

Strengthening CSO Contributions to Development Effectiveness:
A Synthesis of Evidence of CSO Initiatives since Busan

Brian Tomlinson

CSO Co-chair, Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment

A Framework for Improving and Assessing CSO Development Effectiveness

In June 2011, 240 civil society organization (CSOs) representatives from more than 70 countries met in Siem Reap, Cambodia, to launch the [Siem Reap Consensus on a Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness](#)¹. CSO endorsement of this *Framework* signifies the first-ever global civil society consensus on a set of standards that should govern CSO development work around the globe.² This consensus is formed around eight [Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness](#)³, the outcome of a three-year CSO-led process in the lead-up to Busan, involving more than 3500 CSOs in country, regional and sectoral consultations across the world.

The *Istanbul Principles* are a statement of common values and approaches to guide CSO work, with adaptability to highly diverse and different country context and CSO approaches. They have universal application to CSO roles and practices in both peaceful and conflict situations, in different areas of work from grassroots to policy advocacy, and along a continuum from humanitarian emergencies to long-term development. They are a vision for development and a foundation for CSOs to reflect upon, evaluate, and continuously improve, their development effectiveness and practice. Given the many thousands of CSOs around the world engaged in development, with very different capacities and varied contexts, initiatives to implement the *Principles* will reflect these diverse realities.

Box One: The Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness

1. Respect and promote human rights and social justice.
2. Embody gender equality and equity while promoting women and girls rights.
3. Focus on people's empowerment, democratic ownership and participation.
4. Promote environmental sustainability.
5. Practice transparency and accountability.
6. Pursue equitable partnerships and solidarity.
7. Create and share knowledge and commit to mutual learning.
8. Commit to realize positive sustainable change.

¹ http://cso-effectiveness.org/IMG/pdf/international_framework_open_forum.pdf

² CSOs are commonly defined to include all non-market and non-state organizations outside of the family in which people organize themselves to pursue shared interests in the public domain. Examples include community-based organizations and village associations, environmental groups, women's rights groups, farmers' associations, faith-based organizations, labour unions, cooperatives, professional associations, chambers of commerce, independent research institutes, and the not-for-profit media.

³ http://cso-effectiveness.org/IMG/pdf/final_istanbul_cso_development_effectiveness_principles_footnote_december_2010-2.pdf

CSOs committed in Siem Reap to take pro-active actions to improve and be fully accountable for their development practices. The Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness, which coordinated the three-year process to develop the *Principles* and *Framework*, also produced a number of toolkits and guidelines to assist in their implementation.⁴

All stakeholders at the 2011 Fourth High Level Forum (HLF4) in Busan, Republic of Korea, reaffirmed the Accra HLF3 principle that CSOs are independent development actors in their own right. In Busan they went further with a [commitment](#)⁵ to use the *Principles* and *Framework* to hold CSOs accountable as effective development actors. Stakeholders,

“Encourage CSOs to implement practices that strengthen their accountability and their contribution to development effectiveness, guided by the Istanbul Principles and the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness.” [§22b]

Busan was also a breakthrough in the acknowledged link between the standards set out in international human rights agreements and the conditions that enable CSOs to maximize their contributions to development.⁶ The policies and practices of developing country governments, donors and the private sector affect and shape the capacities of CSOs to engage in development. Progress in realizing the *Istanbul Principles* in practice, therefore, depends not only on CSO initiative, but in equal measure on enabling government policies, laws and regulations that are consistent with the intent of the *Principles*. In regard an enabling environment for CSOs, all stakeholders made an essential commitment in Busan 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 maximises the contributions of CSOs to development.” [§22(a)]

Finally, Busan expanded the notion of CSOs as “development actors in their own right.” CSOs were affirmed in Busan as organizations that “play a vital role in enabling people to claim their rights, in promoting rights-based approaches, in shaping development policies and partnerships, and in overseeing their implementation.” [§22]

The application of the *Istanbul Principles*, in the context of an enabling environment, must take into account the full range of CSO roles in development (see Annex 2). Thousands of organizations, working at all levels, promote development and poverty reduction, strengthen peoples’ voices in governance, and respond to humanitarian emergencies.

⁴ The Principles and Framework along with toolkits for their application can be found at <http://cso-effectiveness.org/InternationalFramework>. CSOs define “development effectiveness” as “policies and practices by development actors that deepen the impact of aid and development cooperation on the capacities of the poor and marginalized people to realize their rights and achieve internationally-agreed development goals. It places human rights, social justice, gender equality and ecological sustainability at the core of aid relations and the development process more broadly.

