



OPEN FORUM BACKGROUND NOTE 1

“Open Forum on CSO Development Effectiveness”: Its Origins

Open Forum Origins in Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness Process

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are deeply involved in the aid system as donors, aid recipients, development practitioners and watchdogs for aid and development accountability. In 2006, for example, CSOs channelled 10 percent of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to developing countries and contributed an additional US\$ 20 billion to US\$ 25 billion through their own public fundraising. CSO, because of the critical and multiple roles they play in development, recognize the need to be effective.

More than 70 national, regional and global civil society organizations and networks came to a “CSO Exploratory Conference” in Paris in June 2008 committed to exploring ways to maximize CSO development effectiveness – the result was the “Open Forum on CSO Development Effectiveness”.

Although the “Open Forum” was launched in June 2008, its origins lie in concerns raised in the preparations for the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF3), held in Accra in September 2008. Civil society organizations played a critical role in the lead-up to and at the third High Level Forum. The HLF was an opportunity to assess progress, by donors and governments, in implementing commitments made in the 2005 *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*. CSO were critical of the progress on aid reforms undertaken by donors and governments. But although the High Level Forum was to look at government and donor progress, CSO aid effectiveness was also challenged – how might CSOs implement and apply the principles of the *Paris Declaration* in their development efforts? A multi-stakeholder Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness (AG)¹, set up in 2007 under the leadership of CIDA and the OECD DAC-based Working Party on Aid Effectiveness, was tasked with examining these issues.

The Advisory Group consulted with CSOs around the world on the role CSOs play in aid and development. The AG, as a multi-stakeholder body, agreed with its CSO members that while the *Paris Declaration* was an important milestone in improving the effectiveness of donors and government in the aid relationship, its principles could not directly be applied to CSOs’ own development roles and relationships.

Applying the Principles of the *Paris Declaration* to CSOs?

The *Paris Declaration* is an important agreement between donors and government and its commitments and their implementation can deepen the effectiveness of aid. But its principles and commitments fail to reflect that CSOs are distinct actors, playing multiple development roles, different from those of governments and donors. Furthermore, CSOs at the Accra HLF3, including more than 700 CSOs involved in the Better Aid Platform, proposed that *Paris Declaration* principles and commitments measure aid effectiveness, not only in terms of narrow donor/recipient relationships, but against the impact of aid for poor and marginalized

¹ The Advisory Group was made up of three donors (Canada, Norway and France), four developing country governments (Colombia, Cameroon, Rwanda and Zambia) and eight CSOs (CCIC, Concord, Actionaid, AWID, WIDE, Reality of Aid/IBON Foundation, Third World Network (Ghana), and AFRODAD). See the Advisory Group’s Recommendations and Findings at http://ccic.ca/e/docs/002_aid_2008-08_ag_synthesis_and_recs.pdf

populations (i.e. its *development effectiveness*).² CSOs called for more far-reaching reforms based on the inclusion of citizens in determining development priorities, that is, “democratic ownership” of development in developing countries.

Applying the *Paris Declaration* principles to CSOs was repeatedly raised by donors and government officials during policy dialogues with CSOs in the lead up to the Accra meeting. Consequently, CSOs, rather than accepting an externally imposed framework (e.g. the *Paris Declaration*), agreed, through the “Open Forum”, to define and promote their own *Development Effectiveness Framework*.

A CSO Initiative for an Open Forum on CSO development Effectiveness

A CSO development effectiveness framework will not be limited to the technical interpretation of the aid relationship found in the *Paris Declaration* (i.e. aid effectiveness). Rather, a CSO Framework will encompass a holistic view that goes to the heart of the impact of international co-operation for a people-centred development (development effectiveness). Many CSOs in developing countries are deeply active in development but have limited or no relationship to aid.

From their 2008 “CSO Exploratory Conference”, CSOs proposed that the challenges of CSO development effectiveness required a CSO-led process, autonomous and independent from governments and official donors. This process, the “Open Forum on CSO Development

Accra Agenda for Action (paragraph 20)

“We will deepen our engagement with CSOs as independent development actors in their own right whose efforts complement those of governments and the private sector. We share an interest in ensuring that CSO contributions to development reach their full potential. To this end:

- a) We invite CSOs to reflect on how they can apply the Paris principles of aid effectiveness from a CSO perspective.
- b) b) We welcome a CSO proposal to engage with them in a CSO-led multi-stakeholder process to promote CSO development effectiveness. As part of that process, we will seek to 1) improve coordination of CSO efforts with government programs, ii) enhance CSO accountability for results, and iii) improve information on CSO activities.
- c) We will work with CSOs to provide an enabling

Effectiveness”, will run from September 2009 to October 2011. Although independent, the “Open Forum” will engage with donors and governments. It will also build on the experiences and lessons from existing CSO accountability frameworks. An “Open Forum” concept paper, workplan and financing agreement have already been developed (see its web site, www.cso-effectiveness.org).

Although the “Open Forum” emerged independent of the High Level Forum, it will build on CSO achievements at Accra. In the *Accra Agenda for Action* (AAA) (see Box), donors and governments expressed a shared interest that “CSO contributions to development reach their full potential”. The AAA welcomed the

“Open Forum” and recognized CSOs as “independent development actors in their own right, whose efforts complement those of government and the private sector”.

² While there is no commonly accepted definition of development effectiveness, for the Open Forum development effectiveness is about the impact of the actions of development actors, including international aid actors, on improving the lives of people living in poverty and the marginalised. Enshrined in international human rights law, development is effective if it promotes sustainable change that addresses the root causes as well as the symptoms of poverty, inequality and marginalisation. Given CSO numbers and diversity, they are seldom defined by their role in the international aid system, but rather by their role in the development process. The Open Forum therefore is focusing on the development effectiveness of CSOs and not merely their effectiveness as aid actors. But issues arising from CSO engagement in the aid system, particularly for northern CSOs, will be included in the Open Forum’s framework.