

INGO Accountability Charter Company Annual General Meeting (AGM) 2015

London, 10 April 2015

Minutes

AGM 15/01 - Welcome, Introductions, Approval of Agenda and Charter Developments

Brendan Gormley, the Chair of the Charter Board, welcomed 32 representatives of Charter Member organisations, seven guests of organisations interested in the Charter, and three Independent Charter Board Directors.

Brendan Gormley reported on highlights and developments of the Charter in the past year, which are also found in our [Annual Report 2014](#).

AGM 15/02 – The Global Standard for CSO Accountability

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) agreed in March this year to fund our Global Standard project with a total of € two million over the course of three years. Nine well-established CSO networks from across the world - including the Charter - will systematically cooperate to outline the overlap between their codes and devise a collective reference standard for the core areas of CSO accountability globally. The International Civil Society Centre will manage the project as Implementing Partner and work will be conducted in close collaboration with CIVICUS and other key stakeholders in the sector. The project is estimated to start in summer this year and run through to July 2018. For more information please visit our [website](#).

One of the three founding purposes of the Charter in 2006 was to create greater convergence among the multiplicity of overlapping reporting requirements. The Global Standard project has the potential to help us make significant progress in this regard. The project will further help shape a more global outlook of the Charter generally, changing in due time its ten Accountability Commitments and Reporting Requirements in light of the global discourse on what is key to good CSO accountability in the Global South and North.

AGM 15/03 – The Changing Face of CSO Accountability (I+II)

Five very insightful presentations were given on the huge changes currently going on in CSOs work and how this necessitates new approaches to accountability. Most important issues that were touched upon include:

- Turning accountability from a reporting to a power sharing exercise that empowers the people we serve is a big challenge we have not yet solved. (ActionAid)
- Only people's movements will help us solve our most challenging problems. But how to be accountable for a fluid mass of ad-hoc supporter groups? (Greenpeace)
- The digital age allows ongoing instantaneous feedback that provides highly relevant information for decision-making. We need to systematically tap into this resource. (Greenpeace)
- Real change cannot be achieved from a desk in the North. Decentralisation is necessary and taking place. In regard to accountability this poses the challenge of ensuring the consistency of policy positions. It also triggers the question of responsibility for decisions when formal membership is increasingly replaced by fluid supporter groups. (Amnesty International)
- Decentralisation is necessary, actively being pursued and critically involves culture change.

- Civil society is facing a global crisis with shrinking political space around the world. This includes restrictive laws, bureaucratic harassment, motivated prosecutions or even physical attacks. Against this background, CSOs need to demonstrate higher standards of accountability and enhance their credibility. This involves engaging much more with the local civil society and share learning, experience and knowledge. (CIVICUS)
- Governments in the Global South are increasingly critical of ICSOs coming in with foreign money and foreign agendas. CSOs need to invest much more into their accountability systems and get much better at promoting their collective achievements. ICSOs need to get better at acknowledging the work of local partners including national accountability codes. (Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF) / Viwango)

These and other crucial changes of CSO work are also discussed on the newly launched [Disrupt & Innovate](#) online platform by the International Civil Society Centre.

The AGM endorsed the proposed new strategy (see below) as supportive of addressing these challenges and driving more positive impact of ICSOs. The proposed new strategy has an overarching purpose and six supporting objectives:

Purpose:

Driving ICSOs' positive impact on people's lives and the environment

- Enhance ICSO accountability practices and hence quality of work
- Build knowledge and trust in ICSOs contributions
- Strengthen the collaboration of CSOs globally

Objectives:

1. Build knowledge & trust in ICSO work
2. Position accountability as a leadership not a compliance practice
3. Strengthen global CSO collaboration (Global Standard) & reduce multiple reporting
4. Turn Charter into a truly global practice
5. Develop thought leadership on accountability in digital age
6. Strengthen community of practice and mutual support to accountability practice

AGM 15/04 – Defining a new Strategic Direction for the Charter

The AGM discussed the objectives in more detail and the following picture emerged:

1. Build knowledge and trust in CSO work

Building legitimacy and credibility of our sector and Charter Members in particular is critical to improving ICSO impact. To this end we will:

- Frame messages around *benefits* not *processes* of accountability - e.g. better coordination with partners, enhanced legitimacy, reduced corruption risk etc.
- Change to plain language!
Accountability is too far removed from daily lives.
- Actively build *internal* ownership across functions and regions of Charter Members before investing in external communication.
- Make Charter Member [Commitments](#) and collective contributions more visible and build the Charter brand as collective sign of great quality.



- Acquire new Charter members to strengthen our voice.

2. *Place accountability firmly in the hands of leadership*

Accountability is a culture - not a reporting exercise. As such it can't be delegated. It rather has to be firmly in the hands of leadership. To help underpin this we will:

- Provide thought leadership on the strategic dimension of accountability i.e. its fundamental role in achieving our objectives. It builds legitimacy, credibility and advances the impact of our work as we actively engage with stakeholders. This needs to be better documented and understood.
- Encourage discussion of the above at CEO meetings. Stage dialogues of Charter Member CEOs with the Independent Review Panel to accelerate progress.
- Explore the right level of accountability for the global, national and local level to ensure consistency in decentralised organisations while allowing for sufficient ownership at all levels.