⁵ http://effectivecooperation.org/files/OUTCOME_DOCUMENT_-_FINAL_EN2.pdf

⁶ The relevant human rights standards include freedom of association, freedom of expression, the right to operate free from unwarranted state interference, the right to communicate and cooperate, the right to seek and secure funding, and the state’s duty to protect

CSO roles often combine engagement with communities, poor and marginalized groups for service provision and development innovation, empowerment of affected populations to claim their rights, making connections and linking people across the globe, enrichment of development policy agendas at all levels, and the monitoring of government and donor implementation of development policies, plans and practices.

In the two years since Busan, CSOs around the world have taken seriously their commitment to strengthen their development effectiveness. They have been actively promoting the *Istanbul Principles* among hundreds of CSOs at the country level, developing initiatives to assess CSO practice against these principles, and taking measures to improve their accountability.

Documenting Progress in CSO Development Effectiveness

This casebook brings together case stories documenting a global CSO commitment to improving their effectiveness, contributed by 19 CSOs from different countries and sectoral experiences. It should be read as a snapshot of different CSO initiatives, and by no means an exhaustive review of evidence, particularly at the organizational level. The cases come from both national CSO coordinating platforms and sectoral CSOs.

This chapter is a synthesis that highlights some of the successes and strategies to date in addressing CSO practices, consistent with the *Istanbul Principles*. But it also points to the challenges and gaps CSO face in improving these practices. These cases must also be read within a broader context for many CSOs in an increasing number of countries, where evidence points to a persistent narrowing of the legal, regulatory and policy space for CSOs.

A Challenging Environment for CSO Development Effectiveness

As noted above, an enabling environment for CSOs is a crucial condition for the strengthening of CSO effectiveness in contributing to development. CPDE's Working Group on CSO Enabling Environment has developed an overarching rights-based framework identifying three essential areas and five dimensions affecting CSOs' capacities to organize and act for development through peoples' participation in their communities and engagement with their governments (see Annex Three). [CPDE has brought together evidence](#) in relation to this framework for the legal and regulatory environment for CSOs, the spaces for policy influencing, and changing donor-CSO relationships.

Despite the commitments of Busan to an enabling environment, the CPDE's Review of Evidence, parallel CSOs country level studies and collection of data, independent observers, such as Maina Kiai, the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, all confirm deteriorating conditions, in which "repressive legislation, often shared between states, is becoming a threat to civil society as Member States make laws criminalizing or restricting [civil society] work. ... Restrictions on funding have become a major existential threat to associations around the world."⁷ A CIVICUS' *2013 State of Civil Society Report* documents this narrowing of

⁷ Maina Kiai, "Sounding the Alarm: emerging threats to civil society and the need for a coordinated international response," The High Level Event on Supporting Civil Society, New York, 23 September 2013, accessible at <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/FAssociation/StatementCivilSocietyRoundtable23092013.pdf>

space in over 30 contributions.⁸ Another recent CIVICUS report points to 413 threats to civil society in 87 countries between January 2012 and October 2013.⁹ CPDE's [*An Assessment of the Enabling Environment for Civil Society: A synthesis of evidence of progress since Busan*](#), submitted to the OECD's team monitoring progress for the Busan commitments, is an essential companion to the case studies presented in this booklet. Together these reports document an environment in which initiatives for CSO development effectiveness is becoming increasingly difficult and undermined by government policies, laws and regulations.

An Overview of CSO Initiatives in Strengthening CSO Development Effectiveness

Since Busan, CSOs around the world have been working with regional and country level platforms and individual CSOs on awareness building, training initiatives, and improvements in CSO practice, guided by the *Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness*. Hundreds of CSOs have adopted the *Istanbul Principles*, and are now taking advantage of various toolkits and guidelines prepared by the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness.¹⁰ At the end of 2012, the mandate for sustaining momentum with respect to CSO development effectiveness and the *Principles* passed from the Open Forum to the CSO Partnership for Effective Development (CPDE).

In June 2013, the CPDE's Working Group on CSO Development Effectiveness organized its first activity, a 'Training of Trainers' workshop in Johannesburg, South Africa. The purpose of this workshop was to develop capacities to reach out and encourage more civil society organizations at the country level to look closely into their organization's praxis as accountable and effective independent development actors. Forty-five civil society educators, facilitators and trainers attended from across the globe. The participants worked together to develop regional plans to bring forward CSO development effectiveness work in their region. Most plans centered on three areas, namely capacity development, outreach and expansion and advocacy and engagement.

Parallel to this workshop, initiatives related to the *Istanbul Principles* have been taken up in numerous countries and organizations. The case studies in this booklet highlight some of these efforts and provide a good overview of the nature of these initiatives in six important areas.¹¹

a. Increasing awareness and exposure to the Principles and their implications for practice

⁸ CIVICUS 2013. *State of Civil Society 2013: Creating an enabling environment*. Andrew Firmin, Ciana-Marie Pegus, Brian Tomlinson editors. Accessible online at http://socs.civicus.org/?page_id=4289.

