

REPORT FROM ROUNDTABLE 6

**THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN ENHANCING AID EFFECTIVENESS
ORGANIZED BY THE ADVISORY GROUP ON CIVIL SOCIETY AND AID
EFFECTIVENESS**

September 17th 2008

SUMMARY

The aim of RT6 was to build upon the work of the Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness (AG-CS). The AG-CS is a multi-stakeholder group reporting to the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness, which led an extensive consultation process, analytical work, and case study work in the 18 months preceding the Accra HLF.

RT6 had three objectives:

- *to consolidate a shared understanding and recognition of the roles that civil society organizations (CSOs) can play in development, and in advancing the aid effectiveness agenda;*
- *to discuss actionable ideas on CSO effectiveness; and*
- *to develop a sense of momentum around a forward agenda for multi-stakeholder dialogue and action between now and the next High Level Forum (HLF).*

The AG-CS entered RT6 having already made significant progress in advancing the subject of civil society onto the aid effectiveness agenda. This was reflected in paragraph 20 of the draft AAA, in the WP-EFF endorsement of the recommendations put forward in the AG-CS' *Synthesis of Findings and Recommendations* and in the case study works on good practice included in the AG-CS' *Reference Document and Case Book*.

A first point of consensus to emerge from RT6 was recognition of the many roles of civil society, and of the importance and value of CSOs as development actors in their own right and as aid recipients, donors and partners. This increased recognition was reflected not only in RT6 but in all of the roundtables. Participants in RT6 and in HLF3 more broadly also expressed interest in collaborating more closely and in including CSO effectiveness as a topic worthy of serious attention. This recognition and desire to engage are explicitly recognized in paragraph 20 of the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA). RT6 and subsequent discussion among stakeholders have highlighted the necessity to build on the momentum generated, to now turn attention to implementing the AG-CS recommendations in the three years leading up to HLF4.

This forward agenda will need to be an international effort involving donors, governments, and CSOs themselves, and shared leadership for different aspects of this work. It includes four elements:

1. Working together to provide a more enabling environment for CSOs, including appropriate models of donor support, based on existing and evolving models of good practice. Such an effort would work best if managed by a coordinating body to facilitate, monitor and report outcomes and findings for input into HLF4.
2. Work on how CSOs can develop more effective partnerships with each other, including North-South, South-South, global networks and national umbrella organizations. While this will generally be the purview of CSOs themselves, there is merit to further multi-stakeholder effort on this subject as there are implications for donor and government policies and practice.
3. Support for the CSO-led Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness. This independent process merits targeted donor and government support, and close coordination with the multi-stakeholder component and to facilitate tie-in to HLF4.
4. Preparing the ground for CSO engagement in HLF4, ensuring that a multi-stakeholder perspective on CSO effectiveness is a major theme of HLF4.

BACKGROUND

The rationale for Roundtable (RT6) on the Role of Civil Society in Enhancing Aid Effectiveness was to consolidate the work of the Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness (AG-CS). The AG-CS was launched by the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness (WP-EFF) in January 2007 to address three emerging issue areas in relation to civil society and aid effectiveness, in the pursuit of three outcomes:

1. *Better understanding and recognition of the roles of civil society organizations (CSOs) as development actors and as part of the international aid architecture, and engagement of CSOs in general discussions of aid effectiveness (**recognition and voice**)*
2. *Improved understanding of the applicability and limitations of the Paris Declaration for addressing issues of aid effectiveness of importance to CSOs, including how CSOs can better contribute to aid effectiveness (**applying and enriching the international aid effectiveness agenda**)*
3. *Improved understanding of good practice relating to civil society and aid effectiveness by CSOs, by donors and by developing country governments (**lessons of good practice**).*

Through a widespread consultation process, and a process of dialogue with the WP-EFF and its Steering Committee, the AG-CS had been able to advance understanding and agreement in relation to these outcomes as reflected in the draft AAA and the AG-CS' own *Synthesis of Findings and Recommendations*. RT6 provided an opportunity to recognize the progress that the AG-CS had made in achieving these outcomes, to air any remaining differences, and to chart a forward agenda so that the consultative process undertaken over the previous 18 months translates into action.

