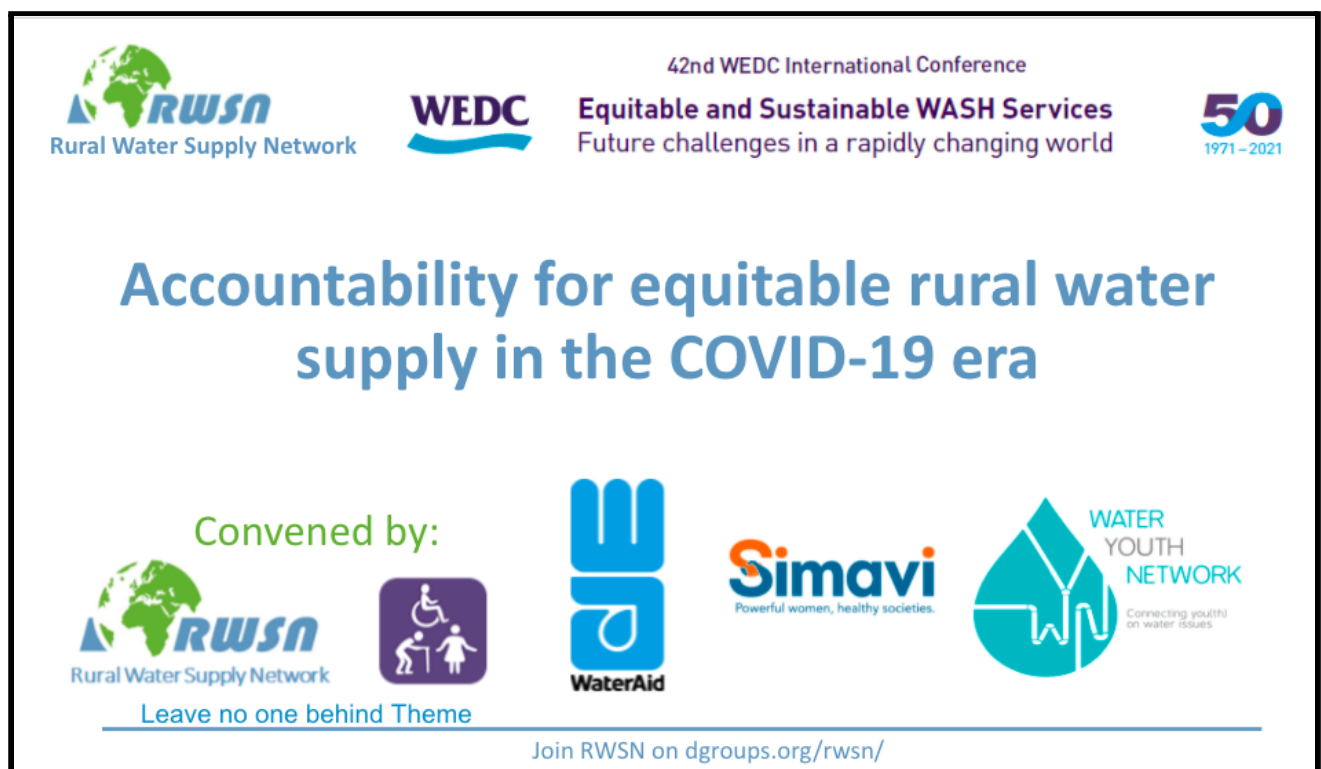# Rural Water Supply Network

Accountability for equitable rural water supply in the COVID-19 era

Report of the Agency event at the 42nd WEDC International Conference

14 September 2021

Prepared by Sara Ahrari (Simavi), Louisa Gosling (WaterAid), Euphresia Luseka (Water Governance Specialist), Aline Saraiva Okello (RWSN) and Temple Oraeki (Water Youth Network)

September 2021

RWSN Leave no one behind Theme

Join the community: https://dgroups.org/rwsn/leave-no-one_rwsn/

Introduction

Countries at all income levels experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks, implemented different measures such as lockdowns to contain the spread of the virus. Lockdown imposes practical limitations on the freedom of association and collective action, making it more difficult for rights holders to demand accountability. Challenges include decreased freedom of movement, funding cuts to programmes that support community participation, and poor access to mobile technology and the internet as organising becomes virtual. The gendered digital gap, lowered already limited women's public participation and access to information. Moreover, increased governmental control over daily life and consolidation of power during the crisis in some cases further constrained civic space.

