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Shifting Power with Partners

Toolkit for implementing the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance

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Best Practices in Development Co-operation

Shifting Power with Partners

Toolkit for implementing the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance

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Foreword

The DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance, adopted in July 2021 underpins DAC members' commitment to enable civil society's contribution to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to protect and strengthen democracy.

The Recommendation guides DAC members and other development co-operation and humanitarian assistance providers in protecting and promoting civic space and working with civil society actors, underscoring enhanced effectiveness, transparency, and accountability.

The Recommendation contains 28 provisions outlining adherents' commitments. As many provisions are inter-linked and mutually reinforcing, the OECD clustered some into toolkits to help DAC members translate the Recommendation into practice. Toolkit topics and priorities were identified in consultation with the DAC Community of Practice (CoP) on Civil Society and informed by input from the DAC Civil Society Organisations Reference Group (CSO RG).

In line with the broader agenda for locally led development, this toolkit is part of the thematic series on supporting civil society in partner countries as independent development and humanitarian actors to strengthen local ownership and leadership. Another toolkit in this series is the *Funding civil society in partner countries* toolkit, published in 2023. (OECD, 2023[1]).

Shifting Power with Partners: Toolkit for implementing the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance draws on desk research and a review of the literature, and various policies, reports and evaluations. It benefited from peer-learning exchanges and sharing of practices, particularly with the CoP on Civil Society, including during meetings in December 2022, June 2023, and November 2023. The CoP assigned a sub-group (the Sounding Board) to this toolkit, which contributed evidence, shared knowledge and provided input throughout 2023. Two CSO RG representatives, one from the Global North and one from the Global South, were also members of the Sounding Board. Additional consultations included written inputs from the CSO RG, the OECD Development Co-operation Directorate (DCD), and across the OECD.

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Executive summary

In development co-operation and humanitarian assistance, strategic choices, budget allocations, and policy decisions are often made in the provider country with little input from people closer to communities in partner countries. In addition to historical, institutional, and cultural barriers to change, development co-operation actors often face pressures that hinder adjusting to locally driven ways of working. These power imbalances lead to effectiveness gaps in programming and lack of local ownership by partner-country civil society organisations (CSOs). Development co-operation and humanitarian assistance providers (hereafter "providers") must address biases that reinforce imbalanced relationships and support more equitable partnerships to enhance the effectiveness of development co-operation with civil society.

This **toolkit offers guidance for providers to establish and incentivise more equitable partnerships with and between CSOs.** It aims to help them deliver on the following provisions of the OECD DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance for strengthening local ownership and leadership, and supporting civil society in partner countries as independent development and humanitarian actors:

- **Promote and invest in the leadership of local civil society actors** in partner countries or territories by, where appropriate and feasible, ensuring local civil society actors are involved in decision-making based on equal power relations with supported civil society strategic alliances, networks, platforms and resource centres, in the design, budgets, and implementation of their programming (Pillar Two, para. 4, section c.).
- **Work with and support CSOs to implement mutual capacity strengthening** to address CSOs' vulnerabilities and bolster their resilience, accountability, and effectiveness, especially at partner-country or territory level (Pillar Three, para. 3).
- **Support more equitable partnerships** between provider-country and/or international CSOs, and the partner-country or territory CSOs they work with in which the comparative advantages of each type of CSO are appropriately drawn from (Pillar Three, para. 4).
- **Promote participatory and rights-based approaches** for local ownership and accountability of CSOs and their activities throughout programme design, implementation, and monitoring, while helping ensure that programmes do not exacerbate existing forms of discrimination or inequalities (Pillar Three, para. 5).
- **Foster CSO leadership and innovation** in identifying and adapting new approaches to solving development and humanitarian challenges, including through partnerships and co-creation with a range of actors (Pillar Three, para. 6).

The guidance is structured around five areas (see Table 1), highlighting the most effective options for providers, as well as additional considerations and mitigation approaches to avoid unintended consequences.

Table 1. Summary of guidance for supporting more equitable partnerships

GUIDANCE AREA	MOST EFFECTIVE OPTIONS	ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS
Complementarity of diverse civil society actors	• Support uptake of different roles for partner-country CSOs and for provider-country/international CSOs • Ensure that local capacities are valued in CSO partnerships • Facilitate long-term partnership-building and its evolution • Learn from long-standing development co-operation modalities based on complementarity, such as South-South or triangular co-operation	• Draw from providers' local staff knowledge and expertise while shifting resources to partner countries • Do not advantage one community, political group, ethnicity, or religion above others with providers' support to local CSOs • Align the intermediary model with partner-country CSO needs • Favour the participation of the most marginalised people and CSO networks with strong representation from local communities in partner selection processes
Equitable decision-making and inclusive dialogue	• Include partner-country CSOs in decision-making bodies of partnerships • Enable CSOs to implement participatory grant-making or aspects of it • Respect the agency of civil society in taking power • Support dialogue with partner-country CSO leadership and staff • Include partner-country CSOs in providers' national and international policy dialogues • Diversify providers' staff for inclusivity and diversity of voices • Evaluate policies, strategies, and programmes to ensure local actors' agency	• Consider covering costs for partner-country CSOs to participate in steering functions • Share risks with provider-country/international CSOs acting as intermediaries • Be aware of negative sources of informal power (e.g., financial dependency, gender) • Be open to diverse tools for dialogue with partner-country CSOs (e.g. WhatsApp) • Empower embassies to connect with local organisations, including outside of capitals • Do not advantage one community, political group, ethnicity, or religion above another through local CSOs' participation in policy dialogues
Mutual and locally led capacity strengthening	• Expand capacity strengthening and use innovative methods (e.g., coaching, shadowing, mentoring, and peer learning) • Define capacity needs at partner-country level • Assess the capacity of actors in capacity strengthening programs/projects by mapping strengths and weaknesses • Support partner-country CSOs' full-cost coverage and sustainability	• Scale capacity assessment to programme/project size and scope, to avoid assessment fatigue and administrative burden • Acknowledge that partner-country CSOs' complex operating environments might impact their performance
Shifting power through funding and compliance	• Shift funding modalities to favour partner-country CSOs' ownership and leadership, such as core and flexible support, and responsive funding • Establish a funding distribution target between provider-country/international CSOs and partner-country CSOs in partnerships • Fund costs associated with partnership-building and encourage building trust between partners • Reduce access barriers to funding informal civil society • Apply feminist principles to funding and compliance • Ensure full coverage of partner-country CSOs' overhead/indirect costs and facilitate cost recovery in partnership agreements • Revisit approaches to risk management	• Recognise that competitive funding can impose a heavy burden on CSOs with limited human resources • Require full transparency by provider-country/international CSOs about resources transferred to partners and funds invested in partner capacity strengthening • Be aware that uncoordinated external support to movements can cause harm • Do not use funding allocated for capacity strengthening activities to replace overhead costs
Inclusive communication, language, imagery, and storytelling	• Abandon harmful and stereotypical narratives about development co-operation in partner countries • Assess language and imagery with partner-country experts and partners • Produce guidance and learning material for staff	• Do not shy away from portraying realities such as poverty and conflict authentically in communications, but avoid exploiting these images for public support in provider countries

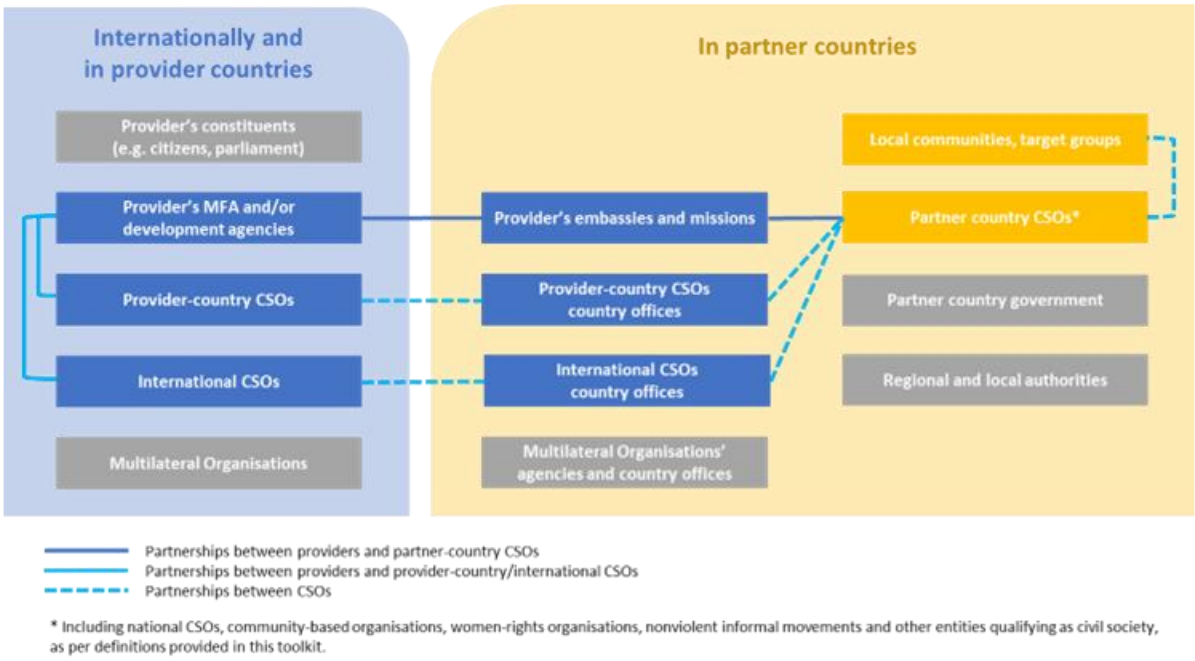
1 The case for shifting power with partners

On 6 July 2021, the DAC adopted the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance (OECD, 2021[2]). The OECD Development Co-operation Directorate is now developing toolkits to offer guidance on what its provisions could look like in practice, in consultation with the DAC CoP on Civil Society[1] and the CSO RG.[2] Each toolkit addresses a cluster of related provisions in the DAC Recommendation and is directed to its Adherents and prospective Adherents, namely country governments and international organisations that are providers of development co-operation and humanitarian assistance (hereafter 'providers"[3]).

This toolkit helps providers support and incentivise shifting power towards more equitable partnerships with and between CSOs.[4] For partnerships between CSOs it explores power imbalances inherent in partnerships between provider-country or international and partner-country CSOs (OECD, 2024[3]; OECD, 2023[4]),[5] though these reflections might apply across CSO partnerships of a different nature too (Figure 1.1). The toolkit is not intended to be prescriptive, but rather to point providers towards the types of partnerships they might wish to engage in or support.

Figure 1.1 provides an overview of the main partnerships and relations addressed in this toolkit (blue lines) and the actors they involve (blue and orange boxes). It aims to clarify the focus of the guidance provided in the following chapter, without prejudice to the complexity of the reality and recognising that it shows a non-representative portion of all actors and relations existing in development co-operation and humanitarian assistance, at the international and provider-countries' levels and at the partner-countries' level.

Figure 1.1. Overview of main partnerships addressed in this toolkit



Even if conceived as a stand-alone publication, the current toolkit follows the *Funding civil society in partner countries* toolkit (OECD, 2023[1]), which addresses the following guidance topics:

- Values and principles
- Funding target
- Dedicated human resources
- Funding channel
- Funding modality
- Identifying partners
- Managing risk: Administrative and financial procedures and compliance requirements
- Transparency
- Monitoring progress towards localising

The reader will benefit from having familiarity with them.

