ChildFund Alliance Secretariat Independent Review Panel Feedback

Accountability Report 2020

Review Round May 2021

ChildFund Alliance Secretariat
Feedback from the Independent Review Panel
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27 May 2021

Dear Meg Gardinier,

Thank you for submitting your accountability report. We, the Independent Review Panel of Accountable Now, appreciate your efforts to strengthen accountability to communities, local partners, supporters, staff, donors, or other key constituencies. Our key focus is on accountability to those you serve. It is against this background that we critically discussed your report and came to the individual assessment below.

The first accountability report of ChildFund Alliance Secretariat is comprehensive, provides evidence for most reporting questions and demonstrates a **strong commitment** to accountability.

Specific strengths found in the report are the Child-friendly accountability approach which has been flagged as a **good practice** (reported in A3), maximisation of coordination with other actors (D3), involvement of stakeholders in your advocacy work (F2), Availability of key policies and information on your website (G1) and Scope of the accountability report and other members of the alliance being independent members of Accountable Now (K3).

The panel also noted the following areas for improvement: Responsible stewardship for the environment (C5), gender pay gap and top salaries (G2), Staff development H2), and external complaints mechanism (J3).

Overall, the Panel approves of ChildFund Alliance Secretariat's first accountability report to Accountable Now, and the organisation is moved from Affiliate to Full Membership with immediate effect.

We look forward to discussing our feedback with you in a follow-up call, which the Secretariat will be in touch to schedule. This conversation will form the basis for your response letter, which will be made publicly available on the Accountable Now website along with your report and this feedback letter.

If you have any other feedback or comments on our work, please share them with us by sending them to the Accountable Now Secretariat.

Yours sincerely,

Accountable Now's Independent Review Panel

ChildFund Alliance Secretariat's Accountability Report 2020

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Opening Statement from the Head of Organisation
The opening statement by ChildFund Alliance's Secretary General, Meg Gardinier, emphasises the commitment to continuing to seek participation of children and youth. This demonstrates a strong commitment to dynamic accountability key principles, which is also reflected in ChildFund Alliance's mission: "Together with children, we create sustainable solutions that protect and advance their rights and well-being". It also highlights the *Working Together as One* recently adopted set of principles, one of them being a recommitment to transparency and accountability to stakeholders.
The opening statement outlines major Alliance wide strategic initiatives, including the ambitious COVID-19 Response, and also reflects on the huge challenge the pandemic poses on eliminating violence to children, and extreme poverty.

Cluster A: Impact Achieved	
A. The impact we achieve	
A1	*Mission statement and theory of change*	**4**

	The mission, vision, and overview of the Alliance if provided. It is explained that ChildFund Alliance does not have a Theory of change and the members operate guided by eight principles, which are shared.	
A2	**Key strategic indicators for success** In its latest Strategic Plan, ChildFund Alliance commits to prevent violence against children and enable them to participate in the achievement of the SDGs. The SDG target 16.2 "*End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children*" provides the basis for the Alliance's strategic priorities, which are outlines along their corresponding KPIs. The Strategic Plan was developed in consultations with Alliance members (online survey results available here). Several Task Forces and Subcommittees were set up in different areas to monitor progress and develop work plans.	*3*
A3	**Progress and challenges over the reporting period** The response provides a very comprehensive overview of progress and challenges over the report period against the strategic indicators. The Addendum document provides background and developments on previous periods for each strategic priority and its corresponding indicators. Several tools and resources are made available publicly. The panel commends the Child-friendly Accountability Methodology, Field Manual and Toolbox, and flags the approach as **good practice**.	*4*
A4	**Significant events or changes regarding governance and accountability** Comprehensive information on the Alliance governance, background, history, and purpose is presented, including descriptions of governance bodies and strategic decisions processes. *The Alliance Foundations* foundational document is shared. Major agreements arising from the Board of Directors meeting in 2018 are shared, including more frequent in person meetings, the review of Alliance governance structure, the setup of a task force for reviewing accomplishments of the strategic plan and the development of a 2021-2025 strategic plan. It was also agreed that all members would be joining Accountable Now.	*3*

