Interim Accountability Report 2020/21

Contents

Restless Development is a non-profit global agency. We support the collective power of young leaders to create a better world. We are run out of nine independently registered Hubs (India, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, UK, USA, Zambia and Zimbabwe), bound together by our vision for youth power.

On the cover page, Aisha, a volunteer with Restless Development in Tanzania who uses data on youth and maternal health services to advocate for improvements

Opening statement from Kate Muhwezi, our Co-CEO

In 2021 we took the decision to update our strategy to better reflect the agency we had become and what we were striving to achieve. We recognised the world around us has changed; we have faced growing inequality and injustices in light of the pandemic and the unparalleled threat of climate change. Youth-leadership has also changed; there has been a new wave of youth-led change from school strikes for Climate to end SARS. Restless Development had also changed, as the pressures of the pandemic and our commitment to fighting systemic racism led to significant operational innovation, and an increased focus on shifting power.

Our new [strategy](#) has only strengthened our commitment to dynamic accountability. We have created a power shifting checklist to guide our work and to help others ensure that all young people have the power to lead. We have made an explicit commitment to be 'open, dynamic and accountable' and to ensure the full participation of young people; to be transparent; and to provide a continuous feedback loop. In many ways the concept of shifting power itself, transferring resources and ownership to young people, is the ultimate level of responsiveness to those we work with.

Below are three priorities that demonstrate this focus on power shifting and accountability:

Shifting power to youth civil society:

Restless Development hosts the [Youth Collective](#), which is a global community for youth-led organisations. We strengthen the youth collective, enabling members to access peer-to-peer support, learning and opportunities. We have made a strategic investment in this area, creating an online platform; conducting [research](#) into the state of youth civil society; and hosted '[donor dialogues](#)' bringing together funders and youth-led organisations.

We have also embraced a power shifting approach in our new global resourcing strategy, which includes a commitment to power restoring partnerships. These are defined as those where funded opportunities include designs co-created by young people; or are informed by youth-led research; or redistribute funding to youth civil society organisations.

Building a new agency model that reflects our approach to shifting power:

In April 2021 we launched a new, more inclusive and representative leadership structure, shifting power closer to the communities we serve. We replaced our Senior Leadership team with the Restless Leadership Team. Members come from six countries (India, Peru, UK, USA, Zambia and Zimbabwe), and importantly includes three young staff members and majority women. Alongside this we launched three teams reporting into the Restless Leadership Team - Agency; Strategy; and Resourcing leadership teams with representatives from all our Hubs. We have also changed our global board, with young representatives joining from Kenya, Nepal and Nigeria. We have taken advantage of the reliance on virtual and remote ways of working during the pandemic to make this change possible.

Fair pay to tackle systemic racism:

We have removed a historical distinction between national and international remits in our salary scale, which we felt was structurally racist in how it was applied. From October 2021 onwards there was one set of global roles shared across the entire agency.

Our response letter regarding our last Annual Accountability Report provided some brief answers to the specific points raised by the panel in their improvement analysis. This interim report provides further detail on actions we have taken in the past year under the four areas highlighted. We end the report with a summary of significant organisational changes from the reporting year.

Our response to the improvement analysis

i) Progress and challenges over the reporting period (A3):

The review panel noted that they would have liked to have seen more of an assessment on the challenges to accountability in the last reporting period, given the increased level of digital and online work in response to Covid-19, and the unequal access that may result in.

Capturing best practice in digital programming

The Covid-19 pandemic prompted the adaptation to digital and online approaches in many of our programmes. This presented many challenges in engaging with the young people, communities and other stakeholders who are core to our programmes. Our International Programmes team pulled together an assessment of these challenges into a digital best practice paper, based on a variety of sources, including quarterly programme report submissions and annual learning submissions from our different Hubs.

This paper was shared around the whole global agency. It not only provided an assessment of the main challenges, but also recommendations based on our experience of how to respond to these:

Challenges:

- **Exacerbating existing inequalities:** Our Hubs identified that the groups most likely to be marginalised through lack of digital access included those in remote communities; women and girls; and young people with visual and hearing disabilities.

