



The Reality of Aid

An Independent Review of Poverty Reduction and Development Assistance

Civil Society and Development
Effectiveness: Another View

RealityCheck

AUGUST 2008



Issue prepared by
Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC) and
Asociación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Promoción (ALOP)

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about this issue

This edition of the Reality Check tackles the critical issues of civil society and development effectiveness. In the lead-up to the Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, CSOs have been challenged to respond to the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in relation to their own effectiveness as aid and development actors. Rejecting the direct application of the Paris Declaration to CSO development roles, CSOs have focused on their roles as innovative agents of change and social transformation. This Reality Check highlights issues of CSO accountability, support for women's rights organizations in development, political roles, and North/South civil society relationships, among others. In July 2008, about 80 CSOs from around the world launched a two-year Global Forum on CSO Development Effectiveness to discuss these issues and agree upon civil society development effectiveness principles and guidelines to implement these principles.

This issue is prepared by:



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Civil society and development effectiveness: North/South challenges¹

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Donors have been constructing new approaches to aid delivery based on lessons in aid effectiveness drawn from past decades of development cooperation. To date, aid reform strategies to improve aid effectiveness, most recently expressed in the 2005 *Paris Declaration*, have single-mindedly focused on donor-government relationships.

Donors have implied that the principles that are guiding the reform of their aid practices – country

ownership, harmonization of donor approaches and aid conditions, focus and alignment with country poverty strategies, managing for results and mutual accountability – are universally applicable to all development actors, including civil society organizations (CSOs).

An explicit challenge by donors to CSOs has been... “Are Northern CSOs ready to apply the principles of the *Paris Declaration* in their relations

¹ This article draws from a number of recent policy discussion papers and presentations by the same author: Brian Tomlinson, “Determinants of Civil Society Aid Effectiveness”, CCIC, November 2006. Brian Tomlinson, “North/South CSO Relations – A Northern Perspective”, International Civil Society Arena Conference: Civil Society and the Aid Effectiveness Agenda, Harnosand Conference, Sweden, August 2007. Brian Tomlinson, “Values and CSO Aid Effectiveness”, Northern Civil Society Consultations on CSOs and Aid Effectiveness, Brussels, October 2007. These documents are available on CCIC’s aid policy web site, <http://ccic.ca/e/002/aid.shtml>.

with Southern CSOs?” The answer by CSOs would be “no”, but not because CSOs inherently reject efforts to improve aid effectiveness, their own included. The answer is “no” because it is the wrong question to frame a dialogue about effectiveness and civil society organizations.

The Paris Declaration and CSO development effectiveness

CSOs reject the Paris framework in relation to their own effectiveness on three grounds.

- 1) The politics of aid reform: CSOs were not participants in the negotiations for the *Paris Declaration* and CSO roles in development were never considered. As a result any application of the principles of effectiveness in the *Paris Declaration* to North/South CSO relations would be merely coincidental. More recently CSOs have been arguing for the commitment of donors and governments to enrich their understanding of the implementation of the Paris principles which would include contributions from CSOs.² Independent CSO policy engagement has been seeking authentic tripartite policy dialogue (governments, donors and CSOs), perhaps leading to a more comprehensive and ambitious successor agreement to the *Paris Declaration* in 2011.
- 2) The limitations of the Paris Declaration in reforming the politics of aid: For CSOs the operational architecture of aid relationships cannot, and must not, be separated from their actual impact on the conditions for realizing sustainable livelihoods for poor and marginalized people. Women’s organizations have argued, for example, that there has been little analysis, in the establishment and
- 3) The nature of CSO roles as donors and aid recipients. CSOs as aid donors and as aid counterparts in developing countries are very distinct from the roles and obligations of official donors and developing country governments. Civil society organizations are expressions of active citizenship in their society and are development actors in their own right. As such, in the North, international CSOs are channels for peoples’ solidarity, representing the interests of distinct segments of society, with disparate organizational values, mandates and forms of governance. Through their efforts and resource transfers, Northern CSOs form a complex web of global, regional and country-based relationships for development with civil society counterparts in the South. Governments, on the other hand, through legislatures and programs must be fully representative of their citizens, and share international human rights obligations with donor counterparts.

As development actors in their own right, CSOs have an inherent responsibility to make their own

2 See *The Synthesis of Findings and Recommendations*, Advisory Group on Civil Social and Aid Effectiveness, June 2008. The Advisory Group was created by the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness to give advice on the inclusion of civil society organizations in donor and government strategies to improve the effectiveness of aid. See its key documents on CCIC’s aid policy web site, <http://ccic.ca/e/002/aid.shtml>.

3 International CSO Steering Group, *Better Aid: A civil society policy paper for the Accra 2008 High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness*, June 2008, accessible at www.betteraid.org.



Photo: Curt Carnemark - World Bank

choices about whether and how to relate to donors, the state and private sector actors. Southern CSOs should be able to make the important decision to challenge existing power relations in society, in global institutions, and in North/South CSO relations. This freedom to choose the nature of their development relationships is an essential ingredient of CSO effectiveness, albeit one that it is highly contentious.

The centrality of CSOs in building democratic culture and promoting alternatives is in tension with a narrow donor interpretation of “country ownership” in the *Paris Declaration*. While civil society is largely missing from the 2005 *Declaration*, the assumption that civil society can be simply subsumed under the *Declaration*’s principles and commitments may undermine key conditions that make CSOs effective development actors. While the question of CSOs aligning and implementing the *Paris Declaration*’s existing commitments is not the right one, CSOs must nevertheless ask themselves what principles, approaches and commitments shape their own development effectiveness? An understanding of

their roles in pursuit of democratic accountability, poverty reduction, equality and justice is essential for clarifying this question of CSO effectiveness.

A rights-based approach

Most CSOs welcome the role of aid in strengthening Southern governments in poor countries to meet their human rights obligations for health care, education, or decent work for their citizens. But actions to counter poverty are also inherently political. National political will, strategies and institutional capacities on the part of government are certainly essential, but governments alone (often under the influence of economic and political elites) are often insufficient. These limitations have been compounded by the external insertion of commercial, security and political interests of donors and transnational corporations, who limit political space for alternative government policies in poor countries.

Political and social movement organizing, by those living in poverty or otherwise marginalized in

their society, is essential to their efforts to claim their rights. One of the central implications of using a human rights framework for assessing effectiveness, then, is the need to take into account these links between sustainable development change and the efforts of engaged citizens.

Roles, principles and challenges for Northern civil society in North/South relationships

Where do civil society organizations fit in citizens' efforts to reduce poverty and claim rights? CSO roles are inevitably diverse, reflecting widely differing organizational values, objectives, intervention sectors, organizational structures, interests and resources. But at their heart, *effective* CSO roles, if understood within a rights framework, promote peoples' participation and democratic action and reflect the values of socio-economic justice and solidarity as global citizens. The universal right to association, to gender equality, along with substantial participation by people in strategies to claim rights, therefore, is crucial for understanding the effectiveness of civil society organizations in reducing poverty. The capacity of people to take advantage of these rights is strongly influenced by inequalities, vulnerabilities and poverty.

Recent deliberations by CSOs⁴ have identified a number of roles and contributions by Northern CSOs that are highly relevant for the accompaniment of Southern processes of empowerment:

- 1) Collaborating in solidarity with organizations and movements working with poor and marginalized people;
- 2) Articulating and coalescing of citizen interests for democratic governance, particularly by Southern CSOs;
- 3) Advancing gender equality, focusing on the rights of poor and marginalized women;

- 4) Expanding space for peoples' voices, particularly in the South, in policy dialogue;
- 5) Stimulating innovations grounded in the realities of where poor people live and work;
- 6) Building organizing and organizational capacities in various areas relevant to social change;
- 7) Networking and learning, leveraging CSO knowledge and CSO policy perspectives;
- 8) Mobilize and leveraging Northern financial and human resources; and
- 9) Promoting practical initiatives and support for global citizenship and exchange in the North for global social justice in the South.

Clearly, there are also major challenges in both the commitment and the capacities of Northern CSOs (NCSOs) to change organizational behavior to be effective in fulfilling these roles. Among other issues, Southern CSOs (SCSOs) consistently point to the profound imbalance of power in favor of the North in their CSO and donor relationships. Many SCSOs acknowledge the value-added of North/South CSO relationships (see Annex One), but question the capacities and the will of Northern CSOs to ensure that the potential contributions inherent in North/South civic relationships are met. The programmatic scope and the terms for the North-South transfer of money and the deployment of capacity are seen to be critically important.

Three key challenges in civil society relationships seem to be central to the effectiveness of North/South civic partnerships to support rights and justice:

1. Northern CSO project modalities and pre-determined priorities limit Southern CSO autonomy and legitimacy, with scarce financing for SCSO democratic processes and advocacy for rights. In the selectivity of their project work, NCSOs have enormous influence over

⁴ *Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness: A Synthesis of Advisory Group Regional Consultations and Related Processes*, a background paper for the International Forum on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness, prepared by Brian Tomlinson, for the Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness, January 2008, accessible at http://ccic.ca/e/docs/002_aid_2008-02_synthesis_final_version.pdf.

agendas, over who get funded, and over who gets to define “success” and “results”.

Southern CSOs will be most effective if they can build their work iteratively, rooted in the logic of their relationships with domestic constituencies. As they strengthen their institutional capacities, many SCSOs seek access to core programmatic financing from NCSOs and for a common approach to funding from their various donors. What are the barriers for Northern CSOs to respond to such requests for core support and civil society donor harmonization? What influence do official “back-donors” of NCSOs play? Is the results-oriented funding culture in the North driving Northern and Southern organizations to demonstrate quick project success stories, while avoiding the messy realities of challenging operating environments on the ground? Are public fundraising CSO imperatives, approaches and messages in the North driving the project modality?

A related concern that can compound the challenge of effectiveness and constituency-building for Southern CSOs has been the “internationalization” of the presence of the largest and most powerful Northern NGO. These Northern NGOs command billions of dollars in resources, while seeking to expand and “domesticate” their “NGO brand” in developing country markets through local offices.

It’s instructive that the Ford Foundation recently published a manual for Northern NGOs called *So You are Thinking of Moving South – What you need to know and ask*.⁵ While clearly the largest international NGOs bring with them advantages of resources, knowledge and scale, such moves can stunt or undermine the autonomous growth of local Southern CSOs. NCSOs in the South

are able to attract high quality staff, can have privileged access to official donors, and can prioritize their own international civil society perspectives to domestic consultations with local government, sometimes to the detriment of local CSOs.

2. Weak Southern CSO institutional capacities coexist with challenging socio-economic, political and conflictual situations. Many northern CSOs, along with official donors, place considerable emphasis on “institution-building” in the south, which is understood as an essential precondition for sustainability.

To what degree are the priorities for SCSO strengthening being driven by northern interests, issues and expectations arising from institutional demands from northern-driven aid reforms? Yet even this capacity-building for narrow program or project-management skills and processes to meet Northern institutional requirements often take little account of the very difficult operational environments facing many CSOs in the South. Assumptions are being made in the North about effective service delivery CSOs, whether they are best placed, for example, to expand advocacy and monitoring capacities. As a Tanzanian informant in one recent consultation suggests – “People are living in very different worlds.” The assumption is often that NCSOs have relevant abilities and capacities purely because they live in the North; organizations and CSO staff in the South must be “taught”. Where in capacity building is there space for sharing experience, which is unique in both the North and the South?