⁹ CIVICUS 2013. "Global Trends on Civil Society Restrictions: Mounting restrictions on civil society – the gap between rhetoric and reality," A report co-authored by Tor Hodenfield and Ciana-Marie Pegus. October 2013, accessible at <https://civicus.org/images/GlobalTrendsonCivilSocietyRestrictions2013.pdf>.

¹⁰ The Open Forum led the process for the development of the *Istanbul Principles* and *International Framework*. In its final year it developed several practical and comprehensive resources to support their dissemination and implementation in many different organizational and national contexts. These include the [Practitioners' Activity Guide](#), the [Implementation Toolkit](#), and the [Advocacy Toolkit](#). These resources are available in English, French and Spanish.

¹¹ The identification of countries below is based on the case studies in this booklet and other sources (e.g. the [Open Forum web site](#)). They are by no means complete. The CPDE's Working Group on CSO Development Effectiveness will continue to develop its monitoring capacities to have a more comprehensive overview of activities related to CSO development effectiveness.

The case studies indicate the importance of building awareness and understanding of the *Principles*. While many thousands of CSOs were consulted and contributed to the adoption of the *Principles*, during the past two years it has been essential to bring the *Principles* back to the country level in order to deepen and broaden an appreciation for their meaning among a highly diverse community of CSOs. This has meant, *inter alia*,

Translating the *Principles* and the *International Framework* into working languages at the country level (e.g. Finland, Greece, Republic of Korea, Japan, Nepal, Cambodia).
Formal adoption of the *Principles* by CSO country platforms, as guidance for work by these platforms with their members on improving CSO practice and in framing new and revised Codes of Conduct for their members (e.g. Czech Republic, Canada, Ireland, the Netherlands, Pacific Region [PIANGO]).

Creating tools and learning materials adapting the implementation guides to the local context (e.g. United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, International Trade Union Confederation, Nepal, European Union [CONCORD]). Some examples include BOND (UK)'s [NGO Health Check](#) and [Impact Builder](#), ITUC's [Trade Union Development Effectiveness Profile Tool](#), Concord [EU]'s [DEEEP](#) action experiment on citizens' empowerment for global justice, and CCIC (Canada)'s [case studies](#) and 2013 [calendar](#).

Workshops / Webinars with CSOs as part of membership-based CSO platforms to deepen understanding of the *Principles* and develop country-specific strategies for affecting the practices of CSOs (e.g. Australia, Canada, Ireland, Tunisia, Nepal, Japan, Cambodia, MENA Regional Workshop [Iraq]). The Austrian CSO platform offers in-house workshops for individual CSOs on issues of development effectiveness and the *Istanbul Principles*.

Focused workshops and processes on individual *Principles* (e.g. CCIC [Canada] – human rights based approaches; CONCORD [EU] – peoples' empowerment; JANIC [Japan] – human rights, gender equality and equitable partnerships).

b. Promotion with official aid provider agencies and partner country governments

At Busan, governments agreed to be guided by the *Istanbul Principles* and *International Framework* in assessing CSO development effectiveness. Since 2012, national CSO platforms have worked with a number of governments to integrate the *Principles* into official policies. The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) guidance to official donors on [Partnering with Civil Society: 12 Lessons from DAC Peer Reviews](#)¹² suggests that donors “should take into account CSO-defined effectiveness standards such as the *Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness* as well as other relevant CSO capacity standards.” [page 32] They should also “assess CSOs’ accountability systems and capacity as a whole, taking into consideration the *Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness*.” [page 36]

¹² <http://www.oecd.org/dac/peer-reviews/12%20Lessons%20Partnering%20with%20Civil%20Society.pdf>

KEPA (Finland) has promoted the *Principles* with the Finnish government and the latter noted in its [2012 Development Policy Programme](#)¹³ that greater CSO effectiveness will be assured in accordance with the guidelines established by the *Principles*. A December 2013 Memorandum of Understanding between CSOs in Georgia and the Parliament endorsed the *Principles* and *Framework* as the basis for dialogue. The government of the [Republic of Korea](#)¹⁴ was one of the first governments to endorse the *Principles* in the lead-up to Busan. In Canada, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) in 2014 published guidelines for the implementation of the ODA Accountability Act, which calls on the Minister to be assured that the perspectives of the poor have been taken into account in all approved ODA projects. The [guidance questions](#)¹⁵ include whether “civil society organizations involved in the [proposed] initiative align their practices with the *Istanbul Principles*.”

The case studies also point to a number of CSOs that have used the *Principles* as the basis for dialogue with their government. Examples include JAIC in Japan, IAA in Iraq, PLANOSCAM in Cameroon (with local government), and PIANGO in the Pacific Region.

c. Strengthening Human Rights Approaches (HRBAs) to development cooperation

The [Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation](#) notes, “civil society organizations (CSOs) play a vital role in enabling people to claim their rights, in promoting rights-based approaches, in shaping development policies and partnerships, and in overseeing their implementation.” [§22] The first *Istanbul Principle* affirms, “CSOs are effective when they develop and implement activities and practices that promote individual and collective human rights, including the right to development with dignity, decent work, social justice and equity for all people.” A human rights perspective infuses all eight *Principles*.

