

Building a More Civil Society



Governing and Managing Organisations

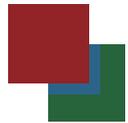
Guidelines for AKDN's work with CSOs
No 8

A K D N

AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

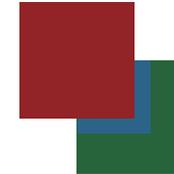
For more information about the AKDN Civil Society Programme, please see http://www.akdn.org/civil_society.asp

Building a More Civil Society



“Civil Society Institutions play an essential role in the provision of social services, the protection of the marginalised, and the delivery of development programmes”

*His Highness the Aga Khan,
Toronto 18 June 2004*



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Why you may need these guidelines¹

Some problems appear in organisations of all kinds. Here is a sample:

- Board members are unconfident and/or over-committed.
- Managers face the same difficulties.
- The organisation's ideals do not match its day to day reality.
- Meetings are badly planned, badly run and/or badly recorded.
- Decision-making and management structures are not clear.
- Unpaid staff and volunteers lack clear job descriptions and responsibilities.
- It is not clear how to deal with unsatisfactory work performance or behaviour.
- The organisation's haphazard administrative systems hinder rather than help its effective operation.
- Financial management or control procedures are inadequate.
- You find unwillingness to address any of these problems, or inadequate procedures to tackle them.
- The organisation works on technical issues, but does not take a stand on matters of principle, values and ethics.

*If any of these problems affect your organisation,
these guidelines are for you!*

¹ Adapted from "Just About Managing", London Voluntary Service Council 2004

Discussion points for your organisation

After reading this booklet, your organisation can discuss or consider these points:

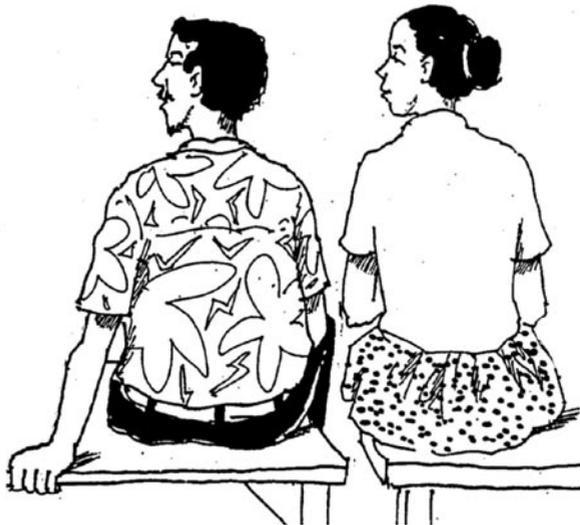
1. Do you recognise the situations described here as being issues that you regularly face?
2. Do you feel able, within your culture, to try some of the suggestions made?
3. Do you feel that the primary work of your AKDN agency could be supplemented by some of the ideas expressed here?
4. Do you have an idea where to look for manuals, suggestions, or training on issues of good governance, integrity and the building of a civil society?
5. Do you see difficulties in implementing some of the ideas suggested? If so, which?



Action points for your organisation

Decide which of these problems afflict your organisation, and note any others. For solutions, see the sections on:

1. Pluralism and tolerance
2. Peace building and conflict resolution
3. The Rule of Law, transparency and accountability
4. Integrity
5. Gender equity
6. Compassion



Building a more civil society

Competent, well managed non-government and non-profit organisations are not enough – even if they have visions and missions that will lead to greater economic and social development for their members and those they serve.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) should demonstrate and promote a truly civil society. By this we mean a society that exhibits not just an acceptable level of social and economic development, but also the prevalence of ethical values. Both of these are necessary for a good quality of life.

The ethical values that are important to the AKDN agencies are:

- Pluralism,
- Tolerance
- Peace building
- Conflict resolution
- The Rule of Law
- Integrity
- Transparency
- Accountability
- Gender equity
- Compassion

Wherever an AKDN agency finds that local CSOs do not exhibit these ethical values, it is the agencies' role to help them, just as much as making sure that their governance and management practices are in place. The following pages suggest how the AKDN agency could investigate these subjects, and decide on action.

Attitudes and practices

Problems of ethics and principle appear in all kinds of organisations of all shapes and sizes, particularly when poor governance is the norm in the country where the organisation is situated. AKDN agencies frequently work in such situations. What are the issues, and what can AKDN agencies do?

Here is a sample of the principles that can guide CSOs in tackling such problems:

1. Pluralism and tolerance

The environment in which the CSO works may be split along religious, ethnic and sectarian lines. The CSO should actively demonstrate that it stands for a different way of living and working.

2. Peace building and conflict resolution

There may be conflict in the society in which the CSO works. The CSO can actively demonstrate its desire for peace and its willingness to help diminish violence and resolve conflicts.

