

FoRS Code on Effectiveness

Czech Forum for Development Cooperation



FoRS Code on Effectiveness

Approved by the FoRS General Assembly on 1st June 2011

FoRS - Czech Forum for Development Co-operation focuses on capacity building of its Members and observers to enhance quality and development effectiveness of their actions in the area of development cooperation, development education and humanitarian assistance. All actions of FoRS Members and observers share the common goal of enhancing positive impacts on people living in developing countries, with a special focus on long-term benefits for the poorest and the most marginalized groups.

FoRS Members and observers have endorsed the framework development effectiveness principles stated in Prague Proclamation in June 2009 (see Annex 1) and Istanbul principles agreed in the global process of the Open forum for Civil Society Organisations Development Effectiveness (see Annex 2).

Based on an open discussion, the FoRS Members and observers accepted the FoRS Code on Effectiveness, including regular evaluations of agreed principles and indicators. It has been agreed that the focus will be given to the effectiveness principles in the following five areas:

1. Grassroots Knowledge (Istanbul Principle Nr. 3)

The projects of FoRS Member and observers apply genuine knowledge of the specific situations, issues and priorities of the target groups. FoRS Members and observers use this knowledge to actively influence development programs priorities and for preparation of own strategies including fundraising strategy as long-term priorities cannot be changed ad hoc based on the latest calls for proposals or tenders announced by donors.

Indicators:

- *FoRS Members´ and observers´ strategic priorities are published on their websites and in official documents including basic justification.*
- *The territorial and sector specialisation and the concrete fields of operation (e.g. policy work or awareness) of FoRS Members and observers are stated in their official documents.*
- *FoRS Members and observers participate in FoRS Working groups´ activities in the field of their specialisation.*
- *Principles of democratic ownership are applied in preparation and implementation of projects and other actions. Local actors (final beneficiaries) are involved already in identification and formulation stage.*
- *During project implementation and evaluation, necessary information is verified directly on site of implementation, and from primary information sources.*

2. Transparency and Accountability (Istanbul Principle Nr. 5)

FoRS Members and observers are fully accountable for the outcomes and approaches of their work and they are ready to publish them. FoRS Members and observers have a transparent management structure and transparent way of financing their actions. They collaborate with their partners to prepare information about implemented projects, and this information is available and accessible to public to the extent as required.

Indicators:

- *The information about organization's activities and the sources of financing are stated on its website and in annual reports that are freely accessible to public.*
- *FoRS Members and observers are prepared to put forth the results of realized audits and internal or external evaluations.*
- *FoRS Members and observers have a transparent management structure and the contacts of executive staff are freely accessible to public.*
- *FoRS Members and observers present truthful and unbiased information about their activities, partners and target groups (key indicator).*
- *FoRS Members and observers refuse to use and tolerate corruption practises to obtain financial resources for their activities and within implementation of their projects (key indicator).*

3. Partnership (Istanbul Principles Nr. 6 and 7)

FoRS Members and observers share with their partners all information regarding joint goals and activities. Partnership is based on shared values and interests, mutual trust and shared accountability towards donors, private sponsors and target groups. FoRS Members and observers respect the diversity of partners' opinions, attitudes and experiences and they make decisions on joint projects based on consensus.

Indicators:

- *Partner organizations have access to all relevant documentation and reports of joint projects.*
- *FoRS Members and members enhance the mutual exchange of information on cooperation with other organizations active in the fields related to joint activities.*
- *Main principles of project and program cooperation are mutually agreed in partner agreements (written or oral).*
- *Sharing of experiences and mutual capacity building is a part of partner projects and activities.*
- *Partner organizations prove in all their actions that they do not misuse collective information and know-how to pursue their own benefit at the expense of their partners (key indicator).*

4. Respect to human rights and gender equality (Istanbul Principles Nr. 1 and 2)

Respect to human dignity, human rights and the use non-discriminating approaches are the shared values of FoRS Members and observers. FoRS Members and observers strive to improve the situation of socially excluded and other vulnerable groups and to strengthen their role in the society, with a special attention to women and girls empowerment.

