

CSO DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

SWISS CONSULTATION

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WHY THIS CONSULTATION?

CONTEXT

The Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness is an initiative conceived of and led by a diverse coalition of CSOs from around the world to identify the elements that are essential to the development effectiveness of CSOs. One of the key activities of the Open Forum is the Country Consultations to discuss development effectiveness issues and promote dialogue among CSO leaders and practitioners, governments, donors and other stakeholders. The consultations are expected to promote dialogue and elicit CSOs' input on the proposed CSO development effectiveness framework, including principles, indicators, implementation guidelines, good practices for accountability mechanisms and minimum standards for enabling conditions. The outcome of each consultation will be compiled in a common narrative report, which will then be consolidated into regional reports. These national and regional reports are then compiled into a draft Global Report, which is presented at the first Open Forum Global Assembly and will serve as a basis for the framework and contributions to be presented at the fourth High Level Forum in Seoul 2011. (Extract from: Open Forum. 2009. Outreach toolkit.)

PURPOSE

The Swiss Consultation serves a dual purpose: First, the ongoing debates in the Open Forum process on CSO development effectiveness shall enrich Swiss CSOs' efforts to enhance the quality of their interventions (self-reflection). And second, the participants in the Swiss consultation take position to the process and the key statements and assumptions of the Open Forum (positioning). The present report summarizes the results of an inquiry among 46 Swiss development organisations which will provide the basis for further discussions and actions within the Swiss CSO community.

WHO PARTICIPATED

Some 60 Swiss development organisations were asked to participate in the consultation process. In order to ensure the representativeness and to reflect the diversity of CSOs, also actors beyond the classical type of development organisation were included, like research institutions, trade unions and private foundations. The four criteria for selection were: (a) a minimal financing volume of at least CHF 3 million; (b) transparent information on objectives and field activities (homepage); (c) genuine partnership with an organisation in the South and (d) field presence.

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MAIN STATEMENTS (POSITIONING)

ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN DEVELOPMENT

(1) As a consequence of the intensive debates on how to make aid more effective, the roles CSOs ought to play in the aid architecture have changed considerably in recent years. There is, at least on paper, a growing number of roles local CSOs should now perform in national development - roles that go beyond aid and delivery of services. (☛ see question VII-2)

(2) The following “new roles” of local CSOs have been classified as key by the respondents: (a) empowering marginalised grass-root communities and women in particular (voice), (b) fostering local ownership for development, and (c) monitoring government policies and practices (watchdog). This does not imply, however, that Southern CSOs should no longer act as service providers or withdraw from participating in program aid or national sector interventions. (☛ VII-1A)

(3) Given the increased presence of Northern CSOs in Southern countries, particular attention has to be paid on how CSOs interact in partnership. (☛ IV-2) As far as the division of roles is concerned, the survey showed a clear picture: Due to their specific competences and the “added values”, Northern and Southern CSOs have different functions to perform in partnership. For instance, raising and leveraging funds, promoting domestic public engagement and monitoring donor practices are considered as the most important roles of Northern CSOs. (☛ VII-1B)

(4) There are, however, roles which basically have to be performed by all partners. This is particularly true for networking or public relations activities. (☛ IV-1) Moreover, one of the key features of genuine partnerships is mutuality, mainly relevant for learning processes or concerning reporting/accountability obligations. (☛ IV-1) Performing different roles needs to go hand in hand with the sharing of responsibilities, albeit with different implications for Northern and Southern CSOs.

(5) In order to increase development effectiveness, there is a need to strengthen Southern CSOs’ voice and representation in regional/international debates on global regulations in general and on CSO effectiveness issues in particular. We cannot assume that interests and perspectives of Southern and Northern CSOs are necessarily congruent or identical. (☛ VII-1A)

CSO PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLES

(6) Relationships between Northern and Southern CSOs are by no means free of conflict. To the contrary, conflicts and imbalances have become even more pronounced in recent years. With regard to CSO development effectiveness, particular attention should be paid to

accountability mechanisms (downward versus upward) and funding schemes (prescriptive donor funding; project versus core funding etc.). (☛ IV-2)

(7) A long-term committed cooperation, based on mutual respect as well as on shared values and objectives, is the cornerstone of effective CSO interventions in North-South partnerships. (☛ IV-3)

(8) The most important values the partner CSOs should actively work towards are mutual trust and reliability. As a minimum requirement on the path towards genuine CSO partnership, objectives and the agenda have to be set jointly by all partners. (☛ IV-4)

(9) Although not easy to translate into practice, mutuality is a core concern in CSO partnerships mainly in the context of responsiveness (mutual accountability to beneficiaries) as well as for capitalising on experiences (fostering mutual learning). Both aspects are crucial determinants of CSOs aid and development effectiveness. (☛ IV-4)

CSO DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

(10) CSO effectiveness should primarily be assessed in the light of meeting development goals; particular emphasis has to be placed on securing the rights of marginalised groups and women as well as on changes in institutional and democratic processes. (☛ VII-2B)

(11) CSO effectiveness is determined by both how CSOs themselves are doing the right things right and the “quality” of the enabling environment that impact on the capacity of CSOs to engage in development in an effective manner. (☛ VI-3 and VII-2F)

(12) Assessing outcomes or impacts are indispensable for making CSOs’ activities more effective and sustainable. This in turn requires, first, long-term oriented intervention (beyond demonstrable quick results) and, second, a realistic understanding of what has to be assessed and measured. Not in every case and depending on the context, assessing impact is necessarily the best way to strengthen learning processes or to get clear about what has been achieved so far. (☛ V-3 and IV-2)

HARMONISATION AND ALIGNMENT

(13) There is no doubt that the Paris Declaration principles have significant implications for CSOs’ development work (enabling or disabling). From a CSO perspective, mainly the principles of harmonisation and alignment may be subject of opportunities but also involve risks, such as ‘power loss of CSOs’ or ‘loss of diversity and innovation’. (☛ II-4 and III-1) It is therefore essential for CSOs to carefully examine donors’ aid effectiveness framework, at conceptual levels as well as concerning the implications in practical fieldwork.

