



**Accountable
Now**

GLOBAL STANDARDS LOCAL TRUST



Sightsavers Independent Review Panel Feedback

Accountability Report 2018

Review Round September 2019



Sightsavers

Feedback from the Independent Review Panel

Review Round September 2019

07 October 2019

Dear Caroline Harper,

Thank you for submitting your accountability report. We, the Independent Review Panel of Accountable Now, appreciate your efforts to strengthen accountability to communities, local partners, supporters, staff, donors, or other key constituencies. Our key focus is on accountability to those you serve. It is against this background that we critically discussed your report and came to the individual assessment below.

Sightsavers' eighth accountability report is an interim report which responds to the Panel's [improvement analysis](#) on Sightsavers' 2017 report. On the whole, the information requested has been provided, and improvement is evident. The Panel also appreciates that the opening statement from CEO Caroline Harper includes direct reference to the areas the Panel had flagged for improvement.

Several illustrative examples are provided throughout the report, which strengthen the information in the report relating to processes. While there is still some room for improvement, particularly in relation to beneficiary feedback/complaints mechanisms and their actual use, the report indicates a strong approach to dynamic accountability in the organisation.

The report also provides an update on several other key developments, organised along the line of the 12 accountability commitments.

We look forward to discussing our feedback with you in a follow-up call, which the Secretariat will be in touch to schedule. This conversation will form the basis for your response letter, which will be made publicly available on the Accountable Now website along with your report and this feedback letter.

If you have any other feedback or comments on our work, please share them with us by sending them to the Accountable Now Secretariat.

Yours sincerely,

Accountable Now's Independent Review Panel





Sightsavers' Accountability Report 2018

Review Round September 2019

Opening Statement from the Head of Organisation

The opening statement from CEO Caroline Harper focuses on how Sightsavers is responding to the current climate in the CSO sector, with organisations affected by the safeguarding crises, and a decline in public trust in institutions. Accountability to stakeholders is flagged as crucial to maintain trust and be able to fulfil Sightsavers' mission.

Key highlights with regard to compliance (and due diligence related) matters are listed, including compliance with the DFID Supporter Code, an enhanced safeguarding policy, and improvements in supporter care (indicated by a drop of one third in fundraising complaints).

Successes from the past 12 months have also been outlined – these include an increase in the number of eye operations supported, wins in eye health advocacy, strengthened engagement with beneficiaries (and including their views in advocacy work), and a large increase in contracts won as leaders of various consortia. Offsetting this has been the end of a number of major contracts, making it a period of significant change for the organisation. The statement also recognises that these various changes may increase the risk of its staff's (mental) wellbeing, and the initiatives Sightsavers is taking to counter this.

The top three accountability related issues Sightsavers is focusing on in 2019 are: increasing accountability and transparency in its major programmes; a strategy refresh which includes an increased focus on bringing evidence into practice; and ways of supporting staff positively (rather than just focusing on complaints and grievances).

The Panel appreciates that the statement also includes reference to areas flagged by the Panel in its last feedback letter, and commends Sightsavers - and its CEO - for a solid approach to dynamic accountability in their work.

Cluster B: Our approach to change

E. We listen to, involve and empower stakeholders

E3	<p>Main likes/dislikes from stakeholders and organisation's response</p> <p>Sightsavers' response in its last report had focused largely on feedback from donors and the Panel had requested information on feedback from beneficiaries and partners in this interim report.</p> <p>This information is provided; the response states that a number of beneficiary feedback approaches are used in programmes, and</p>	3
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	<p>consultations are held with implementing partners to review these approaches. Sightsavers' MEL team has been working to refine guidance for the collection of beneficiary feedback, and has been analysing the feedback that is collected.</p> <p>In 2018 eight project evaluations were conducted, with a further five ending in 2019. All of these sought feedback from partners as well as other direct and indirect beneficiaries, and examples are given from projects in Sierra Leone, Uganda, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. These examples focus mainly on the methods used and how findings are used to improve projects, more than what the feedback received revealed (except in the case of Sierra Leone, where key findings are provided).</p> <p>The Panel appreciates Sightsavers' approach to gathering and using feedback, and in the next full report would also like to see some more key findings (both positive and negative) from this feedback, such as what partners and beneficiaries particularly liked, disliked, or any common requests they had. While the examples provided were useful, it did not provide an overall picture of whether (as a whole), the programs evaluated were successful .</p>	
<p>F. Our advocacy work addresses the root cause of problems</p>		
<p>F2</p>	<p><i>Stakeholders support your advocacy work and value changes achieved</i></p> <p>The response explains how Sightsavers' advocacy strategies are developed – with the input of the people affected by change – at local, national, and international levels.</p> <p>At local level, Sightsavers supports the people they work with to identify changes they wish to see, as well as strategies to overcome barriers. An example is given of how with was done with SDG scorecards in India, and shows that partnerships with local organisations is key to the approach.</p> <p>At national level, advocacy work is integrated into programmes. Consultations with partners and the people Sightsavers works with are used to identify the impacts of policy change. An example is given of how Sightsavers supported the development of the Disability Alliance for the SDGs in Bangladesh.</p> <p>Internationally, advocacy work is shaped by Sightsavers' engagement at local and national levels, and the changes identified in programmatic work are considered.</p>	<p>3</p>



