



## **BRIEFING PAPER**

**Good Practice in Donor Engagement with Civil Society: Creating  
an Enabling Environment for CSOs?**

**A Commentary on  
*Partnering with Civil Society:  
Twelve Lessons from DAC Peer Reviews***

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**Briefing Paper #2  
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**AidWatch Canada** is a Canadian not-for-profit social justice organization, producing and disseminating independent research and analysis on aid and development cooperation trends, policies and practices. *AidWatch Canada* promotes development cooperation that enables people living in poverty, vulnerable and discriminated populations to claim their human rights.

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### **AidWatch Canada Briefing Papers**

Briefing Paper #1, The Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation: Foundations for development effectiveness?, December 2011

Briefing Paper #2, Good Practice in Donor Engagement with Civil Society? A Commentary on *Partnering with Civil Society: Twelve Lessons from DAC Peer Reviews*, November 2012

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**Good Practice in Donor Engagement with Civil Society:  
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**A Commentary on *Partnering with Civil Society:  
Twelve Lessons from DAC Peer Reviews***

**A. Introduction**

The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) has produced a series of “good practice” papers derived from more than 30 years of peer reviews of its donor member countries.<sup>1</sup> The 23 DAC members publish periodic reviews of the aid practices for each DAC member every 3 to 4 years through a DAC facilitated process implemented by the donor peers. The purpose is to improve donor accountability to DAC policies and norms, encourage learning and take account and contribute to good donor practice.

The Engagement and Evaluation Division of the OECD’s Development Co-operation Directorate (DCD) has been coordinating a series of “Twelve Lessons” papers in key areas of donor policy, guided by the outcomes of the High Level Forums on Aid Effectiveness (HLF).<sup>2</sup> These lessons are intended to assist in identifying good practice and inform ongoing peer reviews. In October 2012 the DCD published *Partnering with Civil Society: Twelve Lessons from DAC Peer Reviews (Twelve Lessons)*.<sup>3</sup> It is expected that DAC members will use this paper to reflect upon their practices. For civil society organizations (CSOs) in donor countries, the *Twelve Lessons* will be an important resource in dialogue with their government on current issues in these practices.

*Twelve Lessons* is the result of a three-year process involving a number of steps starting with a DCD survey of donor policies and practices governing their partnerships with CSOs. This initial stage resulted in a 2011 summary paper on the outcomes of the survey, titled *How members work with civil society organizations*, which also took into account CSO responses from a parallel survey of selected NGO platforms in 6 donor countries.<sup>4</sup>

The three-year process for the identification of the *Twelve Lessons* in 2012 was accompanied by an informal steering group composed of several CSO experts from DAC countries, selected NGO umbrella organizations, and selected DAC members.<sup>5</sup> *Twelve*

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<sup>1</sup> See the OECD DAC page for lessons from peer reviews at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/peerreviewsofdacmembers/lessonsfrompeerreviews.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> These include the *Paris Declaration* (2005 HLF2), the *Accra Agenda for Action* (2008 HLF3) and the *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation* (2011 HLF4).

<sup>3</sup> See the text at <http://search.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=DCD/DAC%282012%2931&docLanguage=En>.

<sup>4</sup> See OECD DCD, *How members work with CSO* at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/howdacmembersworkwithcivilsocietyorganisationsanoverview2011.htm>

<sup>5</sup> CCIC was among the NGO platforms consulted and the author of this commentary was a member of the informal steering group.

*Lessons* also took into account relevant commentary in DAC peer reviews as well as the outcomes of a 2011 workshop, “What makes for good cooperation between DAC members and CSOs”, involving representatives from northern and southern CSOs and DAC members. However, the 23 DAC members alone have revised and agreed to the final published version of the *Twelve Lessons*.

## B. What are the Twelve Lessons?

In a forward to *Twelve Lessons*, Brian Atwood, the Chairperson of the DAC, situates these lessons with the observation, “CSOs and DAC members often share the same objectives of

### **DAC’s Twelve Lessons on Partnering with Civil Society**

#### **The Strategic Framework for CSO Partnerships:**

**Lesson One:** Have an evidence-based, overarching civil society policy.

**Lesson Two:** Strengthen civil society in developing countries.

**Lesson Three:** Promote and support public awareness raising.

**Lesson Four:** Choose partners to meet objectives.

**Lesson Five:** Make policy dialogue meaningful.

#### **Delivering Effective Support for Civil Society:**

**Lesson Six:** Respect independence while giving direction.

**Lesson Seven:** Match funding mechanism with purpose.

**Lesson Eight:** Minimize transaction costs.

**Lesson Nine:** Build strong partnerships with humanitarian NGOs.

#### **Focusing on Learning and Accountability:**

**Lesson Ten:** Focus on results and learning.

**Lesson Eleven:** Increase transparency and accountability.

**Lesson Twelve:** Commission evaluations for learning and accountability.

reducing poverty and inequality in developing countries and encouraging democratic processes, including strengthening civil society”.<sup>6</sup>

The Chair notes in this regard the commitments by all DAC members at the November 2011 Busan High Level Forum to:

“Implement fully their respective commitments to enable CSOs to exercise their roles as independent development actors, with a particular focus on an enabling environment, consistent with agreed international rights, that maximize the contributions of CSOs to development.

