

Evaluation Insights



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Support to Civil Society

Emerging Evaluation Lessons

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The role of civil society in development cooperation has featured prominently in development discourse in recent years. Governments of developed and developing countries at the High Level Fora on Aid Effectiveness in Accra (2008) and Busan (2011) have agreed to support civil society organisations (CSOs) to exercise their roles as independent development actors with a particular focus on the need to create an enabling environment for CSOs to fully contribute to the development process.

Civil society comprises more than the sum of formally constituted non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or CSOs. It includes a wider range of informal organisations, networks, and citizens' groups from traditional forms of civic association such as faith-based organisations and village heads to the emergence of new civic groups and actors as illustrated by the "Arab Spring". The DAC, until recently, has used the term NGO to gather statistical data on civil society. This Insight will use the term CSO, including in the use of DAC statistics, to better capture the diversity of civil society.

CSOs play many and varied roles in development cooperation. These include enabling people to claim their rights, influencing and monitoring development policies and practices, providing basic services to poor and marginalised communities, responding to humanitarian emergencies, and contributing to public awareness of development issues. Donors value CSOs as partners, particularly, for their grass-roots knowledge of poor communities, technical expertise, and as advocates for human and civil rights.

Most DAC members set out the rationale for their support to civil society in a civil society policy or strategy. Some consist of guiding principles on the contribution of civil society to development cooperation; others focus on operational guidelines for civil society support, particularly the funding of donors' domestic CSOs. The proposition that a strong, independent civil society contributes to good governance and pro-poor development outcomes is a common feature of most of these policies.

Many donors are reviewing their development policies in anticipation of a new framework for Official Development Assistance (ODA) after 2015, the target date for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). A number of civil society policies are also being reviewed to advance the aid effectiveness agenda and respond to changes in the evolution of civil society in developing countries. Several evaluations and studies have been conducted as part of this process that have explored the following key questions:

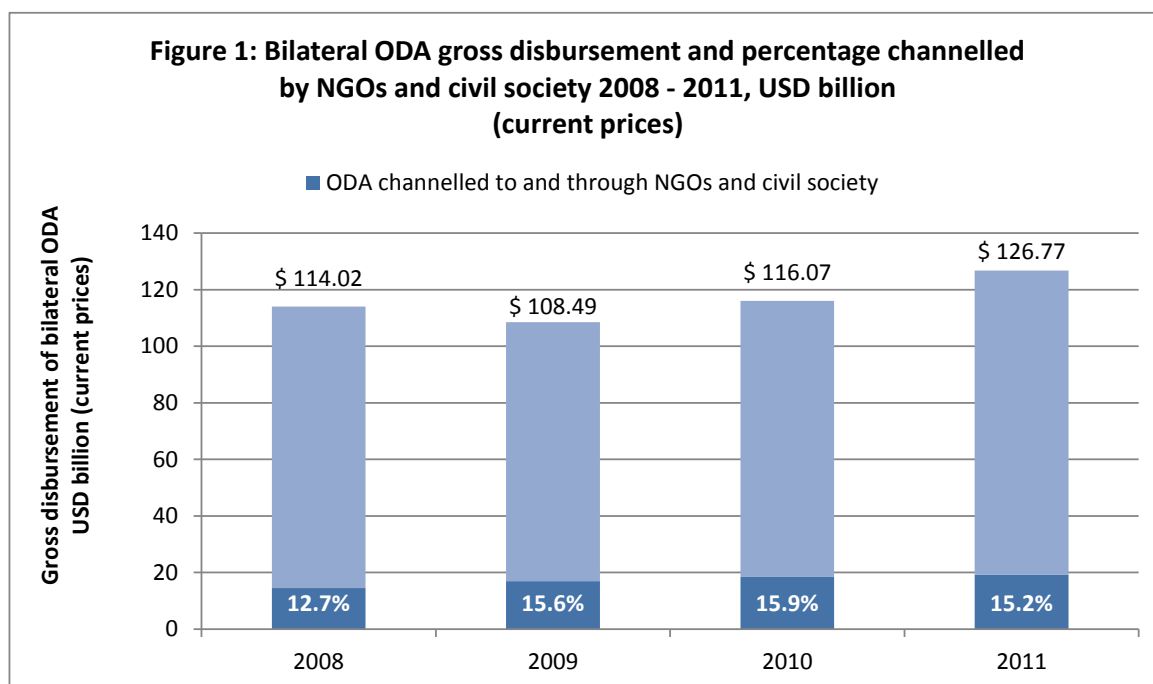
- How effective have CSOs been in contributing to development outcomes?
- How can civil society contribute to changes in government policies and practices that benefit the poor and marginalised?
- How can support to CSOs be most (cost) effectively channelled?

This Insight provides a summary of current trends in support to civil society, synthesises emerging lessons from recent research and evaluations on civil society support, and highlights some implications for policy makers and civil society partners.

SUPPORT TO CIVIL SOCIETY – TRENDS IN FUNDING

Funding support to civil society in developed and developing countries has steadily increased in the last decade through three main channels - Official Development Assistance (ODA) to and through CSOs, public donations to Northern CSOs, and the entry into the sector of major new corporate philanthropic donors.

