



**ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CIVIL SOCIETY
BY CIVIL SOCIETY:**

A Guide to Self-Regulation Initiatives



CIVICUS

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ABOUT CIVICUS

OUR VISION

A worldwide community of informed, inspired, committed citizens engaged in confronting the challenges facing humanity.

We are CIVICUS, the only global alliance dedicated to enhancing the rights, freedoms, health and vitality of civil society as a whole. We've worked for two decades to strengthen civic action and civil society throughout the world. We believe a healthy society is one where people have multiple opportunities to participate, come together, deliberate and act for the common good. The world is rich in voluntary bodies, charities, campaigning organisations, rights-based social movements, protest and other citizen groups. Collectively, we call this civil society. Uniquely, our purpose is to strengthen civil society as a whole. We work for civil society, protecting and growing the civic space where people can express and organise themselves. We speak up for civil society when it is threatened, and work to win it more recognition and influence. We work with civil society to enable it to be more effective.

We are a membership network underpinned by a set of core values. Our alliance encompasses a geographically and thematically diverse and growing membership in over 100 countries. We complement this with a wide range of partnerships

OUR MISSION

To strengthen citizen action and civil society throughout the world.

with global, regional, national and local civil society organisations (CSOs) and other parts of civil society, and with governments, donors and other institutions. We research, analyse and convene to generate and share knowledge and to take action to strengthen civil society.

To achieve impact we communicate, campaign and advocate. We're a network, so we always work in partnership with our constituents. The fact that CIVICUS is a network also defines the character of our leadership. We need to have the legitimacy and authority to speak for civil society when the occasion demands it. But far more often, CSOs and citizens speak for themselves. Our leadership role is to steward the space and ideas around civil society, and we see CIVICUS as our collective expression for the common good. We recognise that to act in effective and sustainable ways, citizens must enjoy the rights of free association, assembly and expression, and must also be able to engage the different power-holders within society in a way that enables and respects people's voices.



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FOREWORD



I am pleased to present the latest contribution from CIVICUS to the world of legitimacy, accountability and transparency. In today's world, it is increasingly important for civil society to assert our credibility and demonstrate our accountability, to donors, constituents, the private and public sectors, and the broader public sphere.

The CIVICUS Legitimacy, Transparency and Accountability (LTA) programme was launched in 2006-7 in response to key findings of the first global phase of the Civil Society Index studies. These studies highlighted issues of LTA as one of the main concerns for civil society organisations (CSOs), and we at CIVICUS wanted to produce resources that would provide practical support for CSOs grappling with these issues. This Guide aims to encourage further self-regulation amongst our network and members, especially amongst civil society umbrella bodies.

In my experience, civil society organisations across the world are being asked to be more and more transparent and demonstrate their accountability. The pressures come from multiple angles, from greater scrutiny over how public money is spent to more sophisticated impact analysis and to increasing demands to demonstrate 'value for money'. These pressures have resulted in civil society often having to do more with less, while also coping with intensive donor-led monitoring processes. Self-regulation initiatives can help combat some of this "obsessive monitoring disorder" and give CSOs the space to demonstrate their competence in self-management and accountability to various stakeholders, including donors.

I urge those interested in LTA issues to explore some of the other research and information that CIVICUS produces. For example, the **Enabling Environment Index** on Enabling Environment Index that was published in 2013 attempts to measure and compare the operating environment for civil society in over 100 countries. Our regular **Civil Society Watch** bulletins also provide updates on the threats to civil society that are unfortunately all too common in many parts of the world. Finally, the **INGO Accountability Charter** empowers CSOs to report in a meaningful manner on their activities, funding, governance and other

aspects of operations such as gender balance and environmental impact. This self-regulation initiative is used both by CIVICUS and some of our members.

Ensuring that civil society organisations are seen as legitimate and credible actors in the public sphere is crucial for civil society itself, but also to allow civil society to play its central role in supporting healthy democracies. CIVICUS hopes this guide to self-regulation initiatives helps support civil society in coping with current reporting, monitoring and funding pressures, and demonstrates successful civil society self-regulation.

Finally, if you or your organisation are not already members of CIVICUS, I urge you to join us. Our alliance, that includes members in 126 countries at the time of writing, is dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society all over the world. Visit www.civicus.org/join for more information on how to get involved.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dr. Danny Sriskandarajah".

Dr Danny Sriskandarajah
CIVICUS Secretary-General

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INTRODUCTION

For more than three decades now, the number of civil society organisations (non-governmental organisations, local community-based organisations, trade unions, community foundations, civil society platforms, umbrellas and network bodies) has been increasing dramatically all around the world and at different levels (global, national and local). As their numbers have soared, their roles, responsibilities and activities have continued to increase and their position within their community, society or sector has continued to evolve. The work of civil society spans a wide range of issues in societies; from service delivery to supplement the work of government agencies, to advocacy and raising awareness about human rights violations, environmental or trade concerns; to development and aid programmes and emergency responses to natural and human induced disasters. Recently civil society organisations (CSOs) have been acknowledged by the international community as development actors in their own right¹.

While their roles and functions have been evolving, CSOs have also come under increased scrutiny from governments, the private sector, media, the general public and civil society itself. As CSOs often assert that they speak on behalf of minority voices, regularly demand greater accountability from other sectors and manage increasing volumes of public funds, CSOs are being asked to improve their practices internally, among themselves and in their relations with other stakeholders. There have been repeated calls for higher professional standards within the civil society sector, greater information disclosure, increased financial transparency and greater cooperation between CSOs themselves. In recent years, following financial crises, declining donors' resources and new restrictions on civil society space², the focus on value for money pushes CSOs even more to demonstrate their good use of tax payers' money while managing to be more effective, closer to their constituencies and beneficiaries, and constantly prove their relevance.

In reaction, CSOs have also been working for decades on developing their own initiatives to address these demands, as they understood the importance of finding effective ways of regulating themselves and balancing their rights with their responsibilities. As a result, the three part concept of legitimacy, transparency and accountability emerged. The **legitimacy** of a civil society organisation can be defined as the perception by other stakeholders of a CSO's actions as being "justifiable and appropriate."³ Legitimacy needs to be distinguished from 'representativeness,' as an organisation can be deemed legitimate enough to speak about an issue without necessarily being elected or appointed as a representative. **Transparency** refers to the level of openness and the disclosure and dissemination of information concerning a CSO's values, processes and procedures.⁴ **Accountability** means the CSO's willingness and its ability to answer and take responsibility for its actions, activities and messages. It also indicates the justification for each of the CSO's activities and communications to all stakeholders. Four levels of CSO accountability have been defined, each one based on the different stakeholders to whom a CSO must be accountable: upward to donors and regulators, downward to beneficiaries, outward to peers, members and partners and inward accountability to staff, board and volunteers⁵.

¹Para 20, the Accra Agenda for Action, OECD, 2008. The full text is available at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/34428351.pdf>

²Restrictions on civil society space have been increasing in the last decade, particularly regarding the access to foreign funding. This has been documented by CIVICUS in various reports including CIVICUS, State of Civil Society Report 2013: Creating an Enabling Environment, 2013, 300 p. and CIVICUS, The 2013 Enabling Environment Index report, 2013, 32 p.

³David L. Brown, Jagadananda, "Civil Society Legitimacy and Accountability: Issues and Challenges", Scoping Paper, Hauser Center and CIVICUS, 2007, 43 p.

⁴Kumi Naidoo, "The End of Blind Faith? Civil Society and the Challenge of Accountability, Legitimacy and Transparency", Accountability Forum 2, 2004, p.14-25; CIVICUS, Turning Principles into Practice – A guide to Legitimacy, Transparency and Accountability, 2010, 44 p.

ACCOUNTABILITY AS AN ON-GOING LEARNING PROCESS



Accountability should be seen as a long term and on-going learning process through which CSOs not only seek to improve their stakeholders' trust but also as a way for CSOs to achieve their overarching goals and mission. Be it the struggle against poverty or authoritarian regimes, social change or environmental questions, all CSOs should embark on this process in order to improve their working practices and thereby increase their impact.

WHAT ARE SELF-REGULATION INITIATIVES?

The three concepts of legitimacy, transparency and accountability (LTA) are very much intertwined. A CSO's legitimacy requires accountability in its processes and decisions and transparency in its actions and promises. There are many ways CSOs can act on this concept, for example by electing a board to guide its missions and review its performance, adopting a core vision, values and missions, or by publishing annual reports⁶. At the sectoral level, these efforts towards greater legitimacy, transparency and accountability have led to the creation and development of **self-regulation initiatives**.

As defined by One World Trust⁷, a self-regulation initiative is a scheme promoting a set of values developed by civil society for civil society⁸. A self-regulation initiative can be developed by one organisation but more often it will be done by a network of CSOs in order to create joint standards. Self-regulation initiatives are intended to influence the governance, behaviours and practices of participating organisations and are to be applied consistently⁹. Most initiatives are voluntary in nature, but they can sometimes be linked to a government's regulation or tax benefit scheme. Self-regulation initiatives may also be devised for all of civil society, a network of CSOs, a specific sub-sector, or be restricted to the participation of a selected group (usually members of a national platform). In that regard, self-regulation can be seen as an exercise of self-definition for the civil society sector as CSOs are developing their own standards rather than having them imposed by governments or donors.

One World Trust has established a database of self-regulation initiatives between 2009 and 2012 and found more than 300 schemes worldwide. This guide will follow the classification used in this database¹⁰; five different modalities of self-regulation are defined:

- **Working groups** refer to a collective of CSOs which organise themselves to discuss their own transparency and accountability, share best practices and direct new initiatives.
- **Information services** are initiatives which require the participating organisations to publish a specific set of required data that is relevant to accountability and transparency. It may also serve as a directory of CSOs.
- **Awards**, which are given in recognition of achievement in transparency and accountability practices through a competitive process. They often aim at rewarding excellence, innovation or good practice.
- **Codes of conduct or ethics** are a set of standards which is defined and agreed on by a group of CSOs as a guide to their behaviour and practices. A code usually attempts to regulate various aspects of CSOs' operations including governance, accountability, fundraising, etc.
- **Certification or accreditation schemes**, which will evaluate an organisation's governance, programmes and practices against a set of standards and norms defined and established by a group of organisations. After proving adherence to these standards the organisation receives a seal of certification or accreditation.

For all five categories, the question of **compliance** with the principles and standards of participating organisations is crucial. In the case of awards, information services and certification schemes, compliance with standards will be initially appraised prior to the organisation joining the scheme. Such an assessment will be done either by the applicant itself (*self-assessment*), by another member of the scheme (*peer-assessment*) or by a *third party*. Compliance can also be assessed subsequently; when signing a code of conduct, getting a seal of certification or being accepted as part of an information service. In those cases, the compliance mechanisms can include a *complaints mechanism* and several requirements such as the submission of annual reports. Lastly, compliance mechanisms can be linked to **sanctions mechanisms**, which can range from recommendations or financial penalties to the expulsion of the organisation.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Shana Warren, Robert Lloyd, "Civil Society Self-Regulation, The Global Picture," Briefing Paper 119, One World Trust, 2009, p. 2-17

⁸ There are some examples of self-regulation initiatives which haven't been developed by civil society though, and this is mostly the case for awards, often established by other stakeholders such as media.

⁹ Kernagan Webb, "Chapter 1: Understanding the Voluntary Codes Phenomenon", Voluntary Codes: Private Governance, the Public Interest and Innovation, 2004, p. 3-32

¹⁰ The One World Trust classification of civil society self-regulatory initiatives can be accessed at: http://www.oneworldtrust.org/csoproject/cso/general/how_initiatives_are_assessed

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR A SELF-REGULATION INITIATIVE

CIVICUS is the secretariat of the Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA), a network of national organisations and umbrella bodies which, among other activities, advises CIVICUS on its Legitimacy, Transparency and Accountability programme. On self-regulation initiatives specifically, AGNA members have developed ten key principles to guide the development of a strong, credible and sustainable self-regulation scheme:

1. Establishing the self-regulation initiative must be a civil society-led process.
2. Motivation and commitment of members are crucial.
3. All stakeholders must be involved in the process from the beginning.
4. A flexible self-regulation initiative will attract a diverse group of organisations, irrespective of size, focus and type.
5. Diversified resources are a prerequisite for the sustainability of a self-regulation initiative.
6. Using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can increase participation of stakeholders.
7. Working in networks facilitates and encourages the implementation of self-regulation mechanisms, mutual learning and problem solving.
8. Members must seek to provide high quality and accurate information during reporting to benefit from learning and recommendations.
9. A compliance system is needed for monitoring and enforcement of a self-regulation initiative.
10. A peer review mechanism can provide credible information about the implementation of the framework.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE TO SELF-REGULATION INITIATIVES

This guide is intended to further reflection on CSOs' accountability and self-regulation initiatives. As demonstrated in previous CIVICUS research¹¹, questions of accountability and transparency remain high on the list of concerns in the civil society sector. This guide will therefore seek to analyse whether self-regulation initiatives are one of the solutions to these concerns, expose the underlying challenges these initiatives are facing and present key innovations or recommendations for improvement. It can assist both individual CSOs and umbrella organisations who are considering joining an existing self-regulation initiative or developing a new one in their sector, country or network.

The guide is designed to serve as a reference on self-regulation initiatives and also as a compendium of best practices to strengthen either a developing or an existing initiative. Rather than reading the entire guide all at once, we recommend consulting relevant sections and subsections according to specific concerns related to a single or umbrella organisation's context. To make this guide more accessible, several tables of contents,

¹¹V. Finn Heinrich, Lorenzo Fioramonti, Global Survey of the State of Civil Society – Vol.2 – Comparative perspectives, CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, 2008, 406 p.

tables and tip-boxes are included to help the readers choose which sections they should consult to access key important ideas, information or advice of importance to them. This way, organisations or networks can use the information in this guide at their own pace to learn about and improve their self-regulation and accountability.

STRUCTURE OF THIS GUIDE

Part 1 seeks to help in choosing a self-regulation initiative that best fits particular contexts and needs when considering creating or joining such an initiative. Within part 1, two sections will guide you through different steps for that purpose.

- Use **Section 1** to assess the internal and external context of a self-regulation initiative. This section provides key questions, activities, case studies and resources to help reflection on the strengths, opportunities, constraints and deterrents for each particular context and how this is going to affect the development and running of a self-regulation initiative. At the end of this section, the table 1 “What modalities of self-regulation initiatives would work best for a certain context?” lists different types of self-regulation which may work best to address the question of the different stakeholders’ level of trust in the civil society sector.
- Use **Section 2** to learn more about the difference between principles and standards, and about the five modalities of self-regulation initiatives. This section first gives examples of both principles and standards of CSOs’ self-regulation. It then presents each of the five modalities of self-regulation initiatives, explaining in more detail how they work and highlighting, through case studies, best practices and lessons learnt. Two tables seek to summarise both the resources needed to set up and maintain each type of self-regulation and the possible impact they may have. International initiatives are also presented at the end of this section.

Part 2 presents many different recommendations, best practices and innovations gathered through CIVICUS’ research on transparency and accountability¹². We recommend adapting or using them to improve practices within a self-regulation initiative, foster greater accountability and increase its overall sustainability.

- Use the section on **Innovative practices** to learn about ways to re-assess the context of a self-regulation initiative, review and adapt its standards, incorporate volunteers, use ICTs, work on standardising information, further finance practices and make use of self-assessment tools.
- Use the section on **Accountability** for advice on improving a self-regulation initiative’s transparency through disclosure of information, managing expectations among its members, incorporating a monitoring and evaluation system to measure its impact and taking beneficiaries into account.
- Use the section on **Sustainability** for information on the importance of improving an initiative’s membership, fundraising for its financial sustainability, using outreach to engage with external stakeholders, having a promotion and communications strategy for all stakeholders and developing capacity-building activities.

¹²Since 2006 CIVICUS has been conducting research on those concepts and organising capacity-building workshops, webinars and trainings through its programme on Legitimacy, Transparency and Accountability. Consult CIVICUS’ website for more information at www.ita.civicus.org.

While reading this guide, keep these **key recommendations** in mind. These insights apply to all aspects of self-regulation regardless of changes in context or differing modalities.

- **“No one size fits all”**: the diversity of civil society organisations and the contexts they evolved in makes it almost impossible to create a single standard, structure or scheme which will speak to this diversity. Evidence shows that political contexts and the question of an enabling environment for civil society play a critical role in the options available for civil society’s accountability¹³.
- **Gradual implementation**: for both a single organisation seeking to improve its accountability practices and for a group of organisations willing to start a new self-regulation initiative, implementing self-regulation gradually will make the process towards more accountability less burdensome and more appealing.
- **Complementarity**: the options and innovations listed and explained in this guide should be understood as opportunities which can complement each other.
- **Adaptability**: for a self-regulation initiative to be successful, it needs to involve multiple stakeholders and be carefully adapted to its specific context. Each organisation therefore needs to analyse its context, its own structure, weaknesses and strengths, and then choose the most appropriate format for itself. The modalities described in this guide are not fixed structures but can be tuned to each specific case.

¹³Ibid.

PART 1:

JOINING OR ESTABLISHING A SELF-REGULATION INITIATIVE

SECTION 1 KNOW THE CONTEXT

Before joining or establishing a self-regulation initiative it is necessary to consider the context in which an initiative will be developed or exists. In this guide, **context** refers to the setting and circumstances that comprise the environment in which a self-regulation initiative operates. This includes all economic, social, cultural and political conditions that can affect how an initiative functions and how it is understood by stakeholders. Understanding context helps predict potential challenges while also raising awareness of opportunities for collaboration. This section is intended to foster critical thinking about how the context can influence which type of self-regulation initiative an organisation may join or begin to develop.