Shifting power with partners facilitates progress towards locally led development and enhances effectiveness

Development actors increasingly recognise that the current system of international development co-operation needs to address systemic power imbalances. Debates around locally led development (LLD), #ShiftThePower, decolonisation of aid, and development effectiveness all increasingly demand that long-standing development co-operation models and practices are updated or reformed for continued relevance and sustainable impact (Global Fund Community Foundations, n.a.[5]; OECD, 2023[6]; Peace Direct, 2021[7]).

Civil society actors in partner countries are advocating to exercise their agency in development. They demand increased ownership and leadership in the definition of development priorities, and relations

that are mutually beneficial and grounded in a spirit of trust, equity, solidarity, and complementarity (CPDE, 2023[8]; NEAR, 2023[9]). Provider-country or international CSOs (hereafter, "provider-country/international CSOs") and providers are asked to cede their power in a spirit of global solidarity, embracing a vision of society built around inclusivity and distributed leadership (Global Fund Community Foundations, n.a.[5]). This requires a significant shift in their values, principles, mind-sets, and language. It means redefining theories of change to open new ways of working that enable local actors to exercise agency, knowledge, and power.

More inclusive and equitable partnership modalities with and between CSOs can support this power shift, for more effective development actions and more sustained impact. They can enable an environment in which the diversity of CSOs' resources, interests, and beliefs are properly understood and valued, and where partner-country CSOs can fulfil their potential (NEAR, 2023[9]). That said, not all civil society actors hold or operate according to rights-based and democratic values. Recognising that it is not possible to characterise all civil society as having a common mandate, this toolkit focuses on actors "characterised by relationships of social solidarity with marginalised populations and concerns for social justice" (OECD, 2010[10]).

Box 1.1. Defining concepts related to shifting power with partners

Partnerships with and between CSOs occur along a continuum. They range from transactional (based on contracting specific services and a provider-recipient relationship) to collaborative and transformational (based on active participation, co-creation, and optimal combination of partners' resources to deliver better results) (Social Development Direct, Plan International, 2022[11]). While they serve varied legitimate purposes, longer-term and transformative engagement built on qualities like inclusivity, respect, trust, humility, and reciprocity have the greatest potential to enable societal change and benefit both partners and the communities they serve (OECD, 2023[12]; Peace Direct, 2023[13]).

As defined in this toolkit:

- **Shifting power with partners** means transferring and/or ceding control over resources and decision-making in partnerships (between providers and CSOs as well as between CSOs) for increased local ownership and leadership in defining development priorities that respect principles of social solidarity and justice, ultimately achieving more equitable and just power relations, and access to resources (CPDE, 2023[8]; OECD, 2023[1]).
- **Equitable partnerships** means relations between at least two partners to achieve shared goals addressing local needs and priorities. Decision-making is inclusive of all partners, building on a compatible vision and commitment to systemic change, and drawing on the resources and talents of each (Peace Direct, 2023[13]). Equitable partnerships need not seek equally distributed resources and opportunities. Instead, they recognise the circumstances of each partner – including long-standing issues of inequitable power relations – to share or cede power and resources with a context-specific, differentiated approach (CPDE, 2023[8]).

In recent decades, several international frameworks, initiatives, and commitments recognised the importance of equitable partnerships to localise support for civil society ((OECD, 2023[14]). (OECD, 2023[14]; OECD, 2023[1]).[6] The signatories of the 2010 Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness agreed to "pursue equitable partnerships and solidarity with CSOs and other development actors, freely and as equals" (Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness, 2010[15]).

Actions by the signatories of the 2016 Grand Bargain address ways to shift resources and decision-making to local responders and people receiving aid[7], including through the 2021 Caucus on the Role of Intermediaries to foster robust relationships and equitable partnerships among humanitarian actors (The

Grand Bargain, 2022[16]). Principles to support locally led climate adaptation were launched at the 2021 Climate Adaptation Summit, endorsed by over 120 governments, leading global institutions, and local and international CSOs, emphasising the need for accessible and predictable funding, investing in local capabilities, and ensuring local actors' direct access to decision-making in climate finance (International Institute for Environment and Development, 2021[17]).

Provider countries also stepped up their commitments to locally led development through the adoption of the OECD DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance and the Donor Statement on Supporting Locally Led Development. And they are increasingly addressing locally led development in their development co-operation policies or strategies. For example, the need for local leadership is integrated throughout the UK's 2023 International Development White Paper, which commits to developing a local leadership strategy (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, 2023[18]). A total of 48% of OECD members responding to the 2020 Survey on Open Government have a policy or strategy dedicated to promoting CSOs as part of development co-operation, with some referencing the need to build CSO autonomy and independence for greater local ownership (OECD, 2022[19]).

In parallel, the need to change partnership practices between provider-country/international CSOs and partner-country CSOs is gaining traction among CSOs worldwide, with several commitments, projects, and campaigns increasingly present on the global development scene (Box 1.2).

Box 1.2. Select civil society-led initiatives and commitments to catalyse change and shift power with partners

- Pledge for Change 2030
- RINGO Project: Re-Imagining the INGO and the Role of Global Civil Society
- Peace Direct Time to Decolonise Aid (2021) and Transforming Partnerships in International Cooperation (2023) reports
- #ShiftThePower movement and manifesto
- Accelerating Inclusive Power Shift project
- Giving for Change programme
- Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network

Development actors need to make greater effort to shift power with partners

Despite commitments made by multiple actors, changes are yet to be fully realised in practice. Providers and CSOs still operate in a development co-operation chain that often results from relationships that cascade from the Global North to the Global South (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2023[20]) (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2023[20]).[8] Strategic choices, budget allocations, and policy priorities are decided in the Global North, and people closer to the communities enter the process after important decisions have already been made. In this context, decisions can be ineffective or inappropriate, leading to sub-optimal programming without local ownership or long-term sustainability. Control over funding remains an important, if not determinant source of power. Upward accountability mechanisms tend to define the terms of relationships, compliance with which Global South partners depend on as funding is often essential for their survival (Partos, 2022[21]).

Power imbalances and related barriers to change can be of different natures. Imbalances and barriers can be institutional, such as when development priorities are defined in provider countries with top-down

approaches to implementation. They can also be historical or cultural, such as when they are based on paternalistic attitudes, lasting impacts of colonial history and other forms of global inequality. For example, the prevalent idea that higher income countries are best placed to assist people in lower income countries and less likely to mismanage financial resources is not based on fact but on biased narratives (From Poverty to Power, 2023[22]; Partos, 2022[23]; OECD, 2023[6]). As noted in the *Funding civil society in partner countries* toolkit, the concept of structural racism is increasingly used by analysts of the development co-operation system to cast light on power imbalances (Acharya, 2022[24]; Barnett, 2020[25]; Currion, 2020[26]; International Development Committee, 2022[27]; Omlo at al., 2022[28]; Peace Direct, 2021[7]; The New Humanitarian, 2020[29]).

Progress is affected by the complexity inherent in incentives and pressures faced by development actors. The diversity of civil society actors and the range of partnerships and other forms of engagement across geographic levels create a complex picture that needs time to adjust to locally driven ways of working. Providers might encounter resistance to change, including from their domestic constituencies (e.g. publics, parliaments, CSOs) and hurdles to revising the bureaucracy of partnership terms and conditions. Provider-country/international CSOs might resist or be slow to reform their organisational structures, business models, and capacities, including to accept downsizing their activities. For many partner-country CSOs, overcoming decades of imposed development co-operation models and the power imbalances that come with them requires a mind-set change (DAC-CSO Reference Group, 2023[30]).

For providers, supporting a shift in power with partners covers a range of activities carried out directly with CSOs and pertaining to relations between CSOs. These activities range from consistently supporting CSOs in partner countries directly to enabling equitable relations between CSOs at different geographic levels and that draw on the comparative advantages of each type of CSO.

The current provider set-up often implies funding restricted or earmarked to provider-country/international CSOs. This impedes more direct support to partner-country CSOs, which is considered most conducive to enabling and strengthening local ownership by CSOs in partner countries and can bring efficiencies by shortening the aid chain from providers to beneficiaries (OECD, 2023[1]). Direct funds for CSOs in partner countries remain marginal despite a slight increase in the past two years: in 2022, only 9.8% of DAC members' CSO funding went directly to partner-country CSOs (OECD, 2024[3]). The *Funding civil society in partner countries* toolkit details several reasons for this (OECD, 2023[1]) (OECD, 2023[1]).[9]

Providers need to be conscious of power imbalances between provider-country/international CSOs and partner-country CSOs caused or exacerbated by providers' operating methods. They can start by reflecting and articulating the values and principles that guide their development co-operation, including understanding biases or negative assumptions and narratives about partner-country civil society actors (OECD, 2023[1]).[10] They also need to embrace doing-no-harm by not creating or reinforcing imbalanced relationships between the CSOs they work with (OECD, 2023[1]).

2 Guidance for supporting more equitable partnerships

This chapter guides providers to support more equitable partnerships with and between CSOs in development co-operation and humanitarian assistance. It describes issues related to the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance, and points to solutions. It offers examples of tools and practices by CSOs and development co-operation providers that help address these issues. However, the solutions, practices, and tools proposed must be adjusted to specific country contexts.

The first three sections in this chapter – 'Complementarity of diverse civil society actors'; 'Equitable decision-making and inclusive dialogue'; and 'Mutual and locally led capacity strengthening' – cover issues directly related to provisions of the DAC Recommendation addressed by this toolkit. The fourth section – Shifting power through funding and compliance – covers an essential aspect of providers' CSO engagements. Complementing coverage of this topic in the *Funding civil society in partner countries* toolkit details several reasons for this (OECD, 2023[1])[11], the approach here examines how providers can enable more equitable partnerships with and between provider-country/international CSOs and partner-country CSOs. Finally, the fifth section – Inclusive communication, language, imagery and storytelling – addresses an issue key to shifting power with partners, despite not being directly covered by the DAC Recommendation.

Complementarity of diverse civil society actors

***DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society* provision addressed in this section**

To incentivise CSO effectiveness, transparency, and accountability (Pillar Three), the DAC Recommendation invites Adherents to support "more equitable partnerships between provider country [CSOs] and/or international CSOs and the partner country CSOs they work with, in which the comparative advantages of each type of CSO are appropriately drawn from" (Pillar Three, para. 4).

