

## ACCOUNTABILITY CHARTER

**Mover:** ActionAid International Board

**Motion Type** Ordinary

**Date:** 28<sup>th</sup> May 2013

**To:** AAI Assembly

ActionAid International (AAI) Board presents the following motion for action/decision by ActionAid International Assembly in its upcoming Annual General Meeting in South Africa.

### **I. Brief background of Motion:**

Under organisational priorities 4 and 5 in our Strategy we make a commitment to enhanced accountability as an organisation. The Accountability, learning and planning systems framework (ALPS) which was updated in 2011 was foreseen as a 'interim' framework to be revised once the new Strategy and HRBA was in place. The Accountability Framework is a key component for ALPS to be brought up to date.

The Charter is based on a comprehensive consultation process that included AAI members and country programmes, the International Board, IS staff and external experts. Based on feedback received from the International Board in December, countries were asked to provide their views on different areas presented as the basic building blocks for an accountability framework. Country consultations revealed different understandings of accountability and a common view to ensure accountability is practiced. The proposed Charter has sought to reconcile these differences and provide a common platform for understanding accountability. It was reviewed by the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) and the International Board and is now before the Assembly.

Through the Charter AAI can take a step to reinvigorate commitment to accountability based on the recognition of interdependence of each entity in the federation (for example where one fails on accountability to communities or to a donor it can compromise the effectiveness of other members). The Charter further views accountability to truly support and improve impact. Similarly, the Charter in practice will demonstrate AAI's commitment to accountability to external actors.

The consultation process for the accountability Charter was linked to that of the governance model review. The report from that review makes recommendations that are linked to AAI's accountability practices. The links will be clear when reading the two papers.

### Support for the motion

The Charter attempts to pin down what we mean by accountability in AAI today. It further lists those who we are accountable to and while it recognises that each of these are equally important there may be occasions and contexts where strategic and political analysis will be needed to clarify the relations. The Charter identifies five key principles that underpin accountability in a federation such as ours. The idea of compliance, and appropriate consequences to situations of non-compliance, came through in the consultation process as an important aspect to address if AAI wishes to be regarded as a credible and legitimate organisation holding others to account.

Practice and compliance appear to be seen as the weakest elements around accountability in the federation at the moment. Ensuring compliance implies assigning responsibilities for monitoring of compliance. To make this possible, the principles in the Charter will be supported by a set of

identified policies and practices. An example of this relating to the principle of 'Transparency' is provided in the appendix to the Charter. Responsibility for implementing and monitoring each will be assigned to specific functions in the federation.

In relation to this deepening our relationship to accountability, the Secretariat is in the process of reviewing all AAI policies in an effort to reduce the number and to be clear on what policies apply to the Federation (ie global standards), and what are simply just good practice guidelines. A number of policies are presented to the Assembly at its June meeting as a result of this. Policies represent high standards and we aspire to on-going improvement in our practices for AAI to achieve standards to a high level. The revision of policies will continue also after the Assembly and will find their supportive role in relation to the Charter. The policies and the Charter will be effective means of meeting those external sector standards and initiatives we have signed up to as a federation.

The Charter will inform future revisions to other key documents, such as ALPS for example where we not only need to align and link reviews but also agree on high standards for the processes to ensure consistent high standards of reporting to different stakeholders.

The strengthening of accountability between entities in AAI is critically important at a point where AAI is still growing and resources are precious. This will require a clear and agreed manner of monitoring and of dealing with non-compliance with agreed standards. The AAI Constitution and Regulations are clear about the monitoring of compliance and the possible sanctions. The Charter further reinforces this. The National Board, the Assembly, and the International Board all have a key monitoring function to play and an important issue is how non-compliance should be reported (what triggers a report) and how and who decides on an appropriate sanction.

Beyond compliance and sanctions, however, the Charter asks all entities to commit to and uphold the accountability of the federation as a whole by ensuring that the responsibilities falling on its lot are met to the highest standards. In that sense, the Charter is an aspirational document aiming to bring AAI together firmly as one while recognising the fundamental importance of difference and diversity.

## **II. Recommendation and expression supporting motion:**

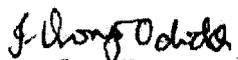
The AAI Board believes:

The proposed new Accountability Charter should:

- strengthen the AAI commitment to being an accountable organisation to external stakeholders
- be supportive of impact and delivery of AAI strategy
- strengthen accountability between AAI entities

## **III. The requested motions (resolves) are as follows:**

AAI Board moves that the Assembly resolves to approve the Accountability Charter as per article 13.2(u) and 13(2)(t) of AAI Constitution.



**Irene Ovonji-Odida**

**On Behalf of AAI Board**

## ActionAid International Accountability Charter

Submitted to AAI Assembly for approval in June 2013

### INTRODUCTION

This Charter affirms our renewed and deepened commitment to organisational accountability. Respecting the commitments made in *People's Action to End Poverty* and reflecting the Human Rights Based Approach at the heart of our mission, this Charter outlines **what** accountability means in the context of ActionAid International, **who** are the groups we are accountable to, and **how** we take forward our accountability commitments – this includes both principles and practice. This Charter, and the commitments outlined here, will be upheld by actions to be measured and reported against a set of standards that will follow from this Charter and will be applied Federation-wide.

