2019
Annual General Meeting Outcome

Accountable Now

GLOBAL STANDARDS LOCAL TRUST

Day 1: Exploring Dynamic Accountability

FEEDBACK & COMPLAINTS

Eight Accountable Now members, as well as the Accountable Now Secretariat, have spent the past six months working on their feedback and complaints mechanisms. At the AGM Amnesty International, CBM, Educo, Restless Development and World Vision presented the progress they have made, key questions we grappled with, and what we need to keep working on in future. Key points were:

- Mechanism should be clearly visible on the website and different from the general contact / info mechanism
- A feedback & complaints policy should accompany the mechanism and clearly outline how feedback is dealt with and how the organisation will report back to the complainant
- A guide for the mechanism will help staff in different countries to make sure country offices meet minimum standards and ensures that the policy is implemented in a more uniform way throughout the organisation
- In order to continuously strengthen the implementation of the mechanism across the organisation we need to build knowledge resources, FAQs, and case examples. Staff in different offices needs to be connected to continuously exchange and learn from each other
- Staff needs comprehensive training on how to deal with different kinds of complaints (from suggestions to programme related issues to safeguarding complaints) – need to be aware that when we open a space for feedback anything can come through
- We need to bring in communications people to improve for example the visibility of mechanism and raise awareness of it
- We need to ensure that feedback is acted upon and a clear process of how feedback influences decision-making is in place
- We need to clarify the question on what level feedback is collected – especially with regards to local partner (considering resources for follow-up etc.)

The "100 days challenge" format allowed us to have clear objectives and deadlines and mutual accountability to achieve sub-steps in process of strengthening our mechanism. See an overview of the peer advice group's concept and get in touch with ibuechner@accountablenow.org. Also have a look at one of the resources that was mentioned: Bond - 8 principles for building trust through feedback.

RESILIENT ROOTS - How embedding Dynamic Accountability in organisational culture changes the way INGOs work

The Resilient Roots initiative tests whether organisations (13 pilot projects) who are more accountable and responsive to their roots -namely, the people they work for and with - are more resilient against civic space related threats. At our AGM we shared with you how this way of working has affected other areas of the pilot project's organisation and explored what changes correspondingly are happening for our members. These changes include:

At the programmatic level:

- Give more power (tools + mechanisms) to different stakeholders to hold organisations to account (for example feedback & complaints mechanisms)
- Establish intermediary committees to reach a wide range of people – also those living in far remote areas
- Do regular programme content consultations with relevant stakeholders
- Work with adjusted log frames – include accountability related indicators and validation through stakeholders directly.

At the internal level:

- Assess internal accountability of the organisation through staff satisfaction survey, 360 feedback appraisal, informal opportunities
- Implement evaluation/testing methodology to see if current mechanisms work
- Link internal accountability to bigger conversations about organisational culture and values
- Support all staff (through internal structures and trainings) to integrate accountability mechanisms into their everyday chores (internal/ external).

Strategic Level

- Include stakeholders – especially people we work for and with, in existing governance structures (board, senior management bodies, staff committees etc.)
- Adjust Human Resource practices to bring in talent and build up skills
- Put policies in place that foster meaningful engagement of stakeholders.

- Develop an agile strategy and invite stakeholder voices (people, other organisations, etc.) to the strategy development process

- Change how we define impact (programme & communications need to be on the same page)

Overall, we learned how these changes affect each other. Change on one level will be a driver on another. The programme, internal and strategic levels as well as staff working on these levels need to be in sync to enable true stakeholder driven accountability. If you want to learn more about the Resilient Roots initiative have a look at the CIVICUS website and read up on the learning blog posts we produced so far.

DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVE – Moving to the next accountability level and enabling a true shift in power towards communities

The Development Alternative programme is testing and scaling a new youth-led model to hold Development Actors to account for the promises they make to the communities they work in. Michael Royce from Restless Development presented the model for change and led a discussion about what is needed to move to the next accountability level and truly enable a shift in power towards communities we work in:

- Need to be aware of skills that are needed for people to participate in those spaces

- Need to create spaces that are safe

- Need to remove service provider power dynamics

- Need to acknowledge the power of donors and ensure accountability is not primarily driven by donor demands

If you want to learn more about the Development Alternative Programme please read the two-pager here.

ENVIRONMENT SESSION

Simon Black from Greenpeace led this discussion on our third accountability commitment, Healthy Planet. We explored why this commitment tends not to be prioritised by CSOs as much as other issues – such as gender or safeguarding – and discussed what CSOs' environmental policies should ideally include.