Knowing how duty bearers performed was also challenged by fast evolving standards and lack of or difficulty in accessing data. Some duty bearers deliberately or unwillingly under the pressure of urgency for quick response were non-transparent. On the other hand, while normal channels of rights claiming were interrupted, there have also been new opportunities to claim the (water) rights.

The aim of the session was to bring together stakeholders from national and international civil society, government and service providers, to share experiences. Key outcomes of a recent RWSN E-discussion and some experiences from the field were used to kick off the discussion, followed by world café style discussions in breakout rooms that enable participants to focus on the issues that are most useful and relevant to them.

There were 216 registered participants, and over 70 attended the live session.

The agenda of the session was as follows:

- **Welcome**, Mr. Temple Oraeki, (WYN, International Development Consultant, Co-Lead, RWSN LNOB Group)
- **5 min   Keynote speech** UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, Mr. Pedro Agudo
- **15 min   Key results of RWSN LNOB group E-discussion (28 June to 18 July 2021)**, Euphresia Luseka(Water governance Specialist and RWSN LNOB theme lead)
- **20 min   Introduction of facilitation team and the themes as set-up for breakout groups**
- **40 min   Breakout groups (including short break)**
- **20 min   Feedback from breakout groups**
- **5 min   Knowledge Management for Accountability**, Tim Brewer, Practice Lead – Research, Water Witness International
- **5 min   Wrap up and words of thanks**, Ms. Louisa Gosling, Chair of RWSN

The slides for the session are available here, the video recording is available here and the final mural is available here.

Welcome speech

Temple Oraeki, LNOB Co-Lead and Advisory Board Member of Water Youth Network, welcomed the participants to the 42nd WEDC International Conference Agency Event. He gave a brief background of the event, highlighting that the event will be consolidating on the outcome of the 3-weeks E-discussion on "Social Accountability for Rural Water Services during Covid-19 Pandemic", which was organized by the LNOB Theme from 28 June to 18 July 2021.

Keynote speech

The UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, Mr. Pedro Agudo gave the keynote speech, focusing on the two reports he is preparing to share in 2022.

- **Survey on Human rights and indigenous people's access to water and sanitation**, deadline 31 December 2021. Survey available in:

- o   English, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Indonesian, Urdu, Makassar, Russian, Chinese: https://linktr.ee/srwatsan_IPsurvey
- o   In Persian, Arabic, Hausa, Bengali, Telugu, Turkish, Romanian, Gujarati, Marathi, Ukrainian: https://linktr.ee/srwatsan_IPsurvey2
- **Survey on Human rights and access to water and sanitation in rural areas**, deadline 31 December 2021. Survey available in:
  - o   English, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Indonesian, Urdu, Makassar, Russian, Chinese, Korean, Japanese: https://linktr.ee/srwatsan_ruralsurvey
  - o   Persian, Arabic, Hausa, Bengali, Telugu, Turkish, Romanian, Marathi: https://linktr.ee/srwatsan_ruralsurvey2

Key results of RWSN LNOB group E-discussion

Euphresia Luseka, LNOB co-lead, presented key results of the RWSN e-discussion on Accountability, using the 5R's framework – Rules, Responsibilities, Reporting, Reviews, Reaction Accountability Model. The RWSN e-discussion took place from 28 June to 18 July 2021 and focused on the following topics:

- ■   Week 1: Social accountability in different contexts in the era of COVID-19 and who is being held into account;
- ■   Week 2: Sharing tools, methods and strategies for social accountability;
- ■   Week 3: Strengthening and scaling up social accountability.

36 people contributed experiences from 18 countries. A summary of all the contributions is available here. The synthesis of the e-discussion is available here.

A video about the Accountability gap was also shared: https://youtu.be/g7cg0Yo81pI

Breakout groups

The facilitation team and 6 themes were introduced. Host organisations gave pre-recorded pitches of their work to attract participants. The pitches focused on:

- ●   What the theme of the breakout groups is.
- ●   How/why is it important for equitable rural water supply in the COVID-19 era?
- ●   Why should participants join your group?

