

# CHANGING THE GAME:

## A critical analysis of accountability in Mega Sport Event infrastructure delivery

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### Abstract

Accountability in the delivery of Mega Sport Events (MSEs) is an overarching value to improve the governance of these events. It is an essential step towards developing infrastructure in host countries which meets people's needs and does not alienate citizens and communities during planning and delivery stages. However, opacity in the legal structure of international sports organisations, secrecy of information on the part of governments and delivery authorities, and a lack of space for informed participation threaten accountability in the implementation of infrastructure delivered for these events. Developing a space for social dialogue and engagement could address low accountability and

participation. Commitment from sports organisations to change their status as non-profits and abide by broad disclosure obligations could see these organisations lead by example and provide necessary support to improve the dynamics of accountability.



It is true that accountability has costs. It is also true that avoiding accountability has potentially much larger costs



*Performance Audit Review, The Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games, preface*



Credit: Matushchak Anton/shutterstock.com

## Introduction

In Robert Klitgaard's famous quote, corruption emerges where there is a monopoly, a discretionary power and the lack of accountability. Although a simplistic formula – corruption equals monopoly plus discretion minus accountability – it has the merit of placing accountability (or lack thereof) as a key factor to explain corruption.

MSEs have become big business, with large sums of public resources allocated to deliver the infrastructure for these events. Despite the use of tax-payers' money, the assessment of MSEs provides many examples of a lack of public accountability. The [first paper](#) in this EAP Insights series focussed on the abuses suffered by construction workers. The [second paper](#) addressed the issue of large-scale corruption in the delivery of

infrastructure for the events. Both of these scenarios can be traced to situations where accountability is weak.

In our third paper in this series we discuss the meaning of accountability as an overarching value to improve the governance of MSEs and the delivery of infrastructure related to these events. We highlight the challenges of establishing accountability mechanisms, explore the consequences that a lack of accountability can generate in addition to corruption and labour exploitation, and discuss how channels of civic engagement can help close the accountability gap. We also present recommendations that we believe are key to overcoming these challenges.

# 1 Accountability in the context of MSEs

According to the UNDP, accountability can be defined as "a relationship between two bodies, in which the performance of one is subject to oversight by another". Depending on the theoretical affiliation adopted, accountability can be seen as a [principal-agent relationship](#) where citizens are the ultimate principals

with the state acting on their behalf to provide public goods and services. From a [human rights approach](#), accountability is built on the basis of a relationship between a bearer of a right and public agents who hold the duty of fulfilling and respecting that right.

“ Horizontal accountability consists of formal relationships within the state itself, whereby one state actor has the formal authority to demand explanations or impose penalties on another. Its focus is on internal checks and oversight processes.

Vertical forms of accountability are those in which citizens and their associations play direct roles in holding the powerful to account. Elections are the formal institutional channel of vertical accountability. But there are also informal processes through which citizens organize themselves into associations capable of lobbying governments and private service providers.

Diagonal accountability operates in a domain between the vertical and horizontal dimensions. It refers to the phenomenon of direct citizen engagement with horizontal accountability institutions when provoking better oversight of state actions. Citizens by-pass cumbersome or compromised formal accountability systems to engage in policy-making, budgeting, expenditure tracking and other similar activities. ”

*Transparency and Accountability Initiative*

Accountability mechanisms may not be sufficient to generate a public response, so adding the ‘social voice’ – understood as both the capacity of people to express their views and the participatory ways in which they do so – can help to address these shortcomings. A social voice can create a [short route of accountability](#) where citizens directly engage decision-makers to improve the delivery of services, monitor performance and expose failures.

According to Mark Bovens, [four questions](#) arise when establishing accountability: who should render account? To whom is account to be rendered? About what is account to be rendered? Why is the actor compelled to render account?

In the context of MSEs, the substantial sums of public money used to deliver the infrastructure required for these events impose a duty on host governments to

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Since sport, both at amateur and at professional level, relies heavily on public sector support, INGSOs [International Non-Governmental Sports Organisations] are also expected to demonstrate a high degree of accountability to their surrounding community. (...) Indeed, it is important that an INGSO is accountable to the citizens who are directly affected by its decisions, in particular when it is involved in decision making with repercussions for other policy areas and for large sections of the citizens

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*Action for Good Governance in International Sports Organisations, (Page 14)*

keep citizens duly informed of how public funds are spent. But accountability does not stop at governments. Because the decisions taken by international sports organisations directly impact the lives and livelihoods of citizens and communities in host countries, and the events they promote are largely built on public funds, the same rationale would apply to the sports organisations, giving rise to a duty to inform the public about their operation and decision-making processes.

