

## Chapter 12

# Ensuring Accountable Cocreation of the SDGs

### Abstract

This chapter argues that failure to secure accountability can be costly because it raises doubts about the fairness, salience, and impact of cocreation. Cocreation must establish accountability with respect to four different audiences: sponsors, relevant stakeholders, affected citizens, and the general public. The chapter discusses the challenges of trying to solely hold cocreation networks and partnerships accountable based on formal accountability mechanisms. It argues that these formal mechanisms must be supplemented with social and more informal strategies of accountability. Finally, the chapter considers how changemakers can strengthen social and informal accountability in and around cocreating networks and partnerships.

*Keywords:* Accountability; accountability audiences; formal accountability mechanisms; informal accountability; social accountability; accountable cocreation

### Why Accountability Is Important

Goal 16 highlights the importance of transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in pursuing Agenda 2030. Moreover, the SDGs are guided by an underlying ethics that stresses that actors engaged in furthering the sustainability goals are responsible for the results and impacts that they produce and must ensure that those affected are not harmed by experimentation with new solutions. As in all human-centric change processes, accountability is an ethical and moral imperative. As a valuable strategy for solving complex societal problems and achieving SDG goals, cocreation must demonstrate its capacity to ensure accountability for its actions and inactions.

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While accountability is an ethical and moral imperative, it is also necessary for ensuring the legitimacy of sustainability efforts. Support for networks and partnerships that cocreate sustainability solutions hinges on the provision of transparent information about processes and outcomes and the explanation and justification of the impacts of new solutions on relevant and affected actors, who must be able to scrutinize, pass judgment, and sanction outputs and outcomes of cocreation (Bovens, Goodin, & Schillemans, 2014).

It is tempting for networks and partnerships to keep their goals, motives, and activities to themselves, either because it takes some work and energy to keep the outside world informed or because they want to keep competitors in the dark or avoid public criticism. Due to the informal and temporal character of many cocreation processes, there is often ample opportunity to avoid the provision of accounts to the general public. However, failure to secure accountability can be costly because it raises doubts about the fairness, salience, and impact of cocreation and what interests it serves. If a group of private developers, public administrators, and politicians join forces to develop a run-down neighborhood and do not inform and respond to concerns from local residents, this may create all sorts of rumors and speculations about dirty deals that may lead to resistance. Likewise, if a network of farmers and rural NGOs sets out to promote sustainable agriculture, its success may prove to be limited if it fails to make the case for its ideas and plans to other local stakeholders.

Finally, weak accountability can also prevent cocreation from receiving feedback that is vital for understanding social, economic, or environmental problems, pursuing a given set of goals, and producing intended outcomes. Suspicion about what cocreation does and who benefits can be more detrimental for securing support from society than the criticism that results from public account-giving. It can also make it more difficult for a network or partnership to get relevant and affected audiences to acknowledge its successes. Public skepticism can create a vicious circle of declining support that makes it difficult to operate legitimately and effectively, and subsequently makes it even more tempting to avoid transparency, scrutiny, and judgment from external actors.

Conversely, an accountable cocreation process stands a fair chance of creating a virtuous circle. Having to explain and justify what is going on (accounts) incentivizes the cocreating actors to perform well (efficiency). They may even learn something from responding to critical inquiries from relevant and affected audiences or the broader public that they can use to improve the impact of their solutions (effectiveness). In other words, having to give accounts can push and help a network or partnership to do better, which will enhance the support from external actors (Bäckstrand, 2006; Weech-Maldonado, Benson, & Gamm, 2003; Wu, Liu, Jin, & Sing, 2016). Support, in turn, can make it easier to communicate with external audiences in productive and constructive ways, completing the virtuous accountability circle shown in [Fig. 12.1](#).

