

Paper#: K131

How Does Diversity Impact Accountability in the NGO Sector?

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ABSTRACT

Defining the sector comprising nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) is difficult, due to the diversity of organizations within it, funding and operating alongside it. Yet, despite the sector's heterogeneous nature, regulators, funders and donors often treat NGOs as homogeneous when demanding accountability. Does this lead to an accountability expectation gap if there are misunderstandings as to NGO's main stakeholders, 'for what' it is accountable and which mechanisms it may best use to discharge accountability?

This paper utilizes a six-cluster NGO categorisation based on revenue streams to encourage a more informed discussion of accountability schemas for these organizations. The literature review found case studies covering: advocacy NGOs, classic charities, infrastructure providers, member-based NGOs, philanthropists and service providers. While this research suggests that accountability across NGO clusters diverges, an objective of this research was to 'test' the generalisability of the case studies' findings to the six NGO clusters. This research therefore seeks to inform our understanding of accountability within these clusters.

Keywords: NGO taxonomy; NGO accounting; infrastructure NGOs; philanthropists, social services, charities