

CSO DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS PRINCIPLES FOR DISCUSSION

Canadian Consultation for the Open Forum on CSO Development Effectiveness

INTRODUCTION

This document sets out draft principles for discussion at the Canadian Consultation for the Open Forum on CSO Development Effectiveness. The principles are drawn from an analysis of the most common principles among Canadian civil society organizations (CSOs), including those shared with CCIC by member organizations and the principles in the *CCIC Code of Ethics*. Principles outlined in previous Open Forum discussions held in Nairobi and in Brussels in 2007 were also reviewed.

Explanatory notes are included under each principle in order to help readers understand what the principle means, and to help identify how various principles found in other documents relate to those found in this draft. **Note:** *Please remember that the principles arising from the Canadian Consultation will serve as our input into the broader global process; therefore, wordsmithing is not our goal.*

PREAMBLE

As development actors, distinct from official donors and governments, Canadian CSOs represent the engagement of Canadians who have organized to promote human dignity and accompany people around the world in efforts to realize human rights and fundamental freedoms. In their development efforts, Canadian CSOs seek to be effective.

Effective development initiatives successfully address the causes as well as the symptoms of poverty, inequality and injustice, resulting in sustainable positive changes in the lives of the poorest and most marginalized populations. Effective development involves a diversity of instruments, policies and actors, acting in complementarity, within a democratic framework.

Canadian CSOs have developed a number of principles for development effectiveness, based on reflection and on insights from practical experiences and discussions with partners. Canadian CSOs aspire to be effective development actors by accepting, and working with the guidance of, these principles in all development efforts.

PRINCIPLES

All CSO development efforts should:

- 1. *Be people-centred and responsive:*** *respecting and promoting the dignity and human rights of all people, supporting poor, oppressed and marginalized women and men to organize themselves to determine and further their own development options.*

Explanatory Note: This principle makes explicit the understanding that development is a process of people's empowerment to strengthen democratic participation. This principle also recognizes that the role of CSOs is to enable, not to dictate or direct, the desired development outcomes of the people with whom they work. It acknowledges that CSOs' work explicitly affects the development prospects of the most vulnerable people.

- 2. *Embody women's equality:*** *supporting women's efforts to realize their rights, and reflecting women's concerns, perspectives and experience.*

Explanatory Note: This principle is included as a core commitment in all existing CSO sets of principles that were reviewed. It underscores that the realization of women's rights and gender equality are preconditions for development effectiveness.

- 3. *Practise fairness and inclusion:*** *promoting social justice and the value of diversity, focusing on the rights of marginalized individuals and groups and ensuring their full participation.*

Explanatory Note: As CSOs focus on the inequities faced by groups and individuals marginalized within their societies, organizations should also strive to respect these values in the ways they carry out their development efforts.

- 4. *Facilitate collaboration:*** *co-operating as equals with civil society organizations and other development actors, promoting synergy of approaches, strategies and actions to accomplish mutually agreed objectives.*

Explanatory Note: This principle combines those from other sets of CSO principles that were called "autonomy", "respect", or "coherence". It recognizes that many relationships – whether local, national or international – will need to balance inequities between players, in order to create the basis to work together for effective development outcomes.

- 5. *Ensure sustained commitment:*** *establishing transparent and accountable North-South relationships of mutual respect, trust and long-term accompaniment, based on mutually agreed development goals and obligations.*

Explanatory Note: This principle is often called "partnership". That term is not used here because some people dispute whether it is the best term for CSO counterpart relationships. The spirit behind partnership, as expressed in many CSO partnership principles, is that the relationship is based on equity and long-term commitment. That is the intention of this principle.

- 6. *Promote democratic practice:*** *engaging the Canadian public, decision-makers and political leaders to ensure they play a decisive role in the fulfillment of the human rights and development priorities of Southern peoples.*

Explanatory Note: This principle reflects the fact that effective development action by Canadian CSOs also takes place in Canada. Engaging Canadians, by providing opportunities for them to learn and act in solidarity with vulnerable people as they strive for dignity and justice, is an essential development role. Given the systemic issues that are the root causes of injustice and global poverty, CSOs must monitor and advocate for changes to policies and practices that undermine effective development. Democratic practices require respect for the basic political rights of citizens and civil society organizations in Canada and in developing countries.

7. **Reflect learnings:** *integrating evidence from experience, knowledge shared between partners, analysis of coherence between organizational practices, and dialogue on progress on the organizational mission.*

Explanatory Note: Many of the sets of principles reviewed by CCIC emphasized the importance for organizations to learn from experience and then transform their own practices in order to stay responsive and relevant. This principle reflects the importance of regular organization-wide evaluation and reflective learning that assesses progress toward the mission and development goals, and adapts efforts as necessary to move towards these goals.

8. **Be transparent and held to account:** *communicating fully, openly and accurately (without endangering lives or personal privacy) and being accountable to international partners (including communities of beneficiaries), staff, donors, the public and each other for development efforts and the use of financial resources.*

Explanatory Note: This principle is found throughout existing CSO sets of principles. CSOs accept the essential connection between effective development practice and accountability. Transparency, through fully accessible and relevant information, is the default position. However, CSOs must consider whether full transparency about particular activities may endanger the organizational survival of partners, or even the lives of people associated with partners.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do these principles reflect the development effectiveness aspirations of your organization? Is anything missing?
2. What are some good examples of a Canadian CSO implementing any of these principles well?
3. What challenges has your organization already met, or do you foresee, in working toward improving your development effectiveness (based on these principles)?
4. What standards for practice do you suggest to guide Canadian CSOs to implement these principles (i.e. what practices do you think organizations must undertake, at a minimum, to demonstrate CSO development effectiveness)?
5. What sorts of mechanisms are needed to demonstrate and improve CSO accountability in relation to these principles and related guidelines/standards? Do appropriate mechanisms already exist?