

FoRS Conference

Official accompanying event of the Czech EU Presidency

Conference on Civil Society Organisations Development Effectiveness Prague, 23 - 24 June 2009

Rationale and Background

In 2005, governments and donors confirmed in the Paris Declaration their commitments to increasing aid effectiveness. The Paris Declaration became an important document which frames some critical challenges to existing models of development cooperation and sets out principles to address them. For the past few years, CSOs, donors, governments and other development actors have been discussing and monitoring progress in implementing the Paris Declaration.

At the same time, donors and governments raised the question of whether the principles of the Paris Declaration can also be applied to civil society organisations. In the period preceding the Third High Level Forum in Accra (September 2008), CSOs in intensive consultations agreed that the Paris Declaration is relevant, but not applicable to CSOs for three main reasons:

- It does not reflect CSO priorities and the many diverse roles of CSOs in development,
- CSOs were not involved in negotiations and thus ownership was not ensured,
- CSOs want to measure themselves against “development effectiveness”, and not “aid effectiveness”.

While advocating donors to adopt a more holistic and ambitious aid effectiveness agenda that takes into account human rights, democracy, gender equality and focuses on reducing poverty and inequalities, and environmental sustainability CSOs began to reflect on their own principles of effectiveness and about their specific roles in development. In June 2008, they launched the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness. CSOs welcome that donors and governments recognized this process in the Accra Agenda for Action and committed to engage in it (enabling environment).

CSO representatives from Africa, Asia, Australasia, Europe, Latin America, and North America met in Prague, Czech Republic in June 2009 for the conference

on “CSO Development Effectiveness” to discuss effectiveness principles in the context of concrete development experience. The conference was open to other development actors and thus brought evidence that joint discussion and sharing of experience across sectors and regions is a key assumption for successful cooperation at local and international level.

Prague Conference Proclamation

Conference participants concur that the added value of the CSOs in development cooperation is, among others, based on four particular aspects:

1. Access and commitment to use grassroots knowledge of local conditions, contexts and motivations
2. Sensibility to human rights, understanding and empathy
3. Genuine partnership based on common vision and interests
4. Diversity of actors in terms of legal status, size, experiences or roles

In order to harness the added value of CSOs for increased development impact, **conference participants commit to discuss and explore within the Open Forum how CSOs relate to the following principles:**

In the field of Grassroots Knowledge:

- Democratic ownership (all key stakeholders must be involved already in the preparation of development strategies, programs and projects)
- Full participation and inclusiveness (development cannot be imposed, full participation of target groups and local partners is essential)
- Building on existing and emerging processes (catalyst of development processes and structures already alive in grassroots organisations and communities)
- Recognition and understanding of all contexts as unique and consideration for linkages and consequences (interventions cannot succeed as stand-alone projects, disregarding the external environment)
- Facilitating consensus on development priorities (with the aim to enhance the relevance of development programs, projects and advocacy actions)
- Willingness to take initiative and risk (to respond to emerging needs)

In the field of Human Rights, Understanding and Empathy:

- Focus on all human rights and human dignity (social, economic, cultural, civil and political rights are at the core of development)
- Frank communication and careful listening to partners and other actors (true discussions and sensitivity to intercultural relations must replace one-way monologues and empty proclamations)
- Communicating own experiences and lessons learned (practical experience must be communicated both within the team and among partners, universal theorems cannot be relied on)

- Mutual understanding and respect (not only understanding the conditions and opinions of the target groups, but also sharing experience and positions of the partners)
- Promoting gender equality and advocating to address the causes of vulnerability (not only advocating for the vulnerable and excluded but supporting their own efforts to claim their rights and creating environment where their voices are responded to)
- Challenging systems and structures that promote or condone inequality and discrimination in any form (and at any level - global, national or local)
- Solidarity among civil society activists and organizations (including support to human rights defenders)

In the field of Genuine Partnership:

- Mutual transparency and predictability (reliability and trust is a precondition for real partnership)
- Division of roles and joint/mutual responsibility and accountability (beside accountability towards donors, responsibility towards target groups - citizens must be strengthened)
- Facilitation and mediation of cross-sectoral cooperation (many actors share the same or similar objectives that cannot be reached but jointly)
- Sustainability (both development projects and development partnerships must be based on the principle of sustainability and not on conditionalities from one side, mutual capacity development and nurturing the partnership is a key assumption)
- Making explicit our own basic assumptions while respecting those of others (consciousness of how the differences influence our approach to development)
- Emphasis on good governance principles and on systemic changes (building a democratic environment is a means for active engagement of citizens)

In the field of Diversity of Actors:

- Respect for the diversity of CSOs (diversity in terms of missions and actions rather than diversity in terms of legal status)
- Mutual support between small and big, new and old, developed and developing CSOs (factors related to size, history, location or financial turnover must not be used to discriminate against certain CSOs)
- Mutual cooperation and sharing of best practices (even new or small CSOs can have significant experience from specific regions or with a specific topic)
- Combination and complementarity of different roles (CSOs act as donors, service providers, managers of projects and programs, advocates of the poor, watch dogs, facilitators of new ways of cooperation and supporters of changes)

- Readiness to propose and discuss new development cooperation frameworks (issues of predictability, transparency as well as flexibility, accountability for results and impacts and not for activities only, respect to human rights and focus on inclusiveness must be projected into a new development cooperation architecture)

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