Preparation for RT6 began many months before the HLF. AG-CS members contributed names of potential co-chairs, speakers, and facilitators, and assisted in contacting candidates. A facilitator was recruited to advance and focus the dialogue.

Roundtable participants were provided with the following documents, all of which were made available on the AG-CS extranet site prior to the Roundtable:

- *Synthesis of Findings and Recommendations (available in English, French and Spanish)*
- *Overview of the AG-CS Findings and Recommendations (2 pages in table format)*
- *An Exploration of Experience and Good Practice – A Reference Document*
- *Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness Case Book*

THE STRUCTURE OF ROUNDTABLE 6

RT6 took place on day two the HLF on the afternoon of Wednesday September 3rd. It involved two AG-CS co-chairs¹, seven panel speakers, including five external experts and two AG-CS members, and contributions from participants from the floor.

The spirit of RT6 was very positive, and many more participants were eager to speak than time permitted. RT6 was attended by an estimated 150 participants with approximately 55% CSOs, 25% donors, and 20% developing country governments. The facilitator sought a balance of interventions from the floor from each stakeholder group.

RT6 was divided into two parts. The first part focused on the promise and possibility of greater CSO involvement, including practical examples, issues and obstacles, and proposed solutions.

The objectives of part one were:

- To consolidate a shared understanding and recognition of the roles that CSOs can play in development, and in advancing the aid effectiveness agenda
- To discuss actionable ideas on CSO effectiveness with a particular focus on:
 - Strengthening the enabling environment
 - Improving models of donor support
 - Reinforcing CSO partnerships

The second part focused on possibilities for the forward agenda. The objective of part two was:

- To develop a sense of momentum around a forward agenda for multi-stakeholder dialogue and action between now and the next HLF, including the following:
 - Action-oriented discussions at the country level
 - Piloting of good practices
 - Engagement in an international CSO-led multi-stakeholder process on CSO effectiveness
 - The integration of CSOs and CSO effectiveness as an integral part of any future processes and agreements on development and aid post-Accra.

RT6 began with opening remarks from the co-chairs who set the context, summarizing key points of agreement, emerging possibilities, and remaining differences. Co-chair *Stephen Wallace*, the AG-CS' chair and Vice-President of CIDA, opened with an overview of the consultative process, drawing attention to its multi-stakeholder character. Co-chair *Tony Tujan*, AG-CS member, Chair of the Reality of Aid, and Director of IBON Philippines, noted the high level of interest in the subject of civil society and aid effectiveness seen throughout this process, and the inclusive nature of HLF3.

To help provide a common ground of understanding, RT6's facilitator, *Suzanne Taschereau*, quoted the definition of civil society from the AG-CS' *Synthesis*. Participants were asked to self-identify by stakeholder group through a show of hands. While a little under half of the participants were from donors or governments, it was clear that a common bond existed among most of the participants as a result of some sort of engagement with CSOs in the past or in terms of current volunteer activities.

¹ One of the intended co-chairs, Ms. Sahana Pradhan, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Nepal, unfortunately was unable to attend, and was replaced by Mr. Tony Tujan, an AG-CS member.

Suzanne Taschereau then launched the first portion of the roundtable by inviting participants from different stakeholder groups to share concrete examples of CSOs' roles in development and aid.

Four external experts then spoke in a facilitated panel exchange, beginning with presentations of their independent points of view and providing a sense of vision to help guide the deliberations.

The first two panelists provided a historical view of civil society, giving examples of CSO contributions to development. *K.Y. Amoako*, head of the African Center for Economic Transformation and chair of the WP-EFF developing country Contact Group, provided a perspective on CSOs' roles in Africa's transformation dating back to colonial times. *Kumi Naidoo*, Honorary President of CIVICUS, reminded participants of the spectrum of CSOs' engagement, from the international to local levels, and of the potential for CSOs and governments to achieve great things by working together.

