

The 11th Annual United Nations and International Organizations Civil Society Focal Points Meeting, jointly organized by the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS) and the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), was held on 17-18 November in Washington DC at World Bank Headquarters.

The meeting, which brought together 66 participants from 37 organizations, sought to explore various aspects of the work streams that will converge in the post-2015 development agenda, including a focus on promoting a common sustainable development agenda to end poverty and reduce inequality, and financing of the new development agenda. During the two-day meeting, representatives of multilateral institutions, bilateral agencies, and civil society organizations (CSOs) held open discussions and shared information and best practices in relation to a number of key threads related to the post-2015 framework, including lessons learned in terms of public consultations with civil society; challenges around partnership approaches involving civil society and the private sector; the role of human rights in implementing the new agenda; and effective approaches to operational collaboration with civil society, as well as exploring the role of the Financial Institutions in supporting the Social and Solidarity Economy.

Excerpt for the report of the meeting.

Breakout Session 4 — What are Effective Approaches to Operational Collaboration with Civil Society? How Can Financial Institutions Support Actors in the Social Solidarity Economy (SSE)?

Active Moderator: *John Garrison*, Senior Civil Society Specialist, World Bank

- *Biljana Radonjic Ker-Lindsay*, Head, Civil Society Engagement Unit, EBRD
- *Andres Falconer*, Partnership Coordinator, Global Partnership for Social Accountability, World Bank
- *Hamish Jenkins*, Senior Programme Officer, UN-NGLS
- *Sylvain Browa*, Director, Aid Effectiveness, Save the Children
- *Yvon Poirier*, Board Member, Inter-Continental Network of the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy (RIPESS)

This session examined the approaches being undertaken by World Bank Group (WBG) and EBRD to increase operational collaboration with civil society, from both an MDB and CSO perspective. It also explored how the development community, including international financial institutions, could collaborate in providing training, capacity building, and the provision of adequate access to affordable long-term finance to help lift the potential of SSE organizations. The moderator, **Mr. John Garrison** (WBG), began the session by presenting the World Bank's "Civil Society Engagement Continuum" in order to help define what is meant by "operational collaboration" – as distinct from other forms of engagement, such as policy dialogue or consultation. The continuum comprises five steps: information dissemination; policy dialogue; consultation; operational collaboration; and institutional partnerships. The WBG has found that the greater involvement CSOs have with the Bank, the higher level of influence they can also have. WBG – CSO relations have evolved significantly on

the first three levels over the past thirty years, but hopefully they will they also advance along the last two steps of the continuum – collaboration and partnerships – going forward.



Mr. Andres Falconer (WBG) made a presentation on the [Global Partnership for Social Accountability](#) (GPSA). He explained that while citizen engagement at the WBG often means citizen's participation in Bank-financed operations, GPSA tries to flip this by using Bank operations to encourage CSOs to engage with governments and improve governance. GPSA has three components: funding (funds CSOs directly and not through governments), knowledge-sharing, and global partnerships. It is an instrument largely geared to promoting efficiency, accountability, and quality of public services. In order to be funded, grantees need to demonstrate that their proposal will address concrete problems of poor public services and/or governance. A ground-breaking feature is that CSOs have the same voting power as government and donor agency representatives on the GPSA Steering Committee which decides who receives funding. **Ms. Biljana Radonjic Ker-Lindsay** (EBRD) talked about the EBRD's experience in engaging CSOs, which goes beyond the requirements of its policies on public information and environmental and social issues. She explained that EBRD is an international financial institution that focuses on private sector investments in 35 countries in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East. EBRD has a dedicated unit in charge of institutional engagement with civil society, which has traditionally focused on information disclosure, policy dialogue and consultations. Most recently, the unit has started collaborating with civil society and enhancing capacity of local community groups and CSOs when there is a link with EBRD's investments and policy dialogue activities in relation to: i) sustainable energy and resources; ii) economic inclusion; and iii) investment climate and governance issues. Through this new initiative, the EBRD utilizes CSOs' outreach to their own constituencies as an additional channel to raise awareness among the local communities and stimulate new patterns of social behaviour. It also focuses on improving CSO institutional capacity, technical expertise and communication and advocacy skills.