The obligation of sports organisations to render accounts to the public is not specified, which creates room for these organisations to avoid public accountability. But with MSEs “[gaining in political and financial significance](#)”, accountability of international sports organisations is necessary to ensure the integrity of public funds, including in relation to infrastructure expenditure.

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Government may be found wherever government funds go. Where government funds go, so too should follow transparency and accountability of those who handle those funds. It matters not who is entrusted with the task, nor for what the funds are being distributed, whether for social grants, for catering contracts for prisons, or for opening ceremonies of the World Cup. Where the funds emanate from ‘the people’, the entity dealing in those funds is or should be performing a public function or exercising a public power

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*Decision M & G Media Limited v 2010 FIFA World Cup Organising Committee, (Page 42)*

## 2 The challenges of accountability in Mega Sport Events

We understand that the challenges of accountability in MSEs are connected to the three stakeholders involved in this process: (i) international sports organisations, (ii) host governments as duty-bearers, and (iii) citizens and civic groups as rights-holders.

### International sports organisations

Looking at the structure of international sports organisations, the lack of accountability in MSEs seems to be by design. More than 60 of these entities are headquartered in Switzerland where oversight has traditionally been low and pushes for transparency only started recently.

In terms of protection, Swiss law allows sports organisations to be incorporated as non-profit associations, which creates many challenges for accountability. Although associations must be 'non-commercial', Swiss law makes a distinction between 'non-commercial activities' and 'non-commercial purposes', allowing sports entities to develop profitable activities and still be incorporated as non-profit associations if their purpose is to promote sports and competitions.

“ SGBs [Sport Governing Bodies] are able to choose the optimal regulatory context for their operations and as such they pick a favourable environment as the home base for their international activities. Reportedly, this is mostly Switzerland, where they are embedded into a legal system that gives them enormous protection against internal and external examination ”

*Good governance in International Non Governmental Sport Organisations: an empirical study on accountability, participation and executive body members in Sport Governing Bodies, (Page 201)*

“ The difference in governance practices between public corporations, multilateral institutions and sports organisations is striking. For example, if one wants to know the compensation of Ban Ki-Moon (about US\$ 240,000), the secretary general of the United Nations, one can find that information online. The same transparency goes for the president of the United States (US\$ 400,000 in 2014) and the CEO of Nestlé (US\$ 10.6 million in 2013), one of the largest Swiss companies. If one wishes to know the salary of Sepp Blatter, the president of FIFA, however, that information is simply not available, and has in fact been refused to be released by FIFA. FIFA can keep this information secret because none of the mechanisms of accountability have much influence on FIFA, and thus it can do as it wishes with very little in the way of consequences ”

*Obstacles to accountability in international sports governance, (Page 8)*

This gives rise to a clear contradiction whereby entities that make big money still enjoy great freedom concerning self-regulation and low scrutiny, as they are not subject to the same obligations imposed on normal businesses. Sports organisations, for example, are not bound to disclose information on salaries and financial compensation paid to staff and leadership teams which adds opacity to the way they operate.

Because of this legal structure, sports organisations also lack the scrutiny that would come from shareholders interested in learning how corporate funds are being invested. The organisational structure based on membership, rather than the ownership of shares, creates room for these organisations to treat national members differently and distribute benefits to members as they see appropriate.

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The Governance of INGSOs [International Non-Governmental Sports Organisations] is said to be characterised by accountability deficits – a lack of accountability arrangements. This is not without danger since a lack of accountability brings with it, and constitutes a breeding ground for, issues related to corruption, the concentration of power, and the lack of democracy and effectiveness

*Good governance in International Non Governmental Sport Organisations: an empirical study on accountability, participation and executive body members in Sport Governing Bodies, (Page 195)*

The membership structure also distances international sports organisations from their position as duty-bearers to the public, as the relationship of rights and obligations is formally established between sports organisations and member associations. Members are

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While I have a mandate from the membership of FIFA, I do not feel that I have a mandate from the entire world of football – the fans, the players, the clubs, the people who live, breathe and love football

*Sepp Blatter resigns after 17 years as FIFA president*

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the ones that take part in competitions, cast their votes on elections and pay membership subscriptions. Despite this degree of separation crafted by the legal structure, the interests at stake remain public and citizens are the ones to bear the costs and consequences of the decisions of member associations and international sports organisations. It will be the citizens, for example, who live with any poor-quality infrastructure left after the events.