The Charter was approved by the ActionAid International Assembly and applies in equal measure to all entities<sup>1</sup> of the Federation. It is expected that all members of the Federation's governing bodies as well as all staff members are aware of the content of this Charter and understand how it relates to and affects their functions and areas of responsibility. By signing on this Charter each entity within ActionAid is responsible for reporting on progress made against standards on an annual basis<sup>2</sup>.

Fulfilling our accountability promises is important to strengthening our legitimacy as an organisation. **Our reputation for being a trustworthy, effective and transparent organisation helps us to strengthen relations and ensure sustainability of our work.** Furthermore, realising our accountability promises makes us stronger advocates and campaigners for change, and positions us as a credible organisation when seeking resources and support to sustain our work and multiply our impact.

We consider accountability as part of a dynamic process to advance change and as part of our theory of change. Many of the mechanisms that support accountability practices such as evaluations, participatory advocacy and planning and transparent governance, also support and enhance processes of change. We also believe that our investment in accountability systems should be proportionate to overall investment in programme work.

ActionAid is already a signatory of a number of standards and initiatives in the Non-Governmental, development and humanitarian sector that seek to establish good practice. The signing of any external charter or standard that implies a higher standard than this Accountability Charter should be reviewed and agreed by the International Board to ensure Federation wide ownership of the commitment. Information about standards and initiatives to which ActionAid is signatory, along with reports for each of these will be found on ActionAid's website.

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<sup>1</sup> Entities here mean Members, Country Programmes and the International Secretariat.

<sup>2</sup> Reporting on advancing accountability will be integrated into the overall reporting mechanism.

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ACCOUNTABILITY?

Our approach to accountability is embedded in our vision and mission as well in our theory of change and in our Strategic Plan. We consider accountability to be an integral part of how change happens – and therefore essential to achieving positive impact. We believe that one crucial element to achieve change is that people living in poverty are able to hold duty bearers to account. We also believe that people living in poverty must be able to hold us, as a Federation, accountable for the work we do, how we do it and for our achievements and failures. As we manage resources on behalf of people living in poverty, which are entrusted to us by donors, sponsors and supporters, we are therefore accountable for the management of those resources. We aspire to the same standards and practices that we demand of others and this is reflected in our behaviour and attitudes as ActionAiders.

As a Federation, we embrace and promote accountability. We are proactively making ourselves available to be held to account and strive to constantly improve accountability in practice. We believe that if people living in poverty can hold us to account then they will be empowered to do so with others – including powerful duty-bearers –and to claim their own rights.

Our Federation is bound together by our shared mission and vision, our strategy and constitution, and the Human Rights Based Approach to our work. We are dependent on each other for delivering the impact we promised and mutually responsible for achievements and failures. The world sees us as one a single entity. Our reputation, legitimacy and credibility, depends on each and every entity in the Federation and on us as individuals. This interdependence carries with it an obligation for affiliates, associates, country programmes and the International Secretariat to be mutually accountable within the Federation. We recognise that our accountability is exercised in a complex organisation and within multiple political contexts requiring strategic analysis and sound judgment on how accountability is to be practised. This analysis and judgment is necessary to responsibly manage the potential tensions between different accountability relations.

For ActionAid, accountability means using our power and reputation responsibly and in ways that strengthens our credibility and legitimacy. It means listening and acting upon the views, and being held to account, by all our stakeholders<sup>3</sup> in particular by people living in poverty.

Accountability translates into

- Proactively and innovatively making ourselves available to be scrutinised, reviewed and questioned by those affected by and supportive of our work;
- Providing the means and information necessary for others to assess whether we live up to our promises and the decisions, how well we use the funding we receive and what impact we have as an organisation;
- Ensuring that our organisational structure and ways of working promote shared responsibility for organisational effectiveness and contribute to learning and improvement.

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<sup>3</sup> Stakeholder is defined as all those entities, groups, individuals who are directly affected by, or involved in, the activities undertaken by ActionAid.

**WHO ARE WE ACCOUNTABLE TO AND WHO CAN HOLD US TO ACCOUNT?**

We practice our accountability in relation to different groups of stakeholders. We consider accountability as a relational and indivisible process: neglecting our accountability to one group will compromise our accountability to all the others. We do not choose to which ones we are accountable as accountability is embedded in our engagement with, and relation to, each stakeholder.

