

## INGO Accountability Charter Company Annual General Meeting 2016 London, 06 April 2016

### Minutes

The [INGO Accountability Charter](#)'s Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 6 April in London was rather timely. Public **critique of civil society organisations** (CSOs) is on the rise worldwide. **Defending civic space** is a critical task and can only be accomplished in partnership. Charter membership is a good place to start. **Strong accountability and transparency practice is essential to build trust.** It is thus also time for very open introspection on how well we perform ourselves.

A study on the performance of CSO accountability conducted by the Charter and the [direct impact group](#) revealed **severe shortcomings in regard to CSO responsiveness.** Of the 40 CSOs we approached on their feedback and complaints handling mechanism, only three got back to us with an interest in our request (more [below](#)). How does that sit with the demand for more citizen engagement by governments in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implementation process? We need to start with our own organisations to underpin this demand. Similarly, it was discussed that the CIVICUS [DataShift project](#) – a dashboard to monitor government contributions to the implementation of the SDGs – should also monitor CSOs' performance. CIVICUS agreed to look into this.



One of the great advantages of the SDGs (and CSOs played an important part in securing this) is the interdependency of issues such as development, environment and governance in the Global North and South. **The SDG commitment to *universal integrity* is mirrored in the Charter Commitments.** Since about 50% of organisations attending the AGM have included the SDGs in their strategies, the Charter Secretariat promised to do a mapping of the SDGs against Charter Commitments and **how compliance will ensure CSOs walk the talk.** Citizen engagement and *leave no one behind* are two key principles of the SDGs. We should ensure that we deliver ourselves on them first to be credible and forceful in our demands to governments and businesses. Part of the [Charter Commitments](#) is also to be very diligent in working out what others already do and which additional value our intervention will add. The exchange of good data is key to success here.

#### CSO Accountability in the Digital Age

The [Digital Accountability project](#) is another good milestone to build more CSO credibility on the ground. Together with Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Oxfam, Transparency International and digital campaigns organisations, such as 350.org, 38 Degrees, Purpose and Tactical Tech, the Charter developed a new paradigm for accountability in the digital age. Ubiquitous technology and the new engagement culture shaped by Facebook, Wikipedia or Airbnb have changed people's expectations on how they want to interact with CSOs. They demand greater and faster transparency, look for ultra-user friendly interfaces and expect to take more active roles. Where done right, this substantially **contributes to citizen engagement and empowerment.**



Increasingly active roles of volunteers, supporters and activists in CSO work also pose challenges to the old accountability paradigm, which was very much built around control and ownership of resources. People are now taking on some accountability and responsibility for their own actions. **Distributed formats of accountability** come into existence – similar to the Wikipedia model – where communities ensure the quality of the information that is provided.

Residual accountability for the overall integrity of an organisation, however, always remains with CSO management. In the digital age, this poses new challenges in regard to data protection and identification of clear rules of engagement on the much more fluid boundaries of their organisations.

The Charter will bring all results of the Digital Accountability project together in a report – including ten user briefs for a trustee, CEO, COO, programme, communications and campaign director etc. – on how to implement the new accountability paradigm. **Key principles and practices of the new accountability paradigm** include among others:

1. Radical clarity on the value that is added beyond what people already do
2. On-time and on-demand transparency
3. Focus on initiating, deepening and monitoring interactive relationships
4. Building environments that are conducive to co-creation
5. Ensuring mutual accountability between CSOs and co-actors
6. Managing risk smartly in the digital age

Successful implementation will ensure CSOs stay optimally attuned to their stakeholders, invite them to play an active role and thus also increase their productivity through these voluntary contributions towards the shared goal.

### Global Standard for CSO Accountability

Civic space is shrinking across the world – restrictive CSO legislation is on the rise. To increase global solidarity and strengthen our overall voice, the Charter has partnered with eight CSO accountability networks from Africa, Asia, Australia, North and South America to develop a common [Global Standard for CSO Accountability](#). During the course of this work, we will build a network of trust with colleagues across the world, with a goal to understanding each other's realities in regard to CSO accountability on the ground. The collectively agreed-upon Global Standard will serve as a *reference standard* only – meaning that it is not a standard to which CSOs can subscribe directly. Instead, it shall be used by CSO accountability codes and other CSO peak bodies or governments to guide and benchmark their thinking. All Project Partner codes will reflect the Global Standard as a central piece of their code going forward – since it elicits **the core of what CSOs have established around the world in regard to good CSO behaviour**. We expect to finalise the Standard in 2016 and present any changes we need to make to the Charter to fully reflect the Global Standard at the next AGM in 2017. Members have stressed that the Standard will only be successful as a basis for a strong collective voice, if it is effectively communicates the common narrative of CSO work. Good interoperability with the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) and others, as well as a strong link to the SDGs, will further help position the Standard in a way that will help strengthen our collective voice.



