



Accountability in the Times of COVID-19: An Open Conversation (Final Doc)

1. Welcome to the conversation!

This event was coordinated by the Dynamic Accountability Community of Practice, a joint effort by CIVICUS, Keystone Accountability, Restless Development and the Global Standard. If you have any queries regarding the Community, please email btranle@accountablenow.org.

2. Break Out Groups (40 minutes)

- Questions for Discussion (approx 10 mins each)
 - a. **What are the new challenges to CSO accountability during this crisis?**
This could relate to communications, transparency, continuous dialogue, responsiveness, trust, meaningful participation, collecting feedback, and closing the feedback loop, etc
 - b. **What steps can be taken to ensure that we live our values and remain accountable?** What good practices have you seen, and are there any other potential innovations or opportunities you can think of here?
 - c. **What new practices would be important to maintain or develop beyond the crisis period?** What are the new opportunities post-crisis that we can identify to further engage people in meaningful ways? How can we learn from this crisis to elevate our efforts to be inclusive and transparent?

Group 1

Discussion questions:

- A. What are the new challenges to CSO accountability during this crisis?
 - a. Moving events from offline to online
 - b. State of emergency and disruption of enabling environment, so managing expectations about what CSOs can actually do/help with
 - c. Young ppl don't always have money for phones and data to stay connected
 - d. Elderly ppl really struggle with online tools
 - e. International work has always been mainly online, so not much of a challenge there
- B. What steps can be taken to ensure that we live our values and remain accountable?
 - a. Additional training for constituents, to test internet connection and help them get used to the new tech
 - b. Being more transparent, reliable and trustworthy than ever, including to donors. Includes through specialised newsletters and surveys
 - c. Sharing more stories from the field/across our networks, to raise these voices
 - d. Ensuring there's clear policies and practices for collaborative working online
- C. What new practices would be important to maintain or develop beyond the crisis period?
 - a. Continuing to assess civic space and the ability of CSOs to function, in terms of new legislation brought in re Covid



- b. Enhanced digital engagement. More virtual meetings, and meeting more frequently because of this (especially in terms of constituent engagement)
- c. Continuing the new forms of communication with constituents, and continuing the emphasis on nourishing these relationships
- d. Still wanting to return to at least some physical meetings, but utilising online engagement beforehand to make these more efficient and effective. People will then appreciate being face to face more!

Key takeaway(s):

- The period remains really challenging and adapting takes time. But it's enabled us to make the leap towards truly digital approaches that can really boost the sustainability and quality of our engagement

Group 2

Discussion questions:

- A. What are the new challenges to CSO accountability during this crisis?
 - a. **How to interact with beneficiaries who have “bigger fish to fry”/other priorities - ie. complying with lockdowns, caring for the health of loved ones, etc.**
 - b. **How to get feedback from constituencies in places with low internet connectivity/power outages/ICT resources**
 - i. Online discussions are not necessarily accessible
 - c. **People are uninterested in our message at this time**
 - d. **Government making new laws that are affecting our programs and campaigns and we are just trying to keep up**
 - i. Mobilization efforts have stopped due to social distancing requirements
 - e. In Armenia, there was a law change to make organizations give more details about project funding
 - i. Many organizations were against this law
 - ii. When COVID-19 happened, there was major communications issues between CSOs and the government as the government passed the laws without input from CSOs/NGOs
- B. What steps can be taken to ensure that we live our values and remain accountable?
 - a. Need to change our way of communicating
 - b. **Need to practice what we preach when we demand that governments be open about the funding they are receiving and taking for COVID-19 response**
 - i. However, in some countries, NGOs cannot be entirely transparent about their funding due to fears of safety and being deregistered by the government
 - 1. Depends on whom you are transparent with
 - a. Need to choose who you can be transparent with
 - i. Staff, donors, beneficiaries