*FIFA is one of many sports organisations headquartered in Switzerland  
Credit: MCaviglia*

## Host governments

### *Limited consultation in the bidding process*

Opacity in the organisation of MSEs is not limited to the structure of sports organisations. Low accountability is observed throughout the bidding process, with the public rarely consulted by governments on hosting the

event. For the Olympic Games, bidding cities normally conduct a survey of approximately 2,000 people to evidence consent. In host cities the majority of the population are often indirectly consulted, with various literature suggesting this would be ‘**manufactured consent**’, lacking a genuine public consultation process.



Many residents in Krakow, Poland's second-biggest city, felt that some of the infrastructure needed for the games - in particular an arena for curling, a sport barely played in Poland - would turn into white elephants afterwards



Reuters, "Krakow citizens reject 2022 Winter Olympic bid"

Seeking majority approval before bidding can minimise the risk of future social confrontation. In Poland, a pre-bidding referendum revealed that 70% of voters were against hosting the 2022 Winter Olympic Games in Krakow. Polish officials promised more than **US\$ 6 billion** in infrastructure investment to grow the local economy, but this was not enough to persuade the public to vote for the games.

The impact of a lack of public consent to host sporting events is often compounded by government secrecy around the bidding process and the infrastructure investment needed. [The bid for the 2014 World Cup, for example, never became public](#) and the promises made by the Brazilian Government to FIFA still remain unknown. Public organisers of the Boston candidacy for the 2024 Olympic Games failed to publicise any of the pre-bidding preparatory works, to the point that most residents only learned about the bid on the day the city was selected by the US Olympic Committee as a potential host – **almost two years** after the preparatory works had started.

### Limited access to information

Preventing access to information critically undermines accountability. As [research](#) carried out by Article 19 identifies, only four out of 54 requests made under the Brazilian Access to Information Law in relation to the construction of the 'BRT Transolímpica' road for the Brazil Olympics 2016 were correctly answered by authorities. In the remaining cases, access to the information was denied, no answer was provided by authorities, the information was allegedly not located, or it was only partially provided.



Citizens protest against the 2014 World Cup in Sao Paulo, Brazil  
Credit: Ben Tavener / Flickr

In Sydney, access to information was denied from the outset with the companies bidding for the 2000 Olympic Games signing a confidentiality agreement and the Cabinet imposing a general ban on Freedom of Information requests related to all Olympic documents, including for infrastructure projects. In other contexts, this would likely be barred under anti-gagging provisions, yet it has been accepted in the delivery of the Games.

A lack of transparency can lead to mistrust from citizens. The implementation of the Manchester City Stadium for the 2002 Commonwealth Games generated a social perception that the public would not benefit from the new facility. This was because a lease agreement, kept out of the public eye, had been signed with the football club Manchester City authorising the immediate transfer of the stadium to the club after the games. The opacity around this agreement prevented the population from learning about the benefits that had been negotiated, including provisions granting access and use of the facility by the local community. As sources report, the [secrecy made citizens uneasy](#) about the use of the infrastructure after the event, even in the absence of any formal irregularity.



Hundreds of millions of dollars were involved in decisions that the government made in complete secrecy, in much the same way as publicly funded infrastructure projects



Best Olympics Ever? The Social Impacts of Sydney 2000, (Page 27)

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The existing population and neighbourhood, the spaces and places in which citizens actively create their daily existence together, are invisible to the bureaucratic abstractions of ‘delivering’ major venues and new infrastructure. It doesn’t matter anymore whether the people making and implementing the policies, regulations and procedures are just ‘good people doing their job’, or whether they are in the back pockets of the real powers behind the event. Either way, the ethos that the poor, homeless and marginalised are simply objects to be removed is pervasive

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*Planning Displacement: The Real Legacy of Major Sporting Events, (Page 397)*

### Limited participation in infrastructure planning

In MSE infrastructure planning, secrecy of information is coupled with limited space for public participation. Reports from numerous MSEs show that participation during infrastructure planning stages reaches the point where civic “space is seen as an abstraction”. In some instances, authorities consent to new infrastructure without consulting the residents that occupy or use the area. For example, ahead of sporting events in [Vancouver](#), [Glasgow](#) and [London](#) residents were displaced in order to make way for infrastructure regeneration and development, without adequate processes to hear the voices of citizens and communities during planning stages.