B. Positive results are sustained			
B1	***Sustainability of your work*** The response is framed around two major mechanisms put in place in the Alliance; (1) Task Forces on Strategic Planning Priorities that enable membership engagement and develop resources and tools on Advocacy, Child-friendly Accountability, Child Protection in Emergencies and DRR, and Membership Growth; and (2) Global Committees that promote common program standards, and enable sharing and exchange of good practices and research, among other goals. A comprehensive description of examples of achievements from these two mechanisms are shared, including ChildFund participation on different processes and events related to the SDGs. Initiatives implemented to support members to comply with common standards in a sustainable way (training of trainers) and achieve lasting change through advocacy at high political level are presented.		*3*
B2	***Lessons learned in the reporting period*** The response outlines the lessons learned within the development of the Child-friendly Accountability initiative (described in A3). Several major learnings, how some learnings are shared, and actions taken upon those learnings are provided.		*3*
C. We lead by example			
C1 & C2	***Excellence on strategic priorities*** ***Expertise is recognised and welcomed by peers and stakeholders*** On advocacy work on ending violence against children, a historical background and timeline are provided, which outline the major milestones achieved during the period 2012-18, including leadership and participation on global campaigns and partnerships to end violence against children. As part of the Child-friendly Accountability Initiative' ealy impact assessment carried by an independent evaluator, several testimonials from child participants and adults in the communities were captured,		*4*

	which are shared in the report, demonstrating a great degree of satisfaction and appreciation.	
C3	*Inclusivity, human rights, women's rights and gender equality* Promote and campaign for the rights and interests of all the world's children is one of the core values of ChildFund Alliance, and all its members agree to respect and foster children rights, in particular specific provisions focusing on child participation and children as agents of change. Child participation is adapted to overcome gender-based inequalities. This commitment is demonstrated with the bi-annual report, Small Voices Big Dreams. On women's rights and gender equality, a Position Paper is publicly available and defines the commitment to support gender equality using a human-rights based approach and reflects the experiences of ChildFund staff in the field.	*3*
C4	*Minimising negative impacts on stakeholders* The ChildFund Alliance Board of Directors approved Safeguarding Policy Guidelines that provide members with minimum standards and guidance to develop their own Safeguarding Policies adapted to their context. The document is very comprehensive and includes samples of procedures and Code of Conduct. The Alliance is a member of Keeping Children Safe. The panel would have appreciated more information on how many members of the Alliance have institutionalised those international standards into their own organisation (besides ChildFund International and ChildFund Korea). In addition, what is the current situation in regards to reported violations of the safeguards received by the Secretary General since 2016? What was the follow up provided? The Alliance Secretariat has a Code of Conduct (included in the Policy Guidelines) which staff need to sign when hired, and a Personnel Policy Handbook which was recently updated including key provisions on sexual harassment. The panel appreciates the information on the Violations Review Committee (VRC), provided in J2.	*2*
C5	*Responsible stewardship for the environment*	*2*

The response mentions some initiatives at the Secretariat level and several developments underway such as a programmatic position paper on environment and climate change, and research on the link between violence against children and climate change. The panel acknowledges the commitment of ChildFund Alliance to include in the next reports follow-up on this initiative, and is looking forward to reading the position paper on Environment and Climate Change of the APC. The panel suggests reflecting on the need to develop sustainable procurement practices, and a system to measure greenhouse emissions at Secretariat level.		

Cluster B: Stakeholder Involvement

D. Key stakeholders are identified with great care

D1	**Key stakeholders and how they are identified** Key stakeholders are categorised into two major groups: (1) members of the Alliance and other NGOs and networks, and (2) Children, families, and communities served by the Alliance members. It is highlighted that members identify local stakeholders in their own contexts and an example is provided to illustrate this.	*3*
D2	**Reaching out to those impacted or concerned by your work** The response refers to Child-Friendly Accountability (described in A3, C1, and C2). In future reports, the panel recommends to also address this question in regards to other stakeholders ie. members, partners, etc.	*2*
D3	**Maximising coordination with others operating in the same space** The response outlines why ChildFund recognises the value of working in coalitions, and the reasons for the increasing importance of partnering with other actors. The core principles that underpin ChildFund's partnerships are described: "A strong commitment to empowering the voices of children and youth at all levels", and "an honest assessment of what we bring to the table". Childfund Alliance is a member of strategic networks of child focused agencies.	*3*

