:
- dialogue within the Field Hearings network communities, and between these community members and others in the network, is positively impacting the global discussion about sustainability and the future of human society through bringing in the perspectives of communities that have not been "at the table" in the past
- an effective system of monitoring, feedback, and responsiveness is in place to assure greater accountability during the Post-2015 implementation phase
- implementation of the policies and programs to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals results in significant improvements in the lives of community members as a result of their vigilant monitoring, feedback, and engagement with governments and other institutions
- empowerment of marginalized communities and community members allows them to set priorities, speak out, connect with peers and allies, engage with political processes, and create their own sustainable development initiatives

B. Monitoring our own activities and results
As a participatory monitoring network, we are uniquely positioned to incorporate self-monitoring into our routine activities. Monitoring of the three categories of metrics above will take place on three scales as follows:

(1) Project coordinators at all levels track the pre-determined or top-down metrics on an ongoing basis. For certain metrics (for example, those that assess the effectiveness of coordination and training), on-line questionnaires will be filled out by local partners. This is scheduled to take place during the last 3 months of each year. Discussions with partners will be conducted by coordinators other than the immediate coordinator with which local partners work, so that partners feel free to raise any problems they have experienced. Each questionnaire and discussion will emphasize a request for positive suggestions for improvement.

(2) Questionnaires and discussions with both local partners and community members will be used to assess the extent to which the responsive or bottom-up metrics are being met. On-line questionnaires and telephone or skype discussions with partners are scheduled to take place once a year (see above), while verbal questions will be posed to community members by the local partners each time they visit. Each questionnaire and discussion will emphasize a request for positive suggestions for improvement.The most difficult metric to assess in this category is

the extent to which individuals and communities have experienced direct impacts from being involved in the Field Hearings and PMA engagement process. Local partners would need to ask follow-up questions to the same individual community members that were interviewed previously, in a private setting so they could speak openly without fear. However, if any negative impacts had been experienced, it is unlikely these individuals would want to speak to the local partners again. Perhaps the best way to assess the extent of any negative impacts is to count any refusal to talk as a potential indicator of a negative impact.

(3) Long-term or goal-oriented metrics are the most difficult to monitor. The first two metrics (altered dialogue, and effective monitoring system in place) will require the perspectives of highly-placed partners who have had experience in these matters at the global level in past years. Our global Advisory Committee will be helpful here, as will other key people in the United Nations and development assistance systems. The second two metrics (improvements due to implementation of the SDGs, and empowerment of communities) will need inputs from the local partners and community members, and will require continued bi-annual visits to the communities over 3 to 5 years to assess the outcomes. Undertaking a PMA network at this scale requires a commitment to long-term follow-through, including assessments of the process itself.

C. Evaluating and addressing problems
It is only meaningful to engage in self-assessment if there is a commitment to resolving the problems that are identified. The results of these self-assessment questionnaires and discussions will be written up in an annual report, and circulated throughout the network during the first quarter of each year. After the report is compiled but before it is released, the global Steering Committee will meet to discuss and evaluate the findings, consider the suggestions for improvement that were made by members of the network, and develop a plan for modifying the project to address all issues that were identified. This plan will be added to the report before it is circulated. Ongoing decisions and plans for the future of the project will then be made in the context of the findings and plans provided in the annual report.

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*In summary, it is essential to engage in internal self-monitoring and evaluation to determine if the Field Hearings PMA Platform is being responsive to local communities and partners and is achieving its pre-determined, responsive, and long-term social objectives. Because the purpose of the Field Hearings PMA Platform revolves around monitoring, it should be possible to incorporate such self-monitoring on a regular basis. Annual surveys and discussions will be necessary, as will a commitment to sensitive internal evaluation followed by modification of the project to address any problems identified by this process.*

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