



Strategic Directions 2026 – 2028

BUILDING **ACCOUNTABILITY ECOSYSTEMS** FROM THE INSIDE OUT.

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The Moment



The world is changing, and so is the environment for accountability work. These strategic directions are written within that reality. Several shifts define this moment:

- **Democratic backsliding is continuing**, and autocracies are increasingly coordinated. But that same pressure has sharpened the case for accountability work, and pushed reformers and civic actors to build more sophisticated, more resilient forms of resistance and solidarity.
- **Civic space is shifting**, with rising digital surveillance and transnational repression. This has accelerated the development of new protective tools, networks, and tactics, and civil society organizations that can adapt to this environment are proving their relevance and value.
- **Funding for governance and democracy work has contracted sharply**. The contraction is forcing a needed reckoning with old funding models, and creating space for more diversified, more resilient financial architecture to emerge.
- **AL is reshaping the terrain**, creating new tools for accountability, budget tracking, and civic engagement, alongside new risks around disinformation and digital authoritarianism. Moving early to harness these tools for accountability can define how the field uses AI, rather than just reacting to its risks.
- **Civic and political engagement is possible in new ways**, and solidarity across borders is more feasible and rapid than ever before. The opportunity now is to convert that civic energy into lasting governance change, rather than letting it dissipate.
- **Governance quality** is now directly tied to access to services, climate finance, private investment, and more. This creates new entry points for accountability work, through which good governance is a practical precondition recognized by donors and investors.

Civil society's value as essential infrastructure is being demonstrated in real time. Organizations that are locally rooted, well-networked, and genuinely trusted by communities are more important than ever. Accountability Lab is one of those organizations. These directions describe how we will use that position.

Who We Are

Accountability Lab makes governance work for people. We support active citizens, responsible leaders, and more accountable institutions through a translocal network of Labs working nationally and regionally across Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

OUR VISION:

A world where resources are used wisely, decisions benefit everyone fairly, and people lead secure lives.



What Makes AL Different

- **The translocal model:** local knowledge and trusted relationships in each country and regionally, connected into a global network with shared identity and influence.
- **Proven practices:** Integrity Icon, Voice to Rep, Accountability Incubators, Civic Action Teams, and Integrity Innovation Labs work across radically different contexts.
- **Ecosystem infrastructure:** Through Civic Strength Partners, fiscal partnership, intermediary work, data collection and civic convenings, AL has moved beyond program delivery into ecosystem stewardship.
- **Credibility at the intersection:** We work across civil society, government, donors, youth, creatives, and researchers. That credibility is earned through proximity to communities and to power-holders.
- **Real-time intelligence:** Tools like the Nepal Governance Weekly, Pakistan Country Analysis and Civil Society Wayfinder show our capacity to generate and share actionable knowledge under pressure.

How We Organize Our Work

Our work runs across three mutually reinforcing pillars, applied across three constituencies: governments, communities and civil society, and the private sector. This is a shared language for the network, not a rigid taxonomy. Each Lab decides which thematic areas (AI governance, public finance, migration, disaster response, climate justice, and others) are most relevant in their context.



AL Governance

Strengthening the rules, institutions, and behaviours that make governance more open and accountable. Includes policy engagement, work on anti-corruption norm shifting, and support participatory governance.

Example: Civic Action Teams and Integrity Icon



AL Ecosystems

Investing in the coalitions, networks, and financing that sustain accountability actors over the long term. Includes fiscal partnership, intermediary work, organizational transitions support, and regional coordination.

Example: Civic Strength Partners and Gen Z Support



AL Knowledge

Generating, curating, and translating knowledge to inform citizens, governments, and funders in real time as governance evolves locally, nationally and globally. Includes research, data collection, monitoring platforms and advocacy.

Example: Pakistan Country Analyses and Civil Society Wayfinder

Not everything that matters is something AL should do. Not everything we could be funded to do is something we should pursue. We concentrate our energies and work at the intersection of the following:

THE AL SWEET SPOT

Values and capacity: Is it work we believe in and are genuinely equipped to do well, drawing on fifteen years of experience and a translocal network?

Impact: Does the work credibly shift governance outcomes in ways that matter to the people with whom we work?

Resources: Can the work be sustained, through grants, service fees, fiscal partnerships, or other revenue and kinds of resources?

Opportunity: Is there a genuine opening, a political window, a partner ecosystem, an unmet need, that makes this the right time and place to act?

The sweet spot is also a tool for saying no. Funded but low-impact work erodes credibility. High-impact but under-resourced work burns out teams. Opportunistic work that drifts from values risks the network's identity.

How Change Happens

AL's theory of action rests on three convictions: accountability systems must be built from within communities and institutions, not imposed from outside; lasting change requires both individual reformers and the ecosystems that sustain them; and connecting local practice to global learning and influence multiplies impact in ways neither can achieve alone.

Formulated as an "if" "then" statement, our theory of action would be the following: "if we invest in reformers, the organizations they build, and the systems they're operating within- and link that work to global learning, narratives and influence- then accountability change outlasts any single project, funder, or political cycle."