3. Insensitivity to Southern CSO interests, voice and knowledge in international policy dialogue. Southern CSOs are often confronted by already established priorities and policy messages, by

5 Marian Nell and Janet Shapiro, “So You are Thinking of Moving South! What Do You Need to Know and Ask?”, Ford Foundation, May 2007, accessible at <http://www.civicus.org/new/media/Relocating-GlobalNorth-Global%20South-Toolkit.doc>.



Photo: Anthony Morland/IRIN

their Northern counterparts. The expectation, with limited consultation, is that all will join in promoting these messages with Northern governments, in multilateral fora, and with their own governments in the South. A long-standing challenge is one of accountability when a NCSO claims to represent Southern policy interests in such meetings, and when it is far more difficult for SCSOs to be regularly present. But clearly these challenges are complex. Some smaller and medium-sized NCSOs with limited resources and outreach capacities, for example, face challenges in translating their field-based knowledge into relevant policy messages in the North, while respecting the integrity of their Southern CSO relationships.

Clearly there are important dynamics of power at play between NCSOs and SCSOs, as there are for official donors. There are several key areas for reform, requiring explicit attention by all development stakeholders (donors, governments and CSOs), which will shape the possibilities for more effective NCSO support for civil society counterparts in the South.

1. Quality North/South CSO relationships should reflect rights-based principles that maximize SCSO capacities to claim “ownership” and democratic space for their own development approaches with local constituencies, governments and multilateral institutions. All donors need to respect the importance of diversity and critical voices in an effective democratic civic culture for development.
2. Internal NCSO operating procedures should be consistent with these principles, reducing the tension between Northern CSO/donor “operational imperatives” and requirements for effective working relationships and structures of democratic accountability with Southern counterparts.
3. CSO aid effectiveness is highly contingent upon official donor and government influence on the ability of NCSOs to respond effectively to SCSO-determined needs and approaches. Restrictive Southern government legal conditions for SCSO are compounded by NCSOs, who are now subject to closer

financial scrutiny by regulators and strict “anti-terrorism” legislation. A one-size-fits-all donor/government logic of “alignment” with donor/PRSP “priorities” or artificial “harmonization” with donor operational policies at a country level may undermine SCSO priorities and alternative critical CSO voices in the South.

Conclusions

At their best, CSO relationships create bridges between local civic actions and national/global civil society aspirations that are responsive to the realities where poor and marginalized people live. They cannot, and must not, replace the responsibility and human rights obligations of government and citizens. At the same time, CSOs, as expressions of active citizenship in the North and the South, should not be considered subsidiary to government development plans.

On the surface, CSO aid effectiveness principles might seem to fit with those in the *Paris Declaration* – ownership, alignment, harmonization, and mutual accountability. However, the implementation of the *Declaration* is largely carried out by donors and a few officials in the central governments of the poorest countries. The goals for civil society, by contrast, are more closely aligned with the principles of democratic culture which requires respect and encouragement of pluralities of views, policy and development alternatives. As a result donor and CSO approaches to effective development cooperation will sometimes be in tension. But it is a tension that CSOs will argue is at the heart of democratic practice, upon which the sustainability of results from donor development interventions depends.

At the same time, CSOs themselves must take leadership, acknowledging that their practices must

continue to evolve and change. This *Reality Check* on civil society development effectiveness sets out some avenues for these changes. It also draws from recent civil society discussions to launch a global CSO-led process to develop consensus on relevant principles for civil society development effectiveness and guidelines for their implementation in the multiple unique local realities in which civil society contributes to development goals.

Northern and Southern CSOs are not new to debates and issues of effectiveness. A number of both small and large organizations in the North have undergone significant change after periods of reflection and consultations with SCSO colleagues and counterparts. At the end of June 2008 more than 80 CSOs from the North and the South met in Paris to launch a global CSO-led process of reflection and consensus building on civil society development effectiveness.⁶ It is one that will benefit from three approaches –

- equitable North/South CSO-led dialogues that focus with transparent and honest reflections between and within CSOs, to clarify mandates, context-specific needs and capacities, and value-added. The results should deliberately guide and inform reforms of CSO operational practices, training of staff, and development action in the interests of poor and vulnerable populations;
- greater attention to facilitating Southern CSO-led coalitions, with legitimate roots in national civic cultures in the South, as well as North/South CSO networks, based on *shared goals and messages*, as forums to formulate collective civil society policy and campaigning initiatives; and
- CSO-led dialogue on their own effectiveness, with a multi-stakeholder character, recognizing that official donors and developing country governments have a strong role to play in

6 See “Open Forum on Civil Society Development Effectiveness: A Progress Report”, August 2008, accessible on Concord’s Effectiveness of Civil Society site, <http://www.concordeurope.org/Public/Page.php?ID=11872>. Concord (the European Confederation of NGOs for Relief and Development) has facilitated a global initiative to launch a two year civil society led process on CSO development effectiveness. This Progress Report summarizes the parameters for this process emerging from a meeting of more than 80 CSOs in Paris on June 29 – 30, 2008.

enabling conditions that facilitate effective CSO relationships.

CSOs are giving a lot of attention and have high expectations for the Accra High Level Forum and its Action Agenda. Over the coming years, CSOs have a

tremendous opportunity to work together, and with donors and developing country governments, with a shared commitment to make more effective the critical development roles of CSOs, enhancing their contributions to innovative development action and assuring democratic accountability.

Annex One:

Value-Added Contributions of North/South Civil Society Partnerships

A workshop at the Harnosand International Civil Society Arena Conference: Civil Society and the Aid Effectiveness Agenda, August 2007, brought together Northern and Southern CSOs, donors and developing country government representatives, to consider the value-added contributions of North/South Civil Society Partnerships in the context of initiatives for aid reform by donors and governments. The following is a summary of the main points raised in this workshop:

1. Northern CSOs are **not only donors, but distinctive development actors**, in terms of their constituencies, mandates and relationships with CSOs in the South;
2. North/South CSO relationships **come from value-based citizens' organizations**, central to the promotion of human rights, gender equality and rights of excluded populations;
3. Northern and Southern CSOs working together **bring significant sources of sectoral and methodological capacities** and learning rooted in long term on-the-ground experience;
4. Northern CSOs **can engage and access a more diverse set of CSO relationships**, supporting a fabric of democratic practice and opportunity for citizens to participate in their own development;
5. as funding channels, Northern CSOs **offer donors funding options** to avoid large funding disbursements, often inappropriate for CSO strengthening, and for politically sensitive engagements;
6. strong North/South civil society relationships are the **basis for international CSO coalitions** to seek necessary change in the geo-political and global economic policies that constrain local development; and
7. strong North/South CSO relationships are **essential to sensitize citizens in the North** as global citizens and to sustain political support for independent aid agencies such as CIDA with strong poverty reduction mandates and budgets.



Photo: IRIN

Civil society organizations that work for development... and also for democracy

Notes on the political role of CSOs

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It is generally accepted that Civil Society Organizations (CSO) are a central actor in development. There is less consensus regarding their political role: that which they actually play and that which they should play in society. There are those that would prefer to see them silently dedicated to deliver social services, while others would like to see them dedicated to the work of political pressure

and leave social services to the State. The majority of the CSOs that currently exist are somewhere between these two extremes and part of a wide and diverse range of shades.

This paper aims to add arguments to this controversy with the understanding that all of the actions of CSOs should, in the end, be understood

as political tasks, to the extent that they work toward the common good or the construction of public goods, and as ways to widen and deepen democracy in our societies.

Which democracy?

It is important to make two clarifying points in the construction of a frame of reference for the arguments that follow. First, democracy is not a precise state to which societies can arrive, but rather a permanent process of construction involving continuous reform and gradual renovation of society (Bobbio, 2001). Seen in this way, the role of democrats is always alive and relevant. There will always be things to do to deepen democratization processes in our society. Therefore, this work is about treating the concept of democracy as an unreachable “ideal” – “unreachable but yet approachable. And precisely because it cannot be achieved in its entirety, but only in part (by moving closer), this is something that should be pursued integrally, insistently, and intransigently” (Flores, 1991: 88).

The second clarification is that our value framework is based on human rights as a historically and culturally conditioned construction in each society. From this perspective democratic regimes make sense and should be evaluated on their ability to guarantee civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for the largest number of people possible.

Of course, when we talk about currently existing democracies, and especially in Latin America, we are talking about weak, restricted, and truly stunted democracies.

Can CSOs move away from the democratic ideal and still be able to carry out their work? It seems that the answer is yes, if and when activities are limited to what they are, or organizations

are organized around simply providing goods or services to temporarily respond to a need, without considering the context that caused the problem or how to make the solution sustainable. Indeed, there are few CSOs that still work with this focus. For almost all, although they focus their work on specific needs, thinking about the sustainability of solutions is an ethical and technical imperative; and when this is the case, it is necessary to affect the context that caused the problems. Furthermore it is important to forge subjects who have the capacities necessary to take the resolution of their future problems into their own hands and are capable of claiming respect for their own rights. For CSOs as a whole, given what they are and what they do, their vocation to work for the deepening of democracy in their countries should be clear and explicit.¹

CSOs in democratization processes

From our point of view we can talk about four fields where the political role and actions of CSOs unfurl: 1) the political regime and democratic public institutions; 2) the eradication of problems of poverty and economic shortages and the defense and promotion of human rights; 3) the creation of subjects with personal and collective projects and societies that live in solidarity, and 4) the widening of a democratic culture.

1) Democratic public institutions

The first task for democratization processes is the construction and consolidation of democratic public institutions, especially those which guarantee the possibility for permanent reform and improvement. This is in the discussion of the formal aspects of democracy. This is achieved based on an effective functioning of powers and balance of powers in the system, the guarantee of civic freedoms and social and political actors who exercise these freedoms responsibly.

¹ One of the foremost inspired writers on the topic of human development, Amartya Sen, says: the importance of democracy resides in three virtues: 1) its intrinsic importance, 2) its instrumental contribution and 3) its constructive role in the creation of values and norms (2000: 197).

The truth is that democracy cannot be reduced to its formal aspects, but there is also a long path before arriving at the moment when these formal issues could be considered of lesser importance. When we talk about formal democracy we are not referring to something of little importance: “Formal democracy means equality of political rights” (Flores, 1991: 80). In fact, the evaluation of formal aspects of democracy is a characteristic of democracy’s personality. How can it not be considered important, from a democratic point of view, that in Latin American countries as a whole there are no longer military dictators as a result of a process where precisely many CSOs from the Southern Cone played a central role? And today, thanks to the existence of democratic formalities, although precarious and insufficient, for example, the CSOs that work to denounce and follow up human rights violations continue to do their work in Central America, Mexico or Colombia, despite harassment and persecution.

Surveillance and control of public power

Another characteristic in all democratic regimes is that public power should be controllable and controlled by independent centres of power, both within the state itself and by civil society through media and social organizations’ actions. Related to this point, Walzer speaks of “critical associationism” as one of the virtues that a democrat should cultivate: “...one of the first obligations of citizenship is participation in civil society” (cited in Kymlicka, 1997: 18). In this view, another way that CSOs insert themselves into democratization processes is promoting citizen participation in open spaces to assure, and especially watch over, public power transparency. They do so through citizen organizations that monitor public policies, evaluate the impact of governmental programs, track public management, and, in general, ensure citizen’s oversight and control of the State.

2) The eradication of poverty and promotion of human rights

It can be affirmed that all CSOs in developing countries work in the field of the eradication of some form of existing poverty in society; in other words, the reality of human rights for those with whom or for whom they work. As previously mentioned some organizations turn their attention to legal and institutional frameworks on the basis that the State is the institution responsible for their guarantee and safeguarding. Other CSOs move more in the area of offering services and providing resources so that large groups of people can overcome situations where their rights have not been respected.