Groups:
1. Role of Women & Youth facilitated by Dr. Leunita Sumba, Chairperson Women in Water and Sanitation Association (WIWAS) with support of Dra Aline Saraiva Okello (RWSN secretariat)
2. Government accountability mechanisms including regulators and legislators facilitated by Timothy Kpeh (United Youth) with support of Senator Jonathan L Kaipay (WASH legislative caucus Liberia) and Louisa Gosling (Wateraid)
3. Donors and development partners facilitated by Virginia Roaf (Sanitation and Water for All) with support of Mariana Dias Simpson
4. Digital platforms/tools facilitated by Annalisa Renna (Integrity Action) with support of Sara Ahari (Simavi)
5. Media, facilitated by Pamela Kabasinguzi (HEWASA) with support of Wouter Dijktra and Sandra van Soelen (Track FM and Simavi from Uganda)
6. Campaigns/Movements facilitated by Al-Hassan Adam, Temple Oraeki and Sam Taylor

Role of Women & Youth

Dr Leunita introduced the Women in Water and Sanitation Association (WIWAS) and the work they are doing to reinforce the role of women in water and sanitation. The organization works with a focus on SDGs 5, on gender equality, women and girls empowerment, and SDG 6, on clean water and sanitation services for all. She shared that in Kenya women are responsible for the water collection in 80% of households that don't have water on-premises. She explained on the pitch that COVID 19 negatively impacted women's health, social and economic wellbeing the most, due to the increased demand for water for hygiene. Other challenges women face

include limited representation of women in decision making tables; 90% of women's jobs depend on water; where WASH facilities are inadequate or lacking, women and girls are exposed to gender-based violence, including sex for water, for livelihoods and even for sanitary towels, particularly in rural and low-income areas. Many women lost their jobs during COVID 19 or had to work in shifts, reducing their income and affordability of safe WASH services.

Several examples were shared about challenges, barriers and enablers for the participation of women and youth. In Nigeria, in a region where the majority of people are Muslim, women are isolated from men due to the cultural barrier, and therefore cannot voice their views. As an enabler, focus group discussions with segregated genders were established so that women can be heard separately from men. Another issue raised is that youth is locked out of decision-making committees. As an enabler, surveys are being conducted to understand the youth challenges, and what can be done to integrate them into decision-making processes. Youth participation has also been encouraged through SMSs.

Another example raised from Kenya raised the issue of representation. Women are poorly represented where water and sanitation issues are discussed, there are very few women in leadership of water organizations. Therefore, their views, their participation is not captured well. In Nigeria, communities were encouraged to include a minimum of 65% women in their WASH committees.

The issue of inequality between urban and peri-urban/slum areas was also raised. In peri-urban and slum areas it is much more difficult for people to hold their leaders accountable. Women in Ghana raised their voices on discrimination in water distribution as the literate and affluent were getting a regular supply than those who did not have piped water. The outcry went viral and was addressed.
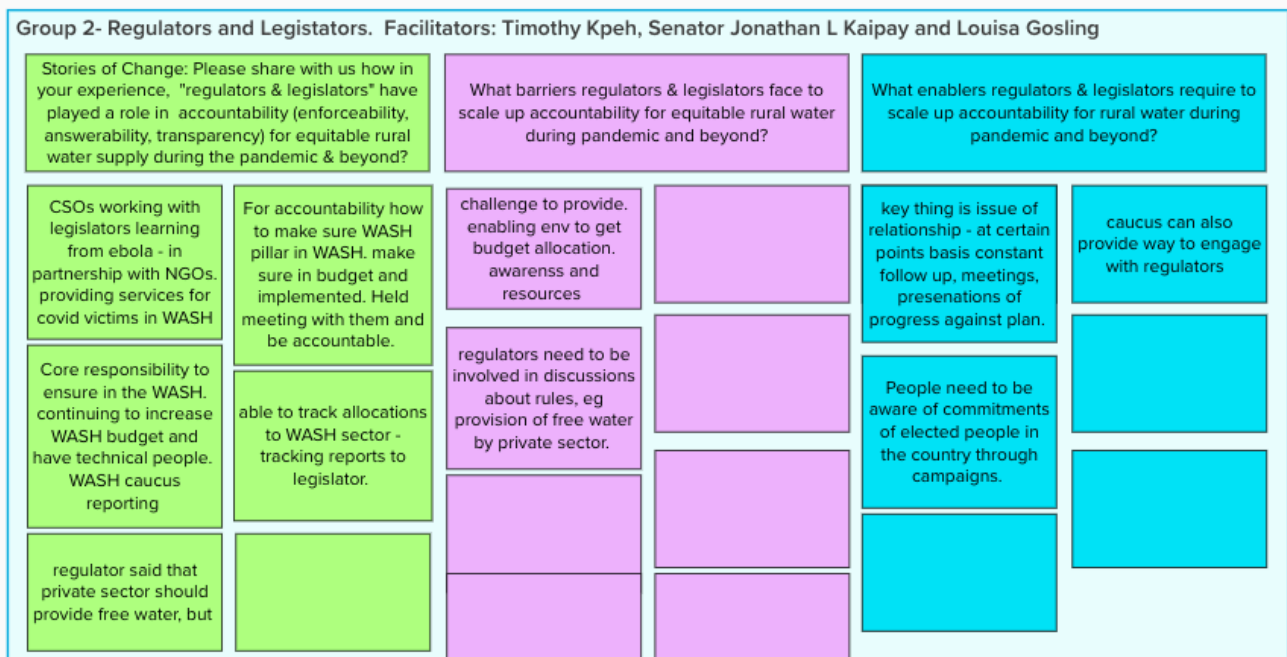

