ACCOUNTABLE NOW

# ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2021

# OUTCOME & EVALUATION

Accountable
Now
GLOBAL STANDARDS LOCAL TRUST

From 9 - 10 June, Accountable Now brought together members for the 2021 Annual General Meeting. Each year, our Annual General Meeting provides the opportunity and space for us to catch up with our members and discuss pertinent issues related to dynamic accountability within the civil society sector.

Though the Covid-19 pandemic kept us from meeting face-to-face, we had insightful discussions that Accountable Now will use to steer strategic discussions and our accountability reporting framework.

# Day 1: Powershift, decolonisation and anti-racism through the lense of dynamic accountability

For the first day, we hosted a thematic discussion on the powershift, decolonisation and anti-racism through the lens of dynamic accountability. Through presentations, open-plenary sessions and a Networkshop we heard from member organisations how they have embraced the powershift and reflected on how their organisation should fight structural inequalities and restore power to Global South actors.

## ChildFund New Zealand

Quenelda Clegg, ChildFund New Zealand: Member ChildFund New Zealand kicked off the AGM with a presentation on their approach to the powershift and decolonisation. Emphasis was placed on their commitment to this journey with the hope to make positive change. This presentation was helpful in framing the discussions we would have throughout the event:

the development sector grew in the last century and has perpetuated colonisation processes, with resources, knowledge and power kept with individuals, institutions and governments in the Global North since. The sense of 'superior knowledge', i.e. western/scientific knowledge has dominated the development sector, preventing other forms of knowledge from directing decision-making processes.

Despite there being recognition of these problems, these processes still persist with systems around the world fundamentally impeding self-driven development. ChildFund New Zealand spoke particularly in relation to their experience of being an INGO in New Zealand where indigenous populations are twice as likely to be charged with a crime compared to those of European descent. ChildFund New Zealand has to, and does, recognise these examples of systemic and structural challenges that impede people's opportunities and with this recognition. They aim to create space for people to drive their own development, as it is through calling out these harmful processes that the sector can help shift power.

The Road Map Methodology: ChildFund New Zealand believes in partnerships that eliminate power imbalances. It is not without its challenges: with being a donor and holder of resources, ChildFund New Zealand is not free from recognising their responsibility as power holders to restore power. In order to tackle this, they set up their Road Map methodology which shifts power to partners.

This methodology allows for partners to be self-reliant, identify their own needs and goals. This human-centered approach aims to create space, time and resources for voices to be heard. It was important for ChildFund New Zealand to also understand what self-reliance means as definitions and interpretations differ across the board. They, therefore, consult with partners and team members to understand what assumptions exist to draw them out and eventually move forward.

This insight into ChildFund New Zealand's approach moreover showed us that the journeys that civil society organisations need to take, will take time and resources. It will be a continual learning process. But if the right spaces are created, positive change can happen.

**Find out more about ChildFund New Zealand's Road Map approach in Accountable Now's webinar**

# Restless Development

Following on from ChildFund New Zealand, Sabine Basi from Restless Development opened the discussion by asking participants whom they feel most accountable to in their day-to-day work. Most said management and board. Recognising that so many of those working in northern-based ICSOs feel that their accountability is directed towards management level staff and board members starkly highlighted the lack of accountability towards the people ICSOs claims to work with and for.

In her presentation, Sabine highlighted the various ways in which Restless Development is transforming who they are accountable to. If it is the case that most will feel accountable towards those in positions of power, we need to look at who is holding power and why. There is currently a great lack of diversity and positions of power are not representative of the communities that CSOs aim to represent. This creates problems of lack of trust and legitimacy and we were given an insight into how Restless Development has taken the steps towards changing its systems and structures:

Restless Development has transformed their leadership structure to ensure that leadership teams are made up of young people from three regions where Restless Development is present. To understand where hidden power lies, Restless Development is dissecting conversations around power and working closely with youth CSOs to strengthen leadership within other organisations. In addition to this, with many organisations relying upon the tools and templates developed by Global North organisations and institutions, this has created a paternalistic relationship between Northern and Southern-based organisations. Reporting tools, templates and KPIs are centred around donor satisfaction and other ways of understanding impact and success or failure are narrowly defined through methods enforced by Global North organisations. Restless Development has challenged this approach by scrapping its quality framework and giving space to different ways for stories to be told.

In consideration of anti-racism in the civil society sector, accountability is lacking.

Reporting mechanisms do not encourage people to come forward when racist incidents occur, and development professionals feel unsafe. Restless Development is holding conversations on how to empower people to come forward and report on incidents, opening up the space for the consideration of reporting systems, similar to safeguarding systems, that specifically target racist incidents.