3. *Improve global CSO collaboration & reduce multiple reporting*

Accountability is not a headquarter tool, but must also be lived and breathed at the national level of Charter Member organisations and CSOs they work with to unfold its full potential. To this end the Charter will:

- Systematically work with 8 *national* CSO accountability networks from around the globe to develop a collective Global Standard on CSO Accountability.
- Six out of eight national networks come from the Global South, ensuring we develop a truly global view. The network's national origin will ensure that national level needs are also well reflected.
- Capacity building of the network's CSO members will play a key role.
- The standard shall be basic and cover core issues only.
- It will be incorporated into the Charter and should be applied by all national entities of Charter Members.
- The same standard will be used by national CSOs organised in the participating networks. This will enhance a collective language and improve collaboration of CSOs from the Global North and South to leverage impact.
- When widely recognised it will also reduce the multiplicity of reporting. To this end we will also engage with the Core Humanitarian Standard and donor led activities to converge the multiplicity of reporting requirements on CSOs.

4. *Turn Charter into a truly global practice*

ICSOs have decentralised and moved closer to the people who are the real enablers of change. This globalisation has to be mirrored in the Charter:

- Working closely with our partners in the Southern led Global Standard initiative will change the Charter's culture, values and sense of identity towards a more global outset.
- The provisions developed in the Global Standard will also be incorporated into the Charter standard and reporting requirements.
- Simple language that is equally understood across the world and addresses accountability in a way that helps people to better master their daily tasks and understand what CSOs do is critical to success.
- Charter documents and website will be translated into more languages.
- Global representation in the Charter Board and the Independent Review Panel will be further strengthened.



5. *Develop strong CSO accountability practice for the digital age*

Digital technology allowing for instant global connectivity has fundamentally changed the way ICSOs work. It poses great opportunities and significant challenges that need to be addressed in new approaches to accountability. We will explore:

- How to best capitalise on huge new opportunities to get in-time feedback from stakeholders to advance positive management decisions.
- How to address the challenges to consistency, brand protection and duty of care in the dynamic, fluid work environments that have emerged
- We will work on these issues with newly founded web-based organisations to develop cutting edge practice for all actors working in this space.

6. *Build strong community of practice*

Accountability practice is particularly strong when developed in collaboration. For one: because it allows learning from the best of peers rather than re-inventing the wheel. Second: it has greater credibility if shared by others. And third: it drives progress through internal competition. We will support this by:

- The Charter will further build its vivid community of practice, including webinars, Peer Advice Groups and an Annual Workshop for Members.
- Additionally web-based communication shall be advanced supporting Members to tap into their collective wealth of knowledge and expertise on critical issues of accountability. This could involve an internal communications platform to exchange challenges, policies and good practice examples.

Taking the endorsement and additional suggestions of the AGM for this strategic direction, the Charter Secretariat will now produce a succinct strategy, which will be discussed at the next Board meeting in June and then shared with all Members for feedback. Implementation will be supported by annual work plans.

AGM 15/05 – Building the Charter Brand

Charter Members strongly supported the intention to build the Charter brand and decided to put communication as the first objective in the new strategy (see above). Currently, however, this is really still in its infancy and needs a strong kick-start to trigger people's imagination and buy-in. The Board extends its specific thanks to Members' communications staff for helping the Secretariat with that. They will jointly discuss potential branding messages and identify target audiences and concrete next steps.

AGM 15/06 – Community of Practice 2014/2015

Janet Dalziell highlighted that the Charter's active community of practice had very much improved last year. A series of *webinars* and *Peer Advice Groups* were conducted covering topics such as effective stakeholder engagement, inclusion and non-discrimination, the risks



of corruption and fraud, and on IATI. Three more webinars are planned for 2015, focusing on issues of developing Charter ownership at the national level, the new Charter strategy and fostering a culture of change. Members are always encouraged to get in contact with the Secretariat for other suggestions in this regard.

In line with the fifth objective of the revised strategy (see above), Members agreed to focus on "CSO

Accountability in Dynamic Environments” for this year’s annual workshop. We aim at co-creating this workshop with thought leaders and experts from traditional ICSSOs as well as recently founded web-based CSOs such as Avaaz, 350.org or Purpose. Representatives from Greenpeace, Plan, SOS Children’s Villages and World Vision volunteered to join the preparatory organisation committee.

AGM 15/07 – Financial Matters

Markus Hesse, the Charter’s Treasurer, presented the audited accounts for 2014. The Charter had a positive result of € 3,702 for the year resulting in a current reserves level of approximately € 82,000. The AGM acknowledged the audited accounts 2014, the Budget for 2015 and the Cooperation and Service Contracts between the Charter and the International Civil Society Centre.

It was highlighted that much work could only be successfully done with the help of many pro bono supporters in 2014.

AGM 15/08 Election of Board Directors

Janet Dalziell (Global HR Director, Greenpeace International) and Bettie van Straaten (Director of Operations, CIVICUS) were both re-elected by ordinary resolution. The Board Chair thanked Markus Hesse for his dedication and professionalism in his role as Honorary Treasurer.

AGM 15/09 Close and Next Steps

Brendan Gormley expressed his gratitude towards Amnesty International for generously hosting the AGM again.