

Annual General Meeting 2017

New Accountability Commitments

In April 2017, the final version of a "Global Standard for CSO Accountability" was agreed by nine [Project Partners including Accountable Now](#) in India (see [Annex I](#)). It is a *reference* standard that invites accountability networks around the world (like Accountable Now) to align their existing standards with this global benchmark for good CSO accountability. The paper below lays out why a full replacement of the current 10 Charter Commitments with the new 12 Global Standard Commitments is advisable. It further offers a draft preamble and closing remarks (see [Annex II](#)) that are specific to the Accountable Now context and Membership.

While the Global Standard for CSO Accountability is the collaborative product of nine accountability networks working together for two years, it has also been influenced by intense consultations with Accountable Now Members on the international, regional and national levels. A Review Committee (see [Annex IV](#)), made up of five Accountable Now Members, that was formed by the Accountable Now Board has thankfully worked with the Accountable Now Secretariat over the past months and provided crucial feedback that also shaped the last drafts of the Standard. The Committee agreed in May this year that the Commitments and Key Actions of the Global Standard should replace in full the Charter Commitments.

What remains and what changes?

- ▶ All current Charter Commitments are reflected in the Global Standard (see [Annex III](#))
- ▶ Compared with the current Charters' focus on organisational healthiness, the new Commitments add: evidence for sustainable impact and stakeholder engagement.
- ▶ The 12 Commitments are evenly clustered around three aspects of an accountable CSO: I. What we want to achieve, II. Our approach to change and III. What we do internally.
- ▶ As such, it provides great clarity and a strong narrative on what CSOs offer - speaking to broader publics and inviting stakeholders to hold us to account.
- ▶ This is further supported by the use of plain language - understood beyond accountability experts.
- ▶ Stakeholder engagement and closing feedback loops have a stronger presence throughout all Commitments.
- ▶ Taken together, the Commitments support an up-to-date understanding of how CSOs can contribute to sustained social and ecological change in today's world.

The constituencies of the nine Project Partners, who developed the Global Standard, differ enormously. But with the Global Standard, they developed a collective frame on what



constitutes the *core* of CSO accountability around the world. Implementation of these Commitments will however happen differently in different contexts. The Reporting and Assessment Framework for Accountable Now is currently under development. In parallel, and with close consultation, the Global Standard will develop [Guidance Notes](#) that include good practice examples from across the world.

The nine Project Partners have all committed to align their standards with the Global Standard over the coming years. Further accountability networks from Afghanistan, Bhutan, Indonesia, Nepal, West Africa and Zimbabwe have already signalled interest to join this alliance. If managed well and filled with life, this can provide a strong voice on global CSO accountability and our sector's contribution to solving the world's challenging problems.

The Accountable Now Board, the Independent Review Panel, many Members who were consulted throughout the process and our Members' Review Committee support the adoption of the 12 Accountability Commitments to replace the current Charter at the upcoming AGM. **Members are asked to read through them carefully and raise any red flags by 1st June 2017 at the latest so that we can clarify this bilaterally or if need be with the Review Committee.** With this, we hope to support a smooth adoption at the AGM.

According to our Articles of Association (14.2 a), any amendments to the Accountability Commitments require the approval of two thirds of the Membership. As of 09 June 2017, Accountable Now consists of 20 Full and 7 Affiliate Members; the latter are not entitled to vote until their first accountability report is approved by the Independent Review Panel. **Thus, adopting the 12 Accountability Commitments requires approval by 14 Full Members.** According to 14.2 b, "the amendment shall be effective from the date of publication of the amended Accountability Commitments on Accountable Now's website." Once adopted, we will no longer call it "The Charter" but our "Accountability Commitments".



Annex I:

12 Accountability Commitments

Preamble

Our promise

By signing up to these 12 Accountability Commitments, we as Members of Accountable Now seek to establish a close link with our stakeholders, continuously improve our performance and enhance our individual and collective contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Who we are

We are independent international civil society organisations (CSOs), working to advance human rights; promote equitable and sustainable development and wellbeing; protect the environment; coordinate humanitarian response and provide other public goods. In this endeavour we seek to complement, rather than replace, other actors working towards the same objectives. We are united in our commitment to accountability, as laid out in the 12 Accountability Commitments below.

