Accountable Now Annual General Meeting 2018

London, 04 May 2018

Outcome Document

Accountable Now's Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held on 04 May, in London. This year, we had the pleasure of being hosted by Amnesty International.

This year's agenda was heavily influenced by the context of the increased scrutiny and opposition that CSOs are facing and focused on how dynamic accountability continues to be a key element to enhance public trust.

1. Keynote Speech: Janet Dalziell, Greenpeace

*"We need to teach the world a new way of understanding our work
and about accountability"*

Janet Dalziell, International People and Culture Director of Greenpeace and a member of Accountable Now ́s Board of Trustees, kicked off the meeting with a powerful and insightful speech. She reflected on the challenging current context where CSOs are under scrutiny due to cases of abuse of power, either individual or organisational. In this regard, accountability was under the spotlight and received widespread attention.

Key messages:

• There are unresolved tensions between transparency, accountability and confidentiality; between the need to act fast but also to respect the due process; and between the need for due process and need to be empathic and warm.

• Organisations need to make sure that their institutional responses are recognised and they need to become better at communicating these to the public.

• We need to recognise that organisations will not be able to solve all these tensions with policies and procedures alone.

• Accountable Now ́s members are able to draw on the formal reporting process, as well as the concept of dynamic accountability, which seeks to engage the people we are working with and for.

2. Panel Discussion: Dynamic Accountability: *from doing to, to doing with*

"We can achieve a lot more if we gain people's trust"

Led by **Alex Stewart**, Restless Development, the purpose of this panel discussion was to hear from CSOs directly, how they are engaging their beneficiaries in their decision making processes.

Daniel Stevens from World Vision shared that they were trying to bring more children's voices to shape national offices' governance. He explained how children had been responsible for developing five proposals to improve World Vision's governance, and had participated in monitoring progress and giving feedback to the organisation's council.

Derek Thorne from Integrity Action shared that they promote stakeholder monitoring. Monitors are recruited with a focus on ensuring gender balance and geographical diversity. To carry out the monitoring, Integrity Action designed a mobile app called DevelopmentCheck. Monitors use the app to post findings, putting particular focus on problems. Everything is published online in real time, creating pressure for problems to be solved quickly.

David Bonbright from Keystone Accountability spoke about how their work is meant to be transformational. Keystone operates under the concept of "doing with". They conduct anonymous surveys of local partners, creating a snapshot of the situation and identifying any challenges (sexual harassment, bullying, etc.). These surveys are also useful to identify whether people are getting what they want, and if not, what should be done differently.

Key messages:

- Alex Stewart shared that dynamic accountability was included in their organisational culture. It is one of their pillars.

- Providing opportunities and encouraging feedback gives people a sense of empowerment.

- Communities and beneficiaries must be engaged with at their own pace.

- Feedback generates useful data, but it's not just about the research. It's about ongoing engagement. Keystone Accountability recommends asking the same questions several times over an extended period to receive useful and comparable feedback.

- It is important to run feedback systems to identify and redress power imbalances.

- Challenge: how to encourage agencies to adopt in-time, flexible and transparent feedback systems although they might not always like the comments they receive.

3. Breakout Sessions

Attendees had the opportunity to attend three different breakout sessions exploring different aspects of accountability.

3.1 Reporting unethical behaviour

Members discussed if and how Accountable Now's reporting framework could be useful in reporting situations involving unacceptable conduct or unethical behaviour. Members identified the challenge posed by different terms, contexts and nuances when discussing these issues. In this regard, it is important to define what *unethical* or *unacceptable* behaviour means. To do so, we also need to take into consideration the differences between *acceptable* and *legal* conduct.

Key take-aways and suggestions:

• Our reporting framework should enquire about unacceptable behaviour as defined in individual organisations' codes of conduct and policies.

• Organisations are searching for the balance between transparency and open self-reflection, and a safe space in which to have these kinds of discussions. It was mentioned that it is possible to share certain information with the Independent Reporting Panel in confidence to allow for feedback on confidential/sensitive issues.

• It is key to communicate about organisations' progress in an honest way – even if this may appear negative in certain instances. For example a steep increase in incident reporting could also be a reflection on improvements to an organisation's complaints mechanism.

• Accountable Now should map the horizon to identify existing working groups on this issue and what they are doing, to promote synergies and avoid duplication of efforts.

• It must be determined whether Accountable Now should play a public role in this discussion and the value of having a public position on this topic should be considered.

3.2 Interoperability between codes and standards

Accountable Now's members need to report against our 12 Commitments but most of them also report against other codes and standards, plus any other reporting requirements that donors and governments might request. Members therefore discussed possibilities of reducing the burden of reporting against numerous codes and standards without losing the emphasis on organisational, cultural and thematic contexts. Members recognised that reporting should not be a static exercise, and that the process is important in order to reflect and extract lessons.

Key take-aways and suggestions:
• The Accountable Now Secretariat should work more closely with members and explore how other reporting mechanisms can be useful to report against our standard.
• Accountable Now should work with donors to encourage greater recognition of these reports.
• Accountable Now and members should explore alignment between different standards.

Resilient Roots is a project led by CIVICUS, in collaboration with Accountable Now and Keystone Accountability, testing whether organisations who are more accountable and responsive to their roots – namely, their primary constituencies – are more resilient against external threats.

