



**HEALTHNET TPO**

## **Lessons learnt from introducing “social responsibility” policies and practices across HealthNet TPO**

### **1. Background on HealthNet TPO**

HealthNet TPO is a globally recognised non-profit organisation dedicated to assisting communities in regions afflicted by war, disaster, and poverty. Its mission is twofold: empowering communities to regain control of their health and wellbeing while strengthening national healthcare systems to sustainably meet the population's health needs. This dual focus ensures that immediate support is complemented by long-term development.

HealthNet TPO's interventions are deeply rooted in community involvement. By engaging local individuals and leveraging their knowledge, the organisation ensures that its initiatives are contextually relevant and sustainable. Since its establishment in 1992, HealthNet TPO has operated in Afghanistan, Burundi, South Sudan, and the Netherlands, where its headquarters are based. These regions highlight its commitment to addressing diverse and complex challenges in both conflict zones and stable environments.

### **2. Importance of “social responsibility” in international development**

Social responsibility reflects an organisation's commitment to addressing the societal and environmental impacts of its activities through ethical and transparent actions. This ethos resonates strongly within the international development sector, where the wellbeing of people and the planet is central.

The “triple bottom line” approach—focusing on people, planet, and profit—is especially relevant. In this model, profit generation must not come at the expense of environmental health or human dignity. For development-focused organisations, this means ensuring that programmes are not only effective but also equitable and environmentally sustainable.

Key facets of social responsibility include:

- **Environmental Management:** Reducing ecological footprints in operational activities.
- **Labour Standards:** Upholding fair and just working conditions.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Actively involving all stakeholders, from local communities to global donors.
- **Gender Equity and Human Rights:** Promoting inclusivity and justice.
- **Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures:** Maintaining transparency and accountability.



However, much of the existing research on social responsibility prioritises corporate benefits. This gap in literature underlines the need for tailored strategies and insights for non-profit organisations like HealthNet TPO. For example, the OECD's guidelines on responsible business conduct, which include topics such as climate change and biodiversity, serve as a starting point but require adaptation to suit the unique needs of non-profits.

### 3. Operationalising “social responsibility” within the organisation

HealthNet TPO adopted a systematic approach to embed social responsibility into its operations. Key steps included:

- **Establishment of an Ethics Committee:** Approved in 2019, this committee oversees ethical compliance across the organisation. Despite delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the committee began regular quarterly meetings in 2022. Its responsibilities include addressing complaints, reviewing compliance issues, and identifying training opportunities.
- **Appointment of a Policy Officer:** This part-time role, created to support the Managing Director, focuses on ethics compliance and policy development. One of the officer's initial achievements was consolidating existing policies into a comprehensive “Ethics, Complaints, Investigation & Whistleblower Policy,” approved in 2023.
- **Strengthening PMEAL (Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning):** In 2024, a PMEAL Officer was appointed to lead the integration of monitoring and evaluation into all stages of project design and implementation. The forthcoming PMEAL policy and organisational data strategy aim to enhance accountability and learning.

These measures not only institutionalise social responsibility but also ensure that staff are equipped with the knowledge and tools to uphold these standards. Training and capacity-building initiatives further reinforce this commitment.

### 4. Main results achieved in target countries

The integration of social responsibility has yielded significant benefits:

- **Building Trust and Team Cohesion:** By fostering collaborative and flat organisational structures, HealthNet TPO has nurtured a strong sense of camaraderie among its teams.
- **Enhanced Commitment and Capacity Building:** Employees at all levels have embraced the organisation's mission, supported by ongoing training and skills development.

For instance, regular workshops and learning sessions empower staff to address ethical dilemmas and implement best practices in their daily work. Such initiatives strengthen



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both individual and organisational capacities, ultimately benefiting the communities served.

## **5. Main lessons learned**

The past three years have been transformative for HealthNet TPO. Key insights include:

- **Understanding Local Contexts:** Effective social responsibility practices require sensitivity to local values and norms. Bridging cultural differences is essential to fostering trust and cooperation.
- **Advocating for Localisation:** HealthNet TPO champions the principle of localisation, emphasising that aid efforts should be led by local communities. By empowering communities to design and implement programmes, the organisation ensures that its interventions are both relevant and sustainable.

For example, in Afghanistan, localised health initiatives have significantly improved maternal care outcomes, while in South Sudan, community-led peacebuilding efforts have strengthened social cohesion. These successes underscore the value of participatory approaches.