Group 1- Women & Youth   Facilitators: Dr. Leunita Sumba & Dr. Aline Okello

Stories of Change: Please share with us how in your experience, "women & youth" have played a role in accountability (enforceability, answerability, transparency) for equitable rural water supply during the pandemic & beyond?		What barriers women & youth face to scale up accountability for equitable rural water during pandemic and beyond?		What enablers do women & youth require to scale up accountability for rural water during pandemic and beyond?	
Support Schools with handwashing facilities; 20 schools per county in Kenya; Meru county - sanitary towels	Ghana - difficult for women to move out of homes; established some advantage points to fetch water; gov	Nigeria: high % of muslims; women isolated from men- cultural barriers;	women not able to speak up; segregation of focus group to enable women participation	Segregation in focus group discussions	Survey to understand youth challanges
Inequities between affluent and poorer/ peri-urban and slums areas	Issues if equity had to be addressed by governor; media used to demand equity- women spoke out	Kenya: issues of representation in decision making positions	Women do not seek higher positions; certificates	[Kenya] sensitization meetings, encouraging women to participate	Investigate further the withdrawl of youth; understand their reasons for not participating
Nigeria - strategy - handwashing with soap - constructing facilities (USAID program)		Youth relutant to join committees; they dont see immediate gains		Youth: encouraged and provided quotas	

Government accountability mechanisms including regulators and legislators

The role of civil society working with parliamentarians in Liberia was shared, as well as the experience of working with the government on the accountability mechanism. Lessons on the engagement with national legislators and the importance of accountability and transparency were also discussed.

Civil Society Organizations (CSO's) were already working with NGOs and legislators in the past through a WASH caucus in Liberia. When the COVID-19 pandemic started, CSOs were able to use the experience of the Ebola response, and continue working with NGOs and legislators through the caucus, to track budget allocations for WASH, and ensure that the WASH budget was protected, and see how the WASH budget was implemented. The barriers mentioned were on awareness of budget allocation and actually get the resources. In Ghana, there was an issue of the government announcing that there would be free water during the pandemic, but then regulators not being involved and not paying the private sector to provide the free water. In terms of enablers, the relationship between CSOs and legislators/regulators is very important. There needs to be constant

communication flow, through meetings, CSOs providing data, tracking, and reports to be discussed in the caucus. CSOs use campaigns to raise public awareness and hold leaders accountable.

Group 2- Regulators and Legistators. Facilitators: Timothy Kpeh, Senator Jonathan L Kaipay and Louisa Gosling

Donors and development partners

Virginia Roaf introduced the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA), which is a global multi-stakeholder platform engaging government, civil society and other stakeholders to achieve all water and sanitation targets of the SDGs.

SWA focuses on mutual accountability and necessary cooperation and interaction between stakeholders that leads to improved access to services. She noted that governments and civil society have no problems engaging with mutual accountability, but donors and development partners struggle to find their role in national accountability processes, as external partners. Donors and development partners have obligations through the Human Rights law not just to the countries they work for, but to the populations of the countries where they operate. Therefore, it is important to discuss these obligations, to ensure that the work they are funding does not result in negative human rights outcomes.

Various barriers and challenges were discussed. The colonial view of donors as benign benefactors. Many times, donors do not even expect to be accountable in the countries they operate, they feel more accountable to taxpayers in their originating countries. The WASH sector relies heavily on donor funding, and the mutual accountability mechanisms focus more on governments than on donors.