Adriana Mejia, Vice-Minister of Foreign Relations of Colombia, and *Tomas Brundin*, Deputy Director of the Department for Development Policy in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, then spoke to obstacles and issues of concern about CSOs that need to be addressed in order to reduce bottlenecks and skepticism regarding their legitimacy, accountability, and independence as development actors. *Adriana Mejia* provided examples of the strong role played by CSOs in Colombia's highly participatory democratic model. *Tomas Brundin* drew attention to the question of CSO legitimacy and factors that contribute to it.

Participants were asked to share their views on what needs to be done for civil society and CSOs to contribute to their highest potential, specifically regarding:

- examples of countries with a favourable enabling environment for civil society;
- examples of supportive donor models;
- examples of Northern NGO activities that support CSOs in developing countries.

Part two of RT6 focused on the forward agenda. This part began with presentations from two AG-CS members, and from a Malian CSO umbrella organization. *Réal Lavergne*, AG-CS member and Senior Analyst on Aid Effectiveness in CIDA, provided an overview of the AG-CS' *Synthesis of Findings and Recommendations*, referring to a two-page overview document presented in a table format. *Bakary Doumbia*, President of the CSO umbrella FECONG, provided an overview of the national consultation process in Mali as an example that other countries might be able to emulate. *Liz Steele*, the AG-CS member representing CONCORD/CARE International, presented the CSO-led Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness, a two-year process scheduled to begin in January 2009, under the leadership of a Global Facilitation Group.

Participants were asked to consider which of the ideas presented most inspired them, and to suggest how stakeholders could organize themselves to work on these ideas.

The co-chairs closed with a summary of key points, focusing on the forward agenda.

OUTPUTS OF RT6

Results achieved prior to the roundtable

The AG-CS entered RT6 having already made significant progress toward its goals as reflected in the draft AAA, the WP-EFF's endorsement of its *Synthesis of Findings and Recommendations*, and the clear recognition of CSOs in many of the statements made in plenary and in earlier roundtables during the HLF. The AG-CS consultation process itself provided a space for CSO voices to be heard in the aid and development dialogue leading up to Accra.

The two RT6 co-chairs launched the proceedings by providing a snapshot of the AG-CS process and of the emerging consensus in terms of increasing recognition and voice for CSOs in the aid and development dialogue.

Stephen Wallace spoke of the breadth of the AG-CS consultations which involved organizations from all over the world, upwards of 3500 organizations, and 5000 representatives from four stakeholder groups (developing country CSOs, Northern CSOs, developing country governments, and donors). He stressed the inclusive, multi-stakeholder nature of the AG process and the emerging recognition of the quantitative and qualitative importance of CSOs as development actors and aid partners.

Tony Tujan noted the interest on the subject of civil society and aid effectiveness, not just from CSOs but from donors and governments as well, as evidenced by the over 1,000 registrants to the multi-stakeholder portion of the CSO Parallel Forum on September 1st, more than double the number expected. He considered that, "The hallmark of Accra has been the CSO process, and the inclusiveness of this HLF." He drew attention to the strong language of recognition encapsulated in the AAA, but stressed the necessity of addressing outstanding donor and government concerns that could impede implementation of the AAA's commitments. He indicated the readiness of CSOs to accept this challenge.

Roles and voice

RT6 helped to further consolidate a shared understanding of the roles of CSOs as development and aid actors. Indeed, the impression from RT6 and from HLF3 more broadly is that the importance of CSOs roles and voice is no longer a subject of debate in the development and aid dialogue. This understanding was buttressed in RT6 by examples provided by participants from each stakeholder group of important roles played by CSOs, ranging from CSOs' watchdog and accountability role to that of service delivery.

K.Y. Amoako highlighted the importance of civil society through Africa's transformation over the past half century. He reminded participants that, "civil society was critical in moving Africa to where we are today." They played an important role in the independence struggle. After independence, civil society was integral to opening up the democratic process, engaging in dialogue and debate in the face of dictatorships, or advocating for structural adjustment with a human face. While the past 10 years have seen increased progress in terms of economic growth and policy-making in Africa, the centrality of civil society to Africa's transformation merits greater attention. CSOs can contribute to greater social inclusiveness in growth and public policy, through their roles in public service provision, in grassroots mobilization, and as advocates.

