



**Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness  
Asian Regional Consultation  
November 6-7, 2009 \* Bangkok, Thailand  
WORKSHOP REPORT SUMMARY**

### **Objectives**

The Asian regional consultation of the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness was the very first introduction of the Open Forum process to Asian CSOs. While left open for donors, governments and other stakeholders, it was dedicated mainly to CSOs. Apart from stressing the objectives and importance of the Open Forum process, the regional consultation familiarized the participating CSOs with the concepts and conduct of the country consultations by carrying out the workshops on generating and ranking principles, and formulating guidelines, indicators and recommendations for an enabling environment.

### **Participants**

A total of 44 participants representing 41 CSOs from each of the 17 priority countries identified actively contributed to the consultation. Participating CSOs were a mix of community-based, country-wide, and regional formations working on various themes and sectors such as the environment, health, CSO development, peasants and workers, women, media, human rights, and consumers rights. Gender balance was well achieved, 22 participants being men and 22 being women. GFG Members Anil Singh, Tony Tujan, Dr. Azra Sayeed, and Tetet Lauron served as resource persons.

### **Highlights**

1. Grey areas on CSO dimensions. There are still grey areas in determining whether one is a CSO or not (i.e. cooperatives, armed groups)
2. Diversity. Participating CSOs are diverse in many respects. Roles and activities taken on range from, at varying degrees, mobilizing the grassroots and marginalized, delivering services, monitoring the government, building coalitions, supporting other CSOs, to participating in government processes, among many others, all towards advocating for and educating about people's rights.
3. Common challenges. Amid diversity, common issues and challenges had been identified and paid special attention to: the lack of an enabling environment, mainly due to limitations posed by governments, general lack of CSO funding and insufficient capacity, weak CSO voice and recognition, and low access to knowledge and information as well as to their constituents, to mention a few.
4. Development and Politics. The differences in context expectedly generated differing views, particularly on the issue of delineation between development and politics – There were views that CSOs should not be political, while some believe that CSOs are political by nature. The term being political itself generated differing views: from political as in having political ambition, being attached to or being formed by a political party, to cooperating with/helping the government, to political in relation to donors and funds. Resource persons pointed out that there is no set rule on partisanship and that historical context should be taken in consideration.
5. Most important principles. Identified to be the most important principles were democracy (internal and external), equity and equality (including gender equality), human rights, sustainability of development and of CSOs themselves, justice, social solidarity and solidarity among north and south CSOs, independence/autonomy, non-violence and harmony, popular participation, and diversity.
6. Overlapping concepts. A couple of important observations/questions were brought up in this session: (1) some of the guidelines presented seemed to be merely defining the principles; and (2) some guidelines were also considered as indicators. That is, there is a tendency for these three concepts to overlap.

7. Enabling environment. Recommendations for an enabling environment are mostly directed to national governments and revolve around (1) recognition, where CSOs demand/assert ease of registration for all CSOs including regional CSOs, enabling (not restrictive and controlling) laws, more space for participation, and constant engagement; and (2) protection, where CSOs demand full guarantee that they may freely and safely exercise their human rights. On the economic/financial side, CSOs call for government financial transparency, access to/allocation from public funds, access to information (including aid related information), the right to raise and receive funds from donors, and tax exemption.

Donors are called on to recognize CSOs, treat them as partners through constant engagement/strategic partnership; to observe financial transparency and provide access to aid related information; assist CSOs that are not recognized by the government, develop or enhance corporate social responsibility, and ensure that contracts they make are fully compliant of existing laws. For fellow CSOs - closely adhere to the principle of good governance, accountability, responsibility and transparency (including financial transparency). Participating regional CSOs also think that it will be helpful for CSOs to collaboratively develop a terms of reference for CSO engagement with regional bodies, i.e. the ASEAN.

### Tentative Schedules of Country Consultations

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| February | Tajikistan, India-Delhi, India-Chennai  |
| March    | Bangladesh (13 <sup>th</sup> ), Mongolia (2 <sup>nd</sup> half), and South Korea                |
| April    | Kyrgyzstan (could also be in May), Egypt (2 <sup>nd</sup> half), Lebanon (3 <sup>rd</sup> week) |
| May      | Morocco (1 <sup>st</sup> week), Indonesia   |
| June     | Cambodia, China*, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Philippines   |

No tentative schedule has been placed for Thailand as its representatives have not attended Day 2 of the consultation.

The plenary agreed to form country core groups and nominate fiscal sponsors was unanimously agreed as a step towards the national consultations

### Evaluation Points

Participants' key recommendations are (1) to have more time for group brainstorming and plenary discussions; (2) to be presented more concrete examples, case studies; (3) to Address language barriers for more active participation; (4) upgrade and translate toolkit.

### Recommendations

1. Separate OF orientation. Thorough introduction of the Open Forum , its background, objectives, processes, concepts, and target outcomes could already be done prior to the consultation proper through a small preparatory orientation meeting, or any other feasible means.
2. Data Gathering. Generation and sorting of principles, formulation of guidelines, indicators and mechanisms, and recommendations for an enabling environment could be done and synthesized at the preparation phase, so that they can be discussed, analyzed critiqued and enriched more deeply during the consultation proper. Country core group could also do research for further (and perhaps, best) examples and case studies.
3. Groupwork output template – Templates for groupwork outputs are also highly recommended for easier synthesis.