Our stakeholders

Our first responsibility is to achieve our stated mission effectively, consistent to our values. In this, we are accountable to our stakeholders - in particular the people (including future generations) whose rights we seek to protect and advance. Depending on the way we work, we are further accountable to our members, supporters, ecosystems, staff, volunteers, donors, partners or regulatory bodies. In balancing the different views of our stakeholders, we will be guided by the following 12 Commitments.

Accountability is dynamic!

Being accountable for us means more than audited accounts and published reports. At the heart of accountability is a constant dialogue with our key stakeholders about what they want, what they offer and how we can work together effectively. Feedback from our key stakeholders will inform decisions at all levels of the organisations to advance sustainable impact. This dynamic understanding of accountability is at the heart of the 12 Accountability Commitments.



The 12 Accountability Commitments

Accountable Now and eight accountability networks from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean worked together for two years to develop the 12 Accountability Commitments below. The Commitments capture a globally shared, dynamic understanding of accountability and are written in plain English to facilitate dialogue with our stakeholders and communication with the wider public. They are organised into three clusters: a) what we aim to achieve, b) our approach to change and c) what we do internally. They form an integrated whole, with each informing the other, and are deliberately aspirational: the focus is not only on what CSOs do now but what we can do in the future. Taken together, they promise a powerful contribution of our organisations to the benefit of people and the environment and an invitation to hold us to account on how well we deliver.

What we want to achieve

- 1. Justice and equality:** We will address injustice, exclusion, inequality, poverty and violence to create healthy societies for all.
- 2. Women's rights and gender equality:** We will promote women's and girls' rights and enhance gender equality.
- 3. Healthy planet:** We will protect the natural environment and enhance its ability to support life for future generations.
- 4. Lasting positive change:** We will deliver long-term positive results.

Our approach to change

- 5. People-driven work:** We will ensure that the people we work with have a key role in driving our work.
- 6. Strong partnerships:** We will work in fair and respectful partnerships to achieve shared goals.
- 7. Advocating for fundamental change:** We will address root causes by advocating for fundamental change.
- 8. Open organisations:** We will be transparent about who we are, what we do and our successes and failures.

What we do internally

- 9. Empowered and effective staff and volunteers:** We will invest in staff and volunteers to develop their full potential and achieve our goals.
- 10. Well-handled resources:** We will handle our resources responsibly to reach our goals and serve the public good.
- 11. Responsive decision-making:** We will ensure our decisions are responsive to feedback from the people affected by our work, partners, volunteers and staff.
- 12. Responsible leadership:** We will ensure our management and governing body are accountable.



What we want to achieve

The first four Commitments spell out the overarching ambitions of civil society organisations. We subscribe to all and contribute in particular to those that are closest to our mission.

Commitment 1	Key Actions
<p><i>Justice and equality</i></p> <p>We will address injustice, exclusion, inequality, poverty and violence to create healthy societies for all.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Listen to people, understand and address the root causes and effects of injustice, violence and inequality.2. Lead by example: be inclusive, respect and promote human rights in our organisation and make sure we do no harm ourselves.3. Support people to know their rights and to hold accountable those responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling them.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	Key Actions
<p><i>Women's rights and gender equality</i></p> <p>We will promote women's and girls' rights and enhance gender equality.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Listen to women and men, girls and boys to understand and address the root causes and effects of discrimination and gender inequality.2. Lead by example: address gender inequality and ensure women's rights are respected in all we do.3. Empower women and girls to live more fulfilled lives.4. Work closely with all parts of society, including men and boys, to drive lasting economic, political and social change towards women's and girls' rights and gender equality.



Commitment 3	Key Actions
<p><i>Healthy planet</i></p> <p>We will protect the natural environment and enhance its ability to support life for future generations.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Listen to people and consult experts to understand the environmental issues faced by people and nature, and how to best address them. 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. Motivate and support people to protect the environment and to promote systemic change for a healthy planet. 4. Collaborate with actors from different sectors to develop innovative and systemic solutions to environmental issues.

