

# Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness

## Open Forum Consultation on Gender Equality and Development Effectiveness

### Executive Summary of Global Report on Gender

Prepared for BetterAid Gender Consultation  
June 2011

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“Women’s autonomy in private and public life is fundamental for guaranteeing the exercise of their human rights. The ability to generate their own income and to control assets and resources (economic autonomy), to have control over their bodies (physical autonomy), and their full participation in the decisions affecting their lives and women overall (autonomy in decision-making) are three pillars of gender equality and joint citizenship.”

*Observatorio de la Igualdad de Género de América Latina y el Caribe 2010*

#### **Introduction**

The Open Forum held a series of gender consultations and surveys with CSOs in Africa, Asia/Pacific, Latin America, East Europe and CIS in order to elaborate the specific policies, practices and conditions that civil society organisations require in order to be effective development actors for gender equality and women’s rights. The starting point of the consultations has been Open Forum’s commitment to gender equality as the Principle Two of the Open Forum Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness. The focus of Open Forum is to promote among CSOs the capacity for operational action and genuine accountability to all women, particularly marginal women, fully aware of the vital need for an enabling environment to put gender commitments into action. Achieving gender equality in CSOs institutions and programmes requires a reshaping of the aid architecture in order to give women greater access to and control over resources. A clear message from the Open Forum gender consultations is that the donor community must recognise the resource needs for CSOs to implement good gender practices in ways that support and interact with communities and people’s organisations. The struggle for gender equality and women’s rights needs to guide the work of all donors, governments and CSOs. You can find more information on the Open Forum consultation on the [website](#).

### ***Commitment to gender equality and women's autonomy at the heart of the development effectiveness agenda***

The process of building greater gender awareness among CSOs, governments and donors requires, first and foremost, establishing within CSOs a culture of accountability and responsibility to gender equality in line with international human rights standards. The Open Forum aims to promote women's organisations and women's voices in the political arena in order to end discrimination against women so that gender equality and human rights become the basis of democracy and development. CSOs therefore must promote gender equality within its structures and activities. Women's empowerment should be interpreted as the capacity of women to decide upon resources, linked to their bodily autonomy and emancipation where ending 'violence against women' must be part of the democratic agenda of CSOs and one of the central elements for development effectiveness. CSOs must promote economic, political, cultural, technological and social empowerment of women as an integral part of gender work with strategic use of the media, mutual learning and solidarity always responding to the changing needs of communities.

### ***Building capacity in CSOs on gender***

Capacity building on gender and development effectiveness at all levels (from grassroots, national and international CSOs to government and donors and among the media is crucial. There is the tendency to see gender as a women's issue rather than as a critical requirement for development effectiveness processes that address power relations between men and women, in all aspects of economic, political, social and cultural development. Conceptual clarity therefore needs to be built within organisations on substantive gender equality in a fully comprehensive approach that covers all levels of organizational arrangements in depth. Resources for capacity building and training on gender need be ring fenced in CSOs budgets and provided by donors in the form of institutional financing. Marginalised groups and small grassroots organizations require particular attention in order to ensure that all the needs of the different constituencies of women CSOs are included. Advocating for gender awareness in donor community is also critical. Donors can be gender blind and misunderstand the call for gender equity seeing it as a threat rather than as a positive step for development effectiveness.

### ***Elaboration, adoption and implementation of gender policy***

Gender policy requires working with all of the CSOs' staff in order to develop the best gender sensitive methodology of work in the organization's specific context. It is important to mainstream gender in all organization's activities at all stages, starting from gender sensitive needs assessment, through elaboration of the projects, its implementation, management and evaluation. CSO budgets should be designed from a gender perspective, in order to provide resources to diverse activities that guarantee gender equality with full knowledge of the different gender instruments agreed to at the international and regional levels.

