

A large, teal-colored circular graphic that is partially filled with a photograph of a crowd of people. The photo shows the backs of several people's heads and shoulders, suggesting a public gathering or event. The graphic is positioned on the left side of the page, framing the central text.

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](#).

The 8 warmest years since modern record-keeping began were recorded within the last decade. We are already witnessing the catastrophic consequences of climate change on people's lives. And it is not only climate change; deforestation, plastic pollution, and overexploitation of oceans are putting most vulnerable people's livelihoods in danger. Scientists are continually alerting us to the urgency of the crisis: most estimations give us only one decade to fundamentally change the way we live and work before climate change consequences are irreversible.

2019 witnessed a generalized explosion of demands, from expected and unexpected endeavors, to protect the environment and to take action to address the climate crisis. Movements like the Fridays For Future and Extinction Rebellion gained significant momentum around the world and mainstreamed the sense of urgency about the climate crisis. These movements are challenging the whole of our society, CSOs included, to reflect and rethink the way we live and work.

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Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) around the world -national and international- have always advocated for better and stronger policies that protect the environment and that have the purpose of mitigating climate change. However, it was not until recent years that most CSOs have also started to assess and transform their own practices and actions to mitigate their own impact on the environment. The end justifies the means narrative is no longer acceptable. Every [member](#) of Accountable Now has a stake in the matter. Either because they are campaigning directly to combat climate change, or indirectly due to the fact that environmental degradation affects everyone, including the people and communities that CSOs are working for and with.

Environmental accountability is taking responsibility for the allocation of resources to actions or activities that have an impact on our natural environment, that contributes to its deterioration. **Healthy Planet** is one of Accountable Now's [12 Accountability Commitments](#). A healthy planet is essential to sustain life now and to ensure future generations continue to thrive all around the globe.

The consequences of environmental degradation are disproportionately felt by the poorest and most marginalised in society. In the search for sustainable policies and practices that seek to benefit people and the planet, CSOs must also develop and implement strategies that contribute to the protection of the natural environment and that reduce their environmental impact as much as possible. These strategies have to start by influencing a change in the behaviour of individuals, including within our own organisations, but should also consider ways to alter the political and economic systems.

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Our commitment encourages our members to reflect on questions like:

What actions is your organisation carrying out to reduce the impact that your work has on the environment?

Does your organisation conduct regular environmental impact assessments?

Does your organisation publicly disclose information on your efforts to protect the environment and to mitigate impact?

Is your organization promoting and advancing the protection of the environment?

Through these questions, we are encouraging CSOs to assess and think about how we are carrying out our work. Aside from the social impact that we wish to have, are we also impacting the environment negatively without knowing it? This is an area where it becomes essential to practice what we preach and the sector rethinks the ways in which we can carry out our activities, with less travel, less waste and thus less environmental impact. **Given the importance of the commitment, this short document presents a snapshot of our Members' efforts over the past year, covering strengths, challenges, and recommendations for further improvement.**

How are our Members reducing their environmental impact?

When reviewing our Members' accountability reports submitted in 2019, we can see that there is great variation when it comes to practices to mitigate their environmental impact. This has been an area of weakness for many years, with several of our members failing to satisfactorily explain how they were mitigating their negative impacts on the environment. Over the past year, however, we have seen significant progress but not the same across the board. To assess this commitment, we ask our members to reflect on how they are protecting the natural environment and to demonstrate responsible stewardship for the environment. These questions allow us to assess if an organisation has:

Policies

Policies and initiatives to reduce negative environmental impacts, such as reducing carbon emissions, limiting air travel, using renewable energy in offices, recycling, water saving and paper saving initiatives, etc.

Targets

Targets on reducing emissions and waste, and a system towards tracking progress.

Mechanisms

Mechanisms that are useful to measure and track carbon emissions.

Strategies

Strategies or action plans to reduce an organisation's carbon footprint.

It is through these mechanisms that it is possible to assess if an organisation is implementing different actions, programmes and policies to try and reduce our impact as much as possible.