Table 2.1. Enabling complementarity of diverse civil society actors

1. SUPPORT UPTAKE OF DIFFERENT ROLES FOR PARTNER-COUNTRY CSOs
• Increasingly work with intermediaries in partner countries. • Work with networks that support leadership of member CSOs.
Working with networks can reach a wider and more diverse set of actors.
Shifting resources to partner countries should draw from providers' local staff knowledge and expertise. Providers' support should empower local CSOs without advantaging one community, political group, ethnicity, or religion above another.
2. SUPPORT UPTAKE OF DIFFERENT ROLES FOR PROVIDER-COUNTRY/INTERNATIONAL CSOs
• Support creation of dedicated structures and resources to enhance CSOs' capacity for regular reflection, assessment, and learning regarding changing roles. • Request descriptions of roles in program/project proposals and monitoring. • Support partnerships where provider-country/international CSOs have different roles and supporting functions from partner-country CSOs.
While the uptake of roles other than that of intermediary is a desirable outcome to shift power, the intermediary model should be assessed in context and in response to the needs of partner-country CSOs.
3. ENSURE THAT LOCAL CAPACITIES ARE VALUED IN SUPPORTED CSO PARTNERSHIPS
• Assess programs/projects on the basis of local capacities, such as knowledge of local context and environment, technical capacity, long-term presence on the ground, ability to access marginalised and isolated people, links with local grassroots organisations and communities, etc. • Develop guidelines to develop more equitable partnerships with local ownership.
4. FACILITATE LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIP-BUILDING AND ITS EVOLUTION OVER TIME
• Ensure time and funding necessary for CSO partnership creation in funding agreements. • Favour long-term and flexible funding over short-term project support. • Support partner selection and partnership creation processes (e.g., matchmaking platforms). • Encourage the evolution of CSO partnerships so that partner-country CSOs take on more responsibility.
Participation of the most marginalised groups and of CSO networks with strong representation from local communities should be favoured in partner selection processes.
5. LEARN FROM LONG-STANDING DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION MODALITIES BASED ON COMPLEMENTARITY
• Find inspiration from modalities such as South-South and triangular co-operation, which support learning and knowledge-sharing among partners with the aim of achieving knowledge co-production.

Description

CSOs are defined in this toolkit according to their geographic location (i.e., provider-country, international, and partner-country) but, even within these groupings, **CSOs differ in their scope, size, structures, governance models, and more.** They can include NGOs, foundations, co-operative societies, trade unions, and other entities. Civil society can also be organised with varying formality, and with informal CSOs, community-based/grassroots organisations, and nonviolent social movements taking part in civic life and development co-operation. Such diversity is enriching and implies different resources and knowledge that can increase development effectiveness and impact (Box 2.1) (van Wessel, Naz and Sahoo, 2020[31]; DAC-CSO Reference Group, 2023[30]).

The diversity of civil society actors offers potential to benefit from their comparative advantages. Providers struggle to engage in direct partnerships that enable partner-country CSOs to exercise agency (see section 'Development actors need to make greater effort to shift power with partners'). Providers tend to rely on provider-country/international CSOs' intermediary capacity and risk-absorbing capabilities rather than leveraging resources that could complement local capacities – contradicting the aim of locally led development (USAID, 2023[32]). From CSOs' perspective, while recognising the importance of examining and revising their roles in partnerships to enable local ownership and leadership, they find changing structures and business models far more complex to achieve than political will, and could benefit from providers' support (DAC-CSO Reference Group, 2023[30]).

Box 2.1. Understanding the complementarity of diverse civil society actors

Current narrative and practice often refer to **provider-country/international CSOs as intermediaries**. But this describes only one of their functions (The Grand Bargain, 2022[16]).[1] They also act as direct donors, using their ability to raise public and private donations beyond those available from official providers. These roles of intermediary and fundraiser allow them to fund partner-country CSOs when support from official providers is not available, giving provider-country/international CSOs power to shape development actions in partner countries (CPDE, 2023[8]).

Resources associated with provider-country/international CSOs include access to specialised knowledge (e.g., about providers' financial and programme compliance requirements), proximity to and familiarity with international political fora and decision-making arenas, and access to new ideas and developments. They also tend to have international credibility, especially when it comes to minimising funders' risks (CPDE, 2023[8]; van Wessel, Naz and Sahoo, 2020[31]). Further, they often have political influence in provider countries, including to protect ODA flows for CSOs (OECD, 2020[33]).

Among other resources, **partner-country CSOs bring local experience and expertise** in community mobilisation; geographical, territorial, and thematic knowledge of local realities and challenges; and access to diverse national and international Global South platforms and partner-country authorities (OECD, 2010[10]; van Wessel, Naz and Sahoo, 2020[31]). Their credibility resides in their ability to deliver sustainable, community-owned results that address the root-causes of problems and involve marginalised people. Their proximity to local communities lets them build trust with local and national stakeholders (CPDE, 2023[8]). It also enhances opportunities to advance Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus approaches when crises arise. And they play a role in political transitions and contribute to upholding democratic values and human rights in autocratic and conflict-affected regimes, fostering social and political change (Atlantic Council, ICNC, and Hardy Merriman, 2023[34]).

Further, partner-country CSOs can act as intermediaries channelling funds from national/regional level to the community/grassroot level, and can possess the resources associated with provider-country/international CSOs listed above. Assumptions should not be made about the resources that partner-country or provider-country/international CSOs can or cannot bring to partnerships. These should be assessed and understood in context.

To support complementarity of roles in CSO partnerships, Peace Direct identified nine roles for provider-country/international CSOs (in addition to those of implementers and intermediaries), which can bring value to partnerships with partner-country CSOs (Peace Direct, 2023[35]):

1. **Interpreter** to translate providers' policies and programs, and make them more accessible, especially when based on Northern perspectives and using jargon.
2. **Knowledge broker and producer** to tap into expertise found in the practice, research, and insights generated globally, as well as to produce new knowledge.

3. **Co-learner and coach** to strengthen skills requested by providers, in a spirit of resource-complementarity and mutual capacity strengthening.
4. **Convenor** to provide spaces for local groups to reflect, plan, and learn together, either in-country or abroad – with local groups setting their own agendas for these meetings.
5. **Connector and eco-system builder** to bridge divides between organisations in the Global South, and between local/community-based CSOs and national/international organisations in the Global North and South, either through a convening role (see above) or by facilitating and funding exchanges and visits.
6. **Advocate and amplifier** to reach policymakers on behalf of local actors, create space for local actors to advocate directly, and ensure that local organisations receive a profile, credit and a platform for their work and achievements.
7. **Watchdog** to monitor restriction of civic space in the policies and practices of repressive and democratic states, and work with others to counter these practices.
8. **Critical friend** to overcome the perception of local actors as "implementing partners" and provide advice and guidance when asked, offering a sounding board for ideas, challenges, and opportunities faced by local partners.
9. **Sidekick** to support the local organisation in whatever it needs, without overstepping the subordinate role. This can mean performing many of the roles outlined above and is a mindset that aims to reverse the status quo.

Note: 1. The Grand Bargain caucus on the role of intermediaries defines them as "organisations, networks or mechanisms which act as an intermediary between providers and local organisations in partner countries through the provision of funding or other support". This function can be carried out by international CSOs, multilateral organisations (e.g., UN agencies), private companies, and more.

Possible solutions

1. Support uptake of different roles for partner-country CSOs

With a view to working directly with partner-country CSOs and enabling them to take up leading roles in partnerships, providers can shift from a provider-country/international CSO to a partner-country CSO as their intermediary (OECD, 2023[1]; Share Trust, Warande Advisory Centre, 2022[36]). This can improve effectiveness and support a more diverse set of CSOs. The Tanzanian Foundation for Civil Society and the Mechanism for Civil Society Support (MASC) in Mozambique are examples of CSOs that evolved to become national intermediaries supporting a range of partner-country CSOs, from national to community-based organisations.

Working with networks can greatly increase providers' local reach and support partner-country CSOs to connect, collaborate, and learn from each other. The Prospera International Network of Women's Funds brings together 47 funds, mostly in the Global South and East. The women's and feminist fund members of Prospera were created by people from the populations they serve to support their leadership, such as by providing flexible support and conducting participatory grant-making to a broad swathe of civil society actors. Leading from the South, the Global-South-led consortium funded by The Netherlands, is an example of collaboration among Prospera members to learn from one another and build common practices and new partnerships (Prospera, n.a.[37]; Leading from the South, n.a.[38]).

Embassies and country missions can create more direct connections to local actors, based on their local knowledge of country contexts and stakeholders. However, as they work more directly with partner-country

CSOs, providers should enable an inclusive civil society comprising actors that hold positive social and/or democratic values, and an independent civil society comprising actors that are non-state, self-governing and non-partisan (OECD, 2021[39]). Providers should ensure that they support local CSOs in such a way that is not perceived to advantage one community, political group, ethnicity, or religion above another, creating new unbalanced power dynamics or exacerbating existing ones.

2. Support uptake of different roles for provider-country/international CSOs

Resources in providers' funding agreements with provider-country/international CSO intermediaries can support structures and capacity dedicated to the design and evolution of more equitable partnerships between CSOs. These CSOs can be supported in identifying their comparative advantage without disparaging the intermediary model (as the appropriateness of intermediation should be assessed in context and based on demand from partner-country CSOs). Trócaire's Global Hub on Partnership & Localisation, based in Nairobi and partly funded by Ireland, is responsible for developing an inclusive approach to drive Trócaire's partnership model towards localisation. As part of this work, Trócaire's local partners participate in a confidential survey to share feedback on partnerships (Trócaire, 2023[40]). In Germany, as part of a multi-year project implemented by VENRO (an umbrella organisation of development and humanitarian non-governmental organisations), the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) provides resources and space for German CSOs to identify and implement changes that enable a power shift in their relationships with partner-country CSOs.

Providers can facilitate reflection on the roles of CSOs in partnerships, as by requesting that funding proposals describe the roles and actions that provider-country/international and partner-country CSOs will undertake, and assessing these regularly and applying lessons to ensure movement towards equitable partnerships (NEAR, 2023[9]; The Grand Bargain, 2022[16]). Through the Netherlands' policy framework for Strengthening Civil Society, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs awards points to Dutch CSOs that demonstrate contributions to local ownership in building consortia with partner-country CSOs. Similarly, Irish CSOs receiving funds through the Irish Civil Society Partnership (ICSP) for A Better World are requested to submit a locally led development policy and demonstrate progress on localisation objectives throughout implementation (Box 2.5). The Civil Society Innovation Initiative (CSII), also known as Innovation for Change (I4C), is a global network of people and organisations in which international CSOs served different roles that evolved over time. In this initiative, funded by USAID, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), and foundations, international CSOs played the role of convenors, connectors, fiscal agents, and amplifiers of locally led initiatives, with these evolving over time.

3. Ensure that local capacities are valued in CSO partnerships

When assessing partnerships with provider-country/international CSOs, providers can consider success grounded in local capacities (Humentum, 2023[41]). This includes how programmes cover knowledge of context and environment, technical capacity, long-term presence on the ground, abilities to access marginalised and isolated people, and links with local grassroots organisations and communities. The European Commission Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) looks favourably on proposals from applicants that recognise and build on local capacities and strengths in partner countries (European Commission, 2023[42]). Providers can also create mechanisms for mutual feedback and identify indicators to assess the partnership itself.

Providers' guidelines can also support reflection on and concrete steps toward equitable partnerships. The Fair Partnership Principles developed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation's (SDC) Ukraine mission defines eight localisation principles to apply in funding relationships between SDC-supported international actors and their partners in Ukraine. Guidance includes co-definition of strategic goals, full cost coverage of local partners' activities, and proposal and reporting formats and processes adapted to the ability of the partner and size of the grant. The principles also encourage

international CSOs to involve local partners in coordination meetings and donor discussions, and to credit local partners' contribution to their work.

4. Facilitate long-term partnership-building and its evolution

Providers can support long-term partnerships that grow in strength and trust over time, in ways not tied to funding or the ability of CSO partners to collaborate on short-term calls for proposals. This can be done by allocating time and money for CSO partnership-creation in funding agreements, and favouring long-term and flexible funding over short-term project support (see section 'Shifting power through funding and compliance').

