

BACKGROUND PAPER FOR INTERNATIONAL NGOS (INGOs)

What is the Open Forum?

The Open Forum is coordinating a series of consultations with representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) around the world with the objective of identifying a framework of development effectiveness and the conditions that CSOs expect from an enabling environment that facilitate their work. In total, over 70 consultations will be undertaken, in every region of the globe.

The origins of the Open Forum lie in concerns raised in the preparations for the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF3), held in Accra in September 2008 where donors and governments assessed their progress on the commitments made under the Paris Declaration (2005). CSOs were critical of the process on aid reform as, among other issues, it did not involve a meaningful participation of CSOs. At the same time, CSOs were challenged about their commitment with the Paris Declaration themselves. CSOs participating in this meeting were clear that the principles and framework put forward by the Paris Declaration did not apply to their role as CSOs, and yet they are key actors in development.

As part of these discussions, civil society organisations decided to coordinate their efforts to discuss and decide on CSO contributions, in the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness (www.cso-effectiveness.org). The objective was to bring forward an agenda of development effectiveness led and defined by CSOs. The Open Forum seeks to shift debates away from a technical agenda focused on (official) aid and its management, to a more holistic and impact-oriented agenda which takes into account all CSO contributions to people-centred development.

Development Effectiveness and the objectives of the Open Forum

While there is no commonly accepted definition of development effectiveness, for the Open Forum, development effectiveness is promoting sustainable positive change, within a democratic framework, that addresses the causes as well as the symptoms of poverty, inequality and marginalisation, through the diversity and complementarity of instruments, policies and actors.

These issues have been in the agenda of CSOs for some years already, as the necessity to strengthen their effectiveness, accountability and legitimacy has grown in importance. Different approaches and mechanisms, including working groups to facilitate information exchange, coordination bodies, codes of conduct or standards at platform level, specific evaluation methodologies and funding schemes etc. have been put in place.

The effectiveness of CSOs, however, not only depends on these organisational efforts but also on the socio-political context and relations with other actors in development. It is well known that many CSOs are facing major constraints in their work due to loss of funding, legal restrictions, criminalization of protest or dissent, etc. This is why advocating for an environment that enables participation and work of CSOs is essential to the Open Forum.

The Open Forum aims to contribute to the convergence of CSO efforts by providing a space for CSOs to discuss on common principles and guidelines of development effectiveness that are relevant for their work; and on the key elements that will ensure an enabling environment. The first Global Assembly in September 2010 will provide the opportunity to share a draft framework, based on the national consultations undertaken within the Open Forum. It will also explore the emerging perspectives on CSO development effectiveness, including the rights, roles and responsibilities of CSOs as actors in development, and initiate a multi-stakeholder debate with governments, donors and other development actors on CSO development effectiveness and the enabling environment for CSOs.

The contribution of INGOs

International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) are key players in international development. More than ten percent of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) to developing countries was channelled through INGOs in 2006, which contributed an additional US\$ 20 billion through public fundraising that year. Yet their role in development goes beyond financial provision. They have become influential advocates for democracy and social justice, important part of civil society coalitions, and play an essential role in humanitarian responses.

It is very important, therefore, that the INGO perspective is fed into the global consultation process of the Open Forum. For this reason, the Open Forum will provide a platform to discuss which are key principles of development effectiveness and discuss the issues around the enabling environment that are specific to the INGO sector.

The result of these discussions will become part of the draft framework and recommendations stemming out of the Open Forum and will help to strengthen the collective voice of the sector in the next High Level Forum of Aid Effectiveness in Seoul in late 2011.

Activities

The Open Forum will seek to strengthen communication about the global consultation process with the INGO sector. We will gather the views of different organisations by conducting a survey and other research activities on the principles of development effectiveness and the enabling environment for INGOs. We will present preliminary results in the Global Assembly at the end of September 2010. Other activities will be subject to what the INGO advisory group prioritizes.

INGO Advisory Group

In order to ensure effective communication and relevant involvement of INGOs in this process, we seek to establish an advisory group formed by between five to six representatives of the INGO sector. This group should represent a diversity of international organisations working in advocacy, community development, humanitarian issues, etc.

The advisory group will ensure that the activities undertaken by the Open Forum are relevant for the INGO community and that they take into account the diversity of organisations and perspectives in the sector. They can also propose extra activities that aim at strengthening the work with INGOs.

- **Research Component**

This component will provide an opportunity to gather information from a wide range of INGOs on the principles of development effectiveness and of the issues around the enabling environment that facilitate or constraint their work. The objective of this component is to identify common principles and approaches of development effectiveness but also the challenges faced by the different INGOs in relation with the multiple levels and relations built around their work.

- **Outreach component**

The objective of this component is to facilitate the participation and involvement of INGOs in the Open Forum process. The activities will aim at: 1. communicating the objectives and importance of the process to the INGO community, 2. establishing a fluid communication between INGOs and the Open Forum, 3. providing a platform for the participation and involvement of INGOs throughout the whole consultation process.

Accountability

We are committed to implement this process with transparency and accountability. All the information and minutes of meetings and activities of the Open Forum will be published on its website. We will also strengthen our communication links with INGOs by sending regular updates on the process and conducting periodic evaluations. The Global Assembly will also serve as a space where INGOs will evaluate the outreach process and agree on ways to consolidate the inputs.

The data and results will be publicly shared in several venues, including the Open Forum website, so organisations can use it for their own purposes if they wish.

More information

For more information about the Open Forum Consortium and the global consultation process visit <http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/>

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