(14) The majority of the organisations surveyed notice an increased pressure from official development agencies to strengthen their harmonisation and coordination efforts - associated

with above-mentioned opportunities and risks. (☛ III-3) In principle however, most organisations see, subject to certain reservations, a need for better coordinated interventions among Northern development organisations and in partnership with Southern partners in particular. (☛ III-1)

(15) Alignment is an integral working principle for most organisations surveyed. Three out of four align their interventions explicitly on Millennium Development Goals and three quarters on National Poverty Reduction Strategies. (☛ II-1) Another striking alignment element is the strong partner orientation: Four out of five organisations consider genuine partnership as a core strategic issue. (☛ IV-1)

(16) Depending on the nature of intervention, there are other relevant reference systems CSOs' activities could or should be aligned with, such as people's movements and CSO strategies as well as international regimes or human rights initiatives. (☛ II-2)

CSO DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS FRAMEWORK

(17) Since effective development requires more than just official aid, a shift of focus from aid to development effectiveness is needed. However, the two concepts of aid effectiveness and development effectiveness should be seen as mutually reinforcing rather than exclusive. (☛ VII-2C and VII-2D)

(18) A majority of respondents supports the statement that the Paris Declaration cannot be directly applied to CSOs. For others, the Paris Declaration principles are a frame of reference that needs to be considered at operational and strategic levels. Five organisations could imagine that the CSO community will sign up to the Paris Declaration. (☛ VII-2E)

(19) There are some good reasons to establish a globally valid 'CSO development effectiveness framework' (☛ VII-2G). However, care must be taken not to create bureaucratic and heavy sets of rules. Priority has to be given to flexible and context-specific rules and regulations which CSOs sign voluntarily. (☛ II-5)

(20) Confronted with a number of critical statements from the South about the ways Northern and Southern CSOs interact, the following problems have been considered as serious that have to be tackled (in order of numbers of answers): (a) growing emphasis on quick and demonstrable results, (b) increased on-way accountability from S-CSOs to N-CSOs, and (c) increasingly prescriptive N-CSO funding to S-CSO. (☛ IV-2)

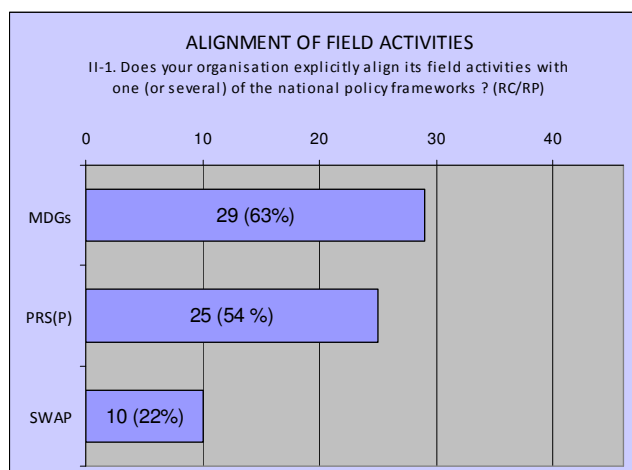
(21) The following key issues should be further deepened in the coming Open Forum processes (in order of numbers of answers): (a) enabling environment, (b) measuring outcomes and impacts, (c) building fair and effective partnership, (d) gender mainstreaming and (e) downward versus upward accountability. (☛ VII-4)

SURVEY RESULTS

1- ALIGNMENT AND HARMONISATION

Central to the debates among Swiss CSOs on the Paris Declaration principles are two critical questions. First, what are the implications and consequences of harmonised aid for Swiss organisations and their partners in the South in particular? And second, what policies and strategies should their interventions be aligned to and what does alignment mean in the context of genuine partnership? These are relevant issues regarding the question whether the global CSO community should outline its own development effectiveness framework. Therefore, we wanted to know more about opportunities and risks of harmonised and aligned aid the organisations surveyed are confronted with in their practical work.

Alignment is not a foreign concept for the organisations surveyed: The overwhelming majority align their field interventions to national strategy/policy frameworks like PRS or MDGs.

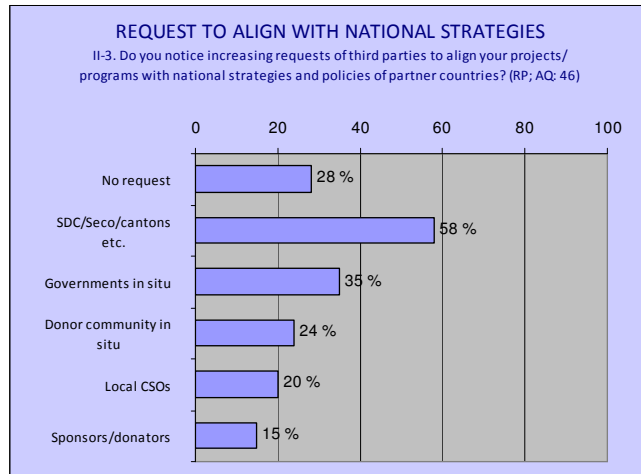


Depending on the nature of intervention, there are other relevant reference systems CSOs' activities could or should be aligned with, such as people's movements or partner CSOs' strategies as well as international regimes or human rights initiatives.



The majority of organisations notice a growing request by third parties to better align their projects/programs with national strategies and policies.

Increased pressure is exerted mainly by official development organisations but to some extent also by partner organisations and donators.