“Encourage CSOs to implement practices that strengthen their accountability and their contribution to development

effectiveness, guided by the Istanbul Principles and the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness.” (*Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation*, §22a and §22b)

The DAC’s twelve lessons on partnering with civil society are “based on evidence and experience”, identifying “common ground for dialogue and action, while respecting the distinctive objectives and roles of official donors and CSOs”.

<sup>6</sup> All quotes are from *Twelve Lessons*, various pages.

Each lesson has been elaborated in terms of what it means, why it is important, and how it can be implemented. The *Twelve Lessons* are focused on important strategic conditions for an enabling CSO environment, and many of these lessons, if fully implemented in collaboration with CSOs, could move towards maximizing CSO contributions to development. As noted already, they set the stage for policy dialogues between CSOs and donors at many levels – global, national, in the donor and developing countries. To what extent do donors’ actual performance measure up against the key lessons as synthesized by the DAC’s peer review processes?

Despite these positive directions, unfortunately, sometimes the elaboration of the lessons is too vague, providing scope for peer reviews to take a narrow or perhaps unintended interpretation. This is particularly true for Lesson One – having an overarching civil society policy and strategy provides little actual policy directions for good donor practice.

The lessons fail to fully understand, and then draw specific directions, in relation to the complexity and diversity of CSOs as development actors. There are many different and often unique ways in which CSOs fulfill their mandates for development and organize themselves as independent development actors. Donors in the *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation*, referenced by Brian Atwood, recognized that CSOs “play a vital role in enabling people to claim their rights, in promoting rights-based approaches, in shaping development policies and partnerships, and in overseeing their implementation” [§22]. But the *Twelve Lessons* does not fully take account of these CSO roles and CSO rights-based approaches, particularly with respect to the conditions for effective policy dialogue, north/south CSO partnerships and collaboration, and an appreciation of CSO engagement in critical policy dialogue with donors themselves.

This *Briefing Paper* summarizes some of the most important positive directions in the *Twelve Lessons* and highlights some weaknesses and missing areas. It attempts to strengthen the intended guidance by drawing together some implicit policy directions, which are summarized in the conclusion.

The CSO reference for understanding the conditions for a favourable CSO enabling environment is taken from the CSO-led Open Forum’s 2011 *International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness* (see the Annex for a summary of these conditions as they relate to donors). This *Framework* is the result of a global civil society broad consultation and consensus, which is intended to help CSOs to reflect on their practice, based on the *Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness*.<sup>7</sup> The *Briefing Paper* also takes note of the *Key Messages* developed by the multi-stakeholder Task Team on CSO Development

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<sup>7</sup> See Section Four of the *International Framework* accessible at <http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/InternationalFramework>. The *Istanbul Principles* can be found in Section Two of the *Framework*.

Effectiveness and Enabling Environment. These *Key Messages* were a donor/CSO (voluntary) consensus on minimum standards for an enabling environment for CSOs.<sup>8</sup>

### C. Important Directions and Critical Weaknesses in the *Twelve Lessons*

#### Lesson One: An evidence-based, overarching civil society policy

##### Enabling guidance ...

**An overarching civil society policy and strategy are essential for a transparent and effective donor engagement with civil society**, and is consistent with CSOs' call for "transparent and consistent policies for development" [*International Framework*, 23]. *Twelve Lessons* identifies the focus for this overall donor policy/strategy as "strengthen[ing] civil society in developing countries".<sup>9</sup> It encourages donors to base their approach on thorough analysis of the civil society sector and an understanding of how CSOs contribute to development". Strengthening civil society should be linked to the "DAC members' overarching strategic vision for development cooperation to ensure political attention and support". Donor policies/strategies should be designed "in close consultation with CSOs from inception to review", with umbrella organizations playing an important role in facilitating consultations.

##### But the DAC should also have considered ...

**Lesson One fails to clearly identify the key principles and approaches that should inform donor CSO policies and strategies.** Is it sufficient for the DAC peer review process that a donor policy or strategy exist, irrespective of its content? *Twelve Lessons* opts out with an observation that "there is no template for civil society policy", based on DAC member political and legal constraints. Certainly donor country context matters. Nevertheless this fact should not have limited guidance on implementation to largely operational issues for developing a policy, however important they may be.

