

European NGO confederation  
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Confédération européenne des ONG  
d'urgence et de développement

## Contribution to the “EU Aid Effectiveness Roadmap to Accra & Beyond” - CSO and the principles of the PD

### CONCORD Enlarged Taskgroup on CSO Effectiveness in Development Cooperation January 2008

#### Background of CSO involvement

European Civil Society has been engaging on the debate on Aid effectiveness and the Paris Declaration for a considerable period of time and within a number of diverse processes.

CONCORD is represented on the Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness (AG), established in January 2007 to coordinate an ongoing dialogue among civil society, donors and developing country governments in the lead-up to the September 2008 High Level Forum (HLF), which will review the implementation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (PD).

Between August and November 2007, the AG has conducted regional multi-stakeholder consultations to improve understanding of three issues: 1) the roles of civil society organizations (CSOs) as development actors and as part of the international aid architecture; 2) the applicability and limitations of the Paris Declaration for issues of aid effectiveness of importance to CSOs, including their contribution to aid effectiveness; and 3) good practice related to civil society and aid effectiveness by CSOs, by donors and by developing country governments. The conclusions from these consultations will feed into a global multi-stakeholder International Forum in February 2008 to reflect upon civil society and aid effectiveness and eventually into the Accra process.

In the context of the wider process initiated by Advisory Group CONCORD organized and hosted the CSO/NGO AE Northern Regional Workshop, held in Brussels on 15 & 16 October 2007. The vast range of participants included representatives from CONCORD's Members, Networks and National Platforms, as well as from wider European Civil Society Organizations. Non-EU CSO National Platforms from the US, Canada, Japan and Norway and representatives from the Global South were also in attendance.

Several crucial issues arising from this consultation will inform the International Forum and the subsequent advice of the AG to the OECD/DAC-based Working Party on Aid Effectiveness, and to the Accra HLF and are outlined below.

## **Limitations of the Paris Declaration – a technical approach to aid delivery**

European Civil Society Organizations welcome the intention of the Paris Declaration signatories to improve the technical and management dimensions of Aid Effectiveness, but see the limitations of this as a largely a technical agenda affecting the means for the delivery of aid between governments. CSOs also see the discrepancies between the principles of aid effectiveness and the practice and impact of aid on the ground. The Paris Declaration commitments are too focused on cost-effective aid delivery mechanisms whereas CSOs propose to *broaden and deepen* the Paris Declaration process so that it reflects *development* effectiveness.

The CSOs recommendations for the PD process are summarized in the CONCORD position paper “Delivering better aid: An opportunity for European Union leadership in the fight against global poverty”.

## **Recognition of the role and voice of CSOs**

The Paris Declaration focuses on donor/government aid relationships and its narrow interpretation of the implications of its five defining principles<sup>1</sup> and does not officially recognize the role and contribution of CSO as development actors in their own right.

CSOs are autonomous membership-based, cause-oriented, and/or service-oriented organizations, which share a common defining identity – social solidarity with the people in society they serve and/or represent. Their scope and roles in development is broader and distinct from that of governments and donors, and their focus is mainly on poor and marginalized people. CSOs are an essential feature of democracy, seeking to express peoples’ organized action in the public sphere for public benefit and change.

The diversity of CSOs’ roles is their strength. CSOs in development cooperation have many roles which include mobilizing grassroots communities, poor and marginalized peoples to claim their rights; monitoring government and donor policies and practices; holding national and multilateral development agencies to account through local knowledge, research, advocacy, and alternative policies; delivering innovative services and development programming; capacity-building; building coalitions and networks for greater civil society coordination and impact; and mobilizing and leveraging financial and human resources in North/South CSO partnerships.

Democratic ownership is the central concept that underlies all five principles of the Declaration, The PD should be based on strengthening governance and democratic culture in which governments meet their responsibilities to their citizens. A democratic culture in which the voices of the poor, the excluded and the discriminated are strong, is essential to overcome the inherent political obstacles in efforts to counter poverty and inequality, including their real inclusion in the development of national development strategies. This is why CSO consultation and involvement is essential.

New aid modalities, inspired by the PD, must not threaten CSOs’ right of association and non-governmental space, citizens’ initiatives or the basis of participatory democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> Country ownership, alignment to country systems, harmonization of donor practices, management for results and mutual accountability.

## **Applicability of the principles of the Paris declaration to CSOs**

European CSOs believe that CSOs' place in aid architecture comes not so much from our role as donors, but from a mix of roles based on social solidarity. While CSOs have a responsibility to ensure their own effectiveness in achieving development results, we would argue that the PD principles, negotiated exclusively within donor/government aid relationships, must not be applied directly to the distinct roles of CSOs as development actors.

We question the validity of applying the criteria of "alignment" and "harmonisation" within the narrow meaning of the PD to CSOs, which will undermine their diversity and civil society's importance for democratic ownership. We do not consider that our effectiveness would be enhanced by uncritical alignment with government development strategies and harmonization with donor conditions for aid delivery, but would undermine CSOs' potential contributions as innovators and agents of change and CSOs' right of initiative.

CSOs deem a broader development effectiveness debate is required, reflecting the diversity of all development actors. While considering the Paris Declaration and its principles as not applicable to our work, as European CSOs we are engaged in developing our own principles for effectiveness in development cooperation. Governments and donors should support civil society in this effort.

## **Principles governing CSO Effectiveness**

The approach of CSOs in development places citizens and their rights at the heart of all their actions and strategies. CSOs are diverse but act according to distinct and common values and principles which include solidarity, partnership and human rights.

The framework for understanding CSO aid effectiveness is the effectiveness of their impact in eradicating poverty and inequality, promoting human rights and social justice. Beyond the Principles of the PD, CSOs propose to define CSO Effectiveness for development cooperation as the continuous enhancement of their transparency, accountability at all levels, autonomy from states and coordination. CSO actions must strive for:

- Sustainable impact and results, based on social processes of empowerment and mutual learning;
- Empowering individuals and communities, strengthening democratic ownership and participation; being people centered;
- Building genuine and long term partnerships, respect and dialogue, while acknowledging the importance of CSO diversity in democratic practice.