

Trust in non-governmental organizations sinks due to money focus: survey

- By Belinda Goldsmith, www.reuters.com
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LONDON (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - Trust in non-governmental organizations has fallen in the past year amid concerns they have become too money focused, according to an annual survey on Tuesday that found global trust in major institutions at a five-year low.

The 2015 Edelman Trust Barometer found the level of trust in government, NGOs, media and business in 27 countries sank in the past year as three major airline crashes, the Ebola outbreak, data breaches and banking scandals hit public confidence.

NGOs were the most trusted of the four institutions, but trust in these organizations fell the most over the past year, to 63 percent from 66 percent a year earlier, with levels down or unchanged in 19 countries.

Only the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, France, Brazil, the United States, Poland, Italy, Spain saw greater trust in NGOs last year.

"There's a feeling that NGOs are now acting too much like business. They're too focused on fundraising and the money," Ed Williams, chief executive of Edelman UK and Ireland, said at the launch of the public relations firm's 15th annual trust survey.

The survey of about 33,000 respondents found concern that NGOs were too focused on money, losing touch with the public, using public funding poorly, corrupt, or incompetent.

Williams also signaled that discontent with NGOs' ability to drive change in China and to tackle energy issues, such as hydraulic fracturing, could have contributed to the fall.

The survey found less trust in business, with 57 percent trust compared with 59 percent last year, while 51 percent trusted the media, down from 53 percent.

Government was the only one of the four institutions to record a slight rise in trust, which edged up to 48 percent from 45 percent, but remained the least trusted institution globally.

This rise was driven by improvements in 16 countries, including India which jumped to become the second most trusted country from fifth in the list after Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office last May.

The United Arab Emirates topped the record small list of six countries to score 60 percent or more in the barometer. The others were Indonesia, China, Singapore and the Netherlands.

Japan was bottom of the list, trusted by 37 percent, and globally the overall trust index was down one percentage point from the previous year at 55 percent.

"NGOs were a rocket ship going up but we are now seeing their descent. The NGO sector is seen as important enough to take seriously and judge if it is performing or not," said Edelman President and Chief Executive Officer Richard Edelman.

(Reporting by Belinda Goldsmith, Editing by Tim Pearce)