Supporting partner selection and partnership creation can also benefit trust-based long-term relations. Marketplaces and/or platforms that match providers with CSOs and Global North and Global South CSOs can facilitate this process. Participation of the most marginalised people and CSOs with strong representation from local communities should be favoured (Partos, 2022[21]). The KujaLink platform launched in 2022 by Adeso grows connections and visibility for partner-country CSOs by linking them to providers worldwide (KujaLink, n.d.[43]). The Nesta's Partnership toolkit supports building successful partnerships once the partner has been identified. It provides guidance formalising good relationships into partnership agreements. Using existing tools and methods, it helps partners find a partnership structure that is mutually beneficial, equitable, and sustainable, with acceptable levels of risk (Nesta, 2019[44]).

Providers can also encourage CSO partnerships to evolve, with the partner-country CSO taking over more responsibility. SDC supports an increasing number of projects where partner-country CSOs eventually assume the lead role. While the initial phase of these projects involves funding agreements between SDC and provider-country/international CSOs, who enter into agreements with partner-country CSOs, subsequent phases support partner-country CSOs, who might enter into agreements with provider-country/international CSOs for specific support.

5. Learn from long-standing development co-operation modalities based on complementarity

Learning and knowledge-sharing among partners to achieve knowledge co-production is a key value of South-South and triangular co-operation. Many actors come together to deliver these initiatives, co-creating and co-implementing projects. The collaborative spirit of triangular co-operation shifts ownership towards local stakeholders. India's model of triangular co-operation leverages the strengths of its diverse CSO landscape to address development challenges in other countries. Indian CSOs draw on long-standing partnerships with DAC members, who often provided funding for development activities in India. Over time, this enabled Indian CSOs to share experiences and innovations with third countries and regions through triangular partnerships. For example, the United States and India jointly support the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), an Indian CSO, to share its expertise and knowledge to contribute to Afghan women's economic empowerment (Chaturvedi and Piefer-Söyler, 2021[45]; OECD, 2019[46]; OECD/IsDB, 2023[47]).

Box 2.2. Examples of provider and CSO actions supporting the complementarity of diverse civil society actors

Sida's guidelines for Swedish strategic partner organisations (SPO) define the need for SPOs to enter into agreements with a local partner organisation.[12] Local ownership is aimed for by having the local partner organisation define priorities and manage implementation and funds. SPOs' programs are assessed on their respect for local ownership; flexibility to adjust the collaboration to changing needs and context; adaptation to local partners' capacity and systems; harmonisation and coordination with other donors' administrative requests; and their funding modality and predictability, with a preference for long-term, core support to local partners (Sida, 2023[48]).

INSPIRED, funded by the European Union and managed by the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD), supports inclusive and participatory policy dialogue in 17 countries on an array of topics (women rights, labour rights of people with disabilities, gender-based violence, access to health, land rights, drug use, etc.). The project relies on local CSOs at partner-country level, engaged as "Dialogue Hosts" through a sub-grant. Dialogue Hosts implement the project, acting as conveners, facilitators, and grant managers. EPD acts as their "sidekick" (Box 2.1). Decision-making on all strategic and political aspects of policy dialogue rests with the Dialogue Hosts.

The Commonwealth Equality Network (TCEN) is a global community of CSOs working to uphold the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) people across the Commonwealth. The Network is administered by a Secretariat based at the Kaleidoscope Trust, with funding from Global Affairs Canada. In many ways, the Kaleidoscope Trust and TCEN play the role of "connectors" (Box 2.1), bridging divides across organisations in primarily low- and middle-income countries to create opportunities for collective advocacy, research, resource-mobilisation, and capacity strengthening.

Equitable decision-making and inclusive dialogue

***DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society* provisions addressed in this section**

The DAC Recommendation invites Adherents to support and engage with civil society (Pillar Two) and to such end to: "promote and invest in the leadership of local civil society actors in partner countries or territories by, where appropriate and feasible: [...] ensuring local civil society actors are involved in decision-making based on equal power relations with supported civil society strategic alliances, networks, platforms and resource centres, in the design, budgets, and implementation of their programming" (Pillar Two, para. 4, section c).

Adherents to the Recommendation also commit to "promote participatory and rights-based approaches for local ownership and accountability of CSOs and their activities throughout programme design, implementation, and monitoring, while helping ensure that programmes do not exacerbate existing forms of discrimination or inequalities" (Pillar Three, para. 5).

Table 2.2. Enabling equitable decision-making and inclusive dialogue

1. INCLUDE PARTNER-COUNTRY CSOS IN DECISION-MAKING BODIES OF PARTNERSHIPS
• Require that partner-country CSOs play a prominent role in partnership governance and decision-making, such as through partnership agreements, funding criteria, and proposal assessment. • Invest in strengthening partner-country CSOs' capacity to exercise leadership when requested and needed.
Tools such as the Power Awareness tool can help providers and CSOs analyse power in development co-operation partnerships.
Enabling partner-country CSOs to participate in steering functions should entail coverage of related time and human resources costs, such as through flexible funding and coverage of overhead or indirect costs (see section 'Shifting power through funding and compliance').
2. ENABLE CSOS TO IMPLEMENT PARTICIPATORY GRANT-MAKING OR ASPECTS OF IT
• Provide intermediary CSOs with flexible funding that can be passed to local CSOs. • Adapt programme/project evaluation to value the process of grant-making as an outcome.
Review institutional approaches to risk to share risks with provider-country/international CSOs acting as intermediaries.
3. RESPECT THE AGENCY OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN BEING ABLE TO TAKE THE POWER
• Recognise local capacities as a source of power. • Recognise informal sources of power, such as personal likeability, relationships, network, etc.
Be aware of negative sources of informal power, such as financial dependency, gender, etc.
4. SUPPORT DIALOGUE WITH PARTNER-COUNTRY CSO LEADERSHIP AND STAFF
• Create space for local exchanges with partner-country CSOs through embassies. • Provide a framework for engagement through dedicated policies and strategies. • Use provider-country/international CSOs to facilitate partner-country CSOs' engagement in partner-country policy dialogues, particularly when providers do not have a strong in-country presence.
Be open to a variety of tools and technologies (e.g. WhatsApp) to dialogue with partner-country CSO leadership.
Provide embassies with the autonomy and resources to connect with local organisations, including outside of capitals.
5. INCLUDE PARTNER-COUNTRY CSOS IN PROVIDERS' NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL POLICY DIALOGUES
• Involve partner-country CSOs in domestic policy dialogues with CSOs for the development of policies and strategies. • Remove participation barriers, such as by using technologies, translations, and covering travel costs. • Engage with networks of CSOs to ensure representation of targeted and/or marginalised people. • Seek inclusion of partner-country CSOs in international policy dialogue settings.
Participation of CSOs in regular and predictable policy dialogue improves their advocacy capacity.
Ensure that local CSOs' participation in policy dialogues does not advantage one community, political group, ethnicity, or religion above another (see section 'Complementarity of diverse civil society actors').
6. DIVERSIFY PROVIDERS' STAFF FOR ADDITIONAL INCLUSIVITY AND DIVERSITY OF VOICES
• Consider diversification of staff to include more local voices, particularly in in-country offices. • Strengthen providers' staff knowledge and competency around bias, paternalism, and lasting effects of colonialism in international development.
7. EVALUATE POLICIES, STRATEGIES, AND PROGRAMMES TO ENSURE LOCAL ACTORS' AGENCY
• Use monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks to measure agency of partner-country CSOs in framing priorities, design, and delivery of strategies and programmes, as well as in accountability. • Ensure adaptability of monitoring and evaluation to evolving contexts during implementation of country strategies or programmes/projects.

Description

Ceding power in partnerships between CSOs means addressing barriers for partner-country CSOs to exercise leadership in decision-making. Partner-country CSOs expect to be involved in strategic decisions on development programmes/projects. They also seek space to lead implementation and design initiatives that respond to their communities' priorities and realities (RINGO, 2021[49]). Openness and transparency within partnerships is essential for this. Knowledge about the partnership's motivations, budget allocations, and decision-making procedures can translate into sources of power for the actors involved. Making sure the knowledge is channelled openly enables power shifts (Peace Direct, 2023[13]).

Barriers also exist to partner-country CSOs' participation in providers' priority-setting to define foreign and development assistance policies and programmes. Providers' agenda-setting practices tend to follow internal timelines and procedures, and political priorities of their constituencies, which do not necessarily consider development needs at partner-country level. This practice hampers investment in locally led development and transformative change, in favour of short-term solutions that might not address core issues (Humentum, 2023[41]; Partos, 2022[21]). Dialogue mechanisms to inform providers' decision-making in development co-operation and humanitarian assistance could ensure communication flow for agenda- and priority-setting, joint learning, and exchange.

Partner-country CSOs need access to formal and informal coordination mechanisms hosted by national governments and international actors (e.g., the United Nations, other providers, and provider-country/international CSOs), which are important spaces for priority-setting but can be difficult to access, particularly by CSOs based far from capitals and operational centres.

Possible solutions

1. Include partner-country CSOs in decision-making bodies of partnerships

Providers could require that partner-country CSOs play a more prominent role in governance and decision-making in their partnerships with international/provider-country CSOs. Funding criteria and proposal assessments could favour the inclusivity of decision-making bodies, and agreements could contain clauses on the envisaged governance of the programme funded. The Action for Paid Care Workers Initiative funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and launched in November 2022, has a localisation requirement for project proposals. The proposals need to outline how local women's rights, feminist, and indigenous partners co-lead the design of objectives, activities, and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) to ensure feminist principles are applied.

For inclusive decision-making to be meaningful, modalities for making decisions need to be thought through and articulated to allow all partners to endorse them or express doubts (Global Mentoring Initiative, n.a.[50]; Hellyer, 2022[51]). Providers can enable this by including the costs associated with participation in steering functions in programme/project funding and investing in strengthening leadership according to partner-country CSOs' assessment of their capacities (see section 'Mutual and locally led capacity strengthening'). The use of tools such as the Power awareness tool designed in the Shift-the-Power Lab can help providers and CSOs analyse power in development co-operation partnerships to help highlight imbalances and enable steps towards shifting them (The Spindle, 2020[52]).

2. Enable CSOs to implement participatory grant-making or aspects of it

Participatory grant-making cedes decision-making to the communities that projects/programmes intend to reach about what for and how to use funds. This form of funding does not replicate old grant-making models rooted in scarcity and competition, and recognises the process as part of the outcome (Foundation Center, 2018[53]; Participatory Grantmakers, n.a.[54]). Providers can support this by providing flexible funding to and sharing risk with intermediary CSOs. The GAC-supported Equality Fund uses a non-competitive

grant-making model called Step Up/Step Back, incorporating feminist values of collaboration, solidarity, and community. Participating feminist funds are responsive to resourcing needs and priorities decided by communities through processes that value and strengthen communities' and women's leadership, with funding provided in flexible multi-year grants (Equality Fund, 2023[55]; Equality Fund, 2022[56]). Similarly, in the Youth Action for Peace Programme (YAPP) of Sida's Local Action Fund, local CSOs are key in identifying and distributing grants to local youth-led initiatives, promoting greater local leadership and decision-making in the funding process. In 2021, 153 organisations were supported through YAPP, almost all of which had not previously received any international funding (Peace Direct, 2022[57]).