Commitment 4	Key Actions
<p><i>Lasting positive change</i></p> <p>We will deliver long-term positive results.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learn from people and partners where we can add most value to what already exists. 2. Support people to have the information, resources and capacity to actively drive the changes we want to see collectively. 3. Evaluate our long-term results in consultation with the people we work with, including unintended negative effects. 4. Collaborate with other actors in ways that build on one another's strengths and ensure accountability for our collective impact. 5. Continuously monitor, evaluate, learn, adapt and innovate with a focus on lasting results.



Our approach to change

Commitment 5	Key Actions
<p>People-driven work</p> <p>We will ensure that the people we work with have a key role in driving our work.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Learn from the people we work with and represent so their issues are our goals.2. Support people in taking active roles to drive the change we collectively want to see.3. Ensure that people's views are well reflected in our decision-making processes at all levels of our organisation.4. Invite and act on people's feedback to improve our performance and collective impact.

Commitment 6	Key Actions
<p><i>Strong partnerships</i></p> <p>We will work in fair and respectful partnerships to achieve shared goals.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Identify organisations that work towards similar goals and build respectful partnerships that play to each other's strengths.2. Ensure that the roles and responsibilities of our organisation and our partners are clear and fair.3. Collaborate with different kinds of organisations to achieve shared goals.4. Share information, resources and knowledge with our partners and take important decisions collectively.



Commitment 7	Key Actions
<p><i>Advocating for fundamental change</i></p> <p>We will address root causes by advocating for fundamental change.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure our advocacy work is based on evidence and is informed by the views of affected people. 2. Advocate for positive changes which address both root causes and their effects. 3. Support people – including affected people – to learn, connect, mobilise and make their voices heard. 4. Mitigate the risks for people involved in or affected by our advocacy. 5. Evaluate the effects of our advocacy in consultation with affected people.

Commitment 8	Key Actions
<p><i>Open organisations</i></p> <p>We will be transparent about who we are, what we do and our successes and failures.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 2. Share information in a timely and accurate manner and in ways which are accessible to all people. 3. Establish and uphold clear procedures in our organisation to respect privacy rights and protect personal data from misuse. 4. Provide opportunities for people to question our work and engage in constructive dialogues to reach a shared understanding where possible. 5. Ensure our communication and marketing is reflective of our values and protects people’s dignity and privacy.



What we do internally

Commitment 9	Key Actions
<p><i>Empowered and effective staff and volunteers</i></p> <p>We will invest in staff and volunteers to develop their full potential and achieve our goals.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure that staff and volunteers share and act in line with our values and professional standards. 2. Put in place recruitment and employment practices that are fair and transparent and value diversity. 3. Encourage staff and volunteers to constantly improve their skills and provide them with the resources they need to do this. 4. Involve staff and volunteers at all levels of our organisation in our planning and decision-making and encourage leadership. 5. Protect the personal safety of people who work with us and create fair and supportive workplaces.

Commitment 10	Key Actions
<p><i>Well-handled resources</i></p> <p>We will handle our resources responsibly to reach our goals and serve the public good.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Acquire resources in ways that align with our values, independence and goals. 2. Manage resources responsibly, using them for the causes they were provided for and in ways that maximise impact. 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. 4. Report openly and transparently about who provides our resources and how we manage them.



Commitment 11	Key Actions
<p><i>Responsive decision-making</i></p> <p>We will ensure our decisions are responsive to feedback from the people affected by our work, partners, volunteers and staff.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invite and analyse feedback and complaints from key stakeholder groups to inform decision-making. 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. 3. Clarify and communicate how people can provide input and feedback into decision-making processes. 4. Enable frontline staff and volunteers to respond to feedback and make decisions in real time. 5. Communicate about the feedback received, how it was used and what changes have been made.