A challenging question was what tensions might exist between environmental sustainability and an organisation's mission or values, and where exceptions may need to be made. Participants also identified the fact that this is a cross-cutting issue which should be considered together with questions around development and gender, for example.

Participants agreed that there was room to work more collaboratively on environmental issues, and that there was a need for more examples and resources to inspire how they tackle this challenge. Accountable Now will look into how we can share more resources and bring our members together on this.

To read more about the discussion, see our one-page summary.

DIGITAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Louise James and Gernot Klein from **Accenture Development Partnerships** spoke to us about digital accountability and how well the civil society sector is equipped to keep up with the fourth industrial revolution. In their presentation they shared some key principles for digital responsibility and provided examples of how CSOs are using social media and technologies such as block-chain to increase their reach and impact.

In groups we brainstormed opportunities, risks, and best practices. Key points addressed were:

Opportunities: Technology allows us more direct, timely and ongoing interaction with and feed-back from a wider range of stakeholders – including younger people, those who are illiterate, and those in various/remote locations. It also gives us access to a greater amount of data, and helps us multiply impact and increase outreach and collaboration

Risks: The greatest risk identified was possible data breaches, compromising users' privacy and potentially safety. Although it increases our reach, technology can also lead to increased inequality, as those without access to the required hardware, software, or the internet will be excluded.

We also risk focusing on new/hyped technology to the detriment of using simpler solutions which may be more appropriate. With the speed that technology is developing, by the time organisations adopt a new tool or system, it may become outdated again quickly.

Best practices: Organisations should conduct proper risk assessments before using new technologies, require informed consent from people who provide data, and use encryption. User-centred design and participatory processes help ensure technology benefits those we are working with and for.

For more details and specific examples, see Accenture's summary.

For those looking for further resources on this topic, the Principles for Digital Development, the World Economic Forum, and NetHope are good places to start – specific articles are mentioned in Accenture's presentation.

IMPACT

Led by Catherine Manning from **Social Value International**, this session explored social value and impact, challenges faced in the CSO sector, and what to think about when measuring impact. The focus was on impact beyond the financial, looking at the effects of our work on communities, the environment, etc. Both positive and negative impacts are considered in order to improve services and programmes, and it is crucial to both measure impact and actually use the data we have collected.

Catherine shared some key takeaways from the Inspiring Impact programme, which has been developing good practices on managing social impact in the UK voluntary sector. These include:

- Cultural change is key for improving impact management, and there needs to be buy-in within the organisation

- No single approach or tool is perfect – we just need to start somewhere and build on what we are already doing

- It is crucial to consider local contexts and to collaborate both within the sector as well as cross-sectorally. Networks and peer support groups to share successes and failures are
- important in this regard.

For more information, see Catherine's presentation.

TRUST, TECH, TALK

Wolfgang Jamann from the **International Civil Society Centre** shared the Centre's work on their Civil Society Innovation Report, which in 2019 is focusing on CSOs' responses to populism in a digitally-enabled era. The key observations the report is building on are:

Declining trust, not just of civil society, but also of technology and its possible misuse, of institutions, and between different segments of society

A lack of compassion as we see an erosion of common values and a pushback against liberal worldviews and norms

Several aspects of technology are driving future innovation, including the rise of artificial intelligence, blockchain, fragmentation of the internet, shrinking of digital freedoms and increased surveillance, and the fluidity between offline and online realms

CSOs are increasingly under attack, disconnected from innovation, and are seen as outdated. In order to engage in the current environment, CSOs need to reconnect with citizens, refresh their mandates, change the way they communicate to focus on values rather than issues, and work in stronger partnerships.

Some examples of innovative communication are included in Wolfgang's presentation.

STRENGTHENING TRUST AND INTERNAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

Markus Hesse from the **Direct Impact Group** shared experiences from their work on how organisational culture can be impacted and changed through a participatory, co-creative process. Key points of discussion were:

An organisation's culture influences how staff approach their work and can drive progress, but may also pose barriers to accountability. For example, a culture of excellence may undermine experimentation, and a culture of solidarity may lead to bad behaviours going unaddressed.

Listening, openness, accepting and talking about failure, experimentation, learning, and inclusivity are key for a dynamic accountability approach and management buy-in is crucial to change the culture.

An organisation's values and "team rules" drive the daily behaviour of staff. These values should be specific and select to ensure the strength and impact of each one.