Kumi Naidoo, Honorary President of CIVICUS, reminded participants that, “the citizen is the basic building block of civil society.” Increasingly CSOs engage across the macro, meso, and micro levels simultaneously as they seek to influence international institutions and policy while also operating nationally and locally. He added that, “we need good civil society and good government, and we need to create the basis for them to work together creatively to address poverty.” He noted that the predominant roles played by CSOs have evolved, and that there is now greater emphasis on policy dialogue and good governance. He provided several examples of CSOs from the North and South working together to good effect, including the land mines campaign and the debt cancellation initiative. He noted that CSOs provide a source of “free policy intelligence” that should be mobilized to the best effect possible. He gave the example of the Domestic Violence Act in South Africa, the first draft of which was written outside of parliament. He identified the need for greater attention to the enabling environment, arguing that there are 40 countries in the world where the trend is towards fairly restrictive NGO legislation.

Contributions from the floor further affirmed the importance of CSOs’ roles and voice. A representative from the *Mouvement citoyen de la République du Niger* spoke of how CSOs were able to reveal misappropriation of funds through their monitoring of the Basic Education Program.

Terri Hasdorff, USAID Centre for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, highlighted findings of a 2007 WHO survey which showed that between 30 and 70% of the health infrastructure in Africa is currently owned by faith-based organizations. A 2006 Gallup poll of 19 Sub-Saharan African nations found that faith-based organizations were the most trusted category of institution.

Speaking to obstacles and issues of concern that might reduce space for CSOs’ to act and speak as independent development actors, *Adriana Mejia* advocated an openness to dialogue of a constructive, non-confrontational character. She drew attention to the important role that CSOs had played in defining the very character of democracy in Colombia through the organization in 1991 of a national constitutional assembly that emerged from an initiative of the student movement and was very inclusive, including women’s groups, political parties, ethnic groups, even guerilla groups. This assembly led to the inclusion of the principle of participation in Colombia’s constitution. She noted that Colombia has faced great challenges of violence, the existence of armed groups, inequities, and poverty linked to the drug problem, but has made great strides in overcoming these obstacles in large part because the government is open to dialogue with civil society, and upholds the principle of participation, with widespread consultation on most decisions, including in drafting the national development plan.

Tomas Brundin drew attention to the challenge of CSO legitimacy. He noted that in the World Bank’s study *The Voices of the Poor* (*Deepa Narayan, 2000*), the category of CSO in Africa that was found to have the highest level of legitimacy was funeral associations. Though these organizations may not be formally registered, they are owned by their members, and deliver an important service. He considered it a strength of the current process that CSOs were prepared to be more transparent about their own weaknesses. He considered that HLF3 represents a huge advance in recognizing CSOs as development actors in their own right, as evidenced by the presence of 82 CSOs in Accra compared to the 14 present in Paris in 2005.

Finally, *Tony Tujan* noted a remaining challenge that lies in the question of how to create space for inclusive civil society engagement. CSOs can coordinate among themselves to consolidate their voice, but such efforts are futile if space at international, national and local levels is absent.

CSO effectiveness

RT6 also made headway in meeting its second objective of identifying actionable ideas on CSO effectiveness targeting the enabling environment, donor models of support, and CSO partnerships. It was clear from participants' contributions that many initiatives are underway in these areas, but that more work is needed to learn from good practices and address bottlenecks.

The enabling environment

With regard to the enabling environment, three key issue areas were emphasized:

- Attitudes toward civil society
- Capacity
- CSOs' accountability

A representative from the Government of Egypt, *Talaat Abdel-Malek*, argued for action on the enabling environment at two levels in Egypt. One is with regard to legislative review, which the Government is undertaking in close collaboration with CSOs, as current legislation has been deemed too restrictive. The second is with regard to the change of mindset that is required to ensure that emerging legislation is interpreted and implemented in a positive way to give CSOs the necessary space to function. He saw two challenges for CSOs in Egypt: the need for capacity development, and for quality standards and better organization and knowledge-sharing among CSOs themselves.

