



**Accountable
Now**

GLOBAL STANDARDS LOCAL TRUST



World YWCA Independent Review Panel Feedback

Accountability Report 2019-20
Review Round September 2021

Accountable Now · www.accountablenow.org ·

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World YWCA

Feedback from the Independent Review Panel

Review Round September 2021

11th October 2021

Dear Casey Harden,

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 World YWCA's tenth accountability report demonstrates the commitment to accountability, ending a hiatus of three years in which no accountability reports were submitted.

The report demonstrates a strong focus on policy development in several areas, however more information on how policies are being rolled out and what initiatives and training are in place to make staff aware and knowledgeable of the policies would have strengthened the report.

The Panel notes positively the real impacts of women and girls within YWCA movement through case studies via blogs, conferences and meetings, demonstrating effective bottom-up inclusive approaches to support young women leadership (C1 and C2). Further strengths of the report include; identification and engagement of stakeholders (D1 and E2), and staff development (H2).

Some questions are not or only partially addressed, which is understandable given this is the first report following the new Reporting Framework. Specific areas for improvement flagged by the Panel include; Sustainability of your work (B1), lessons learnt (B2), Responsible stewardship for the environment (C5), Main likes and dislikes by stakeholders (E3), Stakeholders support your advocacy work and value changes achieved (F2), Internal complaints and feedback mechanism (J4) and Protecting confidentiality of those involved in complaints (J5).

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





World YWCA's Accountability Report 2019-20

Review Round September 2021

Opening Statement from the Head of Organisation

The Opening Statement by World YWCA's General Secretary, Casey Harden, starts by acknowledging the exceptionally long period where accountability was absent, and the start reversal in 2019 with changes in leadership. The statement refers to the [latest feedback letter](#) and outlines progress in several areas the panel had flagged for improvement.

The statement highlights the focus on accountability since the organisation embarked on a broad review, and the resulting adoption of a new strategic plan, which reflects strong emphasis on accountability. Transparency, engagement and policy enhancement are mentioned to be specific areas related to accountability addressed recently.

The statement also emphasises the role of the World YWCA office team as leader of the efforts in strengthening accountability practices.

The Panel commends World YWCA leadership's decision to focus on accountability to underpin the ambitious Goal 2035, and is glad to see strategic focus on accountability in several areas.

The Panel notes the specific emphasis on internal stakeholder feedback, transparent communication with internal and external stakeholders, and evaluation of and further improvement in World YWCA consultation and inclusion processes. The Panel appreciates the acknowledgement that power dynamics and potential power shifts carry a larger scope of focus.

The Panel also notes positively the highlight on the weakest score from 2016 report: environment. While acknowledging the challenges of Covid pandemic, this context has encouraged YWCA to step into new environmental practices.

Cluster A: Impact Achieved

A. The impact we achieve

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| A1 | Mission statement and theory of change | 3 |
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| | The mission statement and the Goal 2035: Theory of Change are shared. Also, the World YWCA Constitution , which enshrines the vision and purpose of World YWCA is shared. | |
| A2 | <p>Key strategic indicators for success</p> <p>The response provides background on how the World YWCA Strategic Framework 2020-2023 was discussed and approved. The Strategic Plan framework is underpinned by three strategic priorities, each of them with corresponding key initiatives associated. It is stated that indicators (which are the major goals listed under each of the three priorities in the framework) were also established.</p> <p>In addition, eight conditions of success identified are outlined.</p> | 3 |
| A3 | <p>Progress and challenges over the reporting period</p> <p>The response addresses general progress on strengthening communications and accountability within the organisation.</p> <p>The panel appreciates the information provided and points out that this question should refer to the key indicators (as per question A2), and address challenges as well as progress encountered. It is recommended that a progress report is shared at the next submission to demonstrate progress on the indicators developed.</p> | 3 |
| A4 | <p>Significant events or changes regarding governance and accountability</p> <p>The response provides historical background on the organisational changes and leadership and governance transitions of the past few years.</p> <p>In 2019, new policies (publicly available) and procedures were adopted, which reflects the commitment to strengthen accountability.</p> <p>The response also outlines how the COVID19 pandemic has prompted innovation and adaptation to ensure alignment toward Goal 2035.</p> <p>Whilst the panel acknowledges and appreciates development of new policies, World YWCA Feedback and Complaints Policy could provide further clarification about how the cases will be investigated depending on the types and sensitivity of complaints. It is also recommended to provide more than one channel besides the dedicated complaint email address, especially in light of digital inequalities raised earlier.</p> | 3 |
| B. Positive results are sustained | | |
| B1 | Sustainability of your work | 2 |