- c. Set up online meetings one time a week with all staff, all donors, and all beneficiaries to get feedback and share information in order to be accountable to them
 - d. Created a beneficiary survey on impact of COVID-19, collated the information derived from the survey
 - e. Informed people that we were cancelling projects
 - i. **Inform young people on how we are transferring our work online**
 - 1. Told our young beneficiaries that we are available for them for mental health checks or anything they might need at this time
 - f. Sharing outcomes on social media
 - g. **React as quick as possible to show that we are there and that we are worried about the situation too**
 - i. **We are still here to work with them as best we can with the current restrictions**
 - ii. **It is really important to show support right now to our beneficiaries**
 - 1. **We must be reliable and trustworthy in times of crisis**
 - h. Think of new ways to create dialogue and ask for their needs
 - i. Adapt your programs to address these changing needs
- C. What new practices would be important to maintain or develop beyond the crisis period?
- a. There are some practices that we can maintain, but there are practices we need to reinvent as well
 - i. But, we need to have the feedback of the people to know what is aligned with their priorities and where we can help
 - 1. This feedback may inspire new ways for us to be accountable and transparent
 - b. We need to make sure we are learning from this pandemic experience so we know how to cope with a similar experience in the future
 - c. Build capacities on digital platforms
 - d. Time of opportunity, can spend more on content rather than overhead
 - i. Can you make a better tool/approach

Key takeaway(s):

- It is really important to show support right now to our beneficiaries
 - We must be reliable and trustworthy in times of crisis
- Need to practice what we preach when we demand that governments be open about the funding they are receiving and taking for COVID-19 response
 - However, in some countries, NGOs cannot be entirely transparent about their funding due to fears of safety and being deregistered by the government
-

Group 3

Discussion questions:

- D. What are the new challenges to CSO accountability during this crisis?
 - a. The speed of response. There is a need of being more responsive and not so much just reactive.



- b. The challenge of respecting rights is not only for states, but for CSO as well.
- c. The crisis should not give an excuse to the CSOs of not being accountable for our actions.
- d. India information not disseminated transparently. The challenge is to keep the transparency standards as high as possible.
- e. In Cambodia 1350 CSOs. Most get funding from outside. Right now no funds to support programmes and activities especially in the community.
- f. Its pre-existing situation of the cso's not being ready to be self accountable.
- E. What steps can be taken to ensure that we live our values and remain accountable?
 - a. CSOs are adapting to innovative ways of operations and working in delivering its own programmes on the ground.
 - b. The current situation is the new normal. This implies that to relook at international corporations amongst CSOs.
- F. What new practices would be important to maintain or develop beyond the crisis period?
 - a. CSO unity and solidarity is absolutely essential to step into the future and will be the key to success for the whole sector.
 - b. CSOs can no longer exists in silos they have to have be part of international corporations with csos networks.
 - c. Networks of CSOs will retake the lead role in strengthening the role of CSOs in being able to deliver its programmes.

Key takeaway(s):

- Post Covid will be the new normal. CSOs will have to adopt to innovative ways to run its operations and deliver its programmes off course with human rights based approaches. International corporation and solidarity is the key to the CSO sector in general.

Group 4

Discussion questions:

G. What are the new challenges to CSO accountability during this crisis?

- a. Witnessed **accountability being de-prioritised** in light of other direct challenges that need to be addressed first.
- b. The CSO sector (in SA) there has been more of a pivot towards funding and away from accountability/communication/trust, etc. How can we **bridge this communication/feedback divide between different constituent groups** (local communities, CSO, governments, etc.). There is more communication and there are more feedback loops happening at the top level (where things are more professionalised with access to remote communication, etc.) as opposed to those with less access.
- c. In Macedonia, the **government** has cut funding to CSOs and has redirected these funds towards Covid response. As an umbrella organization that provides funding to organisations, there has been a lack of communication with the government. CSOs have responded to the government, requesting funding which has been negatively perceived by the public. Challenging especially as well for youth organisations who want to engage but only have access to social media. High degree of uncertainty and lack of **transparency**



especially for organisations that usually act as a 'watchdog' due to reallocation of funds. Large risk of **corruption** as well.

H. What steps can be taken to ensure that we live our values and remain accountable?

- a. Reprogramming/re-arranging activities and funds to ensure that constituents are receiving the support they require given external challenges that the CSO faces.
- b. Clear and direct communication.
- c. Capacity-building tools
- d. Importance of a strong leadership that understands the value of accountability.
- e. A clear need for collaboration in the CSO sector itself!

I. What new practices would be important to maintain or develop beyond the crisis period?

- a. Capacity-building.
- b. Continual communication and feedback
- c. Collaboration between CSOs
- d. A need to shift the value of accountability to be something that needs to be wholly integrated into an organisation on all levels.

