

## **Five minutes with... Caroline Harper, CEO, Sightsavers International**

### **Why is effectiveness important to you?**

I think there are several parts to this. Obviously at Sightsavers we want to know that the money we're spending that donors give us is being spent effectively, it's not being wasted and it's actually having an impact on the ground, delivering the objectives we set for the programmes we were funding. I think that's just fundamental. In today's world donors and supporters are more and more keen to see that that's the case and you just won't be able to get further funding unless you can demonstrate it.

So when you look at the Bond Effectiveness Programme and the reason I support that, I think in today's environment, which continues to become more uncertain, the government are going to have a really hard time persuading the public that aid money should continue to be spent at the same level let alone be increased.

Therefore having something that demonstrates how effective we all are as a sector is becoming absolutely imperative. I don't think we're very good at it and certainly not good at it as a group.

Also, I think unless we come together and do something, something will be imposed upon us that we might like a lot less and may not be as effectual. I think we need to show we're serious about effectiveness.

### **What did you learn from doing the Sightsavers partner survey?**

It was quite a while ago now, back in 2004-2005. We had situations where the vision and mission of the INGO are not necessarily aligned with those of the partner. We certainly found that was the case in many places.

We also had power balance issues where we were demanding more and more accountability of the partner because we were being driven by the donors. And I think not enough accountability really for the beneficiary end because when you have money flowing from donors to INGOs to the partner inevitably that leads to imbalances of power. We saw that this was very much the case.

Interestingly the survey was meant to just investigate how people felt about the partnership but several of our partners said things like "did we pass?" Thinking this was a test to see if they would continue to get money from us. So we saw that as an issue.

We did find out positive things for example that most of our partners were very committed. The survey showed we had a good strong relationship with most of them. The good partnerships were ones where it wasn't just about grant making but actually about capacity building and development. Some of our partners ended up becoming stronger than Sightsavers and able then to support other partners.

From there we developed a partnership policy which we've now rolled out pretty much everywhere. Part of that was to develop some tools that our guys could use to assess partnerships. This involved looking at the financial strengths of the partner, looking at the capacity beyond that so governance issues for example. And then looking at how we might work together. So they now have a suite of tools that they can use when working with partners. It wasn't just about qualitative information. It did actually lead to some really specific things to help guide future field work.

**What components should the Bond effectiveness framework encompass?**

That's a big question! Well I think it needs to look at how organisations are delivering against the objectives they set for themselves. But first of all Bond should have a look at the various frameworks that exist now and see if we can pull from them the best things. I think what's essential is we try and keep it simple. My worry has always been that we would use this as an excuse to totally revisit the development paradigm and ask really deep questions about what's development for and what's the role of a Northern NGO. All those are relevant things but I think this needs to be a fairly simple tool that NGO's can use to help them assess how effective they're being.

Yes it could then be used by donors because it would be useful to report against it but the most important thing is that it helps NGOs with that really difficult question of 'did I actually achieve what I set out to do?'

So keep it simple, don't reinvent the wheel, and look at what people have already done. Make sure that it's actually useful and not too theoretical.