3. Respect the agency of civil society in taking power

Providers and provider-country/international CSOs need to respect the agency of civil society in being able to take power rather than being granted it by others. This can start by recognising and appreciating local CSOs' capacities as an important source of power (see sub-section 'Ensure that local capacities are valued in supported CSO partnerships'). Additionally, providers can recognise informal sources of power, which can work to support power shifts if they are used in deliberate ways. Manifestations of informal power can be personal – related to someone's persuasiveness, likeability and charisma – or relational – linked to proximity to leadership, the extent of someone's network, or influence on a certain community or on organisational culture (International Civil Society Centre, 2022[58]).

At the same time, every form of formal and informal power can have negative influences in partnerships, which should not be overlooked. Financial dependence on programme/project funding can lead to the suppression of voices for fear of money being withheld or withdrawn. From a feminist perspective, gender can also be a form of power, as can the ability to work long hours, which can put people who have care functions at a disadvantage (Cercle de la Coopération den ONGD du Luxembourg, 2023[59]; Five Oaks Consulting, n.d.[60]; International Civil Society Centre, 2022[58]).

4. Support dialogue with partner-country CSO leadership and staff

Conversations with partner-country CSOs' leaders could explore the resources and power attributed to them, helping create partnerships and shape programs that consider capacities and informal power sources and locations, and ensure recognition of different forms of power (International Civil Society Centre, 2022[58]). These could include national partner-country networks and other civil society structures, facilitating direct or indirect linkages between actors within the country. Providers (particularly trough their embassies) could create space for these local exchanges, provided that autonomy to act and human and financial resources are ensured to engage beyond capitals and reach a broader swathe of organisations (USAID, 2023[32]). Being open to a variety of tools and technologies such as text, audio, and video messages via WhatsApp, to foster dialogue with partner-country CSO leaders can also achieve results.

Providers can offer a framework for these engagements through dedicated policies and strategies. The 2012 European Union (EU) Communication "The roots of democracy and sustainable development" centres on the participation of civil society in policy dialogues in partner countries and across the EU programming cycle. The policy identifies EU Civil Society Roadmaps for engagement with CSOs as instrumental to shifting towards a more strategic support for local CSOs, "ensuring a more structured dialogue[13] and strategic cooperation" with civil society.

Providers can rely on provider-country/international CSOs support in facilitating partner-country CSOs' engagement in policy dialogues, particularly when providers do not have a strong in-country presence. This could include connecting actors (see section 'Complementarity of diverse civil society actors', including at sub-national levels, as local coordination mechanisms can be overlooked by international actors. Dialogues lead by provider-country/international CSOs can strengthen democratic governance, fostering participatory processes, and promoting human rights and inclusive development in partner countries characterised by restricted civic space or fragile contexts (European Commission, 2012[61]; Trócaire, 2019[62]).

5. Include partner-country CSOs in providers' national and international policy dialogues

While several DAC members have systems for policy dialogues with domestic CSOs, they do not necessarily involve representation from partner-country CSOs (OECD, 2020[33]). To maximise the result of policy dialogues, providers can make sure that these are diverse, such as by critically assessing who is missing from the dialogue and noting when consensus could signal a lack of diversity. Providers need to be aware that over-representation from partner-country actors and marginalised communities should be the norm in certain fora, especially where they would not normally have a voice (CSO Working Group on the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society, 2023[63]; NAF, 2023[64]). Providers can make sure that dialogues are regular and predictable, with transparency rules. As opposed to episodic dialogues, regular dialogues can avoid instrumentalising consultations for "box-ticking", and have the potential to strengthen partner-country CSOs' advocacy and policy-influencing skills. Ideally dialogues are followed by sharing feedback on the outcomes, and explanations of why any recommendations were not taken up in ensuing policies and programs.

For more representative and meaningful engagement in policy dialogues, consideration should be given to removing participation barriers. Digital solutions can support inclusion of partner-country actors in dialogues, such as by organising hybrid meetings and online consultations. This includes providing translation and interpretation, offering online participation options and internet access, or resources and reimbursements to cover travel expenses. Engaging CSO networks outreach to local communities and representation of targeted and/or marginalised groups (e.g., youth, women, people with disabilities) can ensure representation of local actors based not only in partner-countries' capitals (CARE International and Oxfam, 2022[65]; Global Standard for CSO Accountability, 2022[66]; Humentum, 2023[41]; Partos, 2022[21]; UNOY, n.a[67]). The Africa Strategy of the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development supports paid opportunities for young people to enable more meaningful youth engagement and decision-making power (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2023[68]).

Further, providers can include partner-country CSOs in international policy dialogue settings. Two participants from civil society are regularly part of the Netherlands' delegation to the Commission on the Status of Women.

6. Diversify providers' staff for inclusivity and diversity of voices

Providers should consider diversifying their staff, particularly in in-country offices, to improve representation of local voices in their systems. Most of the 16 development co-operation professionals supporting Iceland's district-level programs in Malawi and Uganda are locally engaged staff. They are crucial to the success of Iceland's programs and find ways to work better with local CSOs (OECD, 2023[69]).

Provider-country/international CSOs can be encouraged in this direction, including diversifying their management and governing bodies. Several provider-country/international CSOs experiment in ways to change systems and attitudes that affect organisational cultures and partnership dynamics (CSO Working Group on the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society, 2023[63]). The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) based in Denmark aims to have a majority of Indigenous board members. As IWGIA promotes and defends the rights of Indigenous Peoples, IWGIA's legitimacy as a non-Indigenous organisation depends on how the perspectives, experiences, and needs of Indigenous Peoples are reflected in the organisation's decision-making.

A complementary action would be to strengthen providers' staff knowledge and competency around bias, paternalism, and lasting effects of colonialism in international development (CARE International and Oxfam, 2022[65]). Since 2018, New Zealand has been implementing its Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, which addresses bias and strengthens cultural competence, among other areas. Related activities include rolling out unconscious bias trainings for staff, and organising courses and workshops to improve Māori cultural knowledge and raise awareness on the impact of colonisation on the Māori people (New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affiars and Trade, 2023[70]).

7. Evaluate policies, strategies and programmes to ensure local actors' agency

Learning from their own policies, strategies and programmes can help providers understand the level of agency that local actors, including partner-country CSOs can exercise in framing priorities, design and delivery of strategies and programmes, and accountability such as MEL frameworks (OECD, 2023[14]). While developing partner-country strategies, indicators and assessment tools that acknowledge partner-country CSOs' capacities and contribution to the success of a strategy are necessary to identify the degree to which local agency is being achieved.

Performance-based monitoring and evaluation should be flexible to consider changes during implementation of country strategies or programmes/projects to adapt to evolving contexts, such as political instability (OECD, 2021[71]). Strategic steering groups with representation of relevant partner-country actors can facilitate adaptability and responsiveness to country contexts (Global Standard for CSO Accountability, 2023[72]; International Civil Society Centre, 2022[58]; Foundation Center, 2018[53]).

Box 2.3. Examples of provider and CSO actions supporting equitable decision-making and inclusive dialogue

Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships was a consortium programme of Christian Aid, CARE, Tearfund, ActionAid, CAFOD, and Oxfam funded by the European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. The project supported uptake of more prominent roles in steering functions for local actors through steering committees with strong and deliberate inclusion of communities and grassroots organisation (Accelerating Localisation through Partnerships, 2019[73]).

The **New Zealand 2021 Pacific Resilience Approach** guides development and foreign policy engagement in the Pacific. The policy draws on Māori customs and knowledge to frame New Zealand's approach to partnering in the Pacific. New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade staff integrate Māori concepts and terms into official communications, and partners appreciate the growing representation of Māori and other Pasifika peoples in senior positions in government (OECD, 2023[74]).

USAID's 2022 Interactive Co-creation Guide describes how to use co-creation across the programme cycle. As defined in the guide, co-creation "centres on shared power and decision-making for mutually beneficial outcomes". USAID supplements the guide with trainings for staff to use co-creation to expand dialogue with USAID partners and stakeholders on development investments (USAID, 2022[75]).

France's **National Council for Development and International Solidarity (CNDSI)** is a forum for dialogue and consultation between development and international solidarity stakeholders on the guidelines, objectives, and resources of France's development policy. The CNDSI comprises 67 members divided in ten groups, which represent various components of civil society. It includes a group of seven non-French members that bring unique external expertise to the Council.

Free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) is an instrument aimed at obtaining consent from Indigenous Peoples in Brazil and around the world for any activities undertaken on their land. Governments cannot implement a policy or program on or concerning Indigenous Peoples' lands unless there is prior consultation and consent from the Indigenous community, which can be withdrawn at any stage. FPIC also enables Indigenous Peoples to negotiate the conditions under which the programme/project is designed, implemented, monitored, and evaluated (Institute for Human Right and Business, 2022[76]; Observatório de Protocolos Comunitários, n.a.[77]).

Mutual and locally led capacity strengthening

***DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society* provision addressed in this section**

To incentivise CSO effectiveness, transparency, and accountability (Pillar Three), the DAC Recommendation invites Adherents to "work with and support CSOs to implement mutual capacity strengthening to address CSOs' vulnerabilities and bolster their resilience, accountability, and effectiveness, especially at partner country or territory level" (Pillar Three, para. 3).

Table 2.3. Enabling mutual and locally led capacity strengthening

1. EXPAND CAPACITY STRENGTHENING AND USE INNOVATIVE METHODS
• Embrace a wider concept of capacity that equates to relevance, rootedness, and constituency. • Use innovative methods, such as coaching, shadowing, mentoring, and peer learning. • Support mutual capacity strengthening needs over time. • Establish feedback mechanisms that can challenge and hold each partner to account, including providers.
2. DEFINE CAPACITY NEEDS AT PARTNER-COUNTRY LEVEL
• Ensure that partner-country CSOs have the lead in defining what capacity is needed to respond to a specific humanitarian and development context. • Outline principles for effective programming and equitable partnerships in local capacity strengthening in collaboration with local actors.
3. ASSESS THE CAPACITY OF ACTORS IN CAPACITY STRENGTHENING PROGRAMME/PROJECTS
• Encourage mapping strengths and weaknesses of actors, including providers, involved in programmes/projects with a capacity strengthening component. • Apply a learning lens to assessing progress and gaps in CSOs' capacity strengthening in programmes/projects.
Assessment of capacities should be proportionate to the programme/project size and scope to avoid assessment fatigue and increased administrative burden. In capacity assessment, providers must recognise that partner-country CSOs often operate within complex, sometimes fragile environments, which may impact their performance.
4. SUPPORT PARTNER-COUNTRY CSOS' FULL-COST COVERAGE AND SUSTAINABILITY
• Ensure funding for capacity strengthening of partner-country CSOs when there is a demand for it. • Provide core support and full-cost coverage of programmes/projects, including coverage of overhead or indirect costs, and ensure that provider-country/international CSOs pass on coverage of overhead or indirect costs to partner-country CSOs. • Support long-term sustainability of capacities gained, such as by supporting CSOs' self-defined sustainability gaps, like financial sustainability or attracting and retaining qualified staff.
Full-cost coverage and the provision of indirect costs or overheads can have positive effects on the ability of CSOs to invest in their organisational strength and financial sustainability.

Description

Capacity strengthening activities for partner-country CSOs are largely designed according to needs defined by providers or provider-country/international CSOs. These emphasise the organisation's capacity to implement funded programmes/projects or meet administrative and financial compliance requirements (OECD, 2020[33]). If lacking these specific capacities, local and national CSOs in partner countries might not appear as institutionally strong even when their capacities to respond to the needs of communities are. Moreover, this perception can manifest as a lack of trust in partner-country CSOs' capacity, and therefore not reflect the reality of CSOs' capacity and trustworthiness.

