

## Charter Members' Workshop 2014

### *How to establish a globally consistent accountability culture and practice in international CSOs?*

#### Outcome

The outcome document is structured around the following four sections:

- I. Accountability: a dynamic leadership concept
- II. Benefits of a *consistent* approach across functions and regions
- III. Challenges to implementation
- IV. Solutions Charter Members found



#### I. **Accountability: a dynamic leadership concept**

Paul Skinner (founder of the *Agency of the Future*) suggested an accountability concept that includes good answers to the following three questions to ensure optimal value creation for our stakeholders:

##### a) **What do we want to do?**

What do we ultimately want to be held accountable for? Which strategic choices create more or less value for our stakeholders? Have we exercised sufficiently bold leadership, boosted innovation, enhanced our impact etc.?

##### b) **Are we doing it well?**

Do we have a Monitoring and Evaluation process in place that optimally ensures continuous improvement of our work at the programmatic as well as the strategic and leadership level?

##### c) **How can we improve further?**

Is meaningful, two-way, in-time engagement of internal and external stakeholders the key driver for continuous improvements?

Accountability, understood as a collective *stakeholder value* creation process, works best when universally implemented across functions and regions of an organisation. In order for this to happen it is, however, essential to (i) establish a shared agenda around collective goals, (ii) create opportunities to co-create best solutions, and (iii) make communication more accessible and engaging.

#### II. **Benefits of a *consistent* approach across functions and regions**

As organisations like Greenpeace, Amnesty, ActionAid or Oxfam devolve more power across the globe – strengthening the independence of national entities and functions – it is all the more important to ensure a collective understanding of *what* they want to achieve collectively and *how*. A unified approach to accountability allows for a structured and systematic conversation and leadership bringing all functions and regions onto the same page. It is helpful if this framework is not just guided by headquarter input, but devised by a cross-sector agreement of NGOs like the INGO Accountability Charter, as it provides the possibility to externalise some of the requirements.

A consistent approach to accountability will help to:

- a) create collective ownership for global objectives;
- b) support better leadership decisions;
- c) drive quality improvement and control;
- d) help risk management and brand protection.

### III. Challenges to implementation

The greatest challenge Charter Members identified to implementing a globally consistent accountability approach is lack of ownership across functions and regions. All too often the global approach is owned by a headquarter accountability function, but hardly known by staff in fundraising, communications, finance or regions beyond the headquarter country.

The other challenges commonly encountered were: (i) lack of leadership support, (ii) lack of resources and capacities, (iii) differences in cultural and political contexts, (iv) multiplicity of reporting requirements, (v) complicated language and bureaucratic touch as well as (vi) adverse power dynamics between the international and national level and the fact that (vii) many feel accountability is still not sufficiently geared towards those we serve.

### IV. Solutions Charter Members found

#### ***Leadership***

Where leaders, such as the founder of BRAC or senior management of ActionAid, have placed accountability as the centre stage to their theory of change, it created a very strong culture of accountability. Oxfam leadership has made stronger accountability one of its six key global objectives in their new strategy. World Vision assesses senior management performance against accountability indicators. Where accountability becomes a key leadership instrument, it is usually not only better embedded in the overall culture of an organisation, but also sufficiently resourced.

#### ***Creating ownership***

Accountability tools cannot just be imposed. National and functional directors, in particular, must have the opportunity to discuss how a consistent accountability approach helps advance the organisation's overall goals. An advanced accountability approach requires careful planning to fully integrate accountability into ongoing processes around strategic planning, budgeting, programming, monitoring, learning, reporting etc. Most importantly: it should be clearly stated which information is gathered and disseminated at which point of time to inform better decisions at all functional and regional levels.



#### ***Reducing complexities***

Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) shared experiences with a Total Quality Management System (TQMS). It maps all IRW's accountability requirements within HAP, the Charter, People in Aid and IATI against 10 key areas of governance / management. Based on this, it identifies how coordinated information flows from the various accountability tools can best inform all areas of work.

#### ***Setting priorities / Allowing for contextual flexibility***

Oxfam, Islamic Relief and others foster ownership at the national level by asking national directors to prioritise for themselves where – within the given parameter - they wish to make progress in the short, medium and long term. Different cultural, political and resource related contexts should also allow for some degree of flexibility within the overall clearly set framework.

### ***Linking accountability to impact***

World Vision established an Evidence and Learning Unit at the second highest level of the organisation to collect better evidence that strong accountability leads to better management decisions. Oxfam is also undertaking efforts to measure how stronger accountability creates greater impact. Amnesty International, on the other hand, is thinking about how to better link the information they gather on strong governance and management of their national entities to programme results. None of them has yet linked resource allocation to improved accountability. BRAC has created a separate monitoring department and an Independent Research Division presenting to the Board and Annual General Meeting on how accountability-driven performance has been improved.

### ***Getting the framing right***

Creating a strong culture of accountability to improve key *stakeholder value*, needs a shared cutting-edge narrative that is very different from the current association of accountability with bureaucracy and administration. Accountability is our license to operate as we claim to work for others. It is therefore a leadership tool, as much as a key driver in all functions and regions of our work. It will take some communication effort to get this framing right again. But it is worth all our efforts!

It is also important to share accountability reports with the Board (in special reports like BRAC) with the Auditing Committee (like Transparency International), in our annual reports (like Greenpeace and many others) in cross-functional management teams (like CBM) etc. And very importantly: we need to find better ways how to share the generated data with those we serve. The INGO Charter of Accountability will look at this when investigating how accountability can move further from ex-post reporting to an instant, two-way means of communication to continuously improve the value creation for our stakeholders.