

## Advancing Good Governance Seminar

8 June 2012 – 11:15 – 12:30 PM

### How Do You Put Principles of Good Governance Into Action?

This panel focused on how civil society organizations (“CSOs”) can best find common ideals and principles and, by doing so, leverage their combined strength to be better able to focus on their primary clients and not on donor-imposed requirements. Panelists and participants discussed the benefits of cross-organization, non-negotiable principles and efforts to provide and promote structuring frameworks for CSOs, such as the INGO Accountability Charter.

#### Key Points from the Panel

1. **Governance as an organizing principle.** How an organization defines its mission and culture and puts it on paper, and takes the model out to the clients/donors/society at large, is its branded governance structure. By leveraging the structure, the organization can attract new donors and clients and present itself as an entity with non-negotiable principles to which it will adhere, despite potential donor pressure to depart from them. Of course, governance cannot become an end unto itself. Rather, governance must assist an organization in its efforts to align the vision and values of the organization. This will enable CSOs to deal confidently with issues that might compromise their values.
2. **Benefits/risks to banding together.** CSOs should identify their organizational principles (that is, the vision and values of their organizations) in order to band together with like-principled organizations. However, CSOs may have concerns with respect to sharing of information, including admitting problems/flaws, and a feeling of vulnerability and its possible consequences will need to be accounted for in any information-sharing arrangements.
3. **Developing an industry-wide standard.** CSOs need to come together and set up an overarching macro framework which lays a plan for how CSOs should govern themselves industry-wide. Such an organization of CSOs could propound standards, and non-joiner CSOs would have to state why they’re not following them if they choose not to do so. At a minimum, CSOs should come up with a standard set of questions that a CSO should be able to answer.
4. **“Power speaks powerfully.”** CSOs are not rewarded for reporting on the attitudes of their primary clients; rather, donor attitudes dictate what metrics are used in evaluating projects. CSOs need to respond to their various stakeholders, but also need to find a way to counter the current balance of power which favors the donors. The best way to do so might be by uniting in some sort of organization like the INGO Accountability Charter.

#### Emerging Questions

1. What are the ways in which an organization’s governance structure can reflect and align the organization’s vision and values?

2. Should CSOs band together and propound standards and/or a standard set of questions that all CSOs would be answerable to?
  - what would those standards/questions be?
  - what are the sources for those standards/questions?
  - should there be an entity enforcing those standards?
3. How can CSOs counter the demands placed on them by donors so that they can be more focused on the needs of their beneficiaries?