
ADVANCING AND DEEPENING THE IMPACT OF ACS' EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN ACCOUNTABILITY FOR UHC

A FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE

During the first few years of the African Collaborative for Health Financing Solutions (ACS) project, the team spent significant time grappling with situating the different categories and elements of accountability in the broad and nebulous universal health coverage (UHC) space. During ACS' Accountability Collaborative's core group meeting, which convened in April 2019 in Nairobi, the project began to build out a collaborative learning agenda on strengthening accountability for UHC, by linking our research and learning (R&L) agenda explicitly to priorities identified and discussed. We also began stakeholder mapping in two of ACS' implementing countries (Benin and Botswana) to better understand accountability efforts and the actors involved to consolidate the Accountability Learning Collaborative (ALC). In West Africa, ACS has supported conducting country-level action research and technical assistance in Burkina Faso and Togo. There is also alignment in the Benin and Botswana country workplan activities that focus on accountability-related support, including: 1. stakeholder surveys on the priority topics around accountability; 2. mapping and identifying accountability themes that are of interest to the countries; and 3. supporting a cross-country learning exchange on accountability.

To date, accountability activities have been proceeding in a relatively siloed manner, with some information sharing, but little synergy. As a project, ACS endeavors to demonstrate a lasting impact of its accountability-focused activities to support UHC processes more effectively in sub-Saharan Africa. Current approaches have focused on developing a membership-based ALC to guide priority areas and exchange, but the challenge has been to articulate how to translate participants' knowledge acquisition into results and impact at the country level as they learn from the collaborative without accompanying country-level support.

There is a need to redefine accountability within the ACS context, rather than limiting it to the proposed ALC. With limited implementation time remaining, the redefinition should look at:

- A collective vision that aligns country and regional efforts.
- Linkages to existing platforms at country, regional and global levels to build sustained access to relevant knowledge and information.
- Ways to develop capacity/coaching to apply the available knowledge and information in stakeholder country contexts.

Significant progress has been made on the R&L agenda that has helped build a more solid conceptual framework for strengthening accountability for UHC. With this, ACS can more clearly articulate a vision to guide the final two years of the project and to inform longer-term collaboration and learning across the continent, for more concrete impact at the country level. Instead of performing discrete isolated activities, this vision statement frames accountability as a cross-cutting focus of the overall ACS approach. It re-emphasizes the need to create a conducive environment for greater sustainability of accountability mechanisms through increased African institutional ownership of this learning agenda as it evolves.

Therefore, it should be noted that this vision focuses less on establishing an ALC-driven platform with closed membership and in-person convenings, and more on *building and sustaining a collaborative learning dynamic on accountability for UHC led by African institutions and existing networks and platforms*.

This vision calls on a restructuration that reinforces accountability interventions taking place within a country led UHC process, while regional activities build on and extract country lessons to package cross-country learnings. In its first phase, a focus will be on engaging deeply in (interested) ACS implementing countries, building especially in West Africa where current activities across the different axes presented here are concentrated, and multiple funding streams are available. Overall, ACS will continue to invest core funds to broaden interest in and support to strengthen accountability for UHC across the continent.

The accountability vision is grounded in the Heaven and Hell framework to anchor ACS' accountability work, to articulate synergies and to build in a continuous learning function at project, country, and regional levels.

Figure 1 outlines the three main axes of ACS activities to strengthen accountability for UHC: 1. the research and learning axis, 2. the country iteration axis, and 3. the regional collaboration and exchange axis.