In an October 2013, [survey](#)¹⁶ of members of CCIC (Canada) and InterAction (United States) documenting understanding of the *Principles* and their implementation, a large majority indicated that components of a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) was part of their operations, with 30% indicating specific tools and resources that guided the organization in implementing a HRBA. CCIC (Canada) has followed up with the testing of a [training resource](#)¹⁷ to assist CSOs to integrate HRBA into their development practice. Dóchas (Ireland) developed a short [web guide](#)¹⁸ introducing the rights-based approach and witnessed members advancing this approach with the Irish government. Both KEPA (Finland) and JANIC (Japan) have organized specific training sessions on HRBAs and development cooperation.

d. Promoting development cooperation embodying gender equality

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http://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CCoQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fformin.finland.fi%2Fpublic%2Fdownload.aspx%3FID%3D107270%26GUID%3D%7B09DC4B95-EE88-4190-B3E7-996CBE179DE9%7D&ei=BvYhU_GqOsT72QWkm4GAAG&usg=AFQjCNHsmhatUMm-Ahneeyn5NUi1KFr9ag&sig2=6nHUrHDxHj-zCLxm8QcTjg&bvm=bv.62922401,d.b2I

¹⁴ <http://cso-effectiveness.org/government-of-south-korea,524>

¹⁵ <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/acdi-cida/acdi-cida.nsf/eng/NAT-24113434-MFP>

¹⁶ http://www.ccic.ca/_files/en/what_we_do/2013_10_29_CPDE_Report_of_Findings.pdf

¹⁷ http://www.ccic.ca/_files/en/what_we_do/final_guide_on_hrba_and_partnership-final.pdf

¹⁸ <http://www.dochas.ie/RBA/>

Achieving gender equality, through addressing unequal power relations and fulfilling women and girls' rights – in all their dimensions – is essential for realizing sustainable development outcomes. These goals are not only embedded in the *Istanbul Principles*, they are also reflected in the Busan Partnership document (§20).

The case studies highlight several initiatives. FoRS (Czech Republic) has developed a resource and training kit, [Gender in Development Matters](#).¹⁹ This platform is working with its members to assess gender equality in programming through workshops using the training resource. The Uganda National NGO Forum is building member capacities in Uganda for gender mainstreaming. In Iraq, IAA has been working with the *Principles* to assure women a more active role in policy making and the democratic process as well as in drafting a strategy to combat violence against women. The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) is a key member of CPDE. AWID has produced an important [series of influential reports](#)²⁰, based on surveys of its members, on the financing of women's rights organizations.

e. Strengthening equitable partnerships for effective development

Rooted in a HRBA, equitable partnerships are based on shared development goals and values, mutual respect, trust, organizational autonomy, long-term accompaniment and global citizenship. Such partnerships strengthen essential aspects of solidarity and are a core dimension of development cooperation that defines the work of CSOs, often distinguishing CSOs from other development actors.

While many CSOs have long struggled with the dynamics and challenges of equitable partnerships, the case studies point to several initiatives since Busan, which arise from reflection on the *Istanbul Principles*. KEPA has developed [Compass for Partners](#)²¹, a partnership checklist, which is intended for KEPA members and their developing country counterparts to strengthen their dialogue and realize more equitable partnerships. ACODEV (Belgium) and PARTOS (the Netherlands) have together implemented partners' satisfaction surveys with almost 4000 partners, which will be the basis for further dialogue on issues identified.

Both CCIC (Canada) and Dóchas (Ireland) have linked work on partnerships with HRBAs. In 2013, members of Dóchas adopted [Partnership Guidelines](#)²² for Irish CSOs and CCIC has been working with its principles of partnership in its [Code of Ethics and Operational Standards](#)²³ for a number of years. In 2014 JANIC (Japan) carried out a workshop with members on issues in equitable partnerships with case studies. Finally, in 2013 members of FoRS (Czech Republic) came together to assess and develop their understanding of how to implement equitable partnerships using the Open Forum's [Practitioners' Activity Guide](#).

