

Accountable Now

GLOBAL STANDARDS LOCAL TRUST



Sightsavers Independent Review Panel Feedback

**Accountability Report 2016
Review Round July 2017**



Sightsavers

Feedback from the Independent Review Panel

Review Round July 2017

07 September 2017

Dear Caroline Harper,

Thank you for submitting your Accountability Report. We, the Independent Review Panel of Accountable Now, appreciate your efforts to continuously 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. Before we share this with you, however, we want to highlight a few issues of concern that we found throughout most of the nine reports assessed in the last review round.

Closing the feedback loop with stakeholders (NGO2, NGO9)

A [recent study](#) on 40 international civil society organisations' (CSOs') accountability practices - conducted by the *direct impact group* on behalf of Accountable Now - revealed that only three out of these 40 CSOs responded with an appropriate answer to a complaint test within three weeks.

This is alarming. All Members of Accountable Now should have a fully functioning feedback mechanisms in place. However, when checking your reports we found a consistent lack of reporting filed complaints per type, quantity, and region as well as a total lack of information on how they were resolved. We believe this is not an acceptable level of accountability. CSOs should not only have a mechanism in place but should first be capturing complaints with the appropriate level of detail and then monitoring their resolution and agreeing what actions need to be taken to ensure the same issues do not arise.

[Feedback Labs](#), with whom Accountable Now collaborated on the [People-Powered Accountability project](#), also serve as a valuable source of information on how to close feedback loops.

Collaboration with partners, communities and networks (NGO6, EC7 & SO1)

As part of the [12 Accountability Commitments](#), Accountable Now Members commit to working in genuine partnership with local communities and partners. With increased globalisation of information, more empowered citizens engage and civic space is challenged, it becomes ever more important to help local communities and partners to thrive. However, we found that coordination with local communities is still an overall weakness area among the Accountability Reports we received. Some



“common” ICSO practices can have intended or unintended consequences on local communities. We would thus like to particularly highlight a lack of contributions to building local capacity and resources. Do you take into account local market conditions and think about working alongside local organisations building their capacity? We suggest that ICSOs should start to consider their impact on the sustainability and independence of local civil society in all their work (such as planning, budgeting, economic impact, etc.).

Adding to what people do to improve their lives

(NGO3)

To state the obvious, impact measurement is important. However, many evaluations mentioned in received Accountability Reports focus on collecting relatively large amounts of data on people reached, however, this does not tell us much about the improvement in their lives. Moreover, we should critically ask ourselves: What is the ICSO’s credit in this improvement and what positive impact is actually due to the people and beneficiaries themselves?

While we are of course aware that resources are limited, there is clearly no substitute for a robust and honest impact evaluation of our programmes and activities.

Organisation-specific feedback to Sightsavers:

Sightsavers’ interim report demonstrates a strong **institutional commitment** to accountability and improvement in some areas. Numerous internal and external strategies, tools and processes have been developed or updated over the past year, including an Open Information Policy in response to Accountable Now’s impact study.

Examples of **good practice** include: a thorough MEL system which is aligned with strategic objectives (NGO3), publication of policy positions on the Sightsavers website (NGO5), a visualised partnership framework with individual toolkits (NGO6), and a proactive approach of fostering a positive work environment and tackling possible issues before they fully develop (NGO9). The production of an annual Inclusion Report, and expanding the role of HR operations to cover social inclusion, is also noted positively as evidence of Sightsavers’ accountability and commitment to the implementation of its Empowerment and Inclusion Strategy 2015.

Promotion of Accountable Now membership on the Sightsavers [website](#), including a prominent link to Sightsavers’ [complaints policy](#), is commended.

A lack of statistics on workforce training or evidence about the effectiveness of training (LA10), as well as failure to answer the Panel’s questions the completion of performance and development reviews (LA12) and workforce grievances (NGO9) constitute minor **areas of weakness**. The Panel would like to see progress in the next report, or clarification as to why these areas have not been addressed.



Our intention is that this feedback letter, and any response you may wish to provide, is made publicly available on the Accountable Now website along with your report – as it is the case with all previously reviewed reports. However, should there be errors of fact in the feedback above or in the note below; we would of course wish to correct these before publication. Please share any comments or amendments by 22 September 2017.

