Enabling Effective and Continued Participation of Civil Society in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Input for the High-Level Event of the General Assembly "The Contributions of Women, the Young and Civil society to the Post-2015 Development Agenda" from the Task Team[1] on Civil Society Development Effectiveness & Enabling Environment, February 2014

The world faces multiple global challenges that must be addressed in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Establishing the Post-2015 Development Agenda is nothing less than a momentous task; but ensuring full inclusivity will be a critical condition for meaningful ownership and commitment to this Agenda by all development actors.

Building on the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons (HLP)'s call for an "equal partnership of all stakeholders"[2] in pursuing a transformative and people-centred agenda, the Task Team offers some critical markers for the roles civil society can play in the determination and realization of the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals. More specifically this document highlights the critical role of civil society in relation to social inclusion and the space to effectively contribute to decision-making. These are the two factors that the concept note for this event deems determinant for the continuing and effective participation of civil society, youth and women in the design and implementation of the Post-2015 Agenda.

Civil society organizations as independent development actors

The role of civil society organizations (CSOs) as independent development actors was recognized in Accra at the 2008 High Level Forum (HLF) on Aid Effectiveness and again in Busan at the Fourth HLF in 2011. During the Busan Forum stakeholders forged "a new global development partnership that embraces diversity and recognizes the distinct roles that all stakeholders in co-operation can play to support development."[3]

Civil society and social inclusion

While CSOs play a multitude of different roles in sustainable development, such as humanitarian assistance, service-delivery and innovation, especially pertinent here is their role with respect to social inclusion. CSOs are often "particularly effective at reaching the poor and socially excluded, […] mobilising community efforts, speaking up for human rights and gender equality, and helping to empower constituencies."[4] CSOs can also be particularly effective at achieving high impact development results due to "their connections with marginalised populations or segments of the population that experience systemic discrimination in development processes, such as women, indigenous peoples or landless people."[5]

In the view of the Task Team, the Post-2015 Agenda can address the diverse and intersecting inequalities that challenge inclusive sustainable development prospects by explicitly acknowledging civil society's roles in advancing social inclusion. CSOs may have distinct priorities, plans and approaches in designing and implementing development programmes derived from the needs and priorities of the people they serve or represent. CSOs' 'right of initiative', that is, the space to create, seek support for and implement development initiatives based on the priorities and interests of their members and constituencies, is thus essential to enabling meaningful partnerships for inclusive development.

> *How to address inequalities that challenge inclusive sustainable development prospects?*
> 1. *Acknowledge and create an enabling environment for civil society roles with respect to social inclusion, in particular their capacities to reach and empower poor and marginalized populations.*
> 2. *Acknowledge civil society's 'right of initiative' as independent development actors.*

Civil society and space to effectively contribute to decision-making

CSOs can provide a vehicle for citizen participation in development policy and implementation, "drawing attention to issues that may otherwise be ignored by politicians, partisan political organs and governments."[6] "By bringing in

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[1] The Task Team was established in 2009 to monitor and strengthen commitments in relation to civil society and aid effectiveness in the lead-up to the 2011 Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness. The multi-stakeholder Task Team, composed of self-selected donors, CSOs and partner governments, affirms the need for ongoing effort to advance the Busan principles and commitments to democratic ownership and CSO development effectiveness and an enabling environment for civil society. The Task Team is co-chaired by representatives from the Government of Mali, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE).

[2] High Level Panel of Eminent Persons, A *New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development – The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda*, 2013, p. 3.

[3] *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation*, 2011, §22a and §7.

[4] OECD, *Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness: Findings, Recommendations and Good Practice*, 2009. p. 14.

[5] OECD, *supra*, p. 27

[6] OECD, *supra*, p. 27.

different, sometimes challenging perspectives to policy dialogue and public accountability" CSO involvement "helps to ensure the inclusion of different stakeholder perspectives in national development strategies and programmes."[7] Inclusive policy processes, when institutionalized and accountable, are the foundation for democratic ownership of country development strategies and their implementation. In Busan all stakeholders agreed to "deepen, extend and operationalise the democratic ownership of development policies and processes."[8]

In relation to dedicated space to effectively contribute to decision-making, the Task Team proposes the establishment of transparent, institutionalized and multi-stakeholder spaces for development policy dialogue, as a vehicle through which the diversity of civil society can reflect the voices of people it serves or represents. At country level, "this means that there are institutionalized opportunities for all development actors [....] – be they national or local governments, civil society, parliaments or the private sector – to engage in establishing and monitoring government priorities and plans such as reflected in Poverty Reduction Strategies or other development policies. It is through such inclusive processes that ownership in setting directions for the implementation of solutions can be built, in ways that draw from and engage the comparative advantage and synergies of the various stakeholders."[9]

The importance of an enabling environment for CSOs to maximize their contributions to the Post-2015 agenda

Evidence compiled by the Task Team documents significant challenges faced by civil society in many countries across the world where the space for civil society to engage in co-defining development priorities and approaches is shrinking. Civil society's ability to operate as independent actors, and to enter into partnerships with governments, the private sector and others towards the goals of eradicating poverty and advancing social justice, requires that there be minimum legal, regulatory and policy enabling provisions for CSOs to operate effectively. In its report, the HLP made a notable call for an enabling environment and access to due process as necessary for CSOs and other non-state actors to fulfil their varied roles in sustainable development.[10]

> *What* **measures** *must be taken to ensure that civil society, women and youth have the* **space to actively & meaningfully engage** *in shaping, implementing and monitoring the post-2015 Development Agenda?*
>
> 3. *Institutionalized transparent multi-stakeholder policy dialogue spaces that include the diversity of civil society, particularly the organizations of the poor and marginalized populations*
>
> 4. *An* **enabling environment** *in law and in practice and access to due process for CSOs and other non-state actors.*

In light of the above, the Task Team embraces the HLP's proposed goal to ensure good governance and effective institutions. This goal is especially pertinent to inclusive development if associated targets address the HLP's recognition that "citizens need a legal environment which enables them to form and join CSOs, to protest and express opinions peacefully, and which protects their right to due process."[11] The goals to increase political participation, including diversity of representation in public-decision making and civic engagement, as well as measures that ensure universal freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly and access to independent media and information, are noteworthy and welcomed contributions of the HLP. The Task Team has elaborated good practices in support of an enabling environment, consistent with human rights standards, for CSOs to maximize their contributions to development results.[12]

To conclude, the Task Team believes a fully inclusive multi-stakeholder process is indispensable to both determine the Post-2015 Development Goals and to realize meaningful partnerships for their implementation. The Task Team's own experience as a multi-stakeholder body in support of CSO development effectiveness demonstrates that consensus building through fully inclusive engagement is not only possible, but is essential for building shared understanding and real ownership of agendas for action that are politically feasible.

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[7] OECD, *supra,* p. 14.
[8] *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation*, 2011, §12a.
[9] Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment, *Review of Evidence of Progress on Civil Society-related Commitments of the Busan High Level Forum*, 2014. p. 5.
[10] HLP, *supra,* p. 4.
[11] HLP, *supra*, p. 9.
[12] Documents can be found on the site of the Task Team: http://taskteamcso.com/