

Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness

CSO Effectiveness Principle on Gender Equality and Equity

Prepared for BetterAid Gender Consultation
June 2011

Background

Millions of civil society organizations (CSOs) worldwide contribute in unique and essential ways to development as innovative agents of change and social transformation. These contributions are long-standing; CSOs support grassroots experiences of people engaged in their own development efforts; they are both donors and practitioners of development; they promote development knowledge and innovation; CSOs work to deepen global awareness and solidarity among people across national boundaries; and they seek out inclusive policy dialogue with governments and donors to work together for development progress.

Acknowledging not only their contributions, but also their weaknesses and challenges as development actors, CSOs have affirmed their commitment to take pro-active actions to improve and be fully accountable for their development practices. The *Open Forum on CSO Development Effectiveness* is a CSO-led global and fully participatory process, which has determined the vision and essential principles that define and guide change for effective CSO development practice.

In September 2010, more than 170 CSO representatives from 82 countries gathered in Istanbul, Turkey, to consider and unanimously adopt the ***Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness***, based on thorough consultations with thousands of CSOs in more than 70 countries and sectors, involving thousands of stakeholders from across the globe.

The eight *Istanbul Principles* take into account the diversity of CSO visions, approaches, relationships and impacts in their development actions. Given this diversity and geographic spread, the *Open Forum* seeks meaningful but distinct applications of the *Istanbul Principles*, in ways that are appropriate to each CSO local context or sector.

The *Istanbul Principles* are the foundation for the *Open Forum **International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness***, which will be presented for adoption in June 2011 at the Second Global Assembly in Siem Reap, Cambodia. The *Framework* sets out guidance for interpreting and aligning CSO practices with the *Principles* in diverse local and sectoral settings. A “Toolkit” with further elaboration of guidance and indicators will enable CSO actors to adapt and work with the *Framework* in their own organizational and program realities in the years to come.

2. Embody gender equality and equity while promoting women and girl's rights

CSOs are effective as development actors when they ... promote and practice development cooperation embodying gender equity, reflecting women's concerns and experience, while supporting women's efforts to realize their individual and collective rights, participating as fully empowered actors in the development process.

Achieving gender equality, through addressing unequal power relations and fulfilling women's and girls' rights - in all their dimensions - is essential for realizing sustainable development outcomes. The empowerment of women through gender equity promotes the goal of gender equality – equal access for women and girls to opportunities, resources, and decision-making at all levels. Given that women are not a homogeneous category, CSOs stress the need for diversified approaches, which include and work with different groups of women, especially marginalized groups (e.g. migrants, indigenous women and women affected by conflict etc.) in order to promote their empowerment, safety and well-being. CSOs also acknowledge that men and boys are crucial partners and need to be engaged fully in this process.

CSOs themselves are not free from gender inequalities and practices. Advancing gender equity goes beyond improving practical conditions for women, to redressing strategic inequalities in power among men and women, tackling discriminatory laws, policies and practices. But women's participation per se is not sufficient to guarantee that their rights and needs will be put forward and defended and that the culture of CSOs will be transformed to embrace gender equality at the core. Explicitly including the rights and opportunities of girls and young women, including women's reproductive rights, is fundamental to realizing gender equality and women's empowerment. Women's organizations and movements are essential actors in development, and have been particularly important as a force for women's empowerment and democratization.

Guidance

- a) **Integrate and implement gender equality and women's rights in the constitutive practices of CSOs**, in their mandate, their policies, in their active dialogue with counterparts, in gender-specific allocation of human and financial resources (on a scale proportional to organizational capacity), and in capacity strengthening programs aimed at staff and other counterparts.
- b) **Embed gender equality and equity indicators and analysis in program plans** by ensuring CSO program planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation are based on comprehensive gender analysis as well as gender equality and women's rights indicators, including consideration of issues affecting girls and young women.
- c) **Invest in partnerships to increase capacities in gender equality and women's rights**, including significant support for women's organizations and movements, fostering greater engagement by men and boys in this process, while respecting local dynamics and profiling successes in gender equality and women's rights in CSO public engagement and advocacy.
- d) **Seek opportunities for collaboration on multi-stakeholder policy dialogue** to promote context-appropriate changes to guarantee women's reproductive rights, their economic empowerment, leadership and greater control over productive resources, and improved political participation to further their strategic interests.