Indicators:

- *Selection of target groups of FoRS Members and observers derives from priorities set in a participative and transparent manner.*
- *FoRS Members and observers support an equal access of all representatives of target groups to the benefits of development projects and programs, with emphasis on gender equity and equality.*
- *FoRS Members and observers reject displaying stereotypes of target groups shown as mere passive recipients of humanitarian and development interventions.*
- *The practices and documents of FoRS Members and observers respect the human dignity and human rights of target groups and other actors of humanitarian aid and development cooperation (key indicator).*
- *FoRS Members and observers refuse displaying and describing extreme suffering for the purpose of obtaining financial recourses for their activities (key indicator).*

5. Accountability for impacts and their sustainability (Istanbul Principles Nr. 4 and 8)

FoRS Members and observers are accountable for positive and negative, intended or unintended impacts of their development interventions and other activities on the situation of target groups and other development actors. They assume their part of accountability for sustainability of positive impacts and they are interested in the changes in lives or attitudes of target groups even after they had finished their projects. They enhance sustainable development of local communities by helping to reduce damages to the environment and by promoting preserving of biodiversity.

Indicators

- *The indicators of impacts - changes in life of the target groups are included in all project documents of FoRS Members and observers.*
- *A participative assessment of reached, envisaged or possible impacts after project completion is a part of internal or external evaluations.*
- *Presentation of the target groups' opinions on project implementation and outcomes is a part of final reports.*
- *FoRS Members and observers give priority to environmentally friendly solutions.*
- *FoRS Members and observers are accountable for the impacts of their activities; they use the evaluation results and solve actively the incidental negative impacts of their actions (key indicator).*

Enforcement and Assessment of Effectiveness Principles of FoRS Member and observers

FoRS Members and observers commit to enforcing agreed principles of development effectiveness in their activities and to assessing the compliance with these principles on the basis of above stated indicators. The results of these self-evaluations will be accessible at FoRS General Assemblies. FoRS website will state which members and observers have submitted their evaluations. FoRS Members and observers can use mutual peer reviews to receive quality feedback and to foster further development.

The self-evaluations express the readiness of FoRS Members and observers to enhance quality and effectiveness of their activities and to share their experiences. The self-evaluation can serve also as an impulse for updating joint development effectiveness principles and indicators.

A serious infringement of agreed principles (see *key indicators*) can lead to the exclusion of the concerned organization from the FoRS platform. In the first phase, an appointed member of the FoRS Board moderates the consultation on such a potential infringement. In the case that the situation is not resolved adequately, the FoRS General Assembly decides about the organization exclusion.

The proposed indicators are formed to fulfil the minimal standards that are acceptable to all organizations. Their attainment can be described using both quantitative and qualitative data (e.g. by providing case studies). All indicators can be evaluated using following categories: "no – partly – mostly yes – yes". When assessing each indicator, the organization can add information whether it strives to improve the situation, eventually other explanatory comments. The answer: "not applicable" is not acceptable for any indicator. For example, even organizations implementing their projects without any partner have to realize they share some partnership accountability with other FoRS Members and observers, FoRS Secretariat and the FoRS Board. The commitment to this Code on Effectiveness is also considered as a form of a partnership agreement.

Self-evaluations of application of / adherence to the principles of effectiveness by FoRS Members and observers enable them to identify opportunities for improvement and foster mutual sharing of experiences. An independent control (e.g. if all projects are really published on the websites) and feedback (e.g. recommendation to improve Member presentation in case of unclear or insufficient information) will be enabled as well.

Ensuring an Enabling Environment to Enhance Development Effectiveness

Enabling conditions need to be created by other development actors on the national and international level so that FoRS Members and observers can put their effectiveness principles into practice and fully apply their development potential. These conditions include among others:

- Relevant legal framework (rules and regulations implementing the *Act on Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid*, tax laws including issues related to development cooperation, laws defining the legal status of NGOs working in the field of development cooperation and development education, laws and implementing rules and regulations regarding financing and accounting principles relevant for development cooperation and humanitarian aid, policy coherence for development, and others).
- Transparency and predictability of Official Development Assistance (fulfilment of international commitments related to financing for development, transparent tenders and grant mechanisms, functioning system of evaluations, and others).
- Functioning management of development cooperation (flexible mechanisms of financing with special attention to long-term outcomes of development cooperation and humanitarian aid, simplified and more effective administrative procedures, support of sectoral and cross-sectoral partnerships).
- Structured official dialogue of all development actors (open communication on priorities and development policies, stronger position of the Czech Republic in the EU and other international structures).