[CIVICUS](#), an international alliance of CSOs, is working with the [International Civil Society Center](#) (ICSC is a forum for large international CSOs) to develop a [basic set of principles](#)²⁴ for CSO cooperation. These partnership principles, which are compatible with the *Istanbul Principles*,

¹⁹ http://al.odu.edu/gpis/docs/gender_in_development_matters.pdf

²⁰ <http://www.awid.org/Our-Initiatives/Where-is-the-Money-for-Women-s-Rights>

²¹ https://www.kepa.fi/tiedostot/kepa_partnership_eng.pdf

²² <http://www.dochas.ie/Shared/Files/4/dochas-partnerships.pdf>

²³ http://www.ccic.ca/about/ethics_e.php

²⁴ <http://icscentre.org/pages/partnership-principles>

attempt to address a number of shortcomings in the relationship between local and national CSOs on one side and international CSOs on the other. The ICSC also acts as the secretariat for the [INGO Accountability Charter](#)²⁵, which is a rigorous accountability mechanism for 22 International CSOs.

f. Practicing accountability and transparency

CSOs are often called upon to demonstrate a sustained organizational commitment to transparency, accountability in multiple relationships (particularly to beneficiary populations), and integrity in their internal operations.

Recognizing that transparency is an essential condition for accountability, CSOs have become increasingly aware of the importance and challenges in being more transparent. More than 145 CSOs have begun to publish their aid information to the [International Aid Transparency Initiative \(IATI\) Standard](#)²⁶, which provides access to aid transactions information at the activity level. CSOs have formed a [CSO IATI Working Group](#) that is working closely with the IATI Secretariat and several CSOs are members of the IATI Steering Committee. The Working Group has developed a [Protocol](#)²⁷ to guide aid providers, developing country governments and CSOs in identifying issues and challenges for CSOs publishing to the IATI Standard. Platforms in the United Kingdom (BOND), the United States (InterAction), the Netherlands (PARTOS) and Canada (CCIC) have an active program introducing their members to the IATI Standard and assisting in publishing their data.

Beyond IATI, there are several initiatives with CSOs in developing countries. [Rendir Cuentas](#), a regional initiative in Latin America, brings together 25 civil society networks in eight countries to improve standards of national CSO transparency and accountability, in sometimes-difficult political environments. CSI (Georgia) describes an initiative that publishes information on more than 950 Georgian CSOs and 15 networks on a [web portal](#)²⁸. In France, [F3E](#) works with CSOs to publish their full evaluation reports on its web site.

As development actors, CSOs enjoy significant trust by the public and local stakeholders. Most CSOs practice high standards of management and probity. While there are acknowledged issues in CSO accountability, CSOs are continually improving their accountability through oversight of their Boards of Directors, ongoing and transparent dialogue with programming counterparts, clear communications with constituencies, accessible program reports and external financial audits, compliance with government regulatory oversight and through a variety of CSO-managed Codes of Conduct.

The case studies in this booklet and related information describe some initiatives that have been developed since Busan:

²⁵ <http://www.ingoaccountabilitycharter.org/>

²⁶ <http://www.aidtransparency.net/>

²⁷ <http://support.iatistandard.org/entries/29744178-Implementing-the-International-Aid-Transparency-Initiative-IATI-Standard-by-CSOs-A-Protocol>

²⁸ <http://www.csogeorgia.org/>

- BOND (United Kingdom) has [a major program](#)²⁹ with its members focusing on frameworks for assuring quality CSO engagement in development and humanitarian assistance.
- UNITAS (Bolivia) in 2013 implemented a [Collective Accountability Report](#)³⁰[Spanish] in the nine Departments of the country, providing detailed information on members' activities and financial information.
- The Uganda National NGO Forum is developing a program to train community monitors to create greater accountability for all development actors, including CSOs, to the community, and through dialogue at various levels. Since 2006 this platform and its members have been working with the [NGO Quality Assurance Certification Mechanism \(QuAM\)](#),³¹ a self-regulation initiative developed by NGOs and for NGOs in Uganda to promote the adherence to generally acceptable ethical standards and operational norms.
- VANI (India) has a program for its members to provide a [model policy document](#)³² in several Hindi languages to facilitate the operations of small and medium sized organizations, and to help them in self-regulating accreditation. Credibility Alliance (India) has developed a [CSO Accreditation System](#)³³ and Peer Review Model, involving more than 500 voluntary organizations across India. It works to strengthen and enhance the legitimacy and credibility of organizations in the sector by equipping them to meet the accreditation norms.
- NFN (Nepal) has amended and endorsed its [Code of Conduct](#) in line with the *Istanbul Principles*. It works with its members in a program Promoting NGOs' Governance and Management in Nepal.

Through the *Istanbul Principles* CSOs stress the fundamental importance of voluntary accountability mechanisms, not government-imposed 'policing regulations'. Given the diversity of CSOs worldwide and in any given country, voluntary mechanisms have the requisite flexibility to safeguard CSO autonomy and independence. But to continue to be credible, such mechanisms need to evolve and strengthen in innovative ways that demonstrate CSO compliance and growth as organizations.