### Study on CSO Accountability Practice

Markus Hesse of the direct impact group presented his assessment of 20 Charter Members and a similar sample of non-Member CSOs. Please find his presentation [here](#). The results were varied. While Charter Members in general performed better than non-Members on five areas of accountability, they mainly did so because Charter reports are published on the Charter website. Much of this information is, however, not found on the Members' websites. Communications staff and accountability staff in many organisations do not communicate well. In general, CSOs were much stronger on having policies in place than making sure they work in practice. This is in line with year-long findings of the Independent Review Panel assessing Charter Members' accountability reports.

Good performance needs **strong support from the top to mainstream accountability as a key priority across the organisation**. The study found a clear relation between top performers and strong CEO support for accountability. In addition, they stress that, in the digital age, organisations only have one online interface with the outside world – **internal silos must be overcome**. Moreover, the implementation of policies must be better monitored. It can be included in random checks by external auditors. Results of the study can be shared with each organisation individually to see how they did compared to the average, but individual results are otherwise kept anonymous. To encourage progress, the Charter will offer support to all Charter and non-Charter Members, as well as a webinar in June 2016 when the final report will have been published.

### Charter Branding



The Charter's second strategic goal is to enhance public trust and communicate that the Charter and its Members are accountable. However, the Charter will only be seen as a strong collective agreement on accountability in the sector if Members actively and proudly support communication around their membership.

Gilles van Handenhove (Oxfam International) presented progress on the Charter's branding work so far, including a [brief description of the Charter in one sentence, one paragraph and one page](#). This is the result of a lengthy process with multiple consultations and has been approved by the Charter Board. The

next step will be to develop a visual identity that fully supports this positioning statement. The Charter Board was also supported by the AGM in rethinking the Charter's name in light of these developments, the challenge being that it includes the term "NGO", which we have replaced with "CSO" in most of our communication. Furthermore, Charter translated into Spanish means "letter" and is hard to communicate. Finally, the name "INGO Accountability Charter" is rather complicated. The AGM mandated the Board to review and change the name based on an appropriate consultation with Charter Members to ensure that we are able to move forward with our communication efforts before the next AGM in April 2017.

### Special Resolution to the Articles of Association

Members, via a special resolution including two proxies, accepted the proposed amendments of the Articles of Association (4.1c) and **extended Board Directors' terms of office** (from two to three years while keeping the maximum of consecutive six years the same) as follows:

*Each Director shall be appointed to serve for a term of **three years** [commencing at the AGM at which s/he is appointed]. Any Director may be re-appointed **once** at the end of his/her*



*three-year term, but may not serve more than two terms consecutively. The Directors may unanimously resolve that, due to exceptional circumstances, a Director should continue to hold office for a maximum additional period of one year.*

*Thereafter, a Director may not serve for a period of one full term, at the end of which they may be re-nominated as a Director. While there is no limit as to the overall number of terms a Director may serve, no Director may serve more than two terms consecutively.*

### Election of Board Directors

Janet Dalziell asked all nominees to introduce themselves and opened the floor for on-the-spot nominations. Caroline Harper (Sightsavers), Clare Doube (Amnesty International), Miklos Marschall (Transparency International), Brendan Gormley, Rosa Ines Ospina and Janet Mawiyoo (KCDF) were all re-elected by ordinary resolution. It was clarified that while Rosa Ines Ospina and Brendan Gormley are Independent Directors, Janet Mawiyoo is elected on behalf of the Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF), which is a formal partner associated with the Charter (see Article of Associations 4.1a). Perry Maddox (Restless Development) and Elie Gasagara (World Vision International) were elected for their first terms of office.



The Board Chair thanked Emmanuel Isch (World Vision International) for his dedication and professionalism in his role as Board Director throughout the last two years.

### Charter Finances

Bettie van Straaten, the Charter's Treasurer, presented a five-year trend of income and expenditure from 2011 to 2015. She also presented the audited accounts for 2015 and identified significant findings. The Charter had a positive result of € 51,301 for the year resulting in a reserves level of € 134,133 at the end of 2015. The AGM acknowledged the audited accounts 2015, the Budget for 2016 (including key new developments) 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 2015.

### Highlights 2015 & Outlook 2016

Brendan Gormley, the Charter Board Chair, presented some of the highlights of 2015 and plans for the coming year:

- [Annual Report](#)
- [Strategy beyond 2015](#)
- [Webinars](#)
- [Peer Advice Groups](#)
- [Annual Members' Workshop](#)



RESPONSIVENESS TO  
PEOPLES NEEDS