- **Recruitment and retainment of volunteers and participants:** Hubs highlighted the concept of digital fatigue, as so many elements of people's lives were through online means.

- **Suitability of activities:** Monitoring and evaluation, along with influencing activities proved to be particularly challenging. We also found that the level of digital literacy amongst participants affected what was possible in online training.

Recommendations:

- **Carefully consider the suitability of any activities to be delivered digitally:** Although online delivery can often require fewer resources and can foster innovation, it should only be employed when fit for purpose. Online engagement can be complemented by alternative strategies such as radio, or safe in-person delivery.

- **Strong measures are needed to prevent exacerbation of the digital divide:** This is ideally something considered at the design phase. Targeted stakeholders and audiences can be mapped against different engagement strategies. Resources should also be allocated to support engagement, for example to cover data costs. It is also important to monitor any potential marginalisation of groups throughout the programme.

- **Ensure young people are protected in digital spaces:** This can be through risk assessments; sharing guidance with young people on online safety; and creating a digital rights framework.

- **Design for sustainability:** This includes ensuring that any digital approaches can continue to be employed beyond the lifespan of any programme.

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ii) Lessons learnt in the reporting period (B2):

The panel shared that it would be good to understand how our learning products and processes impact decisions across the organisation in a systematic way. We have outlined three examples of this below:

Our global reporting system

Our global quarterly programmes reports consolidate the results and learning from across all our Hubs. As part of our quarterly leadership cycle, the toplines from this report are presented to both our global leadership team, and our board of trustees (through the Programmes and Policy committee). Actions may be agreed, dependent on any performance concerns, or importantly, if steps are needed to help share best practice and learning across the agency.

- *For example, in an Agency Leadership Meeting in July 2021 the presentation of the programme report highlighted the impact that Covid-19 related restrictions were having on the level of activities Hubs could conduct. An action was agreed to compare this data to Hub expenditure throughout the year to understand the extent to which this was impacting on our financial position.*

Annual reviews

As part of the annual review process in 2021, all Hubs completed a learning submission, which pulled together an evidence-based review of their results and inputs from key stakeholders to review the past year. The process was structured so that each Hub Leadership team took this learning and used it to inform the strategic vision submission. The template specifically asked, *'based on your impact and learning analysis, and review of progress against your last strategic vision, what are the most important insights that will inform your new strategic vision?'*

At a global level, a summary of the learning submissions, and cross-cutting themes was presented to the global leadership team, and was used to inform planning for the international support function.

- *Cross-cutting themes and priority areas highlighted by Hub submissions included a growing focus on climate response work and livelihoods in the context of Covid. These themes have been priority areas for our globally focused external engagement work.*

Evidence and learning Review

In 2021 we commissioned an external consultant to conduct an [evidence and learning review](#) of 10 years of our work, based on key research and evaluations we have produced. The focus was on the question of how we facilitate youth leadership.

In order to maximise the value of this research, two online roundtable sessions were held with Directors and leading programme staff across the agency. The first session was used to present the findings for the review, and then set each Hub with the task of discussing the findings and recommendations in its own context, and how it would respond. The second roundtable brought these plans together.

- *This review has gone on to play a pivotal role in informing our new [Global Strategy](#) as one of the key sources of evidence to draw from. In particular, findings from the review have informed the contents of the Power shifting checklist that guides our work.*

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iii) Main likes and dislikes from stakeholders and organisation's response (E3):

In our 2019/20 Agency Accountability report we shared highlights from the feedback we received from staff through the Annual Agency Survey and the young people who lead our work through the Annual Volunteer Survey. We also shared the actions we took in response to this feedback. The review panel asked what we would do to close the feedback loop with staff and volunteers.

