GLOBAL STANDARD FOR CSO ACCOUNTABILITY

12 COMMITMENTS FOR DYNAMIC ACCOUNTABILITY

TRANSFORMING ACCOUNTABILITY AND ENHANCING IMPACT

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) play a critical role in creating just societies and a healthy planet. We work with multiple stakeholders, particularly affected people and partners.
To be successful, we need to be in constant dialogue with our stakeholders about what they want, what they have to offer and how we can work together effectively to achieve change.
Feedback from our stakeholders needs to inform our decisions so that we can both continuously improve our performance and build trusted relationships.

DYNAMIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Feedback from our stakeholders needs to inform our decisions so that we can both continuously improve our performance and build trusted relationships. This dynamic understanding of accountability is at the heart of the Global Standard for CSO Accountability. It transforms accountability into an ongoing dialogue which drives learning and change, develops trust with our stakeholders and enhances the legitimacy and credibility of CSOs, all of which are critically important in these times of shrinking civic space.

Building on the Istanbul Principles and the rich experience of the sector, Accountability Initiatives from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean worked together for two years to develop a Global Standard which captures a globally shared, dynamic understanding of accountability.

The purpose of the Global Standard is to mainstream this dynamic approach to accountability in ways which strengthen CSO effectiveness, connectedness and credibility.

The Global Standard is a reference standard. It aims to strengthen alignment across existing or new accountability standards and practices. It is not intended to replace them.

The Global Standard can be used on a voluntary basis as a benchmark by:

- CSOs, CSO networks and advocacy groups to improve their accountability standards and practices
- Governments and donors to create enabling regulations and funding policies for CSOs
- CSO stakeholders to hold CSOs accountable
- CSOs to enable effective partnerships

The Global Standard includes 12 Commitments and associated Key Actions which CSOs promise to deliver and against which they can be held to account. The Global Standard is written in plain English to facilitate dialogue with our stakeholders and communication with the wider public.

The Commitments are organised into three clusters: what CSOs aim to achieve, their approach to change and their internal practices. The Commitments form an integrated whole, with each informing the other. The Commitments are deliberately aspirational; the focus is not only on what CSOs do now but what they can do in the future. They call on CSOs to enhance their performance, both individually and collectively and to contribute to a better world. Taken together, they tell a powerful story about the role and added value of civil society, now and in the future.

Supplementary Guidance Materials provide advice on how to use the Global Standard, including how to assess whether CSOs are living up to the Commitments and whether accountability standards align with the global reference standard.

When these Commitments are fulfilled, CSOs will establish closer links with their stakeholders, continuously improve their performance, develop trust in turbulent times, strengthen their individual and collective impact, and enhance their contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals.

THE GLOBAL STANDARD ...

... creates dialogue with people and builds trust	By emphasising a dynamic approach to accountability which puts stakeholder feedback centre stage
... aligns civil society accountability globally	By defining key principles and practices of good CSO accountability used around the world
... strengthens existing frameworks and standards	By providing an ambitious benchmark and practical guidance on how to work towards it
... supports a strong CSO voice in times of shrinking civic space	By allowing for comparable communication on what we contribute, how we do it and how to hold us to account

THREE CLUSTERS ...

THE 12 COMMITMENTS

CLUSTER A
WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE

1 JUSTICE & EQUALITY

2 WOMEN'S RIGHTS & GENDER EQUALITY

3 HEALTHY PLANET

4 LASTING POSITIVE CHANGE

CLUSTER B
OUR APPROACH TO CHANGE

5 PEOPLE-DRIVEN WORK

6 STRONG PARTNERSHIPS

7 ADVOCATING FOR FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE

8 OPEN ORGANISATIONS

CLUSTER C
WHAT WE DO INTERNALLY

9 EMPOWERED AND EFFECTIVE STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

10 WELL-HANDLED RESOURCES

11 RESPONSIVE DECISION-MAKING

12 RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP

CLUSTER A
WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE

The first four Commitments spell out the overarching ambition of all Civil Society Organisations. We subscribe to all and contribute in particular to those that are closest to our mission.