Subsequent interventions reinforced these points. For the Peruvian Cooperation Agency, interest in strengthening the enabling environment for CSOs is tied to an interest in promoting greater CSO accountability. From their perspective, the voice of civil society should be the voice of people with no voice – the poor; and CSOs need to ensure they are responsible and accountable to the poor and to their governments.

The issue of mindset and the political will that goes with it was affirmed by the panel representative from Colombia, who drew attention to the London-Cartagena-Bogota process of dialogue and joint policy development, that has not been without difficulties, but that helped to build trust and pave the way for longer-term systematic dialogue.

Emmanuel Akwetey, Institute for Democratic Governance in Ghana, suggested that increased recognition of CSOs in Accra will remain a minor achievement if it is not accompanied by an increasingly "effective interface" between governments and civil society, based on an acknowledgement that both operate in the public sector and share that space. In his view it is the problematic character of this interface that constitutes the principal challenge to CSO effectiveness in policy dialogue, since the current relationship is one in which governments see CSOs as confrontational. As he put it, the government perception of CSOs is "someone in the street with a placard who does not get it." So the challenge of establishing an "enabling environment" is not just about the legislative framework. It is also about willingness and capacity to engage in constructive dialogue on the part of both CSOs and government. Other participants supported these points, emphasizing that confidence and trust need to be built up on both sides.

An outstanding issue that influences attitudes toward civil society is that of the political role of CSOs. While there is a growing understanding that CSOs are involved in the politics of development, the fact that this can flow into partisan politics poses a difficult issue for which there are no clear answers.

Donor models of support

With regard to donor models of support, both DAC donors and developing country governments shared their experience with mechanism of support to CSOs and civil society strengthening. Key themes emerging here were:

- Joint efforts
- Respect for CSO diversity.

In terms of joint efforts, Norway's *Berit Fladby* mentioned the Nordic + initiative on support for civil society at the country level. Based on a seven-country study, this group of donors has agreed on a set of principles to guide their civil society support, and invites other donors to participate in piloting efforts that are now being launched.

An appeal was made for funding mechanisms that preserve CSO diversity and their ability to be responsive to emerging issues, and to the priorities of their constituents. It was pointed out that many CSOs operate in "survival mode", and the necessity of competing for resources is not conducive to greater coordination and alliance building among them.

Examples of specific initiatives to support CSOs included the following:

- An initiative of interest presented by France's *Marie-Odile Blanc* is the EU-led local development initiative which promotes collaboration between European and developing country CSOs to pursue accountability regarding aid spending at decentralized levels.
- The Government of Austria and neighbouring European Union countries (the EU12) co-finance a regional partnership program of capacity building of national NGO platforms. Also in place is a "triad" program providing a platform of exchange and training between traditional donors and emerging donors from the region.
- The Government of Serbia has put in place a Social Innovation Fund for local groups to work with citizens to solve problems at the community level.
- USAID's Center for Faith-Based & Community Initiatives was established to help Faith-Based & Community Organizations become more familiar with USAID & to compete more competitively for USAID funds. It is guided by a "three C" model of compassion, capacity, and collaboration, and seeks to build relationships across organizations within the faith and secular community.

CSO partnerships

There was widespread appreciation for the CSO Open Forum initiative for addressing CSO effectiveness, of which the subject of CSO partnerships will be central. Recurring themes were:

- The subject of CSO accountability as a key topic which CSO partnerships could help to address. All parties considered that this is an area worthy of further attention.
- Coordination among CSOs – The challenge of coordination to achieve greater synergies and division of labour among CSOs was raised by all stakeholder groups, including civil society.
- CSO capacity development – The need for CSO capacity development in areas such as their own governance, and ways to dialogue with government, was also raised by all stakeholders.

Again the issue of CSO diversity arose, with cautions to donors and government against forcing coordination and harmonization on CSOs that may have no natural affinity. However, efforts at greater coordination among CSOs are already underway. The example of Alliance 2015 was provided, a

coalition of large European NGOs that began a process of merging their efforts in 2000. While the process has not been without challenges, the coalition has identified significant benefits such as:

- Broader knowledge and skills base₂
- Stronger advocacy campaigns₂
- Harmonized funding for projects₂
- Reduced transaction costs₂
- Shared evaluations, and
- Broad reach to over 1,000 partners

An over-arching conclusion of the RT was that the paradigm of the aid effectiveness agenda is changing and will continue to change in the coming years, from a technical process to a more political one. That the discussion has turned from a focus merely on aid to development was welcome.