Key takeaway(s):

- Uncertain times, lack of transparency, high risk of corruption, and intensified divide between different levels of constituents - which makes for an operating environment that is even harsher.
- Need for reprogramming activities, further communications and capacity building
- Existence of a common issue does not necessarily mean that people will unite even if faced by similar challenges.
- While it is often considered as less important (of lower priority) than other activities, there is a relationship between various factors: clear communication, transparency, feedback, trust are essential to create an environment that allows for accountability.

Group 5

Discussion questions:

J. What are the new challenges to CSO accountability during this crisis?

- CSOs changing focus and services, doing different work, shifting to humanitarian aid/emergency response
- It is a big challenge for organizations who are not emergency responders to remain relevant without looking un-empathetic
- needs have increased a lot and orgs are spending more money
- CSOs are re-organizing their projects/services, some to support the medical sector. This means finding new meanings to CSOs agendas. Responses need to be fast, so there is not much time to evaluate; it's learning as we go.
- Many organizations, with the best intentions, are working a lot trying to offer some support to others but end up doing the same thing, duplicating (e.g resources for remote work).
- There is a lack of organization in order to know what it's useful to offer and to whom



- We are still understanding what is happening, it's difficult to plan and coordinate efforts while we are still wrapping our minds around what is happening
- It's also about re-prioritizing, but we need more time to think - and communicate about - why we are making decisions a certain way. Decisions are uncomfortable and explaining them is also going to be uncomfortable. We need ground to anchor ourselves onto.
- Working remotely is a challenge for some organizations, in Nigeria for examples access to computers and internet access is very unequal and it's a real problem to continue work
- Funding is also a challenge because they cannot carry on the activities that funding was designed for. Everyone is now working on Covid-19 but at the same time organizations have a hard time keeping open (providing services to their beneficiaries, paying staff)
- difficulties with the ability to transfer funds between banks because of closures, but at the same time orgs cannot work with cash bcs of anti-money laundering regulations

K. What steps can be taken to ensure that we live our values and remain accountable?

- a. Cut down on what we are doing and being okay with that - but being really clear about the process we followed to make that call and communicate why we are making those decisions/ what that means for us moving forward
- b. Responses need to be fast, but we should keep track of the rationales behind decisions because that will help us communicate this rationale in the future
- c. crowdsourcing accountability initiatives; creating a public narrative about how organizations (and institutions) should be kept accountable, so that people expect their money to be spent with accountability
- d. in Argentina CSO are addressing donors to reassign budgets to be able to adapt to the current crisis - They are asking for permission to use the budgets to different activities, uses
- e. Surveying constituents is a fast way to get some feedback. Though not very detailed, it can offer hints for the network about the constituents' main needs and how to orient priorities

L. What new practices would be important to maintain or develop beyond the crisis period? What are the new opportunities post-crisis that we can identify to further engage people in meaningful ways? How can we learn from this crisis to elevate our efforts to be inclusive and transparent?

Key takeaway(s):

- CSOs changing focus and services, many now focused on emergency response. It is a big challenge for organizations who are not emergency responders to remain relevant. It's difficult to plan and coordinate efforts while we are still wrapping our minds BUT we need to be mindful of the rationale for our decisions and be able to communicate that rationale, however uncomfortable.
- Challenges are not the same everywhere. In Nigeria, for instance, access to computers and internet for remote work is a real challenge, as well as access to funds via banks or cash.
- Be clear about the process of decision-making and what changes are occurring and why



- Create an accountability narrative and expectation within the public - so they expect to be able to hold accountable both organizations and institutions who spend donated or public money.

Group 6

Discussion questions:

- M. What are the new challenges to CSO accountability during this crisis?
 - a. Timeliness / Speediness of decisions that are outside our usual / structured day-to-day communication with stakeholders
 - b. Communicating with our stakeholders / members while not being certain about issues ourselves (bridging the balance between honest / proactive self-reflections and providing reassuring guidance)
 - c. Virtual engagement not the same as f2f engagement (in terms of connectivity issues and communication culture)
 - d. Collecting feedback when everyone is already overwhelmed with online work / calls / online forms
 - e. Day-to-day business in parallel to new Covid-19 needs and adjustments
- N. What steps can be taken to ensure that we live our values and remain accountable?
 - a. Cross-sector discussions to share learnings around adaptation and response measures
 - b. [CIVICUS' Social Protocol for staff safety](#) as part of a prioritised process of who we're accountable to first: 1) staff safety; 2) member safety and needs; 3) wider alliance and partners
 - c. Sensitizing the public in Nigeria as part of campaigns by Accountability Lab Nigeria to help people feel safe (e.g. combat fake narratives via e-flyers)
 - d. Moving f2f events towards virtual meetings quickly
 - e. 350.org training to carry out virtual meetings [ppt here](#)
- O. What new practices would be important to maintain or develop beyond the crisis period?
 - a. People seem to be connecting more across time zones, cultures etc. based on this new shared challenge → more spaces to advocate for CSO accountability
 - b. Continuing things that work well now (e.g. more online meetings to reduce carbon footprint, think twice before sending equipment to the fields / print new report etc.) beyond the crisis period
 - c. Being forced to prioritise / focus on core mission and what's truly needed / important, i.e. "Do Less Better" rather than doing (too) many projects and initiatives in parallel
 - d. Continue to focus on inclusiveness and responsiveness
 - e. Use of technology

Key takeaway(s):

- We've talked for years about ways to connect more innovatively with our stakeholders, to reduce our carbon footprint, to be more strategic / focused on our core mission of work - all of the sudden, this seems possible now and hopefully we'll continue these measures post-crisis



3. Join the Dynamic Accountability Community of Practice!

If you enjoyed the conversation and would like to keep in touch, please do!

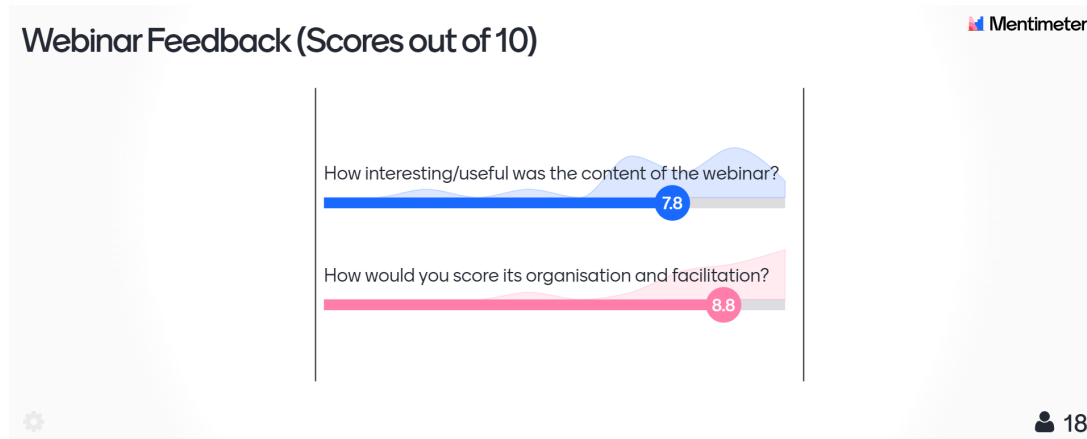
1. [Join our newsletter](#) to receive regular updates from the Dynamic Accountability Community of Practice, and/or:
2. [Join the Google Group](#) for the Dynamic Accountability Community of Practice, where people are sharing experiences, challenges, resources and much more!

We have published a “flog” post that takes a critical look at some of the things that went wrong with the pilot phase of the Community of Practice and have informed how we’re rolling out its current phase. [You can view it here!](#)

We intend to focus the next edition of the Community of Practice blog on the insights generated through this webinar.

4. Webinar Feedback

Webinar Feedback (Scores out of 10)



Please share any particular things that you appreciated or think could be improved

broader outreach with more cso practitioners taking part in in these discussions, do it more often, put it in regional context,

It was great. Thank you

Appreciate your efforts and time organizing this event

The meeting went well. It was participatory and enabled each organisation make suggestions and comments.



Need to have facilitators within the breakout rooms

The breakout sessions

I appreciated the diverse participation

Very good methodology. More people in the break-up groups.

It was well organised and facilitated but a little limited when split into groups. It would have been more interesting to discuss the answers from each group in more depth or split them into themes and get to concrete action-oriented ways forward

There was a lot of interest on the questions! They were great but some more time to discuss it would come in very handy. Coming from different backgrounds it takes time to introduce.

Facilitation and technicality were good.

more time for group discussions :)

Sharing of more actual good practices of CSO accountability during Covid-19 with everyone (links, resources, survey templates, draft mailers...)