To better analyse the wide ranging elements and factors involved in the idea of 'context', this guide looks at both the *internal* and *external* context. **Internal context** refers to civil society itself, including the analysis of civil society organisations, the partnerships amongst civil society organisations and the overall state of civil society in one country. This definition is based on the understanding that self-regulation initiatives are developed by civil society for civil society. As such, the state of civil society, the level of collaboration and existing partnerships within civil society prescribe key conditions for any developing or existing self-regulation initiatives. **External context** is defined as the outside conditions that affect the ability of civil society to function. This might include existing legislation, social and cultural conditions and the relationships between civil society and various other stakeholders. These stakeholders may include the government (local, provincial and national), donors, the private sector, interest groups, beneficiaries or clients and the general public. These conditions and relationships themselves are defined by these stakeholders' attitudes and interactions with civil society.

This section suggests guiding questions to begin examining the internal and external contexts. While not exhaustive, these questions represent the necessary aspects and elements that must be examined to properly prepare civil society organisations to participate or lead a self-regulation initiative. Answering these questions may be done through desktop research, online surveys, focus groups and interviews. In addition, this guide suggests a participative activity for analysing the internal context to inspire similar activities to facilitate this research. Other relevant activities, toolkits and resources that can be used to answer the key questions are also listed.

THE INTERNAL CONTEXT - CIVIL SOCIETY

Understanding the internal context requires measuring the level of trust and confidence that exists within civil society and the possibilities for further collaboration within the sector, either as a whole or within a subsector. Gauging this level of cooperation provides a basis for understanding how partnerships within the sector can expand expertise and resources to result in a stronger initiative.

KEY QUESTIONS

Interest in Legitimacy, Transparency and Accountability (LTA)

Determining the existing interest in legitimacy, transparency and accountability among civil society organisations will highlight relevant organisations to partner with, potential expertise on accountability measures within organisations and the motivating factors and challenges that are driving demand (or not) for transparency among civil society organisations.

- Are there demands for more transparency and accountability practices in the sector and, if so, who is making these demands?
- What is the overall interest in those issues and self-regulation initiatives among your peers (members, partners or network)?
- What are CSOs seeking from a self-regulation initiative? What do the CSOs involved need/ want/ value from a self-regulation initiative?
- What is the level of knowledge on transparency and self-regulation initiatives in your organisation?
- Would the majority of your members, partners and peers be willing to be assessed critically?
- Would they be willing to be compelled to follow through with recommendations?
- What type of role does your CSO want to play in a self-regulation initiative? How much and for how long can your CSO commit to a self-regulation initiative?
- What is the level of corruption in the sector and what are the different perceptions around it?
- Have local, national or global events or trends influenced national and local civil society and its LTA perception?

Partnerships

Self-regulation initiatives are inherently group collaborations that will involve many participants. Therefore, understanding the existing relationships among civil society organisations and the potential for future partnerships is essential for developing a self-regulation initiative.

- How well organised is civil society in your country?
- What are the different types of CSOs and subsections in the sector? Are they collaborating already? Do they face the same challenges in terms of their transparency, legitimacy and accountability practices?
- Is there a national CSO umbrella body or platform and, if so, how strong is it? Does it already have a self-regulation initiative in place? Are there existing self-regulation initiatives in the sector?
- What are your peers (members, partners or network) looking for in a self-regulation initiative? What are their needs? What would attract further participants to a self-regulation initiative?
- Will potential participants of a self-regulation initiative be able to contribute financially to its development and implementation?

Capacity

Before joining or undertaking the development of a self-regulation initiative civil society organisations should evaluate their own capacity so as to know what advantages and weaknesses they will bring when joining or developing an initiative. Different levels of capacity among the participants of a self-regulation initiative will influence the type of initiative that will best fit their capacities and the role they will play.

- Identify capacity gaps in the sector and within your peers, including financial, human resources, ICT and the level of knowledge and expertise on transparency and accountability practices notably.
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of CSOs present in this context?
- What are the sizes of the CSOs who will be involved in the scheme?
- How dependent are they on donors, private and government funding?

ACTIVITY TEMPLATE

To assess the above questions on the internal context consider adapting and implementing the participatory activity template below.

Analysing your sector's Legitimacy, Transparency and Accountability Practices

Format: Workshop

Participants: between 5 to 25 participants / Time needed: around 1 hour 30 minutes

STEP 1: Conceptualisation activity - 25 minutes

- Divide your participants into groups of 3 and ask them to *define* legitimacy, transparency and accountability.
- For each notion, ask them to list key requirements and actions on transparency and accountability that they are familiar with or have implemented themselves. Regroup and then contrast the different answers among your participants.

STEP 2: A SWOT analysis of the transparency and accountability practices - 30 minutes

- Define SWOT as Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, the first two being internally focused while the last two are mostly externally focused.
- Explain the SWOT analysis in the LTA context: the state of transparency and accountability practices in the sector.
- Organise the participants in small groups, each with a rapporteur and note-taking material.
- Give the groups 25 minutes to discuss each component of the SWOT analysis and their general feeling about it.
- Reconvene the entire group and have each group's rapporteur present their findings. Summarise to come up with a common SWOT analysis.

STEP 3: Group discussion – 30 minutes

- Review the definitions given in step 1 and link it to the results of step 2. Introduce the notion of self-regulation.
- Facilitate a group discussion to gather feedback on opportunities to develop self-regulation initiatives and the relevance of self-regulation in the specified context. Questions to lead this discussion could include:
 - In the current context, what would be the best approach to improve transparency and accountability in the sector, network or group of organisations analysed? Do you think a self-regulation initiative would be the best option available?
 - Would a self-regulation initiative be relevant and useful to address the weaknesses and threats highlighted before?
 - How could a self-regulation initiative build from the strengths and opportunities highlighted before?

OTHER POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

- Webinar discussion among civil society organisations on legitimacy, transparency and accountability. Compare definitions, motivations to undertake self-regulation and expertise within the organisations.
- The *McKinsey Capacity Assessment Grid* is a good example of a capacity assessment that civil society organisations can use to analyse their organisational capacity. Consider adapting this assessment with targeted questions on transparency and accountability.

<http://www.nami.org/Content/NavigationMenu/NAMILand/EXCMcKinseyCapacityAssessmentGrid.pdf>

RESOURCES

- One World Trust ‘Database of civil society self-regulatory initiatives’ - a searchable resource listing self-regulation initiatives from around the world:
<http://www.oneworldtrust.org/csoproject/>
- One World Trust ‘Accountability Tools for Policy Research’ - an online inventory of ideas, tools and publications which can be used to examine and improve self-accountability:
<http://www.oneworldtrust.org/apro/>
- Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness Implementation guide, *Putting the Istanbul Principles Into Practice*. See in particular the questions and activities listed in the section on Principle 5 - Practice Transparency and Accountability:
<http://cso-effectiveness.org/IMG/pdf/230111-implementation-toolkit-en-web.pdf>
- CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) - read the past CIVICUS Civil Society Index Reports and their case studies:
<http://civicus.org/resources/reports-and-publications/csi-reports>

CASE STUDY Acting on internal calls for greater accountability - Imagine Canada¹⁴

Title of initiative: Standards Program for Charities and Public Benefit Non-Profits
Organisation: Imagine Canada
Country: Canada
Type of modality: Certification Programme, with third-party peer assessment
Date established: 2010
Participating organisations: 206 current participants including 82 accredited (as of December 2013)

CONTEXT

Imagine Canada is a national charitable and umbrella organisation for Canada’s charities and non-profits. It has had a voluntary ethical code of conduct since 1998. More recently, Imagine Canada has updated its self-regulation initiative to meet internal demands for greater accountability and transparency.

In 2006, Imagine Canada conducted a consultation among its membership about the content of its voluntary Ethical Fundraising and Financial Accountability Code. One of the recurring themes throughout this consultation was the desire from within the charitable and non-profit sector to have a more rigorous set of standards to further the public’s trust and confidence in the transparency and accountability of their operations. In response, Imagine Canada led an in-depth consultative process to get clarity on the standards demanded and how a new code could operate. This process ran for from 2007-2010 and was mainly accomplished through online advisory groups. In 2010 Imagine Canada organised a Standards Forum where they presented their plan for a new “Standards Program for Charities and Non-Profits”. Here they asked their members to not only vote on the new programme but also to support its implementation by making a small donation to the secretariat. Fifty-two organisations voluntarily gave a CAD\$ 2,000 contribution which then allowed five working groups to develop and implement a new certification programme based on the new standards voted by all members. This new accreditation programme was officially established in 2012; the product of responding to internal demands within civil society for greater accountability.

¹⁴ A full case study on Imagine Canada’s self-regulation initiative can be found on pages 42-43.

THE EXTERNAL CONTEXT - OUTSIDE CIVIL SOCIETY

The external context can be analysed by examining the influence of external stakeholders and their relationships with civil society. These stakeholders may include the government (local, provincial and national), donors (private and institutional), the private sector, the civil society organisations' beneficiaries and the general public. The perception of CSOs' accountability among these external stakeholders determines the credibility and legitimacy of civil society organisations. Therefore, the expectations, actions and level of trust of such stakeholders create the external context that CSOs must consider when developing a self-regulation initiative.

More broadly, the external context can also be conceptualised as the enabling environment¹⁵ for civil society. An enabling environment for civil society can be defined as the conditions that affect the capacity of citizens or organisations and their actions to participate and engage in society. These conditions include the governance and policy factors that directly affect civil society, and the socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions which affect individuals¹⁶. Gauging the enabling environment will better inform civil society organisations on how the legal framework and capacities, funding, political and social conditions can impact them and their participation in self-regulation initiatives.

KEY QUESTIONS

Trust

Self-regulation initiators must be aware of the levels of trust towards civil society from all external stakeholders so that their initiatives can be tailored to resolve confidence issues or be resilient in the face of resistance from certain stakeholders. Furthermore, establishing what are the various stakeholders' demands regarding CSOs' transparency and the motivation behind these calls will help organisations prioritise what their self-regulation initiative must address to respond to those external stakeholders' concerns.

- Is there trust and confidence towards CSOs from different stakeholders such as beneficiaries and constituents, the public, government or donors? Are there types of CSOs who are more trusted than others? Why?
- Is the government critical and restrictive of CSOs? Is the media critical of CSOs' activities and funding?
- Have there been any highly publicised cases of corruption or financial/programmatic mismanagement which may have affected perceptions of CSOs in the country?
- Are there any specific interests or demands for CSOs' accountability articulated, and from which stakeholders (beneficiaries, general public, the government, donors)?
- Would it be safe for a self-regulation initiative's participants to be assessed critically and publicly?

Partnerships

Self-regulation initiatives should take advantage of potential partnerships with stakeholders outside the civil society sector. Being aware of opportunities for collaborations with donors, the private sector or government can improve the sustainability and relevance of a self-regulation initiative (provided that these stakeholders are also willing to work with civil society on these particular themes¹⁷).

- Is there any interest from government, the private sector or from donors to support or fund a self-regulation initiative scheme?
- Is there a possibility of tax exemptions for CSOs being involved in a self-regulation initiative? Is the government already giving tax exemptions to all civil society organisations? How is it done and what are the criteria? To what extent are transparency and accountability practices institutionalised in legal regulations (accreditation, annual report, etc.)?

¹⁵At the 4th High Level Forum on Aid and Development Effectiveness, in Busan in 2011, 159 governments plus the European Union made the commitment to create an "enabling environment" for civil society organisations. Para 22, The Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, November 2011. The full text is available at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/49650173.pdf>.

¹⁶For a more detailed explanation of the enabling environment and more information on how it can be applied in each national context, consult the CIVICUS Enabling Environment Index report at http://civicus.org/images/Civicus_EEI%20REPORT%202013_WEB_FINAL.pdf

- Who are the main civil society donors in the country (individual, private, national or international)? Are donors' funding schemes regular and stable in the country? What would be the interest and the potential stability of funding for a self-regulation initiative?
- Does the private sector have an interest in becoming involved in a self-regulation initiative to share their resources and expertise?

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

To assess the above questions on the external context, consider adapting and implementing the activities below during a participatory workshop.

- Use a Venn diagram to list and detail all stakeholders and their interest regarding the establishment of a self-regulation initiative.
- Jointly create a timeline of important events that shape civil society in your country with attention to: political changes, funding changes, key national events that have galvanised action in transparency or accountability.
- Use the Enabling Environment Analysis Tool Group Discussion and Planning Template - this tool will guide participants in questioning what barriers to civil society exist within its environment and also provide a planning template to facilitate this analysis (available in English, Spanish and French).
http://wiki.cso-effectiveness.org/IMG/pdf/step_1_-_identifying_critical_barriers_to_cso_development_effectiveness-2.pdf

RESOURCES

- CIVICUS Enabling Environment Index - annual reports on the enabling environment worldwide and country rankings to assess the enabling environment in 109 countries: <http://civicus.org/eei/>
- Case studies and toolkits on the enabling environment are available at:
<http://wiki.cso-effectiveness.org/-Enabling-Environment->
- The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law 'NGO Law Monitor' - information on legal environment for CSOs in national contexts (country reports): <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/>
- Transparency International 'Corruption Index' – annual index by country which breaks down their current research on a country and their past work: <http://www.transparency.org/country>
- Overseas Development Institute 'Mapping Political Context: A Toolkit for Civil Society Organisations' - a toolkit that CSOs can use to map their political context including a stakeholders' analysis, page 26:
<http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/152-mapping-political-context-toolkit-civil-society-organisations>
- Local Livelihoods 'Stakeholder Participatory Discussion Guide' - a toolkit of participatory activities designed to both assess stakeholders' opinions and involve stakeholders in decision-making processes. In particular try adapting the "Engaging with your Stakeholders activities" (pages 9-14) to analyse stakeholders' interests and the "Scoping Exercises" (pages 15-20) to record key aspects of the external context:
<http://www.locallivelihoods.com/cmsms/uploads/PDFs/Participation%20Toolkit%20-%20First%20Edition%202007.pdf>
- BetterEvaluation 'Stakeholder mapping and analysis' – a basic format for stakeholder analysis:
http://betterevaluation.org/evaluation-options/mapping_stakeholders
- Caribbean Natural Resources Institute 'Guidelines for Stakeholder Identification and Analysis' – a guide on stakeholders' mapping which can be adapted to your context: <http://www.canari.org/Guidelines5.pdf>

¹⁷CIVICUS research has demonstrated that recent governmental laws on civil society have been used as tools to restrict civil society's organising and activities in many countries around the world. Further information is available at <http://civicus.org/images/GlobalTrendsonCivilSocietyRestrictions2013.pdf> pages 7-9.

CASE STUDY Restrictive space for CSOs in Zimbabwe¹⁸

Title of initiative: Zimbabwe NGO Code of Ethics
Organisation: National Association of Non-governmental Organisations (NANGO)
Country: Zimbabwe
Type of modality: Code of Conduct
Date established: 2006
Participating Organisations: 200

CONTEXT

In 2004, the Zimbabwe government put forward a highly restrictive draft law with the intention to regulate non-governmental organisations. While ultimately the law was not signed by the Parliament due to CSOs' advocacy and lobbying, the threat of additional government oversight was a strong incentive for the Zimbabwean civil society sector to create new internal regulation mechanisms.

The National Association of Non-governmental Organisations (NANGO) runs its Code of Conduct with careful attention to the information being publicised so that the Code signatories are not victimised by the media or government. To this day Zimbabwe remains an unstable environment for civil society organisations. As such, NANGO deliberately keeps the rules governing disclosure of information in their non-compliance procedures as informal as possible to protect their members from retaliation. NANGO and CSOs in Zimbabwe have had to tailor their self-regulation activities and transparency practices because of the external context in which they evolve.

CASE STUDY Responding to government calls for accountability
-The Philippine Council for NGO Certification¹⁹

Title of initiative: NGO Certification
Organisation: Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC)
Country: The Philippines
Type of modality: Certification Scheme
Date established: 1997
Participating Organisations: 370

CONTEXT

In the mid 1990's, the Filipino government began reforming the tax system. Recognising that such a change would eliminate the tax exemption status of many CSOs, a coalition of 6 networks of non-governmental organisations was formed to consult with the Filipino government.

The Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC) is a case where CSOs organised themselves to respond to the government's decision to change the tax reduction system for non-profit organisations. Indeed, the coalition of 6 civil society organisations' networks decided to create together a system which would register CSOs that adhere to set standards, which eventually led to the creation of the Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC) in 1997. Then, by working with the government, PCNC was able to

¹⁸ A full case study on NANGO self-regulation initiative is available page 38-39.

¹⁹ A full case study on PCNC self-regulation initiative is available pages 47-48.

ensure that CSOs continue to have a donor's tax exemption provided they follow adequate practices of transparency and accountability. Responding to key external developments in government regulations and laws allowed Philippine CSOs to adapt a self-regulation initiative that kept the donor's tax exemption for non-profit organisations and responded to the government's concerns.

Table 1: What modalities of self-regulation initiatives would work best for a certain context?*

Listed in the table below are the key stakeholders with whom an organisation or network of CSOs seeking to develop a self-regulation initiative needs to engage. Depending on the CSOs' relationships with each of those groups of stakeholders, different modalities of self-regulation may work better than others to address those stakeholders' trust towards the civil society sector.

