



DFATD Draft Civil Society Partnership Policy

Equitas Feedback and Comments

General Comments

We welcome and appreciate the Minister's initiative to provide a policy framework for partnerships between DFATD and civil society organizations (CSOs) as well as the process identified for public consultation. We also note and appreciate the Minister's Statement in Mexico in April 2014 on Canada's Commitment to Protect and Promote an Enabling Environment for Civil Society. Equitas appreciates the opportunity we were given to participate in the Round Table hosted by the Minister on June 19th and we have prepared some notes to provide further input into the consultative process.

To echo what was shared during the Round Table, the draft policy provides a very concise and well thought out framework as a starting point. However, Equitas believes that the document would be strengthened by:

- Reinforcing the references to human rights and rights based approaches
- Including explicit references to gender and gender equality throughout

To echo some of the important comments from the Round Table it would also strengthen the document to include a section that provides an overview on how DFATD envisages the policy being implemented and monitored. We also note that the draft policy is strong in identifying the expectations that DFATD has of civil society, but not as strong in clarifying what civil society might expect from DFATD.

Purpose, Introduction and Definition of Civil Society

- **The Purpose** could acknowledge that the Government of Canada has been working with CSOs for decades and recognize these partnerships continue to deliver important development results and assist in achieving the Government's objectives.
- **The Introduction** refers to "traditional partners" in its first paragraph. We understand that this would likely include CSOs, government agencies, multilateral organizations and possibly some others. However, CSOs are not mentioned explicitly.

Suggestion:

The last sentence of the first paragraph should read, "The Government is committed to working with accountable and effective partners *from civil society* that align with Canadian values and policy priorities, and enhance the visibility of Canadian investments."

- **The Definition of Civil Society** provides a good starting point, but we propose some changes to the language around the roles.



Suggestions:

Under Advocates, we suggest the first bullet be modified to read, “Enabling *women, men, girls, boys, including the poor and marginalized*, to be more involved in the *political and decision-making process* and ensuring that their interests *and rights* are taken into account. We also suggest adding another bullet that could read, “Promoting more equitable access to the benefits of development”.

Under Innovators, we propose adding a bullet to make reference to the important role of CSOs in research as well as documenting and sharing best practices.

Principles and Commitments

While the details remain to be worked out, we imagine that DFATD’s partnerships with CSOs will take into account the post-2015 Agenda. Perhaps this could be mentioned in a footnote.

Objectives and Actions

1. Augmenting the Voice of Individuals, Particularly Poor and Marginalized People

The first sentence should be revised to acknowledge the importance of applying a gender lens to development interventions. It could read as follows:

“For policies, strategies and services to be effective, the perspectives of *women, men, girls and boys* in developing countries, including the poor and marginalized, need to be taken into account.”

2. Facilitate an Enabling Environment for Civil Society in Developing Countries

The second objective is critical and we imagine that the newly merged department will be better positioned to coordinate political and development interventions than in the past. In addition to supporting efforts to provide the proper legislative and policy frameworks, DFATD should put a priority on monitoring implementation and encouraging host governments to respect their commitments.

The second sentence should reflect the notion of the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights. We suggest that it be revised to make explicit reference to all human rights, not just “core civil society freedoms”, as follows:

“In order for civil society to grow and strengthen, it must operate in an enabling environment that respects the rule of law, promotes good governance and *protects human rights, including freedoms of expression, association and assembly*.”

Such a change would bring the policy into closer alignment with the language used by the Minister in his Statement on Canada’s Commitment to Protect and Promote an Enabling Environment for Civil Society in Mexico on April 17th.



3. Foster Canadian CSO Leadership in International Development and Innovation

CSOs in the South also have a lot of expertise to share. We strongly believe that the heading for the third objective should read:

“Foster the Leadership of Canadian *and Southern* CSOs in International Development and Innovation.”

Such a change would build on the reputation that Canada and Canadian CSOs have developed as trusted counterparts who are “working with” not “working for” our partners.

We would also like to echo the point made during the Round Table that the last sentence should read:

“To that end, DFATD will support *CSOs and* CSO alliances ...”

4. Integrate the Role of CSOs as Development Actors in Development Programming

This objective rightly refers to the importance of financial independence for CSOs. Reality for many Canadian CSOs tells us that this is a work in progress. We would suggest slightly different wording as follows:

“DFATD *encourages* CSOs to be financially independent and seek funding from a variety of sources.”

5. Increase Transparency and Accountability

Under Increase Transparency and Accountability, it would be helpful to clarify what is meant by DFATD’s commitment to provide predictable funding opportunities. This is a critical point for most CSOs and is probably worthy of its own objective.

6. Enhance Sustainability

To reinforce the sustainability of CSO-led initiatives, CSOs must be strengthened to fulfill the many important functions envisaged in the draft policy. Objective 6 should include mention of the importance of supporting capacity-building initiatives for CSOs.