Human rights constitute a values framework, but also to a certain extent the legal framework around which all democratic regimes should revolve. The relationship between CSOs and human rights is highly varied and widespread. There are those that focus their work on formal and legal defense of human rights where civil and political rights occupy a predominant place. And they are motivated, to a great extent, by the fact that the basic issues such as life, organization and free expression are still not guaranteed in many societies. But there is also a large group of CSOs that dedicate their energy to human development, the objective fulfillment of rights, with the promotion of employment, the attainment of dignified housing, and the enjoyment of the rights to education and healthcare. There tends to be a real abyss between these two understandings of CSOs roles.

This abyss should not be, given that democracy, human rights and human development share a common field of concerns and priorities. Human development and human rights are on closely related paths, as the UNDP highlights in their Human Development Report of 2000: “The promotion of human development and the fulfillment of human rights in many ways share a common motivation and reflect the fundamental commitment to promote freedom, wellbeing and dignity of individuals in all societies” (p. 19). Something similar happens between democracy and human development: “In order for policies and political institutions

to promote human development and to protect freedom and the dignity of all, we must spread and consolidate democracy” (PNUD, 2002: 1).

3) The construction of citizenship

Democracy requires democratic citizenship, or rather, men and women that embody democratic values. This has been, and will be, a privileged terrain for the work of CSOs, especially with their formative strategies and promotion of grassroots organizations. Social organizations themselves and their networks can be democracy-spreading instruments in society.

This task is difficult given that there is widespread skepticism within currently existent democracies. The social conditions for the vast majority of Latin Americans include exclusion from societal benefits, growing inequality, and high levels of insecurity. In sum, the democracies around the globe have issues of effectiveness in resolving these central challenges and this has ended up discrediting democratic regimes’ ability to improve citizenship. In fact, many people would prefer authoritarian regimes if they would be able to resolve the previously mentioned problems. Colombia is a country that lives its own drama in this field: tired of war and violence, it embraces the hope for security and is willing to sacrifice a great part of their rights at its altar.

4) Democratic environment

In the face of this panorama, a central task for CSOs is democratization, and we have much to do: “work for change in political culture” (Lechner, 1988: 40) or, as Santos proposed, the construction of a “new common sense” (1998: 340) that rescues the

emancipating promises of democracy yet to be completed. In order to deepen the precarious levels of democracy, citizens must increasingly embrace democratic ideals and work, both in their private and public lives. The path towards more just, more harmonious and more peaceful societies passes through democratization processes rather than cutting around them.

The construction of this environment consists of more and more people, groups and institutions living and identifying with democratic values each day.

“Bobbio speaks to four clear points: first, tolerance, perhaps the first thing we have forgotten in our culture where it is common to resolve the most insignificant



Photo: Allan Gichigi/IRIN

disagreements violently, and what is worse, with weapons; nonviolence that for our purposes should be assumed as a full out 'no' to weapons as instruments for political struggle; the gradual renovation of society that gives a permanent idea of movement, dialectically, and an understanding that steps forward are made with the existing grassroots, not through their destruction; and finally, a value that always humans all long for: fraternity..." (Fernández, 1990: 4).

Taking a new quality step!

An important group of CSOs has taken a step beyond considering their work as merely individual aid, and has begun thinking of themselves as human development promoters. In many sectors there is the need to understand that CSO work is not separate from political issues and, therefore, CSOs should be

interested in politics and public agendas. A recent study published by the *Asociación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Promoción*, (The Latinamerican Association of Promotion Organizations) (ALOP) (Buthet y otros, 2004) concludes that, for CSOs "there are efforts to recuperate the political sphere" and a "profound self-criticism". The latter raises awareness about limitations and, therefore, the need to "connect micro actions much more directly with both politics and economics, joining transforming currents for high impact." These two steps (from merely individual aid to human development and from ostracism to politics) are of great importance. Nevertheless a definitive step is missing: assuming and making explicit the interest of the deepening of democracy as part of what these institutions work on in civil society. We are, and we should be, social development actors, but also, political actors in the democratization of our societies.

Translated from spanish into english by Suzanna Colled

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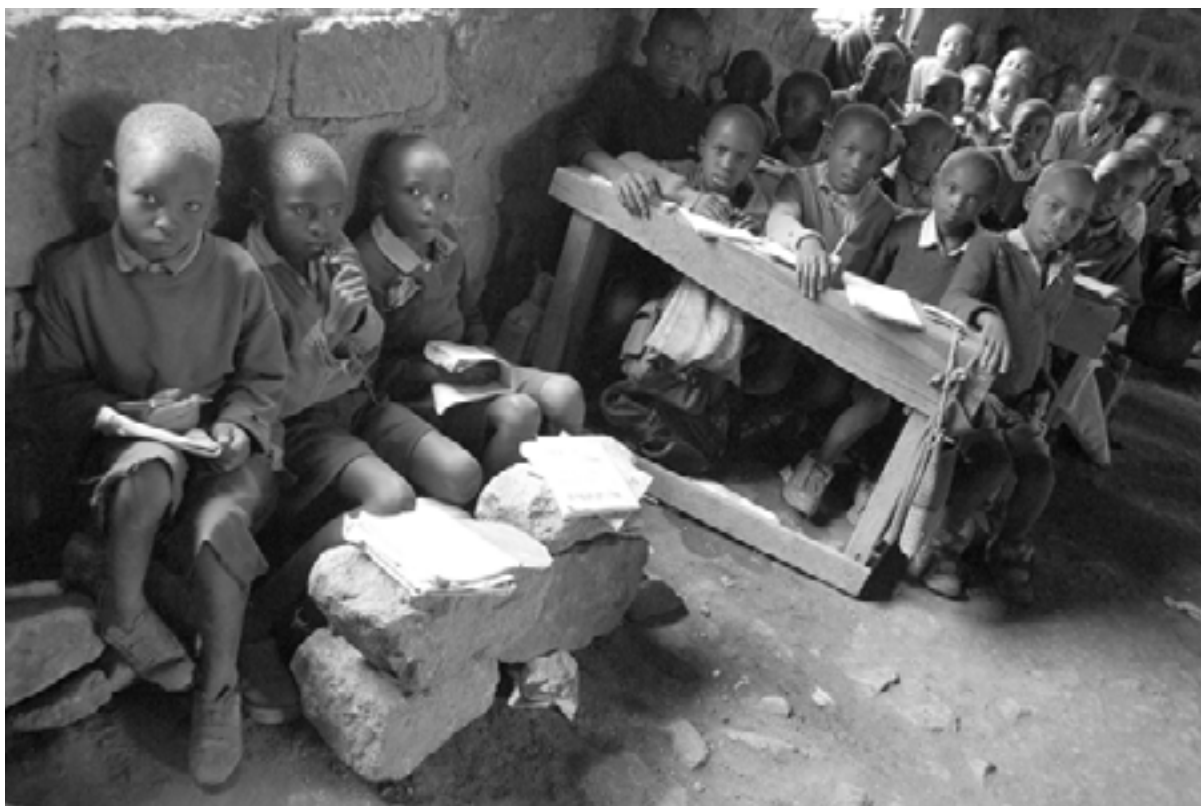


Photo: Allan Gichigi /IRIN

Reviewing Paris: Draft notes on CSOs and aid effectiveness¹

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1) The interest in aid effectiveness is timely and important — we know from our own personal experiences, from the fact that despite 45 years of high aid to countries like Tanzania students still cannot read and women die from childbirth, and from reading Bill Easterly and others. The reality that we should all face is that the aid business has not done as well, there is a lot of wastage, that impact is not as it should

be, and that too many people — especially those who are historically excluded such as women, young people, and people with disabilities — are left out. Responsibility for the situation applies equally to all of us — governments, donors and civil society alike — and at times I feel that we NGOs are the least effective of them all. So as a start I celebrate that there is attention to this question of aid effectiveness, because implicit

¹ These remarks were presented virtually at a CSO consultation in the Netherlands organized by Hivos on 5 June 2008

in it is recognition that things are not well, and that we must get things seriously right.

- 2) But with all the attention the Paris Declaration has received, and now Accra, and in between stuff around GBS and harmonization and so on, it is easy to lose sight of a simple point – that *the purpose of aid effectiveness is not aid effectiveness*, but impact on the ground, changes in the lives of people. In that sense Paris is only the *plumbing*; the purpose is water and to have *thirsts quenched*. The problem with donors and governments in places like Tanzania is that they seem to have lost sight of the purpose of aid – so that countless hours and days and months are spent drawing up assistance strategies and performance matrices which measure the extent to which aid is harmonized or percentage of which is provided in budget support, *as if these in themselves were the goals of development* – instead of keeping one's eyes on the prize – real change in the lives and institutions of people. The true measure of aid effectiveness mechanisms should be: is it helping make a difference in people's lives?
- 3) A useful way to approach the whole Paris Declaration plumbing may be to put it aside for a moment, start with the core purpose of development, and then work backwards to what kind of plumbing we need. I think for many of us this would be linked to that elegant Hivos slogan – 'people unlimited'. That ordinary people have the ways and means, the options, to live a good life, to get the basic services they need, to secure livelihoods, to have voice and to have their rights respected. To make things happen, rather than just have things happen to them. In short, we can call this 'citizen agency'.
- 4) Citizen agency is not only the purpose – or the *ends* – of development and democracy, it is also its most effective *means*. People who are in good health and well educated, confident and secure and rights-respecting, able to access opportunities within a level playing field, able to access information and express themselves – these are the people who can make things happen, fight against injustice and unfairness, help create a better world. And historically we find that all the big important changes – women's equality, racial equality, ending apartheid, respect for gays and lesbians, concern for the environment – all of these were driven not by declarations in Paris or New York or The Hague or Dar es Salaam, or government schemes or NGO projects – but by socio-political movements of capable, committed and courageous people. The focus of our efforts, and for the Paris review for that matter, should be: how do we enable capable, committed and courageous people to do their thing, to unleash their potential?
- 5) When I think in these terms an immediate observation is how the business of development is so removed, so out-of-touch from the reality of people's lives – it is as if there are two separate worlds – lived reality on this side, and the aid industry on that side. The connection between the two is too often not organic, when citizens take part in development my experience is that they don't really believe in the enterprise (regardless of whether it is about education or HIV/AIDS or human rights or agriculture) one goes through the motions of what one needs to do to get their piece of the cake, which if you are lucky is a share of the budget but more often than not it's the 'allowance'. In Tanzania, when I have asked ordinary people to define development, many times I have been told that 'it is to be sensitized and get an allowance'. I cannot imagine a more effective way to erase citizen agency. Demands for an allowance makes sense if we accept that people see no intrinsic value in development – *you see it is a game that brings money, and you see that people running the game are making money from it, so you try to get your piece of it too*. On our (CSO) side we have to offer sitting allowances as a bribe for people to show-up to our events, because otherwise they wouldn't

(since they don't find what we are really doing to be worthwhile), and we wouldn't be able to fill our boxes to show success. In this sense I am increasingly convinced that development – whether done by governments, donors or NGOs – however well-meaning – is in practice too often all too corrupting.

