

Accountable Now Beyond 2018 Strategy

The Beyond 2018 Strategy builds on the 2015 Strategy and seeks to respond not only to the context within which we work but also to member's expectations and needs. It's important to mention that the strategy outlines the broader goals and strategic areas that Accountable Now will be focusing on in the next years. However, if approved, we would still need to include milestones to be able to identify success and also a very comprehensive workplan that would set the priorities for the year which will be updated on a yearly basis.

The strategy outlined below is the result of several exercises:

1

Strategic sessions: Throughout the year, the Accountable Now Secretariat organised two strategic meetings with the purpose of undertaking an assessment of the current context in which the organisation operates, identifying opportunities and priority areas to focus on in the upcoming years. These sessions took into consideration the numerous conversations that the team had had with members, other organisations and relevant stakeholders over the past months.

2

Board feedback: In May, the strategy was presented at the board meeting where feedback was provided on the strategy with the purpose of strengthening it. Among many comments, the Board discussed the role that Accountable Now could play during crises and if we could speak out on behalf of members. This is a point that has to be discussed further with members. The Board also mentioned that the new strategy had to reflect our role as Global Secretariat of the Global Standard and the implications it would have on the strategy. The meeting concluded with the Board agreeing that Accountable Now could start providing more tailored support to members.

3

Strategy vetting: From August to Mid-October, one-on-one calls were held with 22 of the 29 members to collect their feedback on the strategy and to identify any points that might not have been included. Furthermore, the calls were also useful to identify expectations and if these would be met with the new strategy. Members were very thankful for the opportunity to comment on the strategy. See the strategy vetting document for a summary of the outcomes of these calls.

The Context

Accountability mechanisms tend to focus on the success stories

Although civil society organisations have made significant efforts to strengthen their accountability mechanisms, there is still room for improvement. Accountability continues to be highly driven by donors and thus there continues to be a tendency to report only the successful stories. Accountability mechanisms also need to focus on the not so successful experiences to be able to learn throughout the process.

Accountability has not been mainstreamed

Accountable Now has a set of **12 commitments** that serve the purpose of transforming civil society organisations from within. It is a framework that moves the attention away from the end-result of the accountability report to the underlying process of extracting lessons from within organisations. Our approach seeks to promote the use of our commitments and reporting framework as guiding tools so that organisations can reflect on what they have achieved and how they achieved it. Through our model we want to transform organisational culture so that organisations embed accountability in their day-to-day work, thus reducing the “accountability burden”.

Dynamic Accountability is gaining traction within our sector

On the whole, organisations have yet to make significant efforts to meaningfully engage their stakeholders to inform decision-making processes. Most of our member organisations already undertake projects where feedback is central to the project's effectiveness. This approach is not only undertaken at the international level: increasingly, national level organisations are piloting and rolling out accountability mechanisms that seek to engage their various stakeholders to inform their decisions. This approach is acquiring momentum and it is through these experiences that we can extract lessons to try to identify what Dynamic Accountability looks like in practice and how CSOs can learn from each other.

The Context cont.

Donors are promoting stakeholder engagement

...yet, it is not clear what type of engagement they are promoting. Meaningful engagement means many things and we need to be sure that this is not a tick-boxing exercise or using feedback mechanisms just to affirm approach. In addition, donors' frameworks (log-frames) are not flexible enough to allow organisations to plan and co-create with their stakeholders, thus hindering the further involvement of them in decision-making processes.

Accountability has become costly and time consuming

There are numerous standards and codes (i.e. CHS, Sphere, IATI) and most of our member organisations are also reporting against these as well. In this regard, accountability is becoming a burden. Furthermore, with the recent safeguarding crisis, due diligence processes have been reinforced by donors and regulatory bodies, putting more pressure on organisations.

Reports are not reaching the people they work with and for

Organisations feel that the people they wish to benefit are not using the information or reports that they produce. Most of the information produced to report against codes and standards is published on websites and people are not aware that this information exists. The work of members has to be widely disseminated but in a simple way so that it becomes appealing and so that any person can understand it.

Shrinking civic space

With the recent safeguarding crisis, members and other civil society organisations at the global and national levels are under scrutiny and resources are scarcer than ever. Organisations are more willing to be accountable with the purpose of rebuilding trust, strengthening their legitimacy and also to become more resilient to threats.

Accountable Now's ambition

Civil society organisations are an essential part of democracy but in order to be effective and enhance people's trust they need to mainstream an accountability approach that is more dynamic. This dynamic approach continues to promote openness and transparency but it also encourages organisations to have a more proactive, feedback-driven approach where their stakeholders – people, donors, staff – have an active role in shaping the organisation's policies and the activities they undertake which have an impact on people's lives. It is through this process that organisations will strengthen their day-to-day operations and thus achieve greater impact.

Accountable Now wishes to work with its member organisations and other stakeholders so that we go beyond the usual accountability exercise that focuses on reporting, to achieve a more sustainable and long-term approach where the Dynamic Accountability approach is embedded in CSO culture and people are at the heart of the decision-making process.