The Paris Declaration (PD) Alignment Principle opens a range of opportunities for Southern governments (more decision-making power leading to increased government ownership).

In practice, however, it is not always easy to make use of them; limiting factors identified are insufficient local capacities, corruption and lack of budget transparency.

Viewed from a CSO development effectiveness perspective, alignment involves risks and uncertainties. Depending on the country context, there is reason to fear that CSOs are not only losing their critical voice but also funds and influence.

OPPORTUNITIES OF THE PD ALIGNMENT PRINCIPLE
II-4A. Viewed from a fieldwork perspective, do you see any potential opportunities of the PD alignment principle?

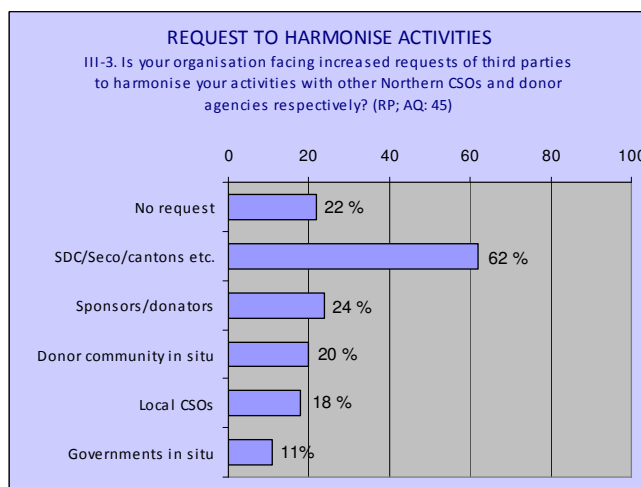
- ✓ “More power to Southern countries”
- ✓ „Clearer lines of responsibilities”
- ✓ „Higher ownership of partner country government”
- ✓ „Primacy of national strategies “

CHALLENGES/RISKS OF THE PD ALIGNMENT PRINCIPLE
II-4B. Viewed from a fieldwork perspective, do you see any potential risks/challenges of the PD alignment principle?

- ✓ “Insufficient local capacities”
- ✓ „Lack of democratic legitimacy”
- ✓ „Loss of CSOs’ critical voice”
- ✓ „Exclusion of CSOs “

Four out of five respondents feel increasing external pressure - mainly from Swiss agencies and the donor community in situ - to better harmonise their activities with other development actors.

Harmonisation seems to be an issue for sponsors and donators too. By contrast, only one out of ten organisations has noticed partner governments’ interests in harmonisation issues.



Although recognizing the need to better coordinate aid, doubts still dominate whether harmonized aid will automatically lead to better and more effective aid.

There is nothing against donors' efforts to counter fragmentation of aid or to lower transaction costs. However, donor harmonisation can lead to a new predominance of donors, which might contradict the ownership principle.

Moreover, harmonization has more or less direct implications for CSOs' working environment. Special attention needs to be given to autonomy and legitimacy issues as well as to the inherent risk of hampering CSOs' diversity and agility.

Despite some objections to harmonised aid, only 2 out of 46 surveyed organisations do not see any need to better coordinate interventions among Northern CSOs.

Enhanced coordination, however, is not an end in itself. Costs and efforts have to be balanced against the benefits on a case-by-case basis, and the coordination efforts should reflect divisions of tasks and responsibilities among partners.

OPPORTUNITIES OF THE PD HARMONISATION PRINCIPLE

III-1A. Viewed from a fieldwork perspective, do you see any potential opportunities of the PD alignment principle?

- ✓ "Lesser "anarchy" of initiatives and programs"
- ✓ „Theoretically lower transaction costs"
- ✓ „Scope for broader and deeper impact"
- ✓ „More transparency "

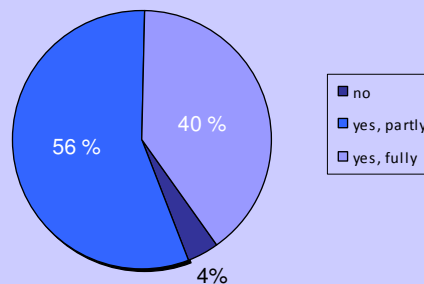
CHALLENGES OF THE PD HARMONISATION PRINCIPLE

III-1B. Viewed from a fieldwork perspective, do you see any potential risks/challenges of the PD alignment principle?

- ✓ "Less innovation and diversity"
- ✓ „Predominance of donor community"
- ✓ „Less autonomy and power loss of CSOs"
- ✓ „Exclusion of civil society"
- ✓ „Control of social movements "
- ✓ „Costly and bureaucratic end in itself "

CSO COORDINATION/COOPERATION ?

III-4. Do you share the view that Northern CSO should give more attention to cooperation and coordination among themselves? (RP; AQ: 46)



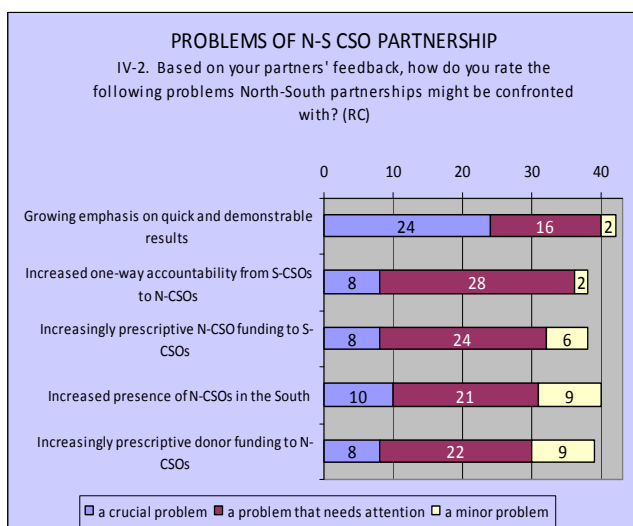
2- NORTH-SOUTH CSO RELATIONSHIP

The relations between Northern and Southern CSOs are increasingly subject of concern and debates within and between Swiss development organisations. All 46 organisations surveyed are working in partnership with Southern organisations, including those having their own staff in partner countries. Most of them are confronted with recent trends in the aid system pushing towards growing imbalances in CSO partnership between North and South – imbalances that directly affect outcomes and effectiveness of joint interventions. So there are many good reasons to have a closer look on these trends and to scrutinize the features of effective and genuine partnership.

