



2019

**CSO Accountability
in Focus**

How did our members score?



2.7 / 4

Out of the ten member reports reviewed in 2019

This average was calculated using the scores given by the IRP when reviewing member accountability reports. For more information please read our [reporting framework](#).

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

-national and international- play a crucial role in democratic societies and in improving people's lives. They do this through a wide array of concerted actions which go from service delivery efforts to advocating for better public policies that put people's rights at the core.

CSOs have the capacity to bring communities together for collective action to voice concerns at local, national, regional and international levels. They have also succeeded in opening up areas for dialogue with decision makers and other actors at the national, regional and global levels, contributing their capacities and expertise to inform higher quality policy and normative discussions. In a nutshell, this is what a CSO can do. This is the potential that one organisation has.

**Now imagine,
what would
happen if
organisations
worked closely
together in
partnership?**

Why do we promote working in partnerships?

Working in partnerships is one of Accountable Now's [12 Accountability Commitments](#). Working in mutual and equal partnerships with other CSOs is recognized as a strategic approach to obtain better results. Partnerships can take different forms and these can be carried out with local organisations or with other fellow ICSOs.

Irrespective of who CSOs collaborate and coordinate with other civil society organisations help CSOs adopt a more holistic approach, identify gaps where actions can be improved and prevent duplication of efforts in achieving collective results. Our commitment not only enquires on the existence of partnerships. It also encourages our Members to assess and think more deeply about the foundations and operation of a partnership.

It is on the basis of these reflections that organisations can assess the type of engagement they have with other CSOs and thus determine if the partnership is grounded on values of mutual accountability. Mutual accountability in a partnership is essential. It guarantees that we avoid duplicating efforts, ensures more effectiveness, grounds the partnership on fair and transparent rules to help avoid unnecessary competition, and it contributes to building trust. Given the importance of embedding strong dynamic accountability mechanisms in our partnerships, this short document presents a snapshot of our Members' efforts over the past year, covering strengths, challenges, and recommendations for further improvement.

Are CSOs working towards similar goals?

Is it based on principles of transparency and accountability?

Is the partnership based on clear and fair roles and responsibilities?

Are decisions made collectively?



CSOS work in partnerships because:

Enhance

They enhance the effectiveness of the work carried out by CSOs

Mobilization

There can be greater mobilization of resources for programmes and services.

Capacity

There is more capacity to mobilize people and public opinion to build greater momentum for policy change locally, nationally and globally.

Benefit

They benefit from the economies of scale when working in a particular community: sharing, learning and exchanging expertise and skills.

Opportunities

Opportunities to strengthen innovative approaches and programming for people are identified and created.

How are our Members working in partnerships?

When reviewing our Members' accountability reports submitted in 2019, we saw that most of our Member organisations choose to carry their work out in close cooperation with, or even directly through local partner organisations. In this way they are able to better understand and respond to the needs of local communities, and are likely to have a longer-lasting impact, as the partner organisations will continue working long after specific projects and interventions have ended.



How do you know that people and partners you worked with have gained capacities, means, self-esteem or institutional strengths that last beyond your immediate intervention?



To assess this commitment, our members reflect on how they listen to, involve and empower stakeholders, in particular fellow CSOs. They also reflect on issues related to sustainability by asking them “How do you know that people and partners you worked with have gained capacities, means, self-esteem or institutional strengths that last beyond your immediate intervention?” This question ensures we understand if and how our members are partnering with local CSOs and makes sure that this is not only a service provision relationship.

all 10

organizations are **working in partnership** with other CSOs and in most cases, these are local organisations.

all 10

have at least a **policy or a procedure** that establishes clear rules and guidelines on how to establish a partnership and how organisations coordinate their efforts.



From the 10 full accountability reports received in 2019 we were able to draw the following conclusions:

5

member organisations were commended by the Independent Review Panel **on the strength of their approach** to working in partnerships.

5

organisations in addition to policies, procedures, have provided **systematic evidence or examples** that show how these work in practice.

only 1

has fully addressed the commitment. This means that there is evidence that the (approach to the) commitment has been fully embedded into the organisation's day to day operations.

Policies and procedures

Every member report that was reviewed in 2019 has either a policy or a procedure that guides their work with partner organisations.

These are useful to set organisational relationships on the basis of core values such as transparency, openness, participation and inclusiveness, among others.

Some examples that illustrate this:



World Vision's [Local Partnering in Practice guidance document](#) provides comprehensive information on identifying partners, entering into and maintaining partnerships, approaches to evaluation and learning and how to sustain outcome. team or institutional strengths that last beyond your immediate intervention?" This question ensures we understand if and how our members are partnering with local CSOs and makes sure that this is not only a service provision relationship.



Oxfam carries out a Partner survey that has the purpose of identifying areas to improve. This has been useful to drive how they build partners' influencing capacities and also has helped them to increase effectiveness in projects.



CBM's [partnership guidelines](#), developed in line with their programme commitments, which aim to build on locally driven development agendas and seek to ensure local ownership.

Systematic evidence or examples of policies put in practice

Having policies and procedures is not enough for a true accountability exercise. **Policies are the first step and they can be extremely useful to set the ground rules but they will not be useful if they are not put into practice.** This is why we ask our members to share with us examples on how the policies and procedures are put into use. In addition, we also ask them to document and share results, progress, and ambitions for further improvement.