ActionAid is accountable primarily to *women, men, youth and children living in poverty and their communities*. We consider them to be at the centre of everything we do. The other relations and engagements we have stem from this primary accountability as we seek the commitment to our mission by other groups. These groups are:

- The poorest and most excluded people, especially women, children and those who are affected by disasters and conflicts in the countries in which we work,
- Sponsors: in particular child sponsors,
- Supporters, including financial supporters, activists and volunteers,
- Institutional donors,
- Partner organisations, both public and private, with whom we work,
- The state, both in terms of bodies who regulate our operations and in terms of influencing their policies or behaviours,
- Peer organisations in the development and human rights sector,
- Employees - ensuring mutual accountability and holding each other to account for upholding our responsibilities to ourselves, to our strategy, and to the reputation of ActionAid.
- ActionAid entities to the relevant governing bodies of the organisation
- As members of civil society, we are responsible for upholding our commitments towards protecting the environment and are accountable to those bodies who are entrusted to monitor and enforce such responsibility<sup>4</sup>

Reaffirming that, as a Federation, we strive to be accountable to all our stakeholders, we recognise that the means for doing so can differ drastically. Acting in full awareness that some stakeholders are in a more privileged position than others in their ability and power to hold us to account, we commit to honour our contractual accountabilities as well as to monitor and improve mechanisms where formal arrangements are lacking and unequal power exists.

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<sup>4</sup> These bodies can include states, internationally recognised standards such as the INGO Charter of which we are a member and requires annual reporting on environmental impact, etc.

## HOW ARE WE ACCOUNTABLE: PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

As a Federation, we recognise the following five principles as guiding our accountability. These principles are consistent with our values, mission and the Human Rights Based Approach to our work. They are consistent with existing external standards to which we are signatory, they are interdependent and there is no intended hierarchy amongst them.

**Principle I** **Participation and inclusion:** We understand and internalise the rights, interests and viewpoints of those with whom and for whom we work. We commit to ensuring that our decision-making processes, strategic directions and lessons learnt are informed by the views of our primary stakeholders. As all our stakeholders are not equal in power, we commit to addressing power inequalities in our consultation and decision-making mechanisms.

**Principle II** **Evaluation and learning:** We are accountable for our performance in delivering our mission and strategy. We commit to gathering evidence of our impact and to analyse and share how we bring about change. Equally we commit to learn from evaluations and reflection processes, share lessons learnt within ActionAid and with partners, peers and our supporters feed them into future plans, and bring them to the attention of the leadership of the organisation and other relevant stakeholders.

**Principle III** **Transparency:** We commit to making information related to the following areas available to our stakeholders. In doing so, we will use channels that increase access to information and do not discriminate against groups with regards to language or technology.

- what we do and how we do it, including strategic objectives and targets
- partners,
- our impact,
- details of our governance system and management structure,
- our organisational policies,
- location and duration of our main activities,
- decision making processes and mechanisms,
- our funding sources and allocations,
- how we share information,
- results of evaluations and lessons learnt,
- complaint mechanisms.

**Principle IV** **Complaints and resolution:** We strive to readily and rapidly receive stakeholders' views on our work, impact and behaviour. We commit to providing adequate response to the complaints received, including information on actions to redress an unsatisfactory situation. This is a critical aspect of accountability without which those to whom we are accountable would not be able to hold us to account.

**Principle V** **Monitoring our commitments and ensuring compliance:** We commit to monitor compliance on our agreed minimum standards, policies and accountability principles and their implementation in practice. Each entity in the federation is responsible for implementing the accountability standards which follow from this Charter. Governing bodies have the responsibility to monitor compliance and to sanction non-compliance. We will monitor and report on progress as appropriate, and take responsibility as members for upholding them.

## Appendix 1–Example of standards and assigned responsibilities

Below is an **example** of how this charter will be supported by standards in the form of an existing policy or practice. These are to be upheld in practice by each AAI entity. The specific standards are organised around each of the five accountability principles. Please note that table below is only an example and not the complete or definitive list.

<b>Principle 1: Participation and inclusion</b>			
<i>Standard</i>	<i>Accountable for process</i>	<i>Responsible for implementation</i>	<i>Responsible for monitoring</i>
Partnership policy implemented	National/International Board	Programme/Partnership Director	Country Director/Chief Executive
<b>Principle 2: Evaluation and learning</b>			
<i>Standard</i>	<i>Accountable for process</i>	<i>Responsible for implementation</i>	<i>Responsible for monitoring</i>
Peer reviews implemented and shared	National/International Board	Programme Director/OE Director	Country Director/Chief Executive
<b>Principle 3: Transparency</b>			
<i>Standard</i>	<i>Accountable for process</i>	<i>Responsible for implementation</i>	<i>Responsible for monitoring</i>
Open Information Policy adhered to	National Board and International Board	Country Director/Chief Executive	National Board, International Board, CoCo
Submission of INGO report (applicable to IS only)	International Board	CEO	Audit and Risk Committee
<b>Principle 4: Complaints and resolution</b>			
<i>Standard</i>	<i>Accountable for process</i>	<i>Responsible for implementation</i>	<i>Responsible for monitoring</i>
Whistleblowing policy implemented	National/International Board	Country Director/Chief Executive	National Board, International Board
<b>Principle 5: Monitoring our commitments and ensuring compliance</b>			
<i>Standard</i>	<i>Accountable for process</i>	<i>Responsible for implementation</i>	<i>Responsible for monitoring</i>
Global HR standards <sup>5</sup>	National Board and International Board	HR Director/Manager	Country Director/Chief Executive

<sup>5</sup> Proposed to 2013 AAI Assembly for approval.