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| | <p>The response addresses financial sustainability in great detail. This is understandable given the recent history of huge deficits described. The efforts to revert the deficit trend are thoroughly explained and it is expected to reach breakeven in 2023.</p> <p>As the pandemic impacts to YWCA members started to unfold, in May 2020, the board approved a one-third reduction of the affiliation fee. This measure was preemptively proposed by the World YWCA so that members associations could relocate those funds to COVID response.</p> <p>In future reports the panel invites to reflect on different aspects of sustainability, such as capacity strengthening and capacity sharing (as per Commitment 4 “Lasting positive change”). More specifically, what is the role of the Secretariat in supporting members and partners, just to name a few stakeholders, to ensure their programmatic work is sustainable, beyond project life cycles?</p> | |
| B2 | <p>Lessons learned in the reporting period</p> <p>The response describes the <i>2018 Annual Membership Accountability Survey</i> and the subsequent analysis, which generated learnings, some of them presented in the report.</p> <p>A Task Force was convened to address membership issues, such as compliance with World YWCA accountability mechanisms, and exploration of new membership models.</p> <p>The panel appreciates the detailed information of the survey, but points out that the scope of this question is the actionable learnings and plans to ensure the lessons are learnt, rather than focusing on the raw data and information and how these have been captured (this would fit better in E1). Accountability Lab's latest report (pp.12) might provide some indication on how to address this question in future reports.</p> | 2 |
| C. We lead by example | | |
| C1 | <p>Excellence on strategic priorities</p> <p>Several alliances, memberships, and groups to which the World YWCA has been invited to or participate in are listed and linked in the report. Also, the World YWCA is providing leadership in the United Nations (UN) Multi-faith Advisory Council (MFAC), as the General Secretary, Casey Harden is co-chairing the Gender Working Group.</p> <p>Tools, papers, and resources that demonstrate excellence are shared in the report. Participation in discussions on accountability related topics are</p> | 4 |



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| | <p>also shared. Overall, YWCA's contributions have been recognised at the global level, demonstrating excellence on their strategic priorities and maximising its collective impact for gender equality.</p> | |
| C2 | <p>Expertise is recognised and welcomed by peers and stakeholders</p> <p>The response provides examples of YWCA individuals being invited to participate in different international forums and networks, including the United Nations. Such case studies clearly demonstrate the bottom-up and inclusive approaches of YWCA. Furthermore, an award received by YWCA Canada is listed.</p> <p>The panel looks forward to reading in future reports how peers and sector stakeholders welcome and recognise World YWCA's expertise.</p> | 3 |
| C3 | <p>Inclusivity, human rights, women's rights and gender equality</p> <p>As it is reflected in its mission, the World YWCA intrinsically works to advance gender equality. A gender policy is shared in the report. It is stated that an intersectional approach to human rights is needed to sustain the YWCA movement. It is also mentioned that minority women are at higher risk of experiencing human rights violations.</p> <p>It is stated that these considerations are taken into account in initiatives identification and design. The World YWCA Standards of Good Management and Accountability (SGMA), contains several standards to ensure diversity and inclusion. Also, a glossary, which compiles terms that are appropriate and inclusive across the YWCA movement, is shared.</p> <p>The panel welcomes the wide variety of tools and standards to empower women and girls within the YWCA movements. However, how does YWCA ensure that those standards are met among its members? The IRP would welcome, in the next report, data or processes demonstrating how these standards are met, what are the gaps (if any) and what actions are being planned to address them.</p> | 2 |
| C4 | <p>Minimising negative impacts on stakeholders</p> <p>Two policies aiming at creating an inclusive and non-discriminatory workplace are shared: a Transgender Inclusion Policy and a HIV and AIDS Workplace Policy. The Board and staff codes of conduct are also shared, which commit to non-discrimination. World YWCA also commits to create a safe space for any individual participating in World YWCA initiatives. Examples of how this approach was applied in practice at the last World</p> | 3 |



