The Geneva Statement on Building Trust for CSO Enabling Environment

Our Challenge

The world is facing multiple crises in health, economy, geopolitics, equality and rights, and the environment that erode development gains and derail progress at all levels. These crises call for the political will of all development actors to uphold the effectiveness principles and transform the way we work to put the global development agenda back on track.

Development actors have committed to providing an enabling environment for civil society organisations to improve their effectiveness that maximises their contributions to development. A key challenge to meeting this commitment is addressing the mistrust between many governments and CSO partners. Building trust requires working with each other to achieve lasting impact based on a common agenda. It entails an openness to collectively share decision-making spaces and resources to achieve outcomes that put peoples and their organisations at the centre of development.

Moving forward will require more capacity and collective action to strengthen trust among all actors. Governments must make development cooperation more effective and inclusive. Support to and engagement with CSOs who are closest to the people could contribute to realising these principles. Our collaboration, based on the principle of leaving no one behind, must build on the distinct role of CSOs and provide a route to strengthen the trust and energy needed to deliver sustainable development for all.

Our Resolve

CSO Development Effectiveness can only be fulfilled when civic space is protected and there is trust among development actors. Trust-building is crucial to create enabling conditions for local initiatives and organisations to thrive.

We seek the implementation of declarations and commitments made in Paris, Accra, Busan, Nairobi and now Geneva, on CSO enabling environment and development effectiveness. In this regard, we will take the necessary steps to promote trust and strengthen our partnerships with other stakeholders. In the spirit of the Istanbul Principles, we will:

- **Strengthen our capacities** to develop credible and sustainable partnerships built on trust and respect
- **Strengthen our own collaboration, knowledge sharing and evidence-based engagement** by conducting our own research, advocacy and engagement work, and mobilising for advocacy and campaigns that elevate and assert our demands
- **Strengthen partnerships with affected communities and sectors**, and raise awareness of development challenges
- **Address our financial sustainability** by building strong, predictable and reliable partnerships to address the deteriorating funding environment, especially for CSOs in the developing world
- **Invest in internal transparency and accountability standards/mechanisms** to promote transparency and mutual accountability for enhancing trust and solidarity with other CSOs, people’s organisations, and social movements
- **Utilise our collective strength** to participate in government processes that recognise the CSOs’ role as development actors and to maximise available spaces for engagement and participation to influence policies and programs of development actors
- **Promote good governance**, that is gender transformative and socially inclusive; that deepens democratic ownership, enhances human rights and labour rights; and that delivers sustainable development results

With support from

![Sida](image1)
![Irish Aid](image2)
![Austrian Development Agency](image3)
Our Call

Action must be taken by governments and development partners to promote trust and to reverse the trend of shrinking civic space, ensure CSO Enabling Environment, and promote the realisation of CSO Development Effectiveness.

We urge all members of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation to:

- **Ensure policies and laws** provide an enabling environment for building trust and promoting equal and inclusive partnerships between all development actors
- **Institutionalise engagement frameworks** with CSOs at all levels

We call on governments to:

- **Create, institutionalise and support** structured dialogue frameworks with CSOs, and Social Dialogue with the Social Partners
- **Carry out relevant sensitisation with regulatory agencies** to become enablers of CSO partnerships
- **Digitise information management systems** to produce and ensure proper use of credible data on CSOs fostering transparency and accountability
- **Invest in documenting, valuing and giving a higher profile** on the contributions and best practices of CSOs
- **Create basket funding** from different sources (e.g., public finance and development cooperation) to support local CSOs and enable them to co-create and implement programmes effectively
- **Retract laws and policies** that limit CSOs’ capacity to fulfil their role as development actors, including gaining access to aid and funding

We call on DAC donors to:

- **Implement the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society** in Humanitarian and Development Cooperation

We urge all providers of development assistance to:

- **Facilitate participation** of CSOs, women’s organisations, community-based organisations and people’s organisations in development processes
- **Assure CSOs of sufficient resources and a safe operating environment** while doing development work in conflict-affected states
- **Confirm that the core purpose of development assistance** is to support sustainable development and should not be securitised, commercialised or instrumentalised in ways that can harm civil society

The foregoing statement of our resolve and our calls towards governments and development partners, requires the creation of a multi-stakeholder initiative through the GPEDC at global, regional, national and sub-national levels, to translate them into action. The overarching goal for this initiative should deepen our collective understanding of the commitments on CSO enabling environment, supported through the GPEDC’s new delivery model at the country level.

This should be a well-resourced initiative to develop and promote trust building among development actors at all levels, including through capacity building, peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange. This initiative will reflect on conditions, experiences, and good practices to develop practical guidelines for trust building at the country level. It will complement the CSO Belgrade Call to Action and the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society. It will focus on conditions needed to open civic space and enable CSOs to engage in inclusive partnerships, and to do their part in realising sustainable development and human rights commitments.

We call on all GPEDC members to support this initiative to promote trust-building, by incorporating it into the Partnership for the next four years.

Geneva, 10 December 2022

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