Emphasis could be placed on sharing capacities between actors and bringing expertise together. This approaches capacity strengthening from a systems perspective where all actors, including providers, constantly strengthen and update their capacities and build those that are lacking (Peace Direct, 2023[13]). Providers would start by appreciating local actors' knowledge and capacities as assets for programme design and implementation, and move away from the concept of "building capacity" as defined from providers' perspectives (see section 'Complementarity of diverse civil society actors') (European Commission, 2023[42]; NEAR, 2023[9]).

Possible solutions

1. Expand and innovate the concept of capacity strengthening

Providers can equate capacity with relevance, rootedness, and constituency, in a spirit of facilitating collective improvement and challenging one another to hold each other accountable (Global Fund Community Foundations, n.a.[5]; OECD, 2023[12]). Capacity sharing could be reciprocal and the result of exchange and learning that enhance the complementarity of provider-country/international CSOs and partner-country CSOs, and avoid duplication of work to be more efficient and impactful (European Commission, 2023[42]). Methods can include innovative forms of coaching, shadowing, mentoring, and peer learning.

Mutual capacity strengthening need to be seen as a continuous process, given that the challenges development actors address are constantly adapting to global developments and changing local contexts. Mutual learning should therefore be ensured, for instance with feedback mechanisms that can challenge each partner and foster mutual accountability, including of providers.

2. Ensure that capacity needs are defined at partner-country level

Strengthening partner-country CSOs must respect their agency and accountability to their constituencies, strengthening capacities defined by them or jointly with providers (OECD, 2023[1]). Partner-country CSOs and other local and national actors need to lead defining what capacity is needed to respond to a humanitarian and development context, and help identify existing capacity. Provider-country/international CSOs can aim to facilitate, support, and strengthen partner-country CSOs, enabling them to fulfil their roles according to jointly defined modalities (NEAR, 2023[9]). The GAC Women's Voice and Leadership (WVL) programme, which supports women's rights organisations (WROs) and LGBTQI+ groups in partner countries, allows flexibility in using funds and strengthens organisations capacities according to their own strategic priorities, respecting their agency and power.

To support a locally led definition of capacities, providers can outline principles for programming and equitable partnerships in local capacity strengthening, in line with their existing policies and practices for locally led development. For instance, USAID's 2022 Local Capacity Strengthening Policy (LCSP) was developed over three years through a participatory process in which feedback from partner-country actors was solicited and incorporated. To bolster implementation of the LCSP, USAID produced publicly available micro-learning modules on each of the seven LCSP principles (USAID, 2022[78]; USAID, 2023[79]).

3. Assess capacity of all actors involved in capacity strengthening programmes/projects

For programmes/projects with a capacity strengthening component, providers should encourage mapping of strengths and weaknesses of different actors involved. This capacity assessment should be informed by an analysis carried out jointly by partners, or by self-evaluation when possible, ensuring the quality of the methodology to avoid biases related to self-diagnosis (European Commission, 2023[42]; NEAR, 2023[9]). Appreciative inquiry is a method that starts from assessing strengths and successes rather than deficits and failures (Acosta and Douthwaite, 2005[80]). Capacity assessment should also be proportionate to programme/project size and scope, to avoid assessment fatigue and increased administrative burden.

Providers can identify what they could learn from partner-country CSOs, being open to listen to programme/project ideas, political analyses, and/or methodologies developed.

When working with partner-country CSOs to define capacity strengthening needs and activities, providers must recognise that these organisations operate within complex, sometimes fragile, environments. External factors might impact their performance. Therefore, early understanding of those factors can affect capacity assessment and the design of capacity strengthening activities (Humentum, 2023[81]).

Capacity could also be assessed through a lens of learning from programmes/projects, to identify progress and capacity gaps that could be addressed in the future. USAID's Local Works programme uses the CBLD-9 indicator to measure the percent of USAID-assisted organisations with improved performance. CBLD-9 is developed and implemented through a consultative process with partners to define performance improvement priorities and assess gaps between current and desired performance. USAID and its partners then jointly select and implement related solutions (USAID, n.a.[82]).

4. Support partner-country CSOs' full-cost coverage and sustainability

As capacity strengthening cannot be decoupled from sustainable funding (ACT Alliance EU, 2023[83]), funding for capacity strengthening should be ensured when there is a demand for it. Moreover, beyond funding programmes/projects, providers can support partner-country CSOs' organisational advancement by providing core support and enabling partner-country CSOs to accurately and fully account for their overhead (administrative or indirect) costs and identify their overhead cost recovery rates (Humentum, 2023[41]; The Grand Bargain, 2022[16]). Funding allocated for capacity strengthening activities ought not be a replacement for overhead costs, so as to positively affects the ability of CSOs to invest in strengthening their organisations. This can improve their capabilities to mobilise resources, increasing their financial independence and ability to fund themselves over the long term.

Providers could develop policies for covering overhead/indirect costs for partner-country CSOs, while recognising that a one-size-fits-all approach might not work. Such policies need to make sure that provider-country/international CSOs can pass on full overhead/indirect cost recovery to partners and that this is built into the program budget and partnership agreements. Meanwhile, provider-country/internal CSOs can ensure commitment to cover all costs incurred by partners in related policies (Development Initiatives, 2022[84]).

The Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), Australia's longest-running and largest CSO programme, is trialling an approach where Australian CSOs need to pass down a minimum amount of their grant funds for local partners to use for administrative and overhead costs. In 2019, New Zealand introduced a new model of partnership with CSOs, transitioning from the Partnership Fund for International Development to the Partnering for Impact programme. Under this programme, New Zealand-based CSOs and partner-country CSOs can equally share overhead and administration funding, with each organisation having a budget line of up to 10% of total program value for these costs (OECD, 2023[85]; New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affiars and Trade, 2023[70]). In 2021, Canada updated its International Humanitarian Assistance Funding Guidelines for CSO partners, enabling local implementing partners to receive overhead costs by including a budget line for up to 7.5% of their direct project costs, rather than allocating a share of overheads to an intermediary partner. This change enabled dedicated funding to be allocated from the overall budget to local partner indirect costs, helping empower and support local and national responders. The UK Foreign, Commonwealth Development Office's (FCDO) Shifting the Power programme, designed in partnership with Comic Relief and the British public, aims to diversify locally led CSOs' income in Ghana, Malawi, and Zambia, to ensure resilience and reduce dependency on foreign aid. FCDO also committed to paying the programme partners the full cost of grant delivery, including a fair share of overheads, to level the playing field for CSOs of all sizes and enable them to cover the true costs of delivering an FCDO grant, thus contributing to sustainability (FCDO, 2020[86]; FCDO, 2022[87]).

Finally, maintaining capacity after the end of programme/project activities need to be a strategic priority for providers. Approaches to capacity strengthening, even within a time-bound programme/project, should have the long-term capacity of partner-country CSOs in mind. Approaches need to pay attention to provider-country CSOs' self-defined sustainability gaps, addressing core capacity issues such as financial sustainability or attracting and retaining qualified staff (Global Mentoring Initiative, N.a.[88]).

Box 2.4. Examples of provider and CSO actions supporting mutual and locally led capacity strengthening

The EU launched a EUR 50 million call for proposals to develop the **EU System for an Enabling Environment for Civil Society** (EU SEE). The EU SEE aims to mutually strengthen the capacity of civil society at global, regional, and partner-country level to prevent deterioration of the enabling environment for civil society. The system is being built in co-operation with civil society actors, supporting and leveraging existing competencies. It will be implemented through a complementary approach to link global, regional, and local actors, drawing on the knowledge, experience, and capacity of each. It will also encompass activities to share knowledge and build coalitions across CSOs, and activities to improve CSO capacity for efficient advocacy for an enabling environment at all levels.

France's ***Territoires Volontaires*** programme provides opportunities for reciprocal mobility, facilitating co-learning and mutual capacity strengthening. It supports local governments in France to mobilise 250 international volunteers sent from and hosted by France. Every year, the International Solidarity Volunteering initiative allows several dozen volunteers from countries of the Global South to carry out assignments in other ODA-beneficiary countries through South-South volunteering (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2023[89]).

The **Global Development Incubator (GDI)** network, gathering locally-run and independently-managed global partners, offers a Shared Services Platform that creates in-country business hubs, starting in East Africa, to provide shared services to locally-led NGOs, including financial management, compliance, grant reporting, and other support. The goal is for these local NGOs to build their track record and capabilities to receive significant global funding directly, and ultimately to scale their proximate work and impact.

The **Movement for Community-led Development (Un)Learning Labs** is a collaborative space designed for development actors to interrogate their existing ways of thinking, doing, and learning across a range of technical areas. (Un)Learning labs are designed to recognise the capacities, experience, and knowledge that each actor brings into a collaborative space to learn and (un)learn from each other. The Labs are developed and led by Global South CSO members of the Movement for Community-led Development.

The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs **Strategic Partnerships 2022-2025** emphasises strengthening local leadership by transferring funds, ownership, and decision-making power to local partners. Strategic partners (Danish CSOs) are expected to engage in partnerships with locally rooted and representative civil society actors in the Global South based on locally identified needs and mutual added value. This includes strengthening capacity and enabling partners in the Global South to combat poverty, vulnerability, and inequality while building community resilience, crisis preparedness, and climate change adaptation. The progress of strategic partnerships is evaluated by annual consultations throughout the partnership period.

Shifting power through funding and compliance

Table 2.4. Enabling shifting power through funding and compliance

1. SHIFT TO FUNDING MODALITIES THAT FAVOUR PARTNER-COUNTRY CSOS' OWNERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP
• Provide core and flexible support to CSOs, allowing focus on partner-country development needs. Monitor the amount of core and flexible support to partner-country CSOs for transparency and accountability. • Use responsive funding modalities such as unsolicited proposals from partner-country CSOs.
Competitive funding can impose a large burden on CSOs with limited human resources.
2. ESTABLISH A DISTRIBUTION TARGET FOR FUNDING ALLOCATION
• Set a minimum target for distribution of funding between provider-country/international CSOs and partner-country CSOs in supported partnerships.
Require full transparency by provider-country/international CSOs about resources transferred to partners and funds invested in partner capacity strengthening.
3. FUND COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH PARTNERSHIP BUILDING
• Include coverage of costs related to partnership building and equitable programme/project governance. • Encourage building trust between partners.
4. REDUCE BARRIERS TO INFORMAL CIVIL SOCIETY'S ACCESS TO FUNDING
• Make information on funds more easily available. • Provide trustworthy and safe platforms to manage grants. • Provide tailored support according to the different stages of social movements' life cycles. • Coordinate with other providers.
Be aware that uncoordinated external support to movements can cause harm.
5. APPLY FEMINIST PRINCIPLES TO FUNDING AND COMPLIANCE
• Apply approaches to funding that move away from competitiveness, to embrace solidarity and trust. • Address the lack of funding for WROs and feminist movements, which often require tailored support.
6. ENSURE FULL COVERAGE OF OVERHEAD/INDIRECT COSTS
• Ensure that partner-country CSOs can fully account for their overhead/indirect costs. • Develop institutional policies for covering overhead/indirect costs for partner-country CSOs. • Make sure that provider-country/international CSOs can pass on full overhead/indirect cost-recovery to partners and that this is built into partnership agreements.
Funding allocated for capacity strengthening activities ought not replace overhead costs.
7. REVISIT APPROACHES TO RISK MANAGEMENT
• Broaden the definition of risk to include the risk of not engaging with local partners. • Consider risks faced by partner-country CSOs performing work, such as fragile or shrinking civic contexts. • Lessen administrative and financial burdens for CSOs funded directly and through intermediaries. • Adapt due-diligence requirements to partner-country culture and modalities of work. • Make sure that accountability mechanisms imposed on partner-country CSOs are not more restrictive than those required of provider-country/international CSOs.

