

ISTANBUL PRINCIPLES FOR CSO DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

5 PRACTICE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Civil Society Organizations are effective as development actors when they demonstrate a sustained organizational commitment to transparency, multiple accountability, and integrity in their internal operations.



OXFAM
Canada



Photo: Abbie Trayler-Smith/Oxfam Malawi; April 2009

Keystone Accountability Survey:

Oxfam Canada - Southern partners evaluate INGO value-added and performance

Oxfam is an international confederation of 17 organizations (Oxfam Canada is one affiliate) working together in more than 90 countries, as part of a global movement for change, to build a future free from the injustice of poverty.

We work directly with communities and we seek to influence the powerful to ensure that poor people can improve their lives and livelihoods and have a say in decisions that affect them.

CHALLENGE

In general, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) often struggle to measure the “impact” of their programs and to capture the value-added that their organizations bring to international development work. In the past, Oxfam Canada had monitored and evaluated both its programs and strategic plan, but not until the Keystone survey had it asked partners in the global south to participate in a formal, more rigorous evaluation to provide feedback on the quality of their relationship with Oxfam Canada.



RESPONSE



In 2011, Oxfam Canada became not only the first Oxfam affiliate but also the first Canadian organization to carry out the Keystone Accountability Survey. This independent and confidential survey, administered to the agency’s southern partners through Keystone Accountability allowed southern partners to provide completely anonymous feedback on the quality of their relationship with Oxfam Canada.

The Keystone Accountability Survey is innovative and unique because, unlike other surveys, it allows NGOs to benchmark their performance against that of their peers. This benchmarking process helps INGOs learn from each other. To date, 28 International NGOS (INGOs) have joined in the survey process, including Save the Children UK, CARE USA, Trocaire, and International Rescue Committee.

As part of Oxfam Canada’s dedication to transparency and true “constituency voice,” Oxfam first reviewed the results with participating partners and since then has made the survey results publicly available.

¹ Constituency Voice and Downward Accountability are often used interchangeably in development discourse. Oxfam prefers “constituency voice” because it removed the “hierarchies” from the concept of accountability.

LESSONS LEARNED & BEST PRACTICES

The Keystone Accountability Survey provided valuable qualitative and quantitative information that Oxfam Canada can use both for internal evaluative purposes and to engage constructively with southern partners. The agency is still analyzing information collected from the survey (while preserving partner confidentiality), but has identified areas of success, as well as a number of areas where Oxfam Canada can strengthen its partnership practice. For example, on the one hand, the survey found respondents were overwhelmingly satisfied with Oxfam Canada's work on women's rights and gender equality. On the other, the partners were not familiar with the agency's complaint mechanisms. In response, Oxfam Canada circulated the policy and other relevant information to its partners.



MAINSTREAMING/KNOWLEDGE SHARING



The process of improvement began rather than ended when Oxfam received the results from the Keystone Survey.

In the spirit of true transparency and accountability, the results have been circulated to all of the participating partners, with many partners participating in facilitated discussions in order to deepen Oxfam's understanding about areas that need improving. Internally, Oxfam Canada has also prioritized a number of areas in which it can improve its performance in the coming years. The benchmarking mechanism has been helpful in this regard, as it helps Oxfam to view areas where the entire INGO cohort can improve (i.e. providing more core funding to partners in the global south) as well as areas where Oxfam was rated both high and low compared to the INGO cohort.

NEXT STEPS

Oxfam Canada is considering either a second Keystone Accountability Survey around 2013 or enabling southern partners to carry out their own survey with beneficiaries and communities in the field. Any follow-up will respect the time and resource constraints of Oxfam Canada's southern partners.



FURTHER INFORMATION

The Keystone survey and Oxfam's commitment to accountability and transparency
<http://www.oxfam.ca/who-we-are/accountability-and-transparency>.