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| | <p>YWCA Council, are provided. YWCA also chose to get merchandising from ethical suppliers.</p> <p>In future reports, the panel invites to reflect on potential negative impacts on broader group stakeholders, and on the relevance of conducting risk analysis in order to identify potential negative risks and develop risk mitigation plans.</p> | |
| C5 | <p>Responsible stewardship for the environment</p> <p>Not addressed.</p> | 1 |
| <h2>Cluster B: Stakeholder Involvement</h2> | | |
| <h3>D. Key stakeholders are identified with great care</h3> | | |
| D1 | <p>Key stakeholders and how they are identified</p> <p>YWCA Constitution and policy/programmatic guidance determines identification of stakeholders. It is stated that World YWCA key stakeholders are girls and women, and its work is rooted in the needs of local communities.</p> <p>It is explained how the World YWCA has been pursuing external partnerships in the past few years.</p> <p>A comprehensive list of stakeholders is provided. Stakeholders are categorised in internal and external, and within the latter, in youth, ecumenical, government institutions, multilateral institutions, NGOs, academic institutions, and corporates.</p> | 3 |
| D2 | <p>Reaching out to those impacted or concerned by your work</p> <p>The communications strategy has prioritised local, national and global virtual engagements aimed at movement building. Other diverse types of initiatives have been used to engage with stakeholders.</p> <p>The internship programme <i>Young Women's Leadership Cohort 2020</i> is described as it is an example of engagement with young women, whose experiences are shared by linking to blog posts written by them. The panel commends/welcomes YWCA's inclusive approaches that are carefully planned and executed for their continuous learning and improvement. In the next report, the IRP suggests providing more information on how women with little or no access to the internet are reached out.</p> | 3 |
| D3 | <p>Maximising coordination with others operating in the same space</p> | 3 |



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| | <p>It is stated that the World Office is intentional in pursuing and cultivating relationships with strategic partners and it was strengthened in the pandemic context. An example of the World YWCA leading the creation of an alliance aiming to expand civic space, is shared (more details here). Also, it is highlighted that this alliance is setting a foundation for similar scalable initiatives in different countries and regions.</p> <p>Different partnerships and the initiatives developed collaboratively are shared, notably the initiative with WHO and UN Foundation on changing narratives on young people and COVID-19.</p> | |
| <p>E. We listen to, involve and empower stakeholders</p> | | |
| <p>E1</p> | <p>Stakeholder feedback</p> <p>The link between YWCA's Goal 2035 and stakeholder feedback is explained. Several examples of how World YWCA listens and engages with internal stakeholders are provided, such as young women led initiatives. In B2, details on the Annual Membership survey are provided.</p> <p>The IRP appreciates the information provided here and points out that it fits better in E2 or F2. In E1, a description is expected on how World YWCA seeks feedback on its work and services from its stakeholders, internal and external (e.g. how does World YWCA capture World Council participants' feedback on the organisation and coordination of the World Council 20xx? How do partners evaluate the work with World YWCA?).</p> | <p>2</p> |
| <p>E2</p> | <p>Stakeholder engagement</p> <p>Member associations influence decision-making through the World Council, whose meetings are held every four years. The World Board monitors work plans and budgets annually.</p> <p>Engagement of young women is recognised as a critical element in achieving its Strategic Development Goals, and this is reflected in the Goal 2035. It is stated that a <i>Feminist Consultation Methodology</i>, developed by young women, has helped on understanding the challenges of working with young women in different communities, backgrounds, orientations and understanding. The key components of the methodology are listed, one of them being 'Participatory process'. The methodology is used in shaping programme design, implementations and evaluation. An example of a tool developed using this methodology is shared.</p> | <p>3</p> |
| <p>E3</p> | <p>Main likes/dislikes from stakeholders and organisation's response</p> | <p>2</p> |