Description

Directly funding partner-country CSOs can shift power in partnerships and build trust, as addressed in the *Funding civil society in partner countries* toolkit. Nonetheless, many providers fund provider-country/international CSOs to channel those funds to partner-country CSOs. Barriers to change vary, including legislative and regulatory constraints in provider and partner countries (OECD, 2023[1]). However, change is possible as demonstrated by the COVID-19 context, when DAC members showed adaptability in supporting and engaging civil society to enable their work, such through increased flexibility in funding mechanisms, diversity of funding portfolios, improving the adaptability of programs, streamlining and making administrative and financial requirements more flexible, and increasing dialogue with CSOs.

Attempts to establish collaborative forms of partnerships tend to leave out the costs of partnership building even though these are compensated by efficiency, impact, and sustainability gains over time, especially when included at early stages of programme/project development (Share Trust, Warande Advisory Centre, 2022[36]; Social Development Direct, Plan International, 2022[11]). Covering overhead or indirect costs is essential for CSOs' financial stability and ability to engage in partnership building operations (see section 'Mutual and locally led capacity strengthening'). These costs are not always or insufficiently covered when partner-country CSOs are funded indirectly via provider-country/international CSOs. This reduces their ability to participate in activities not directly covered by programme/project funds, such as dialogues with authorities and drafting project proposals, with big impact on CSOs' ability to form equitable partnerships (Share Trust, Warande Advisory Centre, 2022[36]; The Grand Bargain, 2022[16]).

Administrative and financial procedures can impose a heavy burden on CSOs and reduce the effectiveness of development actions. Administrative and financial procedures can perpetuate privileged relationships between a provider and provider-country/international CSOs, which often have greater absorption capacity for large funds compared to partner-country CSOs (CSO Working Group on the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society, 2023[63]). This perception can transform the ability to manage institutional funds into "an enduring form of power" (International Civil Society Centre, 2022[58]; Partos, 2022[21]). Overly demanding procedures can constrain partner-country CSOs in their activities when provider-country/international CSO transfer heavy administrative burdens to them. These cases disproportionately impact partner-country CSOs, as they are asked to meet bureaucratic requirements of both providers and intermediaries.

Partner-country CSOs often feel pressured to change their business models to comply with demands by providers. This risks diverting focus from their mandates towards administrative procedures, replicating inefficient models of the past, undermining their autonomy, and reinforcing unequal power dynamics (CPDE, 2023[8]; Partos, 2022[21]; Humentum, 2023[90]).

Possible solutions

1. **Shift to funding modalities that favour partner-country CSOs' ownership and leadership**

Core and flexible support to CSOs is conducive to long-term collaboration and allows for focus on partner-country development needs. It allows for a move away from single-issue programmes/projects to address systemic problems, plan strategically, and react to ever-changing needs. Funding based on unsolicited proposals from partner-country actors, and other responsive funding modalities could be increased, as competitive funding can impose a large burden on less-formal CSOs or those with limited human resources (OECD, 2023[1]; The Stephen Lewis Foundation, n.a.[91]; Sida, 2019[92]). Monitoring the amount of core and flexible support enhances transparency and accountability in resource allocation to CSOs.

While barriers to these funding modalities persist, urgency shows that change is possible, such as when providers showed remarkable adaptability in how they enabled the work of civil society in the COVID-19 context (OECD, 2021[39]). Providers increased flexibility in funding mechanisms and diversified funding

portfolios. They improved the adaptability of programmes and streamlined administrative and financial requirements (OECD, 2020[93]).

2. Establish a distribution target for funding allocation

A distribution target for allocating funding between provider-country/international CSOs and their partner-country CSO counterparts can support more balanced relations within partnerships (Partos, 2022[21]). Providers ought to require full transparency by provider-country/international CSOs on resources transferred to partners and funds invested in partner capacity strengthening (Trócaire, 2019[62]). Sida's guidelines to Swedish strategic partnership organisations require reporting on the share of total budget disbursed to the local partner, irrespective of whether the disbursement goes directly or through other Swedish or international partners. The rationale for the share should be explained (Sida, 2023[48]).

3. Fund costs associated with partnership building

Supporting equitable partnerships means moving away from funding focused on delivery and towards relations that funded programmes/projects entail. Equitable partnerships take time to develop and require investments of staff time and effort, which need to be considered in programme/project funding from the beginning. Partnership building and equitable programme/project governance must be funded to ensure that partner-country CSOs do not find obstacles to participation in these processes. There needs to be greater focus on building trust with partners and leadership development to move away from seeing partners only as implementers (Social Development Direct, Plan International, 2022[11]). Increased coverage of overhead (administrative or indirect) costs can make partnership building activities more sustainable for CSOs (see sub-section 'Support partner-country CSOs' full-cost coverage and sustainability.

4. Reduce access barriers to funding informal civil society

Grassroots organisations in partner countries (formal and informal), non-violent social movements, and other forms of informal civil society face specific challenges in accessing providers' funding. Among these, searching for grants and support can be challenging and time consuming, as can drafting project proposals that are often rejected. Less-formal groups that are not legally registered might also not be able to open bank accounts for receipt of funds. These barriers can be addressed by providers, such as by making information on funds more easily available, and by providing a trustworthy and safe platform to help manage the funds (Grassroots Solidarity Revolution, n.a.[94]). Finland funds thematic foundations with innovative ways of making funds accessible to grassroots organisations: the Abilis Foundation supports initiatives on disability rights proposed by local groups, without requiring them to be registered.

Providers' support to social movements need to be tailored to the stages of movements' life cycles. Working with typologies of movements' growth and phases can support providers in this learning process (Merriman, 2023[95]). Action Aid Denmark drafted initial recommendations on what providers' support to social movements should entail. This includes flexibility of funding, managing risks for both activists and providers, and coordinating and collaborating, keeping in mind that uncoordinated external support to movements can cause harm (ActionAid Denmark, 2023[96]). The USAID Nonviolent Collective Action in Democratic Development Primer provides five actionable recommendations for USAID (and other providers) to promote democratic development through support for nonviolent collective movements in the manner and moments most helpful to them (Naimark-Rowse, 2024[97]).

5. Apply feminist principles to funding and compliance

Shaping providers' funding policies and practices through the application of feminist principles creates opportunities to shift and transform power in partnerships. Feminist approaches to funding move away from competitiveness to embrace solidarity and trust.

Within this approach, providers could address the lack of funding that reaches WROs and feminist movements, which often require tailored support. As many feminist movements depend on volunteerism, unfair demands are imposed on women who engage in activism in addition to formal employment and unpaid care work at home. Funding models also need to recognise and respond to the transversal nature of feminist activism, which goes beyond women and gender as standalone funding streams, and embraces issues such as climate and economic injustice, racial equality, LGBTQI+ rights, migrant justice, and more (Tant, Jiménez and Rodriguez, 2022[98]; Concord, 2023[99]). The FCDO International Women and Girls Strategy 2023–2030 commits to supporting grassroots and WRO movements to operate and become more effective, including through provision of core, flexible, multi-year funding to emerging and established feminist organisations in the Global South.

6. Revisit approaches to risk management

Providers are advised to broaden their definition of risk beyond reputational, financial, and fiduciary risks to encompass the risk of not engaging with local partners, which has an impact on programme sustainability and achievement of development objectives (Humentum, 2023[41]). They should also consider risks faced by partner-country CSOs in performing their work, such as security risks in fragile contexts, or risks derived from when their work might conflict with local/national political views and religious beliefs in contexts of shrinking civic space (OECD, 2023[100])[14]. SDC's Partner Risk Assessment allows risk levels of partner-country CSOs to not become a strict exclusion criterion if the partner-country CSO takes adequate measures to mitigate the risk. SDC also offers support for organisational development of partner-country CSOs and helps them comply with international providers' formal requirements.

Providers need to lessen the administrative and financial burden on organisations funded both directly and through intermediaries (OECD, 2023[1]) (OECD, 2023[1]).[15] In doing so, they could expand on traditional approaches to monitoring and demonstrating impact, and set up assessment criteria that consider the partner-country culture and modalities of work without necessarily mirroring the processes and systems set up with provider-country/international CSOs (The Stephen Lewis Foundation, n.a.[91]). Expectations for viable reporting data could be reconsidered, such as allowing partner-country CSOs to use flexible and adaptive data-submission tools and methods that work for providers and CSOs alike.

In programmes/projects where provider-country/international CSOs have an intermediary role, providers need to ensure that accountability mechanisms imposed on partner-country CSOs do not impose more restrictive requirements and additional burdens than those for provider-country/international CSOs. Provider-country/international CSOs can continue ensuring due diligence while supporting partner-country CSOs and providers to co-create and pilot risk management and sharing mechanisms (Humentum, 2023[41]; Partos, 2022[21]). The 'due diligence passporting' being developed by the CSO signatories of the Charter for Change could provide insights on ways to better coordinate requirements between providers and intermediaries (Humentum, n.d.[101]; Humentum, 2023[90]).

Box 2.5. Examples of providers shifting power through funding and compliance

Ireland's flagship multi-annual funding scheme for civil society, the **ICSP**, aims to strengthen locally led action by supporting equitable partnerships and fostering mutual accountability. As per its Memorandums of Understanding, Irish CSO partners had to submit localisation policies by the end of 2023, set ambitious annual pass-on granting targets, and demonstrate annul progress against their localisation policies. Ireland also made several commitments to increase the percentage and number of partners receiving at least 80% flexible multi-year funding (according to Grand Bargain definitions).

The **Funding for Real Change** consortium comprises 12 private foundations that propose recommendations to providers to increase indirect cost coverage and plan multi-year flexible funding. The platform provides practical examples and tools on Indirect Cost Recovery, All-In Project Support, Flexible Programmatic Funding, Targeted Growth Support, Flexible Support, and Multi-Year Flexible Funding. Additionally, the website offers case studies on how members[1] are changing their internal policies to enable locally led projects and strengthening local and national CSOs.

The **French Development Agency (AFD)** **Fund for Innovation in Development** (FID) supports synergies between innovation and research teams and provides preparatory and pilot stage grants as a risk management solution for experimentation in projects to address the challenges of poverty and inequality in low- and middle- income countries. Every year, AFD publishes a call for expression of project intentions for CSOs. The scheme finances projects initiated by French and/or partner-country CSOs on the SDGs and international solidarity in line with CSOs' priorities and mission.

Note: 1. Examples of new policies at the Oak Foundation, Ford Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, Fundación Avina, and Annie E. Casey Foundations. In November 2022, in line with the discussion proposed by the consortium, the Ford Foundation published "Increasing our indirect cost commitment", by Hilary Pennington, Executive Vice President of Programs https://www.fordfoundation.org/news-and-stories/stories/increasing-our-indirect-cost-commitment.