Forward agenda

All indications are that there is a high level of interest and of interesting initiatives upon which to build in the 3 years remaining until HLF4.

The AG-CS' recommendations for the forward agenda were presented by *Réal Lavergne* in his presentation of the AG-CS' *Synthesis of Findings and Recommendations*. He noted that these recommendations represent the culmination of the AG-CS process, although the proposed forward agenda requires further thought to define the best modalities to continue working together. He pointed to two companion documents, the AG-CS' *Reference Document* and *Case Book*, which serve to illustrate that the recommendations are grounded in reality. Four action areas are proposed, as follows:

- A multi-stakeholder approach to strengthening civil society,
- Piloting good practice,
- Support for the CSO-led process on CSO development effectiveness,
- Inclusion of CSOs and CSO effectiveness in future processes on development and aid.

Speaking of the national consultations in Mali as an example of good practice, *Bakary Doumbia* stressed how this process set the path for more permanent spaces for multi-stakeholder dialogue. CSOs have further organized themselves to improve representation of civil society in the country. Donors have established a thematic group on civil society, which will engage with CSOs on a regular basis. A joint funding mechanism for civil society capacity development is also being established.

Liz Steele, AG-CS member for CONCORD/CARE International, presented the CSO-led Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness, a two-year process to begin in January 2009, with leadership from a Global Facilitation Group. This initiative grew out of the AG-CS consultation process, based on a strong sense among CSOs that the Paris Declaration principles, developed between donors and governments, cannot simply be applied to CSOs who are diverse development actors in their own right. This ambitious and historic initiative will create a learning space from which common frameworks and tools to develop CSO effectiveness principles will emerge, building on the AG-CS' recommendations and other processes. In order to be genuinely locally owned and context-relevant, the Open Forum process of dialogue will be as important as its final output.

In raising further awareness about the CSOs' Open Forum, the RT broadened interest among all stakeholder groups that can be expected to contribute to broad CSO engagement, and support for this process from donors and governments as recommended in the AAA paragraph 20b.

Sufficient momentum was generated to spur further dialogue subsequent to the RT about possibilities for the forward agenda. A number of bilateral discussions among donors following the RT have led to expressions of interest in working together to advance practices with regard to the enabling environment and donor models of support, which also address AAA commitments.

CONCLUSION

RT6 helped to advance the aid effectiveness agenda by bringing CSOs and issues related to CSO effectiveness squarely into the agenda. Looking forward, there are several lines of work to pursue, enthusiasm for which was stoked by RT6 and subsequent discussions:

1. Working together to provide a more enabling environment for CSOs, including appropriate models of donor support.

Such an effort would work best if managed by a coordinating body of some sort to act as facilitator, and to monitor and report outcomes and findings for input into HLF4 in response to the AAA's paragraph 20c. It would benefit from the establishment of communities of practice on specific themes to enhance learning across countries.

2. Work on how CSOs can develop more effective partnerships with each other, including North-South, South-South, global networks and national umbrella organizations.

While this will generally be the purview of CSOs themselves, there is merit to further multi-stakeholder effort on this subject as there are implications for donor and government policies and practice in their relationships and support to CSOs.

3. Support for the independent CSO process, the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness.

As a key CSO feature of the AAA, this independent process merits targeted donor and government support and close coordination. A special emphasis will need to be placed on developing country participation, including in the multi-stakeholder component CSOs have proposed. Coordination of the multi-stakeholder component and facilitation of the tie-in to HLF4 will be required.

4. Preparing the ground for CSO engagement in HLF4, ensuring that a multi-stakeholder perspective on CSO effectiveness is a major theme of HLF4.

The aid effectiveness agenda has evolved from the Rome Declaration to Paris and Accra. While the full scope of CSO involvement at HLF4 will need to be discussed over the course of the next year or so, the time is ripe to push the evolution of the aid effectiveness agenda one significant step further.