		Groups of Stakeholders**				
		Peers	Beneficiaries	Donors	Government	General Public
Level of Collaboration and/or Trust	High	Award, Code of conduct or Certification scheme - with a peer assessment.	Award, Information service	Information service, Working group, Code of conduct	Information service, Working group, Award	Award, Information service, Code of conduct
	Medium	Code of conduct, Working group	Award, Code of conduct	Code of conduct or Certification scheme - with compliance mechanisms	Information service, Working group, Award	Award, Code of conduct or Certification scheme - with compliance mechanisms. Public disclosure of information, Good promotion
	Low	Working group	Award, Code of conduct, Certification scheme with a third party certification - with complaints mechanisms and beneficiary feedback	Code of conduct, Certification scheme - with compliance and sanctions mechanisms, International initiatives	Possibly a Code of conduct But consider potential government retaliations in restrictive civil society spaces.	Award, Code of conduct or Certification scheme - with compliance and sanctions mechanisms. Public disclosure of information, Good promotion

* Overall, there is not enough research done on the impact and outcomes of self-regulation initiatives²⁰. Therefore, this table only seeks to provide indications of which modality of self-regulation initiatives could work best in different scenarios and to address different stakeholders' levels of trust in the sector, but a full analysis of all the components of a particular context is necessary before choosing a modality of self-regulation.

**The private sector is not included in this table because of insufficient data on the interest and links between CSOs' self-regulation initiatives and the private sector. Nonetheless, there are examples of collaboration between some self-regulation initiatives and the private sector, especially when the initiatives require financial audits or financial assistance in the assessments. The extent of connections between the private sector and self-regulation initiatives is something that also requires further research

²⁰A good reflection on the effectiveness and impact of self-regulation initiatives is Alice Obrecht, "Effective Accountability? The drivers, benefits and mechanisms of CSO self-regulation", Briefing Papers 130, One World Trust, 2012, 38 p.

SECTION 2 CHOOSING A MODALITY OF SELF-REGULATION

Once organisations or networks have analysed their internal and external context they can begin the two-step process of choosing between the different modalities of self-regulation initiatives.

The first step is to distinguish and establish the **principles and standards** of a self-regulation initiative. This step explores recommendations on how to develop both principles and standards that will guide a self-regulation initiative's conduct and outline the basis for understanding accountability among its members.

The second step is to determine which **modality of self-regulation** best suits the internal and external context of an initiative and will determine the adherence to and application of its principles and standards. This step details those different modalities through a series of case studies, highlighting good practices and lessons learnt.

With this expertise and such examples, this section aims at equipping organisations or networks to undertake the process of choosing for themselves the most adequate and appropriate self-regulation initiative for their context, their own organisation and participating organisations.

STEP 1: ESTABLISHING A SELF-REGULATION INITIATIVE'S PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS

The principles and standards of a self-regulation initiative create the moral structure that will help identify the requirements participant organisations will have to fulfil to be more transparent and accountable. Self-regulation initiatives require both principles and standards to ensure that they conduct their activities in an accountable manner. While principles and standards are highly related, to be properly understood they must be distinguished from each other.

PRINCIPLES – CORE VALUES

Principles are the core values that will guide a self-regulation initiative. They establish the fundamental foundation for desirable and positive CSOs' behaviours and decision-making processes. Agreeing on general principles will typically be easier than creating more specific standards. In the context of a self-regulation initiative, transparency and accountability will be key principles but others may include the participation of key stakeholders, quality management, commitment to civil society values and social change, etc²¹. Internationally, a number of initiatives have defined key principles for CSOs' behaviour and ethics, which national organisations seeking to improve their transparency and accountability could consider adapting to their own context. One good example of such international principles developed by civil society organisations for civil society organisations are the Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness (see the box below).

THE ISTANBUL PRINCIPLES FOR CSO DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

The Istanbul Principles are a set of 8 principles which were adopted in 2010 after a global consultation led by the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness. These principles are meant to guide civil society actors to be more effective and accountable as development actors.

²¹For example see One World Trust research and Global Accountability Report (GAR)'s dimensions: participation, evaluation, transparency and feedback mechanisms. Further information is available at <http://www.oneworldtrust.org/globalaccountability/gar>.

The 8 Principles are:

- Respect and promote human rights and social justice.
- Embody gender equality and equity while promoting women's and girls' rights.
- Focus on people's empowerment, democratic ownership and participation.
- Promote environmental sustainability.
- Practice transparency and accountability.
- Pursue equitable partnerships and solidarity.
- Create and share knowledge and commit to mutual learning.
- Commit to realising positive sustainable change.

More on the Istanbul Principles:

<http://cso-effectiveness.org/istanbul-principles,067>



STANDARDS – NORMS AND MEASURES

Standards are specific norms or models which serve as guidelines to attain a set of principles and a means to measure how well they are being accomplished. They can be considered as the actual actions which need to be undertaken to fulfil the principles of accountability and transparency. Standards are very often introduced through a breakdown of key dimensions that need to be addressed. Typically standards will address three main domains: the CSOs' financial practices, its programmatic work and its governance.

Financial standards will seek to increase the level of transparency in how funds are managed and used by CSOs. Basic standards may include:

- having a bank account;
- annual financial reporting;
- regular audits;
- having proper financial controls in place;
- using proper accounting standards;
- having a budget system in place.

Programmatic standards will address how programmes are planned and implemented according to the guiding principles. Basic standards may include:

- having a programmatic plan;
- documenting the organisation's work;
- having monitoring and evaluation systems;
- Including different stakeholders (particularly beneficiaries) in the development and implementation of the programmatic work;
- applying the organisation's own principles in its day to-day work (such as respecting the environment, gender equity and fulfilling human rights obligations).

Governance standards will regulate how organisations are run in order to meet the established principles. Basic standards may include:

- being legally registered;
- having a constitution;
- publication of the organisation's vision, mission and values;
- publication of the organisation's address and contact information;
- having a board;
- having responsible polices for governing how board members are selected;
- having systems to avoid conflicts of interest;
- responsible recruitment policies for both staff and volunteers;
- ensuring there are annual reports.

INCLUDING ACCOUNTABILITY TO BENEFICIARIES IN STANDARDS

Accountability to beneficiaries or constituents is a growing area of concern for CSOs. Otherwise known as downward accountability, this form of accountability involves consulting and involving beneficiaries in decision making that affects them. Standards can dictate that constituents be consulted in the design of programmes, that beneficiaries must be informed about the organisation's activities, that there must be mechanisms for them to provide feedback and, most importantly, that organisations internalise and act on beneficiary feedback. Organisations and networks in the process of developing a self-regulation initiative may also consider involving beneficiaries in a consultation process in order to develop the principles, standards and structure of the initiative.²²

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPING A SELF-REGULATION INITIATIVE'S STANDARDS

1) TIERED STANDARDS - Considering several levels or a tiered system of standards

While there should be a single set of principles, it can be useful to have different levels of standards. Distinguishing standards amongst different levels will give participating organisations time to adjust and implement standards at their own pace, so that they are not overwhelmed by trying to adhere to an entire set of standards with possibly inadequate capacity. For instance, there can be a tiered system of standards with a first level for core minimum standards and a second one with desirable standards that CSOs can work towards.

A tiered system can more specifically target different types of organisations based on relevant criteria within the internal context (CSOs' size in terms of budget, volunteer and paid staff, elected board or not, etc.). This will allow the self-regulation initiative to better target and reach a wider range of CSOs; both smaller and bigger organisations with different capacities, levels of knowledge and practices regarding transparency and accountability.

DEVELOPING YOUR STANDARDS

Follow these key tips during the process of developing standards:

- Develop standards through a consultative process.
- Engage with multiple stakeholders.
- Have clear objectives throughout the process.

2) SCOPE – Tailoring the standards to fit CSOs' challenges

Standards need not be exhaustive but instead should focus on key issues and challenges that participating organisations face. The size, purpose and context of a self-regulation initiative and its leading organisations will have to determine the scope of its standards. The scope should be designed to most adequately respond to stakeholders concerns, and be tailored to the characteristics of other peers and civil society. Also link the scope of the standards to the context so that the standards are relevant to the key challenges. For example, if there has been criticism of CSOs in the past, develop standards that address such incidents (e.g. corruption cases, gender representation, money spent on travel, etc.).

²² For more in-depth analysis on involving beneficiaries, please see Jeannet Ligan, Michael Hammer, "Empowering citizens: Realising service user involvement in the UK Third Sector organisations through accountability principles in self-regulation initiatives", One World Trust and Goldsmiths, 2011, 21 p. The full text is available at http://oneworldtrust.org/publications/doc_download/448-empowering-citizens-realisation-of-user-participation-in-sris.

3) TERMINOLOGY – Using clear, concise and accessible vocabulary for each standard

Standards should be phrased carefully so that they are easily understood and accessible to a wide range of stakeholders. It is more important for the standards to be communicated clearly, in simple language and with clear concepts, than to have a longer or more comprehensive list of standards. Rather than have a large block of text for each standard, distil the standards into a clear and simple idea. Further explanation of each standard can be given below the standard. Avoid using jargon or technical language. All stakeholders, regardless of their level of knowledge about civil society, should be able to read and understand the standards.

4) PRESENTATION – Communicating clearly about the standards

Communicating standards involves having them stated clearly in an accessible document. Standards will be most successful when they are presented in a clear, organised and user-friendly format. The presentation should reflect the phrasing of the standards by having clearly organised sections that distinguish between levels of standards. The language used should be as simple and accurate as possible. Finally, strive to have an aesthetically pleasing document that is enjoyable to read. The presentation of standards is the first exposure that stakeholders, peers and participating organisations will have to the entire self-regulation initiative.

Figure 1: The NGO Quality Assurance Mechanism in Uganda (QUAM) Standards

QUAM is a certification scheme currently managed by the Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations (DENIVA) and Uganda NGO Forum. The QUAM standards are all categorised under 3 sections, financial, programmatic and governance accountability. There are 3 levels of standards: the minimum required for a provisional certificate (1-29), a second level when CSOs meet all the minimum quality standards (1-48) and the advanced level when there is compliance with the standards for improvement (1-59). Each standard is written as a clear, concise statement while underneath an explanation provides key details to consider.

A. THE NGO AS AN ORGANISATION: GOVERNANCE

We recognise that quality starts at home: in the way our NGO is managed internally, with regard to its principles, its people and its other resources. A certified NGO or NGO network provides evidence that it:

1. Minimum standards

a | Ethical governance

1* Is legally registered with the appropriate authorities.

The NGO is registered with the National NGO Registration Board or, in the case of an NGO network, it is either registered with the NGO Board or with the relevant district authorities. The candidate NGO will be able to produce an up-to-date registration certificate or evidence showing that renewal of

STEP 2: SELECTING A MODALITY FOR A SELF-REGULATION INITIATIVE

There are many forms of self-regulation initiatives. Selecting the appropriate one means first considering the internal and external context in which it will be developed, and then how it will enable the initiative's participants to fulfil the principles and standards of the self-regulation initiative²³. The following section presents the most common modalities of self-regulation initiatives, introducing basic information for each and providing case studies from CIVICUS' research conducted on different self-regulation initiatives from around the world²⁴.

The modalities examined and their subsequent variations are listed following their level of formality:

- Working Group (p.28)
- Information Service (p.30)
- Award (p.32)
- Code of Conduct (p.35)
 - Code of Conduct with Compliance Mechanisms (p.37)
 - Code of Conduct with Sanction Mechanisms (p.40)
- Certification Scheme (p.42)
 - Certification Scheme with Self- Assessment (p.44)
 - Certification Scheme with Peer Assessment (p.47)
 - Certification Scheme with Third Party Accreditation (p.49)
 - Certification Scheme with Compliance and Sanctions Mechanisms (p.51)

For each type of self-regulation initiative, this guide provides a definition, explains how it works, highlights the resources needed to undertake such a scheme and explores the pros and cons of each modality. Specific case studies are also provided for each with attention to the context, best practices and lessons learnt. It is important to keep in mind that each case study is analysed in the context in which it has been developed.

We recommend looking at the modalities which best suit the resources and capabilities at the disposal of an organisation and its internal and external context, as explained in section 1. Table 2 'Initial considerations when choosing between different modalities of self-regulation' exemplifies the resources needed for each variation of self-regulation and it compares initial considerations needed when undertaking a self-regulation initiative and its potential sustainability. This table can be useful to choose a modality and then consult the relevant section for a more detailed analysis. At the end of this section, table 3 'Comparing outcomes from the modalities of self-regulation' briefly compares the outcomes of different self-regulation modalities in terms of improved CSOs' effectiveness and increased credibility.

MENU OF SELF-REGULATION

The types and specific examples of self-regulation presented here are not being recommended as a direct option to join or replicate. Rather than adhering to a single modality, organisations and networks should consider which aspects, conditions and factors are the more relevant in their own context and for their own purposes.

An introduction to international self-regulation initiatives is also included because, although they don't suit all civil society organisations, international initiatives have developed useful resources for self-regulation and accountability.

²³ As per the classification done by One World Trust in their database of civil society self-regulatory initiatives available at http://www.oneworldtrust.org/csoproject/cso/general/how_initiatives_are_assessed.

²⁴ A total of 22 interviewed were realised in 2013. For more information on each of those self-regulation initiatives, consult the list of interviews page 76 and also CIVICUS' website for the full case studies.

Table 2: Initial considerations when choosing between different modalities of self-regulation

The table below compares the initial considerations needed to undertake a self-regulation initiative and the initiative's potential sustainability. Reviewing this table can guide CSOs or networks of organisations in choosing what modality of self-regulation to pursue based on what they can afford to input into a self-regulation initiative. However, keep in mind that context is more influential than the components of any given self-regulation initiative.

Resources and capabilities	Efforts for implementation*	Human and financial resources required	Time needed for design and implementation	Potential sustainability
Modality of SRI	Short term			Long term
Working Group	+++++	+++	+	++
Information Service	+	++	+++	+++++
Award	+++++	++	+++++	+++
Code of Conduct	+++++	+++++	+	+++++
[Add on:]** Compliance Mechanisms	+++	+++	+	++
[Add on:]** Sanctions Mechanisms	+++++	+++++	+++++	+++++
Certification Scheme	++	+	+	+++
With Self- Assessment	+++	+++	+	+++++
With Peer Assessment	+	++	+	++
With Third Party Accreditation	++	+	+	++
[Add on:]** Compliance Mechanisms	+++++	+++++	+++++	+++++

+ = negative | +++ = in-between | +++++ = positive

* The efforts for implementation refer to different elements and the level of work needed to organise a self-regulation initiative, such as the existence of internal expertise or partnerships on self-regulation, the need for promotional tools for the initiative and their existence, whether specific documentation is needed, etc. It seeks to describe the complexity of the mechanisms and processes needed to start and implement such an initiative.

** These options that self-regulation initiatives can choose to add to the initial schemes are analysed in this table from the point of view of resources and capabilities needed to implement them once the initiative is already in place and operational.

WORKING GROUP

DEFINITION: A working group refers to a collective of CSOs which organise themselves to discuss their own transparency and accountability, share best practices and direct new initiatives.

HOW IT WORKS: Working groups are typically less formalised than other self-regulation initiatives. Essentially, they comprise a set number of individuals or organisations who meet on a regular basis to work together on toolkits, guides or standards and who might have received funding for that purpose. Less formal compositions would be a loose network of individuals or organisations that are discussing transparency and accountability standards and means of promoting those standards but without meeting regularly or being required to produce a specified output. Working groups may also undertake capacity-building activities through workshops and trainings for their members or non-members. Some working groups may also develop a plan of actions to improve the legitimacy, transparency and accountability of its members and then act as a monitoring body to ensure progress is made against the plan of actions.

PROS AND CONS

For participating in this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- A working group can help build better relationships between peers on a common and shared challenge and preoccupation.
- It will allow its members to share best practices, knowledge, challenges and resources.
- It can offer a better internal buy-in for organisations than other self-regulation initiatives because its structure is more flexible and accessible.

Cons:

- A working group is a slow and difficult process and does not easily lead to tangible results.
- The credibility of participating organisations may not be improved substantially and, in fact, the slow process could even be perceived negatively by other stakeholders.

For initiating this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- The flexible and loose structure is not constricting and may attract many organisations to participate.
- For umbrella bodies or national platforms, a working group can also be a good way to improve coordination and cooperation within the civil society sector or among their membership.

Cons:

- Funding may be difficult to secure for such a loose scheme, and it would therefore require voluntary contributions from its participants (even if in terms of their time).
- It may be difficult to achieve consensus among participants, and coordinating a working group with very diverse organisations represented may be challenging.
- Externally, a working group and its initiator can be perceived negatively by other stakeholders, especially if it doesn't lead to any tangible results.

RESOURCES NEEDED

A working group does not require intensive resources but funding can in fact be difficult to secure for such a slow and loose scheme. Working groups often rely on voluntary contributions and volunteers to undertake the necessary work.

CASE STUDY The Governance Code, Ireland



Organisation/Secretariat:	The Wheel - as part of an 8 member working group
Country:	Ireland
Type of modality:	Code of conduct
Date established:	June 2012
Participating organisations:	600

CONTEXT

The Governance Code is the result of a 2 year consultative process led by a working group of 8 major Irish umbrella bodies. 600 organisations officially adopted the code at its launch. The code was developed by the working group in the context of a new Charities Act passed in 2009 and coming into effect in 2014.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS:

- The working group of 8 umbrella bodies met once a month for 2 years.
- There was a good interest in governance in the civil society sector. CSOs wanted a sector-led initiative and therefore they developed a code before the Irish New Charity Regulator came into being.
- The code has 3 different stages depending on the size and structure of the CSOs. It recognises that different governance challenges arise for different organisations.
- The code's Register of Compliance is voluntary for all participating organisations, and there have deliberately been no measures to make it other than voluntary for now.

