

Advancing Good Governance Seminar

8 June 2012 – 1:30 – 2:45 PM

Do Good Governance and a Results-Driven Approach Mix?

This panel discussed the role of governance in the balancing and preferencing of civil society organizations' (CSOs) various stakeholders, focusing in particular on the need to include users/beneficiary perspectives in project design. Panelists discussed the complications inherent in such models, however, with the increasing emphasis by donors on results-driven projects.

Key Points from the Panel

1. **Donor vs. development time.** Increasingly, CSOs are forced by their donor base to show results/outcomes quickly (that is, to operate in *donor time*). However, projects may take many years to produce viable evidence of effectiveness (*development time*). At present, development time and donor time often work at cross-purposes, thus catching CSOs in an endless cycle of trying to prove long-term impact in short time frames.
2. **Addressing imbalance of power.** The current system of aid maintains a stereotype of beneficiaries/constituents as being uninformed and dependent upon others, positioning CSOs as best placed to speak on their behalf. Instead, beneficiaries/constituents must be actively engaged in the CSOs' decision-making, outcomes and processes; this will address the power imbalance, and will facilitate "bottom-up" monitoring within the organization.

"Success" for a CSO occurs only when the beneficiaries communicate that the CSO's goals have been achieved. For this reason, CSOs should monitor their client populations through microsurveys, allowing them to determine when it is necessary/appropriate to undertake more in-depth monitoring.

3. **Data.** CSOs should tell the "story" of their organization, its mission, and its culture, through qualitative and quantitative data. In doing so, CSOs will encourage the kind of donor involvement that will best serve the organization's goals. CSOs need to identify relevant statistics in addition to gathering evidence from clients showing that their efforts are effective. "Great organizations doing great work will get good evidence about what people think."

A larger issue, however, is ensuring that the clients' voices are heard. Among the ways of doing this that were discussed during the panel include relying on the organization's own board or leadership to make sure the clients' voices are communicated beyond the organization; the use of community-reporting technology, including on-line vehicles; and the use of "social auditing," or relying on the general public to make sure those voices are heard broadly.

Emerging Questions

1. How can CSOs best manage expectations/demands of donors, when they run counter to the work/mission of the organization?

2. What are the concrete steps a CSO can take that directly address the imbalance of power that often lies at the heart of an organization's work? How can CSOs involve beneficiaries, in a non-tokenistic manner, in all of the important decision-making of the organization, so that a culture of ownership over the organization and its mission is created?
3. What are the types of data an organization should seek to gather that will address the needs/requirements of donors and will give voice to the clients/beneficiaries of the organization? Is there an overlap between these kinds of data, or are they opposed/contradictory? What are methods of gathering the kinds of data that will satisfy both requirements?