	Two examples of partnerships are provided, which include comprehensive descriptions and links to relevant publications and webpages.		
	E. We listen to, involve and empower stakeholders For this whole section, it is noted that only members of the Alliance are being considered as stakeholders. The panel appreciates this clarification being made here but would like the inclusion of other stakeholders such as partners in future reports.		
E1	***Stakeholder feedback*** The response focuses on only one stakeholder group, the members of the alliance. Descriptions of the CEO Forum, Alliance working groups and Secretary General (SG) role are provided, along with examples on how the CEO Forum provides a regular communications channel with and among members. The panel recommends that feedback from other stakeholders such as partners, are included in the future reports.	*3*	
E2 & E3	***Stakeholder engagement &*** ***Main likes/dislikes from stakeholders and organisation's response*** This response also focuses only on members. Recommendations from members on how CEO Forum members needs can be better met are shared. Also an example on how the approach to developing the Five Year Strategic Plan has been changed to better engaged members is also provided.	*2*	
E4	***People and partners have gained capacities that last beyond your immediate intervention*** As the report's scope is the Secretariat only, the panel agrees that this was addressed in B1 and provided sufficient information on capacity strengthening.	*3*	
	F. Our advocacy work addresses the root cause of problems		
F1	***Evidence regarding the root causes of the problems you address*** The SDG 16.2 is the global framework for advocacy work, in addition members' programmatic experiences informed the *Advocacy Asks* that	*3*	

		guide advocacy and which are included in the Strategic Plan for 2016-2021. It is also explained that advocacy positions are further informed by different types of research work, which are outlined.	
	F2	***Stakeholders support your advocacy work and value changes achieved*** The large consultation exercise carried out to inform the development of the 2030 Agenda, is mentioned, highlighting the massive participation (16,000 children from 50 countries). The Child-friendly Accountability Methodology enabled ChildFund to listen to children and eventually to the development of a specific project addressing SDG 16.2: Child Participation. Another example on how the Child-friendly Accountability Methodology works in practice is shared, which illustrates children participating and experiencing the results of their contribution to ChildFund's advocacy work. The panel appreciates these examples and their relevance, and considers this question as a **strength** in the report.	**4**
G. We are transparent, invite dialogue and protect stakeholders' safety	
	G1	***Availability of key policies and information on your website*** In the ChildFund Alliance's [website](), information on financial statements, governance and ethics (including policies), staff, and members is easily accessible in english language. The response also provides an outline of the budgeting process, and explains all staff joining the organisation must read the Personnel Policy Handbook, which is available upon request. The panel commends ChildFund Alliance for the comprehensive outline of materials available online, and flags it as a **strength** in the report.	**4**
	G2	***Pay scale, gender pay gap and top salaries*** There is a salary range in place which considers a set of criteria listed in the response, including work experience and prior salary history.	**2**

	In the next report, the panel would appreciate the rationale for including the prior salary history as part of the criteria. Also, It is not clear to the Panel whether there are two different salary structures (one for New York and other for Brussels?). The panel would have appreciated to see the gender pay gap (difference between the average pay of men, and the average pay of women) and suggest that the ratio between the highest and lowest salaries to be provided.	
G3	**Ensuring privacy rights and protecting personal data** The response explains that personnel files are confidential and list procedures to ensure access to only those who need it. Employees sign a confidencial provision included in the *employee letter*. The panel has easily found privacy policy in the website.	**4**
G4	**Largest donors and their contributions** The Alliance Secretariat is funded by members' contributions. In the next report, could ChildFund Alliance helpfully provide an overview of their contributions?	**3**

Cluster C: Organisational Effectiveness

H. Staff and volunteers are enabled to do their best

H1	**Recruitment and employment is fair and transparent** It is stated that ChildFund Alliance employment is guided by the organisation's core values. Alignment of recruitment/employment procedures and the organisation's core values are briefly explained, including the Equal Employment Opportunity. The panel suggests providing information on the term-length or turnover of staff.	**2**
H2	**Staff development**	**2**