WE WORK SIMULTANEOUSLY ACROSS THREE LEVELS:

1



Reformers and Civic Leaders

We invest in the people doing accountability work: building skills, protecting safety, amplifying voices, and connecting people to peers and platforms that make their work more durable. This includes reformers inside government and outside it.

Success means they can sustain their work independently of AL.

2



Organizations and Coalitions

We help build and strengthen the organizations, networks, and coalitions through which reformers work collectively. We support governance, financial sustainability, safety, and the connective infrastructure that keeps civil society functioning under pressure.

Success means organizations that outlast any single funding cycle.

3



Systems and Narratives

At the systems level, we work to change the rules, incentives, and narratives that determine whether accountability is practiced or punished. We engage policy processes, generate evidence, and change public expectations about accountability.

Success is measured in governance outcomes, not just organizational outputs.

Our translocal model means we work at all three levels at once, grounding global claims in local evidence, and connecting local reformers to systems-level levers that determine whether their work takes hold.

Directions for 2026–2028

These directions relate to the current moment and reflect a year-long internal process of reimagination during 2025 and the early part of 2026. They are intentionally directional and each direction corresponds to one of the three levels above: reformers and civic leaders; organizations and coalitions; and systems and norms. Annual work-planning at Lab and network levels will translate them into concrete priorities and targets.

Supporting Reformers and Civic Leaders

Lasting reform only happens when the people with the most at stake lead it. AL invests in reformers as the core of everything we do, inside and outside government.

- Strengthen leadership pipelines and support emerging accountability leaders across the network, including the Gen Z civic leaders who are reshaping politics across South Asia, Africa, and beyond.
- Build insider-outsider coalitions that bridge civic activists and government reformers.
- Ensure inclusion is structural. Women, youth, and marginalized groups are co-leaders and co-designers of accountability systems, from program design to network governance.

Strengthening Organizations and Coalitions

The sector's most acute deficit right now is connective tissue. AL will serve as the backbone, weaver, and infrastructure for civil society beyond our own programming.

- Expand convening, brokering, and support for broader civic ecosystems.
- Grow Civic Strength Partners, fiscal partnership, and intermediary offerings to help organizations navigate funding shocks and political pressure. The collapse of traditional donor pipelines is creating demand for exactly this kind of infrastructure.
- Develop a clear and credible position on the link between governance and key sectoral issues including climate justice, private sector development and emerging technologies.

Shifting Systems and Narratives

Accountability is cultural as much as technical. Organizations that can change how people think about governance occupy a critical and increasingly rare position.

- Expand programs that make ethical leadership aspirational, using art, music, storytelling, and community celebration.
- Invest in youth-led accountability initiatives that create visible cultural shifts in communities.
- Build inclusive governance narratives that counter democratic backsliding with locally grounded stories of accountability working.

HOW WE WORK: THREE CROSS-CUTTING PRINCIPLES

COMMONS-FIRST THINKING:

We shift from individual organizational optimization toward stewarding shared resources and pooling connective infrastructure across the network.

PARTNERSHIP HUMILITY:

We practice genuine partnership with donors, governments, and supported organizations, with mutual benefit, shared risk, and design authority with those closest to communities.

PROXIMATE DEVELOPMENT:

AL has practiced locally-led development long before it became a donor imperative. Reforms only persist where domestic actors control design and operations, and where local trust is the source of legitimacy.

Financial Resilience

The organizations that will lead the next decade of accountability work are those that have broken dependence on any single donor, region, or political arrangement. AL is building this resilience systematically.

Diversification of revenue across grants, earned income (training, tools, know-ledge products), fiscal partnership, and philanthropic relationships; and sustainability plans at each Lab with explicit revenue diversification targets, and build shared reserves at the network level.

Civic Strength Partners and AL's intermediary architecture is the **funding infrastructure** the sector needs: pooled funds, fiscal partnerships, and blended finance structures that can reach organizations traditional donor pipelines cannot.

South-South and regional partnerships and engagement of new philanthropic actors. Traditional Northern donor funding is declining and becoming less predictable. AL will build genuine peer relationships across civil society and reform communities, not transactional connections.



What Success Looks Like By 2029

FIELD INFLUENCE

Donors and peers look to AL to understand what works in governance. AL research and advocacy shapes how the DRG community thinks about locally-led, reformer-centered approaches.

CIVIC IMPACT

Civic space in AL countries is measurably stronger, more connected, and more capable of sustaining accountability under political pressure and funding volatility.

ECOSYSTEM HEALTH

Organizations and communities own the platforms and coalitions AL helps build, and they continue when AL steps back. AL is recognized as essential to civic infrastructure.

COLLECTIVE SUSTAINABILITY

Labs operate with genuine financial independence. All staff are fairly compensated, operating safely, and helping lead the network's strategic evolution.

INTERNAL CULTURE

Trust, transparency, and mutual accountability are the default across the network. Decision-making authority is clear. Safety systems protect all Labs.

NETWORK VIBRANCY

The translocal model is fully operationalized. Labs collaborate as a matter of course. The network speaks with one coherent voice while honoring local diversity.

Specific indicators for tracking progress are [here](#) in the shared network KPIs document. This document will be reviewed by the network leadership on a semi-annual basis, with changes made to reflect rapidly changing contextual realities.