Lastly, funding. Restless Development's resourcing strategy closely links with the decolonisation agenda and is a means to restore power to the communities where wealth has been taken and channeled away. New standards can be set, and Restless Development challenged us to think about how INGOs can increase their share of funding to local-level organisations to prevent them from being passive implementers of INGO strategies. Principles need to also define where INGOs get their funding: saying no to receiving money from institutions that push back on the anti-racism agenda may be hard but it will ensure organisations are guided by their values and mission; strengthening accountability towards the communities they serve.

# Networkshop insights

A networkshop kicked off the discussion and gave the chance for members to share their experiences and perspectives on the powershift, decolonisation and anti-racism in the civil society sector. We centred the networkshop around the Global Standard's 12 accountability commitments, which provide the framework for Accountable Now's reporting mechanism. We wanted to understand how the 12 accountability commitments address, or fail to address, the powershift, decolonisation and anti-racism and therefore identify how Accountable Now's reporting framework should evolve to support members in their efforts to embed the powershift into their work.

The 12 accountability commitments: The 12 accountability commitments were co-created over two years through consultations with grassroots, local, national and international organisations, led by Accountable Now and other eight accountability

networks from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean. They are based on dynamic accountability principles and they capture a globally shared, dynamic understanding of accountability that is defined by civil society.

Given that discussing 12 accountability commitments would require much more time than we had available, we narrowed the scope of the conversation to four of the accountability commitments which we believe most strongly related to powershift, decolonisation and anti-racism:

## Commitment 1: Justice & Equality Takeaways

- Participants argued that a list of developments or initiatives addressing this commitment from a powershift, decolonisation and anti-racism perspective shouldn't be indicative, but rather we need to find a more nuanced and qualitative way to demonstrate genuine and meaningful progress.

- ICSOs can set an example through decentralized governance. Having country offices means members can be accountable to local governing boards who have a strong voice in ISCO decision-making processes.

- ICSOs should adopt recruitment practices. Salaries should always be transparent and educational requirements should be scrapped to give more importance to lived experiences.

## Commitment 4:  Lasting Positive Change Takeaways

- Member organisations are implementing a number of policies and practices that aim to ensure they learn from partners:
  - Amnesty International encourages programmes to actively involve internal and external stakeholders in the design, implementation and evaluation
  - Accountability Lab, being a trans-local network, raises money directly as well as through the support of HQ. They continually share learnings and are radically open and transparent about funding and practices to enable autonomy & shared learning.
  - Restless Development regularly hold strategy review meetings to evaluate & learn, to which community members thoughts are collected beforehand or asked to join the reviews directly

- Despite all these positive practices, participants also discussed how far the civil society sector has to go before a meaningful discussion about good practices in relation to decolonisation and anti-racism can take place.

- Questions arose on how formalised accountability reporting processes can take into account the informal processes that can most often drive the powershift agenda.

## Commitment 6:  Strong Partnerships Takeaways

- One good thing about COVID-19 is that it showed how local organisations were ready to put their power into practice as there was space to practice it and take the lead in discussions or decision-making processes.

- It is important to reflect on decolonising the mindset. We need to make an effort to consciously counteract colonial ways of thinking and unlearn expert bias.

- ICSOs should co-design and co-create joint visions and missions which include a mutual learning approach, add knowledge and find synergies.

- ICSOs should question the power structure of partnerships and ask what they can bring to the table before embarking on project or programme development.

- We need to recognise the importance of different powers. Maintain trust-building communication channels to listen and give feedback is key.

- There is no silver bullet to establish horizontal partnerships but it is essential to have meaningful engagement, mutual communication, build long-term relationships between organisattions.

## Commitment 10: Well-handled Resources Takeaways

- As a group, we recognise that within the sector, funding and resources often flow from North to South. We also recognize that funding from (usually northern) governments are usually pre-earmarked for a specific project and target.

- Policies on fundraising, and on which kind of 'gifts/fundings' are accepted, are in place for most organisations, especially for corporate or private gifts. These policies ensure that funding for CSOs does not harm the diversity of civil society. However, how these policies are created could be more inclusive, to enable further voices and inputs of the people whose lives funding will impact.

- Similarly, with regards to how we can ensure impact is achieved, M&E policies can put processes in place that support accountability to communities, to go beyond accountability to donors.

- Regarding how ICSOs acquire and use resources that communities give freely, e.g. photos, ChildFund gave an example of their practice whereby their organisation provides easy-to-access authorisation forms to inform and solicit consent from young children/parents in order to get the authorisation for image use.

- Furthermore, ChildFund also raised the idea that in the age of the internet, the model of fundraising through child sponsorships may no longer be applicable as this puts the safety of children at risk. ChildFund is currently thinking about how traditional models like this could adapt, or if they should shift the model entirely and use a new one.

# Day 2: Future Outlook of Accountable Now

In 2020, Accountable Now set about understanding how members perceive the added-value that membership and accountability reporting provides. A full added-value analysis was conducted with members and the results and recommendations of this analysis were used as a basis for a new management action plan that will influence future strategies and priorities of the organisation.

