

CORE - The Corporate Responsibility Coalition

*Strategic review of its impact,
effectiveness and performance:*

Key findings

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INTRODUCTION

CORE (The Corporate Responsibility Coalition) provides policy and advocacy co-ordination and information for a range of civil society organisations working in loose coalition on corporate accountability issues. It was founded in 2001 in response to the specific opportunity arising from the government's policy review which led to the Companies Act 2006. CORE incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee in 2010.

This is CORE's first strategic review. It has sought views from a wide range of stakeholders in order to get a sounding on the following areas covered in the full report:

- Impact and benefits of its work, focusing particularly on the last three years. (Section 2)
- Its position and purpose (Section 3)
- Current structure, including governance, management and membership issues (Section 4)
- Organisational strengths, challenges and risks (Section 5)
- Future challenges, both external and internal (Section 6)
- Suggestions for future work (Section 7)

The primary purpose of the review is to enable staff, board and the wider membership to understand the current 'state of play' for the organisation and enable internal discussions about how CORE could and should develop over the next five years. This report provides a starting point for discussions and does not propose definite solutions, as these will emerge from future discussion based on the findings herein.

The review was conducted by Ceri Hutton, an independent consultant with 30 years' experience in the social justice sector. A brief methodology is provided at Appendix A of the full report, as is a full list of interviewees.

KEY FINDINGS

Benefits for civil society

1. Civil society stakeholders appreciate the way **CORE brings information, balance and rigour into discussions** and co-ordinates groups with diverse interests, viewpoints and activities. By so doing it has enabled the sector to have a response which is *"more than the sum of its parts"* and allowed the sector to come up with *"clear and actionable asks"*. Members feel that CORE is muscular, packs a punch well above its weight, and represents them well at governmental and policy level.

2. There were a **range of benefits coalition members reported** deriving from their association with CORE, notably:

- Their voice is amplified by being able to draw on the expertise of CORE as well as its networks to push out messages. Larger, more engaged NGOs report this as well as smaller NGOs. *"Compared to some organisations we are well resourced, but the challenges of making progress on these issues are huge and you need multiple voices and people with different political contacts on the political spectrum."*
- Bringing different perspectives, specialisms and skills together means that approaches and submissions are rounded and well-informed and greater than any one single contribution could be. *"The advantage of [a submission] coming from CORE is that it reflects a broad spectrum of issues."*
- NGOs feel that CORE enables them to 'sing from the same songsheet' and ensures sometimes scant resources are brought to bear in the most effective way possible.
- CORE's information work (through seminars, meetings and briefings) is well targeted, appreciated and attended.
- The provision of pooled resources (such as a lobbyist) to take forward certain policy areas is felt to be particularly useful
- Members feel that CORE enables them to keep a watching brief, learn new things, and refine and shape approaches by engaging with others. Even the largest NGOs do not have the resources to scan

and respond to all issues, and CORE's work therefore fulfils both a horizon-scanning function and a resourcing function for those areas where they are unable to engage without the input of others.

- Small NGOs in particular are reliant on CORE to help them take forward their corporate accountability work and feel that without this input they would be unable to participate and be involved in corporate accountability work.

3. Overall, CORE enables **both large and small organisations** to **participate more effectively** in the corporate accountability arena and several NGOs confirmed that CORE is central to their internal organisational strategy in taking forward work in this area.

Benefits for policy makers

4. Policy makers report CORE's reputation as being extremely good and are impressed with the quality and thoroughness of CORE's submissions. *"CORE has issued comment papers ... which have been so logical and well argued, well set out, that they are basically pretty unanswerable. They have struck just the right tone, the content of them is excellent."*

5. CORE enables a co-ordination of efforts and this is greatly welcomed by policy makers as a way of ensuring that NGO input is targeted in the most effective way possible. *"Co-ordinating efforts is a sensible strategy and is incredibly useful for us."* In some cases policy-makers stated that without the 'funneling' of NGO views through CORE, access to decision-makers would have been limited. *"None of the organisations ... would have got to meet the minister alone, but because it was CORE they came as part of a team and so CORE had that access which wouldn't have been secured otherwise."*

Benefits for the policy and regulatory context on corporate accountability

6. CORE's work has helped shape the policy context for corporate accountability work. Both NGOs and policy-makers noted that there have been gains in relation to the Company Law Amendment; Business and Human Rights Action Plan, Non-financial reporting directive and the Modern Slavery Bill which would not have happened without sustained and detailed influencing and co-ordinating work from CORE.

7. CORE provides a focus and 'institutional memory' for the NGO sector, and a repository for learning and expertise which can outlast changes of priority and personnel within individual NGOs engaged on this issue. This is helpful both for the field in the UK, and for the wider contribution the UK makes to the European and international debate.

Learning about CORE's positioning and operations arising from the review

8. The strategic review also looked at issues relating to CORE's positioning, reputation, structure, governance and membership. The key conclusions have been taken to a strategic review meeting attended by board and staff, and were broadly that:

- CORE has a good reputation though within a limited 'inner circle' of organisations.
- There has been a tangible gear change and increase in professionalism in CORE's operations over the last few years
- CORE's purpose, in particular in relation to its 'membership' could be better articulated
- CORE's current governance arrangements are strong given the expertise and commitment of those engaged, but could be improved by a few measures including more transparency, limits on board tenure and the appointment of a Chair and Treasurer
- Overall, whilst the engagement and involvement of key partners to take forward the corporate accountability agenda lies at the heart of CORE's mission, it is felt that the concept of 'membership' is not a helpful one for a range of reasons. Redefining this role as that of 'coalition partner', being more transparent about those contributing to costs (and that these are not fees) and more streamlined about consultative mechanisms were all suggested as ways forward.

- CORE's single member of staff (co-ordinator) is recognised as a great asset but also represents a risk given they are responsible for the learning and reputation of CORE. Extending the staff team to at least two was suggested by both NGOs and policy makers.
- The name is felt to be confusing and inaccurate and CORE should consider changing this

Future priorities for CORE

9. The context for CORE's work was felt to be extremely challenging given the change of government and the long haul nature of the engagement. That said, it is also clear that the need to make the case for increased corporate accountability grows daily.

10. NGOs feel in the face of this, there is more of a need than ever for CORE to learn from and co-ordinate efforts with partners in the UK, Europe and internationally. Current coalition members wish, broadly, to see it fulfil a more robust leadership and co-ordination role which activates the specialisms of members and creates a forward-looking strategy both to influence where possible events now, but also plan for influencing in the future.

11. Key priorities mentioned were to look at 'follow through' in relation to existing wins (for example, on the Modern Day Slavery Act), to pursue work on the Business and Human Rights Action Plan and to focus in particular on Access to Remedy as an important but neglected pillar for corporate accountability. There was also strong support for pursuing and co-ordinating efforts around the redefinition of 'corporate purpose'.