DAC statistics¹ indicate that ODA provided to or channelled through CSOs increased from USD 14.5 bn in 2008 to USD 19.3 bn in 2011. During the same period ODA to and through CSOs increased from 12.7% to 15.2% of total bilateral ODA.



Source: DAC Creditor Reporting System Database, Channel Code in 20000 series.

DAC attributes most of the growth in ODA to CSOs to an increase in earmarked funding for service delivery e.g. in health, education and water and sanitation, to help meet the MDGs. CSOs certainly make a very significant contribution to service delivery in some countries – for example, one evaluation estimates that they represent 25% of the service delivery budget in Ethiopia, 40% of health services in Malawi, and 10-15% of education services in Nepal². DAC reports that most bilateral ODA channelled through NGOs in 2011 was for social infrastructures and

¹ All financial data derived from forthcoming, OECD-DCD, aid flows and trends for CSOs.

² Aboum, A. et al (2012), *Tracking Impact: An exploratory study of the wider effects of Norwegian Civil Society to countries in the South*, NORAD, p.39

services - 37% of NGOs interventions in the social sectors was on Government and civil society, followed by humanitarian assistance.

Donors assign different levels of importance to the support to civil society as reflected in their ODA figures. Just over two-thirds of DAC members allocated more than 20% of their bilateral funding to or through CSOs in 2011 and just more than a fifth allocated 4% or less.

Northern CSOs continue to be a preferred channel for ODA support to civil society in developing countries but there is evidence this may be on the decline. In 2009, DAC members provided around five times more aid to CSOs based in their countries than to international and local CSOs in developing countries. In 2011 this had been reduced to twice as much. Since 2009, indeed, some domestic CSOs have experienced significant drops in donor funding in a few countries as overall aid budgets have been reduced in response to the financial crisis (Ireland, Spain) or changes in government policy (The Netherlands).

Northern CSOs are also important fundraisers and donors. It has been estimated that in 2011, for example, Northern CSOs managed USD 41.3 bn on aid projects and programmes (directly or through implementing partners) – USD 19.3 bn provided by ODA and a further USD 32 bn raised from non-ODA sources, equivalent to 30% of the total amount of ODA in the same year. This latter figure is likely to be an underestimate.

In spite of these figures, current research indicates a growing donor interest in providing more direct support to CSOs in developing countries, in particular, through multi-donor funds in-country.

Box 1: Support to civil society: key trends

ODA support to civil society has been steady since 2009, although there are significant disparities between donors.

Growth driven mostly by earmarked funding for service delivery in support of MDGs.

Northern CSOs remain the primary conduit of support to civil society in developing countries, although there is growing interest in direct support to southern civil society.

ROLES OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Support to a strong, independent civil society in developing countries is justified in different ways in donor civil society policies and strategies:

- As development and/or humanitarian actors directly contributing to development or humanitarian outcomes e.g. in delivering services;
- As change agents indirectly contributing to development or humanitarian outcomes by supporting informed and active citizens to make governments more effective and accountable, to stimulate public debate, influence laws, and promote democratic processes, accountability and good governance;
- As a crucial component of the well-being of society with intrinsic merit, for example, by building more connected communities and enhancing social inclusion.

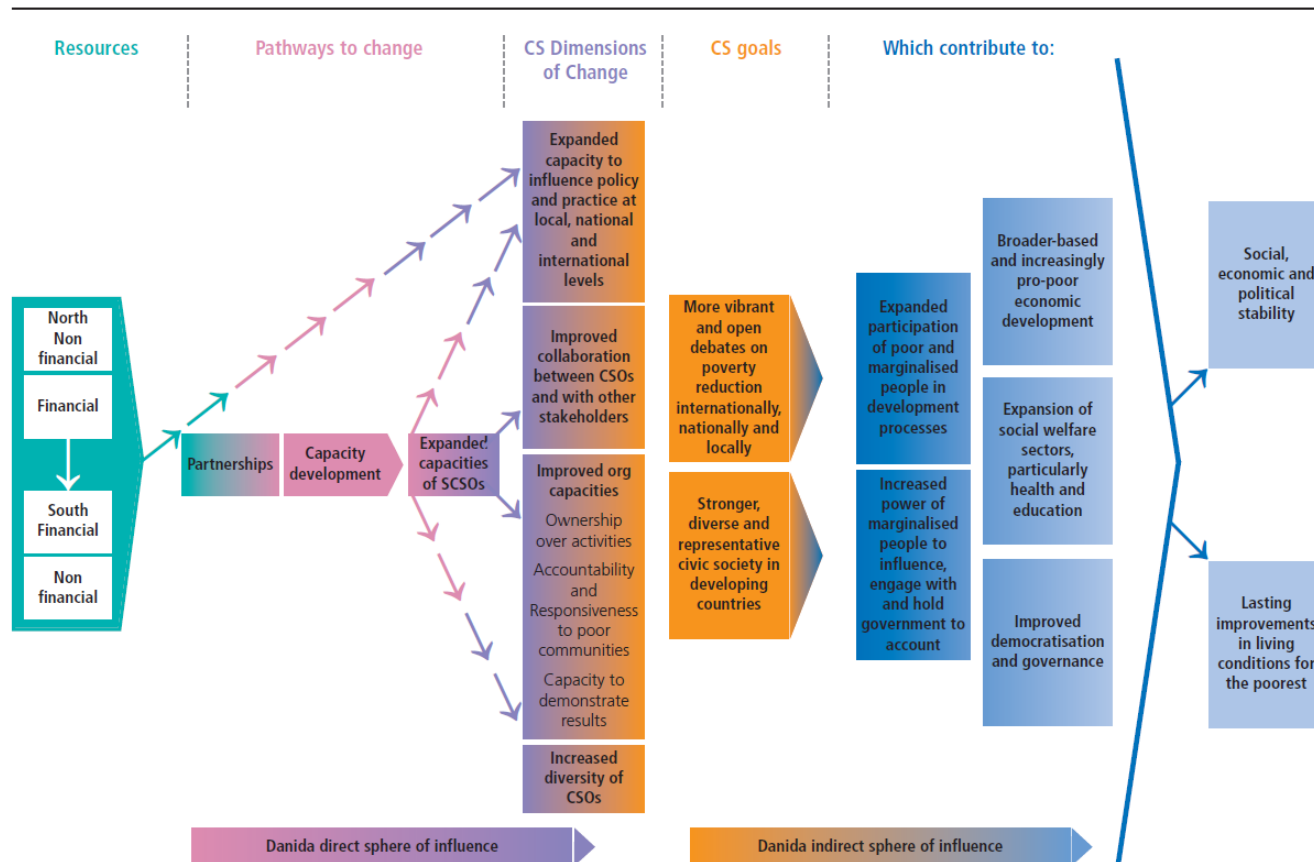
It is not always clear which of these roles, or combination of roles, donors expect civil society to play. More than half of DAC members' report their first reason for supporting CSOs to implement aid programmes linked to service delivery (OECD, 2011). Evaluations note that there is often a tension between these different roles for civil society support. Each role has different implications for the type of funding support that is appropriate and the way success is measured.