Mr. Sylvain Browa (Save the Children) spoke about Save the Children's experience in engaging with official donor agencies and posed some framing questions. While Save has had some effective but limited experiences in collaborating operationally with the WBG through project financing, their sense is that CSOs are still not considered full-fledged "clients" or partners of the Bank and other MDBs. The question, Mr. Browa asked, is what will be next frontier look like in these evolving relations? Will operational staff within MDBs evolve to truly treat CSOs as strategic partners rather than secondary service providers? Can MDBs effectively help CSOs engage governments without fear, and bridge the gap between CSOs and the private sector? Finally, who are the ultimate "clients" of these MDBs, governments or the citizens they are supposed to represent?

Mr. Hamish Jenkins (UN-NGLS Geneva) talked about the United Nations' experience with the emerging "social and solidarity economy" (SSE) sector. This is a term which refers to social enterprises that adopt an alternative, non-profit economic approach geared to helping communities achieve sustainable development objectives. While this movement is largely invisible in most policy circles, the UN created an inter-agency task force on SSE (TFSSE) which now includes 19 agencies and observers from the SSE sector. The TFSSE published a Position Paper last July: [Social Solidarity Economy and the Challenge of Sustainable Development](#). One of the tasks this body is exploring is whether MDBs and other financial institutions can provide financial support to this sector in a sustainable fashion.

Mr. Yvon Poirier (Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of the Social Solidarity Economy – RIPESS), one of the observers in the TFSSE, complemented Mr. Jenkin’s presentation by noting that most SSE groups don’t define themselves as traditional CSOs. Unlike microfinance, the overall focus is on promoting sustainable social enterprises which benefit whole communities. He gave examples from Africa and Asia of investments needed to improve business activities in low-income communities. This requires establishing partnerships with financial institutions as well as local/regional governments. The potential of SSE enterprises lies in their ability to involve community members, empower women through their leadership roles in these social enterprises, and create new jobs.

In the discussion that followed, participants brought up a number of issues, including the specific experiences of other MDBs in the area of civil society engagement. The Asian Development Bank (ADB), for instance, is currently piloting co-financing with CSOs of large infrastructure projects (their most recent experience is partnering with World Vision on a large housing construction project). They feel that it is desirable to collaborate with CSOs, but it is difficult to figure out with whom as very few CSOs have the size and/or flexibility to support large-scale development efforts. The African Development Bank (AfDB) representative explained that they don’t have a granting mechanism for civil society, but are developing other forms of engagement, such as mapping out CSOs in different countries and sectors. They have set up an advisory group to guide their engagement efforts. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) maintains CSO advisory committees in 26 countries which provide advice on IDB policies and programmes at the country level. They also annually convene CSOs from these committees and other CSOs from throughout the region to discuss regional policies and programmes. Their civil society unit is now working to convince IDB staff that operational collaboration with CSOs should be considered a “business opportunity,” but it takes time to change staff perceptions. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) faces similar challenges and opportunities. While the GEF has an independent and strong network of CSOs (composed of some 500 CSOs) that has been monitoring and participating in GEF activities for over 20 years, there are questions about how representative and broad-based it is. More recently, five large international CSOs (including the WWF, IUCN, and Conservation International) have become “implementing agencies” and will start channeling GEF grants to smaller CSOs.

In terms of SSEs, a participant argued this sector should be seen as a natural partner for MDBs since it aims to promote economic growth through small enterprises and job creation. In addition, it is generally just as expensive for the private sector to lend to small enterprises as it is to a huge company, thus MDBs should consider financing SSE ventures. Another participant noted that there are many innovative civil society engagement approaches being implemented by the MDBs and UN agencies, but they are quite distinct in nature with varying degrees of speed and impact. There was a final discussion on the true motivations behind these engagement initiatives and whether they reflected institutional priorities or were more geared to improve the image of the MDBs. Colleagues at the WBG noted that engagement with civil society did indeed start out as a way to protect its image and respond to street protests some 30 years ago, but that today CSOs are increasingly seen as part of the Bank’s strategy to strengthen the development impact of its work on the ground.