Lesson One calls for policies to articulate "the principles that will underpin partnerships", but and then fails to suggest "best practice" principles and approaches for CSO partnerships, derived from current practice, policies and the Busan outcomes. *Twelve Lessons* reaffirms the Accra HLF4 identification of CSOs as "development actors in their own right". But it is also essential that the DAC guidance on policies for civil society partnerships address enabling issues for civil society consistent with the commitments of the *Busan Partnership*

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<sup>8</sup> The Task Team's *Key Messages* can be found at [http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/IMG/pdf/final\\_key\\_english\\_c3.pdf](http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/IMG/pdf/final_key_english_c3.pdf). These *Messages* cover ways that donors should respect CSOs as independent actors, the importance of policy dialogue, the linkage between enabling environment and human rights standards, donor support models and CSO effectiveness, and enhancing accountability and transparency.

<sup>9</sup> All quotes are from the *Twelve Lessons* document unless otherwise indicated.

*for Effective Development Cooperation.* What are the implications for donor civil society policies, for example, of the Busan four “shared principles to realize common goals” [§11],<sup>10</sup> the Busan commitments on gender equality [§20], on an enabling environment for CSOs consistent with human rights standards [§22] or on improved transparency [§23]? How should donors translate these Busan norms into “best practice” policy directions?

In the conclusion of this Briefing Paper, there is an attempt to draw together the best practice policy guidelines that are suggested among the remaining eleven lessons, which ideally should have been highlighted in relation to Lesson One. These will be suggested as the minimum guidance for an assessment of the quality of donor policies directing their relationships with civil society as development actors.

## **Lesson Two: Strengthening civil society in developing countries**

### **Enabling guidance ...**

**Lesson Two focuses positively on the goal for DAC donors in partnering with civil society to strengthen civil society in developing countries. It also importantly acknowledges, “civil society around the world is facing increasingly restrictive environments and shrinking political space”.** Lesson Two suggests that “strengthening civil society in developing countries can empower citizens to participate in development and take up democratic ownership – a pillar of effective development”. In terms of implementation the guidance strongly suggests that designing support for strengthening civil society in developing countries should be based on a solid understanding of the context for civil society in each country, on dialogue with civil society, coordination with other donors, and increased core funding to strengthen CSO ownership. It suggests that donors should “make the enabling environment, including legal frameworks, for a free, open and capable civil society an agenda item in policy dialogue with partner governments” and “encourage partner governments and CSOs to participate in regular meaningful dialogue”.

### **But the DAC should also have considered ...**

**This lesson among others in *Twelve Lessons* fails to fully take account of the diversity of CSO roles, constituencies and modalities for involvement in development, and the**

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<sup>10</sup> These four Busan principles are a) ownership of development priorities by developing countries, b) focus on results, having “a last impact on poverty eradication and inequality”, c) inclusive development partnerships, and d) transparency and accountability to each other. These principles are “consistent with our agreed international commitments on human rights, decent work, gender equality, environmental sustainability and disability” and “form the foundation of our co-operation for effective development”. [§11] The principles are to guide actions to “deepen, extend and operationalise the democratic ownership of development policies and processes”. [§12] See AidWatch Canada’s Briefing Note #1, “The Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation: Foundations for development effectiveness?”, December 2011, accessible at [http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/IMG/pdf/aidwatch\\_canada\\_briefing\\_paper\\_on\\_busan\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/IMG/pdf/aidwatch_canada_briefing_paper_on_busan_2_.pdf).

**complexity of their national and transnational relationships.** Lesson Two says that “there is no single model for donor support to strengthening civil society” and that donors need to have a solid understanding of the state of civil society. But in turn, *Twelve Lessons* has little to say about the actual realities of civil society and their implications for strategies for donor partnering with civil society.

There are many strong and capable CSOs in developing countries involved in various forms of development cooperation. But CSOs are not one homogenous group, either in developing countries or donor countries, or in their varied international relationships for development cooperation. For example, a recent study commissioned by ITUC documents the unique ways in which the trade union movement works as a national/global structure to strengthen trade union recognition and capacities in developing countries.<sup>11</sup> This is very different than the ways in which large International NGO families (Oxfam, CARE, etc.) partner and strengthen civil society in developing countries, which in turn must be differentiated from the contributions of national CSOs in donor countries (linking and engaging citizens, bringing particular expertise, piloting innovation etc.).

All development actors, wherever they are located, need to consider the changing environment and the implications of new modalities and opportunities for strengthening democratic ownership with CSOs in developing countries. Yet Lesson Two seems to ignore three decades of experience in donor support for these varied forms of civil society development cooperation in the North, involving and collaborating with CSOs in developing countries. What have been the strengths of these relationships and how can donors build on these strengths? How can donors work in ways that facilitate CSOs to address the weaknesses in CSO partnerships to create better conditions for democratic ownership? How can donors avoid creating unnecessary competition between CSOs at various levels and design actor-relevant support mechanisms? These questions may lie beneath the surface of *Twelve Lessons*, but are not drawn out or reflected in the accompanying guidance.