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,

Mihir Bhatt

Rhonda Chapman

John Clark

Louise James

Jane Kiragu

Nora Lester Murad

Saroeun Soeung



Cover Note on Sightsavers's Accountability Report 2016

Review Round July 2017

PROFILE DISCLOSURES

I. Strategy and Analysis

1.1	<p>Statement from the most senior decision-maker</p> <p><i>Fully addressed</i></p> <p>Sightsavers' interim accountability report opens again with a strong statement from CEO Caroline Harper. The statement refers to the negative impacts of the exit of the UK from the EU, as well as reduced development funding in the US. However, Sightsavers' finances remain strong and the organisation aims to remain agile in order to overcome these obstacles.</p> <p>The SDGs are pinpointed as the bedrock of Sightsavers' work, with reference to work on data disaggregation which is helping redesign programmes. The Panel looks forward to more details about this focus on the SDGs, the results of the work and the changes to programmes in the next report.</p> <p>Accountable Now's impact study is referenced as an important development in Sightsavers' accountability work, and the Panel is pleased to hear that an Open Information Policy has been introduced as a result. The panel would appreciate to receive an update on the resilience of the Open Information Policy and emerging lessons, if any. Strategy updates for specific areas of work, as well as forward-thinking approaches to risk management and possible media crises, are commended. The panel was very pleased to see how the membership of Accountable Now and the Independent panel support were helpful in the submission to Givewell.</p> <p>The open publication of the SIM card results on Sightsavers' website is once again noted positively,</p> <p>Sightsavers' successes are reflected in their positive performance results – with increased output and reach in most categories – as</p>
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well as its recognition as the top customer service provider amongst UK charities.

Material Changes

Numerous changes are identified, relating to Sightsavers' strategy, governance, programmes, management, and fundraising. The evident efforts to improve strategies, processes and tools across the range of Sightsavers' operations (both internal and external) are commended.

The Panel looks forward to learning about the implementation and initial results of the Refractive Error Strategy and NTD overarching strategy in Sightsavers' next report. It would be interesting to know which strategic gaps were identified in the Eye Health strategy refocus, and which thematic focus areas have been selected to concentrate on going forward.

The introduction of an Annual Inclusion Report is appreciated, as it includes comprehensive coverage of diversity. In the next report, the Panel would be interested in learning about initiatives on promoting voice, agency and empowerment, particularly how promoting political participation through inclusive elections has been rolled out in West Africa and any lessons that have emerged.

The Panel was pleased to see that Accountable Now's impact study led to the identification of a need for an Open Information Policy, and that one was developed and launched in 2016, and published online.

Establishment of a Social Inclusion working group is noted with interest, and the Panel is interested in reading about initial outcomes and achievements in the next report.

The provision of programmatic information on the IATI website is commended as a mechanism for transparency. Development of a Child Safeguarding Policy is also appreciated; the Panel would be interested in seeing the policy once it is adopted.

It would be useful to know how the Lobby Return process works and the extent to which this supports the transparency of those seeking to lobby Ministers and Permanent Secretaries.

The Panel congratulates Sightsavers on the recognition of their successes through numerous awards in 2016, particularly relating to the improvement of supply chain operations as a form of accountability to consumers.



PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

IV. Human Resource Management

LA10	<p>Workforce training</p> <p><i>Partially addressed</i></p> <p>Sightsavers' efforts and investments relating to workforce training are lauded. The organisation demonstrates a strong commitment to the training of line managers in 2016, with the introduction of internal Knowledge Cafes and additional support for new managers. It is good to see that the upcoming Knowledge Cafe series is planned to be complementary to the new Personal Development Review process, and that there is an effort to train staff in Africa on people management issues too. The institutional support for developing managers' feedback skills is also appreciated. The Panel looks forward to outcomes and evidence of the successes of these trainings in the next report.</p> <p>The Panel is also interested in knowing whether trainings are provided to other employees beyond line managers. There is reference to Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs) for staff who need extra support, and the Panel is pleased to note that this has resulted in improved performance in some cases. Are there more proactive trainings offered to a broad range of staff, not just those who specifically require performance improvements?</p>
LA12	<p>Performance development process</p> <p><i>Addressed</i></p> <p>The Panel was pleased to see that Sightsavers responded to the feedback from the 2015 employee survey regarding the need to improve performance development processes. In response to a further survey in early 2017, Sightsavers is implementing training for managers on giving effective feedback, and has moved to regular reviews of personal and team objectives rather than annual appraisals.</p> <p>The interim report mentions that completion rates will not be monitored due to these reviews being conducted on a rolling basis. However, formal development reviews will still be conducted for each staff member every 12 months, and the Panel would be interested in the completion rates for these – particularly in light of the fact that</p>



	<p>only 57% of staff Performance and Development Reviews were returned in 2015. The Panel had requested an explanation for this low number – was the reason identified, and are there systems in place to encourage better completion rates in the future? This is of interest also because it supports other mechanisms such as the PIPs.</p>
NGO9	<p>Workforce grievances</p> <p><i>Addressed</i></p> <p>Sightsavers refers to an updated Global Grievance Policy and Procedure as of January 2017, and updated Whistleblowing Policy as of 2016. The Panel repeats its previous request for links to these in the next report and suggests making the Whistleblowing Policy publicly available on Sightsavers' website – the Grievance Policy is already online here.</p> <p>The report mentions that employee relation issues were all resolved informally and that there were no formal grievance cases or employment tribunals. Is there a figure for the number of issues that were brought up informally with the HR Business Partners?</p> <p>The Panel welcomes Sightsavers' proactive approach of tackling possible issues early on and building positive relationships to maintain a positive work environment.</p>