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| | <p>The response acknowledges the historical rigid structures of communications and the transition to explore new methods of communication and feedback such as Whatsapp. Initiatives that enabled learning generation and sharing are described, including the Rise Up! Leadership programme, which aims to understand how young women leadership looks like and what the main barriers and opportunities are.</p> <p>The panel appreciates the information provided here, although it would have suited better in other parts of the report (ie. the first paragraph in E1, the examples provided might have been very relevant in D2 and F2 with different framing). In this question, a summary of the key feedback received from stakeholders (internal and external) is expected. Sightsavers report (pp. 20) might provide a practical example of what is expected.</p> | |
| E4 | <p>People and partners have gained capacities that last beyond your immediate intervention</p> <p>Building young women's leadership is central to the World YWCA mission. It is stated that community needs and crises inform advocacy, which aims to systemic change. Some examples are provided, which illustrate the emphasis of World YWCA in supporting young women leadership development. It is however not clear to the Panel how impact of such initiatives on partners and people has been measured.</p> | 2 |
| <p>F. Our advocacy work addresses the root cause of problems</p> | | |
| F1 | <p>Evidence regarding the root causes of the problems you address</p> <p>It is stated that advocacy is rooted in YWCA vision and advocacy priorities are aligned with World Council resolutions and decisions. A Global Advocacy Policy is shared. World YWCA plays a facilitators role with members associations and other parties when developing advocacy positions.</p> <p>The panel appreciates the information provided here but points out that in this question a description of how World YWCA (or YWCA entities if relevant) gathers evidence regarding the root causes of the problems it addresses in its advocacy work. SOS Children Villages International report (pp. 16) might provide practical indication on what the panel is looking for in this question.</p> | 2 |
| F2 | <p>Stakeholders support your advocacy work and value changes achieved</p> | 2 |



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| | <p>This question is partially addressed in other sections of the report (i.e. E1, E3).</p> <p>The response would have benefited from elaborating the examples in the report that are relevant to this question.</p> | |
| <p>G. We are transparent, invite dialogue and protect stakeholders' safety</p> | | |
| G1 | <p>Availability of key policies and information on your website</p> <p>Women leaders from the YWCA movement participated in the consultative process for the development of the newly designed website. The webpages where information about governance, leadership and accountability related topics can be found are linked in the report. Membership of Accountable Now and other organisations is also highlighted in the new website. The annual report is also linked in the report.</p> <p>Key documentation is provided in the three official languages of the World YWCA, and translation to local languages is allowed and encouraged.</p> <p>Social media analytics are also provided.</p> <p>The Panel invites to reflect on how contents and images on the websites are monitored, and this reflection process may result in development of media and visibility policy. Furthermore, considering that the majority of YWCA staff and stakeholders are women and girls who are often the target of image abuses, development of media image policy/photography policy is encouraged.</p> | 3 |
| G2 | <p>Pay scale, gender pay gap and top salaries</p> <p>The new wage scale is available online, which outlines salary ranges for the different levels of job of the organisation. The scale is reviewed biannually using salary market data from the Swiss government.</p> <p>The report also states that the World Office "remunerate employees with fair wages and other compensation (e.g. health insurance, paid leave, etc.)". No information is provided on the ratio between top and bottom salaries, nor on initiatives to evaluate any pay gap based on other types of discrimination. The Panel encourages YWCA to analyze current trends of gender pay gap, or gaps based on any other factor of discrimination (ethnicity, disability) within the organisation.</p> | 2 |
| G3 | <p>Ensuring privacy rights and protecting personal data</p> | 2 |