### ***Building effective participation of women in CSOs***

CSOs need to be proactive in providing effective spaces for women to participate in CSOs, and develop built-in mechanisms to put gender guidelines into practice. Supporting women's participation means understanding the factors that impact women's ability to participate, e.g. women's existing heavy workloads/gendered roles including as mothers and carers as well as being aware of practical considerations where women are not safe out at night. These measures do not ignore the need to challenge unequal sharing of home duties between men and women, but acknowledge the realities posed for women by entrenched social norms. Spaces are needed within CSOs for women to break their silence. Potential indicators include the presence of Anti-discrimination policies, inclusive not protectionist in nature, (e.g equal opportunity; anti-sexual harassment) so that women have avenues to address sexual harassment, gender-based violence etc in CSOs. A transparent approach needs to be reflected in the presence and utilisation of organisational policies, from financial management to rules and procedures. This includes transparent affirmative action policies and actively promoting women's inclusion in staff, management and governance levels, in a qualitative not simply quantitative approach.

### ***Promote Women's leadership and equal opportunities***

CSOs need to promote equality of opportunities taking into account all diversities. It is important to provide relevant training and skills building, planned with specific considerations that enable women's participation. These opportunities should build on, recognise and harness women's existing knowledge and skills including attracting and empowering young women activists and strengthening networks across the women's movement, including marginalised groups such as women with disabilities, LGBT groups, migrant workers and indigenous women.

### ***Pursue Equitable Partnerships and Solidarity***

CSOs not working directly on gender issues need to work more closely with organizations that specifically address women's rights. Such alliance building among CSOs will bring critical gender issues to the public agenda and in policy making such as in sexual and reproductive health, the increase in gender violence, the effective political participation of women, and feminization of poverty. Women's rights organizations will bring to the wider CSO constituency their perspective and methodologies in order to identify and demonstrate what still must be achieved to reach gender equality. It has to be underlined that women's participation *per se* does not guarantee that women's interests and needs are proposed or defended.

### ***Knowledge networks and research on gender equality***

It is important to build knowledge networks among CSOs working on gender concerns to share information and strategies, create opportunities for collaboration through peer-peer exchanges and exposure visits. CSOs need to collect evidence and record events as part of evidence based

research which can address the roots of the gender problem and lead to positive, sustainable change. In order to address gender inequalities, gender discrimination within CSOs, governments and donors need to be recorded. Collecting gender disaggregated data with indicators that measure community involvement including men's involvement in gender equity processes are also important for strategizing effectively.

'Traditional leaders and institutions across the CSO spectrum need to embrace and accept women's rights and bring women's rights issues to the centre of their agenda and movements... Sustainable change in relation to women's human rights is a long-term goal and movements should actively build the capacity of new feminists and activists, and strengthen networks between movements.'

*Open Forum Asia Pacific Consultation on Gender and Development Effectiveness 2011*

## **Recommendations**

### **a. Recommendations to CSOs**

1. Build a gender aware culture and practice in and among CSOs
2. Be accountable to gender equality and equity in all operations and delivery of services:
3. Take affirmative action for gender equity within the CSO
4. Build leadership capacity of women in CSOs:
5. Ensure sustainability of gender programmes
6. Bring women's rights and gender equality concerns to Busan
7. Bring a feminist and women's rights agenda to CSOs understanding of development

### **b. Recommendations to Governments of Aid Receiving Countries**

1. Create an environment where women's rights are respected and promoted:
2. Recognise and Support Civil Society efforts and mandates
3. Observe international agreements and commitments to protect women's human rights
4. Promote a Bottom up development of gender agenda rather than donor led agenda
5. Adopt Gender Mainstreaming and specific measures in development policy
6. Create mutual learning opportunities and information sharing between governments, CSOs and donors

### **c. Recommendations to Donors (states, multilateral agencies, donor CSOs)**

1. Work towards harmonization
2. Address structural inequities in the global funding environment
3. Demonstrate commitment to supporting women
4. Provide Core Funding
5. Support programmes for gender equality
6. Allocate resources for gender training including skills building, education and capacity building and strategies for working with the media
7. Promote transparency and openness in all development programs
8. Finance long term programmes