Addressing accountability in NGO advocacy: Practice, principles and prospects of self-regulation

Description

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â??Global and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are the most distinct organisational form of civil society, and as such have become increasingly involved and influential in forming public opinion and policy through targeted and professional campaigning and policy advocacy. Yet their growing power has also raised questions about the basis on which they engage in these activities, including their accountability and legitimacy in view of frequent explicit or implicit claims these organisations make to social representation, the quality of their research work, and the public benefit they provide.

Based on a world-wide survey of civil society self-regulatory initiatives undertaken by the One World Trust this paper examines how NGOs have begun to address the accountability challenges they face in particular when engaging in advocacy and explains some of the strengths and weaknesses of existing self-regulation for NGOs engaged in advocacy.

Research presented in the paper suggests that both normative and instrumental reasons account for the adoption of accountability principles by advocacy organisations through self-regulation, and that lessons learnt from the One World Trustâ??s parallel work on accountability principles for policy oriented research organisations can be usefully applied also to strengthen accountability of advocacy NGOs.

The briefing identifies for each major dimension of accountability a set of initial good practice principles for advocacy organisations, including on:
â?¢ transparency of the evidence basis used in advocacy, of funding and funders for specific campaigns and activities, and around forward looking information such as strategy, and the processes used to determine advocacy priorities;
â?¢ opportunities for participation of beneficiaries and other key stakeholders of the organisation in the development of advocacy objectives and their review; and
â?¢ the development of criteria for evaluating the impact of advocacy with beneficiaries and other stakeholders, and the establishment of feedback and complaints handling mechanisms to address individual experiences and problematic impacts.

The paper concludes with the identification of remaining challenges for research and self-regulation practice to strengthen accountability in advocacy by NGOs: how to deal with inherent tensions between objectivity and messaging in purpose driven advocacy; how to protect independence, freedoms and role of NGOs in the public policy process, and how to strengthen the connection between ethical practice in fundraising and selfregulation of policy advocacy workâ•

Tags

1. accountability
2. advocacy
3. Civil Society / NGO

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