

International Development and Humanitarian Assistance Civil Society Partnership Policy

Purpose

The Civil Society Partnership Policy sets out the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada's (DFATD) approach to enhancing effective development and humanitarian cooperation with international, Canadian, and developing country [civil society organizations](#) (CSOs). The Policy outlines the guiding principles for and overall objectives of Canada's development cooperation engagement with CSOs in alleviating poverty and delivering [humanitarian assistance](#). Given that the context for engagement matters, the Policy is not prescriptive in nature.

Introduction

The Policy is built upon lessons from international best practices, and a long history of partnership between Canada and CSOs involved in development cooperation and humanitarian action. It recognizes the diverse expertise and experience of civil society actors, as well as the importance of an enabling environment for civil society.

Canada's support for the *Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation* includes the commitment to harness effectively the efforts of actors engaged in development. In keeping with that commitment, Canada engages with those actors that can best deliver development results that support DFATD's thematic and geographic, as well as humanitarian assistance, priorities. These actors include both traditional development partners, such as CSOs, and new ones, such as the private sector, the science and technology sector, and diaspora communities. Canada is committed to working with accountable and effective partners whose efforts support Canadian values and policy priorities, and enhance the visibility of Canada's investments in development and humanitarian assistance. The Government also supports the central role of CSOs in ensuring inclusive development.

DFATD further understands that accountability for development results and democratic governance in developing countries depend on a vibrant civil society. Aligned with the [Official Development Assistance Accountability Act](#) and Canada's foreign policy priorities, DFATD's support for an enabling environment for civil society is a tangible expression of Canada's commitment to freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, as well as the values of citizenship, equity and [environmental sustainability](#). A sound and coherent approach to partnering with international, Canadian and developing country CSOs, and supporting an enabling environment for civil society in developing countries, is critical to the achievement of poverty reduction and sustainable results.

What is Civil Society?

The term "civil society" refers to a wide range of non-government, non-profit, and voluntary driven organizations, as well as social movements, through which people organize to pursue shared interests, values, beliefs, and objectives in public life. In the international development and humanitarian contexts, these organizations are found at the international, regional, national and local levels, and are development actors in their own right. Examples of CSOs include community-based organizations, environmental groups, women's rights groups, farmers' associations, faith-based organisations, philanthropic organizations, human rights groups, labour unions, youth organizations, co-operatives, village associations, professional associations, independent research institutes, humanitarian assistance organizations, and the non-profit media.^{[Footnote 1](#)}

Civil society contributes to development and humanitarian assistance in varied ways that often complement the roles and functions of governments, the private sector, and multilateral and global organizations.

DFATD engages with international, Canadian and developing country CSOs dedicated to international development and humanitarian assistance through policy dialogue, consultations, operational collaboration, and funding arrangements. The overarching goals of these efforts are to reduce poverty, deliver effective and timely humanitarian assistance, and advance democracy and human rights in developing countries. Canadian CSOs dedicated to international development and humanitarian assistance:

- play an important role as trusted partners in Canada's official development cooperation program by implementing development and humanitarian assistance programs, often in support of CSOs in developing countries;
- are a principal mechanism to engage individual Canadians and to raise awareness of and involvement in international development;
- help to finance development by raising funds and volunteer services directly from the Canadian public and private sector;
- support the realization of human rights internationally, in particular, those of vulnerable and marginalized groups such as children, persons with disabilities and from ethnic and religious minorities and of indigenous origin, especially the rights of women and girls;
- engage in research, policy dialogue, and advocacy on issues of importance to international development and humanitarian objectives;
- pilot alternative ways of working and use innovative approaches to address development and humanitarian challenges at the local, regional, and global levels;
- co-invest in economic endeavours and facilitate public-private partnerships; and
- provide humanitarian assistance.

In developing countries and globally, civil society:

- works and engages directly with poor and marginalized people and their communities in ways that other development actors cannot easily do;
- provides basic services, enhances resilience, and builds capacity in the areas of health, education, social protection, and water, among others;
- enhances the capacity of individuals and groups to realize their human rights;
- mobilizes the voice of poor and marginalized people, and advocates for their interests in communicating with governments or holding governments to account;
- promotes transformative change by addressing underlying causes of poverty or raising new issues and perspectives;
- acts as honest brokers in situations of conflict among government, private sector and communities;
- helps build trust and social cohesion, particularly important in rebuilding communities affected by or at risk of political violence, armed conflict or ethnic strife; and
- responds to the impact of natural disasters, acute food insecurity, and complex humanitarian crises through principled and coordinated humanitarian actions.

Guiding Principles and Commitments

To achieve the objectives outlined within this document, DFATD's development and humanitarian engagement with CSOs will be guided by legislative requirements and Canadian and international commitments, notably:

Official Development Assistance Accountability Act (ODAAA): The Act mandates that all Canadian official development assistance (ODA) be focused on poverty reduction and be consistent with aid effectiveness principles and Canadian values. For activities to be reported to Parliament as ODA, the Minister must be of the opinion that they meet three criteria set out in section 4.1 of the Act: contribute to

poverty reduction; take into account the perspectives of the poor; and be consistent with international human rights standards.