In 2019, we received 10 full accountability reports from our members and when reviewing these, we were able to draw the following conclusions:



8

organisations have at least an **environmental policy or a procedure** in place that establishes clear rules and guidelines on how the organisation seeks to mitigate their impact.

2

members have **no formal policies** in place but explained efforts they were undertaking to mitigate their impact

3

member organisations have **provided systematic evidence or examples** that show how their policies and procedures work in practice

3

organisations **have 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.

4

member organisations **track their carbon emissions**

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organisation appeared **not to be focusing on the issue** at all given competing priorities.

These numbers are a reflection of the momentum and importance that engaging in climate action is gaining. Only 20% of our members reviewed during 2019 do not have an institutionalized process. However, it is important to highlight that just because an organisation does not have a policy, it does not mean that they are not undertaking certain actions to mitigate their impact.

Most organisations undertake simple actions like recycling, using energy-saving appliances, and reducing printing, which are all important ways to reduce negative environmental impacts. Going beyond this, organisations are also making efforts to reduce the number of flights they take, cater their events with vegetarian and local food, and raise awareness amongst staff about how to be more environmentally conscious.



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Illustrating how our members mitigate their environmental impact



In 2017, **Civicus** introduced a new and comprehensive Environmental Policy that includes detailed information on efforts to mitigate negative environmental impact. It includes targets in the areas of energy, water, Office supplies, transportation, maintenance and cleaning, and culture. Environmental awareness training was introduced for staff in parallel with the new policy.



Greenpeace, on the other hand, has an environmental policy that regulates when staff can take a plane or when they must travel by train. It also includes requirements to purchase only vegetarian food. In addition to this, Greenpeace monitors their carbon emissions. Something that is interesting is that information is divided by the use of their marine transportation, helicopters, inflatables and natural gas. This allows them to identify when they increase. In 2018, this was the case due to an increase in use of their ships. These actions are beginning to influence the very nature of CSOs work. With stronger environmental and particularly travel policies, we are seeing organisations begin to re-evaluate the need to attend or host certain meetings, and the frequency with which these meetings occur in person. Decisions are no longer made solely based on the financial and human capacity to attend, but also based on environmental impact.



MIO-ECSDE, for example, has several initiatives in place to reduce their consumption of energy, water and paper and the ecological footprint of projects and meetings. Staff as well as the office cleaning company are briefed on recycling and eco-friendly cleaning products are used. Staff are encouraged to have plastic-free and near paperless meetings. Video-conferencing is used increasingly, including for Board meetings and Annual General Meetings, which are now held physically every 2 to 3 years. Several members also assess the environmental impacts of their programmes. These efforts are not always reported on, as they don't seem as impactful as data about carbon emissions, but they can add up to have a significant effect and are fundamental in shifting an organisation's overall approach and culture to the environment.

How can CSOs improve their approach to environmental sustainability?



Reduce, reuse, recycle should be the by default approach to waste wherever possible in the office and in the field for staff and all stakeholders.



Guidelines on how to cater locally sourced, organic, and **vegetarian food**, and how to avoid single-use packaging and utensils should be provided.



CSOs should seek the **cleanest energy** provider available.



Travel often has the greatest impact. Opt for train or bus over plane travel and replace face-to-face meetings with online meetings where possible.



Communicate your approach and actions, internally and externally. **Train staff** and partners, speak about the reasons behind your decisions to reduce travel or to provide vegetarian catering, and communicate that environmental sustainability is relevant to all organisations – not just “environmental organisations”.



Institutionalise your organisation’s approach and include environmental sustainability in your organisational culture by creating – and widely sharing – an **environmental policy**.

Environmental issues can sometimes seem overwhelming and it can be difficult to know where to start. If you need some inspiration for your organisation’s environmental policy, check out this [webinar](#) that was carried out with our member MIO-ECSDE. **In 2020 Accountable Now will aim to promote environmental sustainability further both with our members and internally in the Secretariat. We will continue putting this on the agenda in our discussions with members and sharing good practices and resources.**



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