- 6) My pessimism about the aid industry is surpassed by my enthusiasm for what happens on the 'lived realities' side of the column. When people are not 'doing development' sitting in workshops being sensitized and drawing up recommendations that go nowhere, there is a lot of suffering but there is also a lot of wonderful stuff happening. Recently in Uganda I learned of powerful debates on FM radio stations – where through *Ekimeza* programs people discuss what matters to them, and rally against the corrupt politicians, even condemn President Museveni despite the power at his disposal, where ordinary people use meager resources to send in an SMS so that they can be heard. This has enabled people's voice to be heard and fostered public debate in a manner that is historically unprecedented. Or in Tanzania we see in the last year an equally unprecedented stirring up among people about the use of natural resources, that is both driven by and that drives the media and Parliament to uncover more and more of the truth. All this is a long story – its highlights are that they have led to the Governor of Central Bank being fired, the Prime Minister resigning, the cabinet dissolved and in the reshuffle more than seven powerful ministers losing their posts. Mining contracts with most powerful companies are being reviewed. Stolen billions from the bank are being returned. A powerful minister is under investigation for corruption. Donors have been forced to change how they play the game. And perhaps most importantly, among the people, there is a clamoring for transparency and accountability, and an understanding that government must work for them rather than the other way around, that can no longer be
- 7) So what does all this mean for the Paris Declaration? First, we need to recognize the high level of our irrelevance, of development as we know it and do it. Second, we need to understand that the aid architecture and our work will become relevant to the extent to which it can enable citizens to connect with the public domain, to find ways to make government and public space their own, and to aspire and pursue their dreams, practically.
- 8) I don't have a comprehensive architecture to offer, and this would not be the place for it. But a few rules of thumb may help. Here are three interconnected suggestions:
 - *Practical information for everyone:* Information is indeed power – not abstract supply driven information, but information that is concrete, practical, user-friendly – that makes sense to ordinary people. By definition this has to be demand-driven and responsive. For example: this is not national enrolment rates, but rather information about who in my school is going to school and who isn't, and how that compares with the neighboring schools and the schools in the capital city. It is not pre-packaged notes on local government policy, but practical stuff on how local government can be a vehicle to improve your community and how you can get rid of a local leader who is corrupt. More importantly, it is ordinary people having the ability to search whatever they happen to be interested in that moment and getting the information in a quick, reliable and affordable manner. Imagine,

RealityCheck

AUGUST 2008



Photo: Neil Thomas/IRIN

for instance, being able to do a mini-Google search by sending an SMS from your cell phone or walk up to an updated mobile kiosk:

- *Quality and independent media:* Mass media – newspapers, TV and in particular radio – are essential to get information to people, to create space for citizen views to be heard and debated, and through them to hold governments publicly to account. Already, despite all sorts of constraints, these are doing an amazing job in many countries. Amartya Sen has famously declared that

no country with a free press has had a famine, or other similar avertable calamity. So what's really important is to keep media free and independent (free from undue state or commercial interests), and to help it have real quality and reach, and to have it represent a diversity of views and voices. Investing in a pluriform and free media is perhaps the single most important thing one can do to enhance democratic space in our countries.

Citizens monitoring government: Governments and other public institutions are meant to do things for and on behalf of the people, but most people often have little means to know or track what the government is actually doing. Access to information and independent media will help; but in addition we need to develop a fabric and tools for citizen monitoring of public bodies and public resources. In recent years there has been some really important work on analyzing budgets and tracking revenues and expenditures – so that people know how public monies are allocated, distributed in practice, and used. This work needs to expand, as well as work in seeing whether people get services, who benefits and who is excluded, whether one achieves impact. This is not a technocratic exercise, but one where people really can know what they are interested in, share it and discuss among themselves, and find practical recourse to addressing their concerns. A telling indicator of democratic culture has to be the extent to which people can monitor what their governments are doing, follow-up and experience the power to do something about it.

9. Put differently, this conception defines development in the interaction – the contestation and cooperation – between citizens and public institutions. Information is the lubricant that

helps fuel and massage the exercise of power in this political dynamic, and one that, because it puts matters in the public domain, exposes matters and allows citizens to exercise influence over the state. When private – individuals are only as powerful as their wealth or personal connection, but when public the equation can dramatically change, as we have seen in so many countries. *The true work of civil society is not technical or capacity building (that awful phrase) or handouts or lobbying or advocacy, but to lubricate the ways and means in which citizens can exercise power.*

10. The core problem with the Paris Declaration is that, after correctly identifying the problem, it offers a managerial set of technocratic solutions. The core reason development isn't effective is not because of poor management or lack of harmonization or high transaction costs or low 'ownership', but because of the political dynamic between states and the citizenry is warped, and public institutions are either captured or dysfunctional or too weak to be a corrective. As a set of management tools, I have little problem with Paris. *But what it seeks to take on and solve has its roots in something far more fundamental and ambitious.*
11. For Hivos partners and civil society, it would be a mistake, in my view, to just complain about the Paris Declaration as ignoring civil society or taking away money from it or giving too much or too little control to donors (both can be argued), or worse of all that we were not involved in the process. These constraints aside, there are many aspects of Paris that make a lot of sense to me in the plumbing of supporting governments. Moreover, it has been argued (and the donors in Tanzania have agreed) to apply the Paris principles for support to CSOs – it certainly makes the job of an NGO head easier to have only one proposal, one budget, one set of reports and one set of processes, all designed by itself, to use with its donors. Ask Betty Missokia from HakiElimu and she will tell you of its advantages. But the core point is that all this getting the plumbing right does not solve the challenge of whether Tanzania or HakiElimu or Hivos or any of us are doing the right thing – in terms of creating that space for ordinary citizens, at scale, to exercise agency and hold governments to account.
12. The Paris review offers us at least two opportunities: One of them is to situate the Paris plumbing in terms of its larger context of accountability to citizens, and to challenge governments and donors to review Paris in that light. The other is to take a hard look in the mirror. Many of us would be far more relevant and effective if we got our houses in order in terms of enabling that citizen space – with a renewed level of energy and imagination – than rallying against the powers that be that can brush us aside anyway. If we truly had the ability to inform and be informed by citizens, at scale, and transform ourselves into true resources for individual and collective citizen action, those capable, committed and courageous people – the organic true stuff, not more workshops and allowances – then the powers that be would have to pay attention to citizens. This is the stuff of enabling citizens to claim and reclaim their democratic mandate and *constitute the powers that be in themselves*. In the elegant slogan of the Kenyan-American US Democratic Party presidential candidate, we will know we have arrived when the citizens of our countries know and feel that “we are the ones we have been waiting for”. People, unlimited, indeed.

How should we mobilize new resources for building stronger feminist movements and advancing women's rights worldwide?

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Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)¹

The second FundHer Report from AWID probes into fundamental questions related to resource mobilization and movement-building. How are women's organizations and movements growing worldwide? Where is the money for women's rights? How should we mobilize new resources to build stronger effective feminist movements in order to advance effective women's rights worldwide? This extract from the Second Report makes a strong argument for shifting funding and financial strategies of women's rights CSOs towards a politics that enhances movement building and transformative leadership.

Mobilizing resources for stronger women's rights movements and organizations implies a significant shift from traditional approaches. Financial sustainability requires us to mobilize more resources for the long-term agenda of promoting, protecting and guaranteeing women's rights, for our own work and the movement. To do so effectively and astutely, we need to both better understand the nature of resource flows as well as find creative ways to influence budgets and to where the money is being channeled. By doing so, we build our



Photo: Manoocher Deghati/IRIN

¹ This chapter is extracted with permission from Joanna Kerr, *The SecondFundher Report: Financial Sustainability for Women's Movements Worldwide*, Association for Women's Rights in Development, 2007, Chapter Four, accessible at <http://www.awid.org/eng/Issues-and-Analysis/Library/Financial-Sustainability-for-Women-s-Movement-s-Worldwide-Second-FundHer-Report>.

political agency, we expand resources for women's rights agendas, and we shift de facto public policy by increasing the visibility and legitimacy of both women's rights issues and the role of women's movements as important agents of change.

This conceptual shift from fundraising to agenda setting and movement building suggests that by moving away from one organization dealing with one funder at a time to movements of groups and organizations working with and influencing funding sectors, funding policies, or funding mechanisms we are more likely to shift more resources into women's rights work and influence agendas by demonstrating women's agency and collective power.

This new paradigm also implies more specific strategies on how to shift women's rights organizing for financial sustainability. In this chapter therefore we call for new approaches that challenge the disconnects that funders and NGOs have reinforced, that build collective power and recuperate politics into our organizing, that enable greater autonomy for the movement and enhance feminist transformative leadership.

1. Prioritizing the building of collective power

In recent years, the power of neoliberalism and fundamentalisms, coupled with the depoliticization of advocacy by some powerful NGOs eager for quick technical answers and concerned with branding, has led us back to the questions of organization, consciousness, and the issue of movement-building.²
Just Associates, 2006

First and foremost women's rights movements need to be strengthened in order to effectively take on patriarchy in all its forms as it relates to poverty, HIV and AIDS, religious and conservative political agendas, and increasing conflict and environmental degradation. A group of NGOs does not a

movement make – and when NGOs are competing for financial resources our foundations for collective action further crumble. In South East Asia, for example, some see that women's movements have been largely professionalized and are often perceived as exclusive. This especially plays out in relation to the gap between grassroots activists and others in the movement (e.g. those on the ground versus those in the “limelight”, or those who speak English). In Africa, as in most places, activists note how differences in language, culture, religion, politics, and economics impact on our abilities to organize, strategize, and implement our agendas.

Thus, a revitalized ethos of solidarity is urgent; one that bridges divisions of class, as well as other differences such as: rural and urban, educated and grassroots activism, English-speaking and other language speakers, and young activist and those from other generations. It must also be inclusive of indigenous women, women with disabilities, sex workers and members of other groups whose voices should be amplified. As such, women's rights activists are demanding the creation of more platforms for coalition-building:

- opportunities for women to come together need to be created, organized and funded, with processes designed explicitly to overcome divisions and build bridges between feminist movements in the region and with other social actors and movements;
- women's movements in each region need the opportunity to do collective reflection and analysis of their changing contexts, building a shared vision to be achieved as feminists and women's rights activists;
- these spaces for planning and reflection should be used to clarify ideology and values (to include “non-negotiables” for example, of women's bodily integrity, indivisibility of rights, diversity as strength, women's agency, etc.) as well as

2 Just Associates, 2006. *Making Change Happen: Power, Concepts for Revising Power for Justice, Equality and Peace*, Series #3. This document is recommended reading for any activist or researcher concerned about transforming power.

for coordinating activities, networking and developing mechanisms for widening the base of the movement and the field of work related to women's rights; and

- planning and strategizing should also focus on resources – how to tap them and how to invest them – underlining that any identification of priorities for funding to strengthen women's movements would have to be generated through a genuinely democratic process in the region, especially since some groups and issues have dominated access to resources in the past.³

Collective organizing and planning needs to also incorporate greater sharing of resources; rising above competition. United we stand, divided we fall, and therefore creative approaches need to be applied to how groups share assets, especially to support the functioning of smaller community organizations, such as legal and financial specialists, fundraisers, office space, funding for meetings, information on donors, communication technologies and more.

2. Engagement with donor allies

Donors not only need to be influenced in order to increase their spending on women's rights organizations and movement building, but the internal champions within donor agencies need to be supported. Donors and women's organizations alike need to challenge the disconnects that both sides have reinforced in order to better understand each other's theories of change, approaches to women's rights and gender equality, political ideologies and most effective ways of collaborating. Specifically:

- Women's rights organizations should come together to explicitly look at the issue of resources for the movement in their sub-region, especially the least resourced groups, as well as their issue area. They should map who

is doing what, who are the funders, and who are the potential funders. Meetings with and for donor allies should happen regularly, with proactive strategic agendas on the table, instead of allowing the donors to define the agenda on behalf of the movements. Women's rights advocates should also seek ways to support internal champions so that they can better influence their funding institution. And

- Women's groups should come together to develop, apply and learn from alternative evaluation systems with indicators designed by and for women's movements, according to our realities and strategic needs and that measure change in more realistic terms. Funders and women's rights advocates are equally keen to know how to measure impact and learn what works; the key is for women's movements themselves to be driving evaluation processes and not having them imposed.