The added-value analysis and follow-up action plan will also guide the communication strategy of Accountable Now. Increasing internal ownership and external awareness of Accountable Now will be the guiding principle of the communication strategy to ensure that Accountable Now increases member ownership, fulfills the offer of offering different membership models and continues to improve CSO accountability practices.

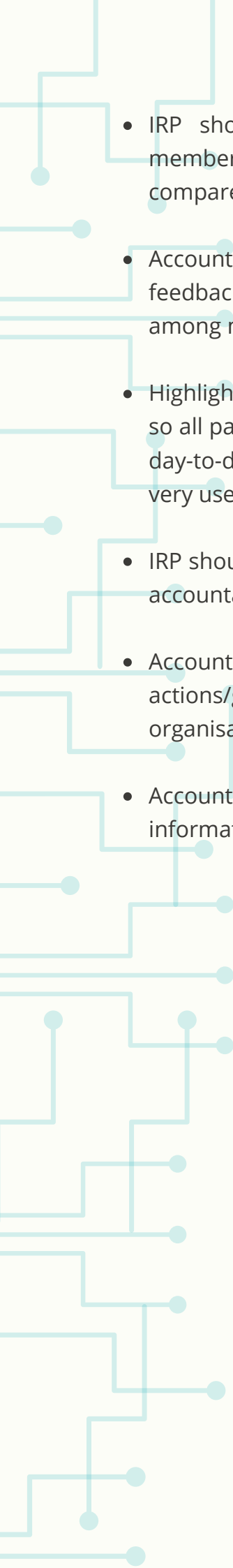# Day 2: Independent Review Panel feedback session

We used the last session of the event to collect feedback from members on Accountable Now's reporting review process, and in particular, on the feedback, they receive from the IRP on their accountability report.

The reporting framework and the feedback provided by the Independent Review Panel (IRP) on accountability reports are the main services Accountable Now provides, and is in fact the most valued by members. In our aim to bring more added value to our members' accountability journeys we explored how we can make it more relevant and useful and how it can be more helpful to the members to strengthen their accountability practices and to address the changes they need to make.

The session provided valuable insights to inform discussions within the Accountable Now IRP, Board and Secretariat on how to strengthen the methodology and in addressing real needs and capacities that we have.

## Learnings & Takeaways

- The new reporting framework is focused and provides members with a very useful tool for assessing accountability

- Accountable Now's self-assessment provides a new opportunity for members to understand the difference between how they assess their own accountability vs. how the IRP assesses member's accountability.

- The IRP may need to consider explaining the reporting framework's accountability ratings further to ensure all members understand why they receive certain ratings.

- The IRP may need to consider that Accountable Now's reporting cycle should be flexible and adapt to the members' different cycles to ensure all members have the needed resources and information from within their organisation, to create the accountability report.

- Not all organisations use English as the main working language. Flexibility and translating opportunities need to be given to organisations that would prefer to report in different languages.

- Feedback members receive is concise and concrete, but some terms are too niche and do not resonate with the entire member organisation. The IRP needs to meet people where they are at and unpack some of the terminologies.

- IRP should consider creating longer reporting cycles to help increase the quality of accountability reports.

- IRP should also consider the capacity of member organisations. Smaller members sometimes may not be able to produce the same kind of report compared to other larger members.

- Accountable Now needs to consider how we can make accountability report feedback more shareable across member organisations and to support exchange among members that are facing similar challenges.

- Highlight the importance of simple language when reporting/providing feedback so all parts of an organisation understand the content and can be useful for their day-to-day work. Replacing complicated language/concepts with videos will be very useful to pass the message across the organisation.

- IRP should consider setting up communication channels to share thoughts about accountability with members.

- Accountable Now members should provide examples/evidence that shows how actions/good practices are the result of mechanisms/processes embedded in the organisation - both formal and informal.

- Accountable Now should then provide more guidance on how to collect this information, and allow for member sharing of best practices around this.

# Evaluation

We asked all participants (38) to share their thoughts on the coordination and content of our 2021 AGM. 17 respondents provided their inputs with the following results:

Overall, participants felt satisfied (41%) or very satisfied (41%) with the 2021 AGM. The format and content were appreciated. The technical support and coordination ensured the sessions ran smoothly. Participants felt the discussions on day one around the powershift, decolonisation and anti-racism were difficult but stimulating and were overall relatable for most (75%). Participants thought that the membership matters discussed on day 2 deserved more time to discuss and felt the AGM enabled us to get us started on some crucial topics for Accountable Now.

**What we will aim to improve next year**

- We will clearly outline which papers are needed for what session, and send them out earlier to allow more space to digest and discuss within member organisations.

- We will do our best to connect with other forums discussing the same issues to build upon the current thinking in the sector.

- We will allocate more time for focus group discussions that are complex and might need more time to introduce and discuss.

**View the full results here**

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