

# BUILDING EXTERNAL RELATIONS



## IN THIS SECTION:

The focus of this section will be placed on addressing issues related to the environment within which the association functions and its potential impact on the association's performance and how it is perceived externally.

## WHAT IS 'EXTERNAL RELATIONS' AND HOW IS THE ASSOCIATION PERCEIVED?

A health professional association does not function in a vacuum. It evolves in an environment that, at times, may facilitate its ability to operate and, at other times, may challenge it. Its performance can also be influenced by the way the association is perceived by outside stakeholders. For example, an association with little credibility may face difficulties in developing partnerships with other stakeholders involved in reproductive, maternal and newborn health and may need to take action to enhance its credibility before being able to develop such collaborations. Although an association may not be able to control all the external factors it could face, remaining aware and attentive to these may enable the association to better manage the potential consequences.

In the OCIF, **external relations and how the association is perceived** are addressed through the following capacity areas:

- The **rules and norms** that regulate the environment within which the association functions;
- The **legal and political framework** within which the association evolves;
- The **linkages and networking** opportunities existing within the specific area the association functions;
- The stakeholders' sense of **ownership** and their **participation** in the causes supported by the association.

## RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

A health professional association concerned with the potential positive and/or negative impact of external forces on its performance:

- Remains aware and plans for situations that may negatively impact on the association (political instability, social unrest, natural disasters, loss of the national secretariat due to fire, etc.) (*see Tool 7.1*).
- Maintains its legal registration with national authorities up to date and works toward ensuring compliance with its country's laws and regulations (labour, taxation, fundraising laws and regulations, etc.).
- Remains informed of the changes and shifts in the environment that may affect reproductive, maternal and newborn health outcomes in the country, the practice environment or its association.
- Builds and nurtures partnerships with other key stakeholders involved in the field at international, national and local levels.
- Builds and nurtures partnerships with the media to expand the reach and impact of the association's key messages and to enhance its public image (*see Tools 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3*).

## ACTIONS TO MOVE FORWARD

- Integrate into the strategic planning exercise discussions of the external factors that could influence the association's goals and priorities (i.e. Strength–Weakness–Opportunity–Threat (SWOT) exercise) and consider these when developing your strategic plan.
- Integrate into the strategic planning exercise opportunities for major stakeholders to participate and provide feedback about the association's mission, vision, objectives and strategic priorities.
- Stay informed about the work of other partners in the field and explore all possibilities for collaboration on dossiers of mutual interest.
- Identify one or two allies in the media and initiate discussions with them on possible collaboration.

### ► **FOCUS: Building and nurturing partnerships**

Networks, coalitions and partnerships provide opportunities for a health professional association to better respond to the needs and expectations of its stakeholders, to progress toward its goals and objectives and to fulfil its mission. They permit the association to expand its impact and reach of its work beyond what it could have achieved on its own. Networks, coalitions and partnerships further enable an association to capitalise on the use of their resources, reach new audiences, develop new skills and knowledge, share their skills and knowledge and strengthen their voice and message. Finally, like other relationships, building, maintaining and nurturing

relationships take time and resources, and in order to be constructive they must be beneficial to all partners.

Successful networks, partnerships and coalitions are based on the following:

- A common purpose
- A clear purpose
- Shared values
- Shared benefits
- Effective communications
- Continuous learning
- Long term commitment<sup>1</sup>.

► ***FOCUS: Transparency and accountability — Why it should be of concern to health professional associations***

Transparency and accountability are essential for health professional associations who are committed to strengthening their organisational capacity for the purpose of improving their overall performance. They are considered central pillars of good governance. When understood and practiced by associations, transparency and accountability contribute to enhancing their credibility, their public image and, further, their ability to meet the needs of their stakeholders, including beneficiaries. They also contribute to building and maintaining donor and public trust and confidence.<sup>2</sup>

Transparency and accountability are interconnected and mutually reinforced concepts. An association cannot be accountable without transparency, and its transparency efforts would have little value if the association was not accountable.<sup>3</sup> Both are considered essential for associations, especially those managing public and external funds.

CIVICUS, an international alliance of civil society organisations, defines transparency as ‘the openness of processes, procedures and values [of an organisation] ... the proactive public disclosure and dissemination of information<sup>4</sup> to its stakeholders and the general public. Transparency thus implies more than the sharing of timely and reliable information about the association’s goals, objectives, mission, vision, strategic directions, financial position, governance structure and political position. It also includes the establishment and application of clear processes and procedures that will guide the decision-making processes within an association and the way it manages its resources. The following are examples of actions that can be undertaken by an association striving for greater transparency:

- Share and promote widely its goals, objectives, mission, vision and strategic priorities (e.g. through its website and other promotional material);
- Provide information (e.g. through its website and other promotional material) about its legal status and governance structure, including the names of its elected officials and senior staff (e.g. Executive Director/Chief Executive Officer);
- Share its annual financial report (e.g. through its website or upon demand);
- Use a participative approach to develop programmes/projects;

- Use auditors, budgetary reviews and independent evaluations whenever possible.

