

PART 3

Let's secure what you have done: preparing for the future



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Dave Brown, Associate Director of the Hauser Centre for Non-profit Organisations, Harvard University:

It's clear that not all CSOs should drop everything and focus on LTA right away. After all, building your bases for legitimacy and systems for accountability can take a lot of energy and thought. But I do think civil society leaders are wise to pay attention to emerging issues that can be used to attack their credibility. Getting clear about missions, strategies and value creation chains is central to creating organisational learning systems that can be used to respond to accountability and legitimacy challenges (as well as to build operational capacity and enhance strategies and tactics). So leaders that invest in dealing with LTA can also help their organisations or their domains (e.g., sectors, campaigns, cross-sector partnerships) become more effective on other fronts as well.

8. ADAPTING TO CHANGE

In the past decade, the civil society and the CSO environment has changed dramatically. In the next few decades that change continues. Legislation is changing, IT is developing fast, education and living standards are increasing in most parts of the world, people are becoming more demanding and they have more time to pay attention to questions related to morale and ethics, and LTA is becoming part of your organisation-wide thinking and reporting; there are so many opportunities opening up for progressive and open-minded CSOs. As competition tightens and the traditional boundaries between CSOs, businesses and public sector are becoming vague, CSOs find themselves on totally new territories with requirements for new skills and attitude. Moreover, the people, our stakeholders and beneficiaries are changing.

Anticipating opportunities and threats

Keep in mind that the more your CSO gains power and recognition, the more accountable and legitimate you must be. Do not take a break from LTA. The main threats you are facing can be the following (please keep in mind that all the examples are random):

- Loss of some funders – for examples, some might not want their names to be published for various reasons: perhaps they are afraid that other CSO come asking for money or perhaps they have not acquired their income quite lawfully.
- Loss of some members – some might not appreciate the transparency and some might fear for their security.
- Loss of supporters and partners – some might feel that they cannot live up to the LTA expectations or perhaps they resist it.
- Higher public scrutiny because you have made yourself vulnerable.

The opportunities, however, are more promising:

- You set your agenda
- You attract honest and open funders
- You attract good people for staff, volunteers, board.

Facing challenges

Here are some examples and if you have a good peer story that you want to share with others, please send it to lta@civicus.org or send us a link:

Challenge	What to do	Examples
How open and public should the finances of a CSO be?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSOs should be self-critical about their use of funding and conduct also internal monitoring • CSOs should agree on their financial information disclosure – how much to whom should be made available • Reporting benchmarks can be a useful tool, both voluntary and legal 	<p>A CSO (name) made all its finances, reports and audits, public on its website.</p> <p>One World Trust accountability assessment</p> <p>Charity Navigator pushes organisations to be open and transparent regarding finances</p>
Some governments do not allow freedom of expression and space for CSOs to engage effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order to be non-partisan and engaged from the position of strength, CSOs should, if possible, work with all sides of the political spectrum. • If possible, try to find an ally, somebody who shares your values for the right reasons. 	How do we participate in policy making and advocate on sensitive issues.
Some governments amend or promulgate laws to regulate the operations of CSOs when they are under pressure to be transparent and accountable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSOs need to learn to establish alliances also outside their own spheres, i.e. academics, media etc. • CSOs need to know more about and be engaged in the judicial system; the same applies to working with media, get them interested and involved 	How has your CSO responded to the threats of restrictive legislation? What responses have you made?
Some governments may challenge CSOs' legitimacy when these are advocating on sensitive issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSOs should deliberately focus on building trust – neutrality and impartiality • CSOs need to consider how they earn and maintain trust • CSOs should make sure that they are legitimate to deal work on the chosen topic with right knowledge and people • Including government representation in CSO strategy meetings 	What methods of reporting and openness have been used to build trust?

