ACC Guidance Note for the Resident Coordinator System on Operational Collaboration with Civil Society Organizations

Approved on behalf of ACC by the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ)
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A. Introduction

1. Cooperation between civil societies and non-governmental organizations and the United Nations system has grown considerably. Particularly in humanitarian assistance, such organizations have assumed an important role in the implementation of United Nations system-aided activities. The General Assembly, in its resolution 50/120 of 20 December 1995, decided that where Governments so desired, the United Nations system should be ready to engage in providing an enabling environment to strengthen the capacity of civil societies and national non-governmental organizations that were involved in development activities, in accordance with national priorities.

2. The recent cycle of world conferences and the reform initiatives within the United Nations system have acknowledged that working in partnership with civil society organizations (CSOs) will contribute significantly to the achievement of the United Nations system objectives.

3. The present guidance note has been established in the light of the results of the inter-agency consultation held in November 1997 and related follow-up work. It, furthermore, takes into account and updates the recommendations to resident coordinators, developed in 1988 by the Consultative Committee on Substantive Questions (Operational Activities) (CCSQ(OPS)), on the means of improving cooperation with non-governmental organizations.

B. General considerations

4. Operational collaboration with civil society organizations at the country level seeks to advance and achieve the goals of the United Nations system, as determined by its mandates and governing bodies, and to assist member States in their national development processes in the most effective and efficient manner possible. It encourages the participation of CSOs in United Nations system programming processes with a view to ensuring the involvement of local actors in national development, and to benefit from their expertise and capacities in the formulation and delivery of the system’s development cooperation programmes.

5. The wide-ranging thematic and structural diversity of CSOs, including non-governmental organizations, needs to be taken into account. Issues such as transparency, representativity, sustainability and accountability of an organization need to be addressed in selecting CSO partners for programme and operational collaboration. “Peer quality control” among local CSOs may give interesting indications for the selection of possible partners. Collaboration with CSOs should not blur or detract from their specific strengths and status and should seek to enhance the comparative advantages of all development partners at the international, national and local levels.
6. Where appropriate, the approval and support of national authorities should be solicited in any active collaboration with CSOs. Such variations as may be required, for example in the context of complex emergency/conflict situations, must be based on a keen appreciation of local dynamics and a careful assessment of the best means of delivering assistance effectively and impartially.

7. It is recognized that no comprehensive or definitive guidance on modalities of collaboration with CSOs/non-governmental organizations at the country level is feasible and that country-specific circumstances will determine the nature and extent of the collaboration. The following mechanisms and practices seek accordingly to facilitate communication and understanding, as well as coherent and common approaches by the United Nations system.

C. Guidance to the resident coordinator system

8. The country team under the leadership of the resident coordinator should:

   (a) Ensure systematic sharing of information and establish a roster of appropriate CSO partners involved in operational activities in the country. Such information should be made available, upon request, to agency headquarters and regional and subregional offices;

   (b) Explore the possibility of establishing a channel through which CSOs could initiate collaboration with United Nations agencies, either individually or collectively, and for the United Nations system’s response to such requests;

   (c) Include periodically the subject of CSO collaboration in the agenda of its coordination meetings;

   (d) Wherever possible, actively promote the participation of relevant CSOs in the policy dialogue with other partners through information exchange, thematic groups and other meetings;

   (e) Seek to facilitate the involvement of appropriate CSOs in United Nations system programming processes and implementation as well as monitoring and impact evaluation;

   (f) Review existing arrangements and develop recommendations for providing support and training to indigenous CSOs and CSO consortia to strengthen their institutional capacities both in technical know-how in policy analysis and advocacy and in project implementation, reporting and accounting;

   (g) Explore procedural bottlenecks and make suggestions with a view to simplifying internal organizational guidelines and operational procedures in order to remove any unnecessary constraints and explicitly encourage cooperation with CSOs;

   (h) Seek to facilitate networking arrangements for indigenous CSOs, including in particular South/South contacts, to strengthen their knowledge and expertise in development policy and programmes;

   (i) Identify focal points at the national level for liaison with and information on CSOs, as required;
(j) Increasingly include information about effective interaction with civil society in the resident coordinator’s annual report.

9. Contractual and other relationships with CSOs for programme implementation will be determined by the practices of the funding agent, but should draw upon the ACC guidelines on national execution.