To do so, Accountable Now will provide support so that:

- **Civil society organisations adopt strong Dynamic Accountability practices to enhance public trust**
- **Civil society organisations and other stakeholders mainstream Dynamic Accountability practices in their day-to-day operations so that they achieve greater impact**
- **We promote international exchange on accountability tools and practices to enhance knowledge.**

Beyond 2018 Strategy

Goal 1: To encourage the adoption of strong Dynamic Accountability practices to enhance trust

Accountable Now's set of 12 accountability commitments, adopted from the Global Standard for CSO Accountability, are a tool for Dynamic Accountability. Dynamic Accountability is an approach driven by a two-way feedback stream. Through a continuous dialogue with our stakeholders – especially the people we work for and with – and by including their voices in the organisation's decision-making processes, stakeholders take an active role in shaping the CSO policies and activities that impact their lives.

Reporting on activities, policies and outcomes is only one activity that CSOs should be undertaking to be truly accountable. CSOs need to move away from top-down accountability mechanisms to an approach where information flows in different directions. It is through this approach that organisations will be able to enhance trust, strengthen their legitimacy and become more effective.

Objectives:

Build strong Dynamic Accountability Practices:

1. To provide tailored support to members and other civil society organisations to embed strong Dynamic Accountability practices.
 - Based on members' needs and shortcomings in regard to their accountability practices, provide ad-hoc support so that they can comply with our minimum requirements and reach the goals established by our 12 accountability commitments.
 - Facilitate discussions on the main principles and characteristics of the Dynamic Accountability approach so that these can be adopted in external and internal accountability mechanisms.

2. To define and promote accountability benchmarks that seek to advance a more dynamic approach.
 - With the help of Accountable Now's Independent Review Panel, we will develop a model report that includes benchmarks and examples of good practices taken from our members' reports. This will be a useful guide for members and other organisations on how to draft their reports. This exercise will also inform the provision of in-depth feedback which is consistent across the board whilst taking into account each member's unique context.
 - Our webinars, working groups, workshops and peer advice groups (PAGs) will target member needs and challenges. We will not only facilitate the PAGs, but will actively organise them and provide guidance and useful resources based on identified areas for improvement amongst our membership.
 - The best practice section of the website will be widely disseminated and best practices will be chosen on the basis of the benchmarks in the model report.

3. To encourage continuous improvement.
 - We will continuously improve our reporting and vetting system to drive organisational developments in CSOs towards better accountability practices.
 - We will foster active exchange of expertise among Accountable Now partners.
 - We will develop a State of the Sector Report to identify key trends and opportunities for our members.

Enhance Trust:

4. To foster a meaningful conversation with the wider public on our members and other CSOs accountability efforts by disseminating their reports and good practices.
 - Disseminate reports and good practices via our newsletter, social media and other relevant fora.
 - Strengthen our best practice library as explained above in point 2.
 - Work with members to improve their own efforts to disseminate reports and other relevant information.
 - Work with members to explore how reports and other relevant information can be translated into a simple and easy to read format that is useful for the people they work with.

Goal 2: To promote a culture of dynamic accountability

Accountable Now's 12 commitments have the purpose of not only providing a guide for organisations to reflect on their outcomes and impact but also on how these were achieved and to transform the way organisations operate. In this sense, it is really about making sure that accountability is not another box-ticking exercise, but more a transformative process where organisations become accountable internally and externally. To do so, this not only requires buy-in and support from CSOs but also from other key stakeholders such as donors.

Objectives:

1. To monitor, learn, document and disseminate cases of effective Dynamic Accountability practices and tools.

Accountable Now will produce case studies on good practices from members and other organisations that are implementing different dynamic accountability practices to learn from these and identify successful approaches by context, type of organization and approaches. The documented information will be widely disseminated and discussed with the wider CSO community through webinars, workshops, conferences and tools. Evidence based research will be taken from:

- The Global Standard for CSO Accountability
- People-powered decision-making pilots
- The Development Alternative
- Resilient Roots
- Members' accountability reports

2. To encourage the donor community and other stakeholders -e.g. regulatory institutions- to adopt, promote and support a culture of Dynamic Accountability among the CSO sector.

- Use the case studies and other relevant evidence based research to inform the donor community to the dynamic accountability approach, its principles and benefits for CSOs.
- Engage and collaborate with donors so that they support, implement and promote the approach with their grantees.
- Inform the discussions on due diligence, legal and regulatory requirements and any other mechanism that serves as an accountability mechanism so that these are not "another tick-box exercise".

Goal 3: To foster international exchange on accountability tools and practices to enhance knowledge

When it comes to accountability, there are many initiatives around the world that have their own codes and standards. Furthermore, each donor has its own reporting framework. Whilst acknowledging the importance that each framework has, accountability has become a costly and time-consuming effort for many organisations. With the purpose of exploring collaboration, complementarity and alignment, Accountable Now will:

Objectives:

- Collaborate with other accountability initiatives -code and standard holders- to explore opportunities for collaboration, cross reporting and minimise multiple reporting requirements.
- Engage with the donor community and other relevant stakeholders - such as regulatory bodies - to identify how our reporting framework is useful for their own due diligence processes.
- Foster a strategic relationship with other initiatives and platforms that have accountability tools to learn and exchange lessons learned.