



## OPEN FORUM BACKGROUND NOTE 2

### The "Open Forum": Vision, Objectives and Expected Outcomes

#### An Inclusive CSO-led Process for an *International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness*

The "Open Forum", an international, consensus-based, Civil Society Organization (CSO)-led process, will address key internal and external factors affecting the effectiveness of CSOs as independent development actors. An inclusive "Open Forum" process, building on the experience of a diverse civil society from the national to the global levels, is critical to achieving a CSO development effectiveness framework.

The "Open Forum" process, running from September 2009 and October 2011, seeks consensus among CSOs on key elements of an *International Framework on CSO Development Effectiveness* (see Box 1). This *Framework* will be based on:

- a shared CSO vision of development effectiveness;
- diverse CSO approaches to development;
- relationships in development (partnerships); and
- the impact of CSO development actions on the poor and marginalized .

#### BOX 1

**An *International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness*** will include a set of principles, indicators, context-specific implementation guidelines, good practices for accountability mechanisms, and minimum standards for external enabling conditions. To facilitate significant CSO buy-in and utilisation of the *Framework*, the process for developing the *Framework* will be open and participatory, reflecting the overall institutional and contextual realities of CSOs.

With millions of diverse CSOs globally, the goal of the "Open Forum" is not to reproduce commitments to "*Paris Declaration for CSOs*" but to agree on a framework for development effectiveness. The *Framework* will have two agreed-to aspects:

1. Principles: Principles influencing CSO development effectiveness (e.g. CSO development actions must be people-centred, poverty-focused and based on human rights and social justice).
2. Guidelines: Guidelines on how to apply the CSO development effectiveness principles in national contexts and international CSO relationships (e.g. minimum standards for CSO accountability charters).

#### The "Open Forum": Multi-stakeholder in Character, Defining Norms and Minimum Standards

However important they may be, efforts to improve CSO development effectiveness cannot only address internal CSO structures and ways of working in development cooperation. Equally important are the enabling (and disabling) conditions established by donors (e.g. terms for funding) and by developing country governments (e.g. the implementation of laws and regulations governing CSO development roles). These external conditions affect the

capacity of CSOs to be effective development actors in their own right, as recognized by donors and developing country governments in the Accra Agenda for Action (see the Background Note 1 on the origins of the Open Forum). CSOs in many developing countries face challenging environments. Their roles as development actors touch directly on the rights of the poor and they are affected by the laws and regulations of governments. The "Open Forum" will, therefore, seek a multi-stakeholder agreement, with donors and governments, on minimum standards for enabling conditions for CSOs to be effective development actors.

### **The Open Forum seeks to:**

- Develop and promote an *International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness*.
- Document good practices for ensuring CSOs are accountable to the "Principles" and "Guidelines" in the *Framework*.
- Facilitate a learning environment on CSO development effectiveness so that CSOs can discuss issues and challenges relevant to their work as development actors. As much as possible, existing research, materials and accountability charters (such as ACFID's Code of Conduct) will be used.
- Engage in a sustained political dialogue with donors, governments and other stakeholders, at both country and global levels, to build understanding and support for an enabling environment for CSOs.

Background Note # 5 sets out the elements of the process through which the Open Forum will work on this agenda.

#### **BOX 2 Expected outcomes**

- 1) An **open process** inclusive of all CSO development actors.
- 2) A shared **vision** of development effectiveness.
- 3) Common **principles** for CSO development effectiveness.
- 4) **Guidelines** on how to apply the principles for CSO development effectiveness and **good practices** for context-appropriate mechanisms ensuring CSOs are held accountable to the principles.
- 5) **Multi-stakeholder agreement**, with donors and governments, reached by 2011, on minimum standards for enabling conditions for CSOs.

### **What the Open Forum is Not**

Despite the expectation of some donors, the "Open Forum" does not intend to reproduce a "Paris Declaration for CSOs". Why not? CSOs are too numerous and diverse in their approaches, missions, visions and expertise to be subject to a "one-size-fits-all" agreement on development effectiveness. In light of their huge numbers, CSOs do not have the resources and capacities to run a global monitoring and accountability mechanism. And rather than imposing yet another reporting mechanism on CSOs, the "Open Forum" seeks to integrate the *International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness* into existing, country-specific, monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and reporting mechanisms.