Commitment 12	Key Actions
<p><i>Responsible leadership</i></p> <p>We will ensure our management and governing body are accountable.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure an independent governing body oversees our strategic direction, legal compliance, risk management and performance. 2. Hold governing body and management equally accountable for delivering on our strategic goals and fulfilling the commitments in this standard. 3. Nurture a culture of accountability where all staff and volunteers feel a strong sense of accountability for their actions and impacts. 4. Support responsible, visionary and innovative leadership at all levels. 5. Take internal and external complaints and disputes seriously, creating safe spaces and appropriate mechanisms to address them.



Fulfilling our commitments

A Reporting and Assessment Framework will accompany the 12 Accountability Commitments. The framework will outline what success looks like and how Members of Accountable Now will be held to account.

As Members of Accountable Now, we commit to:

- ▶ Apply the Commitments progressively to all our policies, activities and operations.
- ▶ Report annually on our performance against the Commitments.
- ▶ Submit each report to Accountable Now's Independent Review Panel for assessment.
- ▶ Publish reports with the Panel's feedback on both our own and Accountable Now's websites.



Annex II: Cross-reference between new and old preambles and closing remarks

New Preamble	Old Preamble
<p>Our promise</p> <p>By signing up to these 12 Accountability Commitments, we as Members of Accountable Now seek to establish a close link with our stakeholders, continuously improve our performance and enhance our individual and collective contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals.</p>	<p>As Members of Accountable Now, we commit to strong principles and practices of accountability. These are essential for our legitimacy, the quality of our work and the trust that we depend on. Accountability is more than a retrospective assurance mechanism. It defines what we are to be held accountable for, influences what we want to achieve and how we work. By signing this Charter we seek to promote the accountability that we stand for and commit our ICSSO to respecting its provisions.</p>
<p>Who we are</p> <p>We are independent international civil society organisations (CSOs), working to advance human rights; promote equitable and sustainable development and wellbeing; protect the environment; coordinate humanitarian response and provide other public goods. In this endeavour we seek to complement, rather than replace, other actors working towards the same objectives. We are united in our commitment to accountability, as laid out in the 12 Accountability Commitments below.</p>	<p>Who we are</p> <p>We are independent international civil society organisations (ICSSOs) that work globally to advance human rights, promote equitable and sustainable development and wellbeing, environmental protection, humanitarian response and other public goods. In this endeavour we seek to complement, rather than replace, other actors working towards the same objectives. Our organisations work across a wide range of countries and cultures, with a diverse range of peoples and in varied eco-, social and political systems. We are united in our commitment to accountability as laid out in this Charter.</p>
<p>Our Stakeholders</p> <p>Our first responsibility is to achieve our stated mission effectively, consistent to our values. In this, we are accountable to our stakeholders - in particular the people (including future generations) whose rights we seek to protect and advance. Depending on the way we work, we are further accountable to our members, supporters, ecosystems, staff, volunteers,</p>	<p>Our Stakeholders</p> <p>Our first responsibility is to achieve our stated mission effectively and transparently, consistent to our values. In this we are accountable to our stakeholders. In particular, we are accountable to the peoples (including future generations) whose rights we seek to protect and advance. We are further accountable to ecosystems, our members, supporters, staff and volunteers, donors, partners, regulatory bodies, the general</p>