To explore and prove this hypothesis, we will work with a group of CSOs from around the world to help them design and roll out accountability experiments focusing on meaningful dialogue with their primary constituencies.

Key take-aways and suggestions
• We must firstly ask project partners to define what accountability means to their organisations. We should do this in a way that is useful to test their resilience.
• Defining and measuring accountability over a 12-month period will prove to be challenging.

4. Special Resolution to amend our Articles of Association

With the purpose of allowing more flexibility, increasing the independence of the Board and strengthening Accountable Now's credibility, members approved by majority (one vote against) an amendment to the Articles so that they simply stipulate that *at least 60% of Trustees must be representatives of member organisations*.

The changes in the Articles of Association are valid with immediate effect.

Please find all information relating to the amendment of our Articles of Association **here**.

5. Election of Board Trustees

Brendan Gormley, Chair of our Board, announced that we needed to appoint new Trustees because **Janet Dalziell's** (Greenpeace) term is coming to an end, and **Clare Doube**, Director of Strategy and Evaluation, Amnesty International and **Miklos Marschall**, Deputy Managing Director, Transparency International have stepped down earlier than planned.
Four new Trustee nominations were received, and with the purpose of having a strong Board, members appointed all of them.

The new board members are:
• **Alex Sardar**, Chief Innovation Officer at CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
• **Betty Su-Chiou Ho**, CEO of Taiwan Fund for Children and Families
• **Colm O Cuanachain**, Senior Director Office of the Secretary General, Amnesty International
• **Jose Faura**, CEO of Educo

Furthermore, **Bettie van Straaten** (formerly CIVICUS and now non-member) was re-elected by ordinary resolution to continue serving her term as our Treasurer.

Please find short biographies of the newly elected board members **here.**

6. Rebuilding trust from a donor and CSO perspective

"We need more 'aha!' moments in our sector."

 The current context is characterised by mistrust of CSOs. This panel therefore discussed what organisations and donors are doing to rebuild trust. We invited **Vera Mshana** from the Ford Foundation, **Tim Singleton** from DFID and **Mike Noyes** from Action Aid to provide their insights. Although we invited two donors to the panel, we were able to enjoy a variety of perspectives due to one coming from the private sector while the other was from a governmental institution.

Key messages:

• Donors expect their grantees to be open and honest and they want to build a relationship based on their (presumably mutually held) values.

• Levels of transparency and accountability in the CSO sector are not necessarily the same as those in other parts of government spending.

• We all want results and change – but this is leading us to focus on "payment by results" – doing what's safe and un-transformative rather than being innovative.

• Ford Foundation stated that we should be answering the question 'accountability for whom?'. We must consider how CSOs are really engaging with people.

• Donors want to discuss failures and challenges faced by CSOs – the key point is to have an open discussion and move towards learning and improvement.

7. Accountable Now's Finances and New Members

Bettie van Straaten, Accountable Now's Treasurer, presented a six-year trend of income and expenditure from 2012 to 2017, as well as a forecast for 2018. A surplus of **€22,906** was recorded in 2017. Accountable Now's reserves, at **€149 366**, are comfortably above the level required by the reserves policy. Bettie also presented the audited accounts for 2017.

In 2018, Accountable Now foresees new membership income, as well as income from the Global Standard Extension Phase and Resilient Roots initiative. Associated activities for these as well as active membership support will result in increased expenditure and Accountable Now is forecasted to end with a conservatively calculated surplus of **€838**.

Please find a full overview of Accountable Now's finances **here.**

Key messages:

• Since this was Accountable Now's first financial year-end as a charity, the auditors placed an emphasis on the changes required due to accounting standards and the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) for charities, with the main difference being timing of recognition of income.
 • Going forward, Accountable Now will recognise all funds received in a financial year as pertaining to that year (with no deferment) and will split funds into restricted and unrestricted.

8. Accountable Now's New Reporting Framework

"The new format will be better if it acts as a tool to discuss what accountability really means."

This is the first year that members will be using our new reporting framework. Terre des Hommes was the first organisation to use it, and with CEO **Eylah Kadjar-Hamouda**, they shared their experience with members, reflecting on the positive experiences as well as challenges they encountered.

Key messages:

• Overall, the new framework proved to be better for a small secretariat of a decentralised federation like TDH-IS.

• Whereas the previous reporting framework had more structural questions, the new framework looks like a *journey* towards dynamic accountability.

• It was appreciated that the new framework is more flexible, allowing members to refer to existing documents and reports rather than having to duplicate information.

• The self-assessment part is helpful – and allows for comparison with others (though it should be noted that only an anonymised overview of members' self-assessment scores will be published online).

• Moving from one framework to another is time consuming, and it can be challenging to consult different groups within the organisation to compile all the necessary information. However, this was also noted as a positive, which would lead to more internal discussion and reflection on accountability practices.

• Accountability needs to be shared throughout the organisation and be engrained in organisational culture – not just sit with one person.

• The reporting framework can help members prepare for governance and accountability challenges and help guard against risks. Overall, it helps instil a greater sense of public understanding and trust.

We are looking forward to hearing about more of our members' experiences working with the new framework, and will conduct a review at the end of the year, as well as periodically in the future, to keep improving our framework and its usefulness for members and their stakeholders alike.