Relationships between Northern and Southern CSOs are by no means conflict-free; a fact that needs increased attention.

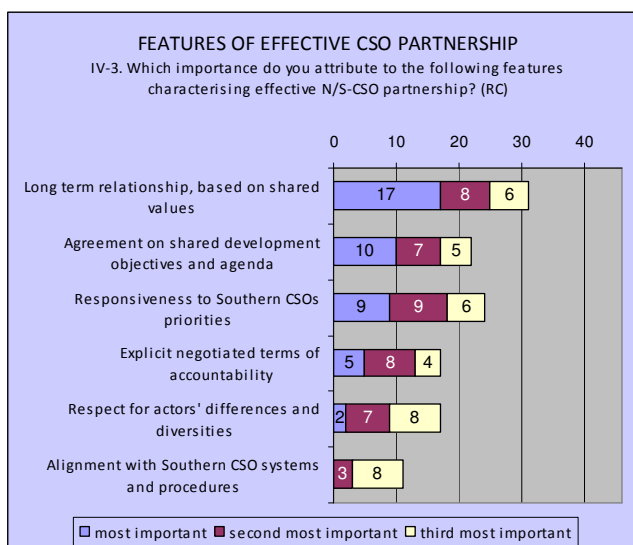
Growing emphasis on quick results has been identified as a major problem in relationship between Northern and Southern CSOs. If not related to their context, this trend might pose considerable challenges for local CSOs.

The increasingly prescriptive donor funding to CSOs is a further challenge; such restrictions might negatively affect Southern CSOs responsiveness and thus development effectiveness.



Today, partnership is recognised as an indispensable tool for making development more effective. There are, however, many interpretations of what genuine partnerships are.

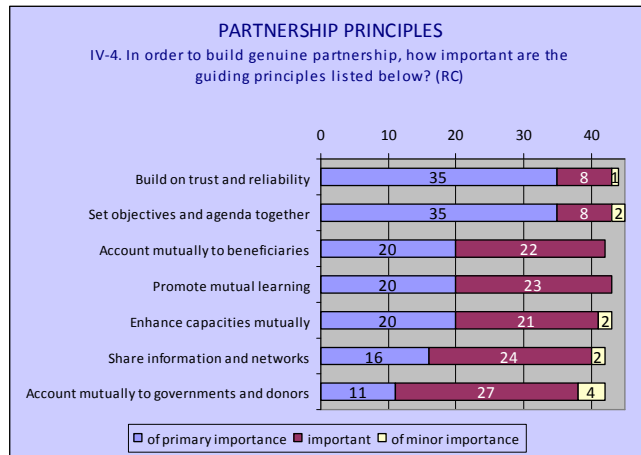
A long-term committed cooperation based on responsiveness as well as on shared values and objectives is considered as cornerstone of effective CSO interventions in partnership.



Building on trust and joint agenda-setting are top on the list of other important principles, partners should jointly work towards.

Mutuality is a core concern in CSO partnerships mainly in the context of responsiveness (mutual accountability to beneficiaries) as well as for capitalising experiences (fostering mutual learning).

The big challenge will be how to translate generally valid partnership principles into (good) practice. They will only become comprehensible in the context of both the environments partners are intervening and the type or purpose of the partnership.



3- ASSESSING IMPACT

There is a shared recognition among the organisations surveyed that assessing impact and effectiveness against expected results or changes is not only desirable but imperative today. Assessing impact/outcome provides, first, evidence to inform stakeholders about what has been achieved so far (reporting/accountability) and lays, second, the basis for learning from the past and to do better work in the future. Impact assessment is, however, neither an end in itself nor an easy task. In order to tackle the challenge of impact assessment, there is a need both to share a common understanding of what has to be demonstrated and to determine the nature of the practical problems related to impact assessment.

There is, in fact, no uniform definition of the term impact. Some respondents emphasise the functional meaning of the term (e.g. independent functioning), others refer to objectives (results in the long run).

Lasting change in people's life is the most prominent aspect that has been associated with the term of impact.

Respondents stress the fact that changes might be planned or not, desired or not, positive or negative and measurable or not.

Challenges in measuring impact are highly technical in nature (attribution gap; length of impact chain) and only secondarily a matter of capacities or resources (e.g. monitoring capacities).

Against the background of this fact, some organisations prefer to assess outcomes rather than impacts.

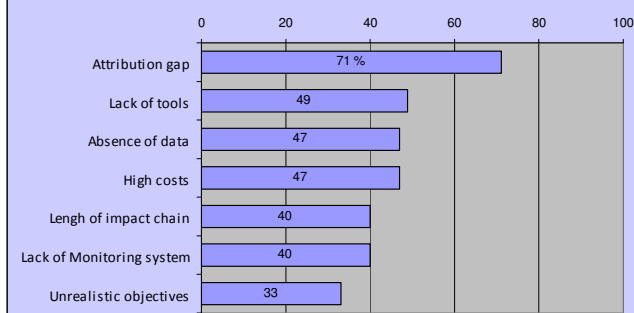
QUESTIONING IMPACT

V-1. There are many interpretations of what the term of effect in general and impact in particular mean. How do you define impact?