However, formal accountability mechanisms based on access to information and opportunity to monitor and sanction a cocreation process are not always in place, and if they are, they are rarely sufficient to secure strong accountability. Ensuring accountability depends on the actual responsiveness of the members of a

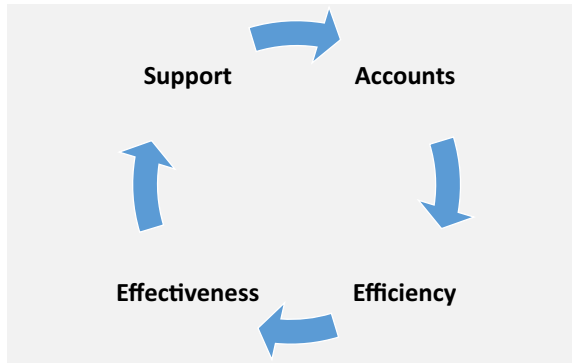


Fig. 12.1. The Virtuous Accountability Circle.

network or partnership and on the efficacy and social capital of relevant and affected audiences, which is again a product of the way and the degree to which they interact with each other (Brinkerhoff & Wetterberg, 2016; Fox, 2015; Wetterberg, Brinkerhoff, & Hertz, 2016). In other words, the quality of an accountability relationship hinges on the extent to which the cocreating actors and relevant and affected audiences possess the self-confidence, skills, and resources needed to play their part. Building this capacity is an important side-product of virtuous accountability circles.

This chapter considers what changemakers can do to promote virtuous accountability circles around cocreating networks and partnerships. First, we consider to whom a cocreation should be accountable. Then we discuss the limits to formal accountability and the prospects of promoting the social and informal accountability around networks and partnerships, before we conclude with some recommendations regarding what changemakers can do to strengthen the accountability of cocreation processes, thus honoring the ethical and moral imperative of leading change.

### **Accountable to Whom?**

An important consideration for cocreation is to whom the process needs to be accountable. In other words, cocreation partnerships need to identify their accountability audiences (Bovens, Goodin, & Schillemans, 2014). While there is considerable variation in the context, goals, and impacts of local partnerships, most partnerships may benefit from being accountable to some, and maybe even all, of the following accountability audiences: sponsors, public, and private stakeholders, affected citizens, and the general public (Collier, 2008; Ehren & Perryman, 2018; Lee, 2004; Sørensen & Torfing, 2005). Sponsors are those external actors who finance or authorize cocreation, including international donor organizations, government agencies, business foundations, or philanthropists. Public and private stakeholders are those formal organizations or informal groups

that have a clear stake in the matter at hand and have an active supportive role to play if cocreation is to succeed in its purpose. The affected actors are those who experience the positive or negative consequences of cocreation in their everyday lives. A final accountability audience is the general public, which includes all those local actors who are not directly interested in or affected by the cocreation but who are members of the community that cocreation aims to influence. Put differently, a cocreation can secure a combination of upward, inward, downward, and outward accountability through engagement with these four audiences, as illustrated in Fig. 12.2.

*Upward accountability* to sponsors is particularly important if networks or partnerships rely on financial, political, and moral support from powerful public and private actors. Failure to provide sponsors with information and accounts about activities and results or allow them to monitor and critically scrutinize these accounts may undermine sponsor support, which can lead to withdrawal of political support and future funding. The need to secure upward accountability tends to be self-evident when government is the main sponsor of cocreation partnerships, such as in the case of community policing and the governance of public schools in Chicago (Fung, 2001). The institutionalization of a system of “accountable autonomy” around these partnerships emphasizes the close connection between upward accountability to government and the local

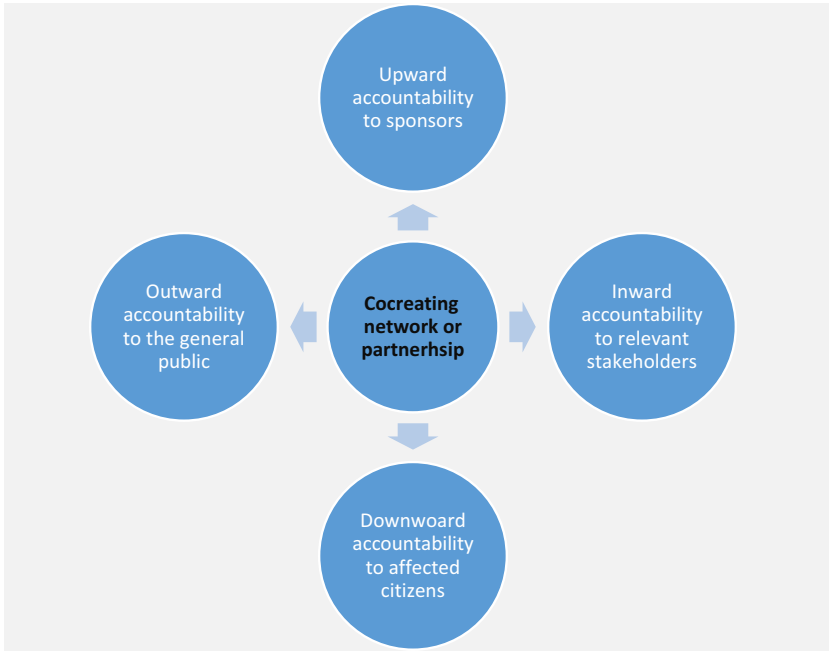


Fig. 12.2. Four Key Accountability Audiences.