Challenges and Issues in Implementing the Istanbul Principles

The case studies are representative of important progress on the part of CSOs, and in particular CSO platforms in many countries, to work with the *Istanbul Principles* and *International Framework*. Nevertheless, several of the case studies also raise significant challenges in fully embedding the *Principles* in the practice of CSOs, particularly at country level where the potential impact on development results is greatest. In the words of Concord (EU)'s DEEEP case study,

"...[T]he Istanbul Principles propose a radical reconsideration of NGO practices in order to stimulate a shift towards a more just and sustainable world. This is quite a challenge for NGOs busy with daily policy business... Getting out of the business-as-

²⁹ <http://www.bond.org.uk/effectiveness>

³⁰ <http://cejis.org/informe-colectivo-construyendo-una-cultura-de-rendicion-de-cuentas/>

³¹ <http://ngoforum.or.ug/quam/>

³² <http://vaniindia.org/pdf/Model%20Policies.pdf>

³³ <http://www.credibilityalliance.org/>

usual and starting to address the essence of the Principles in our own organisational practice, such as moving from charity to justice, addressing systemic change or cross-sectorial partnerships, real participation and transparency is a major strategic shift for most CSOs, which still requires a lot of learning and questioning.”

These challenges can be grouped in several areas.

a. Putting abstract principles into practice

While many CSOs in both aid providing and partner countries still need to be first introduced to the *Principles* by country CSO platforms, CSOs sometimes react to the abstract nature of the *Principles* (i.e. too difficult to apply to everyday practice) and/or suggest that their current practices and development relationships already reflects these *Principles* (e.g. Finland, Belgium, Japan, Nepal, Tunisia). Small and medium sized organizations and relatively new CSOs in the Middle East and Central and Eastern Europe point to difficulties interpreting the *Principles* into day-to-day activities.

The *Principles* are abstract by design. Unlike most other development actors, CSOs are numerous, highly diverse and autonomous organizations working in many different roles in all countries of the world. They include many involved in development who are not aid actors. In broad terms, CSOs are voluntary democratic spaces for people to organize themselves as agents of their own development. CSO development effectiveness therefore involves CSOs engaging in many expressions of development alternatives, CSOs making choices and taking sides in highly unequal societies, and CSOs coalescing in support of the human rights of poor and marginalized populations. The *Principles* respond to this diversity.

In the words of the *International Framework*,

“Although the Istanbul Principles are a consensus on essential CSO values that inform their practice, they cannot fully take account the great diversity in numbers, geographic locales, purposes and challenges faced by thousands of CSOs involved in development activities. The Istanbul Principles must be interpreted and applied locally in the CSO’s country and organizational context.

“[They] are, likewise, not intended to duplicate or replace exiting CSO country or sector specific principles or various accountability frameworks. But rather the adoption of the Istanbul Principles is a means to stimulate structured reflection, deeper understanding, and accountability for enhanced CSO development effectiveness.”

Implementation of the *Principles* therefore requires deliberate programming to interpret and facilitate dialogue on their application in specific country and organizational contexts. The case studies identify not only the importance of the guidance documents prepared by the Open Forum (see above), but also other resources that

- popularize the *Principles* (the use of icons and a calendar in Canada);
- present concrete examples of the expression of individual principles in practice through short case studies (Japan, Canada, Tunisia);

- integrate the principles into ongoing learning events and dialogues with members and government on the part of a platform (Finland, Japan);
- demonstrate initiatives consistent with the *Principles* that then draw others to a dialogue on the expansion of the initiative among other CSOs (Bolivia and its Accountability Report); and
- work through a “bottom-up” approach that brings the *Principles* into discussions on the day-to-day activities of specific organizations, particularly small and medium sized organizations (Czech Republic’s Code and peer review process).

As the Belgium case study suggests, the *Istanbul Principles* should not be used as a mechanical accountability framework or turned into easy-to-reach targets; rather they should be viewed as giving the general direction of where to aim for, not as targets themselves. For the Irish platform, Dóchas, they must be applied locally and uniquely to each CSO, and supported through national level standards and incentives.

b. Policies and practices of governments that limit CSO capacities to reflect the Principles in their practice

The closing space for civil society organizations in an increasing number of countries has already been noted. Many CSOs, while accepting their obligations and own limitations in improving their practices, point to the importance of enabling conditions for CSO development effectiveness. All stakeholders acknowledged (see §22 above) this essential inter-dependence in the Busan High Level Forum.