Women's rights activists should seek new terms of engagement with donors. Beyond pushing them to rethink their approach and prioritization of women's rights, women's groups should work collectively (giving themselves more clout) to discourage funders from imposing agendas, aggressively pursuing and headhunting women NGO leaders with often negative effects on the organizations they leave behind, stealing or taking credit for ideas coming from the movement, or representing women as victims or passive recipients of aid. Women's groups should provide recommendations to donors on how to make their funding more democratic and, accessible to small and community-based organizations and strategic. With renewed commitments to strengthening movements, donors can invest more in alliance building, networking, linking and learning as well as supporting endowments for national women's organizations to build a strong institutional base for the movement.

3 Many of these recommendations emerged from the Money and Movements meeting in Querétaro, November 2006. More details on the regional-specific proposals can be found on the AWID website at http://www.awid.org/go.php?pg=mm_resources



Photo: APRN

The political context for a CSO-led process on CSO effectiveness

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The importance of a CSO-led process on CSO effectiveness can be understood in relation to several frameworks of approach to development and aid effectiveness. The first is a narrow framework arising from the Paris Declaration and the Accra process. In recent months, CSOs have become very effective in presenting its critiques of the Paris Declaration and advocating proposals to move the

aid effectiveness agenda forward – both to deepen and enrich it.

The Working Party on Aid Effectiveness, made up of donors and developing country governments at the OECD, have decided to bring CSOs “into the tent” of the Accra High Level Forum. Bringing CSOs into the tent is based on the long overdue recognition

of CSO roles as development actors: their voices are legitimate in advocating effective aid and criticizing the Paris Declaration just as they seek to make aid effective through rights based approaches.

Bringing CSOs “into the tent” also brings with it the challenge regarding CSOs’ effectiveness as development actors: the challenge coming from donors and governments regarding the applicability of the Paris Declaration principles to CSOs is a legitimate question of CSO effectiveness that must be addressed by CSOs.

However, the Accra process is a narrow framework for addressing CSO effectiveness: it only looks at CSOs from the perspective of the politics of the Paris Declaration, the politics of the donors, and the applicability of the Paris Declaration. CSOs have answered clearly that the Paris Declaration is not directly applicable because in this narrow context, CSOs are considered either simply donors or recipients of aid or aid policy advocates. This approach of aid effectiveness for CSOs is much too narrow because it ignores an understanding of CSO roles in a broader context of development, and of social roles of CSOs in democratic development and simply in an aid regime.

But what are CSOs in this broader context of development? Why do CSOs work in development? What is it that CSOs do and what should they be doing?

This notion of CSO roles in development is complex – CSOs do not simply act as donors; CSOs are not simply conduits of donor money; CSOs are not simply there to provide services for the marginalized. CSOs have a distinct added-value in development which comes from their very definition of being a CSO.

CSOs as development actors cannot be separated from the question of citizenship and peoples’ participation in their own development, and from the related question of social solidarity. This is why

CSOs are especially concerned about human rights, gender equality and sustainable development.

These issues of effectiveness are not new for CSOs. There have been many CSO initiatives in the past looking into the various aspects of their effectiveness. The most common concern has been the question of accountability. How do we frame accountability – is it accountability to the poor to whom CSOs are meant to serve, or is it accountability to donors and funders or other development partners? Accountability is a broad and complex issue, which a global CSO-led process on effectiveness must address.

There is a third and longer-term framework in which this initiative is taking place – this is the question of an evolving aid architecture. In developing a multilateral aid architecture, CSOs do not just have an added value as development actors, subsidiary to donors and government. If CSO voices are legitimate in representing peoples concerns for development, then should not CSOs be reserved a special role in the aid partnership? Should development partnership not be considered as a trilateral partnership? Similar to the ILO tripartite structure involving government, business and labor, should not development partnerships be a dialogue of developing country governments, donors and development CSOs, the latter having an equal place at the table? If this were to be so, then there is an even greater responsibility for CSOs to define and live up to their social role, while acknowledging both the diversity and issues concerning effectiveness in relation to their actions.

As CSOs go to the High Level Forum in Accra they will be addressing three agendas in aid effectiveness – one of course is the Paris Declaration, to engage with donors and governments to assure a proper implementation of the principles of that Declaration. The second is the CSO agenda to deepen the commitments to ending poverty, inequality and injustice, moving the discourse of aid effectiveness towards an agenda for

development effectiveness. In these two areas, the CSOs International Steering Group has been quite successful in engaging with donors, governments and other CSOs, in framing the issues around the principle of “democratic ownership” and the crucial issue of conditionality.

A third agenda that has come forward is that of CSO effectiveness. CSO effectiveness is a concern shared by everyone, and have been raised by donors and governments as an issue that CSOs must address. CSOs are themselves concerned of CSO effectiveness in the totality of their roles in development and their effectiveness in this regard. And because CSOs wish to be engaged in shaping the future of aid architecture.

What is the 2011 High Level Forum going to be like, following the expiration of the Paris Declaration in 2010? What will be its content and how will it relate to processes that are now underway in the United Nations? How will it relate to CSOs? The issue of CSO effectiveness therefore becomes a very important agenda and issue when framed in the context of the overall effort toward development effectiveness reform and reshaping the global aid architecture.

I think there are three areas of concern to be addressed in CSO effectiveness:

1. CSO effectiveness must start from clear understanding of the roles of CSOs as enablers for the poor and the marginalized, for people to claim their rights. If that is the core role of CSOs, then how effective are CSOs at enabling people to claim their rights?
2. How is an enabling environment developed for the CSOs to do their work? An enabling

environment is an important aspect of CSO effectiveness and is as important to CSO effectiveness as CSOs being effective in their work in enabling the poor. The role of donors, international organizations and institutions, of governments, are crucial in this regard.

3. What is the role of international and national CSO networking and partnership in providing this enabling environment, in enabling CSOs who are working on the ground? In CSO development partnership, the focus must be on the South. The focal actor is therefore the Southern CSO. A key question is how effective are these Southern CSOs and in the context of partnerships, how effective are external actors in enabling this effectiveness.

The CSO Effectiveness process must be a politically unassailable CSO-led process, this is the final challenge. The point of this process for CSOs is not to shape an artificially harmonized Global Code of Conduct. We all know and proclaim that CSO diversity is essential for CSO development effectiveness. As diverse, democratic, development actors in their own right, an important challenge for CSOs in the post-Accra period will be how to conceive institutional mechanisms for CSOs to take their “seat at the table”.

This presents a potential tension for CSOs – a tension between efficient presence and respect for diversity. One solution is to have a CSO-led process focusing on their development effectiveness that is unassailable – unassailable by the presence of important CSOs and networks around the world, by its openness in bringing people into the process, and by its capacity to respond to critical post-Accra development effectiveness issues.



Update on development effectiveness

Photo: Manoocher Deghati IRIN

Issues and principles for the exploratory meeting on the effectiveness of civil society organisations

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World Vision Australia

This paper was one of five initial presentations to the meeting intended to collectively provide an overview of the context within which the proposed global CSO process is situated.¹

The meeting represents a very exciting convergence of factors which highlight the need for an international consensus of Civil Society

Organisations on what defines our development effectiveness. Many factors have led us to this point – including increasing public awareness of poverty issues together with increased expectations by donors and the public of development CSOs' professionalism, accountability for outcomes and evidence of demonstrable impact. However, the most immediate factors that have led to this meeting

¹ Exploratory Meeting on the Effectiveness of Civil Society Organisations, Paris, 29 – 30 June, 2008.

were the regional and global consultations around CSOs, the Paris Declaration and Aid Effectiveness. From a critique about the limitations of the Paris Declaration, and increasing pressure on CSOs to adhere to the five Paris Declaration principles, the conversations have appropriately expanded to include consideration of aid and development effectiveness from the CSO perspective. These conversations obviously build on the work that various CSO platforms, global initiatives like the Accountability Charter, and individual agencies have engaged in over recent years and which were mapped by Anne Buchanan, from CCIC for the meeting.

The overarching objective of the meeting is to initiate a process whereby CSOs globally:

- identify the principles underpinning CSO development effectiveness;
- develop tools to support their implementation; and
- promote these principles both within the CSO sector as well as with donors, governments and the public to build their appreciation of the role of CSOs as development actors.

To establish part of the context for this discussion, I was asked to provide a brief overview of the principles and issues of CSO effectiveness. In doing this I drew on both the issues identified in the consultations and the Australian CSO work on effectiveness.

Defining CSO effectiveness

The first issue to be addressed is definitional. Our working definition is that:

“Development effectiveness is about the impact of aid on the poor and marginalised communities, while aid effectiveness is about technical issues in aid management and delivery”.

As Australian development CSOs we defined effectiveness more specifically as:

“Promoting sustainable change that addresses the causes as well as the symptoms of poverty and marginalisation – i.e. reduces poverty and build capacity within communities, civil society and government to address their own development priorities.”²

Guiding principles of CSO effectiveness

Consultations under the auspices of the Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness came up with a first set of principles guiding CSO effectiveness as development actors. These consultations were extensive, initially with regional consultations in Africa, Asia and Latin America as well as one consultation specifically with women’s human rights organisations, and then a global consultation in Ottawa in February 2008.

The conclusion of these consultations determined that CSO actions:

1. should be focused on poverty eradication and the promotion of human rights, expressing social solidarity with people claiming their rights;
2. are people centred, striving to empower individuals and communities, as well as to strengthen democratic ownership and participation;
3. are based on approaches rooted in the practice of international Human Rights (rights-based approach) and the promotion of social justice;
4. are based on genuine and long term partnerships, respect and dialogue, acknowledging at the same time the importance of CSO diversity in democratic practice.
5. strive to have sustainable impact and results, based on social processes of empowerment and mutual learning; and, finally, must

2 ACFID, “NGO Effectiveness Framework”, June 2004, accessible at <http://www.acfid.asn.au/what-we/do/ngo-effectiveness>

6. ensure their own effectiveness through continuous enhancement of their:
 - transparency;
 - accountability to all levels (communities, donors, peers, the public);
 - autonomy from states; and
 - coordination with others

Opportunities and Challenges arising from these principles of CSO effectiveness

It sounds as though it should be quite straightforward to agree on these principles and a process to confirm and give depth to their adoption. However, it is important to identify the opportunities and challenges this presents. We know that CSO strengths lie in our commitment and passion. The flip side of this is that we can be very precious about the nuances in our own views of what constitutes good development practice; that we can jealously guard our independence and can ignore, rather than acknowledge, how the competitive element in our relationships can undermine our capacity for collaboration and genuine partnership. The principles and tools we establish for CSO effectiveness need to be grounded in a realistic appreciation of the opportunities and challenges if they are to genuinely guide our ways of working and contribute to continual improvements in our development practice.

In the following discussion I am not including a separate point on accountability as this is already a hot topic within the forum and my view is the CSO effectiveness principles as a whole are essentially about our accountability to the communities with whom we work – they outline our ways of working, our commitments regarding participation, transparency, and being accountable.