<p>donors, partners or regulatory bodies. In balancing the different views of our stakeholders, we will be guided by the following 12 Commitments.</p>	<p>public and organisations or people whose policies, programmes or behaviour we wish to influence. In balancing the different views of our stakeholders, we will be guided by the commitments made in this Charter.</p>
<p>Accountability is dynamic! Being accountable for us means more than audited accounts and published reports. At the heart of accountability is a constant dialogue with our key stakeholders about what they want, what they offer and how we can work together effectively. Feedback from our key stakeholders will inform decisions at all levels of the organisations to advance sustainable impact. This dynamic understanding of accountability is at the heart of the 12 Accountability Commitments.</p>	
<p>The 12 Accountability Commitments</p> <p>Accountable Now and eight accountability networks from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean worked together for two years to develop the 12 Accountability Commitments below. The Commitments capture a globally shared, dynamic understanding of accountability and are written in plain English to facilitate dialogue with our stakeholders and communication with the wider public. They are organised into three clusters: a) what we aim to achieve, b) our approach to change and c) what we do internally. They form an integrated whole, with each informing the other, and are deliberately aspirational: the focus is not only on what CSOs do now but what we can do in the future. Taken together, they promise a powerful contribution of our organisations to the benefit of people and the environment and</p>	<p>The Charter's purpose</p> <p>This Charter outlines our common commitment to transparency and accountability as being essential to good governance, whether by governments, businesses or non-profit organisations. Wherever we operate, we seek to ensure that the high standards which we demand of others are also respected in our own organisations. The Charter complements and supplements existing laws. It is a voluntary charter and draws on a range of existing codes, norms, standards and guidelines. Its adoption does not prevent signatories from supporting or using other tools to promote transparency and accountability. The Charter also aims to identify common ground among the many existing CSO accountability frameworks, to strengthen civil society cohesion and the visibility of this sector's contributions. Our following commitments to accountability are at the core of what we regard as good practice in CSO accountability.</p>



<p>an invitation to hold us to account on how well we deliver.</p>	
<p>Fulfilling our commitments</p> <p>A Reporting and Assessment Framework will accompany the 12 Accountability Commitments. The framework will outline what success looks like and how Members of Accountable Now will be held to account.</p> <p>As Members of Accountable Now, we commit to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Apply the Commitments progressively to all our policies, activities and operations. ▶ Report annually on our performance against the Commitments. ▶ Submit each report to Accountable Now's Independent Review Panel for assessment. ▶ Publish reports with the Panel's feedback on both our own and Accountable Now's websites. 	<p>Implementation of our Accountability Commitments</p> <p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Apply the Commitments progressively to all our policies, activities and operations; ▶ Report annually on our performance against the 10 Accountability Commitments; ▶ Submit each report to Accountable Now's Independent Review Panel (IRP) for assessment and publish reports with the IRP's feedback on both our own and Accountable Now's websites; ▶ Enable and encourage staff to draw management's attention to activities that may not comply with the law , our mission or provisions of these Commitments; ▶ Refine the Commitments through experience, taking into account future developments, in particular those that improve accountability and transparency; ▶ Accountable Now will provide more detailed guidelines on minimum standards and good practices to further support the implementation of our accountability commitments.



Annex III: Cross reference between the Global Standard and Charter

Global Standard (12 Accountability Commitments)	Charter (10 Accountability Commitments)
Commitment 1: Justice and Equality	Commitment 1: Respect for Human Rights
Commitment 2: Women’s rights and gender equality	Commitment 7: Diversity / Inclusion
Commitment 3: Healthy planet	Commitment 8: Environmental Responsibility
Commitment 4: Lasting positive change	Commitment 10: Professional Management
Commitment 5: People-driven work	Commitment 6: Participation
Commitment 6: Strong partnerships	Commitment 6: Participation
Commitment 7: Advocating for fundamental change	Commitment 5: Responsible Advocacy
Commitment 8: Open organisations	Commitment 3: Transparency
Commitment 9: Empowered and effective staff and volunteers	Commitment 10: Professional Management
Commitment 10: Well-handled resources	Commitment 10: Professional Management Commitment 2: Independence Commitment 9: Ethical Fundraising
Commitment 11: Responsive decision-making	Commitment 6: Participation
Commitment 12: Responsible leadership	Commitment 10: Professional Management Commitment 4: Good Governance



Annex IV: Members of Review Committee

Accountable Now Members

- ▶ **CARE:** Sarah Ralston, Head of Organizational Development & Accountability
- ▶ **Restless Development:** Alexandra Stewart, Strategic Initiatives Manager
- ▶ **Sightsavers:** Alicia Cummins, Head of PS2 Operations and Planning
- ▶ **SOS Children's Villages:** Manuela Radelsboeck, Organisation Development Advisor
- ▶ **World Vision:** Daniel Stevens, Director for Accountability Operations and Transparency

Accountable Now Board

- ▶ Brendan Gormley, Board Chair