KEY ACTIONS

COMMITMENT 1:
Justice and Equality
We will address injustice, exclusion, inequality, poverty and violence to create healthy societies for all.

1.1 Listen to people, understand and address the root causes and effects of injustice, violence and inequality.

1.2 Lead by example: Be inclusive, respect and promote human rights in our organisation and make sure we do no harm ourselves.

1.3 Support people to know their rights and to hold accountable those responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling them.

1.4 Collaborate with other actors to collectively address the root causes and effects of injustice, violence and inequality, and to ensure all people's rights are respected and protected.

COMMITMENT 2:
Women's Rights and Gender Equality
We will promote women's and girls' rights and enhance gender equality.

2.1 Listen to women, men, girls and boys to understand and address the root causes and effects of discrimination and gender inequality.

2.2 Lead by example: Address gender inequality and ensure women's rights are respected in all we do.

2.3 Empower women and girls to live more fulfilled lives.

2.4 Work closely with all parts of society, including men and boys, to drive lasting economic, political and social change towards women's and girl's rights and gender equality.

COMMITMENT 3:
Healthy Planet
We will protect the natural environment and enhance its ability to support life for future generations.

3.1 Listen to people and consult experts to understand the environmental issues faced by people and nature, and how to best address them.

3.2 Lead by example: Map our organisation's environmental impact, minimise it to the extent possible and be open about our successes and failures.

3.3 Motivate and support people to protect the environment and to promote systemic change for a healthy planet.

3.4 Collaborate with actors from different sectors to develop innovative and systemic solutions to environmental issues.

COMMITMENT 4:
Lasting Positive Change
We will deliver long-term positive results.

4.1 Learn from people and partners where we can add most value to what already exists.

4.2 Support people to have the information, resources and capacity to actively drive the changes we want to see collectively.

4.3 Evaluate our long-term results in consultation with the people we work with, including unintended negative effects.

4.4 Collaborate with other actors in ways that build on one another's strengths and ensure accountability for our collective impact.

4.5 Continuously monitor, evaluate, learn, adapt and innovate with a focus on lasting results.

KEY ACTIONS

CLUSTER B
OUR APPROACH TO CHANGE

KEY ACTIONS

COMMITMENT 5:
People-driven Work

We will ensure that the people we work with have a key role in driving our work.

5.1 Learn from the people we work with and represent, so their issues are our goals.

5.2 Support people in taking active roles to drive the change we collectively want to see.

5.3 Ensure that people's views are well reflected in our decision-making processes at all levels of our organisation.

5.4 Invite and act on people's feedback to improve our performance and collective impact.

COMMITMENT 6:
Strong Partnerships

We will work in fair and respectful partnerships to achieve shared goals.

6.1 Identify organisations that work towards similar goals and build respectful partnerships that play to each other's strengths.

6.2 Ensure that the roles and responsibilities of our organisation and our partners are clear and fair.

6.3 Collaborate with different kinds of organisations to achieve shared goals.

6.4 Share information, resources and knowledge with our partners and make important decisions collectively.

COMMITMENT 7:
Advocating for Fundamental Change

We will address root causes by advocating for fundamental change.

7.1 Ensure our advocacy work is based on evidence and is informed by the views of affected people.

7.2 Advocate for positive changes which address both root causes and their effects.

7.3 Support people – including affected people – to learn, connect, mobilise and make their voices heard.

7.4 Mitigate the risks for people involved in or affected by our advocacy.

7.5 Evaluate the effects of our advocacy in consultation with affected people.

COMMITMENT 8:
Open Organisations

We will be transparent about who we are, what we do and our successes and failures.

8.1 Share information on who we are, what we do, how decisions are made, the resources we have, and the positive and negative impacts of our work.

8.2 Share information in a timely and accurate manner and in ways which are accessible to all people.

8.3 Establish and uphold clear procedures in our organisation to respect privacy rights and protect personal data from misuse.

8.4 Provide opportunities for people to question our work and engage in constructive dialogues to reach a shared understanding where possible.

8.5 Ensure our communication and marketing is reflective of our values and protects people's dignity and privacy.

KEY ACTIONS

CLUSTER C
WHAT WE DO INTERNALLY

COMMITMENT 9:
Empowered and Effective Staff and Volunteers

We will invest in staff and volunteers to develop their full potential and achieve our goals.