Some of specific key issues, both opportunities and challenges, to be considered as we define the CSO effectiveness agenda:

1. Demonstrating our effectiveness is critical. The support we receive is increasingly dependent on

being able to demonstrate the impact we have in reducing poverty and marginalisation and increasing the realisation of human rights. This must be evidence-based and not simply anecdotal, requiring a stronger and more consistent focus on quality program evaluations.

2. Effective development requires effective partnerships. The challenge in establishing these partnerships is the reality of competition between CSOs for scarce resources and the differences between them in philosophy and approach. The need to demonstrate individual agency effectiveness can also run counter to shared effectiveness which is required by partnerships focused on more than individual program level changes. Recognition of the balance that has to be achieved between these drivers is critical to successfully negotiating these challenges so that effective partnerships can be established.
3. Emphasis of development effectiveness on governance, increasing participation and democratic reform. The emerging global consensus that these elements are critical to sustainable development provides potentially unique opportunities for CSOs. It will be important to demonstrate the strengths of CSO approaches to promote the value of increased CSO engagement in development cooperation at all levels.
4. Maintaining genuine partnerships built on social solidarity. With much of the focus on accountability around program management and donor risk mitigation, there are strong risks that the North/South CSO relationships could increasingly be defined by a purchaser/provider rather than partnership models. It is critical that this is recognised and strategies identified for ensuring that social solidarity remains the key features of North/ South CSO partnerships.

5. Investing in SCSO organisational development. Core funding for SCSO organisational



Photo: Manoocher Deghati/IRIN

development, rather than focusing only on programmatic capacity building and funding, is required to enhance the consistent development effectiveness of their programs.

6. Alignment and harmonisation. While alignment and harmonisation with the official government development agenda is antithetical to the contributions that CSO can and should make to democratic expression, it is required as an element of organisational effectiveness within the larger INGO alliances/families. For example, with the WV Partnership, with 93 distinct entities, we are reforming the way we work in order to reduce transaction costs and leverage resources for greater impact.
7. Collaboration can provide the basis for even greater partnership. The global process for defining and leveraging CSO development effectiveness can of itself provide the enabling context for greater commitment within the
8. Diversity is both a strength and potential risk for CSOs. As a highly politicised sector, its strength is the passion and commitment that members bring but that can become highly divisive where differences of approach and interpretation give rise to heated debates and fierce competition between CSOs. The responsive, pluralist, agile, innovative strength of CSOs can become a weakness when it becomes simply divisive, fragmenting our voice and influence in large policy debates. Diversity can lead to irrelevance if all perspectives are represented within that diversity in key debates. It can also easily lead to the marginalisation of critical southern voices. Mechanisms for building agreement on key issues, like this one for building a consensus on what defines our development effectiveness, and how we collaborate to continually improve that are vital.
9. The program and policy agenda focused on the South. Turning around the program and policy setting agenda to be genuinely driven by southern priorities rather than northern funding opportunities and constituency priorities/interests is key for enhancing development effectiveness but enormously challenging. Action Aid's experience of implementing their innovative program accountability system highlights this difficulty in living out a commitment to greater accountability and responsiveness to the poor in terms of how they work and bearing the consequences of that in terms of donor expectations and head office organisational demands³.

3 Rosalind David and Antonella Mancini, "Going Against the Flow: The struggle to make organisational systems part of the solution rather than part of the problem". *Lessons for Change in Policy & Organisations*, No. 8, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2004

10. Integration with Existing Accountability Mechanisms. A key question for this process is how this new CSO development effectiveness work will integrate with existing national, regional and international accountability protocols like National Codes of Conduct, Sphere, HAP, the Accountability Charter. The challenge will be to align with these while maintaining simplicity and accessibility rather than increasing the range of accountability mechanisms to which agencies must demonstrate their compliance.
11. Holding ourselves and each other accountable. The value of the outcome is dependent too on resolving the issue of how we hold ourselves and each other accountable for adhering to these principles and embedding them in our organisational business processes – particularly transparency and accountable mechanisms to the poor and marginalised. This is not about creating another formal global accountability and compliance mechanism but some way to make this more than a set of aspirational statements which do not influence the way we work and relate.

I want to end with a couple of reflections from the Australian NGO experience in developing the ACFID NGO Effectiveness Framework. A strength was the “bottom up” approach of not getting hung up on definitional issues but rather through a process of appreciative enquiry and case study workshops, identifying the key elements of CSO effectiveness. An immediate challenge that emerged through the process was whether we were establishing aspirational standards or ones to which we would hold ourselves accountable. This question

can be quite daunting as we are all acutely aware of the gap that at times exists between our aspirations and actual capacities and performance.

The other key issue that we are currently grappling with is that our framework was based largely on professional experience and judgement. This needs to be tested to validate these judgements against the experience of communities, partners and other stakeholders. Our current research agenda asks whether our effectiveness framework reflects the partner and community experience of effective programming – which brings me back to the issue of the critical need for evidence-based effectiveness principles.

Conclusion

This global process is exciting in that it provides the basis for bringing together our experience as CSOs for a more holistic understanding of development effectiveness. This is critical both for our own work and to influence the broader aid and development effectiveness debates. A linked exciting development is the work currently being done on identifying the particular dimensions of Civic-Driven Change – i.e. identifying more clearly the roles that civil society broadly plays in driving social change processes⁴. Together we need to deepen our understanding of the change roles of civil society and address, with eyes wide open and a spirit of collaboration both the great opportunities and significant challenges in forging a new global consensus on development effectiveness. This meeting represents a critical first step in bringing together representatives from CSO national and regional platforms from around the world to define and commit to the process.

⁴ There is an upcoming conference in the Netherlands in mid October, which Alan Fowler is actively engaged in, to explore this further and this will provide important insights into our agenda here. Civic-Driven Change Conference, October 15, Netherlands.

Some learning experiences from NGOs' social accountability processes in Colombia

Rubén Fernández
Corporación Región



Photo: Julio Pantoja/World Bank

There has been an ongoing effort by various NGOs, trade associations and sector networks in Colombia to improve the transparency levels of their organizations and to make concrete, consolidate and expand their social accountability practices over the last several years. These efforts have been pioneered by the Antioquia Federation and by the National NGO Network for Transparency (NGOxT).¹

The effort has been conceived as a process. The first stage has been to consolidate and popularize a culture of transparency, concretely in management style and institutional communication, among the largest possible number of social organizations, led by their trade associations and networks. In the second stage, simultaneous and closely related to the preceding stage, the same social organizations are envisioned to habitually undertake periodic public accountability exercises, regionally as well as nationally, as a way of communicating with other sectors of society and with the state. Another stage requires the commitment of civil society organizations or NGOs at country level at

¹ This article is based on a significant portion of the joint work undertaken in different spaces, in particular the work of the coordination team of the NGOxT Network and from the academic team for social accountability of the Antioquia NGO Federation. Nevertheless, the ideas herein expressed are the sole responsibility of the author and are not intended to represent the opinions of these collective spaces. As this is a process still in progress, the provisional nature of these conclusions remains high and are intended to encourage action learning. English translation has been undertaken by the author with support of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation.

several other countries in the effort of building a critical mass of experiences that could interchange parameters and learnings in the international level.

Further reasons for being transparent

When reference is made to the concept of “Non-Governmental Organizations” or “NGOs” it is only intended to refer to one of the many ways that civil society currently has available to organize itself. However, what is essential for this process is the recognition that these types of not-for-profit organizations develop by building or managing “non-state public goods” or through the delegated management of state goods. They work with a set of knowledge, goods or services that are of a social, cultural, economic or political nature, performing a function of common benefit. This nature explains the state’s encouragement of these activities through the provision of tax exempt status, in contrast to private business.

This notion of organization is central, given that on one hand it separates the sector (albeit ruled by public regulations) from that of state action, but also from that of strictly private action. NGOs have responsibilities to various interest groups and society as a whole, and have the right and the duty

of protecting public goods in general. In order for NGOs to properly fulfill this role, they require fiscal and regulatory facilities from the state as well as autonomy from the exercise of public power over them. At the same time, they should not be exonerated of their moral obligation for their own accountability regarding work performance and the handling of goods and resources entrusted to them by society.

The NGOxT Network has put forward a series of principles in support of social accountability practice. These touch on issues such as the ethical requirement to “put your own house in order” before demanding something similar of others, the advantages that public scrutiny for quality assurance brings, and the rights of donors and beneficiaries to be aware of what and how their resources are used, among others.²

Furthermore, there are practical reasons for undertaking social accountability processes. Once the accountability process is carried out, NGOs have improved their internal information systems or have identified their shortcomings. In some cases they have answered key and basic questions that were not explicit (such as gender discrimination of beneficiaries). In other cases, they have acquired the means to organize the presentation of their results; they have also been able to share information held by individuals in positions of power or have been able to match their results with neighboring organizations. In general, it can be concluded that NGOs benefit from social accountability practices.

There are also reasons of a political nature, particularly strengthening the visibility of a sector that has been often characterized by its minimal presence in public policy spaces beyond its immediate institutional environment. Through the social accountability processes, NGOs are becoming known. Some regional communications

Chart 1: Number of NGOs with social accountability processes, 2007

Region	Inhabitants (Millions)	NGOs No.
Antioquia	5.6	73
Bogota	6.8	55
B/quilla	1.1	33
Barranca	0.2	25
Caldas	0.9	26
TOTAL		212

2 Full version could be consulted on the network’s website: <http://www.ongporlatransparencia.org.co/>

media have covered their work and they have also been exposed to a critical analysis by other sectors.

We have identified an additional ethical reason for NGOs' social accountability practices. In a country such as Colombia where the disclosure of hidden ties between individuals and institutions with illegal groups for mutual benefit has become "daily bread", the fact that there is a group of civil society organizations which are voluntarily subject to public scrutiny is exemplary. Analysts from other sectors who have witnessed such exercises in the regions have, without exception, valued this practice as a major step forward for the country. It consolidates a democratic culture within society, the taking of responsibility for public goods which belong to all, and the respect for the rule of law.

