

# HOW EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS STRIVE FOR THEIR DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

Briefing paper

**APRIL 2014**

This brief provides a short overview of key global and European initiatives on Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) Development Effectiveness and mentions key challenges. Further, it shows concrete examples of how European CSOs have put the Istanbul Principles into practice since 2011. It serves as one of the inputs for the High Level Meeting in Mexico in April 2014, focusing on progress in development effectiveness since Busan. It will also serve as a basis for subsequent work on CSO development effectiveness in European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development - CONCORD and the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE).

## Key messages:

- For an effective implementation of the Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness, it is **essential to contextualise the principles and identify some key starting points for action** - according to the particular national or regional context, challenges and opportunities.
- A lot of **tools and concrete actions have been implemented by the European CSOs**, demonstrating the breadth and diversity of actions undertaken.
- Nevertheless, it is still important to **further raise awareness, exchange examples of both good and bad practices and challenge the perceptions, attitudes and practices of the CSOs**.
- Ultimately, not only governments, but **all actors need to progress with respect to development effectiveness**. Moreover, an **enabling environment is important** to support such changes.

## Istanbul Principles and the key global initiatives

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) were recognised as “development actors in their own right” in the Accra Agenda for Action in 2008. Since then, several global CSO-led initiatives were launched on effectiveness and accountability. These initiatives came together under the umbrella of BetterAid and the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness. The year 2008 also marked the start of the CSOs’ journey to identify and agree on a set of effectiveness principles for their own work. Those efforts resulted in the adoption of the **Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness** (2010), widely referred to as the **Istanbul Principles**. These Principles form the foundation of the overall **International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness** (2011). In 2011, at the High Level Forum in Busan, the International Development Community officially recognised the Istanbul Principles and the International Framework. They also encouraged CSOs to implement them, strengthen their accountability and contribute to development effectiveness. After Busan, the Open Forum and BetterAid merged into a single platform called CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE).



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.

## Key European initiatives and challenges

Experiences of implementing the Istanbul Principles are shared between European national platforms and international networks at the **CONCORD CSO Development Effectiveness Working Group** (CSO DE WG). Its mandate is to help stimulate reflection and exchange among European civil society and to ensure, on that basis, an active European contribution to the global process led by CPDE.

The CSO DE WG launched a **survey in April 2012 on the “Implementation of the Istanbul Principles and CSO Development Effectiveness: Key Initiatives, Challenges and Areas of Interest for Exchange of Best Practices”**. In total, 20 platforms and networks answered, whereby 53% of them reported *they have been following a strategy or activity plan explicitly focusing on the implementation of the Istanbul principles*. However, about 80% of respondents indicated that *work on the Istanbul Principles implementation and improving CSO Development Effectiveness was challenging or very challenging*. Often, the Istanbul Principles were perceived as very broad and needed adaptation to make them relevant for CSOs to serve as a basis for improvements. Further, a gap in awareness about Istanbul Principles among CSOs, including some bigger organisations, was identified. A fear of exchanging experiences was also mentioned as a hindrance for mutual learning.

For an effective implementation of the Istanbul Principles, it seemed essential for CSO platforms and networks to **contextualise the principles and identify some key starting points for action** - according to the particular national or regional context, challenges and opportunities. Several **national monitoring efforts have been undertaken**. A Belgian survey showed that CSOs identified gaps in implementing particular principles and feared that the Istanbul Principles might give an opportunity to donors to limit the CSOs' role in development. Czech CSOs have been undertaking an annual survey based on concrete indicators of its Code on Effectiveness, directly linked to the Istanbul Principles. Based on the need to improve especially participation and focus on sustainable changes, annual capacity building has been implemented. The Slovak NGDO Platform conducted a survey on the implementation of the Istanbul Principles among its members, which has resulted in creating a code of conduct on ethics and responsibility. Further, specific surveys have been undertaken in Belgium, The Netherlands and Ireland to identify satisfactions of local CSOs with European partners (e.g. experience of Kenyan CSOs working with Irish CSOs). For instance, in the Belgian and Dutch survey, over 4000 partner CSOs suggested improvements in accountability and capacity building.