	<p>The report also explains that stakeholders (such as programme participants and disabled people's organisations) are supported in advocating for themselves at global level, and an example is provided.</p> <p>While the report clearly outlines the how the organisation involves stakeholders in its advocacy work (in particular around identifying and positioning the issues), the Panel would like to know whether there have been any key conflicts between stakeholder advocacy positions at local level, versus those at national and/or international level, and if so how Sightsavers has dealt with these.</p>	
<h2>Cluster C: Organisational Effectiveness</h2>		
<h3>J. Governance processes maximise accountability</h3>		
<p>J3 and J4</p>	<p>Complaints handling mechanisms and overview of complaints (internal and external)</p> <p>Over the past year Sightsavers has worked to update and roll-out a number of policies and procedures relating to complaints, including their safeguarding, whistleblowing, and grievance systems. One change was the engagement of partners on the need to report issues and complaints. Links to the updated policies and an explanation of other key changes are requested.</p> <p>An internal audit of Sightsavers' complaints system was carried out in the first quarter of 2019, and the draft report had been submitted at the time this accountability report was produced. Overall, complaints handling were assessed as being "sound and operating adequately" across the organisation, but there is a need for some country offices to improve how they document complaints, with some confusion around what needs to be recorded.</p> <p>It is stated that very few complaints tend to be received from beneficiaries, and this remains a point to look into – might this be because Sightsavers' reporting mechanisms are not promoted well enough, or that beneficiaries prefer other methods of reporting than are available? It is also unclear if the reporting process enables whistleblowers to report issues anonymously or not. Are the complaints mechanisms accessible to those who are visually impaired?</p> <p>Sightsavers' last accountability report had mentioned that a review of country level complaints processes recommended that mechanisms be</p>	<p>3</p>



strengthened to ensure complaints are not missed. The Panel looks forward to hearing more about this most recent audit review's findings and the responses Sightsavers has taken in the next accountability report, particularly relating to beneficiary feedback/complaints mechanisms.

The report gives an overview of reported incidents relating to fraud, fundraising, and under the whistleblowing mechanism.

General updates

The Panel appreciates that Sightsavers has provided a detailed update on significant organisational changes and mapped how these relate to the 12 Accountability Commitments.

Commitment 1	<p>Justice and equality</p> <p>In mid-2018, the UK government announced that Sightsavers would be leading on two major new global disability programmes: a £30m six-year inclusive development programme, as well as leading a consortium of organisations to deliver a £13 million UK Aid Connect programme.</p>
Commitment 2	<p>Women's rights and gender equality</p> <p>In mid-2018, Sightsavers' Advocacy Adviser for Social Inclusion was elected to the UN committee which monitors the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD). Six of the nine positions available were filled by women, which is viewed as a success in light of Sightsavers' campaign for better representation of women with disabilities on the committee.</p>
Commitment 4	<p>Lasting positive change</p> <p>A review of Sightsavers' project design process and quality assurance process was completed in 2018, and the report outlines key recommendations and how Sightsavers is implementing them.</p> <p>The organisation's safeguarding policy was also strengthened in 2018 to include provisions for "adults at risk".</p>
Commitment 5	<p>People driven work</p> <p>The report talks about the participatory design workshops Sightsavers has held (in all three countries in which it has recently started eye health programmes), collaborating with a range of eye health and inclusion partners to co-produce a shared vision for inclusion in programmes. The</p>



	<p>process was guided by Sightsavers' inclusive eye health manual, and future programmes will build upon previous learnings.</p>
Commitment 6	<p>Strong partnerships</p> <p>The report outlines successes in its neglected tropical disease programme portfolio. One of these is the decision that Sightsavers will be leading the Accelerate Trachoma Elimination programme, a \$105 million fund which will support trachoma elimination efforts in several countries.</p> <p>Sightsavers has also established a research centre to help facilitate collaborations with academic and policy partners, and strengthens the organisation's ability to disseminate high quality research. More information can be found on a dedicated website.</p>
Commitment 8	<p>Open organisations</p> <p>Sightsavers was awarded the HMG Cyber Essentials Accreditation in 2018, and upgraded several systems and pieces of infrastructure to this end.</p> <p>A pilot to explore opportunities and challenges around IATI reporting by downstream partners was conducted in Uganda, and key learnings and partner feedback was captured in a report. An update will be shared in the next full report.</p> <p>Sightsavers also migrated to a new CRM system which provides increased security to supporter information, and strengthened GDPR compliance.</p>
Commitment 9	<p>Empowered and effective staff</p> <p>Over the past year Sightsavers has continued to build on efforts to become an employer of choice for candidates with disabilities, renewing and working towards new accreditations in this area, and joining the International Labour Organisation's Global Business and Disability Network for inspiration from the private sector.</p>
Commitment 10	<p>Well-handled resources</p> <p>In 2018 Sightsavers took several steps to "future-proof" its programme procurement function, after transforming its global supply chain in 2017). This in turn led to a number of "improvements" and "efficiency" increases.</p>



	<p>Givewell, which recommends charities that deliver cost-effective and high impact interventions, continued to recommend Sightsavers in 2018 for its work on deworming.</p>
Commitment 11	<p>Responsive decision-making</p> <p>The report outlines the process of the organisation-wide employee survey which was completed by 98% of employees in 2018. Results were shared with staff, who were invited to provide feedback on an analysis of results and identify opportunities for Sightsavers to improve working conditions. The Panel looks forward to reading more about actions Sightsavers took in response, in the next full report.</p>
Commitment 12	<p>Responsible leadership</p> <p>The report provides an overview of changes (outgoing and newly appointed trustees) to the Sightsavers Board in the UK.</p>