CSO Accountability in the Digital Age

Outcome Summary

21 representatives from Charter Member organisations met on 24-25 September at Greenpeace Netherlands' creative office in Amsterdam to discuss the opportunities and challenges of the digital age for CSOs.

A presentation by Lauren Woodman, the CEO of NetHope showed:

- Digitisation allows for unprecedented, instantaneous and global connectivity as well as reducing the cost of collaboration to a minimum.
- Change is exponential and accelerating fast – one can either be swept away by the energy or tap into it to advance one's mission.
- Clever collaboration gets you further than internal strength.
- There is a fundamental shift in culture and the best answers are often found outside of our organisations.
- It is the heyday of accountability as active, real-time, meaningful engagement with stakeholders has taken centre stage in achieving strategy. It is no longer just the right thing to do but the cleverest thing to do.

> "Those who have learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed."
>
> *Charles Darwin*

Charter Members have started to embrace this change as some of their new strategic goals: Greenpeace wants to achieve "a billion acts of courage", Amnesty International aims at 25 million people taking human rights action in 2019, and Transparency International wants to see millions speaking out against corruption.

Restless Development and **Amnesty International** not only shared key elements of their new strategies but more notably the process of crowd sourcing them. It broadened the view much beyond their own organisation and created greater buy-in from central staff as well as rural and broader constituencies into the process which improved the content but, almost more importantly, the ownership.

Key **opportunities** and **challenges** of the new connected, collaborative and responsive working model were identified as follows:

Opportunities	Challenges
• **Increase: Scale / Speed / Innovation / Agility / Knowledge / Voice / Responsiveness / Strategic Networking (ecosystem approach) / Impact** • **Better deployment of our assets e.g. strong relations locally and globally etc.**	• **How to let go of control but keep sufficient: Focus / Reliability / Protection of Data, People, Assets, the Brand** • **Changing our culture / finding the resources etc.** • **Connecting online and offline activities**

The following discussions focussed on how to apply this insight:

1) What does this digital change mean for successful <u>mobilisation</u> as compared to "old" mobilising models?

Transparency International shared perceptions around their work on individual corruption cases and Advocacy and Legal Advice Centres (ALACs). Their indicators for success are the personal relevance of the cause (in this case victims of corruption), help from Transparency to solve the case (making the engagement worthwhile), and scaling/amplification of impact by connecting cases to other anti-corruption fighters, the media, partners etc. This aggregated data is also useful to identify patterns of corruption and to use this knowledge for advocacy. Catherine Shovlin, UK Director of Synthetron, gave an insightful presentation on how to engage thousands of people across the globe in a collective, anonymous conversation and then interpret massive data into clear trends on key issues.

2) How does a fully connected, collaborative and responsive organisation enable <u>collaboration</u> with people (and not *only* mobilisation)?

ActionAid shared a success story of women connecting across communities and countries on mobile phones on the issues they felt were important ("Get Lippy" messages). This helped to empower women as they felt the solidarity of a much larger group. *World Vision* showed how they changed from the distribution of goods by World Vision to local communities towards a digitally supported system of matching people's needs with local goods providers. This has not only increased the effectiveness of the process, it also allowed for more choice by the beneficiaries and provided a data set of needs that is highly relevant. Finally, *Greenpeace* presented their Greenwire platform

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which selects leaders in the organisations' constituency, trains them and asks them to build further networks with people they know who care about the same issues. There are some minimal rules around the use of the brand and key values to adhere to. Otherwise people engaged on Greenwire are provided with a lot of freedom to launch their own online activities as long as they are broadly supportive of Greenpeace's overall strategic objectives and do no harm. As such, they have massively scaled the amount of volunteers who engage with Greenpeace and they are much better able to use volunteers' very specific capabilities than in the previous model of fully crafting a campaign and then simply asking people to passively support it.

3) How do we <u>manage the risks</u> that come with the connected platform model?