autonomy that a cocreation partnership enjoys. This upward accountability may be less self-evident when there are many small sponsors with a limited or mainly informal authority, and when there are no formally institutionalized accountability procedures in place. However, it is equally important for a partnership to secure upward accountability in those situations, and as we shall see later, local changemakers can do a lot to make it happen.

*Inward accountability* is also important. Accountability to public or private stakeholders is inward when these stakeholders are members of the cocreating networks and partnerships and hold each other to account. These stakeholders typically possess a certain expertise or professional competence or share a common goal or interest and they may include public agencies, trade unions, professional or scientific communities, voluntary organizations, business associations, religious groups, organizations representing service users, neighborhood committees, or village councils. Even if they are not formally obligated to do so, the individual participants are often under some pressure to explain and justify their behavior as well as the general performance of the partnership or network to each other. In addition, individual stakeholder groups must often report back to their own organizational constituencies. Facilitating these accountability connections is important for the overall success of cocreation because stakeholder representatives must be able to sell the cocreation project back home in order to mobilize resources and commitment. Portuguese Agenda 21 programs for sustainable development faced accountability problems in many localities where they failed to mobilize support and commitment from local stakeholder groups (Fidelis & Pires, 2009).

*Downward accountability* flows from a cocreation partnership to those actors who are affected by its interventions. The affected actors include both the potential beneficiaries and those who may be experiencing the negative impacts of the project. Critical feedback from these groups is crucial for designing solutions aiming to achieve one or more SDGs. A focused effort to provide information about planned interventions and to explain what the cocreating actors are trying to achieve can reduce the level of uncertainty and anxiety among affected groups. Moreover, downward accountability provides networks and partnerships with practical insights that they can use to match partnership aspirations to the local context. A study of 15 projects aiming to empower poor women in India provides a case in point. The most successful projects drew on insights from the women themselves (Kilby, 2006). Dialogue with the end users proved equally important for a partnership project aiming to improve public transport for low-income citizens in Tanzania (Sohail, Maunder, & Miles, 2004).

While networks and partnerships tend to pay considerable attention to the need for some degree of upward and inward accountability, they often overlook the importance of being accountable to the affected actors. The incentives to do so are often weak. Cocreating actors have a strong incentive to be accountable to their sponsors who have power to stop or reduce political or financial support. There are also strong reasons to be accountable to involved stakeholders who may consider to withdraw their participation and to mobilize resistance. By comparison, the incentive of networks or partnerships to provide accounts and respond to

the concerns and judgments of the affected actors will tend to vary according to their ability to apply pressure. Educated, resourceful, and well-connected actors are often better able to pressure a cocreation partnership to provide precise and regular accounts and to mobilize public resistance if they detect problems in these accounts. Affected actors with fewer resources, including women and minority groups, are not in the same situation and there is considerable risk that cocreation will not do what it takes to harvest the benefits of downward accountability (Collier, 2008). In short, there are in-built inequalities in accountability processes that are not only problematic in the light of Goal 10's efforts to reduce inequalities, but are also harmful for the ability of creation to achieve other SDGs.