BEST PRACTICES/INNOVATIONS:

- The costs of the consultative process were mostly covered through volunteer resources. The Wheel made available one of its staff members, who spent approximately one day a week for 2 years organising the working group. The bulk of the core work to develop the code was done by voluntary contributions from the 8 umbrella bodies. The consultation costs were all borne by member organisations.
- The working group has also been holding workshops to raise awareness and build capacities in implementing the code.
- The working group has required a lot of buy-in from all the organisations involved as there is a lot of work to be done in between meetings as well.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- This collaborative experience led to fostering a greater trust between the organisations involved. As such, a working group is a model for organisations in the civil society sector to collaborate together.
- The working group recognised early that they needed public awareness and support for their initiative. To this end, they organised regional workshops, sought law experts' advice and kept representatives from the public sector informed.
- It takes between one to two years for a working group to develop a code of conduct through a consultative process.
- The internal and external context also plays an important role when seeking to develop a code through a working group. It can be one of the greatest incentives for CSOs to get involved in such an initiative.
- Capacity-building is recognised as key to have a larger buy-in.
- While organising a working group for civil society organisations, consultative roundtables or meetings with government, donors, private sector and members' beneficiaries can be also be very relevant and useful in increasing external buy-in and incorporating points of view, expertise and resources.

CONTACT: www.governancecode.ie

INFORMATION SERVICE

DEFINITION: An information service is a scheme which requires the participating organisations to publish a specific set of required data that is relevant to accountability and transparency. It may also serve as a directory of CSOs.

HOW IT WORKS: Typically there is one single organisation acting as a lead and coordinator of the information service. This organisation determines the initiative's standards, the data to be disclosed and the level of disclosure asked of the participating organisations. Information services are usually hosted on one website and made publicly available. Their target audience is often the general public. They may also organise a rating system based on the amount and quality of information disclosed. A rating system can be seen as a compliance mechanism in the sense that it signifies to the public which members are complying with different levels of requirements and it can motivate organisations to meet higher transparency criteria. Information services can also be innovatively linked to donation schemes.

PROS AND CONS

For participating in this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- An information service can improve an organisation's visibility to the general public.
- It can clarify and demonstrate for an organisation which data is relevant to its own accountability and what data should be made transparent.
- It can be linked to an individual donation scheme via an online platform.

Cons:

- Gathering and processing all the data can be time intensive.
- If the information service is not well promoted and well-known, it might limit dramatically the benefit in participating in such a scheme.
- An information service requires good internet connectivity for ease of submitting and updating data.

For initiating this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- An information service is an innovative tool to promote transparency towards a wide range of stakeholders and it can also be useful for capacity-building on transparency practices.
- It will gather a great amount of data, available for subsequent research on the state of civil society in one country.
- It can potentially have a relatively high impact on both the effectiveness of CSOs' practices and the general perception of civil society's legitimacy compared to the resources necessary to implement and run such a scheme (when compared with other types of self-regulation initiatives).

Cons:

- An information service is resource intensive (especially in its initial set-up) as it needs to compile, organise and submit the collected data online in an accessible and user-friendly way.
- It may be difficult to treat and organise the collected data consistently and accurately, particularly if the participating organisations come from a variety of backgrounds or fields.
- An information service requires good internet connectivity in the country for all organisations and stakeholders to enter or access the information.

RESOURCES NEEDED

The initial stage of setting up an information service adequately requires significant resources in terms of human resources and ICT in both the participating and leading organisations. But keeping the information service up and running requires fewer overall resources.



CASE STUDY GUIDESTAR KOREA

Organisation/Secretariat:	Guidestar Korea
Country:	South Korea
Type of modality:	Information service
Date established:	2008
Participating organisations:	3,482

CONTEXT

The number of South Korean CSOs has been consistently growing over the last decades but both the public and the government expressed concerns of not knowing enough about what were the actual CSOs' activities. In 2008, the South Korean government required by law an official information disclosure for the biggest CSOs (with assets over Won 1,000,000,000 – USD 1 million - or with incomes over Won 500,000,000 – USD 500,000).

KEY CHARACTERISTICS:

- Guidestar Korea was created by adapting Guidestar USA as a model. It is also listed under the Guidestar International group.
- Guidestar Korea is accredited through a special legal status by the government to provide public data and information on CSOs' activities and financial statements under the South Korean National Tax Service's oversight.

BEST PRACTICES/INNOVATIONS:

- The Guidestar Korea website and online activities are linked to social networks (Facebook, Twitter).
- Guidestar Korea is currently trying to get funding from the private sector.
- Guidestar Korea is considering a more in-depth evaluation approach but for now they are focusing on better informing CSOs of the value of an information system.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- An information service requires good ICT capacities and infrastructure for the service's staff and members to run and use it adequately.
- An information service entails capacity-building towards its participating organisations on what information they need to collect and sort and in which format they will need to disclose the information to make it as accessible as possible. Not all organisations submit the same level and quality of data.
- An information service must ensure that all information collected is easily accessible, readable and user-friendly for all the stakeholders who will consult the website. It must be user-friendly and updated regularly. All links need to be regularly checked and this can be quite an intensive resources process.
- Even though an information service is primarily an online platform, it still necessitates significant communications for its promotion, like the Guidestar quarterly magazine *NPOGuideStar* for instance.
- An information service may face some difficulties in promoting its service to all types of CSOs and all different stakeholders. Its communication strategy needs to be directed at specific target groups.

CONTACT:

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AWARD

DEFINITION: Awards are given in recognition of achievement in transparency and accountability practices through a competitive process. They often aim at rewarding excellence, innovation or good practice.

HOW IT WORKS: Awards entail an open or close call for participants, through which organisations either apply or are nominated. Participating organisations are then evaluated by an independent jury against a set of defined criteria, which for a self-regulation initiative will focus mainly on transparent financial management, information disclosure and innovative practices in accountability. Awards can be organised in different categories based on the size and budget of the participating organisations. They are typically granted annually by organisations which are involved in the civil society sector, but which are not necessarily CSOs themselves. Judges may include multiple stakeholders such as representatives from the CSO sector, the public, academia, media and the private sector. Most awards do not publicise participants who do not pass the award criteria but actively promote their awardees. The prizes may be composed of a combination of the following: financial gifts, capacity-building packages, membership in relevant umbrella organisations, and public promotion.

PROS AND CONS

For participating in this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- An award scheme often entails publicity that can be used to promote one organisation's commitment to transparency and accountability.
- Participating organisations usually benefit from a free assessment and should therefore seek to get the detailed results of their evaluation.

Cons:

- Award publicity is not guaranteed and depends greatly on the organisers' own image.
- Participating in an award scheme may potentially damage an organisation's credibility if it does not pass the award criteria and this is publicised.

For initiating this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- Granting awards demonstrates an expertise and a commitment to CSO legitimacy, transparency and accountability.
- An award scheme can be a way of engaging multiple stakeholders on accountability and transparency values including other CSOs, the public, academia, media and the private sector.
- The human resources necessary to run the scheme can be leveraged through the intensity of the judging criteria.
- An award scheme has the potential to reach smaller CSOs.

Cons:

- An awards scheme requires a sustainable source of funding for both the implementation and the actual granting of the prizes.
- Not all CSOs are in the position to start and run an effective awards scheme, as it needs strong financial and human resources, and a good knowledge and reputation in the sector and beyond.
- Based on the resources available, a limitation on the number of participants may have to be considered.

RESOURCES NEEDED

It may take up to a year to start an awards scheme depending on how long securing the funding takes and

what expertise is readily available for the design and implementation of the awards. The human resources necessary during the evaluation phase can be substantial depending on how many organisations participate annually, which types of organisations participate, and the accessibility of their information.

CASE STUDY The Transparency Awards



Organisation/Secretariat:	PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Germany
Country:	Germany
Type of modality:	Awards scheme
Date established:	2004
Participating organisations:	Around 60 annually

CONTEXT

After the 2004 tsunami catastrophe in South Asia, PwC Germany staff further supported by their management organised themselves to donate funds for reconstruction programmes. But PwC Germany could not find an organisation with comparable reporting structures or the financial and transparency practices that could meet their internal standards. They were then inspired to use their expertise in financial accountability and other core competencies to help non-profit organisations improve their own transparency.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS:

- The Transparency Awards' jury panel is composed of representatives from CSOs, the media, private sector and academia, while it is organised by a corporate entity through its corporate social responsibility programme.
- The first analysis of participating organisations' practices is done by academic experts who pre-select finalists. Award winners are then chosen from this list by the jury, whose final selection is based on the analysis reports and pre-selection rankings.
- There are 3 prizes attributed in the competition held every two years, and they range from €15,000 to €5,000. They sometimes grant a €3,000 special award for small organisations with exemplary practices.
- The Awards and their implementation costs are funded internally by PwC Germany.

GOOD PRACTICES/ INNOVATIONS:

- The judging criteria are constantly evolving following regular inputs from multiple stakeholders.
- The Transparency Award logo is made available for all participants' websites and promotion when they pass the award criteria with a substantial percentage – even though they don't win the contest.
- After the assessment process, the individual analysis reports are sent to all participants but are not published.
- The main findings concerning the overall results of all participants and the impact of the contest are also published in a single analysis which is then presented during the award ceremony. It is further made available to be downloaded.
- The award ceremony is designed as a networking event for CSOs and their stakeholders. In addition to the awards themselves, it offers a whole programme of presentations and panel discussions with free participation for CSOs.
- PwC organises and participates in workshops on transparency practices. A significant outcome was the publication of *Best practices guide - management and governance for non-profit organisations* due to participants' requests.

- PwC Germany has developed a free online Transparency Check tool (<http://www.transparency-check.com/>) which all organisations can use to test themselves against the awards criteria confidentially and free of charge.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- Award organisers shouldn't be a member of the judging panel as it may compromise their independence.
- Limiting the number of organisations which can participate (based on their annual revenue, for instance) may be necessary for the good functioning of the awards scheme.
- Having flexible criteria allows for all lessons learned to be incorporated.

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CODE OF CONDUCT

DEFINITION: A code of conduct or ethics is a set of standards which is defined and agreed on by a group of CSOs as a guide to their behaviour and practices. A code usually attempts to regulate various aspects of CSOs' operations including governance, accountability, fundraising, etc.

HOW IT WORKS: Codes of conduct typically begin with consultations among CSOs on the principles and the set of standards on transparency and accountability they wish to follow. Their agreement on the standards will be formalised through the signature of a code or a charter. A code of conduct is often developed by a national platform or a CSO umbrella body for itself and its members—sometimes it can be mandatory to sign the code to be part of this national network. The code of conduct can be sector wide or may target a specific segment of civil society, such as foundations or humanitarian organisations. A code's structure and organisation can vary greatly from being a loose charter of principles to a much more formalised scheme. For instance, codes may include compliance systems through the submission and review of participants' annual reports, complaints procedures or sanctions mechanisms.

PROS AND CONS

For participating in this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- A code can be the basis of more understanding and greater cooperation with the other signatories.
- It can work as a positive sign to external stakeholders that the organisation and its peers are committed to transparency and accountability standards.
- A code of conduct will be usually more flexible to the needs and challenges of the participating organisations because it is developed in consultation with peers or members, and its structure can be more or less formalised.

Cons:

- Organisations compliant with the code can be unfairly associated with other organisations that do not have the same level of compliance. If the code has no compliance mechanism, it can be seen as insufficient to really serve its purpose.

For initiating this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- It will typically not be financially intensive to organise and maintain a code of conduct.
- A code can serve as the constitution, values and vision for a national network of CSOs and its umbrella body.
- Codes can help reinforce good practices and increase the level of integration within the civil society sector or among members of a network.

Cons:

- There is the possibility of free riders who are not compelled to comply with the code of conduct and their presence may discredit the network, the code in itself and the organisation leading it.
- It can be time intensive and challenging for the umbrella body or the leading organisation to set up and ensure the code of conduct remains relevant.

RESOURCES NEEDED

A code of conduct will require more time and human resources than financial resources, both to establish and run it. It can take up to two years to set up such a scheme.



CASE STUDY NNNGO Code of conduct, Nigeria

Organisation/Secretariat:	Nigerian Network of NGOS (NNNGO)
Country:	Nigeria
Type of modality:	Code of conduct
Date established:	2006, reviewed and reinforced in 2012
Members:	Over 1000

CONTEXT

NNNGO is a national CSO platform and their code of conduct has been designed with and for their members primarily. Agreeing on the existence of a code and on the set of standards has not been an easy task because a code was seen as too complicated a procedure. But as NNNGO also advocates for more accountability in the government, the same commitment needed to be made in the civil society sector.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS:

- The NNNGO code used to have a voluntary subscription, but it became mandatory for all NNNGO members to sign it in 2012.
- The code has been reviewed twice, with the last version being adopted in November 2012 at the NNNGO Annual General Meeting.
- The 2012 code of conduct has 32 standards, divided along several principles such as tolerance, independence, openness and transparency, democratic governance, etc.

BEST PRACTICES/INNOVATIONS:

- A code of conduct can be and should be implemented in phases. It can be voluntary at first, and then made mandatory to members. Or the standards can also be reviewed and 'intensified' regularly. A self-regulation initiative can evolve gradually depending on the capacities and interest of the participating organisations.

LESSONS LEARNT:

- The CSOs' ownership and buy-in of the process to develop the code and in the code itself are extremely important.
- A code of conduct can be more applicable than other self-regulation initiatives when the objective is first and foremost to raise the question of accountability in the country or sector and determine what is meant by standards of transparency and accountability.
- Most organisations developing transparency and accountability standards through a code of conduct are not seeking to develop compliance mechanisms at first. They usually don't have the resources or capacity to develop them either. Most explain that they want to be allies, and not controllers of the organisations adopting their code of conduct.

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CODE OF CONDUCT WITH COMPLIANCE MECHANISMS

DEFINITION: A code of conduct with a compliance system means that some mechanisms have been designed to check if a participating organisation is sufficiently following the code's standards in its governance, operations and programmes.

HOW IT WORKS: A compliance system can take different formats; either it will be a review of the compliance with the code conducted through a self-assessment, externally by peers or a third party, or it will be monitored through a complaints mechanism. The self, peer or third party assessment will usually lead to the compilation of a report done through desk-based research and/or interviews on a periodic basis. These reports will evaluate how well an organisation is applying the principles and standards of the code, and they can also list recommendations for improvement. Compliance reports are often made public. A complaints procedure is a mechanism made available year-long and for all stakeholders (for whenever they feel an organisation is breaching the code). Such a mechanism usually entails an investigation into the complaint by the code's lead organisation. All forms of compliance mechanisms are usually more effective when they are well publicised and promoted.

PROS AND CONS

For participating in this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- A compliance mechanism necessitates a better adherence to the code of conduct, which will enhance further and better transparency and accountability practices in the organisations.
- A code of conduct with a compliance mechanism may improve the credibility of participating organisations because it will be perceived by external stakeholders as a more formal and rigorous self-regulation scheme.

Cons:

- Undertaking the assessment and responding to complaints can be resource intensive in terms of time and staff inputs. This is particularly true when the assessments are to be done frequently and very exhaustively, or when the complaints are not necessarily relevant or applicable.
- If not properly addressed, issues raised through the compliance mechanisms may have a negative impact on an organisation's credibility and image.

For initiating this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- Such mechanisms will commonly improve the compliance and adherence to the code among the code signatories.
- Compliance mechanisms will usually improve the credibility and standing of both the code of conduct signatories and the CSOs' network or group involved.
- Compliance mechanisms can also be a good way to learn of the difficulties and challenges which are faced by the participating organisations. They may also be useful in gathering best practices on the code's application and enforcement.

Cons:

- Organising and implementing the assessment together with compiling and analysing the reports are resource intensive.
- Compliance mechanisms alone, when there is no sanctioning mechanism, may not be enough to ensure full adherence to the code.

RESOURCES NEEDED

The resources needed to add a compliance mechanism within a code of conduct are not intensive. However, the resources needed to run compliance mechanisms may vary greatly depending how the workload is distributed among the code's signatories and its organisers. Typically, it will require a strong organisation to lead the code.



CASE STUDY NGO Code of Ethics, Zimbabwe²⁵

Organisation/Secretariat:	National Association of Non-governmental Organisations (NANGO)
Country:	Zimbabwe
Type of initiative:	Code of conduct
Date established:	2006
Participating organisations:	200

CONTEXT

NANGO is a national umbrella body for CSOs in Zimbabwe. Through its code of conduct, NANGO is trying to encourage members to be as transparent as possible but Zimbabwe has a restrictive civil society space. Therefore, NANGO has had to develop a code of conduct with compliance measures that encourage greater accountability without putting code members at risk from government retaliation.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS:

- The code is voluntary for external CSOs and is a requirement for NANGO members.
- There are no official complaint mechanisms nor does NANGO monitor compliance itself. NANGO relies solely on stakeholders' feedback to evaluate compliance with its code.
- Sanctions and expulsions are not publicised.

BEST PRACTICES/INNOVATIONS:

- NANGO needs their members' consent before making any information public, as they are operating in a restrictive environment for CSOs.
- NANGO publicises the code through their website, in their contact with members, in discussions with partners, by holding workshops and through seminars. But the compliance system is completely informal. It is through physical meetings that they inform all reliable stakeholders about how to complain about possible violations of the code of conduct.
- NANGO operates with discretion and not through coercion. It encourages members to comply with the code and works with code breakers on resolving issues. Before taking sanctions against a code breaker, they will propose changes, provide technical support to improve the CSO's conduct, and work with its funding partners to find a solution (for example, the CSO's funding could become tied to compliance).
- Overall, complaints mechanisms can also be a way of resolving conflicts between members.
- In non-restrictive civil society environments, a compliance and complaints mechanism will be stronger when publicised. Then, the code's signatories can be asked to promote the complaints mechanism themselves and also implement one within their own organisations.