	The response recognises this is an area for major improvement and currently development opportunities are limited to spontaneous offerings arising through affiliations. Terre des Hommes latest report (pp. 25) might provide some insights on how similar International Secretariats are approaching this challenge. Also, several online platforms which offer free courses, such as Nonprofit Ready might provide useful resources.		
H3	**_Safe working environment_** It is stated that the Personnel Policy Handbook addresses all forms of harassment, and provides a diversity of mechanisms and processes to ensure independence of investigation in case of violations. The Secretary General maintains an open-door policy for issues to be raised. The panelIRP would like to know if, besides the handbook, other processes or mechanisms are in place to "refresh" the content of the handbook (trainings, reminders) to staff?	*3*	
I. Resources are handled effectively for the public good			
I1	**_Resources are acquired in line with your values, globally accepted standards and without compromising independence_** The Secretariat is funded by ChildFund members dues, which are calculated according to a periodically-revised three-year schedule according to declining revenue bands model.	*3*	
I2	**_Monitoring of progress and re-allocation of resources_** Secretariat's performance against objectives is formally reviewed twice a year by the Board. In I3 it is explained that a Finance Committee monitors performance and makes recommendations.	*3*	
I3	**_Minimising risk of corruption, bribery and misuse of funds_** Provisions on ethical practices and conflicts of interest included in the _Letter of Hire_ and in the Personnel Policy Handbook respectively, are shared. Also it is stated that reporting channels are clearly outlined. The mandate of the Finance Committee is described.	*3*	

J. Governance processes maximise accountability		
J1	**Governance structure and recruitment of trustees/board members** The Board of ChildFund Alliance is composed by Board members of national boards of each member organisation. The criteria for appointment of Board of Director members by the member organizations is listed.	**3**
J2	**Board oversight of adherence to policies, resource allocation, potential risks, and complaints processes** The frequency and scope of the Board meetings is explained. The process for complaint handling by the Board is briefly explained. During the reporting period no complaints or grievances were brought forward to the Board. The panel appreciates this information and suggests that in the next report ChildFund Alliance provides further information on how the Board oversees in practice the relevance and adherence to other relevant policies (besides complaints).	**3**
J3	**Complaints handling mechanisms and overview of complaints (external)** The response refers to complaints from staff (internal). It is stated that the Personnel Policy Handbook explains how to report complaints. . The process for complaints leveraged against a partner is described. The panel suggests to provide in the next report information on how an external stakeholder (e.g. supplier, partner, beneficiary, individual donor) can make a complaint and how the complaint is handled by the Secretariat. A functioning complaints mechanism is considered as of crucial importance and the Accountable Now Secretariat could provide support if needed.	**2**
J4	**Complaints handling mechanisms and overview of complaints (internal)** In J3, the internal complaints process and mechanism is described. Violation Review Committee provides a second avenue (first is the Secretary General)if the complaints are not satisfied. The Personnel Policy Handbook provides further details on the reporting procedure. In the introduction it is stated "The Personnel Policies Handbook (the	**2**

	"Handbook") is for all US-based employees", is there a different complaints mechanism for the Brussels based employees?	
J5	**Protecting confidentiality and anonymity of those involved in complaints** On the Child Safeguarding guidelines available on the website a sample of whistleblowing policy is available. Has ChildFund Alliance Secretariat implemented it? The Personnel Policy Handbook provides a Code of conduct and includes provisions to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of those involved.	3
K. Leadership is dedicated to fulfilling the 12 Commitments		
K1	**The governing body and management are held accountable for fulfilling strategic promises** The working relationships and reporting lines among the governing body are explained. The panel appreciates this information, however points out that in this question is expected is an explanation on how the performance of the board and management-level staff is assessed, particularly on strategic aims and goals, and accountability issues.	1
K2	**Inclusion of staff in discussing progress toward organisational accountability** The response lists several initiatives that included staff on the preparation of key accountability related documents, such as the accountability report and the Personnel Policy Handbook. The 'open door policy' and the regular interaction between the Secretary General and staff as a channel to raise concern are also highlighted.	3
K3	**Scope of this accountability report and influence over national entities** The scope of the report is explained. All ChildFund Alliance members and Secretariat are submitting or will submit their own accountability reports. Upon consultation with Accountable Now Secretariat, a reporting framework was drafted, which outlines the most efficient way for Alliance members to report. The panel commends ChildFund Alliance for this approach, which ensures that each member is able to demonstrate strong commitment to dynamic accountability and also that the feedback from the	4

Accountable Now's Independent Review Panel is tailored to each member's unique challenges and context.