The final accountability audience for cocreation networks and partnerships is the general public. There are cocreation processes that may have reasons to avoid drawing public attention. This may be the case when the goals they pursue are broadly perceived as illegitimate in the local context, when partnerships exclude certain key stakeholders or when cocreation is likely to produce significant negative externalities (Steen, Brandsen, & Verschuere, 2018). Yet, if the goal is to contribute to solving pressing local problems, networks and partnerships have a lot to gain by promoting *outward accountability*, which is important even if publicity might result in heated public discussion. A proactive media strategy makes it possible for a cocreation to frame the public debate around its goals and activities, to start the dialogue early on when it is easier to be receptive to public criticism, and to mobilize support and recruit ambassadors. While secrecy severely harms the reputation of cocreation, openness and transparency can help to brand a project in ways that capture the attention of sponsors and organized stakeholders and boost the backing from the local community. Such a strategy was successfully pursued by a network working to promote the building of a bridge between Denmark and Germany. From day one, it used all available means to spread the word to the general public and to participate in public debate using old and new social media. Based on this feedback and interaction, the network revised the cocreation strategy and managed to influence public decision-makers (Torfing, Sørensen, & Fotel, 2009). However, as the intensity of media communication increases, it becomes more difficult and demanding to capture and maintain public attention, stage a productive dialogue with the public, and signal responsiveness to public judgments. In particular, it can be difficult to find a way to communicate information and give accounts that do not live up to the demand for simple stories that stir emotions and communicate conflict, drama, heroes, and villains.

### **Challenges Related to Holding Cocreation Partnerships to Account**

Despite the fact that those who cocreate SDG solutions can benefit from being accountable to different audiences, the accountability around many networks and partnerships is weak. This is the case in wealthy as well as in middle- and

low-income countries (Acar, Guo, & Yang, 2012; Westhorp et al., 2014). It is tempting to suggest that the remedy is to introduce formal accountability mechanisms that sponsors, organized interests, end users, and the general public can use to monitor, scrutinize, criticize, and sanction those participating in networks and partnerships (Kilby, 2006; Westhorp et al., 2014). Formal accountability mechanisms such as budgetary control, mandatory activity reporting, and process transparency can definitely strengthen the accountability around cocreations. Sponsors can control how a partnership uses the granted funds and autonomy for the intended purpose; public and private stakeholders can make sure that they like what they see; and citizens can get the insights they need to demand an explanation and contest cocreated activities and outcomes. These positive benefits of formal accountability mechanisms are summarized in Table 12.1.

Formal accountability mechanisms are no panacea. They do not necessarily strengthen the legitimacy of public and private organizations nor render them more effective (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2015; Molecke & Pinkse, 2017). However, formal accountability mechanisms also tend to be better suited to holding individual organizations to account than interorganizational partnerships and networks. Organizations are formal entities with rules and procedures, hierarchies, operational capacity, and reward systems that commit its members to stay put and do their job even when they do not feel like it. Cocreation processes are informal ad hoc collaborations between a changing set of actors, and it can be difficult to pin the responsibility for decisions made and actions taken on specific actors and to come up with reliable justifications. It is rarely completely clear what precisely is decided and for what reasons, just as it can be uncertain who is responsible for making the decisions and for carrying them out. In other words, the distribution of authority and responsibility for getting things done tends to be relatively messy, random, and opaque in networks and partnerships compared to individual organizations, and this difference tends to reduce the efficacy of formal accountability mechanisms (Papadopoulos, 2007).

Table 12.1. Potential Positive Impacts of Formal Accountability Mechanisms.

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**Formal Accountability Mechanisms Can:**

- Give sponsors access to informative accounts about how the cocreation partnership has used its funding and adhered to its mandate
  - Grant public and private stakeholders opportunities to investigate how partnership activities align with their own interests and their own professional norms and standards, as well as with overall project objectives
  - Offer affected citizens and the general public a right to raise complaints against a network or partnership, ask the involved Actors to justify their actions, and openly criticize them in ways that potentially harm their reputation
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Another complication is that efforts to impose strict formal accountability mechanisms can discourage public and private actors from joining forces to solve local problems. Although formal accountability is important, strict detailed budgetary control and demands for process documentation and reporting of results places a large burden on the actors engaged in networks and partnerships. Control systems also tend to send a message of distrust that will demotivate and maybe even offend local actors. Actors engaged in cocreation processes take part on a voluntary basis and put in hours that they could have used for other and more private purposes because they want to solve concrete local problems and make things better for themselves and others. Exit options are plentiful and it is tempting to opt out if working together becomes too troublesome.

Finally, formal calls for extensive openness and process transparency can harm the functionality of a network or partnership. Put bluntly, cocreation between actors with different ideas, perspectives, and interests hinges on some degree of secrecy and seclusion. When external actors can follow the discussions among the members of a network or partnership, it becomes more difficult to develop and agree on shared goals and strategies since this often depends on compromise. Outside spectators make the members more prone to stick to fixed positions, which hampers mutual learning, innovative exploration of new ideas, and negotiation of solutions to a given problem. Hence, while some degree of process transparency is indeed crucial for securing accountability, full transparency can end up reducing the value addition of networks and partnerships, which is to get local actors to join forces to solve local problems and promote the SDGs (de Fine Licht & Naurin, 2016).