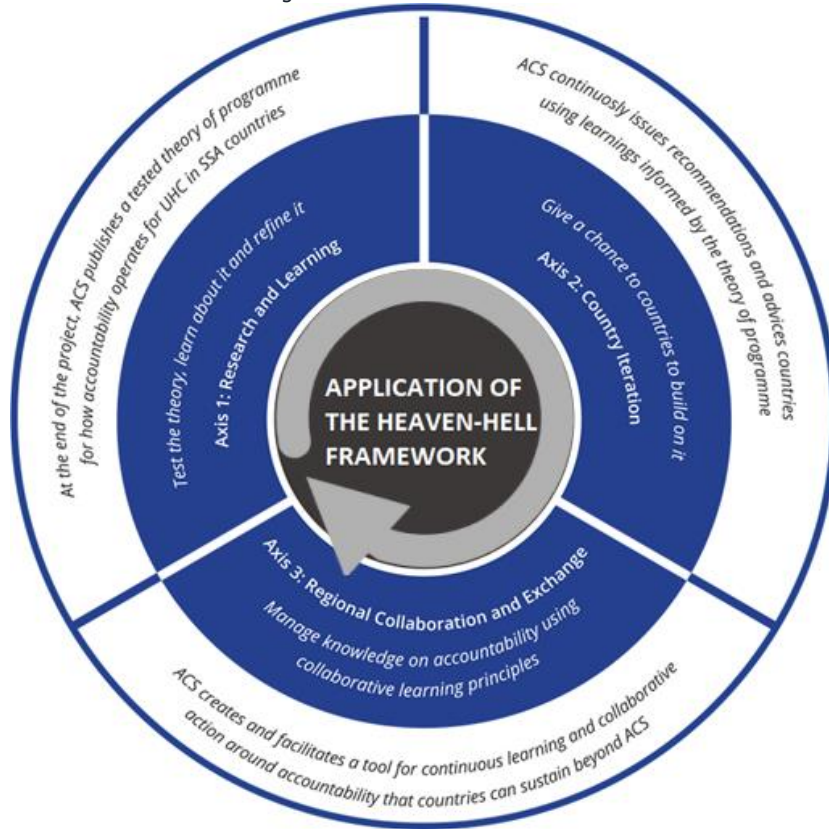


Figure 1: The Heaven-Hell framework

In year 4 and 5 of ACS' core and country workplans, each will further articulate how activities related to the three axes are embedded in country activities to provide solid, complementary packages of support that reflect countries' priorities. A deliberate bottom-up planning effort will start with the identification of countries' accountability-related learning priorities to inform the core work plan. In turn, each country team will identify the accountability activities that are likely to feed into regional learning areas.

AXIS 1: RESEARCH AND LEARNING

This axis is the targeted subset of ACS' broad R&L effort. It focuses on building out the conceptual and evidence underpinnings for strengthening accountability within the UHC space at the country level using and refining the Heaven and Hell framework. We expect this axis to produce articles and provide strategic guidance and framing.

AXIS 2: COUNTRY ITERATION

We intend to apply the Heaven and Hell framework in ACS-supported countries to help the project understand not only what countries are doing/can do to improve accountability (mapping), but also focus on why/how it works and its impact (facilitate using learnings in a particular country context).

AXIS 3: REGIONAL COLLABORATION AND EXCHANGE

This axis aims to leverage collective learning and action to strengthen accountability for UHC, both among countries as well as by linking to other global and regional platforms/mechanisms.

KEY QUESTION

How do accountability mechanisms function within the UHC landscape?

GUIDING PRINCIPLES MOVING FORWARD

- We have the opportunity to explore the "how" of the key question above in at least 1-2 countries where ACS has buy-in resources (e.g. Benin and Togo) to go deeper into these countries.
- We must link regional learning to the country context of the "how".
- We will engage with country teams and local policy dialogue platforms to identify whether we are on the right path.
- We will concurrently pursue the ALC and actual support (capacity building, mentorship, linkages) at country (largely, based on available funds) and regional level.
- Our activities' focus is facilitating the 'how' and building capacity to undertake effective accountability approaches

rather than undertaking the actual work. The 'action' level is the remit of country accountability players.

- We will deliberately seek to learn how skills are permeating and document learnings emerging from these actions.

WHERE TO START

Now that we have a structured framework, upcoming activities will focus on accountability interventions at the country level. Below are some entry points:

- Training webinars for civil society organizations (CSOs) on how to apply the Heaven and Hell framework
- Coaching support to connect accountability implementers to experts
- Sharing of accountability for UHC analytical frameworks including evaluation dimension, best practices as well as practical tools that are useable at low adaptation effort cost
- Building a resource center that attracts governmental officials and CSOs
- Partnering with legitimate, well-known organizations (WHO, AFRO, WAHO, HSG collaborative, etc.) to create synergies and lasting linkages, and to raise the visibility and understanding of how to strengthen accountability for UHC

POTENTIAL CONCRETE ACTIONS

- Dissemination of the mapping exercise findings and publications on the Heaven and Hell framework (abstracts, policy briefs, etc.)
- Development of operational definitions of the different concepts related to accountability for UHC
- Identification, curation and packaging of the literature (books/ handouts/readings, grey literature, case studies, etc.)
- Coaching support to in-country organizations that are willing to strengthen the accountability culture
- Development of accountability impact assessment matrix (checklist, review tool, etc.)

Table 1 attempts to define the different functions and tasks inherent in approaching our accountability support more holistically. We will need to mobilize across the ACS team, especially African partner institutions to succeed, and to set up a sustainable dynamic beyond the life of project.

TABLE 1: ACCOUNTABILITY WORKSTREAM FUNCTIONS

<i>Accountability actors</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
Strategic and technical guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing the accountability vision note • Identifying thematic topics for partners and stakeholders to discuss based on mapping exercises and other analyses • Drafting technical briefs (notes, frameworks, etc.)
Intelligence and knowledge management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devising and developing study protocols and data collection tools (literature reviews, questionnaires, key informant interviews, participatory observations) • Translating available knowledge • Disseminating knowledge across partners and stakeholders within and outside implementing countries • Organizing an accountability resource center • Observing/assessing accountability ecosystem dynamics • Identifying coordination and synergy opportunities • Convening relevant partners and stakeholders (periodical, discrete virtual and in-person meetings) • Connecting relevant partners and stakeholders with regional and global accountability initiatives
Project management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing the operational workplan • Developing the operational budget • Coordinating internally with countries and regional workstreams • Reporting periodically on progress being made (activities and finance)



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