The process through which the *Twelve Lessons* were developed in dialogue with civil society and with donor agencies gave an opportunity to learn and articulate lessons about the complexity of CSO long-term partnerships. Instead we merely have a statement that “DAC members should have incentives for national and international CSOs [in donor countries] to build the capacity of civil society in developing countries”, as if there has been no substantial and continuing national/international CSO experience in this area. Indeed on the contrary, there have been profound, if often problematic, relationships through which CSOs in developing countries have built and strengthened their own independent roles and capacities in development. But are these CSO relationships any more problematic than inter-governmental relationships in development cooperation?

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<sup>11</sup> Vlaminck, Z, Huyse, H., and Peels, R. “Trade union views on working with donor governments in development: An analysis of the support mechanisms of 18 donor countries”, HIVA-Research Institute for Work and Society, Commissioned by the Trade Union Development Cooperation Network, 2012, accessible at [www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/invitation\\_seminar\\_tudcn\\_eng.pdf](http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/invitation_seminar_tudcn_eng.pdf).



On what basis will donors be able to transcend political and power dynamics in engaging civil society, the high transaction costs of direct funding, and the political exposure of Southern CSOs to issues of “foreign funding”, as they focus on partnerships with CSOs in developing countries? Perhaps a better approach might be for DAC members to work with CSOs from both developing and donor countries to understand these issues, agree on appropriate modalities for strengthening CSOs in developing countries, including taking advantage of proposals from Southern CSOs as well as the sometimes comparative advantages of donor-based CSO inter-mediation and capacities for long-term engagement.

### **Lesson Three: Promote and support public awareness-raising**

#### **Enabling guidance ...**

**DAC members should support public awareness raising in the realization that “a citizenry that is informed and educated about global development issues is an important, empowering objective in itself [emphasis added]”.** Lesson Three rightly identifies the strength of CSOs engagement with public constituencies as credible independent voices for development action, often directly rooted in their partnerships in developing countries. Support for public awareness raising should be a “strategic objective” in their civil society policies with “a dedicated budget to meet clearly defined results”.

#### **But the DAC should also have considered ...**

**Despite decades of donor experience in support of CSO public awareness raising and public engagement, Lesson Three has little to say about different modalities of CSO public engagement, as independent actors, and their implementation for an active aware citizenry in development.** The rationale is very donor-centric and instrumental, as donors consider CSOs more efficient in delivering (donor) development messages. If an informed and active citizenry is an “empowering objective in itself”, i.e. a global public good, then donor and CSO policies for public awareness need to include different dimensions of public engagement from education, to north/south solidarity campaigns, to encouraging democratic debate about development policies and practices in the donor countries, not just in developing countries. Some of the most effective development education and citizen empowerment draws from strong long-term civil society partnerships and innovative ways to ensure southern civil society voices are directly represented in public awareness campaigns in donor countries.

## Lesson Four: Choose partners to meet objectives

### Enabling guidance ...

**“Strategic objectives rather than donor funding mechanisms should drive and determine the choice of partners”.** “Civil society organizations are important partners for meeting an array of development objectives” and donors “need to build partnerships with civil society that are consistent with, and enable them to achieve the objectives of the civil society policy.”

### But the DAC should also have considered ...

**While Lesson Four calls for situating the choice of partnerships within donor strategic objectives, the substance of the lesson mostly focuses on operational and political barriers for shifting resources for direct funding of CSOs in the South.** There is no doubt that donors and CSOs in developing countries can develop strategic partnerships, either as institutions or through pooled mechanisms, but this lesson seemingly sets up a binary, “either/or”, tension between Northern and Southern CSOs as the framework for understanding the strategic choice of partnership. As noted above for Lesson Three, there is no interrogation of the current complexity of civil society partnerships for development. How might donors integrating new approaches in donor partner choices in ways that build upon the strengths of civil society’s own modalities of cooperation, rather than only seeing and compounding divisions within civil society?

## Lesson Five: Make policy dialogue meaningful.

### Enabling guidance ...

**“DAC members recognize the added value of dialogue and consultation with CSOs on development cooperation policies and approaches, on policy coherence for development, and specific issues where CSOs specialize such as gender equality and women’s empowerment, environment, climate change and human rights.”** DAC donors are encouraged to make consultations meaningful by being strategic about the types of consultation, being prepared and transparent, being regular, and by being focused on knowledge-sharing and results oriented.

### But the DAC should also have considered ...

**Policy dialogue with civil society should go beyond instrumentalized engagement for donor-determined purposes.** This approach was reaffirmed in the Task Team’s *Key*

*Messages for Busan*.<sup>12</sup> Donor practices in policy dialogue should have reflected upon the engagement of CSOs in the Busan process as equal partners. How might donors build upon new forms of constructive multi-stakeholder engagement? This would have required a more fully articulated good practice taking up issues identified by CSOs in their *International Framework*: systematic and democratic inclusion of diverse views, transparency of purpose and process, freedom to access information and relevant documentation, timeliness to impact decisions, and appropriate resources to enable full participation of stakeholders. [*International Framework*, 23] Contrary to Lesson Five's singular notion of consultations as the basis for multi-stakeholder collaboration around donor priorities, CSO consultations must at times also be about accountability, critiquing and holding donor governments accountable to good development practice and to their commitments. The guidance also fails to recognize the importance of strengthening CSO platforms and networks to play a coordinating role in consultations, dealing with the reality of diverse and complex CSO constituencies and assure representative voices at the table.