The CSO DE WG and its members have organised a series of **exchange and capacity building workshops to enhance the implementation of the Istanbul Principles**, drawing on both successes and challenges. For example, 20 representatives of the Greek National Platform were trained on the Istanbul Principles and Practitioner's Guide to disseminate the work across the sector. The Austrian National Platform – Global Responsibility – prepared a series of "in-house", tailor-made workshops on effectiveness which were attended by more than 130 staff members from 13 CSOs. The Luxembourg CSOs endorsed national Development Effectiveness Guidelines, published a manual Guidance and Tools for Equitable and Solidary Partnership, undertook transparency self-assessments and held a set of related seminars. A different approach has been taken by the Finnish CSO platform, Kepa, which mainstreamed the Istanbul Principles into learning events and tools (see below, more examples are available at the [CSO wiki](#)). Partos, the Dutch platform, as well as Bond UK, the British platform, have been providing [support](#) to their member organisations in the implementation of standards of the International Aid Transparency Initiative besides others. The French network F3E organizes in 2014 every 3 months "aperitifs" of effectiveness to inform members on the international framework and give them the opportunity to contribute to it.

Moreover, **several European governments**, for example Finland and Georgia, have **endorsed the Istanbul Principles** or included them in their key documents. In this way, the need for enhancing development effectiveness among diverse actors was acknowledged. Nevertheless, a shrinking space for CSOs in political processes and consultations and the enabling environment also posed a challenge to the implementation of the Istanbul Principles.

## Living up to commitments in Europe

Below, some particularly good practices of European civil society are highlighted for each of the principles. This is not an exhaustive list but rather an illustration of the breadth and diversity of actions undertaken in Europe. It shows that civil society is living up to the commitments made when endorsing the Istanbul Principles. Nevertheless, it is still important to further raise awareness, exchange examples of both good and bad practice and challenge the perceptions, attitudes and practices of the CSOs.



**Principle 1**  
Respect and  
Promote  
Human Rights  
and Social  
Justice

### **Irish web guide to the rights based approach to development**

The Irish CSO platform, Dóchas, has long advocated an approach to global development which is based on human rights. To try and help clarify what such an approach might look like, Dóchas developed a short web guide introducing "[the rights based approach to development](#)". This was shared with other European CSOs within the CONCORD CSO DE WG in order to inspire the implementation of the Istanbul Principles.



**Principle 2**  
Embody  
Gender  
Equality While  
Promoting  
Women and  
Girls' Rights

### **Czech Resource Book "Gender in Development Matters"**

In November 2011, Czech CSOs associated in FoRS developed the Resource Book and Training Kit for Development Practitioners "[Gender in Development Matters](#)" with the aim to mainstream gender in the work of development CSOs. The outcome of the Resource Book and the whole exercise was the assignment of the gender focal points in several organisations and the inclusion of gender as one of the evaluation criteria for new international development projects supported by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Czech Development Agency.



**Principle 3**  
Focus on  
People's  
Empowerment,  
Democratic  
Ownership and  
Participation

### **French tools for planning, monitoring and evaluation**

F3E, with the support of its members (NGOs, local authorities) focuses on the development capacity of people and their structures. The network is looking at the democratic ownership of the [evaluative tools](#) (evaluation, capitalisation, impact studies, etc.) by its members, their partners and "beneficiaries". In 2014, F3E will launch a program with 14 members to experiment and develop innovative change-oriented methodologies for planning, monitoring and evaluation. Hereby the "local" actors formalize the vision of change they want to contribute to and implement monitoring and evaluation of the process of change. Thus they strengthen their empowerment - political vision, better understanding of the context in general and the stakeholders' system in particular.



**Principle 4**  
Promote  
Environmental  
Sustainability

### **Finnish checklist for environmental sustainability**

The Finnish CSO platform, Kepa, has developed two online tools which help CSOs and their partners to go through practical checklists related to environmental sustainability: the [Envirometer](#) and the [Climate Sensor](#). The tools facilitate discussion on environmental sustainability and help to find new environmentally sound practices in CSO projects and offices. Environmental sustainability is included also in Kepa's training and advice. Special learning events on climate change and mitigation and adaptation strategies, related to it, have been arranged.



