

INGO Accountability Charter Company Annual General Meeting (AGM) 2014

London, 4 April 2014

Minutes

AGM 14/01 - Welcome, Introductions, and Approval of Minutes from the 2013 AGM

Jeremy Hobbs, the Chair of the Charter Board, welcomed 22 representatives of Charter Member organisations, five guests of organisations interested in the Charter, and two Board Director nominees from Charter partner organisations. The minutes of the 2013 AGM held on 5 April 2013 were approved by the Members.

AGM 14/02 - Report from the Board Chair

Jeremy Hobbs highlighted that a growing global audit mentality following a value-for-money econometric approach puts increasing pressure on NGO accountability. The Charter is in a good position to handle this demand from an NGO perspective as it is to date the only comprehensive, global and multi-sectoral framework owned by the NGOs and signed by most of the largest NGOs in the world. Several years of hard work and the ability to now show that the accountability of our Members has significantly improved, allow us to positively argue the NGO case in public and fend off some of the external pressures.

Charter membership continuously sustains the question of rights and responsibilities in an organisation. Annual reports are vetted rigorously by the Independent Review Panel and progress on accountability commitments is closely monitored. Everything is made transparent on the Charter website for public control and non-performing Members are excluded. All of this ensures the integrity of the Charter as a self-regulating initiative while giving us the opportunity to collectively show the added value our sector contributes. Since we follow a value-based, human rights centred approach, our accountability goes beyond the usual econometric measures and includes such things as good governance, environmental sensitivity, inclusion and participation as key elements for good quality of work. Strong performance on these indicators also underpins the credibility of our demands for improved social and environmental accountability of governments and business.

Our public reputation and demands would further profit from greater alignment of the 300 plus NGO accountability frameworks that currently exist. Stronger convergence will strengthen the voice of civil society while improving the quality of information that is provided. It is one of the Charter's key objectives to foster this alignment. Creating a *Global Standard for Core CSO Accountability* with seven Project Partners from Africa, Asia, Australia, North and South America is one step in this direction. The Board has agreed to seed fund the initial phase of this project. The Charter has further joined the *International Aid Transparency Initiative* (IATI) and seeks a strategic agreement with the *Humanitarian Accountability Partnership* (HAP) to actively encourage a NGO accountability architecture that is well aligned, easily understood, and effectively drives the quality of our work. In addition to these developments, new Members such as BRAC, Islamic Relief World Wide and Terre des Hommes have joined in 2013, broadening the Charter base.

As the political space for NGOs is shrinking across the world, it becomes ever more important to strengthen NGOs' as indispensable defenders of human rights and safe guardians of government accountability. Strong and collective accountability practices are a great means of doing this as it has the potential to improve the enabling environment NGOs operate in.

AGM 14/03 – Financial Matters

George Macfarlane, the Charter's Treasurer, presented the audited accounts for 2013. Thanks to the increased membership fees, the Charter had a positive result of 60.375 € for the year. Our reserves currently stand at 79.099 €. It was agreed that the Board should look into developing a Reserves Policy in their next meeting. The AGM approved the audited accounts 2014 and acknowledged the Budget for 2014.

It was also agreed to dispense with the provision that Charter annual budgets agreed between the Board and the Secretariat in fall of the preceding year, need to be approved by the AGM in spring of the following year. Since the overlap in organisations represented at the Charter Board and the Board of the International Civil Society Centre has been reduced significantly, the potential conflict of interest has diminished and does not warrant this procedure anymore.

George Macfarlane finally presented the tender outcome for the Charter's auditor in which three auditors had put in an offer. It was agreed that the Charter will continue working with its current auditor Sawyer Vincent, since their bid was very competitive and it will be important to keep their knowledge for another year as the Charter Treasurer will change after this AGM.

AGM 14/04 – Members' Activities 2013 and 2014

Janet Dalziell highlighted that the Charter's active community of practice was very much improved last year. A series of *webinars* and *Peer Advice Groups* were established covering topics such as effective complaints handling mechanisms, organisation's environmental impact, information disclosure policies, and the risks of corruption and fraud. Three more webinars are planned for 2014, focusing on issues of inclusion and discrimination, stakeholder engagement, and IATI. Members suggested also having a webinar on how to use the Charter as a tool to advance human rights in the future.

For this year's annual workshop, Members decided to focus on: "How the Charter can be implemented coherently across the entire federation". Representatives from ActionAid, Oxfam GB and Transparency International volunteered to join the preparatory organisation committee.