### **Lesson Six: Respect independence while giving direction**

#### **Enabling guidance ...**

**“Civil society should be independent to pursue priorities, which may not align with their respective governments’ and/or donors’ preferences.”** In this regard, this Lesson points to CSO commitment to continue to work to improve their effectiveness “such as by monitoring the implementation of the *Istanbul Principles*”. Donors need to strike a balance between the conditions of funding and the roles of CSOs as independent development actors. The focus should be “on having effective results-oriented partnerships with CSOs that are built on trust, foster synergies, promote effective division of labour and recognize respective comparative advantages for meeting development objectives.”

#### **But the DAC should also have considered ...**

**The Accra Agenda for Action clearly recognized CSOs as development actors in their own right, which implies a commitment to modalities of partnership that strengthen CSO capacities to act “in their own right” in partnership with donors, not a question of balancing CSO initiative with carrying out donor-determined priorities.** As the DAC Chair notes in the forward, there is much common ground for many donors and CSOs in the mandates and overarching purposes in international cooperation. The approach should therefore in the first instance be less one of balance and more one of finding complementarities, based on shared donor and CSO priorities for reducing poverty and inequality. It also suggest that “balance” needs to fully acknowledge the full range of roles, particularly the CSO policy watch-dog role, in relation to donor policies and procedures, not

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<sup>12</sup> The multi-stakeholder Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment’s *Key Messages* can be found at [http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/IMG/pdf/final\\_key\\_english\\_c3.pdf](http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/IMG/pdf/final_key_english_c3.pdf).

only accountability in developing countries. This Lesson, along with others, fails to clearly articulate how donors should relate to different CSO functions. Are CSO roles in developing countries seen only in terms of “alignment with partner country government development priorities” or “filling gaps in these priorities” as expressed in Lesson Six? The consultations conducted by the Open Forum demonstrated that these roles go far beyond such alignment through service provision and “gap-filling”.<sup>13</sup>

## **Lesson Seven: Matching funding mechanisms with the purpose**

### **Enabling guidance ...**

**Funding mechanisms should “allow a range of actors of different sizes, capabilities and interests to access funding, which contributes to supporting a diverse civil society”, with due consideration to multi-year core funding** (see also Lesson Eight). *Twelve Lessons* acknowledges that peer reviews and identifies several challenges relating to funding mechanisms that impact CSO effectiveness. Lesson Seven calls for “a mix of formal funding mechanisms which can be tailored to suit CSO partners, strengthening ownership and matching policy objectives”. They should also reflect the priorities set out in the civil society policy. Lesson Seven encourages donors to support multi-year mechanisms to give predictability and facilitate planning, and core funding “when CSOs have the strategic, organizational and professional capacity to manage resources effectively.” Core funding strengthens CSO ownership and gives CSOs flexibility to manage and prioritize funding. Pooled funding and supporting local civil society through umbrella organizations in developing countries gives access to grassroots civil society and reduces transaction and administrative burdens.

### **But the DAC should also have considered ...**

**While acknowledging some of the current challenges in funding and the importance of a mix of funding modalities, the DAC *Twelve Lessons* should be encouraging the use of modalities that respect CSO “right of initiative”, consistent with CSOs as independent development actors.** Lesson Seven unfortunately fails to apply the lessons identified to the actual experience with mechanisms such as earmarked funding and call-for-proposals. Both ear-marked funding and call-for-proposals may be appropriate funding modalities in limited well-defined circumstances. But both potentially create considerable tension in CSOs addressing civil society partner needs and strengthening CSO ownership, while serving utilitarian contractual implementation goals for donor-determined policies and priorities.

The Open Forum’s *International Framework* acknowledges that tensions also exist for CSOs as donors and commits CSOs to making specific efforts towards more equitable

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<sup>13</sup> See the summary of CSO roles in the *International Framework, op. cit.* Annex Two page 28.

partnerships. But CSO capacity to do so is seriously constrained by stringent donor conditions and increasingly more competitive donor funding mechanisms. CSOs have documented, for example, the experience of call-for-proposals in Canada in undermining partnerships, destabilizing the capacities of Canadian international NGOs irrespective of the quality of their programming, and creating competitive divisions within the community.<sup>14</sup> Funding modalities will contribute to CSOs maximizing their contributions to development if they 1) recognize the advantages of “CSO right to initiatives”, 2) build on shared objectives to improve democratic governance, 3) respect CSO diversity, and 4) take true advantage of CSO innovation and capacities for long-term partnerships.

