

DEFINITIONS

GUIDELINE

A recommendation indicating how something should be done or what sort of action should be taken in a particular circumstance or to attain a particular standard or principle.

INDICATOR

Observable signals or proxies of status or change that are intended to provide a credible means of verifying this status or change (either quantitatively or qualitatively). Indicators should be defined in agreement with all stakeholders and need to be valid, practical, clear, and measurable. While important for documenting improvements in CSO development effectiveness, assessing indicators is not a substitute for periodic participatory analysis of outcomes conditioned by the intended changes.

MECHANISM

Mechanisms are the context-specific means to implement and/or demonstrate compliance with and accountability to agreed principles, standards and guidelines. Some examples could be regular dialogue between partners, core funding with multiple year commitments to Southern CSOs, a common CSO charter, a declaration, or codes of conduct and/or ethics shared by all CSOs in a given context.

OUTLINING THE ISSUE

Internationally, there have been various initiatives to enhance development CSOs accountability, effectiveness and impact. These include, among others, the Civicus Civil Society Index, the International NGOs Accountability Charter, national CSO Codes of Conduct and Ethics or the Sphere Project described below. Such initiatives have resulted in a number of mechanisms, processes, standards, codes of conduct, accountability frameworks etc., all existing within civil society.

The aim of the Open Forum is not to duplicate existing processes to further burden local CSOs with new tools and reporting mechanisms. The Open Forum acknowledges the diversity of CSO experience and the importance of existing mechanisms. The Open Forum process to reach consensus on principles for development effectiveness should help deepen the understanding of existing tools with a view to improving their functioning.

Globally-agreed CSO development effectiveness principles defined through the Open Forum will have to be interpreted and applied locally through context-relevant and specific “**guidelines**”, “**indicators**” and “**mechanisms**”.

For example, if we look at the principle of “*strengthening local ownership of Southern CSOs over development directions*”, possible guidelines for implementation, within the framework of North/South CSO relations, could be: (a) Northern CSOs must develop longer term relationships with Southern counterparts; (b) NCSOs must strengthen their understanding of the mandate, programme priorities and rationale of these counterparts, and situate their own priorities within the former, not the reverse. The mechanisms are the means to achieve these guidelines. For instance: (a) regular partnership meetings involving different levels of organisations from the North and the South; (b) provision of core funding, with multiple year commitments, etc.

While the focus for the Open Forum is on CSO development initiatives, it may be useful to point to another practical example from the humanitarian sector in order to understand the inter-play between “principles” and “guidelines” and “indicators” as applied to the humanitarian sector.

EXAMPLE: THE SPHERE PROJECT¹

Sphere offers an operational framework comprising a set of Minimum Standards and key indicators, outlined in the “Sphere Handbook”, that inform different areas of CSO humanitarian action, from initial assessment through to coordination and advocacy. Developed by a broad network of practitioners, most of the standards, and the indicators that accompany them, were not new, but consolidated and adapted existing knowledge and practice.

- **Minimum Standards:** are general statements that define the minimum level to be attained in a given context. They are based on the principle that populations affected by disaster have the right to live in dignity. They are qualitative in nature, and are meant to be universal and applicable in any operating environment. Eight areas were identified for minimum standards: (1) Participation; (2) Initial assessment; (3) Response; (4) Targeting; (5) Monitoring; (6) Evaluation; (7) Aid worker competencies and responsibilities, and (8) Supervision, management and support of personnel.
- **Key indicators:** act as “signals” that determine whether or not a standard has been attained. As measures to the standards, indicators can be qualitative or quantitative in nature. They function as tools to measure the impact of processes used and programmes implemented².

¹ Launched in 1997 by a group of humanitarian NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, Sphere framed a Humanitarian Charter and identified Minimum Standards to be attained in disaster assistance, in five key sectors (water supply and sanitation, nutrition, food aid, shelter and health services).

² The Sphere Handbook also provides **guidance notes** to the implementation of standards and indicators. These include specific points to consider when applying the standards and indicators in different situations, guidance on tackling practical difficulties, and advice on priority issues. They may also include critical issues relating to the standards or indicators, and describe dilemmas, controversies or gaps in current knowledge.

Let's take the area of **participation** (standard 1) as an example. The standard is defined as *“The disaster-affected population actively participates in the assessment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the assistance programme.”* Key indicators (which could also be read as guidelines) for this standard are:

- Women and men of all ages from the disaster-affected and wider.
- Local populations, including vulnerable groups, receive information about the assistance programme, and are given the opportunity to comment to the assistance agency during all stages of the project cycle.
- Written assistance programme objectives and plans should reflect the needs, concerns and values of disaster-affected people, particularly those belonging to vulnerable groups, and contribute to their protection.
- Programming is designed to maximise the use of local skills and capacities.

Sphere is implemented on the ground through its two main “mechanisms”, namely the Humanitarian Charter and the Minimum Standards. The Humanitarian Charter is based on the principles and provisions of international humanitarian law, international human rights law, refugee law and the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief. The Charter outlines the core principles of Sphere. It also points out the legal duties and responsibilities of states and warring parties to guarantee the right to protection and assistance.

Taken together, the Humanitarian Charter and the Minimum Standards contribute to an operational framework for accountability in disaster assistance efforts. Adherence to the Charter is voluntary. This was decided largely on the basis that Sphere has no means for following up on implementation. Thus the initiative is effectively "self-regulatory".

However, since it was launched in 1997, Sphere has been successfully institutionalised into policies for disaster response. The Minimum Standards have been mainstreamed into tools and procedures, and training programmes on applying Sphere have been conducted globally both with CSOs and with other development actors, including governments, donors and multi-lateral agencies.

SOME GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What guidelines are relevant for the implementation of principles for CSO development effectiveness related to the context in which you work as a CSO?
2. What are appropriate guidelines for your organisation, for CSOs to which you relate, to donors and governments that affect your environment for achieving development effectiveness?
3. How might CSOs, donors and governments implement guidelines to apply CSO development effectiveness principles?
4. Can you identify any cases of good practice in compliance to CSO development effectiveness and accountability processes in your context?

USEFUL RESOURCES

More information on the CIVICUS Civil Society Index can be obtained at www.civicus.org/csi
To read the INGOs Accountability Charter and agreed Principles and to learn more about the initiative go to www.ingoaccountabilitycharter.org

For more information on the Sphere project and to download the Handbook go to www.sphereproject.org

One World Trust – database on CSO self-regulatory initiatives: www.cso-effectiveness.org
(forthcoming)

Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness, An Exploration of Experience and Good Practice, August 2008, available at www.cso-effectiveness.org

Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness, Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness Case Book, August 2008, available at www.cso-effectiveness.org