LESSONS LEARNT:

- When a code is of a voluntary nature, compliance mechanisms may be more difficult to implement.

²⁵ The external context in which NANGO developed its self-regulation initiative can be found page 20.

Requiring financial and annual reports can be a solution to this difficulty and to the challenges faced in a restrictive environment.

- A complaints mechanism functions better if it works as transparently as the context allows.
- Participating organisations need to be made aware of the administrative costs implied.
- Before implementing compliance or sanctions mechanisms, it is also clear that capacities among members need to be built and awareness needs to be further developed. Holding workshops to build such capacity and awareness among members can be something very useful and relevant.

CONTACT:

www.nango.org.zw

CODE OF CONDUCT WITH SANCTION MECHANISMS

DEFINITION: A code of conduct with a sanctioning mechanism will prescribe actions to be taken against participating organisations if they do not comply with the code of conduct's principles and standards.

HOW IT WORKS: Sanctions are an extension of a compliance mechanism which is used to force a code's signatory to correct its behaviour if it is found to be not complying with the code. Types of sanctions range from recommendations for improvement, financial penalties and the suspension of membership or expulsion. Each of these levels of sanctions can be intensified by publicising them, thereby using the threat of damaging the code breaker's credibility. Sanctions mechanisms will work best if they are perceived as independent and impartial. As such they are often handled by an independent committee composed of representatives from both the code's members, the umbrella organisation and CSOs' partners. A code of conduct with the addition of both compliance and sanctioning mechanisms requires a much more formal structure, which will be run very similarly to a certification scheme.

PROS AND CONS

For participating in this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- A code of conduct with a sanctioning system can even further increase the credibility and positive image of participating organisations.
- Before the sanctions are applied, an organisation will often receive support and advice on how to resolve the challenge faced and to correct its behaviour.

Cons:

- Sanctions, particularly when they are made public, can discredit an organisation not complying with the code.

For initiating this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- It is considered as the most credible form of a code of conduct.
- A code with a sanctioning mechanism gives well-planned means of action for the enforcement of the code.

Cons:

- Sanctioning mechanisms, especially when implemented by an independent committee, will require more resources to be effective.
- If the sanctions mechanisms are used and made public frequently, it may discredit the code and the network as a whole in the long run.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Not much additional resources are necessary to implement a sanctions mechanism once a compliance system is in place. Setting an independent committee to review compliance and impose sanctions may incur some costs though (both in terms of time and finance).

CASE STUDY Australian Council for International Development Code of Conduct



AUSTRALIAN
COUNCIL
FOR
INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

Organisation/Secretariat:	Australian Council for International Development (ACFID)
Country:	Australia
Type of modality:	Code of conduct

Date established: 1997, comprehensively revised in 2010

Participating organisations: 127 signatories

CONTEXT

ACFID is an umbrella body for the overseas aid and development sector in Australia. They began designing a code of conduct over fifteen years ago. The Australian government also became involved with the code after a high profile scandal in the Australian NGO sector led to greater demands for CSOs' accountability standards. While ACFID and the Australian government initially developed the code of conduct together, within a few years the code became solely ACFID's responsibility to manage. The code was comprehensively reviewed in 2010, with major changes made to its structure, content and broadening stakeholders to include partners and beneficiaries.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS:

- The ACFID code of conduct is open to all CSOs on a voluntary basis but it is a requirement for ACFID membership.
- The ACFID code of conduct has had an independent complaints mechanism from the start.
- Most complaints received to date have come from donors but there are increasingly complaints from other code's signatories and partners.
- The ACFID code has now evolved into a more formalised scheme as participants are required to undertake compliance activities annually and their prolongation as signatories relies on the acceptance of these documents by the Code of Conduct Committee. Also, code signatories can now place an ACFID logo on their website to demonstrate their adherence to the code, almost like a seal system.
- The code of conduct committee is independent; it has 3 experts and 6 members elected by ACFID. While the committee reports to the ACFID executive committee, it solely rules on complaints and the executive committee cannot overrule its decisions.

BEST PRACTICES/INNOVATIONS:

- If a code signatory fails in its compliance with the code, several warnings will be issued and ACFID will make several attempts to resolve the issues. If the code signatory does not adequately correct the problem, then the independent Code of Conduct Committee will sanction the organisation by expelling it from the code.
- Compliance mechanisms are confidential while ongoing as ACFID tries first to resolve the issue. If the member is expelled, only then will ACFID publicise the use of the sanction and will record the expulsion in its annual publication.
- With the 2010 code of conduct, all signatories are now required to have their own complaints mechanisms within their own structures.

LESSONS LEARNT:

- Sanction mechanisms are found to be a good way to work through issues with the code's signatories and not just to punish transgressions. Therefore, sanctions should only be employed as a last resort after trying to resolve an ongoing issue or complaint.
- Most of the time, resolving an issue does not typically lead to the actual expulsion of the organisation.
- Having the sanctions mechanisms in place is useful for the legitimacy and the functioning of the code.

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CERTIFICATION SCHEME

DEFINITION: A certification scheme is a way to evaluate an organisation's governance, programmes and practices against a set of standards and norms defined and established by a group of organisations. After proving adherence to these standards the organisation receives a seal of certification or accreditation.

HOW IT WORKS: The certification standards are often based on an already existing code of conduct. Standards can be further developed and adapted through a consultative process organised typically by one or several national platforms or umbrella organisations working together. The certification scheme will then be managed by one umbrella body or, more likely, an independent secretariat will be formed. The certification process entails an evaluation of each applicant and this evaluation can be undertaken by the applicant itself (through a self-assessment), a peer or a third party. Certification schemes necessarily involve a compliance system through the evaluation process but they may also have complaints and/or sanctions mechanisms. Certification schemes usually require fees for their services.

PROS AND CONS

For participating in and initiating this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- The existence of a compliance system necessitates applicant organisations to seriously engage with the certification standards, which will in turn improve transparent and accountable practices in the sector.
- A certification scheme will usually increase the level of credibility of the organisations' efforts and commitments to better standards in the sector.

Cons

- Such a formalised scheme results in a resource intensive and expensive evaluation process.
- Fees can be a deterrent for organisations to join the initiative.
- It will be difficult for a certification scheme to appeal to organisations which are far from complying with the standards because of capacities or resource issues.

RESOURCES NEEDED

The resources in terms of time, human resources and finance needed for a certification scheme range from medium to high.

CASE STUDY Standards Programs for Charities and Non-Profits, Canada



Organisation/Secretariat:	Imagine Canada
Country:	Canada
Type of modality:	Certification programme with a peer review
Date established:	2010
Participating organisations:	82 accredited (206 participants, as of December 2013)

CONTEXT²⁶

Imagine Canada is a national umbrella body for Canadian CSOs. It already had a voluntary ethical code of conduct for its members since 1998. Following consultations, they found that their members were

²⁶ A further analysis of the internal context in which Imagine Canada developed its self-regulation initiative can be found page 10.

willing to go further in terms of compliance with transparency and accountability standards. It took six years to agree on 73 accreditation standards ranging across five different areas: board governance, financial accountability and transparency, fundraising, staff management and volunteer involvement.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS:

- Applicants apply online through an online form, submitting relevant documentation demonstrating evidence of compliance with the standards. These documents are first reviewed by Imagine Canada's staff before being evaluated by three peer reviewers, who will together take a collective decision on the application. The process takes between 6 to 18 months depending on the readiness of the applying organisation.
- If successful, participating organisations will be granted a 5-year accreditation, listed on Imagine Canada's website, and will receive a trustmark (or seal).
- Each year, accredited organisations have to produce an annual compliance report and pay a licence fee so as to maintain their accreditation.
- Compliance is monitored through these annual compliance reports, investigations of complaints, and spot checks of 3-5% of accredited organisations.
- The certification programme is financed by the fees collected from applicants.

BEST PRACTICES/INNOVATIONS:

- In developing the standards, Imagine Canada used a combination of web conferences and in-person forums to validate the potential standards, and then to fundraise for the fees necessary for the initial budget.
- It is important in the early stages of development to go through a consultative process with external organisations and stakeholders. This can be done with several organisations championing the process throughout the country.
- Members consider the certification programme as a capacity-building measure as applying for accreditation is seen as an exercise to get their structure in place.

LESSONS LEARNT:

- Developing a certification programme requires a well-planned programme.
- Beginning a certification programme is a lengthy process which requires many consultations with the civil society sector, sufficient buy-in from CSOs and a thorough understanding of how they operate.
- A certification programme is a labour-intensive process. It needs to strike a balance between a manageable workload for staff with maintaining a sufficient number of applications to be processed. Securing enough resources is also important to meet the demand.
- Smaller organisations are faced with greater challenges when joining a certification programme. First, it can be too costly to apply to the programme and they struggle to allocate staff time for it. Second, the governance standards, especially around the boards and governance mechanisms, can be challenging.
- A certification programme requires good outreach and marketing efforts from both the certification body and from the certified organisations, particularly in social media, because the certification is most valuable when more people are aware of the programme.

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CERTIFICATION SCHEME WITH SELF-ASSESSMENT

DEFINITION: A certification scheme implies an entry compliance mechanism, which in this case will be done by the organisations applying themselves. They will have to conduct a periodic auto-evaluation against the scheme's standards and based on the application form developed by the certifier.

HOW IT WORKS: A self-assessment will typically be led by the monitoring and evaluation officer of the applicant, but will call for the involvement of the entire organisation in the analysis and effort needed to complete the assessment. The certification scheme will require conducting a desk review analysis, interviews with staff and sometimes interviews with key stakeholders. Such an evaluation may use a rating scale (points or percentages). The self-assessment may have to be repeated annually or on a longer fixed term. In most cases, a self-assessment will be confidential (and only shared with the certifier) and will form the basis for a plan to address key issues highlighted during the examination.

TIPS TO MAKE SELF-ASSESSMENTS MORE EFFICIENT:

- When conducting a self-assessment, consider organising an internal workshop run by experienced external facilitators.
- A self-assessment can be included in an organisation's own internal processes of planning, monitoring and evaluation so that it acts as both a required activity and a way of completing the certification requirements, thus saving on time and resources.
- To make this process as transparent as possible, the certifier could ask for a summary of the self-assessment results for publication and/or publish the rating.

PROS AND CONS

For participating in this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- Often the context will determine how positive an impact a certification with self-assessment will have in raising an organisation's credibility and public trust.
- A self-assessment based certification will encourage ownership of the evaluation process and of the scheme as a whole.
- It is less costly to implement than a peer review or third party assessment.

Cons:

- The self-assessment exercise may not be perceived as accurate or truthful and therefore not credible enough.
- It requires resources, time and a good internal buy-in from all staff to run a self-assessment.

For initiating this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- A self-assessment based certification scheme will minimise the secretariat's costs in terms of the evaluation process.

Cons:

- Participating organisations may not be rigorous or honest enough for the certification scheme to really achieve a high level of accountability and transparency.
- Such an initiative will not allow the certifier to ensure the overall quality, coherence or level of rigour in all the evaluations.

RESOURCES NEEDED

A self-assessment based certification scheme is less costly and resource intensive for the secretariat, but it can be time intensive for the participating organisations. The initial budget necessary to set up the initiative may be high but, once it is running, the assessments shouldn't be too expensive.

CASE STUDY NGO Quality Assurance Mechanism (QUAM), Uganda



Organisation/Secretariat:	Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations (DENIVA)
Country:	Uganda
Type of modality:	Certification scheme with self-assessment
Date established:	2006
Participating organisations:	51 (as of April 2013)

CONTEXT

It was in 2004 that the idea of a certification scheme was first tested among CSOs in Uganda. After positive feedback, national, regional and multi-sectoral consultations started in 2006. The standards were approved in 2006 and QUAM was launched in September 2006, but the QUAM secretariat, governance system and full certification mechanisms were established in 2008. It is promoted by the two national platforms, DENIVA and the Uganda NGO Forum.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS ²⁷:

- QUAM has developed a thorough self-evaluation form for applicant organisations to fill in as the first step of the process.
- The self-application is then reviewed by a district committee of peers, which will also conduct meetings with the applicant and solicit comments from the general public (within a window period of a month). Within two months from the initial application, the committee will review all the information and send recommendations to a national council. The National Council will take the final decision on the certification.
- QUAM has three levels of certification: the first level certificate (27 core standards) is given for one year, the second level (48 standards) is valid for three years and the third is an advanced certificate with the full 59 standards and is valid for five years.
- All documents are made public at all the different steps in the certification process.
- Certification fees are not determined by the level of certification, but by either regional or national classification.

BEST PRACTICES/INNOVATIONS:

- There are three levels of certification valid for different periods of time and it is the applicant organisation which chooses the level of certification it wants.
- Members of the committees are usually retired CSO staff who volunteer their time and are appointed for a three year term. Possible conflicts of interest between committee members and CSOs being accredited are considered and solved.
- The district committees meet with the applicants and can make recommendations for improvement.
- The QUAM certification scheme includes beneficiary feedback in the assessments, either via a physical meeting, asking for written comments or by interviewing people.

²⁷ For further description of the QUAM's standards, consult the figure 1 page 25 and also page 68.

LESSONS LEARNT:

- All people involved in the certification scheme (staff, boards and committee members) need to be equally qualified and trained on the standards and their application.
- A certification system needs initial support from many CSOs, good feedback from external stakeholders and a good marketing strategy to promote it. Particular attention needs to be paid to donors' interests: both in funding the certification scheme and in recognising the certification in their funding mechanisms.
- Leaving the assessment to the applicant requires that the applying organisations have the capacity to conduct the evaluation. The secretariat needs to assist and equip them for success. Capacity-building even before the scheme is up and running should be considered for local and smaller organisations in particular.
- A certification scheme, even with a self-assessment process, needs a strong secretariat that cannot only spearhead the project but also ensure that the certification is done swiftly.

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CERTIFICATION SCHEME WITH PEER ASSESSMENT

DEFINITION: The initial assessment of applying organisations against the certification scheme's standards is done by designated peer(s).

HOW IT WORKS: The secretariat of the certification scheme arranges for a peer organisation or a group of peers to examine the candidate organisation and analyse its compliance with the standards. Often this peer will be another member of the certification scheme. Peer evaluation will be done through desk-based research and a field visit to the applying organisation. The evaluating peer will submit a report with recommendations to a committee or the secretariat to decide on the final status of the application. Peer assessment schemes are rare because they require a significant amount of time and also the same level of expertise from members.

PROS AND CONS

For participating and initiating in this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- A certification scheme based on a peer assessment can foster greater links and collaboration between CSOs and increase the exchange of good practices among the sector, provided there is already existing trust.
- When the assessment is done by peers, it will usually minimise the secretariat costs to run the certification process.
- Such a scheme will probably benefit from more credibility than self-assessment based certification.

Cons:

- It may be difficult to guarantee the overall quality, coherence or level of rigour of all assessments. Peers may not be qualified to conduct assessments for all types of CSOs. Peers may be reluctant to criticise another CSO's work and practices.
- Peer assessments also require a good level of trust within the civil society sector; otherwise CSOs may be uncomfortable with divulging information to peers.

RESOURCES NEEDED

The secretariat will need to find an appropriate peer assessment mechanism, which may require time and human resources. Overall, the secretariat will bear less financial and human resources costs but it will be more expensive for the candidate organisations.

CASE STUDY Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC), Philippines



Organisation/Secretariat:	The Philippine Council for NGO Certification
Country:	The Philippines
Type:	Certification scheme with peer assessment
Date established:	1997
Participating organisations:	370

CONTEXT²⁸

PCNC was created by six national networks which worked together when the government decided to change the law on donors' tax exemption for CSOs in 1996. These 6 networks negotiated with the Filipino government to give a newly created body, PCNC, the authority to certify CSOs, who would then benefit from donors' tax exemptions. In 1998, the government established a memorandum of understanding recognising PCNC's role in certifying organisations. In 2009, the mission of PCNC began broadening beyond certification for tax incentives into focusing on improving effectiveness of NGOs.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS:

- The applicant organisation is asked to fill in a simple questionnaire and submit relevant documents to establish the legitimacy of its operations and compliance with the government's statutory requirements.
- A group of two to three evaluators will then visit the organisation to lead the actual assessment, which is based on the already completed questionnaire and submitted documents. The assessment includes desk research, a field visit, interviews and meetings. Assessments usually take one to three days to complete.
- PCNC pays for the travel costs of accreditors but the evaluators volunteer their time.
- After the assessment, the group of evaluators produces a report to determine whether the NGO is meeting the standards of the scheme. This report will also include recommendations for organisational improvements.
- The PCNC Board will then review the report and approve or refuse the accreditation. Accreditation can be granted for one, three or five years.

BEST PRACTICES/INNOVATIONS:

- The evaluators are all volunteers. They are members of already certified CSOs who are trained by PCNC. A staff member from PCNC always accompanies them during the field visit.
- For the financial management component of the assessment, volunteers from an association of accountants review the adherence to the financial accountability standards.
- The evaluators are not the ones deciding on the certification. The final word lies with the Board of Trustees of PCNC, an independent group of CSO representatives elected from certified organisations for a set period of time (ensuring a standard level of assessment).