Inclusive communication, language, imagery, and storytelling

Table 2.5. Enabling inclusive communication, language, imagery, and storytelling

1. ABANDON HARMFUL AND STEREOTYPICAL NARRATIVES ABOUT DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION IN PARTNER COUNTRIES
• Communicate authentic stories, representing actions led by local communities more accurately and preserving their dignity. • Require that programmes/projects make sure communication is designed and implemented with inclusive representation of all partners.
Do not shy away from showing the harsh realities of poverty, conflict, hunger, and natural disasters in communications, but avoid exploiting these images to increase public support in provider countries.
2. ASSESS LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY WITH PARTNER-COUNTRY EXPERTS AND PARTNERS
• Assess and revise how power issues are communicated. • Seek advice from partner-country actors, experts, and people from different groups experiencing discrimination on how they wish to be referred to. • Put in place internal checks with funded partner-country CSOs or experts when developing new policies, strategies, and communication material.
3. PRODUCE GUIDANCE AND LEARNING MATERIAL FOR STAFF
• Trainings, seminars, and other forms of peer learning and exchange can be useful to raise awareness about language issues within providers' internal structures, including in collaboration with provider-country/international CSOs. • Providers can produce guidelines to clarify institutional principles and provide a framework for action to their staff.

Description

Communication and language play an important role in shifting power with partners on many levels. They can affect the quality of partnerships and their power dynamics, and have a wider effect on the worldview depicted inside and outside provider countries. Language and words can perpetuate concepts that result from paternalistic attitudes, colonial legacies, and unequal power dynamics, impacting the quality of relationships. As language evolves, it need to be clean of past legacies, structural racism, and elitism. Words that have become outdated or offensive need to be updated or abandoned, in an exercise that brings together actors from the Global North and South (Oxfam International, 2023[102]; Partos, 2022[21]).

Development communication campaigns do not always credit the role played by partner-country CSOs, including in fragile contexts. Data on their contribution remains lacking, and logos of providers and provider-country/international CSOs remain at the forefront of communications. Credit to the work of providers should not over-shadow and undermine the leadership and ownership of partner-country actors, while bearing in mind sensitivities about communicating the work of partner-country CSOs in contexts where they might be vulnerable to backlash.

Providers and provider-country/international CSOs must abandon stereotypical narratives about local actors, especially when communicating to provider-country publics. Communication campaigns tend to portray people living in poverty, and women and girls in partner countries as victims in need of rescue, or as people overjoyed and thankful to receive international support. These narratives depict partner-country actors as passive recipients rather than show their agency to solve challenges and bring change (Africa No Filter, 2021[103]; Pledge for Change, 2022[104]; Health Poverty Action, 2019[105]). Continued use of these narratives undermines the possibility of more equitable partnerships and feeds scepticism in provider countries about the effectiveness of development co-operation, and is not conducive to convincing provider-country publics about the merits of locally led development (OECD, 2014[106]).

Possible solutions

1. Abandon harmful stereotypes about development co-operation in partner countries

Providers have a responsibility to improve public understanding of development actions. Along with provider-country/international CSO partners, they need to communicate the realities and complexities of the inequalities, injustices, and poverty they aim to address alongside the capacities and resilience of the people they work with. They can use their platforms to communicate more authentic stories that connect people of different backgrounds and disrupt inequitable power relations, representing the actions led by local communities more accurately, encouraging mutual respect, and preserving the dignity of those involved (Africa No Filter, 2021[103]; Pledge for Change, 2022[104]). Communication should not shy away from showing harsh realities of poverty, conflict, hunger, and natural disasters, but it must avoid exploiting these images for public support in provider countries for development actions (Pledge for Change, 2022[104]). The EU's Global Gateway Campaign shares the stories of local actors in each of the themes funded by the program (climate, health, education, and digitalisation). It features local partners and their role in making lasting change for their communities.

Providers can require programmes/projects to make sure that communication activities are designed and implemented with inclusive representation of partners, including those at the local level. The SDG Communicator Toolkit brings together communications advice from members and partners of the OECD DevCom Network. It is developed around nine Learning Areas, providing practical recommendations and examples to follow (The SGD Communicator, 2023[107]; Bond, 2019[108]).

2. Assess and revise language and imagery with partner-country experts and partners

Providers need to engage in developing a new and more respectful lexicon and imagery for development co-operation that realises the power of language within a system. At the very least, the language used must not reflect concepts that are patronising or reinforce stereotypes. To do so, providers need to be self-aware in the way they talk about power issues and people of different identities or groups that experience discrimination, always seeking advice on how they wish to be referred to (Oxfam International, 2023[102]). Internal checks could be put in place with funded partner-country CSOs or experts when developing new policies, strategies and communication material. The Oxfam inclusive language guide is a comprehensive tool to support reflection on language used, while sharing language suggestions recommended by specialist organisations which provide advice on language preferred by marginalised people, groups and communities to support development actors in making choices that respectfully reflect the way they wish to be referred to.

3. Provide training, guidance, and learning material for staff

Trainings, seminars and other forms of peer learning and exchange can be useful to raise awareness within providers' internal structures about language issues, and can be done in collaboration with provider-country/international CSOs.

Providers can produce guidelines to clarify institutional principles and provide a framework for action to their staff. The UNICEF Ethical reporting guidelines: Key principles for responsible reporting on children and young people guide reporting on, and representation of children and young people, and help journalists cover children's issues in an age-appropriate and sensitive manner. UNICEF also produced photography guidelines, including six principles on representing children and young people while respecting and safeguarding their rights and dignity. Similarly, BOND produced ethical guidelines that urge CSOs to put partners and local communities at the centre of image-making, to recognise their rights, and to consider CSOs' responsibilities in gathering and using their images and words for communications purposes.

Box 2.6. Examples of provider and CSO actions supporting inclusive communication, language, imagery, and storytelling

The **RINGO language and lexicon prototype** uses AI to enable inclusive communication that is less (or not) implicitly neo-colonial, sexist, or racist. It explores the application of AI to redress and replace the lexicon of pejorative jargon, idioms, and terminology used in the development sector. The designed lexicon contributes to shifting power in two ways: (1) abolishing problematic language while encouraging more inclusive communication using a new find-and-replace style function; and (2) enabling people in Uganda to use their local language by testing their work with Luganda, the language commonly used in the country.

How to write about Africa in 8 steps is a handbook that considers the challenges of ethical storytelling and provides practical examples of how difficulties might be overcome. It looks at all the stages of the storytelling process: conceptualising a project; planning; gathering material; producing a draft; gathering feedback on it; and producing a final version before dissemination. The handbook was produced relying on analysis of existing literature and interviews of eight African storytellers, including filmmakers, photographers, radio producers, and writers.

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Notes

[1] The DAC CoP on Civil Society comprises technical experts and leads on civil society in development co-operation and humanitarian assistance from DAC members' Ministries of Foreign Affairs and/or Development Co-operation agencies. It was created in 2019 to facilitate peer learning, exchange, and evidence-gathering among DAC members. It helped develop the 2020 DAC Members and Civil Society study and spearheaded the 2021 DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society. It serves as the primary forum for peer-learning and mutual, practical support to DAC member and other adherents' efforts to implement the DAC Recommendation.

[2] The CSO RG is an open platform that facilitates CSO engagement with the DAC and DCD.

[3] Providers of official development assistance (ODA), also known as donors.

[4] In this series of toolkits, and in line with the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance, civil society refers to uncoerced association or interaction by which people implement individual or collective action to address shared needs, ideas, interests, values, faith, and beliefs identified in common; and the formal, semi- or non-formal associations and the individuals involved in them. Civil society actors are distinct from states, private for-profit enterprises, and family. Civil society organisations (CSOs) are an organisational representation of civil society, including all not-for-profit, non-state, non-partisan, non-violent, and self-governing organisations outside of family, in which people come together to pursue shared needs, ideas, interests, values, faith, and beliefs, including formal legally registered organisations and informal associations without legal status. As per the DAC Recommendation, adherents seek to enable civil society actors that hold positive social and/or democratic values.

[5] This series of toolkits distinguishes between *partner*-country CSOs, *provider*-country CSOs and *international* CSOs.

Partner-country CSOs are organised and based in partner countries, namely in a country receiving official development assistance (ODA). Partner-country civil society actors can act at decentralised levels within partner countries, including the community level, and on a wider scale, nationally and internationally.

Provider-country CSOs are based and organised at the national and decentralised level in countries that are providers of ODA, including DAC members. *International* CSOs are organised on an international level. Some international CSOs act as umbrella organisations with affiliations in several provider and/or partner countries.

Provider-country CSOs and international CSOs based in provider countries that operate or have offices in partner countries are not considered partner-country CSOs.

These distinctions are based on the definitions in Aid for Civil Society Organisations 2023, which is based on the OECD Converged Statistical Reporting Directives. The authors recognise that these definitions are an oversimplification of CSOs' complexity in terms of size, governance, funding models, and more.

[6] For a definition of what *localising* means for the purposes of these OECD toolkits and an overview of international frameworks, initiatives, and commitments that recognise the importance of localising support for civil society, *Funding civil society in partner countries: Toolkit for implementing the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance*, pg. 9 and Box 1.1. A draft conceptual framework is also available in the OECD discussion paper "Framing DAC member approaches to locally led development".

[7] The Grand Bargain was launched in 2016 by the largest humanitarian providers and organisations, and currently counts 66 signatories, including member states, CSOs, and multilateral organisations. Additional information on its origin and structure is available at this link: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/node/40190 (accessed on 10 May 2023).

[8] *Global North* and *Global South* are used in this toolkit for ease of reading, even as it is acknowledged that the terminology is an oversimplification of a complex global landscape.

[9] For more information on challenges encountered by providers in the process of funding partner-country civil society actors, refer to *Funding civil society in partner countries: Toolkit for implementing the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance*, page 13.

[10] For guidance on what providers can do to operate with a clear articulation of the values and principles underpinning their efforts, please refer to *Funding civil society in partner countries: Toolkit for implementing the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance*, page 17.

[11] For more information on challenges encountered by providers in the process of funding partner-country civil society actors, refer to *Funding civil society in partner countries: Toolkit for implementing the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance*, page 13.

[12] On February 2024, the Government of Sweden announced a new CSO strategy valid for 11 months, where funding is no longer tied to Swedish CSOs and their partnerships with CSOs in developing countries. Since the new strategy, Sida is ending agreements with Swedish Strategic Partner Organisations by the end of 2024. In May 2024 Sida launched a new open and transparent funding application procedure for CSOs: https://www.sida.se/en/for-partners/calls-and-announcements/invitation-to-civil-society-organisations-for-partnership-with-sida.

[13] The EU uses *structured dialogue* to describe the process of engaging with stakeholders in a planned, regular, timely, predictable, and transparent manner. The concept of structured dialogue refers to the approach followed in the engagement process, in contrast to *ad-hoc consultations* or *one-off consultations*, where the EU seeks a specific input. In structured dialogue, stakeholders are invited to provide their input in a planned set-up, and they receive feedback on outcomes of the consultations and information about the overall process.

[14] Additional coverage of risk management is found here: "Risk management and locally led development".

[15] For a description of providers' possible actions to lessen administrative and financial burdens, refer to *Funding civil society in partner countries: Toolkit for implementing the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance*, page 29.

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