Several of the case studies highlight some of the challenges of a “disabling environment.” The Cambodian case study identifies the negative impact of contracts between aid providers and local CSOs, which determine for these CSOs particular ways of working: *“It is hard to integrate all of Istanbul Principles into their projects because they need to fulfill what they have agreed with their donors.”* Dóchas points to pressure from donors for “fast results,” while the *Principles* often focus on processes that do not necessarily produce results over short time periods. The contribution from CEAAL in the Americas suggests that concerns about institutional survival, resulting from changing aid-provider priorities moving resources out of the region, affect both capacities and interest to address the *Principles* in the region. Similarly, CCIC attests that “the enabling environment in Canada has gotten steadily worse in the past five years, with no group unaffected. ... Like many organizations in the South, Canadian civil society is beginning to feel deeply under threat.”

c. Challenges with individual Principles

Human Rights-Based Approaches: Human rights approaches are the cornerstone for all eight *Principles*. As noted above, a growing number of CSOs identify their organizational values with human rights and are considering a HRBA in their day-to-day practices. Yet many also identify challenges in making HRBAs more explicit in these practices:

“Key themes include difficulty in finding funding models and support for HRBA work, limited organizational capacity to implement HRBA effectively and broadly, the

challenge of measuring and mainstreaming HRBA, and other external factors (such as government policies and practices, and working in conflict situations).”³⁴

As noted in the previous section, several CSO platforms have developed training resources, including case studies, to enable the integration of HRBAs into regular practice. It has also been suggested that CSOs need to undertake public awareness campaigns to shape how governments, aid providers and public constituencies perceive HRBAs.

Equitable partnerships: Several case studies highlight the continuing challenges in implementing equitable partnerships, some of which are structural resulting from unequal power relationships; others are attitudinal, requiring overcoming assumptions and a charitable aid paradigm. The International NGO (INGO) model has been very successful in raising private resources for development, but has also concentrated these resources in a few very large global organizations. The Iraq case study highlights the nature of the relationship between foreign organizations operating in Iraq and local NGOs: “These relationships rarely depend on partnership to strengthen the local community, and many of these foreign organizations are implementing projects by direct action without the involvement of local NGOs and the local community.”

Inequitable partnerships have been a long-standing issue for CSOs, as it is for other aid providers. More recently, CSOs have focused more deliberate attention to codes of conduct and approaches that might mitigate some of the structural barriers – due diligence guides for partnership principles noted in section 4, metrics for measuring equitable relationships in the *International Framework*, an emphasis on transparency, and a deliberate investing of time and resources to build effective and equitable partnerships. But for all but the largest INGOs, it is often the case that the modalities of (unequal) partnership are often lock-into exclusive accountability frameworks for resources from aid providers and an increasingly skeptical public.

Other Principles: While the case studies do not provide an in-depth analysis, several cases mention challenges with transforming principles relating to gender equality, sustainable development, and sharing knowledge and learning into CSO practices.

d. Strengthening local CSOs

Several of the case studies mention the importance of strengthening local CSOs as a central and essential issue in effectively implementing the *Istanbul Principles* (Iraq, Libya, Cameroon, Cambodia, Czech Republic). IAA in Iraq points to a common approach to strengthening local CSOs of episodic training, which does not help in sustainable institution building and in improving the ongoing relations between CSOs and public institutions. Several of the case studies are from countries characterized by relatively recent growth of new CSOs involved in development cooperation. In these contexts, more systematic investment in institutional strengthening is urgently required.

³⁴ CCIC and Interaction, 2013. “Two years on from Busan: Looking back, looking forward,” An analysis of a survey on the implementation of the Istanbul Principles, October 2013, accessible at www.ccic.ca/files/.../2013_10_29_CPDE%20Report_of_Findings.pdf.

Smaller and local CSOs will require significant ongoing investment through local country CSO platforms in capacity development consistent with the *Principles* (Nepal). FoRS in the Czech Republic notes the importance of judging the impact of the *Principles* through evaluations of change among CSOs on the ground. In their view, “any way forward needs to be built on open and fair relationships, peer learning, willingness to improve, the provision of sufficient capacities, resources and time.” For PLANOSCAM in the Cameroon, the effectiveness of civil society is measured by the degree of empowerment of local communities so that the latter are capable of monitoring public affairs for the development of their communities. They note the lack of sufficient resources for this goal.

Are official and CSO funding mechanisms that are accessible to local CSOs taking account the need for resources for local institutional strengthening consistent with the *Principles*? Cambodia’s CCC asks for greater awareness of the need to allocate budgets from regional and global levels in support of awareness and implementation strategies with local CSOs.

e. Complex relationships affecting capacities to strengthen accountability

Dóchas affirms, “Being accountable helps us improve the quality and relevance of our programs.” For the CSO of the future, accountability, learning and innovation are closely tied together, requiring, “having the courage to examine your daily routines and the assumptions about your work.”³⁵ Strengthening accountability has been a strong emphasis in CSO work in relation to the *Istanbul Principles*. CSOs involved in these efforts nevertheless raise a number of challenges:

- Maintaining interest in self-assessment requirements for Codes of Conduct in the context of other local CSO priorities (Czech Republic, Canada). Such assessments are in part the basis for determining priorities for platforms working with the *Principles* with their members;
- A peer review mechanism addresses some of the concerns with a self-managed accountability framework. But such processes demand a significant investment of finance and human resources. According to FoRS in the Czech Republic, it is important to directly link peer reviews with the implementation of a Code of Conduct, tailor the reviews to local and organizational contexts, and offer support for peers in the process.
- There is an ongoing tension between accountability and attribution. These are particularly challenging for CSOs where the issues are complex, are linked to complex interventions (such as governance reform), and are taking place in highly dynamic environments.