Challenge	What to do	Examples
Governments play the game of numbers, i.e. how many members a CSO has, not legitimate etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSO should be clear about the source of its legitimacy as an institution and/ or legitimate to deal with a topic. Numbers are not the main conditions of legitimacy. 	The size doesn't matter, what matters is how effective the CSO is (structure and mission).
CSOs are under threat of being left without funding or closed down if they contradict the political system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Question to ask from AG. 	How have organisations responded to the threats of restrictive legislation?
CSOs are closed and messy, and it is not easy to understand who they report to and what they are doing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good CSOs should have good governance (board, systems) CSOs can assure transparency through reporting, consultations, publications, services delivery CSOs should work on making their accountability to stakeholders more effective CSOs should assure good communications systems CSOs need to report also to their constituencies, not just to the donors and the state. If possible, communicate, what your plans are, what you have achieved, where you have failed, to your partners 	How do you decided on what policies/ agendas you push and work for and how do you ensure and organise the representation.
Some countries have lack of legal control/ laws and law enforcement on CSOs and they can do what they want	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A self regulation minimum standard should be introduced and reviewed by stakeholders International standards can be used as a model, such Accountability Charter 	<p>LTA depends very much on how the NA itself defines it and to what extent it is willing to take the expectations of its stakeholders into consideration.</p> <p>How have CSOs on created and implemented a Code of Ethics?</p> <p>Example from Estonia.</p> <p>Have CSOs worked on environmental reporting and compliance?</p>

9. AVOIDING LTA-LAUNDRY

Your funders and other stakeholders are well aware in various techniques to present and “sell” your CSO and can be suspicious and cynical of “we are so good, we do such good and important things”. Even the best proposals or coolest initiatives will be disregarded or thrown overboard if the promises a CSO makes in achieving goals and having impact while being legitimate, transparent and accountable are false, misleading or exaggerated.

Getting the message across

If you want to communicate your LTA principles and their implementation, how can you do it so that you will become very vulnerable or accused on cheap promotion:

- First of all, make sure that everything you claim your CSO to be is true. Ensure that you and your people, from volunteers to board members are familiar with all features of your organisation, your programmes, services, policy statements, operations etc. And also, you should map and analyse all possible controversies of your LTA statements.
- Second, think which parts of your organisation, your advocacy work, your services, your programmes, your governance, your fund development or your management deserve to be promoted as LTA.
- Third, work with other CSOs and partners who can vouch for your honesty and accountability.
- Fourth, be prepared for criticism and challenges; be ready to prove your statements and perhaps also for some unnecessary curiosity and harassment.
- Fifth, be as open about your LTA challenges as you are about your LTA achievements.

Dave Brown, Associate Director of the Hauser Centre for Non-profit Organisations, Harvard University:

Being “accountable” means willing to own up to mistakes and shortcomings – and CSO that become more accountable inevitably have more opportunities to deal with criticism, some of it merited.

What is not LTA

LTA is on its way to be very mainstream, like greening and CSR. So, everybody thinks that every little step they take and every time they say LTA, they’re actually doing it. Let us take a look at what to be cautious of and what to avoid:

- Don’t make irrelevant claims: a CSO may claim LTA that is no longer relevant. For example, saying that because it has general assembly of members, all its decisions are consulted with members whereas a particular statement or opinion has never reached the members.
- Don’t choose the greater evil instead: a CSO may claim LTA that is true but not much use in the context. For example, telling participants in a training that they do not receive certificates since the CSO wants to save paper but at the same time printing all the materials on the glossy non-recycled paper.
- Don’t make statements that you cannot prove: a CSO announces something without providing any certification or proof to back its statement up. For example, saying that all beneficiaries increased their knowledge and skills due to the CSO’s programme but offering no proof of the actual outcome.

TIP

Often we have created a perception of ourselves and tend to believe it irrespective of what others are saying or the evidence tells us. If you want to avoid that, first you need to be able to doubt your own opinion of your CSO and how it is doing – is it really how it seems to me – and second, talk to others and ask around being open to what they tell you and not choosing only what supports your own perception.

- Don't be vague: a CSO makes an LTA claim that has no particular meaning. For example, promoting its service as "the best quality" or "provided by experts".
- Don't fib: a CSO lies. For example, claiming to be audited because it has a bookkeeper when there actually has never been an independent audit.
- Don't misuse your mission: a CSO claims its LTA because it is working on an important and socially important field. For example, saying that because we work with vulnerable children, our LTA should not be questioned.

