Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC)


Approved on behalf of ACC by the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ)

1. Valuing partnership with civil society

1.1 The recent cycle of world conferences and the reform initiatives within the United Nations system have acknowledged that working in partnership with civil society organizations will contribute significantly to the achievement of the United Nations system objectives. The United Nations system therefore attaches great importance to cooperation with civil society organizations and looks forward to intensifying, expanding and refining that relationship.

1.2 Collaboration with civil society organizations should enable the United Nations system to improve the nature and quality of the work through participatory development processes at national and international levels by incorporating the perspectives and practices of civil society organizations and movements. Collaboration with civil society organizations should, accordingly, enhance the United Nations system’s efforts to assist Member States in achieving economic and social progress.

1.3 The application of the partnership approach should enhance the fundamental value of civil society organizations that have the capacity and/or potential to act as catalysts and mobilizers for promoting people-centred sustainable development, through structural changes in policy, governance and operational practices and by fostering solidarity among people and nations.

1.4 The partnership approach implies the involvement of all parties, particularly Governments, at every stage of programme planning and implementation, from needs identification through to monitoring and evaluation.

1.5 Co-funding and contributions in kind can help ensure balanced partnerships. However, such balance can also be achieved between partners of unequal economic or political leverage provided that both sides give sufficient weight to non-monetary qualitative strengths, which should also be a criteria for selecting partners. These strengths may include local knowledge, credibility with the local community, outreach to disadvantaged or marginalized groups, or capacity to mobilize constituencies.

1.6 A balanced partnership implies two-way processes of accountability, in which upstream accountability — such as on the way funds are administered and used — is complemented by downstream accountability — for example on the way local knowledge and information are used in macro-policy formulation or programme design.

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2. Creating an enabling environment: civil society organizations capacity-building and institutional development

2.1 The United Nations system should give further consideration to issues of accountability, representation and criteria to assess competence, as well as to ways of supporting, where necessary, capacity-building of civil society groups at the national and local levels that could contribute positively to national socio-economic development, humanitarian assistance and peace-building.

2.2 The partnership approach requires supporting civil society organizations at two complementary and mutually reinforcing levels:

- At the micro level, United Nations agencies should seek to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations in such areas as technical know-how, management, accountability, advocacy and legal literacy;

- At the macro level, United Nations agencies should, with the agreement of the host country, help to foster an enabling environment for civil society organizations. This may include supporting Governments in the exercise of their responsibilities as prime framers of domestic policies and programmes, strengthening the links between national Governments, the United Nations development system, civil society, national non-governmental organizations and the private sector that are involved in the development process, and catalysing and facilitating the creation and consolidation of mechanisms for dialogue between Governments and civil society organizations and among civil society organizations themselves. It may also include working with Governments in developing legal frameworks that would secure the economic and political space for civil society organizations to operate and grow. Such an enabling environment may also be improved by strengthening government departments that work with civil society organizations and by informing Governments on the benefits of working with civil society organizations.

2.3 United Nations agencies should strive to ensure that sufficient budgetary resources are allocated to respond to the need of strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations.

3. Sound institutional practice in promoting the partnership approach by the United Nations system

3.1 The partnership approach should be reflected in the institutional practice of the United Nations system’s operational collaboration with civil society organizations. This requires relationships to be open and transparent, with adequate human and financial resources secured to ensure regular consultation, information flows, accountability and evaluation.

3.2 To facilitate partnership, United Nations system agencies should strive to achieve greater flexibility, user-friendliness and harmonization of their administrative and financial procedures, as well as coherence in their informal and formal (contractual) relationships with civil society organizations.

3.3 The partnerships and joint activities pursued with civil society organizations should be sustainable, gender-sensitive and culturally sensitive, and fully consistent with internationally recognized human rights principles.
3.4 The United Nations system should engage in more systematic consultation with relevant civil society organizations in the preparation of substantive as well as “coordination” reports, particularly concerning follow-up to recent global conferences.

3.5 Recognizing that United Nations system policies for interaction with civil society vary with the nature of the partner organization and the type of activity, such policies and modalities of civil society organization participation in the work of the United Nations system should be the subject of systematic, regular and intensified inter-agency exchanges of information.

3.6 ACC encourages more systematic inter-agency exchange of information and sharing of experience on the way in which policies and practices governing dialogue and cooperation with the business community are evolving in various organizations of the system. Periodic assessments could be made by ACC of the evolution of those partnerships and of their implications for the system as a whole, including the feasibility of inter-agency collaborative projects.

3.7 The participation of civil society, including non-governmental organizations, in the meetings of ACC subsidiary bodies should take place within the framework of ACC guidelines on the subject.

3.8 ACC encourages the United Nations Staff College to develop specific programmes to enhance staff capacity to work with civil society.

4. Managing partnerships in situations of conflict of interest

4.1 While recognizing the existence of conflicts of interest, the partnership approach should, inter alia, facilitate the empowerment of poorer and more marginalized segments of society. Therefore, the selection of both the types of activities and civil society organizations partners will depend on careful, case-by-case analyses of civil society dynamics and the overall political economic context.

4.2 Where needed, the United Nations system should help to minimize existing and potential social and political tensions through appropriate efforts. Particularly in unstable political contexts, United Nations system organizations should maintain the neutrality and impartiality of their collaboration with civil society organizations, and strive to secure cooperation and support from host Governments.