Code on Effectiveness was approved by the FoRS General Assembly on 1st June 2011.

Annex 1 – Prague Conference on Civil Society Organisations Development Effectiveness Prague

In 2005, governments and donors confirmed in the Paris Declaration their commitments to increasing aid effectiveness. The Paris Declaration became an important document which frames some critical challenges to existing models of development cooperation and sets out principles to address them.

In the period preceding the Third High Level Forum in Accra (September 2008), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in intensive consultations agreed that the Paris Declaration is relevant, but not applicable to CSOs for three main reasons:

- It does not reflect CSO priorities and the many diverse roles of CSOs in development,*
- CSOs were not involved in negotiations and thus ownership was not ensured,*
- CSOs want to measure themselves against “development effectiveness”, and not “aid effectiveness”.*

While advocating donors to adopt a more holistic and ambitious aid effectiveness agenda that takes into account human rights, democracy, gender equality and focuses on reducing poverty and inequalities, and environmental sustainability CSOs began to reflect on their own principles of effectiveness and about their specific roles in development. In June 2008, they launched the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness. CSOs welcome that donors and governments recognized this process in the Accra Agenda for Action and committed to engage in it (enabling environment).

CSO representatives from Africa, Asia, Australasia, Europe, Latin America, and North America met in Prague, Czech Republic in June 2009 for the conference on “CSO Development Effectiveness” to discuss effectiveness principles in the context of concrete development experience. The conference was open to other development actors and thus brought evidence that joint discussion and sharing of experience across sectors and regions is a key assumption for successful cooperation at local and international level.

Prague Conference Proclamation

Conference participants concur that the added value of the CSOs in development cooperation is, among others, based on four particular aspects:

1. Access and commitment to use grassroots knowledge of local conditions, contexts and motivations
2. Sensibility to human rights, understanding and empathy
3. Genuine partnership based on common vision and interests
4. Diversity of actors in terms of legal status, size, experiences or roles

In order to harness the added value of CSOs for increased development impact, **conference participants commit to discuss and explore within the Open Forum how CSOs relate to the following principles:**

In the field of Grassroots Knowledge:

- Democratic ownership (all key stakeholders must be involved already in the preparation of development strategies, programs and projects)
- Full participation and inclusiveness (development cannot be imposed, full participation of target groups and local partners is essential)
- Building on existing and emerging processes (catalyst of development processes and structures already alive in grassroots organisations and communities)
- Recognition and understanding of all contexts as unique and consideration for linkages and consequences (interventions cannot succeed as stand-alone projects, disregarding the external environment)
- Facilitating consensus on development priorities (with the aim to enhance the relevance of development programs, projects and advocacy actions)
- Willingness to take initiative and risk (to respond to emerging needs)

In the field of Human Rights, Understanding and Empathy:

- Focus on all human rights and human dignity (social, economic, cultural, civil and political rights are at the core of development)
- Frank communication and careful listening to partners and other actors (true discussions and sensitivity to intercultural relations must replace one-way monologues and empty proclamations)
- Communicating own experiences and lessons learned (practical experience must be communicated both within the team and among partners, universal theorems cannot be relied on)
- Mutual understanding and respect (not only understanding the conditions and opinions of the target groups, but also sharing experience and positions of the partners)

- Promoting gender equality and advocating to address the causes of vulnerability (not only advocating for the vulnerable and excluded but supporting their own efforts to claim their rights and creating environment where their voices are responded to)
- Challenging systems and structures that promote or condone inequality and discrimination in any form (and at any level - global, national or local)
- Solidarity among civil society activists and organizations (including support to human rights defenders)

In the field of Genuine Partnership:


- Mutual transparency and predictability (reliability and trust is a precondition for real partnership)
- Division of roles and joint/mutual responsibility and accountability (beside accountability towards donors, responsibility towards target groups - citizens must be strengthened)
- Facilitation and mediation of cross-sectoral cooperation (many actors share the same or similar objectives that cannot be reached but jointly)
- Sustainability (both development projects and development partnerships must be based on the principle of sustainability and not on conditionality from one side, mutual capacity development and nurturing the partnership is a key prerequisite)
- Making explicit our own basic assumptions while respecting those of others (consciousness of how the differences influence our approach to development)
- Emphasis on good governance principles and on systemic changes (building a democratic environment is a means for active engagement of citizens)