- ✓ "Lasting and significant change in people's life"
- ✓ „ Non-predictable change at population level"
- ✓ „ Positive or negative effects on the peoples' well-being"
- ✓ „ Outcome for beneficiaries + sustainability "
- ✓ „ What remains after a certain period of time "
- ✓ „ Changes that go beyond specific objectives of a project "
- ✓ „ Impact is difficult to assign to projects "

CHALLENGES IN MEASURING IMPACT

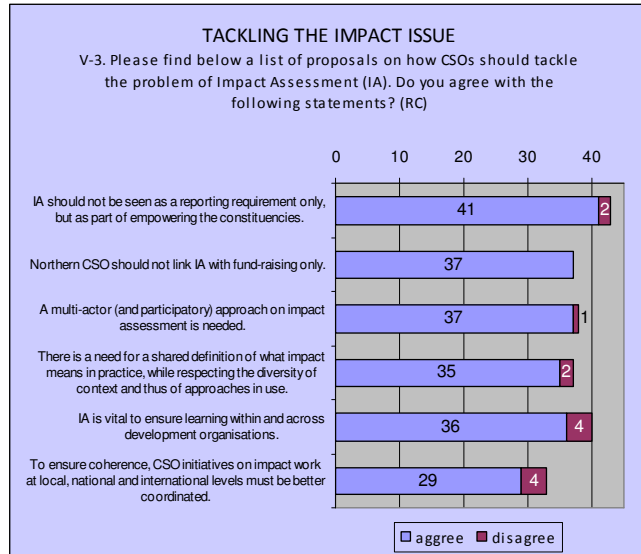
V-2. Viewed from a project/program perspective, what are CSOs' key challenges to be overcome in measuring impact? (RP/ AQ; 45)



Assessing impact is emancipating process, empowering organisations to have a legitimate voice, and ensuring learning within and across CSOs.

Assessing impact is also a matter of „how?“ (e.g. participatory, coordinated) and „what for?“ (e.g. reporting, mutual learning, responsiveness).

In choosing the right approach or methodology in impact evaluation, diversity of contexts has to be taken into account.

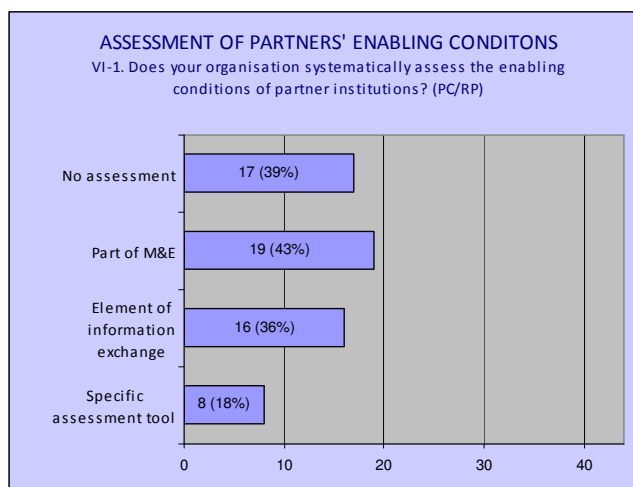


4- ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Although well known as a significant factor of CSO effectiveness, the enabling (and disabling) conditions of local CSOs have hardly been investigated in a systematic way so far, and concrete proposals on how to tackle the issues of enabling environment are rare. This is also true for Swiss development CSOs. Therefore we wanted to know what efforts Swiss CSOs are undertaking in order to improve partners' enabling conditions. Whether and how they scan these conditions? And what main inhibiting factors are preventing partner CSOs' from realising their full potential in development?

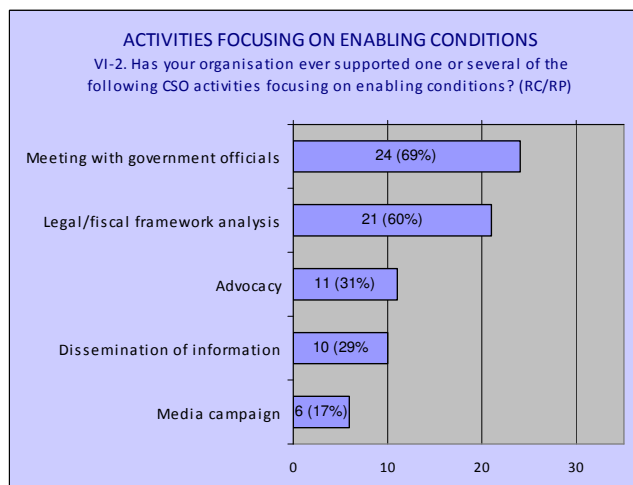
Assessing enabling conditions is a more or less central issue to the majority of organisations surveyed.

Nevertheless, 17 out of 46 organisations do not systematically assess the enabling conditions of partner institutions and only 8 make use of specific assessment tools.

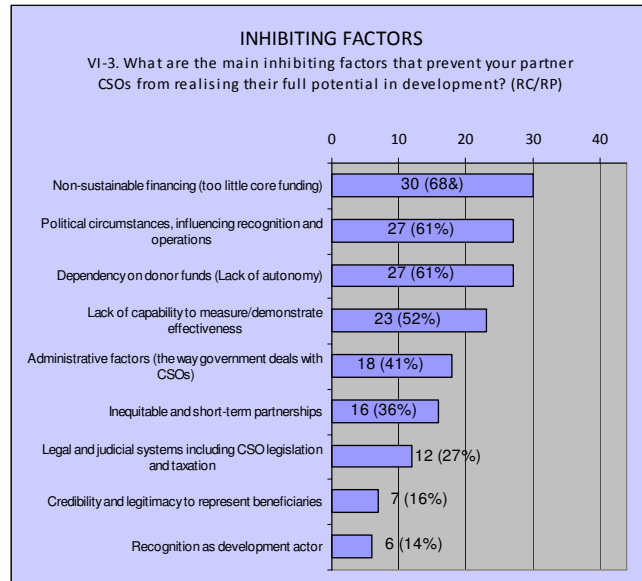


There is a wide range of activities with a potential for improving partners enabling conditions. Most respondents, however, use them only sporadically and selective.