How to avoid problems – get your legitimacy proof in order

- Don't choose only the successes of your work and your compliance with LTA. Be honest and say how you will to deal with challenges. Use auditors or your members to verify your steps.
- Don't be partially honest by burying bad news and failures. If you are genuine about your LTA commitment, your stakeholders will understand that everybody may meet obstacles.
- Give the right impressions. It is very important not just to do things right but also make sure they look and appear right. If you don't, you make yourself a prey to various accusations and even if they do not any ground, it takes your time, energy and attention that could be use in much more effective way.
- Be convincing and constant. Address the LTA issues whenever possible and hep your peers, other CSOs by asking about their LTA and offering help. Focus especially on these CSOs who say that LTA is not their problem or job.

10. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES AND COMMUNICATION FOR LTA

** by Kristinne Sanz, Gender and Disaster Network Coordinator*

Finding solutions

Information and communication technologies (ICT) offer good opportunities for CSOs. At the same time, ICTs provide tools to ensure the LTA of CSOs, governments and private sector.

ICTs for CSOs

The Internet and the World Wide Web are perhaps two of the most recognisable products of these technologies and having access to these could benefit CSOs immensely. Within the organisation, ICTs help CSOs improve their internal LTA in cost-effective ways and reach a wider audience.

Do we need a website?

A website is a useful tool to provide information about your organisation, your products and services. It could help 'market' your organisation to raise funds and generate wider support for your campaigns. Having updated and relevant content is important if you intend to keep your audience interested in your website. Linking up with similar organisations also help in promoting your web presence.

Social Media

Other forms of digital communication are emerging in the form of social media. Defined as "tools that allow groups to generate and exchange content and engage in peer-to-peer conversations" (Trompeter, 2010) social media empowers people by making them producers, instead of merely consumers of content. Collaborative projects (Wikipedia, Google reader), blogs and microblogs (Wordpress, Twitter), content communities (Youtube, Flickr) and social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace), are examples. Social media bridge communication and geographic divides by encouraging people to participate and interact. While using modern technology does not ensure instant accountability, it can certainly facilitate openness and dialogue and could be a powerful tool for CSOs in their daily work.

Leading the way

Adopting ICTs for use by the organisation calls for a well-planned communications strategy. Often this requires funds to implement. However there are ways to defray the costs. If you are a small organisation, you can look for volunteers who are willing to help set up your website, for instance or work together with another organisation to see if there is something you can plan, fund and implement together.

One important thing to keep in mind: don't take on some new tools and disregard the old methods simply because they are not 'cool' anymore. Make sure you know who your audience is, what you want to convey and how you want your message delivered.

CASE STUDY

The Southern African NGO Network (SANGONeT) is an NGO working in the field of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for development, specifically supporting the civil society sector. SANGONeT organises a conference every year and in 2009 the focus was on social media tools for CSOs. The conference looked at

- How NGOs are and/ or should be using social media tools (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc) to support their work;
- How to strengthen and complement fundraising strategies using social media tools;
- How social media tools are used on 'Africa's computer' - the mobile phone.

The two main findings of the conference were: CSOs and their beneficiaries are increasingly using various social media tools, especially the younger generation; and IT innovations works if it is set in the wider organisational and communications strategy. Just introducing one tool because it is cool, is not helpful.

Markos Moulitsas, Dailykos.com

It used to be certain elites would have a monopoly on discussing those issues, whether it's politics, culture, music, art, etc. What's happening is technology is allowing people all over the country (and the world) to discuss the things they care about. Once they start talking about those things, a lot of times, they will act on those issues.

ICTs for LTA

Initiatives such as Guidestar, the Philanthropedia Rating System and Charity Navigator are designed to verify the legitimacy, accountability and transparency of not-for-profit organisations in the US for the benefit of donors and the general public.

In a more localised level, ICTs are now seen as a tool for citizen participation in ensuring the accountability and transparency of governments, CSOs and the private sector. And while Internet and the WWW are more known examples of ICTs, national radios, televisions and mobile phones remain important sources of information that should be tapped especially by CSOs working in developing countries

TIP

GSI is combined with TechSoup Global, whose founder, Daniel Ben Horin speaks really well to how CSOs might undertake social media activities. Here is a blog post is a condensed version of a presentation Daniel made at the EFC.

CASE STUDIES

Twaweza, which means ‘we can make it happen’ in Swahili is a project in East Africa which involves a bottom up approach in monitoring service delivery and holding government into account. By using mobile phones, citizens have easy access to information, are able to exercise their voice and monitor service delivery.