3. The Rule of Law, transparency and accountability

The norm in the country can be 'bending the rules', bribery and corruption. The CSO should clearly show its opposition and that the organisation believes it is both preferable and possible to behave otherwise.

4. Integrity

It is common in some countries for organisations to be run secretly, for power to be wielded illegally and for information to be hidden from many people. Here, the CSO can make clear its own commitment to openness, due process, accountability and transparency.

5. Gender equity

In many societies women are marginalised, exploited, and given few chances to acquire education, experience or the chance to show their strengths. The CSO should demonstrate that it has a different opinion and is prepared to put such opinions into practice.

6. Compassion

In some societies, marginal groups are treated badly and risk becoming poorer, sicker and more powerless. The CSO should show that it cares for and feels compassion for such people

The following sections offer practical advice on how CSOs can react to the problems.

1. Pluralism and tolerance

Whether an AKDN agency is working with school management committees, local resident associations, groups of micro-finance borrowers or traditional musicians, such people exist within their own culture and traditions. In some places it will be the norm for religious or ethnic hatred to be accepted as part of everyday life.

What can an AKDN agency do to encourage greater pluralism and tolerance amongst the people with whom it is working?

1. Make sure that the people in the CSO are diverse and thus demonstrate that it is possible for people to work together in harmony. Pro-actively hire diverse staff and encourage diverse volunteers.



2. Make sure that the ways in which people work in the CSO are fair, equitable, according to professional standards, and without tolerating any exploitation and double standards.
3. Open up the subject of racial or religious strife in a careful and sensitive way so that people's opinions and feelings can be revealed in a non-threatening way.
4. Identify in the community those who are champions of pluralism and tolerance, and seek to involve them in the CSO's work.
5. Consider social events where volunteers and staff of the CSOs can be together to eat or sing or play sports in a way that establishes new norms.
6. Identify other organisations in the country that are specifically active in this field, and investigate what you can learn from them.
7. Tell other people (in local and national government, in religious gatherings and in social events) what you have been able to do in the CSO with which you are collaborating, so that your model can be emulated.



2. Peace building and conflict resolution

AKDN often works in countries where there has recently been conflict and AKDN is part of the peace building process. It also works in countries where there is tension under the surface and it is possible for violence and conflict to break out again. The people involved with the CSO are subject to a variety of pressures from people who are “uncivil” and who are concerned to cause trouble in order to promote their views and those of their group.

Conflict and tension can occur for reasons such as: differing goals and aspirations, injustice, corruption, efforts to protect vested interests, differing beliefs, misinformation, ignorance, poor skills in resolving differences.

What can an AKDN agency do build peace and resolve conflict in such situations?

1. As with inculcating pluralism, it is important that the CSO with which the AKDN agency is working shows in its everyday work that it is for peace and against violence. It must always be ready to step in and mediate when conflict threatens to erupt, and it must be acute at spotting potential conflagration.
2. The AKDN agency should publicly and clearly make plain its position on the need for peace building and conflict resolution, so that no-one thinks that AKDN is partial to one side or another.
3. People from the AKDN agency may offer their services as mediators and intermediaries and ‘honest brokers’ when there is a lack of trust.
4. As with the tolerance problem, AKDN should acquaint itself with ‘professional’ peace building and conflict resolution agencies in the country so that it can learn from them.
5. Where the AKDN agency is providing services in a geographical area, it should make sure that its services are equably distributed amongst potentially conflicting groups, and make sure that people know that it is doing this.

6. AKDN agencies may support those who are working for reconciliation, regeneration and renewal. This can take place both inside and outside the CSO. There may be some champions of peace already associated with the CSO, or there may be others that you can attract to it.
7. AKDN agencies may consider producing booklets, and providing training in peace building as an adjunct to the work of the CSO in the technical field in which it works.

3. The Rule of Law, accountability, and transparency

In many countries citizens' knowledge of the law is very limited, and their confidence that the law will be of any use to them is perhaps non-existent. Where there is visible, everyday flouting of the law and seeming impunity for those who do so, this results in great frustration and anger, often combined with a determination to act the same way, or, on the other hand, apathy and defeatism. People working with an AKDN agency may well feel this way too.

What can an AKDN agency do to encourage respect for and the practice of the rule of law, accountability and transparency?

1. The operational rules of the CSO should be debated and, once fixed, should be publicly displayed and taught through workshops and classes so that no-one can use the excuse of ignorance to hide their lack of integrity.
2. There must be a zero tolerance policy for corruption, however minor, and if such cases are discovered, there must be public announcement of the findings and clear ways of dealing with it.
3. Where corruption is endemic in a country, and where the institutions of the law are considered to be of no use to the general citizenry, the AKDN agency will be fighting an uphill battle. The position of the agency on issues of integrity should be clearly stated and, if necessary, classes and workshops should be held to examine the situation, and explain why integrity makes sense for the individual and the nation.