For example, **ChildFund New Zealand's** work is built on partnerships with local organisations and establishing close relationships with the communities they work in. [Their Road Map](#) approach supports communities in becoming self-reliant, as they create a 5 to 10 year plan which works towards a point where ChildFund NZ can scale back their support to the community. To do so, the community creates a schedule of projects to work towards long-term goals and plans, taking into account expected costs to drive implementation. The Road Maps capture all this information and are published within the community to increase transparency and accountability.



Plan International, on the other hand, using their [Building Better Partnerships](#) approach, advocates for mutuality in partnerships. By encouraging partners to talk to them about potential risks of the partnership together they seek to mitigate these risks. They also hold annual reviews with partners to identify any new risks or negative impacts so that these can be addressed. They also involve partners in safety and security reviews and support them to mitigate risks to their staff.



In addition, we also ask them to document and share results, progress, and ambitions for further improvement.



When it comes to advancing a more dynamic approach to accountability in partnerships, **World Vision International** is committed to involving their partners in stakeholder analysis, planning and decision-making processes in order to empower local stakeholders to own project plans. A Partnership Health Check tool is used together with partners to assess how partnerships are performing in being fair, respectful and contributing to shared goals. This tool has led to more open discussions, more collaborative approaches and better implementation of projects.



Participatory approaches are included in **CBM's** projects cycle management and country planning processes to increase ownership.

Evidence that the commitment has been fully embedded

This aspect is by far the most difficult to address. As can be seen, only one organisation achieved this. With this we are asking our members to show that the commitment is fully addressed and give evidence to show that the approach has been fully embedded into the organisation's practice.

This means that the practice is not a one-off process but that accountability to partners is part of day-to-day operations.

An example that illustrates how an organisation has addressed the commitment comes from **Restless Development.**



Their approach to partnerships is founded in clear alignment of objectives, values, operating principles (from inclusivity to value for money), and strategic vision of the two organisations.

To make sure that there are clear rules, they developed a set of Partnership Guidelines, which sets minimum standards for working with partners.

Something that is interesting about Restless's approach is that it not only focuses on the effectiveness or efficiency aspect of project delivery with other organisations, but that they also make sure that these relationships are grounded on their core values:

- **Heart**
- **Head**
- **Hands**
- **Voice**

What can we conclude?

As can be seen, Accountable Now's members engage with partner organisations with the purpose of identifying the local stakeholder groups most relevant to their work; set goals, plan and implement programmes together; and commit to hold one another accountable. It is good practice to agree on and monitor success indicators together, and to commit to mutual ways of working and behaviours. World Vision International and ChildFund New Zealand both have strong approaches in this regard.

In cases where partner organisations may not have the institutional strengths or capacities required for the work and partnership to thrive, capacity-building is provided. We have seen that our members will share policy templates, suggest new processes and tools, share resources, and provide training to staff. It is important to provide capacity strengthening early on in the partnership to avoid difficulties emerging after projects are well underway. CBM places a big focus on this, within their broader approach to partnerships.

Working in meaningful partnerships will continue to be of great importance to CSOs in the future. In addition to strengthening the outcomes of their work, working in partnerships also contributes to strengthening CSOs' legitimacy and trustworthiness, as well as solidarity between CSOs and within the sector.

Set goals, plan and implement programmes together by:

- **Share policy templates**
- **Suggest new processes and tools**
- **Share resources**
- **Provide training to staff**



1

Agree on a set of shared values and approaches to guide your work together: this will allow both sides to understand the context and culture of the other early on.

2

Create a joint framework for cooperation that every organisation involved can commit to, and help avoid misunderstandings later on.



What should CSOs keep in mind when partnering with local organisations?

3

Regularly check in on the partnership: ask and share feedback, any concerns, and learnings to keep strengthening and growing the partnership.

4

Consider providing capacity strengthening early on: identify any weak areas and provide support where you can, to ensure systems and approaches are aligned from the beginning.

5

Avoid duplicating existing efforts and capacities: assess what local organisations are already doing, identify your added value, and contribute to strengthening existing work.

References

1. [Accountable Now](#) is a global membership platform. We support civil society organisations (CSOs) in being transparent, responsive to stakeholders and focused on delivering impact. Together with Members and partners, we aim to engage CSOs in a conversation on how to advance accountability practices, through reporting, workshops, projects and more.
2. Dynamic Accountability is an approach that is encouraging organisations to practice accountability in a more dynamic, continuous, horizontal and inclusive process. Dynamic Accountability involves redressing unequal power dynamics and building mutual partnerships with every stakeholder that has an impact or is impacted by the work of the organisation. Dynamic Accountability underpins Accountable Now's entire accountability framework, including our [12 Accountability Commitments](#). Each one of these encourages our members to reflect on how they are
3. For more examples from **World Vision's** Accountability Report 2018 and how they work in Partnerships, please go [here](#).
4. Visit **CBM's** Accountability Report 2018 [here](#) for more examples on how they work with local CSOs.
5. See **Oxfam's** Accountability Report 2017 - 2018 [here](#) for more examples on how they engage with local CSOs.
6. See **ChildFund New Zealand's** Accountability 2017 - 2018 report [here](#) to learn more about their Road Map.
7. For more information, see **Plan International's** Accountability Report 2016-2018 [here](#).
8. To read more on **Restless Development** values and how these guide their work, please read their Accountability Report 2017 - 2018 [here](#).





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