Canada's Aid Effectiveness Agenda: Since 2007, the Government of Canada has been committed to delivering aid that is focused, effective, and accountable. Canada has taken important steps to reform its development assistance program in accordance with this agenda and in line with recognized best practices and international agreements, including the Accra Agenda for Action. As part of this agenda, Canada has focused its development assistance by identifying 25 priority countries, five thematic priorities, and the gender equality, governance and environmental sustainability crosscutting themes.

Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation: This 2011 agreement forms the foundation of cooperation for effective development among donors, CSOs, and other development actors. It guides international efforts to reduce duplication, harmonize humanitarian and development assistance, achieve burden sharing and division of labour, reduce transaction costs, and avoid excessive fragmentation of aid at the global, country, and sector level. Within the agreement, the principle of inclusive development partnerships affirms that "openness, trust, and mutual respect and learning lie at the core of effective partnerships in support of development goals," and recognizes the different and complementary roles of all actors. Reiterating the commitments made in Accra, the Busan Partnership recognizes that civil society is an independent development actor in its own right, and acknowledges the importance of supporting an enabling environment for civil society.

The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States: Also supported by Canada at the Busan High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, the *New Deal* lays out the principles of country ownership and leadership, and the advancement of five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (i.e. legitimate politics, justice, citizen security, economic foundations, and revenues and services). The *New Deal* also calls for renewed partnerships built on: country compacts in support of national plans; political dialogue; increased transparency; improved risk management; strengthened country systems for improved service delivery; and greater flexibility and predictability.

Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship: The objectives of humanitarian action for all actors are to save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for such situations. Humanitarian action is guided by the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence and various codes of conduct and standards.^{[Footnote 2](#)}

The Istanbul Principles for Development Effectiveness: The Istanbul Principles form part of the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness. These eight principles were developed by and for civil society to assist organizations in achieving greater development effectiveness. They include: a commitment to human rights and social justice, gender equality and equity, people's empowerment, democratic ownership and participation, environmental sustainability, transparency and accountability, equitable partnerships and solidarity, creating and sharing knowledge and committing to mutual learning, and realizing positive sustainable change.

Objectives and Actions

Cooperation can reduce poverty, support strengthened governance, advance democracy, foster gender equality, promote sustainable development, and alleviate suffering. DFATD's civil society partners are essential actors in helping advance Canadian humanitarian and [development priorities](#). Guided by the applicable principles of its engagement, DFATD will work with CSOs in collaboration with developing country governments, multilateral organizations, the private sector, and other donors to pursue the following objectives:

1. Augment the Voice of Poor and Marginalized People, Including Women and Girls: For policies, strategies and services to be effective, the perspectives of poor and marginalized people in developing countries need to be sought and taken into account. The views of marginalized populations such as women,

children, seniors, the disabled, refugees, and internally displaced people, as well as indigenous, religious, ethnic, indigenous, and sexual minorities, are particularly germane. Civil society provides a vehicle for the voices of the poor and vulnerable to be heard by their governments, and for people to hold their leaders to account.

Aligned with the *ODAAA* legislative requirement to take into account the perspectives of the poor, DFATD will work with Canadian CSOs and other development actors, through civil society programming support and capacity-building measures, to strengthen civil society in developing countries and empower citizens to participate in and assume ownership of their development and stand up for their human rights.

2. *Facilitate an Enabling Environment for Civil Society in Developing Countries:* An empowered civil society is a crucial component for advancing democracy, human rights, and development, and the sustainability of development investments depends on the ability of the population to hold governments to account over the long term. In order for civil society to thrive, it must operate in an enabling environment that promotes effective and accountable institutions and respects human rights, and where the rule of law protects and promotes the freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. Many actors, including governments, have a role to play in creating an enabling environment for civil society to operate effectively and independently.

DFATD is committed to supporting an enabling environment for civil society in developing countries, both in law and practice, leading to more effective policies, equitable and sustainable development, and inclusive growth. To that end, DFATD will work with developing country governments, donors, and a wide array of other actors to protect and promote an enabling environment for civil society in developing countries.

3. *Foster Canadian CSO Leadership in International Development and Innovation:* Canadian CSOs are recognized leaders on the global stage for their expertise and their role in supporting developing country CSOs to exercise leadership. The great diversity within civil society in Canada is also a significant strength that helps to respond in innovative ways to the needs of those living in poverty. DFATD recognizes this strength, and is committed to supporting CSOs of diverse size and scale, sector, and region.

DFATD looks to its Canadian CSO partners to create pan-Canadian partnerships with global reach that can tackle major development challenges. DFATD also looks to CSOs to adopt innovative approaches to development and poverty reduction, in developing countries and on the global stage, that deliver results effectively or efficiently. To that end, DFATD will place increasing focus on incubating innovative ideas, testing promising initiatives, and scaling up those with the potential for widespread impact and effectiveness. Through modernized business processes, DFATD will strengthen mechanisms to facilitate innovation.