The plurality of possible roles highlights the importance of an explicit intervention logic or theory of change in donor civil society policies that identifies what support to civil society aims to achieve; how it will be achieved; and how

success will be measured. Some donors e.g. DFID and AusAid have developed a theory of change to justify their engagement with civil society and clarify how it is expected to contribute to development outcomes.

Many theories of change in relation to civil society are based on an assumption of a state which is capable and willing to respond to the demand of its citizens, as illustrated in the implicit intervention logic in the Danida civil society strategy below.

Danish Civil Society Intervention Logic



Source: INTRAC (2013), Evaluation of Danish Support to Civil Society

Several evaluations, however, have challenged how applicable this type of logic is to all contexts, for example where the state is weak, authoritarian or highly contested by different interest groups. It also does not take into account the possible role and power of other actors such as the private sector and their influence both on the state and civil society. A “political economy” analysis of state and non-state actors at country level is necessary to identify “drivers of change”, identify and support a range of civic actors with the potential to deliver pro-poor outcomes, and to temper expectations as to what is realistic and possible to achieve through support to civil society. The links between support to civil society, democracy, good governance and pro-poor development need to be regularly reviewed to enable both donors and CSOs to clarify what changes they might be able to influence, what changes are beyond their scope of influence, and whether their assumptions are still valid.

Box 2: Identifying the drivers of change in Vanuatu

In Vanuatu, AusAid has looked beyond “recognisable” types of civil society groups (such as service delivery or governance NGOs). Using a “drivers of change” methodology, it identified two categories of non-government actors - the churches and traditional chiefs - that had authority across the islands and were potentially important partners for its aid programme. The programme has worked with these actors successfully since 2007 to improve governance issues at a community and local level in particular incorporating ideas from the traditional governance system. (AusAID 2011)

Evaluations have noted that CSOs themselves do not have adequate theories of change which sometimes contributes to weaknesses in their programming and in their ability to monitor and measure the wider impact of their projects/programmes. This, in turn, can make an assessment of their impact on broader development outcomes more difficult.

DEMONSTRATING CSO IMPACT

There is ample evidence that CSOs play a key role in reducing poverty, marginalisation and vulnerability. CSO projects typically provide support to hard-to-reach areas and vulnerable populations, including women and children and marginalised minorities. The majority of CSO activities are at project or programme level. CSOs tend to focus on the immediate effects of their activities and evidence points to a shortfall in CSO capacity to monitor results at outcome and impact level. Thus, while there is considerable evidence of CSO activities delivering results at micro and meso levels, there is less systematic evidence on the contribution of CSOs to longer-term development outcomes, or their wider impact through for example replication or contribution to policy or practice change.

There is evidence of a potential tension between supporting CSOs to deliver development outcomes e.g. through results driven programmes, and to strengthen civil society e.g. by developing capacity through partnership. Donor governments are expected to demonstrate the tangible results of ODA to civil society, particularly at a period of crisis in many developed economies. A number of civil society studies have identified some possible negative outcomes as a result of a mechanistic interpretation of a results-based approach to work with civil society. These include:

- Pressure on CSOs to choose interventions more likely to produce measurable, short-term results may discourage them from focusing on wider development outcomes. DAC Peer Reviews suggest that donors should have reasonable expectations about the timeframe needed to achieve development results.
- CSOs may focus their monitoring and reporting on documenting results to satisfy the donor rather than to learn lessons or inform strategic planning.
- Greater time, energy and resources are invested in “upward” accountability to donors than in improving “downward” accountability to communities and other national stakeholders that is vital for strengthening CSO legitimacy.
- An over-emphasis on results may discourage donors supporting civil society actors such as grass roots organisations, traditional and faith-based groups and social movements. Donor funding arrangements and reporting requirements may place too high a barrier for such groups to access funding.