4. As with previous problems, the AKDN agency should investigate other CSOs in the country which work specifically on these issues, and see if they can speak to your CSO. The office of Ombudsman can be useful, where it exists. The AKDN agency may disseminate popular versions of important laws.
5. Perhaps other organisations to which the volunteers or staff of the CSO belong (e.g. religious groups, or ethnic groups) have discussion meetings. You can suggest that issues of integrity are discussed in such fora, and help to set this up.
6. If the CSO is offering fee-paying services to clients of one kind or another, it is very useful to display publicly the cost of such services so that everyone knows why they should pay.
7. Where your CSO works in fields where services are offered by others against payment (such as school fees, health costs, bank charges) it is a good idea to publicly display the correct fees for such services so that your staff and volunteers know and can pass this information on to others.

4. Integrity

Some principles of integrity in public life are:

- Official decision making and public conduct should be free from undue personal interests.
- Public decision making should show no evidence of partiality or favouritism.
- Officials should respect the public trust inherent in their office.

A culture of integrity is one that builds on these qualities in public life. The absence of integrity opens up the possibility of corruption and allows self-interest, favouritism and personal interests to predominate. A civil society is in part defined by its commitment to cultivating integrity as a primary civic virtue. Citizens can play their part by committing themselves to integrity at a personal level.

What can an AKDN agency do encourage a culture of integrity?

1. Clarify areas where there are likely to be problems, perhaps because common practices have eroded integrity. Examples are patronage, nepotism and secrecy in information, party politics and cultural practices. Encourage organised discussion in such fields so that people can openly give their opinions and decide on best practice.
2. Encourage staff and volunteers to use the instruments of democracy and integrity that are available to them – write to the newspapers or radio, contact and give their opinion to their Member of Parliament, or participate in local elections.
3. Educate staff and volunteers about the democratic structures and systems that exist in their country – clarifying the rights and responsibilities of a citizen.
4. Consider civic education classes for staff and volunteers. As mentioned before, ascertain whether existing CSOs in your country are experienced in this area, and introduce them to your group.

5. Look around in the country for examples of people, groups, associations, firms or government departments that practice integrity and good governance, and promote them as examples.
6. The AKDN agency can make sure that the CSOs it works with have access to the information that is useful to them in their lives – newspapers, laws, names of public officials, addresses of public oversight organisations, etc.

5. Gender equity

Gender refers to the social differences between women and men that are learned through socialisation, and which are not intrinsic characteristics of each sex. In nearly all societies women are discriminated against, and in some countries such discrimination is underpinned by tradition, custom, laws and religious observances.

An enormous amount is lost to a society when women do not have access to education, jobs, decision making and responsibility. Even more is lost if this is underpinned by domestic physical and sexual violence.



What can an AKDN agency do encourage gender equity?

1. The AKDN agency can make sure that staff and volunteer positions are accessible to women as much as men, and when traditions and culture block this, can work to break down such practices and be a model as a fair employer with regard to gender balance.
2. Look for ways in which the agency and the CSOs with which it associates can overcome some of the difficulties that women have in overcoming structural problems – such as making sure crèches exist for nursing mothers, and that transport (or security) is provided for women to come and go on CSO business.
3. Think of ways in which the usual imbalance of power between men and women can be re-aligned – e.g. by making evening classes available to women, giving them access to literacy materials, or making sure that they have access to credit.
4. As mentioned before, ascertain what organisations already work on gender equity issues and see if they can be helpful to your organisation.
5. Look for agencies, organisations, firms and government departments that are practising what you consider to be good gender relations, and hold them up as a model.
6. Have clear rules and regulations against abuse of women in your organisation, and practice zero tolerance for infractions.
7. Have services in place to help women connected to your organisation who may suffer from domestic violence or other physical and sexual violence.



6. Compassion

In all countries, certain people will have a more difficult life than others. It may be because they are physically or mentally afflicted. It may be that they come from a minority group which is discriminated against. Perhaps they are stigmatised in some way by society (such as those who are living with HIV/AIDS).

Life may be difficult because people have been struck by a natural or human-made disaster. This can often start a downward spiral of misery in the lives of those affected.

What can an AKDN agency do show its compassion in its own agency, or amongst those with whom it works?

1. Wherever possible, an agency should think in advance about those who have more than the usual difficulties in life, and make a policy for their organisations about providing employment or other services to, for instance, the disabled. Once this is done the agency should pro-actively seek ways in which it can implement the policy.
2. Think how it can make life more manageable for disabled people through the provision of, for instance, bicycle powered wheelchairs.