The results from the **Annual Agency Survey** from the 2019/20 financial year were shared with all Hub Directors and Heads in December 2020 (at the start of the next financial year). An agency dashboard and Hub specific dashboards were shared. This ensured that Hub leadership teams could see both a summary of consolidated demographic data and responses, along with a breakdown of Hub specific responses. Leadership teams were encouraged to drill down into this data and identify any potential areas of improvement. Hub leadership teams are encouraged to present this data to their teams so it is accessible to all staff across the organisation. This can be done through an all staff workshop or meeting, allowing staff to not only see results, but also feedback on further actions.

In December 2020 we also shared the feedback from the **Annual Volunteer Survey** with Hub leadership teams. This included both the full global report and demographic data, along with Hub specific reports based on responses from their volunteers. Hubs were provided with guidance so that they could bring together the relevant staff to discuss strengths and areas of improvement, and to develop plans for improved volunteer support.

A snapshot of these results was shared publicly in our annual report; however, a critical step in closing the feedback loop would be to share the results and our planned actions with the young volunteers who completed the survey. This was not completed in 2021 due to staffing transitions.

iv) Protecting confidentiality and anonymity of those involved in complaints (J5):

The review panel noted that it would like to see an example or more information to illustrate how our whistleblowing policy is applied in practice, and how we balance the need for anonymity with the need for transparency when handling complaints.

Further details on how our **whistleblowing policy** works in practice can be accessed on our **website**.

There are a variety of reasons why concerns may be raised through our confidential email address. One example may be through staff raising concerns that they felt uncomfortable talking to their performance manager about, either individually, or with a group of staff who may have a shared concern.

With changes in our leadership team, different staff members have now taken on the responsibility for reviewing the confidential email address that people can contact with concerns. This is now shared between a UK based and an African based staff member.

In order to strengthen our whistleblowing policy in the future, we have identified:

- The need to clearly record the source of the different types of complaints and concerns we investigate (e.g. those relating to fraud and bribery; or safeguarding; or staff concerns regarding improper conduct), so that we can better track the impact and effectiveness of the whistleblowing policy.

- The need to review the extent to which reliance on email reporting makes the whistleblowing policy less accessible for some communities.

We have continued to follow a survivor centred approach when handling all safeguarding complaints and breaches. Therefore, wherever possible, the agency protects the confidentiality of all involved. The only time this is compromised is when there is a need to ensure the safety of others or share information with organisations with greater expertise in handling concerns.

Overview of organisational changes

Below is a summary of significant organisational changes from the last reporting year:

Leadership transitions:

In addition to the changes in our global leadership structure outlined in the opening statement above, we also saw changes in senior personnel. Perry Maddox took the decision to step down as CEO in 2021 and was replaced by Alex Kent (formally our Strategy Director) and Kate Muhwezi (previously our Director of Operations and programmes) as Co-CEOs. This new leadership model has provided the opportunity for further shared and distributed leadership.

We have also seen a number of Leadership transitions at the Hub level, with new Directors starting in India, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zambia. Excitingly, all four were internal candidates, which is evidence of the strength of our talent pipeline. In addition, all African and Asian Hub Directors are now nationals from Africa and Asia.

Diversifying our International team:

We have increased the proportion of International roles which are now based in the Global South and not the UK. In line with our vision to distribute leadership and international functions within the agency, this change involved the difficult decision of relocating some existing roles from the UK to our Hubs. Prior to 2020, 80% of International roles were UK based or filled by Europeans, now that figure is less than 50%.

Changes in our strategic programmes:

Unfortunately, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the UK economy resulted in a reduction in the Official Development Assistance budget for the 2021/22 financial year. This resulted in the end of funding for the innovative Development Alternative consortium led by Restless Development, which aimed to shift power to young people and communities so that they could hold development actors to account (through the application of the consortium's 'model for change').

We have however been successful in securing funding for other significant global programmes, including our role in the Hivos-led We Lead programme, which support young women, especially from marginalised groups, to claim their sexual and reproductive health and rights. The building of strong, inclusive and locally owned organisations and movements is at the heart of the programme.