### **Lesson Eight: Minimizing transaction costs**

#### **Enabling guidance ...**

**Acknowledging the “different, complex and detailed sets of procedures and requirements for CSOs they fund”, donors should “develop more strategic, standardized and streamlined approaches to working with CSOs so they fit the purpose of cooperation and the nature of the partnerships”.** This goal is achieved through increased multi-year core funding, programmatic funding rather than project funding, adapting reporting requirements to the size of organizations, and donor harmonization of requirements. In assessing the accountability and capacities of CSOs, donors should be “taking into consideration the *Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness*” and consider using CSOs own format and systems for monitoring and reporting.

#### **But the DAC should also have considered ...**

**Harmonization of transaction costs need not result in a trade-off between either “CSOs in having access to diverse sources of donor financing” or reducing direct donor-CSO contact and “the burden of responding to multiple donor requirements”.** The Open Forum/BetterAid experience with the donor pooled funding mechanism for their global and country programs is an example of one proposal/one report that at the same time sustained a diverse dialogue with donors at many levels on issues of development effectiveness.

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<sup>14</sup> See CCIC, “Putting Partnership back at the Heart of Development: Canadian Civil Society Experience with CIDA’s Call-for- Proposal Mechanism, Partnerships with Canadians Branch, An Analysis of Survey Results”, Canadian Council for International Cooperation, February 2012, accessible at [http://www.ccic.ca/files/en/what\\_we\\_do/2012\\_03\\_Survey\\_Report\\_e.pdf](http://www.ccic.ca/files/en/what_we_do/2012_03_Survey_Report_e.pdf).

## Lesson Nine: Build strong partnerships with humanitarian NGOs

### Enabling guidance ...

**“Effective humanitarian action must be based on strong, equal and principled partnerships with NGOs.”** The humanitarian and development communities are **inter-dependent**. DAC donors need to apply the *Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles* to their partnerships with CSO humanitarian actors, affirming GHD Principle 19, which focuses on the key advantages of civilian organizations in implementing humanitarian action.

### But the DAC should also have considered ...

**While these orientations towards strengthening CSO humanitarian partnerships are welcome, there is a seeming false assumption that humanitarian CSO action is undertaken largely by distinct humanitarian organizations.** But in many countries the same INGOs and CSOs are involved in multiple levels of humanitarian action, reconstruction, peacebuilding, and long-term development. In policy and funding relationships with CSOs, many donors have failed to adequately address the linkages between immediate humanitarian action and its continuum with complex requirements for reconstruction, leading to sustainable long-term development for affected populations. Many CSOs that have large humanitarian action capacities have strong comparative advantages, with appropriate partnerships, in addressing these linkages, particularly in conflict-affected countries.

## Lesson Ten: Focus reporting on results and learning

### Enabling guidance ...

**Donor accountability and reporting requirements should “ensure that the reporting required from CSOs ... focuses on development results (rather than inputs) and learning”.** There is acknowledgement that donors are often unable to process current detailed reporting demanded of CSO partners. Monitoring requirements should be based on “the rationale for the partnership” and the related sustainable development objectives and results. Systems for learning and applying lessons to practice are also necessary. It is acknowledged that CSOs have other accountability requirements (beneficiaries, constituencies, etc.).

### But the DAC should also have considered ...

**Despite emphasizing learning to feed strategic program design and implementation, Lesson Ten returns to a narrow framework of “clearly defined and measurable”**

**objectives” for reporting on results** [emphasis added]. This Lesson acknowledges the need for “reasonable expectations about the timeframe needed to achieve development results”. But it does not draw out implications for reporting on donor modalities, which commonly have a short timeframe (two or three years at best) and call for measurable outcomes, in contrast to the realities of long term complex processes of change for sustainable development impact.

This Lesson fails to take account of current discourse and evidence that important dimensions of CSO roles in relation to governance, holding governments to account, promoting a rights-based approach and gender equality (all recognized in Busan as core CSO roles) do not lend themselves to “clearly defined measurable objectives”, where outcomes and impact are only understood over much longer timeframes. The laudable goal of “getting CSOs to give critical assessments on risks to achieve objectives” is unlikely to happen, given increasingly competitive donor modalities of support and approaches that draw unnecessary and often artificial divisions between northern and southern CSO development efforts.

Lesson Ten does not address the implications for reporting requirements arising from some key accountability issues raised by the Task Team’s *Key Messages*: the need for mutual accountability between donors and CSOs for their aid and development efforts, the shared responsibility to promote and strengthen each others’ accountability, the emphasis on “social and institutional change pursued by and defined by CSOs as development catalysts”, and the need for joint efforts directed to “accountability for the collective impact of CSOs”. (*Key Messages*, page 12)

### **Lesson Eleven: Increase transparency and accountability**

#### **Enabling guidance ...**

**Transparency is an essential foundation for accountability. “DAC members and CSOs must become more transparent about the money they spend on development and humanitarian assistance.”** Lesson Eleven situates this observation in the opportunities provided by the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) for greater donor and CSO transparency and in the refining of DAC reporting categories in its statistical reporting system. It encourages DAC members to partner “with organizations capable of being transparent and accountable”, by assessing CSOs overall accountability systems and strengthening capacity.