Delivery authorities often use a sense of urgency to justify the lack of social participation in infrastructure planning. Rethinking the role of civil society and public participation in the implementation of MSEs is fundamental to increasing accountability, adding a different perspective and sense of ownership to the process of designing and implementing the new infrastructure. This can be of clear benefit to the delivery authority, reducing the likelihood of conflict during preparatory stages.

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Given the public nature of major events, the Authority can benefit from the participation of individuals and groups outside the government sector. The Convention (article 13 (1)), recommends measures to ensure that the public has effective access to information, support public information activities, and promote transparency and public participation in various aspects of the decision-making process

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*The United Nations Convention against Corruption - A Strategy for Safeguarding against Corruption in Major Public Events, (Page 1)*

### Citizens and civic groups

Citizens and civic groups are the rights-holders in the relationship of accountability with governments and international sports organisations. But in the absence of adequate space for public participation and scrutiny, it is hard to guarantee an effective accountability dynamic.

Even when mechanisms for participation are specifically designed and implemented in the context of MSEs, authorities are not responsive. In Brazil, despite commitments made by the Presidency Office to carry out participatory audits on World Cup construction projects, the process became a mere exercise in documenting irregularities with no action in response from the authorities. Protests and demonstrations against the event also did not prompt adequate public answers.

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The auditing team successfully engaged local CSOs in monitoring World Cup spending. Nonetheless there was little evidence of uptake of the final participatory audit recommendations. (...) the commitment was more of a process of documenting irregularities (...) than a participatory exercise involving collaboration between government and civil society to identify and resolve public problems

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*Outcome report - Open Government Partnership on the Commitment for Participatory Audits on the Constructions of Brazilian Host Cities for the 2014 FIFA World Cup*

### 3 The consequences of the lack of accountability in MSEs

#### Infrastructure with a shelf life

A legacy of ‘white elephant’ projects is one of the consequences of the lack of accountability in MSEs. Four cities in Brazil where arenas were constructed for the 2014 World Cup – Manaus, Cuiabá, Natal and Brasília – have no major football teams active in relevant leagues and now face the challenge of making these constructions profitable (or at least less of a burden on taxpayers). In South Africa, 10 stadia built for the 2010 FIFA World Cup are also not used by the local population. The same can be seen in [Delhi](#) concerning the 12 new facilities built for the 2018 Commonwealth Games. These facilities become stranded assets and pose integration and usage challenges in future urban planning in the host country.

One solution to mitigate the impact of such projects could have been to ensure they had an adaptable design which served local communities after the events. Consulting the public during planning and delivery

“ What the hell are we going to do with a 70,000-seater football stadium in Durban once the World Cup is over? Durban has two football teams which attract crowds of only a few thousand. It would have been more sensible to have built smaller stadiums nearer the football-loving heart-lands and used the surplus funds to have constructed training facilities in the townships ”

*Trevor Phillips, the former director of the South African Premier Soccer League, (Page 216)*

stages could have highlighted this issue and prevented these white elephant projects for which there is no post event demand.

White elephant projects have not only been seen in sports facilities delivered for the events. For the Sochi Games, the government built a mega-structure of road and rail links, with tunnels and bridges connecting the coast to the mountains at the [cost of US \\$10 billion](#),



*Arena da Amazônia in Manaus, Brazil  
Credit: Ivo Ministry*



## US \$1.2 billion per year

To maintain and operate the under-utilised infrastructure

approximately 20% of the total costs of the Games. Despite the significant investment, these structures have not been fully utilised since. Reports indicate that the infrastructure operation and maintenance costs taxpayers US \$1.2 billion a year.