Finally, the orientation of accountability mechanisms remains a large challenge, resulting from binding legal contracts with aid providers and the emphasis on fiduciary accountability. On the other hand, CSO accountability towards the constituencies with whom CSOs work, i.e. communities of people living in poverty or otherwise marginalized, could positively affect the challenges of CSO legitimacy raised by other development actors. A recent report by CSOs to the UN Development Cooperation Forum, notes that such mechanisms “would be an important

³⁵ “Future-proofing Irish NGOs – Thoughts after the BOND conference,” Dochasnetwork Blog, November 7, 2013, accessible at <http://dochasnetwork.wordpress.com/2013/11/07/future-proofing-irish-ngos-thoughts-after-the-bond-conference/>.

demonstration of the essential roles of CSOs in development while confronting the realities of shrinking democratic spaces for these roles, especially in a growing number of Southern countries where reforms of outdated NGO laws are regulating CSO activities in ways that are highly restrictive and/or repressive.”³⁶

The Way Forward

Despite strong evidence in many countries of closing space for CSOs as development actors, the case studies in this booklet demonstrate that CSOs have given practical expression to their commitment to work in development cooperation in ways that are consistent with the *Istanbul Principles*. Clearly challenges also remain, and much more progress is needed, as is the case for all who are party to the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation. Endorsed in Busan, the *Istanbul Principles* provide an important path to strengthen development effectiveness through policies and practices that adhere to human rights standards. This is true not only for CSOs, but also for all actors in the Global Partnership. With a human rights framework embedded in the *Principles*, their implementation in CSO practices requires an enabling policy and regulatory environment consistent with human rights agreements and standards.

The CPDE’s Working Group on CSO Development Effectiveness has been established as a platform to encourage and share good practices in the implementation of the *Istanbul Principles* at the country level, among the hundreds of CSOs that are part of CPDE and beyond. In assessing lessons learnt and socializing tools for practical application of the *Principles*, the Working Group supports the development of capacities to advocate, implement and track progress on CSO development effectiveness.

The CPDE is engaged with the Global Partnership to strengthen inclusive development. All actors for development are inter-dependent – be they CSOs, aid providers, or partner governments – and must collaborate to realize effective development outcomes for poor and marginalized populations. All have a shared interest in a dynamic and effective sector.

To advance CSO development effectiveness in the coming year, the CPDE Working Group will be initiating national training workshops that will focus on issues in CSO accountability, promoting CSO accountability charters in countries where there are no such mechanisms. The Working Group will also provide outreach support and continue to map, draw lessons and synthesize country level experience of initiatives to improve CSO development effectiveness, guided by the *Istanbul Principles* and the *International Framework*. Members of the Working Group are active participants in the multi-stakeholder Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment and contribute to its agenda in support of CSO development effectiveness alongside aid-provider and partner country representatives.

The case studies in this booklet, reflecting trends in the approaches and challenges for strengthening CSO development effectiveness, give added weight to several key messages from CSOs for the Global Partnership:

³⁶ IBON International, AidWatch Canada and Asia Pacific Research Network, “Civil Society Accountability: To whom and for whom,” a policy brief for the 2014 DCF Germany High-Level Symposium on Accountable and effective development cooperation in a post-2014 era, March 2014.

1. All development actors should commit to and work to mainstream human rights-based approaches at all levels of development policy, partnerships and modalities for development cooperation. HRBAs strengthen inclusive democratic ownership as a core aid and development effectiveness principle and create an enabling environment for implementing the *Istanbul Principles*.
2. All development actors should come together in multi-stakeholder dialogue and initiatives to raise awareness and build capacities to advance CSO development practice consistent with the *Istanbul Principles*. In this regard, both official and CSO aid-providers, alongside governments, should work closely with country-level CSO platforms, providing dedicated financing for outreach and engagement to adapt and adopt the *Principles* in a context-specific manner.
3. CSOs must continue to work to strengthen practices and processes in relation to their own accountability as development actors. Accountability mechanisms for CSOs need to address the challenges of the diversity of CSO actors, the limits of voluntary mechanisms, and the increasingly difficult environments in which CSOs work. All CSOs should work to improve their transparency as an essential condition of their accountability, including publishing to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Standard, with informed consent of CSO partners in aid recipient countries.
4. All development actors should work towards the implementation, in law, policy and practice, an enabling environment framework for CSOs, consistent with internationally agreed human rights, including for example, freedom of association and assembly, freedom of expression, freedom of movement, among other human rights and fundamental freedoms.