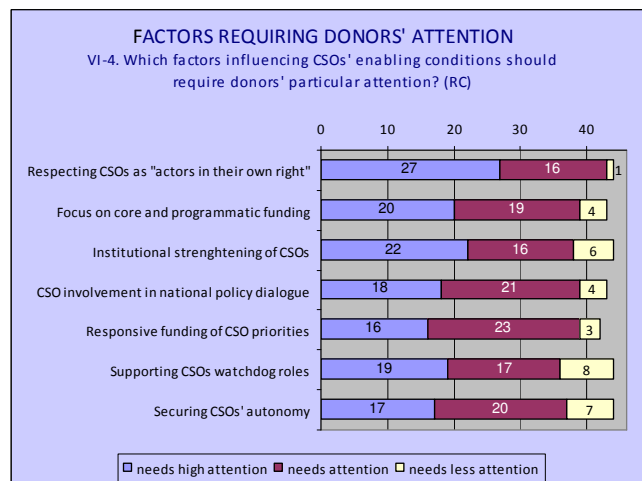
Meeting with government officials seems to be an important channel in order to raise concern about CSOs' enabling conditions.



Beside political circumstances and administrative procedures there are further external factors that impact CSO development effectiveness. These include non-sustainable financial resources and the degree of dependency on donor funds.



Donors play a vital role in improving CSOs' working conditions. Respecting CSOs as "actors in their own right" is deemed to be of vital importance, followed by quality of donors' funding schemes and donors' efforts in strengthening CSOs' institutional capacities.



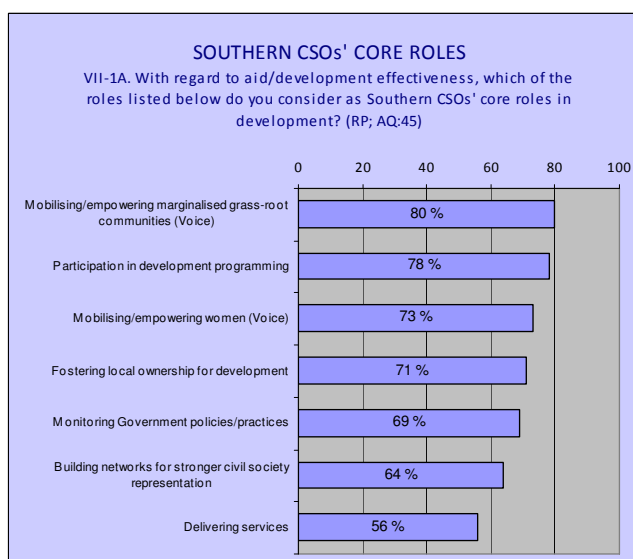
5 - CSO DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS FRAMEWORK

The main purpose of the current Open Forum consultation processes is to attain “a common understanding, shared by CSOs from around the world, of the challenges to realising CSO development effectiveness.” (Open Forum. Outreach toolkit) It is intended to build worldwide consensus on a “global framework for CSO development effectiveness” including both a set of principles, guidelines and practices as well as minimum standards for enabling conditions. This framework shall be based on CSOs’ own development visions and realities. However, the Open Forum process doesn’t start at zero. Since well before the Accra HLF in September 2008, there had been debates within the global CSO community on whether establishing own rules and regulations make sense and how such a framework might look like. In this fifth part, the organisations surveyed comment on the main assumptions and possible scenarios that are currently under discussion.

There is a growing number of functions Southern CSOs perform today in development; these include, first and foremost, empowering people (voice), fostering local ownership, and participating in development programming.

Further core roles of Southern CSOs highlighted by respondents are ‘monitoring government’s practices’ and ‘networking for civic representation’.

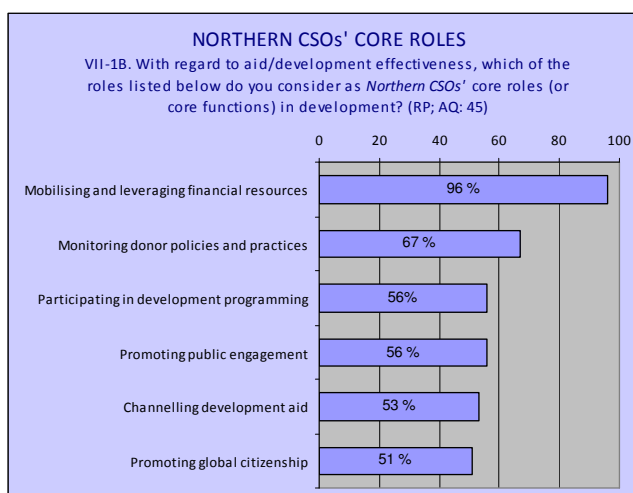
The majority of respondents still considers ‘service delivery’ to be a core function of Southern CSOs in development.



Not surprisingly ‘mobilising and leveraging funds’ figures top on the list of Northern CSOs’ core roles.

Furthermore ‘monitoring donor practices’ and promoting ‘public engagement’ and ‘global citizenship’ are classified as key elements of Northern CSOs’ work.