## Other key issues

Beyond unsuitable and costly infrastructure, other significant issues are evidenced. As mentioned above, non-participatory displacement is a common practice in MSEs, with evidence from contexts as diverse as [Cape Town](#), [New Delhi](#), [Rio](#) and [China](#), in addition to the cases referenced in [Vancouver](#), [Glasgow](#) and [London](#) where communities lost their homes and communal spaces to sporting event infrastructure. Environmental violations - such as construction projects implemented without environmental impact assessments and corresponding approvals, as seen in the delivery of the [Transcarioca road corridor](#) and the [Stadium Arena das Dunas in the city of Natal](#) - are another example of how low accountability can lead to poor infrastructure for citizens and communities.

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Today, the legacy of the Commonwealth Games is unfortunately not a changed attitude to sport, but a glittering mass of structural steel, cement and aluminium, that have already begun to gather the rust of inactivity. Of the 12 new stadiums barely two or three will get used for the activity for which they were planned; the others will pass into a state of high maintenance or permanent decline. Had these stadiums been created with the intent of a future assimilation into the sporting life of the city with a planned integration with community or public school programmes, or had they been designed with new innovative architectural ideals, their worth in the long term would be guaranteed

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*India Today, "CWG has left a legacy of white elephants"*

## 4 The need for participatory processes in infrastructure planning and delivery

The evidence from MSEs shows that participatory processes are virtually non-existent in the delivery of these events. From a lack of consent in bidding, to the exclusion of citizens and communities in the infrastructure decision-making processes, the lack of social participation “creates a feeling of circumvention of normal democratic processes”. Creating spaces for civic engagement during the delivery of infrastructure is necessary to make MSEs more accountable to the public and produce suitable infrastructure.

Community involvement in infrastructure planning can take many forms, including weekly forums where local community members are able to voice their views and concerns regarding forthcoming plans. This was applied in the preparatory works of the [Manchester 2002 Commonwealth Games](#). The Manchester New Deal for Communities, which provided the framework for the infrastructure delivered for the Games, also used Tenants’ and Residents’ Associations as [a method of engaging communities and citizens](#) in the infrastructure regeneration and development processes.

[Residents’ Liaison Groups](#) have been established to engage communities affected by the infrastructure works related to the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games. [Public consultation drop-in events](#) and [on-line ‘Be Heard’ platforms](#) have also been employed to

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In order to ensure that community values are respected, the local community needs the opportunity to continue to be involved in the overall event hosting process. Community-level social capital supports both the formal and informal decision-making forums where relevant affected groups are incentivised to take part in structured, informed discussions of the evidence on the effects of alternative policy options and of the trade-offs that they involve

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*Creating community networks: Can sporting events offer meaningful sources of social capital? (Page 46)*

listen to the voice of communities during the infrastructure works. The [feedback](#) received during a virtual consultation process, for example, helped to redesign a highway project, including changes to ensure safety for cyclists at side roads and junctions.

The use of participatory arenas to allow groups affected by projects to express their opinions [is recognised as a beneficial approach](#) to infrastructure delivery, due to its ability to generate consensus, reduce conflict with communities and produce stronger projects. The adoption of a similar approach to the delivery of infrastructure related to MSEs can be a way of incorporating effective accountability into these events.

## 5 Recommendations

MSEs have become big business, with large amounts of public money flowing into these events and the hands of organisers and public officials. Developing effective channels of civic engagement and participation is essential to improving accountability around these events and ensure the delivery of inclusive and adaptable infrastructure. Based on our findings, a set of recommendations is presented below. As transparency, participation and accountability are mutually reinforcing values these recommendations are linked to those outlined in our [previous paper on corruption](#).

### To tackle opacity in the delivery of MSEs:

#### The application of access to information laws

To ensure that accountability is increased, we recommend that legal determinations are included in bids to ensure that documents related to MSE infrastructure projects and contracts are subject to disclosure obligations. This includes restricting bans and limitations on Right to Information Laws.

This obligation should cover all documentation exchanged between sports organisations and bidding parties during the bidding process and extend to the implementation stages in relation to the winning bidder.

To lead by example, we also recommend that sports organisations commit to change their non-profit status, abiding by broad disclosure obligations regardless of the protections granted by the laws in their place of incorporation.