Box 3: QuAM: an attempt at CSO self-regulation in Uganda

The NGO Quality Assurance Mechanism (QuAM) was developed in 2006 for and by CSOs working in Uganda in response to the rapid growth in civil society. QuAM aims to promote improved CSO accountability to stakeholders by establishing three certification levels: provisional certificate, certificate and advanced certificate. The Provisional Certificate is for NGOs that are of recent creation and meet only selected minimum quality standards. These NGOs are expected to apply for full certification after one year. The full Certificate is issued when all minimum quality standards have been met. These must be respected by a certified NGO (or NGO network) at all times. The Advanced Certificate is issued to an NGO that has met all minimum standards, as well as all standards for improvement.

The introduction of QuAM as a system of self-regulation is positively viewed by stakeholders as a necessary exercise in the context of increasing corruption, particularly in the public sector. More than 50 Ugandan CSOs have undergone the certification process, including the two major national NGO networks.
(www.deniva.or.ug)

CSOs and donors together need to agree what they aim to achieve together and how success will be measured. The 12 Lessons from Peer Reviews on Partnering with Civil Society (OECD, 2012) suggest that a balance needs to be struck between reporting results for accountability and compliance purposes, and reporting in a way conducive to learning and programme development.

Box 4: Demonstrating CSO impact: emerging lessons

CSO activities have been effective in reducing poverty and vulnerability at a local level but there is less evidence of their contribution to broader, longer-term outcomes.

CSOs need to invest in M&E systems to improve the quality of data on the scale and nature of their impact.

In supporting CSOs as drivers for change, donors need to include qualitative and process-related indicators in monitoring and reporting requirements.

Donors should exercise caution with regard to the unintended consequences for civil society of a too rigid interpretation of a results-based approach.

Northern and southern CSOs are increasingly involved in advocacy work in order to scale-up impact by influencing policies and practices or improving government services that affect the poor and marginalised. There are many examples of fruitful North/South collaborations on advocacy, though studies which suggest that more could still be done to ensure that these are equal partnerships in which southern CSOs have their own voice in international debates rather than being instrumentalised in northern-led campaigns.

CSOs in developed and developing countries are becoming increasingly sophisticated in exploiting a growing media audience to communicate policy messages and build networks. In particular, the use of social and electronic media by CSOs to network on policy engagement is expected to become increasingly significant in the future.

Civil society is often seen to play an important role in strengthening democratic processes and good governance. There is considerable evidence of CSOs supporting citizen participation in local governance and contributing to public debate on national issues such as corruption. However, the potential for CSOs in developing countries to influence policy and practice varies from country to country. There is growing concern regarding the deteriorating environment in many countries for CSOs to organise, raise funds, and to speak out free from unwarranted state interference. Nonetheless, evaluations suggest that even in restrictive contexts CSOs have sometimes been able to build constructive relationships with and influence government on social issues, particularly at a sub-national level.

A number of evaluations highlight the need for donors to do more to support an enabling environment for CSOs e.g. by reminding signatory governments of their responsibility to international agreement such as the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation. There are a few examples of how this is being done effectively although the efforts of donors may be less visible to evaluators.

CSOs in some countries are criticised by government and the general public for being overly dependent on foreign support and subject to its influence. Evaluations have highlighted that the perceived legitimacy of CSOs is a precondition to successfully engaging in policy and advocacy work. Donor investment in strengthening CSOs' sustainability and accountability to their constituencies, therefore, may be as critical to supporting their policy work as defending them publicly at key moments.

Donors tend to feel comfortable in supporting CSOs to adopt an evidence-based approach to policy influence. Some evaluations indicate that socially-connected, urban CSOs can predominate in policy dialogue processes as smaller CSOs often lack the skills and expertise to successfully engage in research and advocacy. Longer-term funding support is necessary, therefore, to build the capacity and social capital needed by smaller CSOs to effectively engage in long-term policy dialogue. There is also evidence that successful CSO policy work, for example, through building broader-based coalitions can take a number of years and that support to CSO networking may be more important than support to CSO networks.

Recent reviews have highlighted some of the limitations in measuring the impact of CSO engagement in policy processes. While there is evidence of CSO advocacy contributing to new laws or policies, it is not always possible to directly attribute these changes to the work of the CSOs, and to document to what extent these changes have resulted in improvements in the lives of ordinary people. There is evidence that it is easier for civil society to achieve policy or practice change on social issues than to influence more politically contested policy issues. Even so, there is

Box 5: Policy engagement: a long term investment

AusAid has provided core funding to the Vanuatu's women's centre since 1999. This has helped them sustain a campaign over ten years to lobby for the extension of the definition of rape to include rape in marriage. This was finally achieved and the Centre is now providing advice to the Vanuatu Police Force in applying the act.