LESSONS LEARNT:

- The peer assessment process is time and human resource intensive. In order for it to be fully effective, the evaluators need to be regularly trained and updated on the standards and evaluation process so that the accreditation is done consistently and standards are interpreted similarly.
- There is a need to prove to government and donors that the certification system is able to help improve the standards of CSOs.
- Because the secretariat is in the best position to gather best practices, it needs to allocate some of its time and resources both in capacity-building and in designing and using a system for both monitoring and continuous quality improvement strategies.
- The secretariat also has a role to play in encouraging applicant organisations to organise a thorough initial self-assessment so that all staff members from those organisations also become familiar with the certification standards and apply them in their work.
- Overall, the secretariat has a comprehensive role to play, from mediating among peers to fostering improved quality within the scheme.

CONTACT:

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pcnc@pldtdsl.net • www.pcnc.com.ph/index.php

²⁸ A further analysis of PCNC's external context can be found page 20.

CERTIFICATION SCHEME WITH THIRD PARTY ACCREDITATION

DEFINITION: An independent third party is responsible for analysing an organisation's compliance with the certification scheme's standards.

HOW IT WORKS: A third party assessment is done by an organisation which is not a peer of the certified organisations; it can either be a professional firm, a rating agency or a panel of sector experts. Third party certification bodies very often examine primarily fundraising practices and financial accountability, with some focused on operational quality. Typically, there will be a desk review based on documents sent to the accreditors and a field evaluation visit. Accreditors will meet with the applicant's board and staff members, sometimes also with the applicant's beneficiaries. A report will be produced by the third party and it will serve as the basis for the final decision, usually taken by another body (board of the certification scheme, another independent committee, etc.). Third party certification will be granted for longer periods of time (commonly around five years) and will require a fee to be paid by the applicant.

PROS AND CONS

For participating in and initiating this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- Participating organisations being assessed by expert third-party body will benefit from its expertise, and therefore a third party assessment can be a good way to learn best practices.
- Third party certification will usually benefit from a greater credibility than other schemes.
- The assessment is done solely by the same entity, which can better ensure coherence and quality across all the evaluations.

Cons:

- However, one sole evaluating entity (especially if external to the civil society sector) may not allow for adaptations and flexibility based on the context of each different CSO.
- The credibility of the scheme will mainly rest upon the integrity and image of the third party. It requires finding a relevant and reliable organisation.
- A third party assessment will be expensive.

RESOURCES NEEDED

This type of certification scheme is expensive for both the candidates and the secretariat, but it should require less human resources and time from the secretariat because the evaluation is done by an independent organisation.

CASE STUDY Centre for Philanthropy NPO Certification, Pakistan



Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy

Organisation/Secretariat:	Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy (PCP)
Country:	Pakistan
Type of Initiative:	Certification scheme with third party assessment
Date established:	2001- 2004
Participating organisations:	271

CONTEXT

PCP was funded as an organisation in 2001 and it took three years to develop the certification system, which was established in 2004. While the Pakistani Federal Board of Revenue has also an elaborate mechanism of scrutiny and evaluation before tax incentives are allowed, the government of Pakistan authorised PCP as a certification agency. Certified CSOs receive tax benefits.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS:

- Each organisation needs to fill in an application form.
- PCP then sends staff members to the organisation for a two-day field assessment. PCP produces an evaluation report with recommendations, which is then shared with the organisation. The organisation needs to review the evaluation report and make comments.
- The final report is evaluated by a certification panel, which is the one who actually certifies. This panel is composed of six representatives from the government, CSOs and citizens. They serve for six years and meet around four times a year (whenever there is a certain quorum of reports to review).
- The certification will be given for a three-year period, or the certification panel will give the applicant three months to a year to improve on the recommendations made.

BEST PRACTICES/INNOVATIONS:

- PCP is the organisation doing the evaluation and the certification panel is completely independent from them.
- The fees are cross-subsidised. PCP charges a nominal fee for small or medium organisations which covers around 10-25% of the cost while the larger CSOs pay a full fee, covering partly for the smaller ones. Sometimes the fees can be paid by donors funding PCP. They have created six categories of CSOs with corresponding fees.
- For each application, PCP compiles a document identifying successes and weaknesses with recommendations, which is shared with the organisation.
- They compile a directory of the certified CSOs, called *Gateway to Giving*.
- The certification model is reviewed every three years to implement any lessons learned.
- PCP is therefore accumulating a great deal of knowledge on CSOs' accountability practices. They are planning to hold 'bazaars' with national donors, local representatives of governments and CSOs to discuss development practices.

LESSONS LEARNT:

- The more collaborative the development of the scheme the better; hence communication, advocacy and inclusion are very important. It should be made clear that third party assessment certification is beneficial to CSOs, particularly when that is done, not by a regulatory organisation, but as a chance to strengthen them into being credible partners.
- The government recognition of PCP's certification is beneficial for both participating CSOs and for PCP's scheme itself because it increases their recognition.
- CSOs being certified have to trust the correctness of the certifier's actions and decisions. The credibility of the scheme depends on the certifier's professionalism, objectivity and transparency. Therefore the certifier must be transparent in all its ways of working.

CONTACT:

www.pcp.org.pk

CERTIFICATION SCHEME WITH COMPLIANCE AND SANCTIONS MECHANISMS

DEFINITION: Compliance and sanctions mechanisms will activate when certified organisations do not meet the scheme's standards after the initial certification.

HOW IT WORKS: A compliance mechanism can take several forms, such as when the secretariat will ask certified organisations to produce an annual compliance report or when it has a mechanism to receive feedback from beneficiaries, donors, government, the general public, peers and staff members. When complaints are submitted they will be investigated by the secretariat and they can lead to recommendations to address issues at hand, a fine or possible expulsion, especially if the recommendations are not followed through. The severity and timing of compliance and sanctions mechanisms vary from one certification scheme to another. Certification schemes may or may not publicise the reports, complaints, recommendations and sanctions.

PROS AND CONS

For participating in and initiating this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- Establishing compliance and sanctions mechanisms can be a useful source of feedback for the participating CSOs and the certifier.
- They can be extra motivation for complying with the standards for all organisations involved.
- Such mechanisms can significantly increase the public trust in participating CSOs and the credibility of the scheme.
- Once a certification scheme is in place, compliance and sanctioning mechanisms are not difficult to add.

Cons:

- It can be cost and time intensive to resolve the complaints, especially if the complaints arise due to a misunderstanding of the self-regulation initiative's standards.
- If there are a high number of sanctions used and publicised, it may undermine confidence in the civil society sector. And it can be particularly detrimental to the credibility of all the organisations involved.
- It may be difficult to evaluate which level of sanctions will resolve the issues raised.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Compliance and sanctioning mechanisms do not require significant resources to set up. Managing such mechanisms depends on how many complaints will be received on average.

CASE STUDY NGO Good Governance and Professional Practice Certification scheme, Cambodia



Organisation/Secretariat:	Corporation Committee for Cambodia (CCC)
Country:	Cambodia
Type of initiative:	Certification scheme with peer assessment
Date established:	2004
Participating organisations:	4200

CONTEXT

CCC is a national umbrella body in Cambodia. In 1995, CCC had developed a code of conduct compiling principles for the CSOs' governance of its members. Early in 2000 they conducted research on other self-regulation initiatives internationally and consultations nationally. It led to the revision of the code of conduct and the creation of the certification scheme in 2004 called NGO Good Governance and Professional Practice (GPP). Since then, the code has been revised a further three times, with the latest revision taking place in 2013 based on an online consultation and specific consultation with experts and CCC members.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS:

- The Cambodian NGO Good Governance and Professional Practice (GPP) consists of a code of conduct and a certification system. The code of conduct has 26 standards, 62 indicators and 109 guidelines. The certification system contains an application form, assessment criteria, assessment committees and complaints mechanisms.
- The certification scheme is based on a peer assessment (done by CCC through desktop research, a field visit and a final review by a steering committee) and which has several compliance mechanisms including a complaints mechanism and the requirement of submitting an annual audit report.
- Upon reception of a complaint, GPP will contact the concerned CSOs or individuals to discuss how to address and improve CSOs' practices.
- If a complaint is not addressed or a report not submitted within a window period, GPP will suspend the granting of the certification but this will not be announced publicly.

BEST PRACTICES/INNOVATIONS:

- This self-regulation initiative was developed gradually as it began with a code of ethics, followed by a new code of conduct with standards, indicators and guidelines later on. Compliance mechanisms are now in the process of being added. During the first five years the certification scheme was also free for members.
- The standards for the code are the same as the standards for the certification.
- If a CSO fails the initial certification, it will receive a list of recommendations for further improvements. The organisation can also receive capacity-building training, or mentoring and referrals. This will be kept completely confidential.
- GPP convenes regular meetings in different provinces for stakeholders to attend and learn how the certification and its compliance mechanisms work. They target outreach to specific donors and local government representatives. They also organise annual feedback meetings between donors, government and certified organisations, and "certified learning forums" for certified organisations.

LESSONS LEARNT:

- Even though there are compliance and sanctioning mechanisms, the certification scheme should be established as a rewards system, and not as a punitive system.
- The compliance mechanisms need to be made available and accessible to the public, peers, staff and government. All stakeholders need to know of their existence; the certifiers should play a critical role to promote the compliance mechanisms and guide other stakeholders to play their role in the compliance mechanisms.
- Complaints which arise are often related to issues that fall outside the code's boundaries. This in fact suggests that a self-regulation initiative's code and its standards can often be misunderstood.
- The mechanisms in place have to be responsive and efficient enough to really hold the certified organisations to account, though often it will take time to assess a complaint or a failure to comply with the certification's standards.
- While an official expulsion should be part of the sanctioning mechanism, everything should be done to prevent its use. It should be the very last resort.

CONTACT: www.ccc-cambodia.org

Table 3: Comparing outcomes from the different modalities of self-regulation*

The table below presents a brief comparison of potential outcomes and impact that may occur when undertaking and implementing a self-regulation initiative. This table follows One World Trust’s research on the three main outcomes of self-regulation initiatives; sustainability of the initiative, improvement in CSOs’ effectiveness and increases in external and internal credibility²⁹.

Modality of SRI	Potential sustainability	Improvement in CSO effectiveness	Increased credibility to CSO among multiple stakeholders
Working Group	++	+++	++
Information Service	+++++	++	+++++
Award	+++	++	+++++
Code of Conduct	+++++	+	++
[Add on:]** Compliance Mechanisms	++	+++	++++
[Add on:]** Sanctions Mechanisms	+++++	+++++	+++++
Certification Scheme	+++	+++++	+++++
With Self-Assessment	+++	+++++	+++
With Peer Assessment	++	+++	++++
With Third Party Accreditation	++++	+++++	+++++
[Add on:]** Compliance Mechanisms	+++++	+++	+++++

+ = low | +++ = medium | +++++ = high | +++++ = Potentially High (but not confirmed by research yet)

* It should be noted that increased CSOs’ effectiveness and the impact on raising credibility in the civil society sector are two areas that require much greater research. This guide’s approximation is based on the best available information³⁰.

** These mechanisms that self-regulation initiatives can choose to add to the initial schemes are analysed in this table from the point of view of the resources and capabilities needed to implement them once the scheme is already in place and operational.

²⁹Alice Obrecht, “Effective Accountability? The drivers, benefits and mechanisms of CSO self-regulation”, Briefing Papers 130, One World Trust, 2012, p.4-38.
³⁰ Ibid. And also Catherine Shea, Sandra Sitar, “NGO Accreditation and Certification: The Way Forward? An Evaluation of the Development Community’s Experience”, International Center for Not-for-Profit-Law, Report and Recommendations, p.2-48; John Gaventa, Rosemary McGee, “The Impact of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives”, Development Policy Review, 2013, p.3-24.

INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES

DEFINITION: These initiatives are international level arrangements that span the five modalities of self-regulation (code of conduct, certification scheme, etc.) and may target one specific sector of CSOs' activities.

HOW IT WORKS: These international initiatives can be formed through international consultations, an international working group or by sector experts, particularly when they intend to focus on specific aspects of CSOs' activities. Because they are international, they often do not target grassroots organisations, either in the consultations or as members of their self-regulation initiatives. The most frequent members are large international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) or national civil society organisations, and often these international initiatives target the development sector. It is worth noting that when an INGO becomes involved in an international self-regulation initiative, there needs to be clarity on whether both the international secretariat and its national branches/offices are joining the initiative or only the international secretariat, and whether the national branches should apply to national self-regulation schemes instead.

PROS AND CONS

For participating in this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- The international scope of such initiatives means greater visibility and credibility to an organisation. It can be a way to be recognised as part of the international civil society community, particularly towards governments and donors.

Cons:

- The international self-regulation initiatives are often based on fees, which can be relatively high.
- International standards can sometimes be difficult to access or comply with for small, national or local organisations.

For initiating this type of self-regulation initiative

Pros:

- It reaches international non-governmental organisations which are not typically addressed through national self-regulation initiatives.
- The international scope can mean an enhanced credibility for the organisation running it.

Cons:

- It is difficult to reach out and include small and grassroots organisations, and it may then be difficult to ensure a sufficient global representation.
- It can be resource intensive to set up the initiative.
- An international level initiative might not adequately factor in the diversity and multiculturalism of the civil society sector.

RESOURCES NEEDED

These initiatives will require significant resources because of the international component.

ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES

While these international initiatives have many good resources on self-regulation, the actual schemes may be too costly for most national and local CSOs. These initiatives are worth consulting but are not necessarily recommended for all civil society organisations globally.

CASE STUDY Joint Standards Initiative (JSI)

Joint Standards Initiative
Humanitarian Standards for Aid Workers

Organisation/Secretariat:	JSI Steering Group, composed of chairs, directors or project managers from the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP International), the Sphere Project and People in Aid.
Type of modality:	Working Group
Date established:	2011
Participating organisations:	HAP, Sphere and People in Aid

The Joint Standards Initiative (JSI) is a collaboration between three existing accountability initiatives (Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, the Sphere Project and People in Aid) which aims to improve accountability in humanitarian activities by converging their respective standards. The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) has a 2010 Standard of Accountability and Quality Management³¹ and corresponding certificate. The Sphere Handbook³² is a technical handbook that codifies effective responses to humanitarian emergencies launched in 1997 by a group of humanitarian NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement. The People in Aid 'Code of Good Practice'³³ details effective human resource management for humanitarian and development agencies. Together, they are trying to combine these standards into a coherent set that will cover existing gaps while reducing the overlap in international accountability standards. The new standards are aimed at those who work in the humanitarian sector, whether aid workers or affiliated organisations.

In 2012, JSI held a Global Stakeholder Consultation to gather feedback on four key themes: the use and accessibility of standards, their implementation, compliance and verification mechanisms and future needs. They consulted 2000 people among 350 organisations and across 114 countries using interviews, focus groups and an online survey. JSI hopes to have a Common Core Standard by the end of 2013 and they will be working together on increasing awareness and the visibility of the Standard afterwards.

RESOURCES:

- The 2012 study's results were released in 2013 as the *Global Stakeholders Consultation Report* and can be accessed here: <http://pool.fruitycms.com/humanitarianstandards/News/FINAL-JSI-Stakeholder-Consultation-Report.pdf>

CASE STUDY International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Registry



Organisation/Secretariat:	International Aid Transparency Initiative
Type of modality:	Information Service
Date established:	2011
Participating organisations:	Over 194

The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) was established to improve aid transparency. It works as an online publishing framework where donors, civil society organisations, international aid agencies, non-governmental organisations, governments and multilateral institutions can publish and

³¹HAP 2010 Standard is available in several languages at: <http://hapinternational.org/what-we-do/hap-standard.aspx> . For more information on HAP, consult the case study 4 on international initiatives page 58.

³²Further information on the Sphere is available at <http://www.sphereproject.org/handbook/>

³³Further information on People in Aid is available at <http://www.peopleinaid.org/code/>

access information about aid spending. All submitted information is published according to a common and open standard of publication known as the IATI Standard, so that IATI is accessible and has standardised information. Those publishing information upload it on their own websites which is then linked electronically to the IATI Registry, a central index for all data. Anyone can search the IATI Registry and access the data. When participants change or add new information to their websites, they have to inform the IATI Registry so that it can update their catalogue and let others know there is new information.

RESOURCES:

- The IATI Registry can be accessed here: <http://iatiregistry.org>
- Information on the IATI standards and user guides can be found here: <http://iatistandard.org>

CASE STUDY INGO Accountability Charter



Organisation/Secretariat:	International Civil Society Centre
Type of modality:	Code of Conduct
Date established:	2006
Participating organisations:	22 full members and 3 affiliate members

The INGO Accountability Charter is a framework for international non-governmental organisations developed by CSOs in response to increasing calls for accountability, transparency and effectiveness. It has three aims, which are demonstrating greater commitment of INGOs to their effective accountability, streamlining NGO's accountability commitments across the sector and regions, and improving the effectiveness of organisations through exchange of expertise and benchmarking. The Charter is meant to be a globally accessible and cross-sectorial accountability framework.

The Charter is based on nine principles: Respect for Universal Principles, Independence, Responsible Advocacy, Effective Programmes, Non-Discrimination, Transparency, Good Governance, Ethical Fundraising and Professional Management. Members commit to completing annual reports on their adherence to the Charter's principles using the specially designed GRI NGO Sector Supplement reporting tool. An independent Review Panel assesses the annual reports before their publication online with the Panel's feedback. This reporting process is designed to further organisational development and increase their effectiveness while also encouraging peer learning by sharing information and best practices. Recently, more principles have also been added in the reporting requirements developed with the Global Reporting Initiative, which include Environmental Sustainability, Working in Partnership and a greater focus on mutual accountability.

