

Workshop on NGOs Environmental Performance

Brussels, 20-21 October 2011

OUTCOME

On 20-21 October 2011, 17 representatives of organisations that are Members or potential members of the INGO Accountability Charter attended a workshop on NGOs Environmental Performance. This was the second workshop that the Charter organised for its Members and the aim was to offer an opportunity to exchange experience and challenges on environmental performance management.

In the introductory session Janet Dalziell (Greenpeace International and Charter Board Member) highlighted that exchange of experience and benchmarking is at the core of the Charter and that there is huge potential in learning from each other's mistakes and successes. In the following session participants discussed expectations placed on NGOs with regards to environmental accountability. These range from measures on individual organisations to improve environmental performance to improving the carbon footprint or environmental standards for the entire sector.

The following drivers for improving the environmental performance of NGOs were identified by the group:

- A gap between their campaigns on climate change and the NGOs own environmental performance triggers credibility issues.
- Field offices in regions already badly affected by the climate change insisted on actions taken by their own organisation to limit their CO₂ footprint.
- Donors like DFID and SIDA increasingly demand data on the environmental performance.
- The fact that environmental issues are included in the Charter's reporting framework has been an eye-opener for some.
- It is assumed that NGO stakeholders have an implicit expectation of NGO environmental performance management, which only becomes visible if they are not lived up to.



Overall workshop participants felt that external pressure in this area are not very great, but are expected to increase notably in the coming years.

The organisations attending the workshop started from very different levels of their environmental performance management. However there was agreement around the importance of ownership from top management as well as bottom-up approaches, and around the fact that this is a matter of deep rooted organisational change. It was acknowledged that implementing programmes and establishing awareness around environmental performance take time and that there is potential for mutual learning between the represented organisations as we develop within this area.

Following this session, two guest speakers shared their knowledge and experience from working on sustainability issue in corporate organisations. Firstly Thomas Bergmark, former Global Sustainability Manager of IKEA Group, talked about driving organisational change by integrating sustainable thinking and practices into corporate culture. Thomas mentioned drivers for environmental management at IKEA as being business incentives such as cost

savings, internal pride, external trust, brand building and minimised risks. Thomas talked about ten steps to integrate sustainability, including exploring business potential, getting top management as owners and drivers, identifying a clear vision, and setting goals and key performance indicators at all functions. It is also crucial to link targets to the organisation's core business. Thomas suggested that NGOs could set a baseline and work towards an agreed overall target, similar to the MDG concept. Thomas also mentioned that IKEA had developed some indicators very specific to their own business model in addition to the ones suggested by GRI and that he would recommend other organisations to go down this route.

Secondly Alan Knight, founder of Global Association of Corporate Sustainability Officers (GACSO), gave an inspiring talk about sustainability officers in the corporate sector. GASCO was set out to clarify what exactly the role of a sustainability officer is, what kind of capabilities is needed to fulfil the job effectively and how they can cooperate to feel less lonely in their organisations. Alan highlighted the need to communicate sustainability issues as practical challenges, which smart corporates are particularly able to solve, as this can make organisations feel more comfortable. It is also important to point out that the way corporates work today is definitely going to be unsustainable in the future. Sustainability is not just a question of an individual business case, but a core question of their overall business model in the future - "un-sustainability is unsustainable".

The second workshop day focused on peer presentations of best practice examples from the participating organisations. Matthew Pollitt (Greenpeace UK) shared in his presentation their experience with *CO₂ reporting in a federated INGO*. He emphasised the importance of communicating internally, as this is a matter of organisational change. Putting all the emphasis on perfect measurement of environmental data by contrast can lead to unnecessary time spent in publication and loss of buy-in in the organisation.

Dano Weisbord (ActionAid) presented their *Experiences from a carbon measurement pilot project*. He pointed out the necessity in letting different parts of the organisation set their own targets to create ownership while at the same time this poses challenges to communicate the overall targets and messages. To sell the ideas in the organisation he suggested appointing green champions within each office and presenting the current use of resources in a very vivid way, such as paper piles up to the moon.

Laura Fontaine (World Vision International) presented their *Experiences from developing an Environmental Management System based on the ISO 14001 standard* – a continuous improvement standard. In her view, environmental targets have to be linked to the core business and to be integrated into all departments across the organisation.

Finally, Alexandra Cole-Hamilton (Oxfam GB) told us about their efforts on *Reducing travel through virtual meetings: What are the barriers and opportunities?*. The conclusions from this study were that there are large amounts of money and time to be saved by working with virtual meetings, that there is an interest but also a low level of experience and knowledge among the employees. Oxfam GB is now working on strengthening the knowledge and making the technology more accessible to the staff.

During the afternoon, the workshop participants were divided into working groups to discuss the questions: *How to drive organisational change towards a better environmental performance and what the Charter can do to support this*; and *How to implement environmental policies*. It was agreed that a sense of urgency needs to be created within the organisation to drive change. The Charter and the benchmarking possibilities which it offers, help to foster this sense of urgency – not yet sufficiently created by external pressure. Next it is very important to create a shared understanding of why good environmental management

is of strategic importance to the organisation. How is it linked to its mission and core activities? You should be clear about “what” exactly it is that you want to achieve and “why”. Securing senior management support is as important as securing bottom-up buy-in. A cross-functional, cross-hierarchical group of champions supporting the cause is seen as very beneficial. Clear targets, responsibilities and incentives have to be set to ensure that fatigue does not set in.

There was a sense that this group could keep learning from each other, as all organisations still have a long way to go within this area. Many representatives would be interested in sharing ideas on a web based forum, meeting on a regular basis and potentially co-create new tools and approaches. It was pointed out that the Charter could assist the organisations by stimulating competition through benchmarking, disseminating best practice and by organising meetings face to face or virtually.