Periodic temperature checks by surveying staff to identify how well they feel the organisation's values are upheld can identify weaknesses and encourage progress. It might be helpful to have these conducted by external facilitators once in a while.

You can access Markus' presentation here.

Day 2: Down to Business

REPORTING MECHANISM: REFLECTING ON CHANGES

We discussed members' experiences working with our new reporting framework, and changes we had made to questions around critical incidents and complaints, and what information Accountable Now requests from members on these. While we do ask for an overview of complaints received, what category they fall under, and what percentage were resolved, the main this we are looking for is evidence that members' complaints mechanisms are working, and that members are learning from complaints they may receive.

For safeguarding incidents in particular, the Secretariat offered to talk to members individually to put together an overview of the amount of information they currently disclose. Examples of how to disclose information without compromising individuals' confidentiality can help other members in how they present their own information. The Secretariat will follow up with findings after the summer break.

ACCOUNTABILITY TREND REPORT

The Secretariat also presented their idea for an annual members' accountability trend report which captures key issues, challenges, and particularly innovative practices from the year. The report could also include an anonymised graph aggregating members' colour-coded assessment scores from key topics in the accountability reports. Key points of discussion were that:

- It would in principle be useful to share with each member (confidentially) where they lie on the performance overview graph; this could be particularly helpful to show management in which areas members may be lagging and need to improve.

- It may however be a misleading comparison considering that the size, nature, and capacities of members vary – smaller members are more likely to appear to be weaker.

- The graph would not be a ranking; given there are only four levels of colour-coded assessment, it is likely that several members would have the same score.

The Secretariat needs to think about how they would compile the scores given that members submitting interim reports will not be scored in all areas – would this only be possible on a biennial basis?

ACCOUNTABLE NOW'S COMPLAINTS MECHANISM FOR MEMBERS

Accountable Now recently reviewed its complaints mechanism, which had provided an avenue for the Independent Review Panel to receive complaints against Accountable Now members, as a final escalation if the issue could not be resolved via the member's own complaints mechanism. Given the limited capacity of the Panel and the fact that they would not have the authority (nor is it really their role) to make decisions about specific incidents relating to members' practices, the Secretariat suggested a new policy which removed this mandate.

The new policy would have allowed Accountable Now to receive concerns about how members abide by the 12 Accountability Commitments, to take into account when reviewing members' accountability reports. At the AGM, members requested that this also be removed from the policy, as there are already members' own mechanisms, as well as regulators such as the Charity Commission in the UK, under which people can raise concerns.

The focus should instead be on reviewing the mechanism to raise complaints against Accountable Now, which is one of the Secretariat's priorities for the coming months.

ELECTION OF NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Three new Board Members were elected to Accountable Now's Board of Governors. We would like to extend a warm welcome to:

Amy Taylor: Chief Strategy Officer, CIVICUS
In her current role, Amy provides strategic leadership on civil society resourcing, effectiveness and innovation, and constituency-based accountability. Her passion is promoting a more diverse and resilient civil society sector. Prior to joining CIVICUS in 2010, Amy's dedication to social change led her to conduct independent research on social justice policy in Scotland, implement service learning and career development initiatives for at-risk youth in California, work with local communities and teachers to improve education opportunities for rural youth in Namibia, support community radio managers to promote democratic governance and accountability in Liberia, and produce albums with popular musicians to increase HIV/AIDS awareness in Southern and West Africa.

Jo Thompson: Independent Trustee
Jo Thomson has worked in international development for over 25 years with a consistent focus on accountability and effectiveness standards and good practice for NGOs. She has co-authored the Australian NGO Accreditation Standards and the ACFID Code of Conduct, is an Assessor of NGOs participating in the Australian Government Aid Program and is a CHS Auditor with the Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative (HQAI).

As an independent practitioner, Jo works on a range of initiatives including effectiveness standards and good practice, programme design, monitoring and evaluation, gender, child safeguarding, the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and NGO governance and operating standards. Jo co-founded Learning4Development in 2013, a consultancy social enterprise.

Olivier Guth: Senior Director, ADRA
Olivier has spent almost all of his 40 years career at ADRA, mainly in management and leadership positions, in West Africa and at the US headquarters. Prior to his current role he was overseeing the departments managing US government and UN funded grants, with a focus on finance and US government regulation. Before that he was the head of the HQ Finance and Operation Bureau covering accounting, IT and other administrative units. Now based in France, Olivier is still involved in finance, including as an adjunct professor for a private university in Michigan.