RESOURCES:

- Access the INGO Charter here: <http://www.ingoaccountabilitycharter.org/home/the-charter-principles/>
- Examine their collection of best practices gathered here: <http://www.ingoaccountabilitycharter.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/Good-Practice-on-GRI-Reporting-V1.pdf>

CASE STUDY Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP International)



Organisation/Secretariat:	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
Type of modality:	Certification Scheme
Date established:	2003
Participating organisations:	17 certified organisations ³⁴

The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership Standard of Accountability and Quality Management was established in 2003 to promote accountability in groups and organisations who work during humanitarian crises. It is run by the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International (HAP International) which describes itself as the first international self-regulation body in the humanitarian sector.

Their Certificate in Accountability and Quality Management is open to local, national and international organisations (including non-HAP members). The Certificate is valid for three years with the possibility of a mid-term audit, and is paid for by fees (\$7,500 for organisations with annual expenditure under \$5 million and \$15,000 for organisations with expenditure over \$5 million). The audit itself is conducted by an independent auditor from HAP's Certification and Accreditation Review Board and takes 10 to 12 working days, including field visits to the organisation's headquarters and one of the programming sites. HAP is one of the few self-regulation initiatives which consult with the organisations' beneficiaries in the process of their third party assessment.

RESOURCES:

- The HAP Standards are available here:
<http://www.hapinternational.org/what-we-do/hap-standard.aspx>
- You may want to check the HAP capacity-building workshops:
<http://www.hapinternational.org/what-we-do/training.aspx>
- For more information, consult HAP research on the benefits of accountability measures:
<http://www.hapinternational.org/what-we-do/certification.aspx>

³⁴ HAP International itself also has 89 member organisations but they are not necessarily certified by the Standard.

PART 2:

IMPROVING A SELF-REGULATION INITIATIVE, BEST PRACTICES AND INNOVATIONS

The overview of different modalities of self-regulation initiatives in part 1 demonstrates the variety of solutions to transparency and accountability that have been developed worldwide. As there is no 'one size fits all' model for transparency or accountability, no single type of self-regulation initiative will necessarily work best in any given context. Additionally, self-regulation initiatives which incorporate best practices from several different modalities will be better able to adapt to constantly evolving contexts.

To this end, this guide encourages hybridity in the design and implementation of any self-regulation initiative. This section highlights some of the best practices and useful innovations from CIVICUS' research on self-regulation initiatives. Adapting these best practices and innovations to an existing self-regulation initiative or using them in the development of a new initiative can improve practices within these initiatives, foster greater accountability in self-regulation bodies and increase their overall sustainability.

The best practices are organised among the areas of **Innovative Practices**, **Accountability** and **Sustainability**. The specific recommendations for each area are as follows:

Innovative Practices (p.59)

- Re-assess the context routinely
- Review, adapt and incorporate existing standards
- Volunteers
- Using ICT to improve a self-regulation initiative
- Standardising information
- Finance
- Self-assessment tools

Accountability (p.65)

- Transparency through disclosure of information
- Managing expectations
- Monitoring and evaluation system to measure impact
- Taking into account beneficiaries

Sustainability (p.70)

- Scaling up membership
- Fundraising for financial sustainability
- Engagement with external stakeholders through good outreach
- Promotion and communications strategy to reach all stakeholders
- Capacity building

INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

Adapting innovative practices from across different modalities of self-regulation initiatives can help improve the management and efficiency of an initiative. Here are some practical suggestions drawn from this guide's research on how to incorporate innovation, both within the structure of a self-regulation initiative and among an initiative's participating organisations. These recommendations can enable self-regulation initiatives and their member organisations to become more aware of potential resources and practices to increase efficiency.

RE-ASSESS THE CONTEXT ROUTINELY

Self-regulation initiatives should not be static structures but must address changes, criticisms and new challenges as they arise. The context in which a self-regulation initiative is designed will constantly change and in order to keep abreast of new challenges and opportunities self-regulation initiatives must be capable of self-reflection and adaption. The principles, standards and processes of a self-regulation initiative should therefore be revised regularly. For example, since their launch in 1999, the Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC) have reviewed their standards three times in order to refine them to be more relevant for both small and large NGOs. Each self-regulation initiative should also be designed so as to incorporate feedback from stakeholders, lessons learnt from their own self-assessments, criticisms and new innovative practices.

It is worth considering establishing a set time frame for periodic reviews of the self-regulation's standards and practices. Having set structures already in place for a working group or for convening a wider consultative process will also make reviewing the context and revising a self-regulation initiative easier.

REVIEW, ADAPT AND INCORPORATE EXISTING STANDARDS

Adapting existing standards to the context of a self-regulation initiative or to a specific sector may be more efficient and easier than designing new standards and will save costs. Furthermore, there is the added benefit of using standards which are already known and possibly familiar to the organisations involved in the self-regulation initiative and beyond. For instance, international principles, such as the Istanbul Principles³⁵ (adopted in 2011 after an international consultation led by the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness), can be adapted to the local context through an adaptation workshop.

CASE STUDY Partos 9001



Organisation/Secretariat:	Partos
Country:	The Netherlands
Type of modality:	Other
Date established:	2004
Participating organisations:	114

CONTEXT

Partos is an association of organisations working in international development based in the Netherlands. Partos has had a mandatory code of conduct for a number of years and in 2012 they refined it even further to fit with the Istanbul Principles.

³⁵ See 'Section 2 - Choosing a modality of self-regulation' for further description of the Istanbul Principles (p.22-23).

Together with their members' quality managers they developed a civil society sector-specific adaptation of the ISO norm 9000 (from the International Organisation for Standardisation) and an implementation manual (www.partos.nl/content/partos-9001-norm-en-handleiding available in English too). Their standard, termed Partos 9001, concerns CSOs' quality management and organisational quality. Also referring to the Istanbul Principles, Partos 9001 identifies different "client groups" of development CSOs (such as beneficiaries, partner organisations, donors, private individuals) and underlines the importance of a learning attitude and focus on the effectiveness of the organisation's work. Because auditors were involved in the creation and implementation process of Partos 9001, CSOs can now receive directly from their auditor a Partos 9001 recognition in addition to their ISO 9001 certificate.

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VOLUNTEERS

Using volunteers can be a very useful practice to maximise a self-regulation initiative's resources. Volunteering can be used at different stages of developing or running a self-regulation initiative. Most schemes reviewed have volunteers helping in the assessment process, but volunteers can also be useful for capacity-building activities for instance. Volunteers are a valuable means of gaining expertise from those with specialised knowledge who can contribute to different activities of a self-regulation initiative. To this end, consider finding volunteers with specific expertise or relevant experience, such as other practitioners from the civil society sector or from the private sector (accountants, auditing firms, monitoring and evaluation experts, etc.). When finding volunteers, it is also pertinent to consider their geographical spread as having people based in different regions can be useful in conducting assessments or outreach.



CASE STUDY Volunteers in the assessment check

Organisation/Secretariat: The Credibility Alliance
Country: India
Type of modality: Certification Scheme
Date established: 2004
Participating organisations: 354

CONTEXT

The Credibility Alliance is a certification scheme with a set of norms and an accreditation scheme for non-profit organisations in India. The accreditation has two levels of standards, a minimum and a desirable set of norms. The accreditation given by the Credibility Alliance is valid for five years provided organisations annually submit a copy of their annual reports and proof of legal compliance such as financial statements.

In the process of initially accrediting organisations, the Credibility Alliance makes good use of volunteers by having sector professionals (who sign an agreement with the Credibility Alliance) act as assessors. These assessor officers will visit the programme sites of applicant organisations, verify their submitted

documents and then compile this assessment in a written report. These assessors must be independent experts working in the sector with at least five years' experience and be willing to travel to difficult areas under modest arrangements. The assessors have their travel expenses covered and are given an honorarium but they are not paid a salary. The Credibility Alliance is also careful to ensure that these assessors have no links to the organisation they are visiting. Currently, the Credibility Alliance has a panel of approximately 45 assessors spread across India.

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USING ICT TO IMPROVE A SELF-REGULATION INITIATIVE

Using innovative practices in ICT (information and communication technologies) can improve efficiency, productivity and the outreach of a self-regulation initiative. For instance, a website, which acts as an online community platform, can maximise the flexibility and cost effectiveness of a self-regulation initiative. Almost all self-regulation initiatives reviewed in CIVICUS' research have a website and consider it an essential part of their work. Websites can have profiles on each participating organisations for promotion, and online platforms with authentication system for members to upload information to the site, access resources and interact with each other. Websites and online platforms may be costly but there are great advantages and opportunities to having them.

In addition, online surveys (such as Google documents or Survey Monkey, etc.) can be used to facilitate consultations between CSOs and stakeholders when setting up or reviewing a self-regulation initiative. There are also many possibilities for online forums, platforms and webinars which can serve as mediums for consultations and discussions on how to implement, improve or gather feedback on self-regulation initiatives. Social media can also work as an inexpensive way of gathering feedback, particularly when it comes to receiving complaints. For example, SMS messages can be used as a complaints mechanism for beneficiaries or stakeholders to report absences and failures of accountability in self-regulation initiatives' members' practices. For a more effective complaints mechanism, self-regulation initiatives could have a dedicated phone line or number set aside for SMS feedback.

Finally, ICT can also be used to consolidate and analyse data. For example, the Credibility Alliance has developed their own software to analyse the data submitted by applicant organisations. This has proven to be very efficient and, if submitted documentation is all correct, their assessment process can be as short as two weeks.

CASE STUDY Information service and online donations



Organisation/Secretariat:	HelpArgentina
Country:	Argentina
Type of modality:	Information Service
Date established:	2002
Participating organisations:	93

CONTEXT

HelpArgentina was established in 2002 as an information service for Argentine foundations, non-profit organisations and the Argentine diaspora. They use volunteer chapters in the United States to promote HelpArgentina's website and to target donors such as American foundations and Argentinian diaspora members.

In addition to disclosing information based on regional standards of transparency, HelpArgentina uses its website to channel donations to their approved organisations. To further enhance the amount of donations going through its channel, HelpArgentina is also registered in the United States as a non-profit organisation so that donors can receive tax benefits there and HelpArgentina's members are reimbursed their membership fees if they use the HelpArgentina's transfer channel. This information service also charges a small percentage on each donation but pays for the cost of the international transfer. The online platform has proven very successful as since its inception HelpArgentina has channelled more than USD 8 million.

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STANDARDISING INFORMATION

Information required for reporting purposes such as annual reports and financial records is often useful for enhancing transparent and accountable practices. Standardising the requirements between the annual and financial reports and the self-regulation's assessments will minimise the organisational work and make assessments less burdensome. This can be done by developing standardised reporting forms that organisations can submit to the self-regulation initiative. Ensuring that these reporting documents are standardised with governmental, legal or donors' requirements can also minimise the efforts required for accountability and transparency reporting. Ensuring that all this information can be submitted online will also help information flow quickly.

CASE STUDY Integrating transparency standards in annual reporting



Organisation/Secretariat:	La Comunidad de Organizaciones Solidarias
Country:	Chile
Type of modality:	Other
Title of initiative:	FecuSocial
Date established:	2013
Participating organisations:	22 (Pilot phase)

CONTEXT

La Comunidad de Organizaciones Solidarias is a network of 120 organisations working against poverty. They were part of a national working group on transparency and accountability called “Transparentemos”³⁶ which formulated 20 standards on transparency.

In Chile, non-governmental organisations are legally required to publish an annual reporting document. La Comunidad de Organizaciones Solidarias has developed a standardised form integrating the 20 national standards for CSOs’ transparency and the government regulations with the help of private sector expertise. La Comunidad de Organizaciones Solidarias worked with PricewaterhouseCooper to design a tool called “FecuSocial”, which CSOs can use to complete their annual reports while also meeting the Transparentemos standards. By integrating their standards with the government regulations in FecuSocial, Comunidad de Organizaciones Solidarias allows non-governmental organisations to be compliant with both the government and the national CSOs’ code of conduct with one single application form.

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FINANCE

Self-regulation initiatives’ members and organisers must have transparent financial reporting. Financial transparency requires expertise in accounting and financial reporting that is often lacking in the civil society sector. Self-regulation initiatives can best improve practices on finances and budgeting by forming partnerships with established experts in the field. And such expertise can be readily found in the private sector or charities that specialise in accounting.

Self-regulation initiatives can also seek volunteers with experience in accounting or financial reporting to either teach organisations better financial transparency practices or to help conduct financial reporting. For example, the Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC) uses volunteers from an association of accountants for the financial management component of their assessment.

³⁶ For more information on Transparentemos, consult the case study page 67.

RESOURCES

- Mango, a NGO which works to strengthen financial practices of humanitarian and development NGOs, offers financial capacity building courses, workshops and resources for NGOs. Not all the resources are available for free: www.mango.org.uk

SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Self-regulation initiatives should encourage their members to self-assess their compliance with the principles, standards and requirements of the initiative. Self-assessments are a great practice for all organisations because they provide a structure for a self-evaluation and will foster internal learning. Within a self-regulation initiative, encouraging self-assessment can also increase the internal knowledge on the principles and standards. It is also less costly to have an internal assessment than to have it done externally.

To this end, self-regulation initiatives can develop a self-assessment tool that is tailored directly to their principles, standards, context and practices for the participating organisations to use. To be most effective it is recommended that self-assessments should be done on a regular basis and integrated with the annual reporting process so that they are not burdensome for organisations to undertake.

RESOURCES

There are several freely available resources that can help self-regulation initiatives conduct self-assessments.

- PricewaterhouseCooper Germany 'Transparency Check' - an online test which organisations can use to test themselves against the PwC Transparency Awards criteria. It is confidential, free of charge and available in both English and German.
www.transparency-check.com/
- The ImpACT coalition – Free community working on transparency in the civil society sector. Many guides and toolkits are available on their website.
www.impactcoalition.org.uk
- European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) 'Excellence Model' – a self-assessment framework for measuring the strengths and areas for improvement of an organisation across all of its activities.
www.efqm.org/the-efqm-excellence-model
- The Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC) "Handbook on Organisational Functioning for Small NGOs" – it includes a section on how to conduct an organisational self-assessment.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Self-regulation initiatives cannot promote transparency and accountability without ensuring that they themselves are also transparent and accountable. The following best practices can be undertaken in order to foster a culture of accountability within self-regulation bodies and also to ensure that information within the self-regulation system is accessible and transparent.

TRANSPARENCY THROUGH DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

Transparency within a self-regulation initiative itself is important as a self-regulation initiative's body must be as transparent as their members are required to be. Therefore, self-regulation initiatives must ensure that a certain level of information is made accessible on both their own website and their participants' websites. The minimum level of information which should be made easily accessible to all stakeholders includes most notably: the self-regulation initiative's standards, how it works, a list and the number of the initiative's members and its retention rate; its fees and the sources of its funding; the self-regulation initiative's partnerships and contact information for the initiative's secretariat or main body. One good example is the Credibility Alliance's monthly online factsheet which discloses any new organisations that have been certified and the number of renewals per province.

However, disclosure of information must be balanced with the precaution not to release sensitive information that could be dangerous for organisations if published. For example, NANGO in Zimbabwe does not disclose any information publicly without their members' approval. This is because non-governmental organisations in Zimbabwe exist within a highly restrictive environment where, for political reasons, both the media and government are sometimes highly critical of CSOs' activities. Depending on the context and objectives of the self-regulation initiative, potentially sensitive information which should not be automatically released can include: the results of self-assessments and certification tests, received complaints or the use of sanctions against a participating organisation of an initiative.

The objective of the self-regulation initiative will often determine which information would be too sensitive to publicise. A self-regulation initiative meant to resolve stakeholders' trust issues will publicise more information while a self-regulation initiative designed to foster collaboration within the civil society sector should require less public disclosure of information. This is because, while greater public scrutiny may appease stakeholders, it can also dissuade CSOs to take part in a self-regulation initiative and be fully critical in their assessment.

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Managing the participating organisations' expectations is an objective that self-regulation bodies should reflect on while setting up or reviewing their initiative. This will indeed partly determine the success of a self-regulation initiative. Whether the members' expectations are linked to improving their transparency, capacity-building or increasing their visibility, knowing those expectations will help the secretariat develop appropriate activities or tools to ensure that members see the added value of their efforts and participation in the initiative. Attracting and retaining organisations within the self-regulation initiative is a challenge that needs to be addressed.

Many self-regulation initiatives find that their members frequently expect that they will automatically benefit from better fundraising opportunities and outreach. Unfortunately, there is no significant evidence yet that

self-regulation initiatives have an impact on donors' interests and funding³⁷. Still, self-regulation initiatives' secretariats should be aware of those expectations and undertake pro-active advocacy and promotion to inform donors about their initiatives. As self-regulation initiatives are developed by civil society and for civil society, it should also be made clear that these initiatives' requirements will not necessarily comply with all donors' criteria or wishes. HelpArgentina is a distinctive example of a self-regulation initiative which seeks to facilitate fundraising through its online donation platform. HelpArgentina organises dinners and promotional galas for donors in the United States with the intention to channel funding through its online platform. But all HelpArgentina members are also expected to conduct their own fundraising by promoting their own organisations and programmes. This means that while HelpArgentina members do reap collective benefits from the promotion of the self-regulation initiative as a whole, they cannot completely rely on HelpArgentina for their own fundraising and sustainability.

