

Amnesty International (AI)

Organisational Information

Amnesty International is one of the world's largest human rights campaigning organisations. Their vision is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

Founded in 1961, Amnesty International originally focused on the plight of political prisoners around the world. Since then, the organisation has broadened its remit to take in other aspects of human rights including the abolition of torture and the death penalty, refugees, abuses by armed opposition groups, ill-treatment of women and children, and discrimination against ethnic minorities, gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgender people. Amnesty International also lobbies corporations to act responsibly and to not aid human rights abuses.

Amnesty International does not seek or accept funds from governments; instead the organisation relies primarily on funding from national sections and local volunteer groups. Their income for 2006 was £29.4 million.¹

The Amnesty International secretariat is based in London, UK and employs approximately 450 people. They have more than two million supporters in over 140 countries.

Amnesty International actively engaged in the data collection process for the 2006 Global Accountability Report. They completed a questionnaire, provided access to internal documentation and representatives of the organisation were interviewed as part of the research.

Organisational Structure

Amnesty International has a federal structure made up of national sections, structures, international networks, affiliated groups and individual international members. The 2006 Global Accountability Report considers national sections and structures to be Amnesty International's members. The organisation's governing board is the International Council, which meets every two years. Voting participants at the International Council are representatives from national sections and structures. International networks and other members may attend the International Council as non-voting participants. Voting power for national sections is scaled to reflect the number of groups or members a section has. Sections can have up to five representatives, each having one vote. Structures all have only one vote.

The executive board of Amnesty International is the International Executive Committee (IEC), which has nine members all elected by the International Council. No more than one member of any section, structure or affiliated group may be elected to the International Executive Committee. The Committee meets at least twice a year and appoints the Secretary General who oversees the affairs of Amnesty International and heads the international secretariat.

Transparency Dimension

Amnesty International's transparency capabilities rank sixth among the ten assessed INGOs with a score of 15 percent.

Amnesty International only makes a vague commitment to transparency through their Policy for Granting Research Access to Amnesty International's Internal Archives. This fulfils no good practice principles on transparency, failing to commit the organisation to respond to information requests, or identifying narrowly defined conditions for non-disclosure.

The systems that Amnesty International has in place for fostering transparency are similarly weak. Although the Policy for Granting Research Access to Amnesty International's Internal Archives is

¹ Amnesty International (International Secretariat) Financial Summary 2005/06

disseminated electronically and in paper format among volunteers and is made available in French, Spanish, and Arabic, the organisation has yet to introduce executive oversight of transparency or provide relevant staff with training on meeting the organisation's transparency commitments.

Participation Dimension

Amnesty International's participation capabilities rank fourth among the ten assessed INGOs with a score of 64 percent.

External Stakeholder Engagement

Amnesty International does not have a specific policy that applies to engagement with all external stakeholders, however it does have a detailed policy that guides engagement with a specific external stakeholder group- human rights organisations. This document, the Cooperative Activities Between Amnesty International and the Human Rights Movement, meets a number of good practice principles on stakeholder engagement, identifying the conditions under which stakeholders can expect to be engaged and committing the organisation to provide an explanation if it chooses not to engage stakeholders on a project.

Although the Deputy Secretary General provides executive oversight of the policy, Amnesty International does not provide training to staff on stakeholder engagement and while they translate the policy into French, Spanish, and Russian and disseminate it through more than one medium, they do so only to volunteers and members.

Member Control

Amnesty International exhibits good member control by giving national sections and structures the ability to vote, add items to agenda of governing body meetings, elect the executive body, and even initiate a process to dismiss executive body members. Amnesty International's only shortcoming is that the organisation scales voting power and representation on the size of a national sections' membership base. This diminishes the power of smaller members and increases the possibility of minority control by larger, more powerful national sections.

Evaluation Dimension

Amnesty International rank sixth among the ten assessed INGOs in evaluation capabilities alongside the IFRC and the ICFTU, with a score of 51 percent.

While Amnesty International does not have a formal policy that guides evaluation processes, they make a commitment to evaluation in the Operational Document of the 2004-2010 Strategic Plan. Within this, evaluation is identified as a priority area and a commitment is made to evaluating strategic plans, key internal management and administrative policies across the organisation, and operations. The document however, makes no commitment to other good practice principles of evaluation.

The organisational systems that are in place to implement these commitments are strong. The Executive Deputy Secretary General has responsibility for overseeing evaluation processes, training is provided to staff in the form of modules addressing various evaluation steps, and the Operational Document of the Strategic Plan is widely accessible to stakeholder such as volunteers and supporters. Various mechanisms are also in place for fostering learning within the organisation with managers discussing evaluation findings with relevant staff to ensure dissemination of lessons and six-month formal reviews tracking the implementation of previous findings.

Complaint and Response Dimension

Amnesty International ranks last among INGOs for their capabilities to handle and respond to complaints alongside Human Life International, the ICC and the ICFTU. This is because the organisation fails not commit to and lacks the systems to support the handling of complaints from internal or external stakeholders. This represents a significant gap in the organisation's accountability.

Conclusion

Amnesty International's accountability capabilities are strongest in relation to participation. They have well developed policies and systems from engaging external stakeholders, specifically human rights organisations, in decision-making and fostering equitable member control.

Amnesty International's capabilities for handling and responding to complaints are the least developed dimension of their accountability and one of the areas where they need to focus their efforts. They need to develop mechanisms to handle and responds to complaints from both internal and external stakeholders and in doing so, they need to provide protections that are based on good practice principles.

Amnesty International's transparency capabilities also need strengthening. For much of its existence, Amnesty has faced government pressure in countries where it has exposed state sponsored human rights abuses. Historically, therefore Amnesty International has not disclosed information as a mean of both protecting itself and more importantly, its informants. The context in which AI works however, has changed and INGOs are now faced with growing calls to be more open about what they do. This changing context necessitates that Amnesty International develop the capabilities to ensure a consistent flow of information, not only to its membership, but also to the general public on its activities. In light of this, Amnesty International should consider developing an organisation-wide information disclosure policy that clearly states what, when and how information will be made publicly available.

The 2006 Global Accountability Report assessed the accountability of 30 global organisations from the intergovernmental, non-governmental and corporate sectors according to four key dimensions of accountability – transparency, participation, evaluation, and complaint and response mechanisms. The study investigated the extent to which these organisations have in place the capabilities – policies and systems – at headquarters or the global office that foster accountability to communities they affect and to the wider public. At the global level, organisations need to have in place enforceable policies on key dimensions of accountability in order to promote consistency in approach both at different levels throughout the organisation and in relation to their diverse stakeholder groups. The presence of a policy at the global office indicates a public commitment to the dimensions of accountability and enables stakeholders to demand compliance with these policies; yet how these commitments translate into practice is equally important. The project team at the One World Trust is actively seeking innovative ways to assess accountability in practice both at the global office and field levels. Such assessments will help build a more comprehensive understanding of an organisation's accountability.

For a full list of indicators against which each of the 30 organisations were assessed click [here](#) or for further information on the 2006 Global Accountability click [here](#).