A widely used strategy for managing the relationship between transparency and the need for some degree of privacy in negotiations is to establish a degree of separation between front-stage and back-stage cocreation – i.e., between what goes on in public to satisfy external accountability audiences and in private discussions where stakeholders will be not negatively judged for compromise (Klijn, 2014). A secluded arena for private discussions may facilitate negotiations but may also push cocreation toward exclusivity. [Table 12.2](#) summarizes the potential downsides of formal accountability.

Table 12.2. Potential Negative Impacts of Formal Accountability Mechanisms.

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**Formal Accountability Mechanisms May:**

- Be less effective because of the informal, Ad hoc, and fuzzy character of cocreated governance
  - Create administrative burdens that are difficult for some networks and partnerships to shoulder and thus may discourage participation
  - Send a signal of distrust that demotivates otherwise highly motivated and engaged people from joining forces
  - Hamper compromise formation based on stakeholders concessions or may push stakeholders toward exclusive back-stage privacy
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Taken together the potential positive and negative impacts that formal accountability mechanisms can have on mobilizing and supporting local actors to cocreate SDG solutions indicate that they should be used with some caution. Moreover, they point to the need to look for other additional ways to strengthen the accountability of networks and partnerships.

## **Strategies for Promoting Accountable Cocreation**

A promising alternative to overburdening cocreation with formal demands for openness, transparency, oversight, and sanctioning is to supplement formal public accountability with more social and informal accountability mechanisms. These mechanisms strive to achieve accountability by building a strong external accountability environment and supportive norms that reinforce accountable behavior.

Social accountability refers to the ability of local communities to hold governance actors to account. It presupposes both the ability of governance actors to produce accessible, nontechnical accounts of their action and the capacity of local communities to digest and critically respond to these accounts (Fox, 2015). This mutual relation between governance actors and communities depends on the empowerment of both parties, with some critical questions: How self-confident and capable are the participants in cocreation when it comes to keeping external actors informed and responding to their concerns and judgments? And how comfortable, skilled, and well-connected are the different audiences when it comes to seeking information, passing judgment on the accounts they get, and sanctioning a network or partnership accordingly? These questions suggest that it is far from easy to create social accountability.

It is a challenging task to boost the self-confidence and capability of cocreating actors so that they can explain their actions to people who have not been involved in the collaborative process. Many networks and partnerships shy away from trying to justify their decisions and actions because the issues at stake involve complex dilemmas and a difficult balancing of conflictual concerns and interests. Instead, they come up with partial information and simplified accounts to cover up the difficult choices, although doing so may result in the surge of distrust among competent audiences that detect weak points in the storyline. Moreover, it is tempting to cover up or blame others for failures and negative unintended side effects rather than explaining what went wrong and engaging in discussions of how to remedy flaws and make things better (Hinterleitner, 2020).

The value of investing time and energy in giving accounts and qualifying these accounts in dialogue with critical audiences is illustrated by the experience of a small town in Denmark, where the attempt by a network to build a culture house met heavy resistance from many citizens. To curb this resistance, the network spent several Saturdays in front of the local supermarket and on the pedestrian street arguing their case and responding to different concerns. This practice helped them to gradually enhance support for the project among the local citizens (Sørensen & Torfing, 2003). Building the self-confidence and capacity needed to

give thorough and trustworthy accounts requires a lot of learning-by-doing. Cocreating actors must learn how to communicate the motivation and reasoning for their definition of problems and the solutions they have chosen. They must see that engagement with critical feedback can be productive for generating project support.

Another way to promote social accountability is to make different audiences comfortable in seeking information about what a network or partnership is doing, asking for explanations, challenging these explanations, and imposing sanctions. These actions require courage, skill, and social capital. Courage is necessary to step into the role as critical audience, and people need skills to sort through piles of information and cut to the core of accounts provided by actors with an eloquent tongue. It is also difficult to hold anyone to account if you are alone. Alliances and trust-based social ties are of key importance for community empowerment. A case in point is when a Ugandan community of NGOs representing those affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic used their social capital to successfully challenge the provided services (Awio, Northcott, & Lawrence, 2011). In the same way, citizens successfully used their connections to hold local governments in Sub-Saharan Africa accountable for their service delivery (Ogentho, Munene, Kamukama, & Ntayi, 2020).