CARE Denmark has invested nearly ten years of support to build a coalition of CSOs working in forestry sector (Forest Watch Ghana) to hold government and the private sector to account for sustainable forest management. Forest Watch Ghana is the only civil society voice in the forest sector acknowledged by government.

The LO/LTF Council in Denmark has worked with two national trade union centres in Nepal since 2000 in their advocacy for the development of social security system. An agreement was reached in 2011 with the employers' organisations and Labour Department on establishing a social security fund that will benefit an estimated 1-2 million workers.

insufficient evidence of the effect that, for example, civil society monitoring of government services has had on the delivery or quality of the services provided.

Citizen disenchantment with the capacity of elected politicians and democratic process to respond to their needs has led in recent years to a resurgence of citizen mobilisation in some parts of the world. These non-formal and spontaneous forms of organisation, facilitated by social media and mobile communications, often bypass formal CSOs and present a challenge to donors. Recent studies on CSO policy engagement suggest that new forms of social mobilisation require a readiness on the part of donors to support more fluid forms of civil society association, unconventional civic alliances and processes of change rather than individual CSOs. They report CSOs expressing the need for flexible, responsive funding support for informal, temporary coalitions; networks of small, local issue-based groups; and for “tipping point” moments that occur during policy influencing processes.

Box 6: Civil society engagement in policy processes: emerging lessons

Donor support to CSO policy engagement requires political economy analysis of state and non-state actors to be based on realistic assumptions and expectations, particularly in unstable, fragile contexts.

In light of a deteriorating environment in many countries, donors should offer systemic support for an enabling environment for CSO policy engagement in addition to support to individual CSOs.

Funding support mechanisms should be able to support longer-term, evidence-based advocacy processes as well as offering flexible, responsive support to new, emerging civic networks and associations driving change.

THE DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTION OF NORTHERN CSOS

Northern CSOs often seek to raise people’s awareness of and engagement with development issues in their own national contexts in addition to advocating for national and international policy reforms. They are often prominent in international fora and can play a role in supporting southern CSOs to network with other actors regionally or globally. Northern CSOs frequently draw on their specialised expertise e.g. on child rights, health, and disability, to support their advocacy efforts and those of southern CSOs and networks.

Most donors continue to rely on domestic CSOs as a major channel for providing support to southern CSOs. They recognise their domestic role in public fundraising, development education, and public awareness work on development issues. Partnerships between northern and southern CSOs are seen as an effective means of helping to strengthen CSO capacity in developing countries and achieving development outcomes. North/South civil society partnerships can take other forms - for example, through people-to-people connections e.g. between youth groups and professional networking e.g. between journalists. Such horizontal partnerships contribute to skills transfer and, as they are based not only on a resource transfer but a common identity or interest, offer potentially interesting ways of strengthening global civil society links into the future.

Civil society evaluations have highlighted in recent years that southern CSOs value, in their relationships with northern CSOs, their capacity development support, international networking, access to specific technical competencies, and the long-term stability that durable partnerships bring. At the same time, evaluations consistently highlight the need for greater rigour in assessing and reporting the “added value” of these activities and, in particular, of capacity development efforts. Northern CSO capacity development activities too often focus on helping partners comply better with their own or donor reporting requirements than developing their organisational capacities more broadly. The 12 Lessons from DAC Peer Reviews (OECD, 2012) suggest that donors and civil society partners should agree on how best tracking the progress of their capacity development efforts and how they translate into changed individual and organisational behaviour and impact.

It has also been noted that the tendency for northern CSOs to select partners who share their thematic focus and/or religious/ideological frameworks and beliefs can inadvertently exclude traditional and more informal organisations.

Box 7: Framework Agreements with Northern CSOs: emerging trends

Extension of framework agreements. Donors acknowledge that framework funding was often based on historical relationships rather than a transparent process. There has been some broadening out of the framework funding to enable more organisations to access partnership agreements (Irish Aid, Sida, Netherlands, and DFID).

Establishment of due diligence procedures. Pre-contract due diligence or accreditation procedures have become increasingly common as a requirement for framework funding (DFID, AusAid, Irish Aid, SDC-Switzerland).

Introduction of resource allocation models. Some donors e.g. Irish Aid and DFID, have introduced resource allocation models to enable them to allocate/reallocate funding for framework organisations on the basis of scoring processes.

A focus on results. Donors are focusing more on evidence of results in the form of tangible outcomes (DFID) or the management for results i.e. an organisation's ability to plan for the delivery of results (Irish Aid). Some donors require NGOs to outline a theory of change as part of the funding application process (DFID and AusAid).

Tougher M&E frameworks. Donors are planning, experimenting with or requiring framework organisations to monitor and report on their programmes using standard indicators (AusAid, Sida) or to use specific DAC codes in order to aggregate results (IrishAid). DFID also assesses results through weighting the DAC evaluation criteria.

