

Advancing the DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance

Key Findings from a Survey of the DAC-CSO Reference Group

In July 2021, DAC members and the European Union unanimously agreed to adhere to the [DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance](#). Since its adoption, the Recommendation's commitments have generated considerable interest and support among CSOs and significant energy in the donor community for its implementation.

In April-May 2023, the [DAC-CSO Reference Group](#) conducted a survey of its members, to identify civil society and donor initiatives and actions advancing the principles in the Recommendation. Rather than attempting to assess progress made in implementing the Recommendation, this survey aimed to identify examples of innovation and positive practice, in order to encourage learning and exchange that can support more effective implementation of the Recommendation going forward.

The survey focused primarily¹ on soliciting information with respect to:

- Civil society efforts to support implementation of the Recommendation; and
- Donor initiatives undertaken to implement the Recommendation since July 2021, as well as donor initiatives from the last five years consistent with commitments in the Recommendation.

The survey provides only a partial perspective. Nonetheless, taken together, its responses demonstrate substantial efforts by civil society to socialize and support implementation of the Recommendation, as well as some notable donor initiatives to promote and implement its commitments or advance progress on key issues consistent with the Recommendation. These actions provide a solid foundation of ways of working that can be deepened towards more ambitious action – across the DAC membership, and across civil society – to implement the Recommendation in the coming months and years.

Background on Survey Respondents

59 respondents completed the survey, with 34 responses (58%) from partners in the Global North and 25 responses (42%) from partners in the Global South. The largest proportion of responses were received from partners representing local CSOs (26 responses, or 44%), with civil society platforms furnishing 24 responses (41%), and INGO representatives another 9 responses (15%).

Civil Society Initiatives to Support Implementation of the Recommendation

More than 80% of respondents indicated that they had worked on or led initiatives to advance the Recommendation in the last year (with responses similar across the Global North and Global South).

Many respondents described their engagement in initiatives to **raise awareness of the Recommendation and develop CSO approaches to facilitate its implementation**. Such initiatives included organizing awareness-raising and advocacy events on the Recommendation, as well as pedagogical actions to enhance CSO capacity to use the Recommendation, and mobilizing civil society to draw on the Recommendation to agree on and advance key civic space priorities in dialogue with donors and partner governments. Respondents published articles, chapters, newsletters, translations, and learning modules on the Recommendation. Some respondents included the Recommendation in internal reflection processes with platform members, or featured updates and discussion on the Recommendation as a regular agenda item within global or regional civil society meetings. While such civil society engagement has already been

¹ The survey also assessed, *inter alia*, respondent awareness of the Recommendation, as well as challenges that CSOs and donors have raised with respect to implementation of the Recommendation.

substantial, repeated and continuous outreach will be important to broaden CSO familiarity with the Recommendation and ensure its full integration in CSO advocacy on enabling conditions.

Respondents also **engaged with donors to promote implementation of the Recommendation**. These efforts included convening donor representatives in multi-stakeholder events at the global, regional, and local level to discuss the Recommendation and highlight islands of success and areas for further advancement. Respondents continue to promote the Recommendation in other fora where donors and partner governments are active, such as [OGP](#), [S4D](#), and the [GPEDC](#). CSOs have provided inputs into recent donor peer review processes and advocated for civil society participation in donor development of programs and strategies. There are further opportunities to use the Recommendation to encourage a shared understanding, with donors and other stakeholders, of actions needed to empower civil society.

Finally, respondents **advanced civil society initiatives to implement Pillar III of the Recommendation**. These included engaging in internal dialogues on new ways of working that prioritize shifting funds and leadership to local partners, and otherwise acknowledging the Recommendation in programs to promote empowered and equitable partnerships. National CSO platforms continue to develop and manage codes of conduct and self-regulation mechanisms to promote transparency and accountability.

Donor Initiatives to Implement and Advance the Recommendation

According to survey respondents, donors have engaged in an array of activities either specifically aimed at implementing the Recommendation, or consistent with the Recommendation's commitments.²

In terms of action aimed at implementing the Recommendation, *inter alia*, donors are

- **Organizing dialogues, workshops, “learning journeys,” and webinars on the Recommendation**, with recent efforts from the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland.
- **Undertaking research on incorporating the Recommendation into processes and procedures**, such as research supported by the Korean Prime Minister's Office on localization in Korean ODA, or analysis commissioned by Sida of the alignment of its policies and practices with the Recommendation.
- **Establishing new funding facilities or commitments to fund CSOs in partner countries**, with examples including France, the Netherlands, and the United States.
- **Taking steps to reform or improve policies and legal frameworks to enable action consistent with the Recommendation**, with notable revision processes underway, completed, or expected in Canada, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the United States.
- **Promoting the Recommendation through other fora**, as with Norway's leadership of a workstream on the Recommendation in the Summit for Democracy.
- **Prioritizing the Recommendation in their DAC peer reviews**, as in the example of the Netherlands.

Pre-dating the Recommendation, but consistent with its principles, donors have **sought to promote expanded civic space for civil society in partner countries**. The Dutch MFA, for example, engages in discussions with local CSOs about legal frameworks hampering their functioning, raising these concerns in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy. Civil society policies in Canada, Finland, and Ireland incorporate explicit linkages to their diplomatic engagement to expand civic space. Other donors are **prioritizing action in partner countries to combat disinformation and increase media literacy**; the EC, Sweden, and the United States have all displayed leadership in this area. And a few donors have **adopted good practices for consultation with local civil society** in development programming; EU delegation roadmaps, for instance, have emphasized mapping local CSOs and establishing structures for dialogue at country level.

² These following examples were identified by respondents from their experience and are not intended to be an exhaustive list of activities by donors relating to the Recommendation. More than 30 were identified by respondents. Many were one-off events, from which it will be important to build momentum for implementation.