

Task Team input for the Civil Society Space Report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

April 30th, 2017

The [Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment](#) (Task Team) welcomes the invitation from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to provide input for the High Commissioner's forthcoming report, which will compile 'information on procedures and practices in respect of civil society involvement with regional and international organizations [...] and the contribution of civil society to their work and challenges and best practices'.

For this report, the Task Team wishes to offer the [Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation](#) (GPEDC) as a model for institutionalized engagement of civil society organizations (CSOs). The Task Team believes that institutionalized engagement of CSOs together with the recognition of CSOs as independent development actors in their own right, is one of four elements of the enabling environment for CSOs. The Task Team's four-part conceptual framework of the CSO enabling environment, which it has in common with the GPEDC, was shared with the OHCHR in the Task Team's [2015 submission](#) for the Civil Society Space Report and is also available [online](#).

In its resolution 32/31, the Human Rights Council (HRC) encourages the use of good practice by amongst others 'acknowledging publicly the important and legitimate role of civil society' (para. 14a) and by 'providing for the participation of civil society actors' (para. 14d). In this vein, the GPEDC recognizes CSOs as key actors and partners in development, not only on paper but also in its operations.

The GPEDC is an inclusive platform comprising varied state and non-state actors - 161 countries and 56 organizations – that pursues more effective development cooperation to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As stated in the [Nairobi Outcome Document](#)¹, which came out of its [2016 High Level Meeting](#), the GPEDC views 'all stakeholders as equal and interdependent partners in development' (para. 3). Its 21-person Steering Committee comprises representatives from various stakeholder groups – state and non-state – including a representative of civil society. Close consideration is being given to the addition of a non-executive Co-chair to the Steering Committee, to be filled by civil society or another non-state stakeholder.

Civil society's contributions to the GPEDC are significant. For one, CSO representation in the GPEDC helps to channel the voices of many and varied civil society actors, ranging from international CSOs to grassroots associations. Equally, CSO representation helps transmit the global-level commitments made by GPEDC stakeholders at various High Level Meetings to the country level. The two-way connection between the global and the local level is important in light of findings from Task Team-commissioned studies² that the absence of local actors can

¹ GPEDC, Nairobi Outcome Document, 1 December 2016, available at <http://effectivecooperation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/OutcomeDocumentEnglish.pdf>.

² The studies – commissioned by the Task Team – explored what factors make multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSI) successful and why. It draws from 17 MSI cases in 4 countries (Costa Rica, Indonesia, Kenya and Kyrgyzstan).

weaken the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder initiatives and thus stand in the way of progress. CSO representation furthermore contributes by challenging the GPEDC to be ambitious in its aims while upholding key principles and addressing key issues such as inclusion, human rights and gender equality, so that effective development cooperation is not solely a technical arena.

The GPEDC also explicitly recognizes the crucial role civil society plays in development and commits to creating an enabling environment for it. In the Nairobi Outcome Document, the GPEDC commits to 'support civil society in playing its full role as independent development actor in its own right, ensuring its operations are as effective as possible' (para. 11c). The GPEDC further recognizes but is also 'determined to reverse the trend of shrinking civic space [...] to build a positive environment for sustainable development' (Nairobi Outcome Document, para. 18).

This recognition is furthermore reflected in the inclusion of the CSO enabling environment in the GPEDC's Monitoring Framework. Indicator Two of the Framework seeks to assess to what extent 'civil society operates in an environment that maximizes its engagement in and contribution to development'. Noteworthy is the approach the GPEDC used for monitoring Indicator Two during its last (2015/16) monitoring round. The Indicator Two questionnaire is based on the above-referenced four-part framework and thus targeted the practices of different development actors - a reflection of the understanding that the creation of an enabling environment for CSOs is a shared responsibility. The monitoring process itself called for a multi-stakeholder approach using multi-stakeholder dialogue sessions and focal points (from amongst others government and civil society) to coordinate inputs.³

The Task Team's Stock-take⁴ of Indicator Two monitoring in 2015/16 found that 'in its implementation, Indicator Two monitoring offered a mechanism for increasing multi-stakeholder collaboration, information sharing, transparency, and developing or consolidating relationships of trust.' The development or maintenance of trust is particularly important, as the aforementioned study found that there is a positive correlation between trust and effectiveness. 'When strong trust is in play, transaction costs are reduced, communications are more open and fluid, disagreements are easier to resolve and commitments are more likely to be honoured.'⁵

Meanwhile, the Task Team is working on a guidance on the Indicator Two four-part framework which aims to amongst others deepen a common understanding of what is meant by institutionalized multi-stakeholder dialogue (as an element of the CSO enabling environment) and, more practically, what good practices stakeholders can implement to make progress.

Fowler, A. and Biekart, K. (2016), *Comparative Studies of Multi-stakeholder Initiatives*, Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment, March 2016, available at <https://taskteamcso.com/activities/multi-stakeholder-initiatives-studies/>.

³ For more information see the GPEDC's [2015-2016 Monitoring Guide](http://effectivecooperation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2015-Monitoring-Guide-final1.pdf) (available at: <http://effectivecooperation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2015-Monitoring-Guide-final1.pdf>) and [2016 Progress Report](http://www.oecd.org/development/making-development-co-operation-more-effective-9789264266261-en.htm) (available at: <http://www.oecd.org/development/making-development-co-operation-more-effective-9789264266261-en.htm>).

⁴ Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment (2016), Global Partnership Initiative 12 Stock-take of Indicator Two Monitoring, Jacqueline Wood with contributions from Adinda Ceelen, available at: <https://taskteamcso.com/gpi-12-stock-take-of-indicator-two-monitoring/>.

⁵ Fowler, A. and Biekart, K. (2016), *Comparative Studies of Multi-stakeholder Initiatives*, Volume 1: Synthesis Report (Country Ownership – Building from Within), Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment, March 2016, at p. 28. Available at <https://taskteamcso.com/activities/multi-stakeholder-initiatives-studies/>.

The Task Team is engaging in this work as part of [Global Partnership Initiative-2](#) (GPI-2), a voluntary initiative under the auspices of the GPEDC. The Guidance is a work in progress and expected to be completed in 2018.

In short, the GPEDC can serve as a model and significant source of ideas in relation to institutionalized CSO engagement. As expressed in our 2015 submission, the Task Team believes fundamentally in the potential for multi-stakeholder approaches to help protect, create and maintain civil society space. By giving space for various stakeholder perspectives and experiences, multi-stakeholder approaches can build common understanding, trust, and the political will necessary to enable an accountable, free and independent civil society. From the Task Team's perspective this is part of SDG 16 on peaceful, just and inclusive societies and accountable institutions – which are both a means and an end for development – and which are crucial for the achievement of the broader 2030 Agenda.

The Task Team's own experience as a multi-stakeholder body in support of CSO development effectiveness and the CSO enabling environment demonstrates that consensus building through fully inclusive engagement is not only possible, but is essential for building shared understanding and real ownership of agendas for action that are politically feasible.