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| | <p>World YWCA's approach to privacy of its website is comprehensively addressed in this dedicated webpage and in Responsible Data Policy.</p> <p>The Panel notes however the question is far broader and relates to privacy rights and personal data of stakeholders. Does World YWCA have a separate, stand alone privacy policy, and if so, how has it been implemented? Does YWCA provide training on the policy to its staff? How does YWCA ensure that all staff are aware of and adhering to the policy in their daily work, considering that their work involves global engagements with people who may be considered vulnerable?</p> | |
| G4 | <p>Largest donors and their contributions</p> <p>The five largest contributions and their donors for the 2017-2020 period are listed in a table. Audit statements from 2019 and 2020 are also shared for further details. The report states that World YWCA has no "material anonymous donors".</p> <p>The Panel would appreciate in future reports, an description of what YWCA's approach is to ensuring donors do not have an unfair influence in the organisation's work.</p> | 2 |
| <h2>Cluster C: Organisational Effectiveness</h2> | | |
| <h3>H. Staff and volunteers are enabled to do their best</h3> | | |
| H1 | <p>Recruitment and employment is fair and transparent</p> <p>The World YWCA is subject to the Swiss employment framework. Due to the constraints of Swiss law, recruiting from abroad, or having employees based abroad proves to be challenging. In spite of this challenge, it is stated that the World YWCA strives for its staff to be representative of the diversity of the movement. Staff BIOs are available online, and an organogram is presented in the report. The objectives of the "strategic staffing changes" at the beginning of 2020 are listed.</p> <p>At the global movement level, YWCA entities tend to hire local, and young women with disadvantaged access to opportunities are prioritised.</p> <p>World YWCA states that HR has processes and templates to ensure best practices, but no information is provided. Are there any policies ensuring fairness? What are the means used to ensure there are no biases in recruitment and evaluation?</p> | 2 |



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| | Further elaboration on its recruitment and screening process to ensure fairness and transparency would strengthen the response. | |
| H2 | <p>Staff development</p> <p>An annual performance review enables supervisors and supervisees to have developmental conversations and allow a balanced assessment of employees. A team coaching initiative has been launched, which allows team members to collectively decide which topic to discuss. The response mentions that team meetings have been established, and that the annual budget includes allowance for staff development.</p> <p>The panel would appreciate more information in future reports about the trainings opportunities ie. how are training needs identified, what is the annual budget and how it was used. The panel also encourages conducting learning needs analysis and for each staff to develop professional development plans as it will help identify training needs in line with competency requirements for their roles and deliver against expected performance standards.</p> | 3 |
| H3 | <p>Safe working environment</p> <p>Seven policies related to a safe working environment are shared, including the Staff Code of Conduct and Grievance and Appeal Policy. An external review was carried out to ensure alignment with applicable employment laws and with human rights based approach.</p> <p>The response describes the measures taken to address the challenges provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>The panel appreciates the comprehensive policy framework shared and suggests providing evidence and examples illustrating how the policies work in practice in future reports.</p> | 3 |
| I. Resources are handled effectively for the public good | | |
| I1 | <p>Resources are acquired in line with your values, globally accepted standards and without compromising independence</p> <p>The World Office engages in fundraising and resource mobilisation guided by the <i>Financial Development and Fundraising</i> section of the Standards of Good Management and Accountability. The investment policy and ethical guidelines for fundraising have been shared with the Panel and are available through the organisation's intranet.</p> | 2 |



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| | <p>It is mentioned that strict guidelines are established when opening bids for hosting major events.</p> <p>The response would have been strengthened by providing information and/or examples on how the policies are applied in specific cases and produce the desired outcome.</p> | |
| I2 | <p>Monitoring of progress and re-allocation of resources</p> <p>It is stated that a regular publication of work plan, budget, assessment and reporting was established in 2019. Those are available internally through the organisation intranet and have been shared with the Panel.</p> <p>The response also describes fundraising activities to invest in response against COVID-19 impact.</p> | 3 |
| I3 | <p>Minimising risk of corruption, bribery and misuse of funds</p> <p>A list of relevant policies is shared in the response, which emphasises the 'zero tolerance' approach to corruption and abuse.</p> <p>A description of budget development and its approval process is provided. Two auditing processes and an Audit & Risk Committee are in place.</p> <p>A segregation of duties is in place for the approval of day to day payments.</p> <p>A manual on accounting policies and processes is reviewed annually and it is expected to be known by all staff members.</p> | 3 |
| J. Governance processes maximise accountability | | |
| J1 | <p>Governance structure and recruitment of trustees/board members</p> <p>The historical background of the World YWCA and a brief description of its governance structures, are provided.</p> <p>The World Council, as supreme authority of the World YWCA meets every four years to, among other tasks, elect the World YWCA Board and set priorities. The Board is composed of 20 women coming from the different regions and giving priority to women under the age of 30. The role of the Nominations committee is explained.</p> <p>The response also outlines the committees and subcommittees that are created for specific purposes.</p> | 3 |