**Principle 5**  
Practice  
Transparency  
and  
Accountability

### Belgian website for CSO transparency

The Belgian CSO federations set up [transparency portal](#), where their members publish their financial data (income & expenditures) and operational strategies (themes, countries, human resources). Data from the last five years are available for most CSOs. ACODEV, one of the Belgian platforms, and Coordination SUD, the French platform, have also developed a strong working relationship on quality, accountability and transparency issues – notably around the adaption of the EFQM tool (European Foundation for Quality Management) to the CSO sector.



**Principle 6**  
Pursue  
Equitable  
Partnerships  
and Solidarity

### Finnish Compass for Partner

The Finnish CSO platform, Kepa, has developed an [online tool](#) which helps CSOs and their partners go through practical checklists related to partnerships and improve dialogue among partners. It is based on views collected from Finland, Nicaragua Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia. Feedback has shown that implementing the tool takes time but helps partners discuss issues relevant for a true partnership - values, principles of cooperation, joint activities and genuine interaction. When used frequently, it can also contribute to monitoring the development of the partnership.



**Principle 7**  
Create and  
Share  
Knowledge and  
Commit to  
Mutual  
Learning

### Austrian mutual South – North learning on knowledge management

The Austrian CSO platform, Global Responsibility, implemented a [mutual learning project](#), where 55 representatives of Southern and Northern CSOs shared approaches to knowledge management. The CSOs chose as their themes income generation, advocacy and knowledge management. To ensure relevance to everyday work, all facilitators were knowledge management experts from Southern CSOs, thus challenging the North – South stereotype about expertise. Austrian CSOs are increasingly using knowledge management tools, as encouraged by the Austrian Development Agency.



**Principle 8**  
Commit to  
Realizing  
Positive  
Sustainable  
Change

### French promotion of sustainable positive change

In recent years, F3E led [action research](#) on the impact of Education for Development and on supporting change processes in development actions, in order to better understand the complexity of change and to support change processes. Based on this, the [PRISME](#) pilot program was launched to provide complex change-oriented methodological approaches and share lessons learnt and new knowledge in order to influence the sector. Every two years a seminar on evaluation is organised jointly with the

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French Development Agency in order to deliver messages on development effectiveness. In 2014, the seminar will focus on the evaluation of social change. Finally, F3E participates in the [Barefoot Guide Connection](#), which creates a link between what is intended and what is done on the ground to achieve positive sustainable changes.

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## Further resources

The website on the Siem Reap CSO Consensus on the [International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness](#) contains not only the Istanbul Principles, but also several tools on how to implement these. If you are interested in more examples check the [CSO wiki](#), search for tools, resources and case studies from other CSO practitioners, upload your contributions, and rate the tools you think work best for implementing a particular aspect of the CSO Development Effectiveness agenda. The web also contains minimum conditions for an enabling environment.

The [CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness](#) (CPDE) is an open platform that unites CSOs from around the world on the issues of development effectiveness. Its “Journey from Istanbul: Evidences on the implementation of the CSO DE Principles” with 19 country case studies from Europe and other regions will be available on its website in April 2014. If you are interested in joining one of the CPDE working groups, contact the European representative Justin Kilcullen ([justinmkilcullen@gmail.com](mailto:justinmkilcullen@gmail.com)), the EU sub-regional representative, Inka Pibilova ([inka@evaluace.com](mailto:inka@evaluace.com)) or the representative for Eastern Europe and Balkan sub-region Vazha Salamadze ([vazha@civilin.org](mailto:vazha@civilin.org)).

The [CONCORD Working Group on CSO Development Effectiveness](#) regularly engages in sharing resources and examples of good practice. It has also recently launched a peer learning mechanism. If you are interested to know more, contact Daniel Nuijten from the CONCORD Secretariat ([www.concordeurope.org](http://www.concordeurope.org)).

Trialog Policy Digest: [Development Effectiveness and the Role of CSOs](#), December 2013, gives you an overview of the process of development effectiveness, the role of governments as well as CSOs, and finally tips how you can contribute. The Digest also provides links to key tools for implementing the Istanbul Principles.