Regarding what can be done to improve donors and development partner's accountability, the experience shows that having government-led multi-stakeholder platforms greatly assist in this. It is important to have donors' participation and engagement in multistakeholder national processes, as well as policy and regulations for donors, to keep them in check. Other recommendations include having more funding for monitoring progress and longer-term planning and relationships.

Group 3 - Donors & Development Partners Facilitators: Virginia Roaf & Mariana Dias Simpson

Stories of Change: In your experience, how have donors & development partners demonstrated their accountability for what they do to achieve for equitable services during the pandemic & beyond?		What barriers are there to donors & development partners being held accountable for their contribution towards equitable services during pandemic and beyond?		What contributes to improving donors' & development partners' accountability (enforceability, transparency and answerability) to improve services during pandemic and beyond?	
Inadequately!		We have a colonial view of donors as benign benefactors	Governments dont drive public services or DPs	Government-led multistakeholder platforms	Donors' participation in multi-stakeholder national processes
		Donors feel more accountable to tax payers in their originating countries	Donors are not always prepared or expect to be held accountable	Policy and regulations for donors, to keep them in check	More funding for monitoring progress
		Mutual accountability is more focused on govts than on donors	The sector is very dependent on donors' funding	Longer term planning/ relationships	Donors engaging in MSPs and making commitments at the national level

Digital platforms

This group focused on how digital platforms can contribute to accountability for rural water supply. It is recognized that mobile and internet coverage is growing worldwide, and therefore digital platforms can speed up processes that are important for accountability, such as the collection of data, analysis of data, interactive mapping, etc. Furthermore, citizens' credibility can be boosted when digital devices are used for demanding accountability from authorities. However, there are several concerns: not everyone has access to digital devices, digital platforms can be expensive to implement and challenging to maintain. The purpose of the session was to share examples of what makes digital platforms work, what stops them from working, and when they are useful.

Digital platforms can be useful to public authorities, implementing agencies, and contractors – in a time of movement restrictions – to keep a close eye on rural infrastructure development projects; however, doubts were raised on the benefits of citizens who do not have technical competencies monitoring such projects. Safety concerns were also raised on the use of digital tools (particularly taking photos) to monitor more sensitive projects or projects located in insecure areas. A local multi–stakeholder platform (involving public authorities, contractors and community representatives), as well as technical experts accompanying citizens, could be a solution to ensure that civic monitoring is safe and worthwhile. Access to and cost of the internet are still barriers, as well as the difficulties in obtaining official documents, both online and face–to–face (like service standards, contracts, etc), which can discourage citizens from engaging in demanding accountability from duty bearers.

Group 4- Digital Platforms Facilitators: Annalisa Renna & Sara Ahrari

Stories of Change: Please share with us how in your experience, "digital platforms" have played a role in accountability (enforceability, answerability, transparency) for equitable rural water supply during the pandemic & beyond?		What barriers digital platforms face to scale up accountability for equitable rural water during pandemic and beyond?		What enablers do digital platforms require to scale up accountability for rural water during pandemic and beyond?	
The digital platforms have been used in West Africa & in particular monitoring the drilling work, but is important to inform the contractors, whats app has been very helpful, zoom is also used, enables the remote engagement possible		The risk can be a barrier, how can it be mitigated and how can the people will be engaged?	Connectivity and uploading the photos to internet can be a barrier	Use of knowledgeable people to do the monitoring in particular in areas with security issues	competency is an important requisite for good monitoring
		Access to information (i.e. BOQ) is very difficult to access	Political barriers		

Media

Pamela Kabasinguzi (HEWASA) shared the example of Wottazela radio campaign to hold leaders accountable for the WASH situation in their constituencies. She explained that radio engagement was very important, as listeners could answer poll questions by texting toll-free numbers, providing an effective accountability tool before and during COVID-19. This session focused on discussing how to hold leaders accountable using radio for WASH service delivery, how to use media to influence service delivery, and how to promote community participation in holding leaders accountable.

Various examples were shared of how media, and radio, in particular, were used to engage people, to reach out to water users, to provide space for citizen dialogue. The Wottazela program was shared as an example, and Water for People also has been using radio to support public utilities to reach out to their users. The media helps to generate awareness on the budgetary process, and increased participation due to the anonymous nature of surveys conducted, and it allows for wide participation of people at different levels, encompassing the "leave no one behind" principle. Some of the barriers are the airtime cost (at radio level), but at the individual level, the SMS's calls are all free. Therefore, among the enablers are providing toll-free numbers where communities can interact with the radio. Media has been a trusted source of information for the communities. Political leaders are also invited to the platforms, to interact with the communities and answer communities' questions and issues. This provides politicians with a platform for campaigning, but also to hold them accountable to WASH services. What has been seen is increased participation of wider sectors of society, particularly at the grassroots level, leaving no one behind.

