



## Commonly Asked Questions about InterAction's NGO Standards

The following questions relate to the entire NGO Standards document.

### *How have the Standards benefited the community?*

The Standards serve a critical internal and external role. Internally, the Standards link members in the common pursuit of a set of values and ethical code of conduct. Externally, the Standards certify to the public-at-large that members have committed themselves to certain ideals and ways of operating. In times when the public trust in the nonprofit community has been shaken, the Standards are a highly visible, professional statement that enhances credibility with donors, governments, other NGO/PVO consortia, and the public at large.

Furthermore, the Standards provide InterAction's Membership and Standards Committee with a useful framework for considering prospective members and has lent itself in facilitating the increasing adoption of open and transparent financial, operational, and ethical standards among NGOs in numerous other countries.

### *What if members are reluctant to sign the Standards?*

InterAction is a voluntary association, and the Standards set by and for its members have weight only to the extent that the membership supports them. Self-certification is a clear, simple method of confirming member support. If a member refuses to sign, the issue is referred to the NGO Standards Committee. The NGO Standards Committee will request an explanation from the member, determine whether the abstention is reasonable and forward a recommendation on to the Executive Committee for final review.

InterAction looks at the Self-Certification Plus (SCP) process as a learning tool. These standards are to be used as a tool to have organizations reflect on their operations and have them improve their policies and practices. If there is a potential violation, InterAction will provide recommendations on how the member can improve upon request and look for improvement at future Self-Certification Plus (SCP) processes.

### *What is the legal status of the Standards as a whole document?*

There is no increased legal liability for members who sign and strive to uphold the Standards.

The Standards are best understood as statements of principles, and as such are not legal requirements. Laws generally define minimums, while principles embody the higher values that charitable organizations, by their very nature, recognize and share. The public affirmation of the principles embodied in the NGO Standards through the annual compliance review process does not, in and of itself, create legal issues or liabilities; however there could be legal consequences should agencies conduct themselves or their programs in ways that are at odds with established US, international or local law.

The principles contained in the NGO Standards are of two broad types: 1) Shared values, e.g. development programs should be participatory, employees should be treated fairly, boards should be independent, etc.; 2) Quality standards, i.e. members must consider the quality standards established by appropriate authorities, e.g. receipt and distribution of medical supplies should be guided by the regulations of WHO, financial management practices by the norms of AICPA and FASB, fundraising practices by the norms of the National Society of Fundraising Executives, etc.

Adherence to all relevant laws (or conscientious non-adherence) is ultimately the responsibility of the boards of directors and staffs of member agencies.