We will support a move towards a more collaborative, open and responsive organisation, only if we are clear and upfront about potential risks and look at mitigation strategies. *World Vision* presented their work around data protection, privacy rights (especially in regard to children's rights), reputational dangers and legal differences regarding digital data around the globe. World Vision's Global Director for Data Protection and Privacy will initiate a Peer Advise Group with Charter Members as a follow up to this workshop. In addition to this, one participant suggested the recently published book "Ways to Practise Responsible Development Data" by the Responsible Data Forum (download here). *Transparency International (TI-S)* presented a sophisticated system of doing

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proactive health checks in their National Chapters, constantly training people on how to prevent the risk of being penalised by a non-benevolent government for speaking out against corruption, data hacking, telephone and e-mail tapping etc. It is key that there is clear management of expectations regarding what TI-S can and cannot do for people who engage with their cause, and education on what kinds of risk they are taking. The group also discussed the possibility of an early warning system as it taps into a much larger source of information on social networks, with partners and broader networks. Building a strong community of volunteer supporters was also seen as important to mitigating reputational risk etc.

4) What do we need to <u>change in our organisations</u> to allow for the connected, collaborative, responsive organisation we want to become?

Finally, taking a world café approach, the participants formulated what organisational adaptations we would need to optimally support becoming more connected, responsive, and effective:

Governance

Key Features
- Open membership structures (who can associate with the organisation and in what ecosystem around our organisations?)
- Direct feedback loops between broad constituency and highest governance body
- Accountable for driving connection, collaboration, responsiveness and owning the associated risk
- Separate legal mandate from the connective strategy function
- Fast, agile, open, innovative, connected, simplified

Questions to address in change process
- What are the best facts/trends to support a change agenda?
- What are the core roles/functions of a *Board* – what could be done through crowd sourcing, specialised advisory groups or other?
- What are different modes and styles of *Board* work (not meeting-based – real time exchange)?
- Which technology, process etc. supports good feedback loops between the *Board* and broader constituency?
- How to introduce creativity and innovation into the governance structure?

Triggers of change
- Look for best practice examples in other organisations
- Establish where we are today and where we want to be tomorrow – set smart targets
- Change Board incentives to measurable outcomes around connection, collaboration, responsiveness
- Leadership support
- Smart technology

Leadership

Key Features
- Empowering people and processes
- Comfortable with ambiguity / adaptable
- Walk the talk
- Digital literacy (willingness to learn)
- Bold – willing to take risks

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Questions to address in change process
- What are the concrete challenges to behaviours and skills?
- Whom should it apply to first?
- What are measures to identify the gap between current and desired?
- What is best practice for transformation in other organisations?
- What support should leaders receive?

Triggers of change
- Challenges to status quo from external constituency
- Internal push from above (governance) and below (staff/members)
- Celebrating successes
- Open dialogue, courage, addressing barriers
- Creating space for change

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

Features
- Timely / responsive / aided by digital scaling mechanisms and smart collaboration features
- Interactive / user friendly / plain language / good visualisations
- Promotes horizontal ways of working / agile peer review mechanisms
- Partly self-organising system based on real time feedback
- Enabling smart contextualisation and assessment of our data with world around us

Questions to address
- What are we going to stop doing? (what resources, approaches, expectations of 'quality' / control)
- What is already available out there (in terms of digital MEL systems design & tools) to learn from?
- How to use digital technology to build efficient, decentralised MEL systems?
- How do we create a different narrative of what MEL means in our organisations?
- How do we engage the people that are likely to resist this cultural / technological shift?

Drivers for change
- Devise short implementation timeframes
- Promote cross-functional collaboration across and within organisations
- Boost spaces where learning and sharing of best practices is possible
- Devise lean processes led by small working groups
- Communicate smartly and consistently about the changes to be implemented

The Charter Secretariat has advanced the larger *Digital Accountability* project. An impressive list of people have agreed to support us in this endeavour, coming from ICSOs, online campaigns organisations, academia, consultancy, community organising etc. Together we want to find out how to become more connected, responsive, effective and trusted – i.e. more accountable – in the digital age, while building on the huge opportunities and navigating the challenges of digital connectivity and scale. Project participants will meet at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Centre on 14-18 March, 2016.

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