Campaigns

Al-Hassan Adam shared the experience of the "Claim your rights campaign", which uses the human rights framework as a tool for mobilization. The campaign was successful in some countries, and many lessons were learned. The campaign aimed at giving voice to people that are marginalized and discriminated against and human rights were used as a tool to ensure people who don't have access to water, sanitation and hygiene have it.

One of the great barriers is the lack of knowledge amongst both right-holders and duty-bearers with regards to entitlement, expectations, obligations. In many rural communities, people didn't know who to go to, who to hold accountable, partly due to ghost service providers and informal service providers. Lack of regulation, threats and intimidation to campaigners, shrinking civil society's space. Lack of funding and interest in sustaining civil society mobilization, especially at a national level scale. Another issue raised was that different institutions and regulators were imposing taxes and levies on service providers in Kenya, who would then transfer those costs to the consumers.

Group 6- Campaigns / Movements Facilitator: Mr. Al-Hassan Adam & Mr. Temple Oraeki & Mr. Sam Taylor					
Stories of Change: Please share with us how in your experience, "Campaigns/Movements" have played a role in accountability (enforceability, answerability, transparency) for equitable rural water supply during the pandemic & beyond?		What barriers "Campaigns/Movements" face to scale up accountability for equitable rural water during pandemic and beyond?		What enablers d"Campaigns/Movements" require to scale up accountability for rural water during pandemic and beyond?	
Various methods of water rights claiming have been surfaced byu this work	we see a full range of methods thyat can be employed - some formal others less formal	Lack of funding for civil society mobilisations undermining ability to sustain campaigns	Lack of WASH sector interest in rights-focused campaigning	Understanding that campaigns are about a wide array of methods. not only logos and banners and topline tweets!	
Media campaigns are very effective in hold accountability	Grassroots campaigners have held governments accountable where international NGOs	Building coalitions can provide support and cover in actions	Lack of knowledge of rights-holders' entitlements + duty bearers' obligations. Excluded + rural	Time, staff, resources, organisational backing	Better regulation
We amplify and support the voices and works of partners, allies, and movements, to drive accountability.	Grassroots organisations know the best ways of representing themselves and	Threats + intimidation of rights campaigners	Inability to build on local victories to catalyse national/ transformative change	A deeper analysis of funding for WASH services. Do govs have the resources to fulfil their obligation as duty beares? If not, why not?	
	Right to information vital to realising the right to water.	The prioritisation of profit over people's access to services	Shrinking civil society space		
		Lack of regulation	Government shamelessness		

Knowledge Management for Accountability

Tim Brewer, Practice Lead – Research, Water Witness International, shared about the Accountability for Water program, which is a new action and research programme to strengthen accountability practice in the water sector. The program aims to accelerate the progress of the SDG6 by strengthening WASH and water resources governance systems through accountability. The program has produced a 2-part global review: Global Evidence Review: Overview and Summary Results and Country-Level Evidence Summaries. The program provided training in research and accountability tools to several fellows from different African countries, and then received 36 proposals on accountability research topics, of which 14 were selected for the cross-country research phase. The program intends to deliver vital accountability research and establish a community of practice in accountability.

Closing remarks

Louisa Gosling presented the concluding remarks of the session. She highlighted the richness of examples and experiences shared, and that this was a great opportunity to give accountability the spotlight it requires in the current world, with many conflicting interests, incentives and priorities. The discussions have helped to make accountability more tangible, first by broadening the understanding of accountability, by highlighting the challenges, barriers, opportunities and experiences of what is working in different places.

Participants

There were 216 registered participants, of which 16 were speakers, facilitators and organizers. Majority of the registered participants were from Africa (117), with Kenya (32), Nigeria (21) and Uganda (20) having the highest numbers of registered participants. There were 22 participants from Asia, 44 from Europe (including 25 from the United Kingdom), 23 from North America (including 20 from the United States of America), and 8 from South America.They were all invited to join the Leave no One Behind Dgroup of RWSN to keep the dialogue going.