The Technology for Transparency Network is a collaborative research mapping to document and evaluate technology projects that promote transparency, accountability, & civic engagement around the world. It aims to come to a better understanding of the most effective tactics and tools employed by technology for transparency projects to improve governance and engage citizen participation.

11. EXPLORING AND LEARNING WHAT IS HAPPENING AROUND THE WORLD

CIVICUS programme (LTA)

The CIVICUS LTA programme, in response to a strong call from its constituents to help them improve their LTA structures, is trying to sensitise CSOs to LTA issues and enable them to gain access to resources to address them. The actual achievements of the LTA programme include: new ideas of using LTA tools, publications of toolkits and LTA process-document, policy influences in some countries led by partners, reflective practices by the Communities of Practices (see below), new conversations around LTA and new connections between practitioners, maintaining the website with appropriate resources of tools, and keeping the communication, networking and information sharing on LTA going on. It builds on past CIVICUS commitments to promote ethical practice and agreed codes of conduct for CSOs, including functional and effective CSO boards and other formal oversight and accountability mechanisms.

National initiatives

CSOs have increasingly been collaborating to define common standards of practices and identify to whom and for what they are accountable. A large number of self-regulation initiatives have been implemented in different countries in the last two decades. They include codes of ethics and conduct, certification schemes, self-assessment tools and information services. The aim of these initiatives is to provide a signal of quality and credibility towards other stakeholders by encouraging organisations to commit to principles and/or standards such as transparency, governance, financial management and beneficiary participation.

In June 2009, the One World Trust launched an online database that provides the first detailed stock-taking of the content and compliance mechanisms of more than 340 civil society self-regulation initiatives worldwide. It was preceded by a study on self-regulatory mechanisms conducted by the European Centre of Not-for-profit Law (ECNL).

One World trust has issued have two new papers out on self-regulation in the global south and the different types of compliance systems that are used in CSO self-regulation:

- 1) Ensuring Credibility and Effectiveness
- 2) Responding the development effectiveness in the global South

Some say that LTA is a Western thing.

Dave Brown, Associate Director of the Hauser Centre for Non-profit Organisations, Harvard University:

As we worked on identifying challenges and learning about experiences in different countries it became clear to us that the issues are more than “another Western thing,” in part because CSOs, associations and networks were being challenged in so many diverse contexts. The substance of the challenges often varied across nations and political systems – but questions are being raised in Russia, Egypt, Ethiopia, China, Brazil, Nepal, the UK and the US – to name just a few. I think we can expect questions wherever CSOs become credible challengers to powerful actors, whether government, business, or social sector organisations.

International happening

LTA is not a separate isolated national issue. A lot is happening globally:

- The European Foundation Centre (EFC) Principles of Good Practice: compliance, governance, informed policies et al, stewardship, disclosure and communication, monitoring and evaluation, cooperation
- Accountability Charter of International Advocacy NGOs, reports on compliance with the principles of the Charter: respect for universal principles, independence, responsible advocacy, effective programmes, non-discrimination, transparency, good governance, ethical fundraising, professional management
- Development Effectiveness “Responding to NGO Development Effectiveness Initiatives”
- Ibero-American Working Group on CSO Accountability by Instituto de Comunicacion y Desarrollo

Development effectiveness

Development effectiveness is becoming an increasingly hot topic in international discourse in the run-up to the last High Level Forum in Seoul in 2011. Development effectiveness is about improving the impact of all development actors' actions on the lives of the impoverished, disadvantaged and marginalised, and one of the key elements of this is increasing CSO effectiveness through improved accountability.

The Open Forum is an initiative led by an international group of 25 civil society organisations, and is coordinating a global process of consultations involving civil society organisations around the world. The aim of these consultations is to offer a platform for civil society organisations to discuss and agree on their own principles of development effectiveness, and on minimum standards for the enabling environment in which to do their work. Legitimacy, transparency and accountability are central issues to this debate.

GRI Reporting

The launch of the GRI NGO Reporting framework is one of the more recent developments in CSO accountability. GRI is a comprehensive reporting framework that sets out the principles and indicators that organisations can use to measure and report their economic, environmental and social performance. It is a framework that was originally designed for the private sector, and has been adapted for the public and CSO sector. The launching of the NGO Sector Supplement by the GRI organisation, developed with and specifically for the CSO community, provides a practical method for CSOs to demonstrate their legitimacy, accountability and transparency.