### To tackle limited civic space: Structured spaces for multi-stakeholder dialogue

Few disagree that [coordination between sports organisers, infrastructure agencies, different levels of government, local businesses and communities](#) is essential for better delivery of MSEs. To ensure coordination is effectively implemented, MSEs could adopt a multi-stakeholder approach, enabling enriched and informed discussion in the planning and delivery of infrastructure. This could take the form of regular participatory forums where representatives of affected groups, including communities and local businesses, are able to reflect on the delivery of the infrastructure built or regenerated for the event. Combined with access to



*CoST Jalisco convenes a multi-stakeholder group meeting to discuss infrastructure implementation in Jalisco, Mexico*

information, multi-stakeholder dialogue can help ensure adequate discussion around the planned projects and facilities. This will reduce the risk of assets going unused after the events and foster discussion on the need for, and costs associated with, developing new infrastructure.

Based on our work with CoST – the Infrastructure Transparency Initiative, we understand that these forums could be developed at two levels: (i) at the more strategic sphere of decision-making where the delivery authority defines the concept for the event’s landscape, infrastructure and architecture and (ii) at the project level where the multi-stakeholder forum will follow individual projects and works, from beginning to end.

To ensure neutrality, we recommend that third-party facilitators are included in the design of the forums to avoid stakeholder capture and help build trust and the conditions for constructive dialogue. The provision of these forums should be embedded in the bid documentation to bind governments and delivery authorities from the outset in relation to their implementation. The strategic multi-stakeholder forum should be implemented once the delivery authority starts the planning of the event. We recommend the implementation of the project-level multi-stakeholder forum should begin from the point where the infrastructure plans and works for the event have been defined.

### **To strengthen the social voice: Independent social audits**

Social audits are accountability mechanisms whereby citizens [monitor, track, analyse, and evaluate](#) government performance. They have been successfully used to drive improvements in infrastructure services.

Community groups trained to oversee the bidding, planning and delivery stages of MSEs can create additional spaces for oversight and accountability, working in parallel with the multi-stakeholder forums.

Because social audits require a basic legal framework to take place - including an enabling environment that recognises the right to civic participation and access to information - the provision of participatory audit exercises should be embedded in the bid documentation, creating binding obligations for governments and delivery authorities to accept the appointment of local social auditors.

Considering the need for technical and advocacy skills, an independent third-party with a track record in social audit development could be appointed to train the auditors after the host country is awarded the event. Selection of the third-party should be jointly agreed by multiple stakeholders, including a civil society representative.

### **To amplify the voice of citizens: A dedicated social media platform**

As 2020 has demonstrated, web-based and mobile technologies help to amplify the social voice with [several examples](#) of citizen movements successfully demanding accountability via social media.

The creation of a virtual space which is recognised by sports organisations and governments as an official and protected platform where citizens and civic groups can express - anonymously or not - their concerns, could catalyse the benefits of accountability and participation. It could also enable collective action and build domestic and international pressure to push governments, delivery authorities and international sports organisations to act.

Considering [the growing cases of restrictions on social media use](#), the proposed platform should be embedded in the design of MSEs from the bidding stage and be protected against any form of government censorship. It should be implemented by bidders from the moment their interest in hosting the event manifests, extending to the planning and implementation stages in the case of the winning bidder.

## 6 Conclusion

Furthering accountability in MSEs can create a legacy of improved infrastructure and practices of genuine benefit to citizens and communities. Current evidence indicates that the social voice has been neglected and the accountability mechanisms in place are not sufficient to generate an appropriate response from decision-makers.

To change this game, spaces for informed multi-stakeholder participation, at both the strategic planning and project delivery level, are needed to allow effective engagement and arenas for citizen and community dialogue. Social audits and social media are also important innovations to improve accountability

and participation. Finally, removing restrictions on access to information laws is essential to building trust and providing adequate oversight. These mechanisms should come in conjunction with **fair, equitable and transparent procurement processes** able to avoid wasteful expenditure and ensure the economic, environmental and social sustainability of the assets and facilities delivered.

The implementation of participatory processes in the planning and delivery of MSE infrastructure, such as those highlighted above, will allow host countries to test innovative approaches that can be replicated across other projects after the sporting events have ended. In doing so, MSEs can create a positive legacy able to produce effective and long-lasting benefits across host countries.

### REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING:

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