4. *Integrate the Role of CSOs as Independent Development Actors into Development Programming:* DFATD relies upon the resources, expertise, and networks of Canadian and developing country civil society to help achieve development objectives. DFATD considers that Canadian CSOs, as independent development actors, must strive to be both politically and financially independent and seek funding from various sources. This enables them to better reflect the views of their constituents and secure their own sustainability.

Canada is committed to deepening, extending, and operationalizing the democratic ownership of development policies and processes. DFATD understands the importance of considering a diversity of civil society perspectives in development programs and strategies. To that end, DFATD will institutionalize regular, predictable, and transparent policy dialogue with Canadian international development and humanitarian assistance CSOs, in addition to engaging with Canadian, international and local CSOs in developing countries.

5. *Establish Predictable, Equitable, Flexible, and Transparent Funding Mechanisms:* A variety of predictable and merit-based funding mechanisms allows a wide range of CSO partners from across Canada

and in developing countries, new or long established, to plan and develop sustainable initiatives. DFATD understands that access to a mix of short, medium, and long-term funding is required to support a thriving civil society sector. DFATD also recognizes that responsive mechanisms (including unsolicited proposals) can provide the impetus for innovative approaches, and that CSOs require time to plan their programming.

To that end, DFATD will provide merit-based, predictable funding opportunities through equitable, flexible and transparent modalities that will support the diverse roles and types of CSOs in Canada and in developing countries.

6. *Demonstrate Sustainability, Transparency, Accountability, and Results:* Consistent with the principles of the *ODAAA*, DFATD is transparent about, and accountable for, its expected and achieved outcomes for development assistance. DFATD looks to all of its development partners to uphold similar transparency and accountability standards, and increase the impact of Canada's development investments. Moreover, DFATD is expecting that through effective partnerships with Canadian CSOs, the results of Canada's development assistance will be more visible and recognized by Canadians and others around the world.

To that end, DFATD will seek partnerships with CSOs that demonstrate transparency, accountability and results in line with Canadian international assistance priorities and broader foreign policy priorities. DFATD will also support CSO-led initiatives that produce enduring results that can be locally sustained when external funding comes to an end. Streamlined and modernized business processes will be used in a standard, coherent and transparent manner to accommodate the different roles and diverse nature of CSOs, and the broad variety of projects funded (e.g. development, humanitarian, public engagement).

7. *Foster Multi-stakeholder Approaches to Development:* All development actors, including CSOs, the private sector, multilateral organizations, donors, and local and national governments can contribute to development in distinct and complementary ways. DFATD seeks to foster effective partnerships among these actors.

To that end, DFATD will proactively encourage dialogue between and effective partnerships among development actors to foster respect for human rights and gender equality, create decent jobs, and lead to inclusive service delivery in priority areas of focus.

8. *Engage Canadians in Development:* Canada's unity is strengthened through the expression of common values both at home and abroad. CSOs have an important role in expressing Canadian values internationally, building support for development cooperation, sharing their expertise, and telling Canada's international development story.

To that end, DFATD encourages Canadian CSOs to undertake public engagement activities in developing countries and in Canada. It is committed to supporting initiatives that: encourage Canadian volunteers, raise financial resources for development cooperation, and act as a channel for Canadians to personally engage and contribute to development.

9. *Save Lives and Alleviate Suffering:* DFATD's humanitarian assistance programming aims to save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain the dignity of those affected by conflicts, acute food insecurity, and natural disasters by providing appropriate, timely, and effective responses. DFATD recognizes that humanitarian CSOs are an essential element of Canada's response to humanitarian crises around the world, and can support the resilience and preparedness of communities at risk.

To that end, in addition to working with humanitarian CSOs as operational partners, DFATD will also work with humanitarian CSOs to promote humanitarian principles collectively and address key humanitarian policy and operational issues.

Conclusion

Effective development cooperation with civil society leads to significant development and humanitarian results. CSOs are important partners in promoting community-government engagement and transformative change, particularly through their work to increase the involvement of individuals in the decision-making processes that affect their lives, and to empower poor and marginalized people and communities. Canada's support for an enabling environment for civil society in developing countries helps ensure that CSOs can function effectively and independently in ways that complement the efforts of governments, the private sector, and multilateral organizations.

To meet the objectives outlined in this Policy and make a difference in the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable around the world, the Department will convene CSO representatives on an annual basis to discuss the implementation of this policy. Together, the Government of Canada and its CSO partners will be global leaders in international development and humanitarian assistance.

Footnotes

Footnote 1 This definition is derived in part from the OECD (2009), *Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness. Findings, Recommendations and Good Practice*.

Footnote 2 These principles are elaborated in: *The Humanitarian Charter*, the *Plan of Action and Core Principles of Codes of Conduct on Protection from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation in Humanitarian Crisis*, the *SPHERE Minimum Standards in Disaster Response*, and the *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief*.