#### **But the DAC should also have considered ...**

**Donor policies to encourage greater CSO transparency should take account of the realities of the diversity of CSOs involved in development, in terms of roles, size, mandate, and partnership relationships.** Working only with CSOs with strong

accountability systems, and sophisticated management information, will lead donors to focus most of their efforts with the largest INGOs, undermining this diversity. Many CSOs, working as donors, have to make serious and concerted efforts to improve their transparency, and can do so through publishing aid information consistent with the IATI standard.

In this regard, a CSO IATI Working Group, associated with the IATI Technical Advisory Group, has published a background paper based on consultations with CSOs and the CSO experience of publishing to the IATI standard.<sup>15</sup> This background paper has led the Group to draft a *Protocol* on “Implementing the International Aid Transparency Initiative Standard by CSOs” (2012, forthcoming), for discussion and agreement by the IATI Steering Committee in the later part of 2012. This *Protocol* affirms CSO strong commitment to implement IATI, while identifying norms and approaches that respond to CSO challenges in terms of capacities, sensitive partnerships, ownership by the full range of CSO partners, and the difficult political and human rights dynamics for some CSOs in developing countries. Guidance on CSO transparency for the donor peer review process should take on board this *Protocol*, once agreed by the multi-stakeholder IATI Steering Committee.

## **Lesson Twelve: Commission evaluations for learning and accountability**

### **Enabling guidance ...**

**Donors “should commission evaluations in response to clearly identified learning or accountability needs”, and should be “tailored to suit the types of organization, program approach, activities and objectives identified”.** DAC members are encouraged to collaborate closely with CSOs in selecting evaluation topics, setting an evaluation agenda needs and requirements, and in discussing appropriate methodologies. They should “refrain from routine evaluations”, recognizing the high transaction costs involved for both donors and CSOs. The DAC *Quality Standards for Development Evaluation* should inform approaches to evaluation of CSOs. Lesson Twelve encourages support for capacity building of CSOs evaluation systems, engaging in collaborative evaluations with other donors, taking up country-based and sectoral evaluations, and in ensuring periodic evaluation of the donors own CSO policies and strategies.

### **But the DAC should also have considered ...**

**An approach to evaluation focusing on learning should also be informed and tailored to the different roles and organizational structures of CSOs’ engagement with**

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<sup>15</sup> The background paper, “Civil Society Organisations and International NGOs: Ways Forward in Implementation of the IATI Standard”, June 2012, is available at <http://support.iatistandard.org/attachments/token/m9whau7z9pq5cg/?name=Final+June+2012+IATI+Background+Paper.doc>.



**development.** With exception of the largest INGOs, very few CSOs have fully developed internal capacities for undertaking evaluation for learning. But it should not then be assumed that most CSOs do not have other ways to regularly assess lessons from programming to inform and structure change in their engagement with development. They do so as individual organizations, but many smaller and medium-sized CSOs also rely on collective assessment and learning through their participation in CSO donor country platforms. The latter should be taken into account in donor evaluation approaches and strengthened to play roles to improve program and institutional practices on behalf of their members.

#### **D. Conclusions: Drawing the Lessons Together**

With some important limitations, the *Twelve Lessons* nevertheless provides key lessons and guidance for donors and future DAC peer reviews. These lessons will also facilitate ongoing CSO dialogue in various donor countries regarding the implementation the Busan commitments on ensuring an enabling environment for CSOs. But as noted in the assessment of Lesson One, more direct guidance on key directions for donor overarching policies would have resulted in more strategic focus in the *Twelve Lessons* on the policy orientations for good practice, even if they are elaborated in other Lessons.

Drawing from the various lessons, all donor policies and strategies on civil society partnerships should explicitly address the following principles and approaches, adapted to donor country conditions and context:

**1. Empowering citizens through CSOs.** Focus on the objective of “empower[ing] citizens [in developing countries] to participate in development and take up democratic ownership [as] a pillar of effective development”. [Lesson Two] Encouraging an engaged citizenry in donor countries is also an essential purpose and outcome of strengthening civil society partnerships for development. “A citizenry that is informed and educated about global development issues is an important empowering objective in itself.” [Lesson Three]

**2. CSOs as development actors in own rights, who play a vital role in enabling people to claim their rights, and promote rights--based approaches.** Recognize explicitly that CSOs are development actors in their own right, in line with commitments made in Accra and Busan. [Lesson Two and Seven]

**3. Strategic, informed and inclusive approaches to partnerships.** Develop a deliberate strategic approach to civil society partnerships, fully informed about the context and CSOs roles in development in all their dimensions. [Lesson Four and Lesson Nine] “Strategic objectives rather than donor funding mechanisms should drive and determine the choice of partners”. [Lesson Four]

**4. Transparent and regular policy dialogue.** Undertaking regular, inclusive and transparent policy dialogue with CSOs is an essential dimension of effective donor CSO partnerships: “Open and transparent dialogue with CSOs on civil society policies, partnerships and programmes fosters trust, improves accountability, helps identify common ground for collaboration and paves the way for achieving results.” [Lesson Five]