Levels of social accountability associated with networks and partnerships vary considerably. When both the cocreating actors and their audiences are capable participants in the accountability relationship, there is a fair chance that there will be relatively strong accountability even when the formal accountability mechanisms are limited. Yet, this is not necessarily the case if a network or partnership is self-confident and capable but the audiences lack courage, skill, and social capital. Nor is it the case if communities are empowered but the cocreating actors are unable to produce accessible account and respond productively to community queries and demands. Hence, to secure legitimate and effective SDG cocreation, it is not only important that both sides in an accountability relationship know how to play their part, but that they both have the ability to do so.

A potential weakness of social accountability is that communities may not have power to sanction unaccountable governance actors who produce problematic solutions. A partial remedy to this weakness is that higher-level regional or national governments may step in and force local governance actors to be more responsive (Fox, 2015; Sørensen & Torfing, 2021). Government can add teeth to the bite of local communities aiming to hold governance actors to account.

We have already noted that networks and partnerships follow a different *modus operandi* than organizations. They are plural and voluntary groupings of actors working in more informal ways. Hence, the introduction of formal accountability mechanisms may be counter-productive because formal obligations and administrative burdens can discourage people from investing their time and energy. A promising alternative that may complement social accountability is to strengthen the *informal accountability* around such processes (Romzek, LeRoux, & Blackmar, 2012). Informal accountability is a product of the expectations that condition an accountability relationship. When cocreating actors and their accountability audiences have high expectations about giving and getting

accounts, informal accountability will be strong. Informal accountability comes in the shape of explicit and tacit norms and rules regarding the appropriateness of particular behaviors and perceptions of what counts as good and fair behavior. Pertinent questions include: How is a network or partnership supposed to communicate with different audiences, and how is it perceived as appropriate for these audiences to express their opinion and react? Over time, these expectations turn into routinized patterns of action that people use as a manual for what counts as good and fair, and which may even travel to other networks and partnerships as a part of the baggage that local actors carry with them into other cocreation processes.

When the informal accountability around a cocreation process is strong, networks and partnerships will be expected to make significant efforts to keep their different audiences well-informed and to be responsive to their concerns and criticisms. Likewise, accountability audiences will be expected to seek and scrutinize information and voice their opinion. When a network or partnership fails to meet these expectations, it can seriously harm their reputation, and an accusation of failing to be accountable will be a serious sanction. Fear of such reputational damage can spur accountability even when there are few formal accountability mechanisms in place. This informal accountability mechanism was observed in the case in the provision of public goods in rural China (Tsai, 2007), and in multisector service delivery collaborations in a number of US counties (Romzek, LeRoux, Johnston, Kempf, & Piatak, 2014). However, it can also be costly for accountability audiences when they are passive and do not uphold high accountability expectations. As a result, they may be viewed as disengaged and incompetent. Over time such passivity may not only weaken the attention paid to a given accountability audience, but also reduce the general level of informal accountability. [Table 12.3](#) summarizes the key properties of the actors involved in social and informal accountability.

Table 12.3. Important Actor Properties in Social and Informal Accountability.

	<b>Cocreating Actors</b>	<b>Audiences</b>
Social Accountability	Are confident that they can explain themselves and possess the know-how to do so	Are courageous and skilled and have the social capital needed to seek information, and question, criticize, and sanction networks and partnerships
Informal Accountability	Are expected to go a long way to keep their different audiences well-informed and to be responsive to their concerns and criticisms	Are expected to seek and scrutinize information, voice their opinion, and problematize the reputation of networks and partnerships

While formal accountability mechanisms impose duties and rights on actors in an accountability relationship, social accountability empower actors with the efficacy and responsibility to fulfill these duties and exercise their rights, and informal accountability encourages actors to have high expectations for accountable relationships.