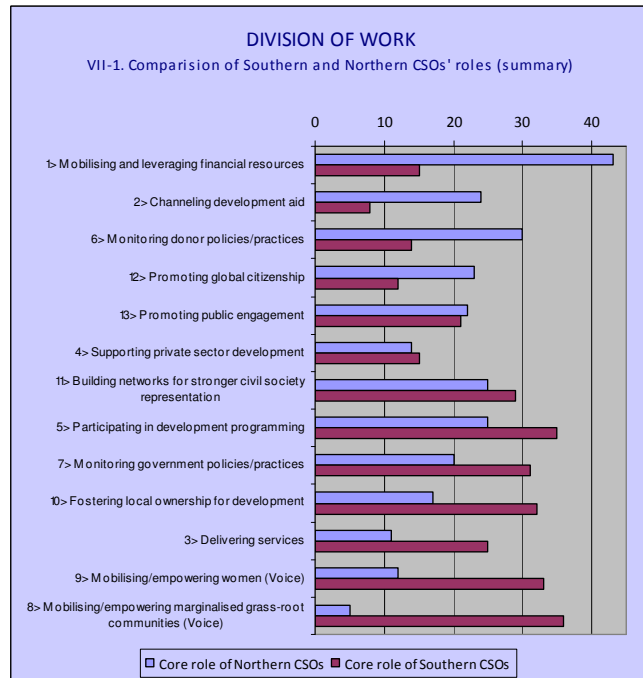
‘Participating in development programming’ is the only core role considered as central for both Northern and Southern CSOs in development.



The lists of key roles presented in the two figures above indicate a clear **division of work** between Northern and Southern CSOs. This is not only due to geographic reasons (north- or south-based) but has also to do with partners' efforts to divide functions and roles according to their competences and added values.

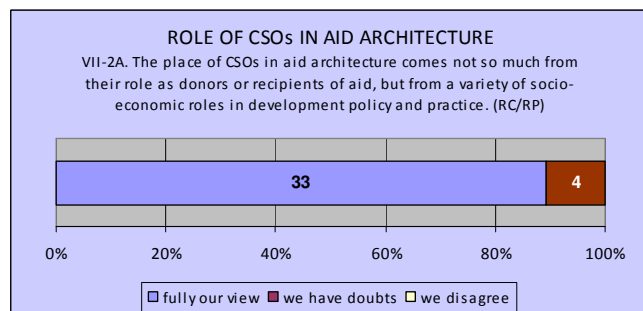
There is, however, not always a clear-cut division of all roles between Northern and Southern actors -, for example, in 'building networks for civil society'.

Mutuality is a meaningful principle in genuine partnerships (like mutual accountability, mutual learning - see IV-4.) Performing different roles needs, therefore, to go hand in hand with the sharing of responsibilities.

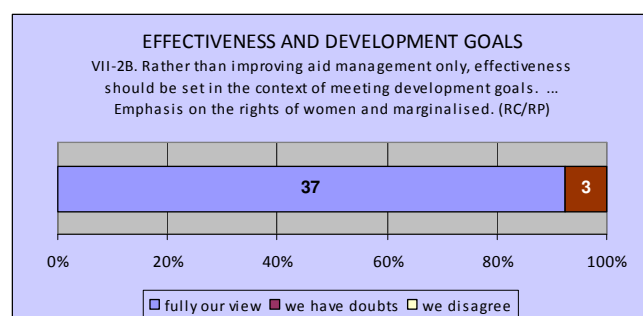


The traditional and still widespread view of **civil societies' roles in aid architecture** as "deliverer" only is to narrow and obsolete.

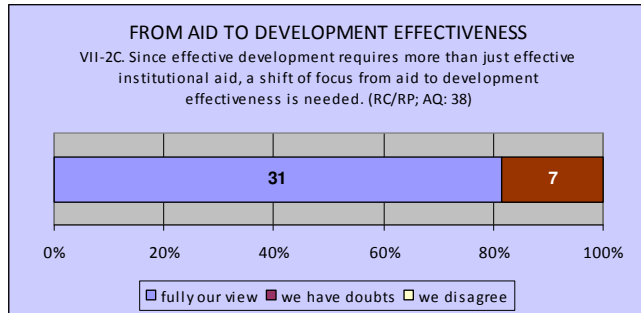
The place of CSOs in aid (and in national development in general) has to be derived from the multifaceted socio-economic roles they play in development policy and practice.



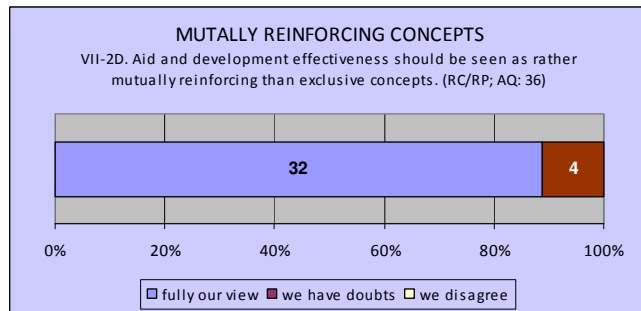
Effectiveness is not primarily the outcome of a technical exercise. Effectiveness should be set (and assessed) in the context of meeting development goals (like the MDGs), with particular emphasis on democratic processes and the rights of women and marginalised people.



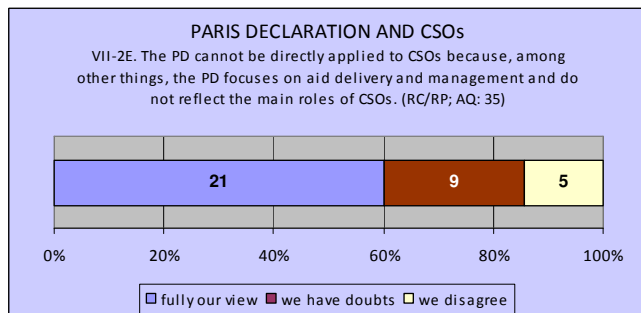
There is a growing understanding that effective development requires much more than institutional aid only. Therefore, a shift of focus from aid to development effectiveness is needed.



