

Legitimacy, Transparency and Accountability (LTA): From Principles to Practice

Time/Date & Venue: August 23, 2010 11:00-12:30, Palais des congrès

Number of participants and Gender breakdown: 22 (9 male, 13 female)

Facilitators: Kristina Mänd, CIVICUS (South Africa/ Estonia) – kristina@ngo.ee

Consuelo Castro, CEMEFI (Mexico) – consuelo.castro@cemefi.org

Speakers: Harriet Namisi, DENIVA (Uganda); Adele Poskitt, CIVICUS (South Africa); Daniel Barragán, Centro Ecuatoriano de Derecho Ambiental (CEDA) (Ecuador); Analia Bettoni, National Association of NGOs in Uruguay (ANONG)

Rapporteur: Manjunath Sadashiva, CIVICUS

Abstract

We aim to help the CSOs to move from principles to LTA in practice by exploring and talking about examples, experiences and tools available. The format of the workshop is a presentation of questions followed by discussions in groups:

- it is easy to be over-positive for LTA as a universally-valuable goal. How can and should CSO leaders decide when to invest in LTA and when not to invest?
- it is hard to pre-tell when LTA helps and when it doesn't. Which are circumstances in which attention to LTA will be particularly beneficial and which aren't?
- it is tricky to predict which benefits going LTA will have to various CSOs. What are the potential benefits of LTA and what can be possible detriments?
- it is complicated to evaluate the actual benefits of LTA. How do you know if your LTA has been successful and if or when it has actually contributed to the achievements and impact of your work?

Introduction by the Facilitator

While introducing the fish bowl participatory methodology for the workshop, Kristina Mand explained that the objective of the workshop was to sensitise civil society organisations to LTA issues and practices. She listed four main LTA questions/topics for group discussions:

1. How do you decide when to invest /not invest in LTA?
2. When is LTA particularly beneficial and when not?
3. Potential benefits and problems of LTA
4. How do you know if your LTA has been beneficial?

Best practices that were discussed

The workshop did not discuss any specific best practice(s) but induced the participants to discuss the four LTA questions either from a general perspective or in their own particular contexts.

Elements of practices that can be reproduced in different cultural contexts

- LTA is a must for CSOs and therefore not an either/or option. However LTA must not be construed as a water-tight compartment or a unitary concept given that there are varying degrees and levels of LTA
- Adoption of LTA practices amongst CSOs must be driven by "ethos" and a sense of "custodianship" of public funds aided by procedures and systems and supplemented by legitimacy derived from evidence collected from constituencies (beneficiaries) that CSOs purportedly serve
- "Too much information" does not necessarily mean transparency and in some cases too much irrelevant information may act against the very principles of transparency
- It is desirable to have counselling commissions that could assist CSOs on a one-on-one basis to comprehend and adopt LTA practices
- LTA practices must be driven by organisational learning on a continuous basis

Observations/Comments relating to gender and diversity issues

There was near consensus that LTA programmes must desist from adopting a "one size fits all" approach given the culturally and politically diverse contexts in which CSOs are located. It was also observed that in politically hostile and repressive contexts, transparency practices pertaining to providing information in the public domain may lead to state suppression of civil society space and voice through excessive regulation and control.

Highlights of the session

The workshop process was completely participatory, aided by the fish bowl method without the traditional power-point/thematic input sessions. Most of the participants reported having gained new knowledge and a critical understanding of LTA issues.

Conclusions/suggestions for action

The participants were asked to recommend ideas for the CIVICUS LTA programme in its endeavour to motivate CSOs to adopt LTA principles and practices. Some of the key suggestions that emerged were: The LTA tools and methodology must be simple, both in semantics and procedures; CIVICUS must set an example in LTA practices; Create a data base of resources and case studies and examples of best practices, etc.; Influence donors to set aside a percentage of grant funds for LTA practices

Links and resources

CIVICUS LTA Online Resource Centre: <http://www.civicus.org/lta/1244>

Contact person and organisation

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