Being clear on what a self-regulation initiative can and cannot offer to its members will temper unrealistic expectations so that both the self-regulation initiative and its members understand the possible limitations of their roles.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM TO MEASURE IMPACT

Most of the self-regulation initiatives reviewed do not have systemic or planned mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating their impact. In fact, many self-regulation initiatives report difficulties in establishing such mechanisms because of time and resource constraints. Nonetheless, a monitoring and evaluation system is essential for gauging how well a self-regulation initiative is working and what needs to be improved or modified. This is particularly necessary as a self-regulation initiative will need to prove and promote its tangible benefits to peers and external stakeholders. A good monitoring and evaluation programme is also critical for the accountability and legitimacy of the self-regulation initiative itself.

Basic components of a monitoring and evaluation system to monitor a self-regulation initiative's impact may include collecting and analysing data on the following:

- The number of organisations joining the self-regulation initiative; its overall retention rate.
- The amount of donations or fees collected and channelled.
- Average time to complete an application for organisations, average time to run the assessment by evaluators, and the difficulties and challenges they encounter in their evaluation.
- Feedback received from various stakeholders (volume and nature):
 - o from participating organisations, questions may target the difficulty or ease to apply the standards into their structures and functioning, if being part of a self-regulation initiative has led to any changes or reflection in their organisation; etc.
 - o Number of comments received (including success stories, suggestions for improvement, complaints, etc.) and their relevance, initiators of those comments, and time necessary to resolve them.

For this information to be useful for monitoring and evaluation purposes, it must be collected in a systematic and consistent way and on a regular basis.

Another way to measure the impact of a self-regulation initiative would be to conduct an impact survey comparing, at the national or sectoral level, the level of reported transparency and accountability between organisations who are participating in a self-regulation initiative and organisations who are not involved in any form of self-regulation³⁸.

³⁷Some of the self-regulation initiative's bodies surveyed in CIVICUS' research reported that their members felt there was an improvement in donors' perception. However, other organisations reported being disappointed in the fact that donors do not necessarily take evidence of a greater accountability (such as a seal from a certification scheme or the disclosure of information on the CSO's website, etc.) into account in their decision to allocate funding to CSOs

³⁸Cited in Catherine Shea, Sandra Sitar, "NGO Accreditation and Certification: The Way Forward? An Evaluation of the Development Community's Experience," International Center for Not-for-Profit-Law, Report and Recommendations, p.28

CASE STUDY An impact measurement tool



Organisation/Secretariat:	AVINA
Country:	Chile
Title of initiative:	Transparentemos
Type of modality:	Other
Date established:	2010
Participating organisations:	More than 60 organisations

CONTEXT

Transparentemos is a national working group convening five national CSO networks and which developed a code of conduct with 20 standards of transparency between 2009 and 2010. As a working group, they also organised a capacity-building programme with 56 organisations through online and in-person training on active transparency.

The third step for Transparentemos was to develop an Impact Measurement Tool to help participating organisations better evaluate the impact of their transparency activities. This tool explains different methods of self-evaluation, indicates how long evaluation processes may take, describes what kind of monitoring and evaluation is most useful and details what type of data collection organisations can use the tool to collect. The tool was piloted by six organisations and was launched in 2013.

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RESOURCES

- Transparentemos 'Impact Measurement Tool' – only available in Spanish:
http://www.avina.net/esp/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/2.3_Gu%C3%ADa-de-orientaci%C3%B3n-Modelo-de-Evaluaci%C3%B3n-de-Resultados.pdf
- CIVICUS 'toolkit on Monitoring and Evaluation' – general toolkit available in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic.
www.civicus.org/resources/toolkits/228-monitoring-and-evaluation
- The Barefoot Collective 'The Barefoot Guide to Working with Organisations and Social Change' – check out the resources on planning, monitoring and evaluation, outcome mapping and horizontal learning (pages 149-159):
http://www.barefootguide.org/uploads/1/1/1/6/111664/barefoot_guide_to_organisations_whole_book.pdf
 The second Barefoot Guide is on 'Learning Practices in Organisations and Social Change':
http://www.barefootguide.org/uploads/1/1/1/6/111664/barefoot_guide_2_learning_whole_book.pdf

- Proving and Improving website – it is designed as a quality and impact toolkit for charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprise.

www.proveandimprove.org

TAKING BENEFICIARIES INTO ACCOUNT

Accountability to beneficiaries, or downward accountability, refers to practices that increase beneficiary and constituents' feedback, participation in and ownership of development or aid and advocacy work. The concern is to involve beneficiaries or constituents as a key stakeholder so as to avoid paternalistic or top-down programming. For self-regulation initiatives and their member organisations to truly practice accountability, they must endeavour to provide the mechanisms that allow beneficiaries or constituents to voice concerns and participate in decision-making that affects them. There are several ways through which self-regulation initiatives can foster greater accountability to beneficiaries in either their own structure or in their members' organisations:

1) Including beneficiaries while developing the self-regulation initiative

Including beneficiaries in the design and development of a self-regulation initiative will allow them to express their concerns and opinions on its standards and mechanisms. As with any other stakeholder, beneficiaries or constituents may have very strong concerns regarding self-regulation or they may have suggestions on how to make the initiative function better. Unfortunately, the survey of self-regulation initiatives in this guide found few viable examples of organisations having involved beneficiaries in their consultative process when developing a self-regulation initiative³⁹. DENIVA and the Uganda National NGO Forum were singular in having consulted beneficiaries when developing the NGO Quality Assurance Mechanism in Uganda (QUAM).

2) Including accountability to beneficiaries in the self-regulation initiative's standards⁴⁰

Accountability to beneficiaries can also be included in a self-regulation initiative's standards. Standards can stipulate that constituents need to be consulted for the governance and programmatic work of CSOs, among other possibilities. For instance, QUAM includes beneficiaries directly in three of its standards: standard 34 requiring organisations to share their objectives with both their members and their intended beneficiaries; standard 47 demanding that organisations have feedback mechanisms in order to receive inputs from constituents; and standard 51 which requires that organisations reflect and then act on those inputs.

3) Receiving beneficiary feedback through a self-regulation initiative's complaints mechanisms

Involving constituents through complaints mechanisms is perhaps the simplest way for gathering beneficiaries' feedback on civil society organisations' programmes and activities in general. For self-regulation initiatives, it can be useful to have such feedback

³⁹CIVICUS would love to hear about ways civil society organisations have included beneficiaries in a consultative process when creating a self-regulation initiative. Contact CIVICUS at Ita@civicus.org.

⁴⁰ For more on this possibility, also refer to part 1: Principles and Standards of this guide.

on members' compliance with the standards. However, it should be noted that most self-regulation initiatives surveyed for this guide report that complaints are most commonly received from staff members, donors or other participating organisations and not from the public or beneficiaries. This suggests that self-regulation initiatives and organisations should be particularly careful in informing constituents about the self-regulation scheme and its complaints mechanisms. For complaints mechanisms to function well, both the standards and the possibility of complaints should be made visible and well-publicised. For maximum visibility, the complaints mechanisms should be accessible on both the secretariat's and members' websites.

4) Seeking beneficiary inputs in assessing a self-regulation initiative's member organisations

A self-regulation initiative should seek and include beneficiary feedback whenever there is an assessment of participating organisations. For example, QUAM includes constituents' feedback in their assessments either through dialogues at meetings, through the submission of written comments or interviews during the field visit to the applying organisation.

MORE RESEARCH NEEDED ON ACCOUNTABILITY TO BENEFICIARIES

Because accountability to beneficiaries or constituents is one of the most difficult aspects of accountability, it could be a good focus for peer learning and workshops among the members of a self-regulation initiative.

RESOURCES

- MANGO 'Accountability to Beneficiaries Checklist' – useful to self-assess a CSOs' accountability to its beneficiaries and constituents:
<http://www.mango.org.uk/Pool/G-Accountability-to-beneficiaries-Checklist.pdf>
- CARE Malawi 'Scorecard Toolkit' – an example on how to receive feedback from beneficiaries on CSOs' programmes. Consult 'A guide for implementing the Scorecard process to improve quality of public services':
<http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/6800.pdf>

SUSTAINABILITY

Ensuring the sustainability of a self-regulation initiative takes planning and effort. The following best practices offer examples of innovations that self-regulation initiatives can undertake to address their own sustainability as institutions.

SCALING UP MEMBERSHIP

A self-regulation initiative needs to reach a minimum threshold of organisations to demonstrate that the initiative is a relevant player in the sector. Establishing clear targets and goals for membership should remain a consistent part of a self-regulation initiative's planning and strategy. Yet the membership must be balanced with the capacities of the self-regulation initiative as more members will require greater resources, especially when there is some sort of compliance process. A self-regulation initiative must therefore find a balance between its membership number and its capacity. This is why several self-regulation initiatives can co-exist within one country as demands for accountability and transparency can exceed the resources of one single initiative.

Scaling up a self-regulation's membership also means promoting the initiative among civil society peers and targeting CSOs which may be interested in joining such a scheme. National platforms for example should market their self-regulation initiatives to their member organisations first and concentrate on external organisations later. A specific focus should also be made towards smaller CSOs as they would probably be the least capable of adhering to the standards. Individual outreach highlighting opportunities, potential support and gradual implementation of the standards should be considered. It will also be very important that the self-regulation initiative's body researches, proves and showcases the benefits of joining its initiative in its particular context.

FUNDRAISING FOR FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

It is not surprising that self-regulation initiatives are currently experiencing the same financial difficulties as the broader civil society sector. As funding is shrinking for most organisations, funding a self-regulation initiative may be even more difficult now despite increasing calls for greater accountability in the sector. The more formalised and structured a self-regulation initiative is, the more a fundraising strategy is necessary as the implementation costs will be higher. While some of the self-regulation initiatives reviewed are currently seeking to be self-reliant, none seems to have achieved complete financial stability as yet.

For their own financial sustainability, self-regulation initiatives will need to be innovative in the way they secure funding. Good avenues to consider include: individual donations, online donations, grants from private foundations, support from the private sector and fees that can be collected from the self-regulation initiative's members. Many self-regulation initiatives have a tiered fee system so that larger organisations pay more while smaller organisations have to pay less to better reflect the abilities of each organisation. As with any fundraising strategy, clear objectives and targets will increase the likelihood of success.

ENGAGEMENT WITH EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS THROUGH GOOD OUTREACH

A key recommendation from the case studies is that a self-regulation initiative must engage in outreach to all stakeholders. These stakeholders, who should be mapped during the analysis of the external context⁴¹, may include the government, donors (both private and institutional), the private sector, beneficiaries or constituents and the general public. The purpose of this outreach is two-fold: first to inform stakeholders on how the self-regulation initiative itself functions and second to instruct stakeholders how they can engage with it.

⁴¹For more information on stakeholders' mapping, refer to section 1 – Know the context.

Communicating to stakeholders what the self-regulation initiative can offer them is essential to ensuring a sustainable and effective initiative. In particular, strong links with donors and governments should be sought. As such, a self-regulation initiative should be developed concomitantly to engaging with national and international donors and government bodies. Outreach to such stakeholders can be done through conducting roundtables, providing regular reports on the self-regulation initiative, maintaining consistent channels of communication and using media and social media.

It is also important to ensure that stakeholders understand how the self-regulation initiative functions, particularly the feedback and complaints mechanisms. This can be done by simply making information about the compliance mechanisms available online and in-person. For example, at workshops and in their routine interactions, NANGO deliberately informs stakeholders that they want to be contacted with complaints about their members. ACFID in Australia also requires that their members promote the Code of Conduct's complaints mechanisms on their own websites and in annual reports.



CASE STUDY A regional initiative for better outreach

Organisation/Secretariat:	Instituto de Comunicación y Desarrollo (Uruguay) and Confederación Colombiana de ONG (Colombia)
Country:	Latin American regional initiative
Title of initiative:	Iniciativa Regional Rendir Cuentas
Type of modality:	Other
Date established:	2009
Participating organisations:	600 in 9 countries (in 2011 and 2012)

CONTEXT

Rendir Cuentas is a Latin American regional initiative that combines different elements of a code of conduct, information service and working group. It is a set of regional standards that can then be adapted through a participatory process to a specific country context.

Rendir Cuentas aims to encourage capacity-building, mutual learning and awareness-raising among different stakeholders in the whole Latin American region. This is accomplished through *Grupos Promotores* or promoting groups; national working groups that gather several national network organisations and CSOs together to discuss Rendir Cuentas' proposed standards and adapt them to the context of the country in question. Each group then leads a national consultation and collects information that will feed into the reporting against the agreed standards (such as data on levels of transparency, cohesion within the civil society sector and the overall level of collaboration). The promoting groups compile a national report on the level of transparency and accountability in the country. Each collective report is audited and then shared with key stakeholders. This information is made publicly available on Rendir Cuentas' website and other channels.

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PROMOTION AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY TO REACH ALL STAKEHOLDERS

A thoughtful and comprehensive communication strategy will promote a self-regulation initiative in order to both increase its membership and successfully engage with all stakeholders. Communication regarding a self-regulation initiative may be structured within an organisation or a network's existing communication policy, or as the self-regulation initiative's own communications policy. Either way, a communication strategy will be most effective if it also includes the self-regulation initiative's members as essential components of the communication effort. This also includes the staff of the self-regulation initiative's secretariat body who should participate in the self-regulation initiative's continuous promotion. It is also worth noting that different modalities of self-regulation initiatives will require different communication strategies because they target different audiences.

A communications strategy should include activities related to general communication such as flyers, brochures, newsletters, magazines, social media and through both the initiative's secretariat body and the member organisations' websites. Participating in conferences, seminars and workshops can also help the promotion of a self-regulation initiative. Each of these activities can be tailored to specific audiences or stakeholders. For example, Guidestar Korea produces a quarterly magazine *NPO Guidestar* aimed at the Korean government, the public and other non-profit organisations as part of their communication strategy. A successful communication strategy will also consider how best to engage with potential donors and the general public. This can be efficiently accomplished by using the logo of a self-regulation initiative or a specifically designed symbol which stakeholders can be taught to recognise. For example, PwC Germany provides a 'Transparency Badge' logo which is updated every year and shared with all organisations that pass their awards criteria so that they can then put it on their own websites.

CAPACITY-BUILDING

Capacity-building aims to equip organisations to fulfil their commitments to a self-regulation initiative. Fostering capacity among a self-regulation initiative's participants is necessary to ensure they have adequate mechanisms and information to properly undertake accountability practices. Capacity-building should target a range of core mechanisms including, among others:

- what it means to be transparent.
- understanding how a self-regulation initiative works.
- what is expected from the participating organisations.
- how the reporting mechanisms work.
- how to integrate beneficiaries' and constituents' feedback in CSOs' programmes.
- how to ensure an appropriate level of quality management.

Self-regulation initiatives should strive to offer capacity-building to their members. If possible, they can also open these trainings to external stakeholders in order to share the data and information they have collected. For instance, PCP has the intention to hold 'bazaars' with national donors, local representatives of governments and CSOs to discuss development practices in Pakistan.

However, due to time and resource constraints not all self-regulation initiatives will be able to offer capacity-building. If so, participating in existing workshops and capacity-building initiatives can be a more cost effective way for self-regulation initiatives and their members to build capacity. It is also good practice to ask for volunteers from organisations or firms with relevant expertise to help develop or participate in capacity-building

initiatives. When designing or running them, self-regulation bodies can also take advantage of their participants' skills which may be able to lead some of the capacity-building activities. For instance, CCC organises in Cambodia "certified learning forums" between certified organisations. Self-regulation initiatives can also target these measures for specific members, typically smaller and less established organisations, who usually require the greatest assistance.

While online resources and publications are valuable tools in building greater capacity, workshops are probably the most successful mechanism as they facilitate greater engagement with participants. However, self-regulation initiatives should consider hosting webinars or online platforms as a cost-effective way to begin capacity-building. For example, Rendir Cuentas hosts an online "Virtual Accountability Center" which offers online training content (<http://www.rendircuentas.org/moodle/>, available only in Spanish). Self-regulation initiatives should also consider having their materials or workshops available freely or with a small charge to the wider public so as to improve knowledge sharing.

CONCLUSION

For now, this guide is meant to be a stepping stone to help civil society begin implementing and expanding their transparency and accountability practices. CIVICUS hopes to continue adding to this guide and increasing the collective knowledge on self-regulation so as to better equip civil society organisations to steadily improve their practices.

There is still much about self-regulation that needs to be studied. In particular, our research has found that there is a need for greater study in several areas:

- accountability to beneficiaries and constituents.
- the impact of self-regulation initiatives in fostering greater trust with stakeholders, and in increasing donors' funding to participating organisations.
- data on public perception of self-regulation initiatives.
- how to monitor and evaluate self-regulation initiatives.

If you have further information on any of these areas, we would like to hear from you. We are looking for more case studies and best practices on self-regulation and legitimacy, transparency and accountability. We hope to update this guide continually and to achieve this we welcome any practices, examples or case studies.

If you have information you would like to share, please email lta@civicus.org.

CIVICUS is committed to transparency and accountability and we will promote greater research into self-regulation and civil society while also continuing to work on strengthening good practices within our activities and programmes.

Keep up to date on LTA by consulting our online resource centre: <http://lta.civicus.org/>

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) Code of Conduct – Australia - Cath Blunt, former Manager of the Growth and Effectiveness Team - 17 October 2013

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Bonnie K. Mutungi, National QuAM Coordinator, Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations (DENIVA) - 23 April 2013

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WITH THANKS TO:

ACCIÓN - Chile

Centro Mexicano Para La Filantropía (CEMEFI) – México

The National Association of NGOs (ANONG) – Uruguay

TUSEV – Turkey

Zambian Council for Social Development (ZCSD) - Zambia

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CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation is an international network of civil society organisations and activists working to strengthen citizen action and civil society throughout the world.

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