## **Building Social and Informal Accountability**

What can a changemaker do to strengthen social and informal accountability in and around a cocreating network or partnership? This question has no easy answer, and the solution cannot be achieved overnight. It involves building a well-functioning accountability relationship that thrives on the mutual empowerment of account-givers and their accountability audiences and requires formation of strong norms about the need for the actors to invest in playing their respective roles in the accountability relationship. In short, social and informal accountability requires both capacity-building and a transformation of what is considered appropriate action. It goes without saying that strengthening social and informal accountability is a gradual step-by-step process.

Changemakers have a key role in creating the conditions for social and informal accountability. If social accountability is weak at the outset, it is important to proceed with caution and look for low-hanging fruits in terms of situations where dialogue between the members of a network or partnership and one or more of its audiences is likely to go well because the level of tension is low or moderate. Even in this situation, it is important to select topics that are relatively easy to talk about, where there is a fair chance that the audiences will be able to understand and digest the information and accounts they receive, and where the cocreating actors are not overly sensitive to criticism and scared of sanctions. If there is a marked imbalance in the level of empowerment between some of the participants, it can be useful to prepare and train groups for such engagements. This is particularly relevant when children or young people are involved.

Positive experiences with engaging in a mutually productive accountability relationship on easily addressed topics can encourage the members of a cocreation process to continue to proactively engage with their accountability audiences and empower such audiences to seek accountability in other situations. Harvesting low-hanging fruits in this way can improve social accountability for the involved actors to a level that makes it possible to promote accountability around more difficult and contentious topics. In other words, changemakers have a key role to play in designing and upscaling the dialogue between a network or partnership and its accountability audiences in a way that gradually empowers both to engage in the creation of accountability around the cocreation of SDG solutions.

Changemakers also have an important role to play in promoting informal accountability. The main objective is to create and maintain high expectations regarding how much information a network or partnership will provide; how and to whom it is communicated; how they will respond to critique and concerns; and how different audiences will react. Although expectations are products of concrete

experiences, they are also shaped by how we talk about what constitutes good and fair behavior. Changemakers can emphasize that close and continuous dialogue with external actors is both valuable for building legitimacy and promoting effective problem-solving and something that is expected and in line with common practice. Promotion of rituals and traditions of accountability can over time make people regard accountability practices as normal routines. Creating “rules-in-practice” is how accountability is built into the architecture of a cocreation process. Over time, such rituals and traditions can spread to cocreational practices in all corners of a local community. They can take the form of regularly held workshops where the cocreating actors and relevant and affected audiences discuss matters of concern. They can also come in the shape of interactive web-pages or other social media platforms that become a locus for spreading information and raising concerns.

Table 12.4. Recommendations for Strengthening Accountability of Cocreation Arenas.

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- Pay attention to how accountability can enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of cocreated efforts to promote the SDGs
  - Regardless of whether or not formal accountability mechanisms are in place, build the social and informal accountability needed to promote accountable cocreation
  - Make sure that networks and partnerships are accountable to all relevant accountability audiences, including those who have a limited ability to impose sanctions
  - Protect the cocreating actors against administrative burdens associated with formal and other forms of accountability
  - Give networks and partnerships ample opportunity to exchange and develop ideas and negotiate goals and solutions in private discussions, but beware of the danger of exclusivity
  - Spread information about the mission pursued by the cocreation processes and its different activities through social media
  - Encourage the participants in networks and partnerships to engage in continuous dialogue with the different accountability audiences – especially those who are skeptical
  - Use carefully designed events and processes to train the involved actors to competently play their part in the accountability relationship
  - Emphasize the importance and appropriateness of providing information, giving accounts, and allowing community actors to critically scrutinize and sanction these accounts
  - Normalize and routinize practices that bolster accountability and integrate them into all the different phases of the cocreation process
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Another way to integrate accountability into the everyday practice of cocreation is to make a habit of conducting focus group interviews with selected audiences or hosting open house meetings that create an opportunity for the general public to raise questions and the cocreating actors to respond. Such routinized activities can help to keep expectations high. A downside is that they tend to be burdensome because it takes time for the cocreating actors as well as for the audiences. Therefore, changemakers will need to carry much of the practical burden associated with organizing such activities, and also with preparing relevant and affected actors to take part in them.

## **Conclusion**

From the points made in this chapter, it is possible to tease out a list of recommendations that changemakers can draw upon in promoting accountability around the cocreation of SDG solutions. The recommendations listed in [Table 12.4](#) stress that securing accountability should be a continuous concern of cocreators and an inherent part of all cocreation processes.