

Task Team submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – Civil Society Space Report

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The Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment offers the following submission in response to the High Commissioner for Human Rights' invitation to contribute to the forthcoming report in keeping with [Human Rights Council resolution 27/31](#).

The [Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment](#) is a multi-stakeholder informal network operating primarily at the international level and concerned with advancing the roles of civil society in development.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

In response to the High Commissioner's question **“What is “enabling”? What does it mean to “create” and “maintain” space?”** we offer the Task Team's conceptualization of what comprises an enabling environment for CSOs. In view of the Task Team, creating and maintaining an enabling environment for CSOs is a responsibility shared across varied stakeholders. As such the Task Team works within a four-part conceptual framework made up of:

- 1) **Democratic ownership comprising:**
 - a. Space for inclusive, institutionalized and transparent multi-stakeholder dialogue in development policies and programs
 - b. Space for CSOs' “right of initiative”, that is, for CSO leadership in development initiatives as independent development actors
- 2) **Legal and regulatory environments:** In keeping with internationally-agreed rights including freedom of association, assembly, expression and access to information
- 3) **Official development cooperation with CSOs:** Through development cooperation provider policies and funding mechanisms conducive to CSO effectiveness
- 4) **CSO development effectiveness:** Involving CSO accountability, transparency and responsiveness to CSO constituencies and beneficiaries¹

¹ For elaboration on these four components and what they entail readers are invited to refer to the Task Team's 2014 [Key Messages](#) and [Review of Evidence](#).

While not strictly part of the enabling environment for CSOs, the fourth component of this framework – CSOs’ practices – are part of the Task Team’s enabling environment framework given the reciprocal relationship between the enabling environment and CSOs’ accountability.

GOOD PRACTICE AND PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

This conceptualization reflects international commitments made in the context of the [Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation](#) (GPEDC) at the Busan and Mexico High Level Meetings. The GPEDC is an open and inclusive platform bringing together varied state and non-state development actors that is concerned with improving the quality and effectiveness of development cooperation. As an example of **good practice** we point to the most recent such commitments in the [Mexico Communiqué](#) made by the GPEDC’s 161 affiliate states as well as affiliates from CSOs, the private sector, parliamentarians, local governments, and others, as follows:

Para 15: Civil society organizations (CSOs) play an important role in enabling people to claim their rights, in promoting rights-based approaches, in shaping development policies and partnerships, and in overseeing their implementation. In this regard, we note the relevance of the Istanbul Principles and the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness². We also reaffirm our undertaking to implement fully our 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 maximizes the contributions of CSOs to development and, in this context, we encourage inclusive and democratic multi-stakeholder dialogue at country level and the provision of related capacity building and supportive measures.

Monitoring progress in achievement of the enabling environment is a **practical example** of how to help create and maintain space for CSOs. Monitoring can help build a common understanding of what is meant by an enabling environment for CSOs through repeated reflection on the concept and its implications in practice. When done in a multi-stakeholder fashion, monitoring can also contribute to the pursuit of accountability across actors that is grounded in trust and a shared interest in progress.

The GPEDC shares the Task Team’s four-part conceptualization of the enabling environment as reflected in their Monitoring Framework. Indicator Two of that framework is meant to assess to what extent “civil society operates within an environment that maximizes its engagement in and contribution to development”. The GPEDC is launching a monitoring exercise with country level data gathering and validation to be undertaken in a multi-stakeholder way between October 2015 and March 2016, with a consolidated report anticipated by September 2016. The Task Team recommends that the enabling environment for CSOs be included as part of the Sustainable Development Goals Monitoring Framework currently under development. In so doing, the work of the GPEDC in monitoring Indicator Two could be drawn from.

In closing, the Task Team believes fundamentally in the potential for multi-stakeholder approaches as a **practical example** to help create and maintain civil society space. In giving credence to various stakeholder perspectives and experiences, multi-stakeholder approaches can build common understanding, trust, and the political will necessary to enable an accountable, free and independent civil society.

² The Istanbul Principles and International Framework are available [here](#) and [here](#).