In the field of Diversity of Actors:

- Respect for the diversity of CSOs (diversity in terms of missions and actions rather than diversity in terms of legal status)
- Mutual support between small and big, new and old, developed and developing CSOs (factors related to size, history, location or financial turnover must not be used to discriminate against certain CSOs)
- Mutual cooperation and sharing of best practices (even new or small CSOs can have significant experience from specific regions or with a specific topic)
- Combination and complementarity of different roles (CSOs act as donors, service providers, managers of projects and programs, advocates of the poor, watch dogs, facilitators of new ways of cooperation and supporters of changes)
- Readiness to propose and discuss new development cooperation frameworks (issues of predictability, transparency as well as flexibility, accountability for results and impacts and not for activities only, respect to human rights and focus on inclusiveness must be projected into a new development cooperation architecture)

Annex 2 – Istanbul Principles, 2010

Istanbul CSO Development Effectiveness Principles¹



Open Forum for CSO
Development Effectiveness

Civil society organizations are a vibrant and essential feature in the democratic life of countries across the globe. CSOs collaborate with the full diversity of people and promote their rights. The essential characteristics of CSOs as distinct development actors – that they are voluntary, diverse, non-partisan, autonomous, non-violent, working and collaborating for change – are the foundation for the Istanbul principles for CSO development effectiveness. These principles guide the work and practices of civil society organizations in both peaceful and conflict situations, in different areas of work from grassroots to policy advocacy, and in a continuum from humanitarian emergencies to long-term development.

1. **Respect and promote human rights and social justice**
CSOs are effective as development actors when they ... develop and implement strategies, 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.
2. **Embody gender equality and equity while promoting women and girl's rights**
CSOs are effective as development actors when they ... promote and practice development cooperation embodying gender equity, reflecting women's concerns and experience, while supporting women's efforts to realize their individual and collective rights, participating as fully empowered actors in the development process.
3. **Focus on people's empowerment, democratic ownership and participation**
CSOs are effective as development actors when they ... support the empowerment and inclusive participation of people to expand their democratic ownership over policies and development initiatives that affect their lives, with an emphasis on the poor and marginalized.
4. **Promote Environmental Sustainability**
CSOs are effective as development actors when they ... develop and implement priorities and approaches that promote environmental sustainability for present and future generations, including urgent responses to climate crises, with specific attention to the socio-economic, cultural and indigenous conditions for ecological integrity and justice.
5. **Practice transparency and accountability**
CSOs are effective as development actors when they ... demonstrate a sustained organizational commitment to transparency, multiple accountability, and integrity in their internal operations.
6. **Pursue equitable partnerships and solidarity**
CSOs are effective as development actors when they ... commit to transparent relationships with CSOs and other development actors, freely and as equals, based on shared development goals and values, mutual respect, trust, organizational autonomy, long-term accompaniment, solidarity and global citizenship.
7. **Create and share knowledge and commit to mutual learning**
CSOs are effective as development actors when they ... enhance the ways they learn from their experience, from other CSOs and development actors, integrating evidence from development practice and results, including the knowledge and wisdom of local and indigenous communities, strengthening innovation and their vision for the future they would like to see.
8. **Commit to realizing positive sustainable change**
CSOs are effective as development actors when they ... collaborate to realize sustainable outcomes and impacts of their development actions, focusing on results and conditions for lasting change for people, with special emphasis on poor and marginalized populations, ensuring an enduring legacy for present and future generations.

Guided by these Istanbul principles, CSOs are committed to take pro-active actions to improve and be fully accountable for their development practices. Equally important will be enabling policies and practices by all actors. Through actions consistent with these principles, donor and partner country governments demonstrate their Accra Agenda for Action pledge that they "share an interest in ensuring that CSO contributions to development reach their full potential". All governments have an obligation to uphold basic human rights – among others, the right to association, the right to assembly, and the freedom of expression. Together these are pre-conditions for effective development.

Istanbul, Turkey
September 29, 2010

¹ Please note, the Istanbul Principles, as agreed at the Open Forum's Global Assembly in Istanbul, September 28 -30, 2010, are the foundation of the Open Forum's Draft *International Framework on CSO Development Effectiveness*. These principles are further elaborated in Version 2 of this Framework, which is being updated and will be found on the Open Forum's web site, www.cso-effectiveness.org.

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