AGM 14/05 – Panel Discussion: NGO Accountability in Africa and Latin America

Caroline Harper stressed the importance of the Charter improving the work and working conditions for NGOs across the globe. Its Members therefore need to understand what good NGO accountability practice is from a truly global perspective and how the Charter can help to achieve it.

Janet Mawiyoo (Chair of Viwango, Kenya) and Rosa Inés Ospina (Co-Director of Rendir Cuentas, Columbia), presented the current state of play in regard to NGO accountability in Africa and Latin America. Both warned that the NGO environment is becoming more and more restrictive and that strong accountability practice is an important way of defending this space. While Rendir Cuentas has approached this by publishing a regular report on the contributions of several hundred NGOs in nine Latin American countries, Viwango has chosen to focus on certification to advance NGO reputation in their country.

Both stressed the difficulty of getting donor funds or even the support of international NGOs for this important work. A collective *Global Standard on Core CSO Accountability* and more cohesion of global civil society to defend their political space would be welcome support, while at the same time strengthening the Charter as a truly global network.

AGM 14/06 - Election of Board Directors

Bettie van Straaten highlighted the Charter Board is developing from a self-governing body of Charter Member representatives to a Board with more dispersed representation of relevant networks, regions and capabilities. This also explains the enlargement of the Board.

With regard to Board candidates who represent Charter Members, Caroline Harper (CEO at Sightsavers International), whose two-year term ends in April 2014, stood for re-election. Amnesty International had nominated Clare Doube (Director of Strategy and Evaluation), Transparency International had nominated Miklos Marschall (Deputy Managing Director), and World Vision International had nominated Emmanuel Isch (Partnership Leader for PAIR Group). The following candidates stood as Independent Board Directors: Janet Mawiyoo (Chair of Viwango, Kenya) and Rosa Inés Ospina (Co-Director of Rendir Cuentas, Columbia) as well as Brendan Gormley (former Chair of the Disasters Emergency Committee) who had been co-opted by the Board on 22 January. The AGM unanimously approved all seven candidates as a group.

AGM 14/07 – Revision of the Charter Principles

Markus Hesse presented the draft revision of the current Charter text including a new principle on environmental sustainability, strengthening its focus on stakeholder inclusion, simplifying its language and separating the principle level from a more operational level.

The draft was produced in a thorough consultation process in which 9 Charter Member organisations participated. The reasoning for various suggested changes was discussed at the AGM and the proposed text was strongly endorsed for approval. A formal written approval will be sought from all Members within the coming weeks.

AGM 14/08 – Developments in the Assessment of Charter Member Reports

Louise James, Global Programme Director at Accenture and member of the Independent Review Panel, attended the AGM for this session. She identified a general level of improvement in the Members' reports and highlighted the GAP Analysis Table as a welcome addition to track progress on identified areas for organisational improvement. However, she also stressed that reports tend to be too lengthy and not sufficiently focused on evidence that accountability mechanisms work well in practice.

The Members' reports are based on the *GRI NGO Sector Supplement* reporting framework that was developed for the Charter Company in 2010. After three years of vetting, the Panel felt it is was time to address some limitations of the GRI framework, including its complicated language, some gaps between the GRI indicators and the Charter commitments and the demand for too many details with little strategic relevance. The Panel and the Secretariat have therefore developed a draft for amended reporting guidelines which will be sent along with these minutes to all Members for comments and feedback. All suggestions will be discussed by the Panel in their May meeting and be finalised in the July Board meeting.

The Independent Review Panel and the Board further suggested that once a new Member has reported several times and the Panel acknowledges a sufficient level of evidence for good accountability practice, a full accountability report will only have to be submitted every two years. In the interim years, they only have to hand in a brief report focusing on progress in identified improvement areas, any material changes that occurred during the current year, and a statement from the CEO on how accountability shapes strategic decisions.

AGM 14/09 Close and Next Steps

Jeremy Hobbs expressed his gratitude towards Amnesty International for generously hosting this AGM. He concluded the AGM by emphasising that the Charter belongs to its Members and that together we can develop it into the central platform for improved NGO accountability and a strong NGO voice in public.

Final Note

In a first meeting of the new Charter Board just after the AGM, Brendan Gormley was elected as Board Chair. Caroline Harper was elected as Vice-Chair and Markus Hesse as the Charter's Treasurer.