

**US Consultation
Part I**
April 27
1:00 – 3:00pm
(Virtual/phone
participation available)

Part II
May 26-27
9:30am – 5:30pm

**Open Forum
Global Assembly
August 24-26**
Montreal, Canada

**To RSVP or for more
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www.cso-effectiveness.org

Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness Defining Our Own Accountability

The Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness is an initiative conceived of and led by a diverse coalition of CSOs from around the world to identify the elements that are essential to the development effectiveness of CSOs. This process is unique in its effort to create a global CSO consensus on the principles that guide our work and to which we wish to be held accountable by the constituencies we serve and represent, by our fellow CSOs, and by donors.

In order to accomplish this mandate, the Open Forum will conduct consultations with a wide range of CSO representatives, as well as non-CSO stakeholders, in over 50 countries by the end of 2010¹. The Open Forum initiative takes place amidst on-going international aid effectiveness processes. It is not, however, a parallel process. Many CSOs do not have any relation to the international aid system, yet decisions made at the international level affect the contexts in which CSOs work. It is, therefore, important that we bring our voices together to define the principles to which we hold ourselves accountable and the circumstances that enable or impede our work.

Background

For about a decade, there has been a series of on-going processes that are shaping the future of international aid. One of these processes is led by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD DAC), which has organized a series of high level forums related to aid effectiveness. While the first of these took place in Rome in 2003 (with a focus on harmonization), it was not until the 2nd High Level Forum, held in Paris in 2005, that the aid effectiveness agenda gained prominence. At the 2nd High Level Forum, donors and partner country governments signed the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness², a five-year plan for reforming aid practices to improve the delivery of aid. In that agreement, signatories committed to undertake actions under five principles: country ownership, alignment with country priorities, donor harmonization, management of aid for results, and mutual accountability for these results. While the principles of the Paris Declaration have been commended, donors' definitions of those principles and the indicators used to assess their implementation have drawn criticism. There is also concern that signatories will not meet their commitments under these principles by the agreed date of 2010.

CSO Engagement

The perspective of CSOs was largely absent from this OECD-led process. Though organizers of the 2nd High Level Forum invited 30 CSO representatives to the signing of the Paris

¹ Funded consultations are distributed across regions as follows: Asia and North Africa: 17 countries; Latin America and the Caribbean: 16 countries; Sub-Saharan Africa: 19 countries; Europe: 4 countries; South Pacific: 2 countries. Four global thematic consultations will also be organized (e.g. gender and women's rights and social movements). Self-funded consultations will take place in many other countries in North America, Europe and Oceania.

² Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008): <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/41/34428351.pdf>. List of signatories to the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action: http://www.oecd.org/document/22/0,3343,en_2649_3236398_36074966_1_1_1_1,00.html.



Declaration, CSO participation was limited to the reading of a statement. At the same time, CSOs were beginning to combine their efforts to more systematically organize their engagement in this process³. Additionally, with the support of some donor governments, a temporary multi-stakeholder Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness was formed in 2007 that created a formal link between CSOs and the OECD⁴. The Advisory Group facilitated CSO engagement in the 2008 3rd High Level Forum in Accra and submitted recommendations to this process⁵. As a body, it was also instrumental in the granting of formal representation to CSOs after Accra on the key OECD body moving forward the aid effectiveness agenda, the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness.

Defining Development Effectiveness

While there is no commonly accepted definition of development effectiveness, for the Open Forum the term development effectiveness is about the impact of the actions of development actors, including international aid, on improving the lives of the poor and marginalized. It promotes sustainable change that addresses the root causes as well as the symptoms of poverty, inequality and marginalization. (Open Forum Toolkit, www.cso-effectiveness.org)

The 2008 3rd High Level Forum set an important precedent in terms of the extent of CSO participation in what were previously discussions between bilateral and multilateral representatives. In Accra, CSOs challenged an implicit assumption of the Paris Declaration, namely that more effective delivery of aid will lead to improved development results. CSOs argued instead for a shift and deepening of the Paris Declaration principles to include the impact of aid on the poor and marginalized (development effectiveness) and the right of citizens to participate in determining the development priorities of their countries (democratic ownership).

In the outcome document from Accra – the Accra Agenda for Action – CSOs were recognized as “independent development actors in their own right” and were simultaneously challenged

to reflect on their own effectiveness.⁶ Both leading up to and in Accra, donors and partner countries called on CSOs to apply the Paris Declaration principles to themselves. CSOs instead committed to engage in a global CSO-owned process of defining and promoting their own development effectiveness framework through an initiative that was already mobilizing with this very challenge in mind – the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness.

The next, and 4th, High Level Forum, to review implementation of the Paris Declaration and determine the shape of commitments moving forward, is set for late 2011 in Seoul.

Why You Should Care About the Open Forum

Knowing that governments are increasingly interested in CSO accountability and effectiveness, CSOs have come to realize that if they fail to gain control of the agenda on these issues, they will be forced to deal with an agenda determined by others. The Open Forum represents a unique opportunity to ensure that CSO accountability and effectiveness is governed by principles CSOs themselves identify and deem appropriate.

For the Open Forum to be legitimate, however, it is critical that a wide range of CSOs working in development participate to shape the outcomes of this process. How the consultations are structured will depend on the context of the country or region in which they take place. Nevertheless, the consistent elements in each consultation will be CSO recommendations on: (a) key principles of CSO development effectiveness; (b) guidelines for implementation of these principles; and (c) the elements critical to an enabling environment for CSOs. Areas in which there is common understanding and where there are divergent views will also be noted. Where possible, a portion of the consultations should be expanded to include other stakeholders, such as representatives from government, foundations, multi-lateral organizations, and academia.

In the United States, participation in this process will be coordinated by InterAction, with outreach to CSOs beyond InterAction’s membership as well as other non-CSO stakeholders. The consultation process will seek to accurately capture a perspective that is representative of internationally-engaged CSOs in the US.

It is fundamental to the integrity of this process that voices from every part of the world are reflected in the outcome of this process. We hope you will choose to add your voice.

3 CSOs have organized into two complementary processes, the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness and Better Aid. While the Open Forum process is the focus of this outreach paper, it is important to note that the Better Aid process focuses on collective CSO advocacy to improve the effectiveness of bilateral and multilateral aid in the context of the Paris Declaration and beyond.

4 The Advisory Group was made up of CSO representatives, three partner country representatives and three donor government chairs. Its mandate ended at the 2008 3rd High Level Forum in Accra.

5 Advisory Group Recommendations: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/ACCRAEXT/Resources/4700790-1208545462880/AG-CS-Synthesis-of-Consultations.pdf>.

6 Accra Agenda for Action, paragraph 20. See footnote #2 for a link to both the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action.