What has been done

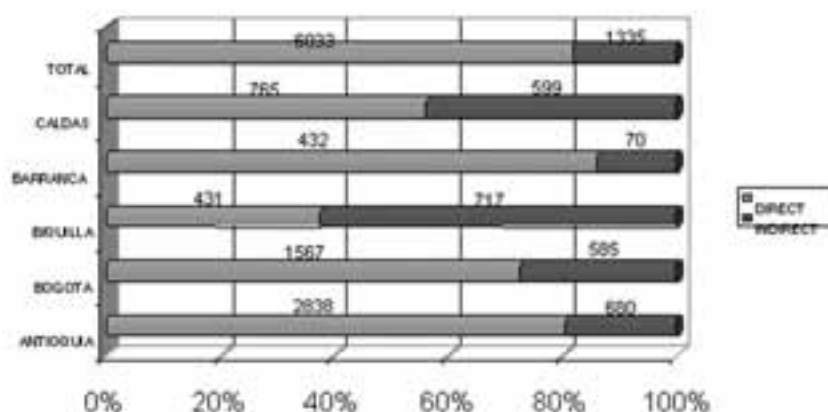
In the overview paper describing the social accountability processes undertaken by the initiative, the nature of the proposal is explained:

"It is part of a national convening in which, in addition to Bogotá, Antioquia, Valle, Viejo Caldas, Magdalena Medio, Cartagena and Barranquilla also attended. It was preceded by a first experience in 2006 where a work model was developed by Antioquia NGO Federation, NGOxT and the Colombian Confederation of NGOs, which is now replicated in other country regions. It is basically the building of an agreement between NGOs operating in a

common area, to voluntarily consent to submit information regarding who they are, what they do and how, with what resources, and who the beneficiaries of their actions are. The group is interviewed by people hired for this purpose, using a collectively developed common format. The data collected is statistically processed and results in a draft which is discussed with its direct stakeholders, then validated through external interlocutors. In some cases the major findings, conclusions and recommendations are presented at a public event in the presence of representatives from the public, private and social sectors."³

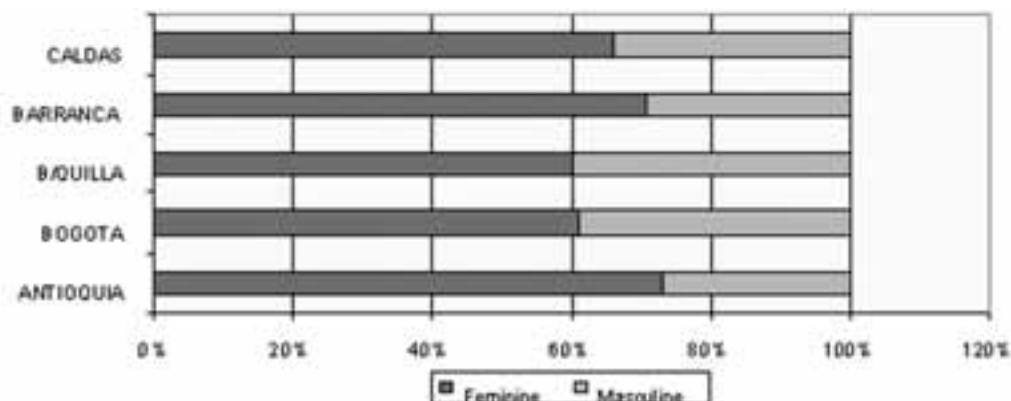
In Bogotá, these working groups were carried out with the participating organizations, a group of academic experts and representatives from the international cooperation sector, the private sector and public officials from the public administration of the Capital District. In Medellín and Barrancabermeja the results were presented at public events through an open invitation and with the presence of observers from other social sectors, which undertook a critical review of the findings.

Graph 1: Types of staff hiring



3 See: NGOs' Antioquia Federations and others. Second Social Accountability Exercise of 73 NGOs working in Medellín and Antioquia. Final Report – 2007. Pg. 2.

Graph 2: Gender distribution of staff hired



Relevant results from the regional processes

One of the most significant gains which this process has already yielded is the high volume of information produced about NGOs. Only a small portion of that information is used here to support the central ideas of this paper. The results described below correspond specifically to a group of 212 NGOs from five country regions based on information collected on their work during 2006. Their distribution by region is shown in Chart 1.

It should be noted that most of the NGOs which carry out social accountability processes have been operating for a long time; they are not ephemeral organizations or set up for short term goals. In Barranca, slightly over 47% of NGOs have been in existence for over ten years. In Antioquia and Manizales, 90% and 92% of organizations, respectively, have been in existence for over ten years. In Bogotá, 78% were created prior to the year 2000.

This group of NGOs links together over 7,300 people. Although job creation is not the first or principal objective of these organizations, it should be emphasized that their existence generates stable incomes for many families and thus they become levers of economic inclusion and link to the formal economy (See Graph 1). Another aspect which

stands out is that in most cases (80%) the hiring of staff is through formal contracting, exceeding 70% in Antioquia, Bogotá and Barranca, which means closer and more stable ties between the employee and the organization, a greater sense of belonging and the amassing of human talent.

This sample from the sector demonstrates a process that is taking place in other economic sectors: the “feminization” of employment. As can be observed in Graph 2, the averages shown exceed 60% of women hired. These averages are occurring at all levels of activity, from the hiring of project staff to executive directorships. Most positions are filled by women. It is conceivable to state that the real power at NGOs is exercised with feminine logic. However at the board of directors level, where in some cases functions are formal or nominal only and in others are roles of real power, the distribution is reversed and the positions are filled mostly by men.

Insofar as staff qualifications, a high professional level is evident within Colombian context. In Bogotá for example, the presence of personnel with postgraduate studies is significant. This is one of the keys to the quality of these organizations which in most cases behave as knowledge organizations. Knowledge organizations mean human groups where the principal value of the group is determined

by collectively built knowledge. In the conclusions from the social accountability processes in Bogotá it was said that: “When NGOs were asked about their main strengths it was found that it is first and foremost the knowledge built, which accounts for the fact that we are knowledge organizations (conceptual tackling of issues, approaches, methodologies, experience)”.

Reviewing financial accounts has been an important part of the process. In reviewing the sources of income for 2006, the results show several key elements to point out (Chart 2). For instance, it is not true that the sector as a whole depends entirely on public resources or international cooperation funds. Of the five regions, such dependency only holds true for Barranca and Manizales. The primary source of income in all other regions was identified as resources generated by the organization’s own efforts. This makes reference to five types of activity: direct collection from the public, investment returns, financial management, sale of products and services, and donations from partners or members.

In all five cases the mobilization of international resources for development cooperation is a commendable achievement by NGOs in favor of society. On account of their efforts, and administrative and technical capacity, over \$74,000

million pesos (more than US \$ 42 millions) have entered the country, increasing the resources destined for social development. Moreover, it is also evident that the sector as a whole contributes and mobilizes more resources than that which it receives from international cooperation funds.

The amount of resources received from the private sector deserves special mention in the case of Antioquia. Longstanding connections developed over the last century between some business sectors and various NGOs accounts for this relationship.

So how and where are the aforementioned economic resources invested? With respect to how, the Barrancabermeja report points out that 61% of disbursements are destined for investment, 36% are operating expenses, 2% represent taxes and 1% are miscellaneous expenses. In Antioquia, the disbursements distribution is: 77% for projects, 21% for administration expenses and 2% for taxes.

Chart 3 shows the type of activities in which resources are invested. The chart presents the specific sectors in which NGOs work according to the number of projects per sector. It can be concluded that education is the most intense work area overall, while noting that this includes a large number and diverse range of activities such as the provision of basic education services, job training, the promotion of human rights and citizenship values, etc.

The second sector of NGO activity is that of childhood, family and nutrition. Some of the oldest and more consolidated

Graph 3: Professional level of staff hired

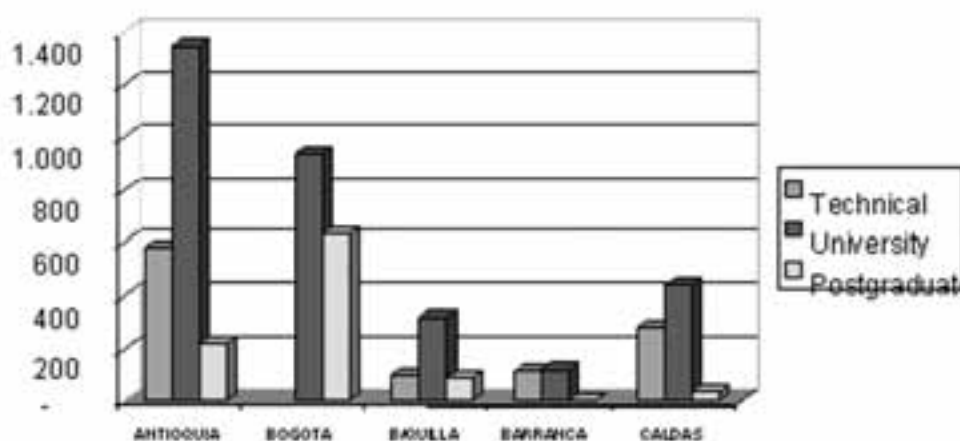


Chart 2: NGOs' sources of income for 2006 (in millions of US\$)

Source	Antioquia	%	Bogotá	%	B/quilla	%	Barranca	%	Caldas	%
Public Resources	27.733	18%	20.327	25%	5.683	15%	946	49%	21.250	59%
Own Resources	62.519	40%	31.407	39%	21.583	57%	611	32%	4.681	13%
Private Sector	51.635	33%		0		0		0	5.063	14%
International Cooperation	13.647	9%	17.873	22%	7.205	19%	147	8%	3.968	11%
Other NGOs	1.927	1%	6.017	8%	974	3%	118	6%	-	0
Other			4.421	6%	2.685	7%	97	5%	1.218	3%
TOTAL	157.462	101%	80.046	100%	38.130	101%	1.919	100%	36.180	100%

NGOs work in this sector, as it requires large investments given that the integral support for families normally requires significant professional and institutional resources. This is followed by the sector of micro-business, employment and income generation, where NGOs act as promoters, advisers, facilitators and guarantors of access to financial and technical resources. Following is the health sector, where organizations are involved in activities that range from education and prevention to primary care.

It can be noted that very few NGOs are concerned with indigenous peoples issues or information and communication technologies, which represents a worrisome fact given the importance of both sectors for the social development of this country.

Institutional capacities

Given processes of the last two years, it can be said that NGOs are reliable organizations. The group which participated in social accountability processes in 2007 are going through a progressive process of institutional strengthening at all levels. They also rely on a workforce with high academic and professional qualifications that support their commitments. However, their weaknesses are evident, and trade associations and networks should develop strategies for each of them:

- 1) Concentration in large cities resulting in neglect of rural sectors and small municipalities.
- 2) Deficient information systems and transparency practices. Advances have been made though there is still room for improvement regarding precision and timeliness of the information in geographical referencing and gender and age group disaggregation.
- 3) Work impacts: it has been possible to demonstrate where, who and what actions are performed but it has not yet been possible to demonstrate how those actions may or may not transform the quality of life of the beneficiaries. On this point a hypothesis can be tested; that it is optimal that monitoring be done collectively rather than one organization or program at a time due to the high level of interrelation between the programs oriented to the same population, thus, the idea ahead is to verify the impacts on quality of life through case studies that use a sample of beneficiaries from a group of NGOs by sector starting with childhood-family-nutrition and then going into others.
- 4) The communication tools of every NGO and trade association, especially websites, are deplorably precarious.

Coda

There are limitless assumptions about NGOs which are routinely repeated in corridors and at meetings which, to a large degree, are contradicted through the social accountability processes. These processes were designed just for that purpose; to portray a perspective closer to reality, rather than one formed by prejudice. This reality, of course, is diverse and complex.

The problems raised about some NGOs with respect to corruption, inadequate management of resources, squandering and bureaucracy, and loss of the sense of mission, are by no means false. In this respect, NGOs, as is any other type of social organization, are a faithful reflection of society as a whole. If the problems raised exist within society, these will also exist in their organizations.

Generalizations on these serious shortcomings, however, should not be made. The more than 250 organizations who will have completed public accountability exercises for the first time at the end of this process are demonstrating their vocation as agents for the

promotion of social development, their commitment to perform this mission with improved quality, and their role as players in the deepening of the democratic consolidation in our country. They are doing so by becoming, willingly, more transparent and socially accountable for their performance. We wish this would happen in the rest of society!