Most donors provide multi-annual, strategic funding for key domestic CSO partners, often known as framework agreements, in addition to project funding windows. Recent evaluations of northern CSO framework agreements indicate that the long-term commitment, local knowledge and specialised expertise of northern CSOs remain valuable assets for bilateral support to southern civil society. However, a number of trends have encouraged several donors to reappraise how to measure and maximise the added value of channelling ODA to southern civil society via domestic CSO framework agreements. These include the evolving maturity of southern CSOs, the increase in funding windows in the South, and the growth of international NGO or CSO confederations. The growth of the latter has posed some challenges to donors as to how they track their own contribution through these complex organisations to results on the ground. Northern CSO transaction costs can also be high due to number of administrative layers between the receipt of funds in host country, to country office, to local CSO partner, and finally to beneficiary communities. There is evidence that some donors are exploring ways to “re-balance” the North/South CSO partnerships through framework agreements to encourage them to be more responsive and accountable to southern demand.

Several donors have redefined their framework agreements in recent years in line with a results-based approach to development. Northern CSOs generally welcome the emphasis placed on demonstrating impact but some recent reviews of framework agreements have highlighted CSO concerns that:

- An over-emphasis on demonstrating short-term results may narrow the range of CSO programmes supported, inhibit innovation and risk-taking, and discourage programmes aimed at longer-term outcomes or complex processes of change which challenge attitudes and beliefs e.g. stopping female genital mutilation.
- The allocation of resources on a competitive process or on achievement of milestones can inhibit learning and distort reporting by providing incentives to present data in the best light.

Box 8: The distinctive contribution of Northern CSOs: emerging lessons

North/South CSO partnerships are seen as an effective means of helping to strengthen CSO capacity in developing countries and achieving development outcomes.

Several donors are reappraising how the added value of channelling ODA to southern civil society via NGO framework agreements can be measured and maximised.

There is growing interest in exploring new forms of partnership that are more responsive and accountable to southern demand.

There is concern about the possible distorting effects that rigid application of a results-based approach may have on civil society and the development process.

DIRECT FUNDING OF SOUTHERN CSOS

Support to civil society in developing countries through ODA is increasingly decentralised and channelled through donor country offices. A number of evaluations have suggested that donor support to civil society in the South through direct funding of southern CSOs, northern CSOs, and bilateral or sector programmes, should be better coordinated at country level to identify programme synergies and share learning.

The two main ways of providing direct support to southern CSOs are through:

- a) **Project/Programme Funding:** DAC members in recent years have tended to use project or programme activities to support CSOs that have specific comparative advantage in a sector or that have close links with beneficiary communities. This has the disadvantage for southern CSOs, as it is shorter-term funding linked to specific activities, of not enabling them to invest in their own organisational development and sustainability.
- b) **Core funding/Strategic partnerships:** As a result, the 12 Lessons from DAC peer reviews (OECD, 2012) suggest that members should strive to increase the share of longer-term, core funding support to civil society. This is seen as a (cost) effective means of funding CSOs which have the strategic and organizational capacity to deliver results as it:
 - Promotes local ownership by funding an organisation’s strategic or operational plan;
 - Enables such “strategic partners” to invest in their own organisational development and learning, and in cross-cutting issues such as gender in development;
 - Reduces the administrative burden for donors and CSOs if reporting is aligned with local partner systems.

Both programme and core funding for civil society can be found in the following forms of bilateral programme:

a) **Sector programmes:** Donor support to civil society through sector programmes is normally channelled through Government budgets, although some donors are committed to involving civil society in the design and implementation of the programmes. Studies tend to document civil society performing a “niche” role in sector programmes which offers them an opportunity to provide technical or capacity development services more broadly in the sector. Sector programmes have traditionally focused on the service delivery role of CSOs which can limit their influence on programme policy development or monitoring of the sector. However, with the adoption of a rights-based approach to development by some donors, CSOs are increasingly supported to hold duty-bearers to account for the service delivery e.g. in health and education, particularly at a local level.

b) **Multi-donor funds:** Research indicates a growing trend for donor to channel support to CSOs in developing countries through multi-donor funds. This is driven by donor harmonisation; to reach out to more CSOs in the South; and reduce transaction costs. Multi-donor funds often combine different funding windows to try to respond to the needs of different contexts, programmes and partners. Grants are most frequently awarded through a call for proposals. These are useful in terms of openness and transparency but evaluations suggest that they can involve high administrative transaction costs for donors and CSOs.

Box 9: The Tanzania Media Fund: a variety of responses to meet different needs

The Tanzania Media Fund (TMF) is a multi-donor initiative to foster independent, diverse, and high-quality media in Tanzania by supporting investigative and public-interest journalism.

The TMF provides funding to the media through a variety of individual and institutional grants - for example, a modest Rapid Release Grant to cover urgent news within a short timeframe; a New Media Grant to give e-journalists, bloggers and mobile phone reporters the opportunity to develop and improve on their craft; and an Institutional Transformation Grant to fund a one or two-year partnership between TMF and a media organisation to build a long-lasting legacy in the partner institution e.g. to set up a dedicated investigative journalism desk or launch a start-up publication.

The TMF promotes “learning by doing”. It deploys experienced journalists as coaches and mentors to co-develop ideas and provide on-going mentoring. Grantees reports on their outputs and impact are subject to peer review and TMF has developed a methodology to verify to what extent a claimed impact can be linked to TMF funding. It also uses public perception surveys to assess the degree to which the media is perceived to contribute to a culture of increased accountability in Tanzania.

There is growing interest among some donors to nationalise multi donor civil society funds in order to promote local ownership. A number of such independent funds exist e.g. the IDF in Uganda, FCS in Tanzania and ZGF in Zambia, governed by a board or steering committee dominated by or including civil society representatives.

