

An Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness: A Progress Report, July 2008

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.

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 grass roots 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

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 will be available as of mid-August from CONCORD at <http://www.concordeurope.org/Public/Page.php?ID=11872>.

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 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;
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 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 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Presented by:

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