Chart 3: NGOs' sectors of work by number of projects

Sectors of Work	Medellin	B/quilla	Bogota	Barranca	Caldas	Total
Education	111	51	69	8	13	252
Childhood-Family-Nutrition	95	24	42	3	17	181
Community Living-Human Rights	17	22	42	2		83
Health-Rehabilitation	27	31	34	3	10	105
Micro-Bus.-Employment-Income	55	21	34	4	11	125
Democracy-Participation	17	17	33	3		70
Institutional Development	6	14	27	2		49
Gender Equity	18	12	24	1		55
Culture	23	30	24	6	10	93
Housing-Public Space	17	15	19	2		53
ICT-Communication	1	6	18	2		27
Recreation-Sports	9	14	14	1		40
Environment	21	24	14	4		63
Ethnic Matters		6	2	4		12
Other		12	33	4		49
TOTAL	417	299	431	49	60	1.256



Photo: Curt Carnemark /World Bank

An open forum for CSO development effectiveness¹

A progress report, July 2008

The Global Facilitation Group for the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness

A. Introduction

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have a crucial role in the development process as innovative agents of change and social transformation. As peoples organizations they are well situated to understand the needs and claims of ordinary people and build multiple relationships with communities, who are the agents and beneficiaries of development efforts.

Given the important roles of CSOs in contributing to development progress and the realization of human rights, all stakeholders – donors, developing country governments, CSO and communities – have a stake in assuring that CSOs realize their full potential. In recent consultations, CSOs have acknowledged their obligation to take forward and lead a process to improve their own effectiveness as development actors.

¹ The Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness was launched in June 2008, as a CSO-led process over two years of dialogue and consensus building on CSO development effectiveness principles, along with guidelines for their implementation. Information on this process is available from Concord (the European Confederation of NGOs for Relief and Development) at <http://www.concordeurope.org/Public/Page.php?ID=11872&language=eng>.

At the end of June, 2008, more than 70 civil society delegates, representing a rich diversity and large constituency of CSOs (ranging from individual CSOs [7], international CSOs [14], national [27] and regional [14] platforms, thematic networks [10]), from both developed and developing countries, assembled in Paris to take up the challenges of CSO effectiveness in development. This Exploratory Meeting on CSO Effectiveness agreed to launch a global two-year Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness, from January 2009 to December 2010.¹ This Progress Report highlights the main agreements on key directions, planned objectives and expected outcomes for this Open Forum.²

B. Key Directions for the Open Forum

1. The Open Forum will elaborate CSO effectiveness principles focusing on their diverse roles as development actors, not solely aid actors. CSOs are first and foremost highly diverse expressions of social solidarity for the active engagement of people in their own development efforts. Their development and advocacy work comes out from the grassroots experience, analysis and open dialogue in community-based processes. As such, CSO effectiveness cannot be reduced to a donor/recipient aid paradigm. Through the Open Forum, CSOs will build consensus on a commonly accepted framework to help measure their effectiveness, based on their development visions, approaches, relationships and impact of actions. The focus will be the enrichment of CSO development roles in support of people claiming their rights, in promotion of women's rights, in contributions to fulfilling livelihoods, sustainable environments and the democratic determination of development priorities. The goals of development

effectiveness and sustainable impacts should be the overarching concern of all development actors – donors, country governments, CSOs and communities.

- 2. The building of consensus in the Open Forum during the next two years is complex, requiring a global process that is constructed from country and regional activities, involving many different development actors.** It is a CSO-led process that is multi-stakeholder in character. The Paris Declaration has been a *voluntary* inter-governmental process spread over a decade for consensus among donors and developing country governments. Similarly, the large numbers and diversity of CSOs, their geographic reach and their multiple roles in development, will require a careful process of dialogue at country, regional and global levels, iteratively building understanding and global consensus on principles, guidance, and good practices on implementing these principles for improved civil society effectiveness. A detailed workplan for this process will be developed in next several months.
- 3. The Open Forum will be an inclusive and multi-stakeholder process, which is managed and led by CSOs.** As distinct development actors in their own right, CSOs require the space to debate the issues affecting their own effectiveness. CSO effectiveness is not only shaped by the many challenges emerging from their own practices, but also by challenges posed by the environment in which they operate, which is often determined by donor and recipient country governments. As also proposed by the Synthesis and Findings of the Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness, the Open Forum process will be structured as

¹ This process builds upon recent civil society consultations with the Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness, its multi-stakeholder findings and recommendations, as well as independent civil society, donor and academic processes that have raised challenges and issues in civil society effectiveness.

² Background documents and a full report of the Exploratory Meeting are available from CONCORD at <http://www.concordeurope.org/Public/Page.php?ID=11872>.

a shared multi-stakeholder agenda. Over the two years, the Open Forum will be managed and facilitated by a globally representative 25-member CSO Global Facilitation Group, which will work closely with a supporting CSO platform, and will coordinate and engage with appropriate donor and government bodies.

4. **The Open Forum, over a two year period, will reach consensus on key principles affecting CSO development effectiveness, along with guidance on how to apply these principles and highlight good practices for context-relevant mechanisms to hold CSOs accountable to these principles.**

The Open Forum will build upon existing understanding of the principles for aid and development effectiveness, including the work of the Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness. In developing a framework for CSO development effectiveness, the Forum will take account of the lessons from many existing civil society mechanisms, codes and tools, including more than 23 country and global codes documented for the Exploratory Meeting. But the Forum will not be proposing a new global mechanism or impose a single international “code of conduct”. Rather than propose a new global mechanism, The Forum will be a learning space for CSOs to agree on a framework of key principles and related guidelines that should direct efforts to assess and improve their effectiveness in development operations, including international civil society partnerships.

5. **The Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness will be a key CSO contribution towards a truly multi-stakeholder and tripartite Beijing Agreement on Development Effectiveness in 2011, with CSOs equally at the negotiating table along with other development partners.** The Accra Agenda for Action recognizes the need for inclusive processes for making development

progress, based on gender equality, human rights and environmental sustainability. The Open Forum will be an inclusive process, whose outcomes will deepen the development effectiveness of CSOs, in ways that will implicate and be relevant to all development partners. The Forum presents a real opportunity for CSOs, donors, governments to undertake a more ambitious level of dialogue, one which could initiate negotiations, with equal participation among the three stakeholders groups, for a joint Declaration on Development Effectiveness at the 2011 Beijing High Level Forum IV.

C. Objectives for the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness

From January 2009 to December 2010, the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness will undertake to:

1. develop an inclusive, participatory and representative process, owned by CSOs around the world, with regional equality of representation, and taking into account issues of gender equality;
2. increase awareness within CSOs around the world regarding their effectiveness as development actors and innovative agents of change and social transformation;
3. increase understanding and reach consensus on the principles guiding the effectiveness of CSOs as development actors;
4. develop guidance related to the implementation of such principles, which will facilitate adaptation to country, regional or sectoral conditions; and
5. generate political dialogue with donors and governments to address the needs for enabling environments for CSO effectiveness, based on the recognition of the distinct roles and voice of CSOs as development actors in their own right.

D. Expected Outcomes for the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness

The Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness will result in:

1. **The creation of an open process**, whose credibility and accountability will be based on its inclusiveness and transparency. It will reach out through country-based, sectoral/thematic, regional and global processes, enabling CSOs to contribute to and identify with an iterative consensus on CSO development effectiveness.
2. **The development of a vision on development effectiveness** through national and international policy dialogue, taking account of the centrality of the concepts of human rights, gender equality, environmental sustainability, and the capacity of development actors to lead the changes they seek, as the foundation for situating CSO effectiveness, as well as the effectiveness of donors and governments.
3. **An agreement on common principles** regarding CSO development effectiveness as development actors, through dialogue and learning. Shared principles will be applied differently by a diversity of CSOs in very different regional or sectoral contexts.
4. **An agreement on guidelines on how to apply these principles and documentation of good practices for context-relevant mechanisms** appropriate to each country and/or region.
5. **Establish a CSO development effectiveness**

foundation for a negotiated and equitable process for a tripartite (CSO, government, donor) agreement on advancing development effectiveness at the 4th High Level Forum in Beijing in December 2011. Such negotiations would be based on the recognition and support for CSOs as distinct development actors in their own right, and a shared interest in strengthening an enabling environment for development effectiveness.

E. Leadership and Governance of the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness

To date, the first phase (April to December 2008) of a CSO exploration of a process to elaborate CSO development effectiveness principles and issues has been facilitated by the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development (CONCORD), and a preliminary Global Facilitation Group. The Exploratory Meeting clarified the leadership and governance of the Open Forum.

1. **A representative CSO Global Facilitation Group (GFG) will guide the development of the process and the inputs for the Open**



Photo: Tim McKulka/UNMIS

Forum. The Exploratory Meeting proposed the names and organizations represented in the GFG, which:

- is based on 25 CSO nominated members, with fixed representation from the different regions of the world, national and international CSOs, platforms, and gender balance;
- provides overall political leadership and representation of the Open Forum, confirming and overseeing the implementation of a two-year workplan that integrates the different levels of the process to achieve the expected outcomes;
- is supported by a CSO platform, responsible in turn for practical aspects of the process – internal communications, website, administrative support, and managing the financial resources required for global coordination, including fundraising;
- is principally responsible for coordinating with donors and governments; and
- Is accountable to a global representative assembly of CSOs participating in the Open Forum, meeting annually.

2. **The Open Forum will implement a decentralized global process.** It will encourage a multiplicity of efforts, particularly through CSO partners and platforms at the country level. These processes will be coordinated, linked, initiated, and supported by the GFG and the supporting CSO platform through the sharing of technical materials and resource persons, fundraising assistance, etc. The Open Forum will use innovative approaches and technologies to build consensus over the two year period.
3. **Multi-stakeholder dialogues are an essential part of the Open Forum process.** The Open Forum will be a CSO-led process, which is multi-stakeholder in character, with dialogue and engagement in various forms at key moments at different levels of the process. This multi-stakeholder dimension is essential a)

to identify concerns and challenges on enabling environment, and b) to identify influences and roles of governments, donors, communities and other actors in the understanding of development effectiveness principles and their application.

We believe the outcomes of the Exploratory Meeting are historic and invite other stakeholders at the Accra High Level Forum to take note:

- for the first time there is a collective CSO commitment to address CSO effectiveness at a global level;
- the process will be inclusive, balancing North-South representation and integrating different levels of operation – local, national, regional;
- the process will be multi-stakeholder, seeking to involve and engage donors, governments and communities as essential components to the whole process and realization of its outcomes;
- CSOs will focus on their internal effectiveness, which will include democratic ownership, equal partnership, mutual accountability and responsibility for results, as well as CSO roles as donors; and
- for the first time there is a commitment by CSOs towards a truly multi-stakeholder and equitable process for a formal global agreement on development effectiveness.

The voluntary and multi-stakeholder character of the Open Forum is premised on the recognition that CSOs themselves must come together to address their own development effectiveness. This can only be achieved in dialogue with communities and different CSOs, but also with donors and governments, who have responsibilities and policies that directly affect the enabling environment for achieving CSO effectiveness. CSOs in turn can enrich the implementation of donor and government approaches to improving their own aid and development effectiveness.

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RealityCheck

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The Reality of Aid Project exists to promote national and international policies that will contribute to a new and effective strategy for poverty eradication, built on solidarity and equity.

Established in 1993, The Reality of Aid is a collaborative, not-for-profit initiative, involving non-governmental organisations from North and South.

The Reality of Aid publishes regular and reliable reports on international development cooperation and the extent to which governments in the North and South, address the extreme inequalities of income and the structural, social and political injustices that entrench people in poverty.

The Reality of Aid Management Committee is chaired by Antonio Tujan, Jr. of IBON International.

The International Management Committee is composed of representatives from Ibon International, Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC), African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (AFRODAD), Asociacion Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Promocion (ALOP) and the European Network on Debt and Development (EURODAD).

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The Reality Check is the official newsletter of the Reality of Aid. It is designed to highlight current issues in aid regime written from a regional perspective but with global significance, edited in rotation by the leading networks in the following regions:

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