Other sectors

Do not limit your search and learning only to CSOs; study LTA standards of other organisations and sectors as well, for example, the codes of ethics for journalists or the explanation of conflicts of interest of political parties may help.

CASE STUDY

The emergence of the new philanthropists such as Gates that want a social return on their investment has led to the requirement of LTA practices. In UK, the Department for International Development (Dfid) is setting up an Aid Watchdog in the UK to monitor the effectiveness of aid money. The new government has committed to maintaining current levels of aid (one of only two government departments ring-fenced from budget cuts) but is putting serious emphasis on results. It's the only way they can justify it to the UK tax payers. Similar dynamics are at play on other countries.

Many businesses have included the triple-bottom line factors in their planning, performance and reporting – i.e. in addition to the financial capital involved in business, they also take the human capital (the well-being of employees, the local community and other individuals the business might affect) and the natural capital (environmental resources) the business uses to achieve its business goals into account. Governments are facing the need to practice good governance, i.e. an open and transparent decision-making process which is used by the elected leadership to direct resources and practice power, taking into account the shared values and doing it efficiently and accountably. You can learn from both:

- CSR-Europe: support member companies in integrating CSR into the way they do business, every day (economic, environmental, social).
- EU White paper on good governance (2001): transparency, involvement, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness, coherence. These principles are now part of the EU treaties.

12. Spotting new opportunities

Being LTA begins with an individual CSO, its behaviour, attitude and deeds; passes through members, partners and other stakeholders, their culture, impact and production chain; functions in the framework outlined by the public sector, depending on the principles, opportunities and obstacles of this framework; continues with building necessary LTA tools and methods into organisation's performance, actions and reporting; and the cycle begins again. By looking constantly at opportunities that your CSO has, either coming from internal strengths or external options and threats, you will master your LTA and are able to build LTA into your organisation.

The LTA challenges the CSOs are facing have opened up great opportunities for those who are proactive and ready for change. Those who have learnt and implemented them early are focusing on their daily work instead of dealing with accusations or threats on their LTA. CSOs that have built LTA into all their methods and operations and communicated or reported their LTA, are, in general, more respected, more funded and more able to work. The challenge for CSOs is mostly in their motivation and attitude towards LTA.

Leading your field – what can you do?

If you are smart, you are continually looking for excellent opportunities. Based on these guidelines, you can do the following:

- Be positive – LTA is foremost a question of attitude and motivation. Be enthusiastic about the LTA of your organisation, be bold and be brave.
- New thinking – your organisation is a living organism. Focus on constant improvement and learning process, think cyclically, and ask your stakeholders about the present

TIP

Take your time and make sure that you and your people allow the new ideas and attitudes to sink in. Talk, have meetings, explain, listen and learn – encourage you folks to be positive and willing about LTA and consider those principles and their implementation through their current modus operandi and future possibilities. Learn from other CSOs and share your good stories.

and future of your CSO.

- New tools – study the resource centre for LTA tools (LINK) and find appropriate ones for your organisation. Do not forget to give us feedback on what works and what doesn't.
- Use IT – social media and modern IT provide awesome possibilities to be transparent, open, communicative, receptive and engaging. Be courageous and learn.
- LTA champions – as our social impact grows, finances go bigger and participation in public policy increases, CSOs need their people to be in the LTA-roles such as monitoring the LTA of a CSO, organise a staff meeting about the LTA, keep the board's attention on the LTA, revise the reporting of the CSO etc. Those with knowledge of LTA, skills to implement those principles and attitude to do that are in high demand. Think if you have such a person in your team or among your board and use them.
- Communicate – nobody knows what you are doing or are planning to do unless you talk about that. Make sure your staff and stakeholders are involved and be ready for criticism. It only makes you stronger and shows your willingness to be a successful and intelligent organisation.
- Join a Communities of Practice and attend CIVICUS' LTA webinars – when you need help in being more LTA, ask your peers, look what the groups of CSOs are talking about and ask for guidance.

This is the beginning of your LTA!

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For more information and resources on legitimacy, transparency and
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