Box 10: Strengthening donor support to CSOs as independent development actors

Increase multi-year core support to facilitate CSOs to operate as actors in their own right.

Provide a mix of funding modalities in order to reach and be relevant to the diversity of CSOs with their different roles, capacities, constituencies and approaches.

Improve donor coordination of country-level support to civil society, based on the local needs identified by CSOs and their constituencies, while taking into account donor policies and priorities.

Provide support to CSO networks and networking to facilitate CSO coordination, policy dialogue and, as appropriate, capacity strengthening.

Simplify and harmonise donor administrative requirements in dialogue with CSOs to reduce transaction costs.

Source: Working Party on Aid Effectiveness (2011)

The continuing financial dependence of many CSOs on donor support, particularly in developing countries, is widely recognised in civil society studies. While longer-term funding, for example, may contribute to their organisational sustainability, there is less evidence of strategies to encourage greater financial sustainability of CSOs. Some evaluations suggest that donors should experiment more with trust funds and endowment grants in developing countries to provide a more sustainable asset base for civil society support.

Many donors are under pressure from their own public and parliaments to demonstrate the effectiveness of ODA and to reduce their own transaction costs. These objectives are not necessarily mutually reinforcing. The evidence indicates that effective civil society support requires skilled personnel with the capacity to read and respond to changing complex contexts and that a mix of expert international and national staff is helpful. On the other hand, a number of evaluations have commented that the pressure on human resources facing donors and their embassies limits their capacity to manage programmes and harmonised initiatives. This has given rise to a concern that what donors fund, how they fund it, and who they fund may be driven more by organisational constraints than by what is effective in terms of civil society support.

Multi-donor funds are attractive to donors as a means of harmonising partnership agreements, monitoring and reporting requirements and thus reducing transaction costs (an initiative to develop a Code of Practice for harmonising donor support to civil society is currently being led by Sida). However, studies report some CSO concerns that a concentration of donor resources in one funding modality might create funding monopolies around donor priorities, reduce the diversity of funding mechanisms available to CSOs, and restrict funding for a wider range of CSOs and CSO priorities. There is evidence that the principal beneficiaries of multi-donor funds tend to be larger and better established organisations unless special funding windows or other kinds of affirmative action are used to target smaller, less experienced CSOs. This applies to both the use of calls for proposals and of core funding. Core funding, for example, may consolidate an elitist focus in civil society by favouring fewer, more capable organisations already well entrenched in the national context. This highlights the tension involved in balancing a commitment to “effectiveness” i.e. supporting CSOs most capable of delivering development outcomes, with “diversity” i.e. strengthening the fabric of a strong, independent civil society. Donors need to be careful not to support the CSOs of today, on the basis of yesterday’s performance at the expense of identifying and supporting tomorrow’s drivers for change.

There is a need for more research on multi donor funds to look at how their different practices and approaches have been more or less successful in managing some of these tensions and in supporting the development and capacity strengthening of a wide range of civil society actors.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

✓ ***A theory of change for civil society support***

A Civil Society Policy should:

- Set out, as part of the overall development cooperation strategy, the role that support to civil society plays in reducing poverty and vulnerability, supporting democracy and good governance; and building a strong, independent civil society.
- Include an intervention logic or theory of change that identifies what support to civil society aims to achieve, how it will be achieved, and how success will be measured.

Direct and indirect support to civil society in developing countries should be integrated into donor country programme strategies. The theory of change should be adapted to the local context based upon a political economy analysis of the drivers for change in that country. Regular reviews of country context and theory of change are necessary to ensure that support to civil society remains relevant and effective.

✓ ***Promote an enabling environment for civil society***

The conditions facing CSOs in many developing countries are likely to continue to be challenging. CSOs adopting a rights-based approach to influence government policy or to defend human rights are increasingly vulnerable in the face of restrictive regulatory regimes. Donors have an important role to play at country level in improving the regulatory environment for CSOs in keeping with existing international commitment, for example, providing support to regulatory bodies, supporting an independent media and access to information, and promoting the establishment of “invited spaces” CSOs to engage in policy dialogue.

✓ ***Strike a balance between development results and strengthening civil society***

Donor funding support for civil society should strike a balance between working towards their own policy goals and respecting the independent role of CSOs, between supporting CSOs to deliver development results and supporting an independent, diverse civil society.

Some key lessons for policy makers with regard to funding support are:

- Work with northern CSOs to clarify and demonstrate more effectively the value they add to the efforts of southern CSOs and support innovative, demand-led partnership models.
- Provide longer-term core funding when a CSO has demonstrated its capacity and effectiveness to deliver development outcomes.
- Ensure funding support is available to smaller CSOs, traditional forms of civic association and new, emerging civic actors through specially designed, flexible funding windows and/or positive discrimination.
- Choose partners through targeted rather than competitive approaches, where appropriate.
- Include civil society in the design, implementation and monitoring of sector wide approaches with partner governments.