KEY ACTIONS

9.1 Ensure that staff and volunteers share and act in line with our values and professional standards.

9.2 Put in place recruitment and employment practices that are fair and transparent and value diversity.

9.3 Encourage staff and volunteers to constantly improve their skills and provide them with the resources they need to do this.

9.4 Involve staff and volunteers at all levels of our organisation in our planning and decision-making and encourage leadership.

9.5 Protect the personal safety of people who work with us and create fair and supportive workplaces.

COMMITMENT 10:
Well-handled Resources

We will handle our resources responsibly to reach our goals and serve the public good.

10.1 Acquire resources in ways that align with our values, independence and goals.

10.2 Manage resources responsibly, using them for the causes they were provided for and in ways that maximise impact.

10.3 Comply with professional accounting standards and ensure strict financial controls to reduce the risk of corruption, bribery, misuse of funds, and conflicts of interest.

10.4 Report openly and transparently about who provides our resources and how we manage them.

COMMITMENT 11:
Responsive Decision-making

We will ensure our decisions are responsive to feedback from the people affected by our work, partners, volunteers and staff.

11.1 Invite and analyse feedback and complaints from key stakeholder groups to inform decision-making.

11.2 Ensure decision-making processes at all levels are informed by and responsive to feedback from our stakeholders, especially from people affected by our work.

11.3 Clarify and communicate how people can provide input and feedback into decisionmaking processes.

11.4 Enable frontline staff and volunteers to respond to feedback and make decisions in real time.

11.5 Communicate about the feedback received, how it was used and what changes have been made.

COMMITMENT 12:
Responsible Leadership

We will ensure our management and governing body are accountable.

12.1 Ensure an independent governing body oversees our strategic direction, legal compliance, risk management and performance.

12.2 Hold governing body and management equally accountable for delivering on our strategic goals and fulfilling the Commitments in this standard.

12.3 Nurture a culture of accountability where all staff and volunteers feel a strong sense of accountability for their actions and impacts.

12.4 Support responsible, visionary and innovative leadership at all levels.

12.5 Take internal and external complaints and disputes seriously, creating safe spaces and appropriate mechanisms to address them.

KEY ACTIONS

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

ACCOUNTABILITY: Taking responsibility for actions and impacts; being answerable and honest to all stakeholders – employees, communities, donors – in a transparent and easy to understand way; doing the utmost to achieve mission goals in a fair and just manner; and openly sharing information.

ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN: Publicly promoting an agenda to a wide audience in order to influence or create change.

ALIGNMENT: Adjusting an organisation's accountability practices or standards based on the Global Standard's principles, content and structure, while ensuring that adjustments suit the context and organisational capacity.

CIVIC SPACE: The set of conditions that allow civil society and individuals to organise, participate and communicate freely and without discrimination, and in doing so, influence the political and social structures around them (CIVICUS Monitor, 2016).

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION (CSO): Civic, non-profit and non-state organisations in which people organise themselves to pursue shared interests in the public domain. They cover a wide range of organisations, including community-based, membership-based, advocacy, issue-based and service delivery organisations (Advisory Group on CSOs and Aid Effectiveness, 2008).

CSO ACCOUNTABILITY INITIATIVES: Civil Society Organisations and networks that influence, promote and drive the agenda of CSO accountability on national, regional or global levels. Their activities include the promotion and management of CSO codes of ethics or accountability standards as well as advocacy, research, and capacity development. These are all aimed to improve the accountability practices of CSOs worldwide.

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT: External or operating environment or space which includes government policies, donor funding policies, community attitudes, expectations and norms concerning CSOs.

EQUITY: The quality of being fair, unbiased and ensuring that everyone has access to the resources, opportunities, power and responsibility they need to reach their full, healthy potential (SGBA, Rising to the Challenge, 2009).

EQUALITY: Treating everyone the same, with no individuals or groups of individuals treated differently or less favourably on the basis of their race, gender, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, age or other characteristics (University of Edinburgh, Equality and Diversity, 2016).