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| J2 | <p>Board oversight of adherence to policies, resource allocation, potential risks, and complaints processes</p> <p>The roles and responsibilities in financial affairs and financial management of the World Board, Treasurer, Audit and Risk Committee, and General Secretary of the organisation are outlined. The additional functions of the Audit and Risk Committee are listed.</p> <p>The Board involvement in the complaints and grievance processes is explained. The report, however, lacks the oversight process in a case where any breaches occur in the adherence to policies.</p> | 2 |
| J3 | <p>Complaints handling mechanisms and overview of complaints (external)</p> <p>A new policy and mechanism for feedback and complaints has been approved in December 2020. Although it is too early to report on its implementation, the response mentions that the two instances of feedback and complaints were processed and resolved.</p> <p>While the panel welcomes this progress, it also recognises robustness of the complaint handling mechanisms. Specific recommendations includes development of complaint categories with different levels of sensitivity (for instance, corruption and fraud; legal; safeguarding; safety and security; abuse of power; conflicts of interests; and modern slavery). It is also not clear how complaints will remain confidential throughout the investigation process.</p> <p>The Panel also notes the different policies that might apply when raising complaints and encourages further reflection on how to ensure guidelines and processes are easy to follow by complainants.</p> | 2 |
| J4 | <p>Complaints handling mechanisms and overview of complaints (internal)</p> <p>In addition to the policy shared in J3, two policies guide the internal complaints, and these are linked in the report. World YWCA indicated that no internal complaints were received over the reporting period.</p> <p>The panel welcomes the Board approval of YWCA Complaint Policy, Grievance and Appeal Policy as well as Whistle-Blowing Policy. It is encouraged to monitor and analyze incoming complaints. The panel further encourages to reflect on approaches on training and awareness raising on the complaint policy to the YWCA staff and wider stakeholders.</p> | 2 |
| J5 | <p>Protecting confidentiality and anonymity of those involved in complaints</p> <p>Although the response on the report highlights the commitment to ensuring privacy and safety of those submitting feedback, it is not explicitly emphasised in the Complaint Policy. Complaints information is</p> | 2 |



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| | <p>only shared with those directly involved in the process. It is stated that "some complaints" can be submitted anonymously.</p> <p>The whistleblowing policy shared in J4, only applies to World YWCA staff. How about whistleblowers who are external to the organisation? What protective measures are being implemented?</p> | |
| K. Leadership is dedicated to fulfilling the 12 Commitments | | |
| K1 | <p>The governing body and management are held accountable for fulfilling strategic promises</p> <p>The response explains the adaptation to the virtual way of working by the Board, and outlines the decisions and discussions held. Surveys and orientation sessions for the new Board were organised by the World Office, and also regular calls involving the General Secretary, President and Board members were established. The response also mentions the Board participation on the Power Shift Lab.</p> <p>The panel appreciates the information provided, however points out that the core of the answer here should focus on how the Board and senior management performance are assessed, as per Commitment 12.</p> | 2 |
| K2 | <p>Inclusion of staff in discussing progress toward organisational accountability</p> <p>The response highlights the focus that accountability has had in the last years, and shares examples of close collaboration with the Accountable Now Secretariat. It is also stated that continuous communication, transparency and accountability are indivisible elements and the World YWCA holds regular meetings to ensure those elements are prominent.</p> <p>While the panel appreciates initiatives presented for including staff in accountability events and trainings, it recommends in future reports to present how these initiatives will be systematised.</p> | 2 |
| K3 | <p>Scope of this accountability report and influence over national entities</p> <p>The scope of the report is explained. In future reports, the panel would appreciate including here a description of the influence of the World YWCA within the rest of the global movement as to better understand the scope of the work on accountability from the World YWCA towards its Members Associations.</p> | 2 |