3. Have very clear rules and regulations in the organisation about prejudice and stigma, and a policy of zero tolerance for those who disobey such rules.
4. Make sure that your organisation offers guidance and counselling on HIV/AIDS, and help with access to whatever other services are available in the country. Be a model of best practice.
5. Think in advance about what your organisation can do in the case of a sudden emergency with its employees or volunteers – how it can help them, what resources it can call on.
6. Encourage your staff and volunteers to think about what they might do to show their own compassion. Consider fundraising in your staff and volunteers on issues that are important to them, perhaps to be matched from your agency – these can be linked to religious charitable duties.
7. It is likely that the society in which you live has traditional institutions for emergency help to those suffering emergencies. Find out about these and consider how they can be strengthened and helped.



An example from the Grameen Bank

A civil society is characterised by an acceptable level of social and economic development and the prevalence of ethical values – which together are the fundamentals for a good quality of life.

The Civil Society Programme is very interested in helping AKDN agencies supplement the valuable work they are already doing by finding what else might raise the standards of civil society in the places where they work.

One organisation that has practised this way of supplementing its core work with other elements is the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, 2006 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. While most people are aware of Grameen's core work as a micro-finance institution, not so many are aware of the 16 Decisions that everyone has to accept to obtain a loan from the Grameen Bank. Grameen Bank borrowers belong to a Grameen group which collectively agree the following 16 Decisions:

1. *We shall follow and advance the four principles of Grameen Bank – Discipline, Unity, Courage and Hard Work – in all walks of our lives.*
2. *We shall bring prosperity to our families.*
3. *We shall not live in dilapidated houses. We shall repair our houses and work towards constructing new ones at the earliest.*
4. *We shall grow vegetables all the year round. We shall eat plenty of them and sell the surplus.*
5. *During planting season, we shall plant as many seedlings as possible.*
6. *We shall plan to keep our families small. We shall minimize our expenditure. We shall look after our health.*
7. *We shall educate our children and ensure that they can earn to pay for their education.*

8. *We shall always keep our children and the environment clean.*
9. *We shall build and use pit latrines.*
10. *We shall drink water from tube wells. If it is not available we shall boil water or use alum.*
11. *We shall not take any dowry at our sons' weddings, neither shall we give any dowry at our daughters' weddings. We shall keep our centre free from the curse of dowry. We shall not practice child marriage.*
12. *We shall not inflict any injustice on anyone, neither shall we allow anyone to do so.*
13. *We shall collectively undertake bigger investments for higher incomes.*
14. *We shall always be ready to help each other. If anyone is in difficulty, we shall all help him or her.*
15. *If we come to know of any breach of discipline in any centre, we shall all go there and help restore discipline.*
16. *We shall all take part in all social activities collectively.*

These 16 decisions apply to a particular institution and culture, but offer examples of how an organisation can take action to develop a more civil society building on its core business (which, in this case, is micro-finance group lending).



AKDN agencies and the CSOs with whom they work are engaged in very valuable work to establish a better quality of life for all those they reach. Their work has technical, managerial, and ethical dimensions. The other booklets in this series concentrate on the managerial dimensions for CSOs. This particular booklet concentrates on the ethical dimensions. As for the technical aspects, these are covered by the agencies themselves.





Places to get further information:

- “Citizens and Governance Toolkit”. by the Commonwealth Foundation 2002
- “Citizens and Governance – civil society in the new millennium” by the Commonwealth Foundation and CIVICUS 1999
- “Citizens Education for Good Governance” by the Commonwealth Foundation and the Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education, 2005
- “Creating a Culture of Integrity” by John Uhr, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003
- “Accountability, Scrutiny and Oversight” by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Centre for Democratic Institutions, 2001
- www.grameen-info.org/bank/the16



The background to these guidelines

The AKDN Civil Society Programme has produced a series of internal booklets to help those involved with AKDN agencies to acquire the skills they need to build and strengthen effective civil society organisations (CSOs).

There are basically four types of institutions for whom these booklets are intended:

1. *The Jamati Institutions: National Councils, ITREB, GRB, NCAB, and EPB*
2. *The Boards of the Service Companies – AKHS, AKES, AKPBS*
3. *Associations set up by the Service Companies or by other AKDN agencies to support the purposes of their programme – such as PTAs, school management committees, nurses associations, midwives associations, teachers associations, tenants associations*
4. *CSOs outside AKDN agencies which support their purposes*

All such organisations involve people who have committed themselves to improving the society in which they live by what they do and how they behave. Commitment and voluntarism may, however, not be enough for an effective organisation – specific organisational skills are needed as well. And these skills can be learnt.

The following booklets are also available in this series:

1. *Problems in Managing Organisations*
2. *Skills in Managing Organisations*
3. *Improving Management*
4. *The Board and its Functions*
5. *Organisational Structures and Systems*
6. *Managing People and their Work*
7. *Managing Finance*
8. *Building a More Civil Society*

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