

Advancing Good Governance Seminar

6 June 2013 – 2:45 – 4:00 PM

Mission Critical: Remaining True to Your Vision

This breakout session featured a discussion amongst panelists representing both donors and recipients of aid. The panel focused on the necessity of clarity of mission and the need for constant monitoring to ensure an organization remains true to its ethos and objectives, particularly in an environment facing great change, an increasing number of competing challenges and the complexity of multiple actors (state, private, international and local, and growing South/South relationships). Ultimately, panelists found that both donor and recipient must be very clear on their priorities: what it is they wish to achieve, now and for the future, and most importantly, how they are going to achieve it. The focus must be on the people who the organizations exist to serve.

Key Points from the Session

- 1. Internal pressures can distract from mission as much as external pressures.** It is important not to get distracted and remain focused on the mission. People are driven by passion and it can be difficult for CSOs and NGOs to concentrate on a unified mission. Similarly, donors are often subject to political pressure or cycles of government and fluctuating public support, and operate in a changing world in which there are increased choices to make about the allocation of funding. The more complex the mission, and the bigger the budget, the more difficult it may be to stay true to mission. Equally though, small CSOs can find it hard to resist following the money.
- 2. It is important that aid is collaborative and that it works with or through governments.** Management of public expenditure and fiscal transparency has increased, so why are these systems not utilized more widely within the sector? Government has a significant role to play in development. The panel felt that it was a problematic trend that money is moving away from working with governments. The focus should be on building and supporting systems in country, rather than imposing parallel solutions. For development work to succeed in the long term, it requires effective government, effective legislation and implementation, good governance, a thriving private sector and systems that offer access to justice and rule of law. Concern was expressed about an increase in the number of unpredictable, and frequently less sustainable, aid relationships.
- 3. Measure yourself against mission.** The panel agreed that evaluation is critical and there is now sufficient knowledge within the sector to continue a cycle of learning, but the challenge is to ensure that evaluation does not become a machine in its own right and is instead used to maximize impact. It is critical for an organization to re-visit its mission regularly, considering its substance and implementation in changing times. Impact should now be built into the decision-making processes of donors and program developers from the outset in order to ensure that the true impact of aid is measured upfront. Beware the target culture which emphasizes inputs rather than outcomes. Simple, short-term solutions are easier to measure, and some donors require results, but it is the long-term investment which will effect real change.
- 4. Success factors for remaining true to your vision.** It is important to focus on doing development better and not to focus purely on costs. The panel agreed that the focus must not always be on driving down the cost, but instead on driving up “revenue” so as to ensure an

increased benefit to the beneficiary/client. Accountability is a dual responsibility: yes to donors, i.e., those who support social sector organizations, but primarily to beneficiaries/clients, i.e., those whom we serve. The community itself must want to change and be given responsibility and power to achieve that change for the long term.

Emerging Questions

1. How can an organization put in place better indicators and measures to be able to quickly identify if it is no longer following its mission? How does it always ensure that it is achieving the best outcome for its intended beneficiaries/clients rather than following the money or doing things the same way in what is a changing environment?
2. How and by what method(s) can better feedback mechanisms be achieved in longer funding chains?
3. Is there sufficient appetite and capacity to build in the sustainability of impact at the outset, i.e. objective setting, decision and implementation stage?