Similarly, for CIVICUS, accountability relates to an organisation's answerability, responsibility and liability. It refers to the obligation of an organisation 'to act based on ... [its] own promises and subsequent justified expectations by various stakeholders.'<sup>4</sup> It involves facilitating the participation of individuals and groups (within and outside the organisation) in decisions that may affect them and responding appropriately to issues of concern, criticism or grievance raised by any of these. The following are examples of actions that can be undertaken by an association striving for greater accountability:

- Develop and apply the systems and procedures promoted in its governing documents;
- Establish a financial management system (including policies and procedures) that permits the association to manage its resources effectively and efficiently;
- Integrate opportunities for major internal and external stakeholders to participate in its strategic planning process;
- Integrate a monitoring and evaluation strategy into all its activities.

### ► **FOCUS: The media as a partner**

The media can greatly influence how an association is perceived by outsiders. There is a risk that this influence can have a negative impact on the association's reputation, and for this reason, many associations choose not to associate with the media. But visibility through media can also positively impact the association's reputation and can be beneficial in many ways, including:

- Reaching out to a larger audience;
- Gaining visibility of the association's activities, projects, and events;
- Gaining recognition as experts in the field of reproductive, maternal and newborn health;
- Increasing public support for advocacy efforts aimed at influencing national health policies;
- Expanding the reach of public education on important health issues;
- Promoting informed debates about ethical issues that affect health practice;
- Recruiting new members;
- Gaining support for fundraising initiatives or public campaigns;
- Informing the public and outside stakeholders about the association's values, opinions, and positions.

▲ **VIGNETTE:** *In 2010, the Society of Gynecologists and Obstetricians of Cameroon (SOGOC) formalised its relationship with the country's Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding, which recognises the professional association as one of its technical partners in the field of reproductive, maternal and newborn health. This partnership has enabled the association not only to participate in high-level MoPH meetings, along with other key development partners, including UN agencies, but also to contribute to the Ministry's efforts to improve health outcomes by upgrading the skills of health professionals and by developing and disseminating clinical guidelines related to maternal and newborn care. The partnership has also enhanced the association's profile within the MoPH and has increased its credibility among other stakeholders. For example, SOGOC's current involvement in the implementation of facility-based Maternal Death Reviews in selected hospitals is serving as a platform for discussions related to the possible expansion of these reviews throughout Cameroon.*

*Similarly, the Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies of India (FOGSI) has broadened its partnership relationships in an effort to improve standard of care in the field of maternal and newborn health in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. FOGSI is currently assuming leadership for the development and implementation of a Near-Miss Review programme and the implementation of a model Maternal Death Review (MDR) programme with MDR software, which is hoped to influence the near-miss policy, set best practices of MDR and provide an internet-based tool for monitoring and evaluation for the Government of India. FOGSI has forged partnerships with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW), Government of India; MOHFW, State Governments; Systems and Program Management; National Neonatological forum; Indian Association of Pediatrics; Anesthetics, Nursing, & Midwifery forum representatives; and seven leading medical colleges to develop contextual near-miss definitions and tools, guidelines for best practices in implementing MDR and use of a MDR software for capturing data for implementation as a pilot and hopefully across India over the longer term. The draft Near-Miss Review documents developed to date have been circulated nationally and have generated a lot of interest among new partners, including medical colleges in several other states, including Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh. MDR implementation is in progress and MDR software is ready for National security audit by the Government of India before its implementation across India.*

## **ACCOMPANYING TOOLS**

- 5.1 – Example: Press Release
- 5.2 – Tool: How to respond to media requests
- 5.3 – Tool: How to organise a press conference

## **OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES**

Compassion Capital Fund National Resource Center. *Partnerships: frameworks for working together* [Strengthening nonprofits: a capacity builder's resource library]. Washington: Dept. of Health and Human Services; 2010. Available: [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/ccf/ccf\\_resources/partnerships.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/ccf/ccf_resources/partnerships.pdf).

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Panos RELAY Programme. Getting into the kitchen: media strategies for research. London: Panos London; 2006. Available: [http://panosrelay.org.uk/wp-content/static/getting\\_into\\_kitchen.pdf](http://panosrelay.org.uk/wp-content/static/getting_into_kitchen.pdf).

Panos RELAY Programme. Working with the media: a guide for researchers. London: Panos London; 2006. Available: [http://panosrelay.org.uk/wp-content/static/working\\_with\\_media.pdf](http://panosrelay.org.uk/wp-content/static/working_with_media.pdf).

"Pathways to partnerships" toolkit. Brighton (UK): International HIV/AIDS Alliance; 2002. Available: [http://gametlibrary.worldbank.org/FILES/459\\_Partnership%20Handbook.pdf](http://gametlibrary.worldbank.org/FILES/459_Partnership%20Handbook.pdf).

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3. Programme on Governance in the Arab Region (POGAR): transparency & accountability. New York: Regional Bureau for Arab States, United Nations Development Programme; 2004. Available: <http://www.undp-pogar.org/governance/transparency.aspx>.
4. Mand K. Turning principles into practice: legitimacy, transparency and accountability (LTA). Johannesburg: CIVICUS; 2010. Available: <http://lta.civicus.org/component/content/article/30-news/49-new-turning-principles-into-action-a-guide-to-legitimacy-transparency-and-accountability-lta>.