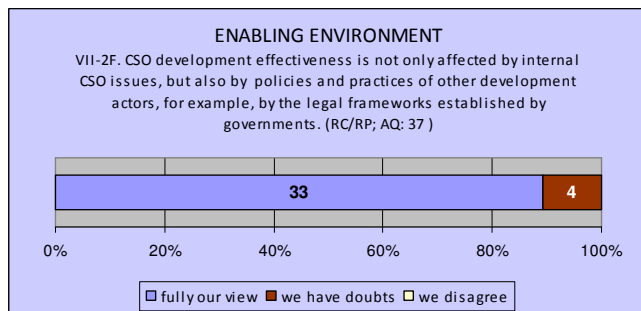
The two concepts of aid effectiveness and development effectiveness are based on different assumptions and target values. Nevertheless, they should be regarded as mutually reinforcing rather than exclusive concepts.



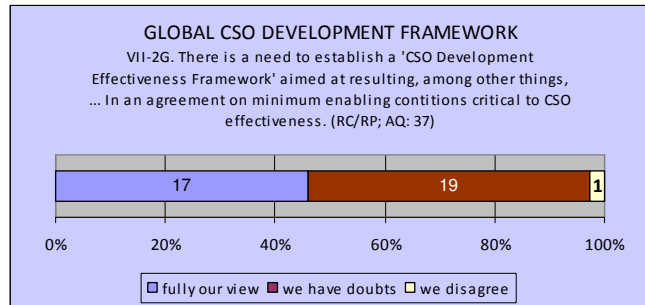
A majority of respondents supports the statement that the Paris Declaration cannot be directly applied to CSOs. For others, the Paris Declaration principles serve as a reference that needs to be considered at operational and strategic levels.



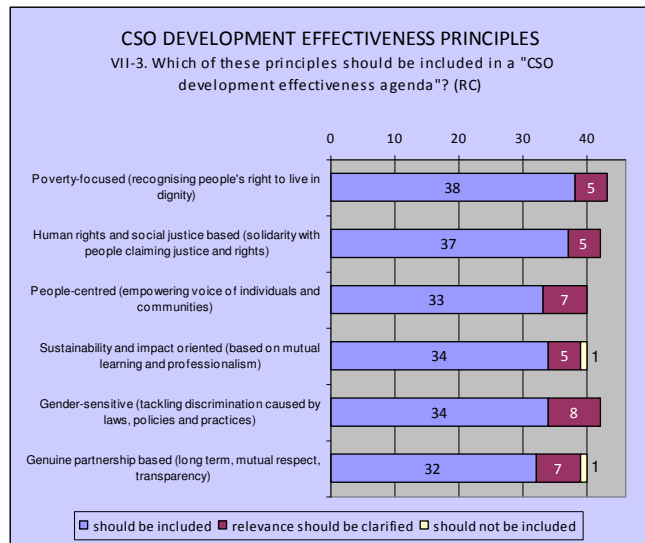
It is up to the CSO community to strengthen their effort towards better outcome and increased effectiveness. On the other hand, CSO development effectiveness is heavily determined by policies and practices of official development actors (known as enabling environment).



The respondents see many good reasons in favour of establishing a globally valid 'CSO development effectiveness framework'. However, care must be taken not to create bureaucratic and heavy sets of rules. Priority has to be given to flexible and context-specific solutions.

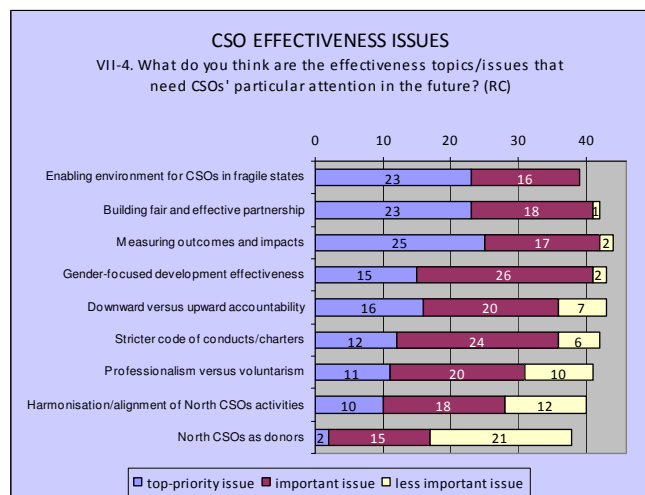


The set of CSO development effectiveness principles listed in the figure have found widespread acceptance among respondents; there were no alternative proposals, except one: 'towards professionalism of all actors along the chain'.



The main challenges in handling these principles will be how to translate these generally valid principles into context-specific mechanisms and practices and how to assess progress or change in a convincing way.

The following key issues should primarily be further deepened in the upcoming debates on CSO effectiveness (in order of numbers of answers): (a) enabling environment, (b) measuring outcomes and impacts, (c) building fair and effective partnership, (d) gender mainstreaming and (e) downward versus upward accountability.



Regarding the **design** of the global CSO development effectiveness **framework**, there is a distinct preference for flexible rather than standardised rules and regulations - and this on a voluntary basis.

Some of the respondents emphasise the need for process- and context-specific solutions in handling effectiveness issues. It was suggested, among other things, to prepare practical case studies reflecting the specificities of both the area of intervention and the type of partnership.

The issue of minimum standards for an enabling environment as element of the CSO development effectiveness framework has not been addressed in detail.

