

## Webinar Outcome Summary

### “What is at the core of effective stakeholder engagement?”

#### Topic Experts:

- Tripti Rai, HRBA Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser, ActionAid International
- Almandina Guma, Regional Programme Development Advisor, SOS Children's Villages (Albania)
- Salimane Issifou, National Director, SOS Villages d'Enfants Bénin

As CSOs we claim to work primarily for our key stakeholders. While business wants to generate *shareholder value*, we seek to create *stakeholder value*. But do we sufficiently live up to this promise of putting stakeholders first in all we do? Do we really offer key stakeholders to actively and continuously engage and determine the outcome of our activities for the better?

This webinar outcome summary is intended to provide you some very good answers to the fundamental questions posted above by Charter Members. To fully understand this brief outline, please also consider the two expert presentations given at the webinar, which can be found on the Charter [website](#).

#### ***A culture of stakeholder engagement is crucial***

Devising policies and processes is an important first step; however, it will only bear fruit when meaningful stakeholder engagement at all stages of work is a deeply embedded part of an organisational culture. Ensure that stakeholder engagement is truly valued, that it does inform and potentially change small and also large decisions. A culture is necessary that not only tolerates stakeholder feedback but actively seeks it – to continuously improve self-performance. This culture needs to be thoroughly supported by senior management.

#### ***What are the core challenges when safeguarding effective stakeholder engagement?***

- Meaningfully engaging key stakeholder views at the global, national, regional and local level takes a lot of time, resources and skills.
- Encouraging participation of all stakeholders bears the risk of offending some, when decisions are ultimately taken.
- Management has to be flexible while at the same time providing clear leadership.
- Many stakeholders are not capable to engage due to lack of time and adequate resources.
- Stakeholders who have engaged feel that their contributions have not been valued.
- Managing projects with limited timeframes, complex risk situations, or ethical issues related to stakeholder participation can be particularly challenging.

#### ***Recommendations towards a meaningful stakeholder engagement:***

- Assign *sufficient* time and resources to fully integrate stakeholders into all ongoing processes, systems and management.
- Be clear on what feedback is collected for which purpose and how it feeds into organisational processes including decision-making processes. Make sure stakeholders understand how their feedback is valued and informing such organisational processes.
- Take time to fully generate / understand motivation of stakeholders to participate; build their capacities to do so; fund their travel where funds are a constraint and work time lost.
- Create specific opportunities and formats which allow meaningful engagement and take your time to build trust.

- Encourage regular feedbacks and talks – make sure there are plenty of spaces for interaction.
- Launch training sessions for staff, volunteers, as well as stakeholders at the national and international level.
- Develop practices ensuring quality participation.
- Carry out clear communication consistent with same and equal language.
- Be sensitive to cultural and local circumstances.
- Perform regular review processes.
- Engage with partners to support reflective learning in ongoing work.
- Be clear about your organisational principles and limitations

Combating the syndrome of “resistance to change” is another challenge, requiring further resources and strategic expertise. Rotating members of local governments imply repeated efforts to build relations with new cabinet members. When an organisation finally receives feedback from its stakeholders, it is not always easy to incorporate it in decision making processes. Individual stakeholders have particular wishes – sometimes with objectives partly contradictory.

Aggregating various kinds of information from distinct sources in order to extract meaningful guidance seems rather difficult. Even when having the impression we have mastered effective stakeholder engagement locally, the greatest challenge remains: how do we efficiently transfer those efforts to a global level? How do countries see relation to global objectives? What formal processes of strategic alignment are helpful? You can find some useful resources in ActionAid International’s “Peoples Action in Practice Handbook which includes the Global Monitoring Framework, the REFLECTION ACTION resource sheet” [here](#).

**Stages of process implementation:** (1) careful planning and budgeting – identifying clear objectives; (2) monitoring and understanding the needs of your stakeholders; (3) appraisal of how stakeholder engagement is an enabler to your projects; (4) strategy development and internal coordination; (5) building trust; (6) establishing spaces for consultations, e.g. conducting satisfactory surveys (stakeholder expectation survey in the case of ActionAid) ensuring the concerns of stakeholders and co-workers are taken into consideration in the day-to-day management; (7) implementing responsive measures to stakeholder feedback; (8) monitoring and evaluating impact (e.g. SOS conducted peer research on effectiveness of their participation practices).

Specific conditions need to be built for different kind of stakeholders (children, disabled, women, most vulnerable etc.) in order to enhance their optimal involvement. Stakeholders need to be motivated and properly empowered prior to and during their involvement. It needs to be clear from the outset what input is sought to inform which decision. Management has to be open to welcome learning at all stages. Effective stakeholders involvement requires time and financial resources that need to be well budgeted. If implemented well and supported by a strong culture of stakeholder engagement it has the potential to ensure your organisation creates optimal stakeholder value and lives up to its commitments, thus helping foster organisational Accountability.