✓ ***Base effective CSO partnerships on appropriate monitoring and reporting systems.***

Donors and CSOs share a common interest in effectively demonstrating and communicating the results of civil society support. There is less agreement about what kind of results, how they should be communicated and to whom. Donors and CSOs have different stakeholder hierarchies and, therefore, need to communicate impact in different “languages”. The type of monitoring and reporting systems required for civil society support has a powerful influence on the nature of civil society partnerships. To ensure a mutually beneficial, effective partnership donors and CSOs need to have a shared understanding of and commitment to:

- The purpose of funding support, the changes it aims to achieve, and appropriate ways of measuring and communicating these changes over time.
- An impact assessment framework appropriate to the type of programmes supported and the size and nature of the CSO.
- Systems and processes conducive to on-going learning and improvement.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS

✓ **Take forward the Istanbul Principles to demonstrate effectiveness and accountability**

CSOs across the world acknowledge their responsibility to demonstrate their effectiveness and accountability to poor and marginalised communities with whom they work, as well as donor and developing country governments. The Istanbul Principles, agreed by CSOs from more than 70 countries at the CSO-led Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness in 2010, represent a consensus on how CSOs want to be fully accountable for their development practices. Northern and southern CSOs should collaborate in taking forward the Istanbul principles by:

- Developing, as agreed, a framework and toolkit for CSO implementation and monitoring of the Principles that can be adapted to country contexts.
- Supporting and participating in national self-regulatory processes such as the NGO Quality Assurance Certification Mechanism (QuAM) in Uganda.
- Investing in their own monitoring and accountability processes e.g. by developing process tracking tools to demonstrate their contribution to change processes, to accurately disclose their achievements and improve their accountability to their primary stakeholders.

✓ **Northern CSOs to clarify and demonstrate added value to southern CSOs.**

Northern CSOs retain an important role in donor support to civil society in the South, in particular working in partnership with southern CSOs to develop their capacity and achieve pro-poor development

outcomes. A number of evaluations suggest that northern CSOs need to define more clearly the distinctive contribution they make to development cooperation. A number of factors, such as the evolving maturity of southern CSOs and the increase in direct funding to CSOs in developing countries, has focused attention in recent years on the added value to southern partners of channelling ODA through northern CSOs. This requires northern CSOs to identify and invest in their distinctive competencies and to improve how they monitor and report on their partnership and capacity development approaches and outcomes.

✓ **Innovate with new forms of partnership**

Research suggests that the dynamics of partnership relationships between northern and southern CSOs are changing. Northern and southern CSOs need to explore new, more innovative types of partnership, for example by:

- Reassigning budget holding and contracting responsibilities to Southern CSOs; and
- Upgrading accountability mechanisms to allow for greater feedback from beneficiary communities and from southern CSOs on northern CSO performance.

Current analyses of civil society also suggest that civil society collaboration with other sectors e.g. with public, private and academic sectors, is required to resolve common problems such as poverty and climate change. Civil society should take the initiative to encourage the formation of problem-solving, multi-sectoral partnerships to address specific issues or challenges that respond to the needs of the poor and the marginalised.

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Evaluation Insights are informal working papers issued by the Network on Development Evaluation of the OECD DAC. These notes present emerging findings and policy messages from evaluations and share insights into the policy and practice of development evaluation. This Insight provides a summary of current trends in support to civil society; synthesises emerging lessons from recent researches and evaluations on civil society support; and highlights some implications for policy makers and civil society partners. It was prepared by Cowan Coventry, an INTRAC Associate. Contact: jccoventry@yahoo.com

Further reading on development evaluation



Joint Evaluation


SUPPORT TO CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN POLICY DIALOGUE

Summary Report

Support to civil society engagement in policy dialogue

November 2012

As civil society and policy dialogue are an issue of increasing importance, an evaluation of Danish experiences with civil society engagement in policy dialogue in Bangladesh, Mozambique and Uganda was launched in 2011. The three countries were chosen for study based on the scope of CSO support from the commissioning donors, their differing contexts and the locations of previous CSO evaluations.



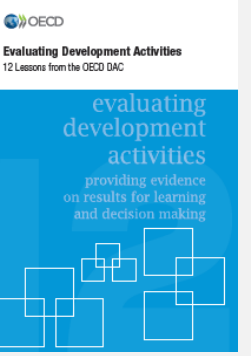
DFID's Support for Civil Society Organisations through Programme Partnership Arrangements

ICAI

DFID's Support for Civil Society Organisations through Programme Partnership Arrangements

May 2013

This report examines the Department for International Development's (DFID's) Programme Partnership Arrangements (PPAs) – one of the principal mechanisms through which it funds civil society organisations (CSOs). Through the PPAs, DFID supports CSOs that share its objectives and have strong delivery capacity.



OECD

Evaluating Development Activities

12 Lessons from the OECD DAC

evaluating development activities

providing evidence on results for learning and decision making

Evaluating Development Activities: 12 Lessons from the OECD DAC

June 2013

As development co-operation faces ever increasing pressures to demonstrate results, donors and partner governments need credible, timely evidence to inform their programmes and improve performance. Evaluation has a critical role to play in providing such evidence. New methodologies and ways of working are being developed to better understand what works, why and under what circumstances and improve mutual accountability. The 12 lessons on Evaluating Development Activities are aimed at strengthening evaluation for better learning and decision-making.

These free publications and more information on the DAC's work on evaluation and development co-operation can be found on the website:

www.oecd.org/derec