FEEDBACK MECHANISM: A formal set of systems and practices established to solicit, discuss and respond to stakeholders' views on the performance and impact of CSOs. This information is then used for different purposes, including taking corrective action to improve the performance (ALNAP/ODI, Closing the Loop, 2014).

HEALTHY PLANET: A well-balanced collection of ecosystems that contribute to healthy communities and societies by providing goods and services (including food, clean air, fresh water, medicines, and livelihoods) essential for human survival for current and future generations, and supporting their ability to absorb and recover from disturbance (WHO, Discussion Paper, 2012).

HEALTHY SOCIETY: A society that enables all of its members collectively and individually to play a role in shaping the future of their communities and to meet the needs of its citizens.

IMPACT: The outcomes and effects (positive and negative) of an initiative, program or action.

JUSTICE: Ensuring that all people have equal rights and access to the economic, social and political benefits in society, without discrimination.

LASTING POSITIVE CHANGE: The process by which an organisation's actions contribute to lasting results that improve the quality of people's lives in the long term.

LEADERSHIP: The top staff of the organisation and its board of directors, who provide the overarching direction and management of the organisation.

PARTNERS: Organisations, individuals and other parties we work jointly with, who have defined roles and responsibilities for achieving common goals.

PARTNERSHIP: An agreement to undertake action that will benefit all involved, bringing results that could not be achieved by a single organisation operating alone, and reducing duplication of efforts. A successful partnership enhances the impact and effectiveness of an action through combined and more efficient use of resources, promotes innovation and is distinguished by a strong commitment from each partner (OECD, Successful Partnerships, 2006).

PEOPLE: The major target group for CSO work – people that directly benefit from the work of the organisation. These can also be referred to as people involved in our work, affected by our work, or the vulnerable and margina-

lised. Depending on what kind of work the organisation does, they are sometimes called beneficiaries or clients.

PEOPLE THAT WORK WITH US: These refer to staff, volunteers, consultants or anyone that does the work of the organisation or represents the organisation in some direct way.

PERSONAL DATA: Any information that directly or indirectly identifies or can be used to identify an individual based on one or more factors specific to his or her physical, physiological, mental, economic, cultural or social identity.

PUBLIC: The group of people that is external to the work of the organisation, and who do not directly benefit from the work of the organisation, but have some interest in the work that the organisation does because it happens in its immediate environment. These people are sometimes known as citizens, residents, society, etc.

REFERENCE STANDARD: A standard that CSOs do not sign up to, or are formally verified against, but that they can refer to in developing their own practice and self-regulation.

RESOURCES: Any kind of financial or in-kind assistance we receive from fundraising activities, funding partners, well-wishers, philanthropists and individuals that we use to achieve our organisation's goals and objectives.

ROOT CAUSES: The underlying causes at the fundamental level for the occurrence and persistence of a problem. Instead of focusing on the effects and symptoms of a problem, we have to recognise and address its root causes in order to contribute to sustainable changes.

STAFF: These are people who are engaged in our work or who work with the organisation. They can be officially employed by, or officially represent and act on behalf of the organisation in its work. These people include regular staff, volunteers, consultants and decision-making bodies.

STAKEHOLDERS: Individuals and groups that can affect or are affected by an organisation's policies and/or actions (Pathways to Accountability, the GAP Framework One World Trust, 2005).

STANDARD: Principles and norms to measure the quality of organisational services and systems.

WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS: Women's and girls' rights are human rights enshrined by the United Nations in 1948. These rights include, but are not limited to, the right to live free from violence, slavery, and discrimination, to be educated, to own property, to vote, and to earn a fair and equal wage.

CONTACT

We are eager to learn and improve our work, and welcome you to send your comments and feedback. For more information and a full list of the organisations that developed the Global Standard, as well as related resources and documents under development, please visit www.csostandard.org.

Website www.csostandard.org
Email: feedback@csostandard.org
Twitter: @CSOStandard

The Global Standard was developed by:
Accountable Now, International
Australian Council for International Development, Australia
Balkan Civil Society Development Network, Balkans
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Quality Assurance Certification Mechanism, Uganda
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