**5. Balanced partner conditions in ways that strengthen CSO independence.** Balance conditions for CSO support based on the recognition that “civil society should be independent to pursue priorities which may not align with their respective governments’ and/or donors’ preferences”. CSO effectiveness in development [in relation to donor development goals and conditions] should be measured against their commitment to improve practices in relation to the *Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness*. [Lesson Seven and Eight]

**6. Funding modalities with flexibility tailored to the diversity of CSOs and CSO “right of initiative”.** “Strive to increase the share of core funding to strengthen CSO ownership” with a mix of funding mechanisms tied to donor strategic directions for CSO partnerships. Recognition of CSOs as development actors in their own right implies that such mechanisms will be assessed and suitable to the strategic roles of different CSO actors with their diversity in mandate, size, constituencies and approaches, giving precedence to CSOs’ ‘right of initiative’. [Lesson Seven and Eight]

**7. Reducing transaction costs** Commit to “develop more strategic, standardized and streamlined approaches to working with CSOs so they fit the purpose of cooperation and the nature of the partnerships” (Lesson Eight).

**8. Address the humanitarian/development continuum in donor CSO policies** Orient support for CSO humanitarian interventions should with the *Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles*, based on strategic partnerships, substantive ongoing dialogue, and measures to strengthen humanitarian capacities of partners. (Lesson Nine) Donor mechanisms in support for humanitarian CSO partnerships should not only focus on immediate emergence response mechanisms, but also address a continuum of interventions, leading to long term sustainable development outcomes.

**9. Accountability to long-term development results** “Ensure that the reporting required from CSOs ... focuses on development results (rather than inputs) and learning”. (Lesson Ten) Donors “should commission evaluations in response to clearly identified learning or accountability needs”, and should be “tailored to suit the types of organization, program approach, activities and objectives identified”. (Lesson Twelve)

**10. Improve transparency** Make transparency the foundation for accountability. “DAC members and CSOs must become more transparent about the money they spend on development and humanitarian assistance.” (Lesson Eleven) Donor policies to encourage

greater CSO transparency should take account the realities of the diversity of CSOs involved in development in terms of roles, size, mandate, and partnership relationships.

In addition to these directions set out in the *Twelve Lessons*, it is valuable for donor policies and strategies to consider the following areas missing from the *Twelve Lessons*:

1. To have greater reflection on donor and CSO partnerships, explicitly addressing the real contributions and current challenges in INGO and national CSO partnerships in development and in strengthening CSOs in developing countries.
2. To more explicitly take into account in donor modalities of support and policy dialogue CSO 'watch-dog' roles in both developing and donor countries.
3. To address in donor policies and strategies the implications of the recognition in Busan that CSOs "play a vital role in enabling people to claim their rights [and] in promoting rights-based approaches".

Hopefully the publication of these *Twelve Lessons* will lead to a sustained engagement on the part of DAC members with CSOs in the Global Partnership and in the DAC, in donor countries and in partner countries to further reflect on enabling conditions that will deepen donor partnerships with civil society in the spirit of the Busan commitments.

**Annex One**  
**Critical Enabling Conditions by Donors for CSO Development Effectiveness**  
**Derived from *The International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness***

An enabling environment for CSO development effectiveness requires

1. All governments to fulfill obligations to fundamental human rights that enable people to organize and participate in development.<sup>16</sup>
2. Recognition of CSOs as development actors in their own right.
3. Structuring democratic political and policy dialogue to improve development effectiveness. Key conditions for dialogue include:
  - Systematic inclusion of diverse views, particularly from grassroots based social organizations, women’s organizations and indigenous peoples’ representatives.
  - Transparency and clarity of purpose and process.
  - Freedom to access information.
  - Timeliness in order to impact decisions.
  - Resources to enable full participation of stakeholders.
4. Being accountable for transparent and consistent policies.
5. Creating enabling financing for CSO development effectiveness. These funding modalities should focus on,
  - Long term results oriented perspective;
  - Core institutional funding, based on the notion that CSOs provide public goods;
  - Responsiveness to CSO initiative;
  - Access for a diversity of CSOs;
  - Predictable, transparent, understandable, harmonized terms;
  - Promoting the mobilization of local resources; and
  - Supporting the full range of CSO programming and innovations, including policy development and advocacy.

From the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness, *The Siem Reap Consensus on The International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness*, pages 22 -24, accessible at <http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/InternationalFramework>

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<sup>16</sup> The multi-stakeholder Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment agreed in its pre-Busan *Key Messages* that an enabling environment must “in law and practice, at minimum [be] in keeping with existing commitments in international and regional instruments that guarantee fundamental rights. These include: freedom of association, freedom of expression, the right to operate free from unwarranted state interference, the right to communicate and cooperate, the right to seek and secure funding, and the state’s duty to protect.” *Key Messages*, page 10.