

Online global meeting Policy Forum on Development: The Global Initiative on Support for an Enabling Environment

31 May 2022

The EC Directorate General for International Partnerships unit Local Authorities, Civil Society Organisations and Foundations (G2) held a consultation to seek input from civil society partners and stakeholders regarding a global initiative to support an enabling environment, specifically how to best design the upcoming call for proposals to ensure the future relevance of the initiative as a whole. The consultation was not an information session on the upcoming call for proposals, and therefore no information beyond what is offered in the annexed MIP and MAP was shared. Following a short overview of the CSO Thematic Programme of 2021-27 and the Multiannual Action plan, participants were asked to comment on three aspects of the proposed future mechanism.

The main recommendations are summarised here.

1) Recommendations for the development of the **Monitoring and early warning pillar**:

Build on existing mechanisms

- Ensure that the new mechanism takes into account what is already in use, compare what exists and is **complementary to existing mechanisms**.

Monitoring and action

- Ensure monitoring systems are not just **reactive but also proactive**.
- Look at ways to **ensure that action can be taken in the fastest way possible**. This includes: put in place rapid response mechanisms; ensure real-time analysis; engage stakeholders at local and national levels; harness ways of foreseeing trends; and build capacity so that civil society is already prepared.
- **Data collection** is a key element of any mechanism, and participants noted the need for proper collection but also adequate protection so as not to put anyone at risk. Better data collection includes understanding how to engage local authorities in partnership with CSOs to better collect local data. Networks and collective bodies could be used to leverage information from specific constituencies/geographies. A recommendation was made to offer public information and specific data sets with more details for specific allies (taking care of not exposing actors on the ground).
- Use monitoring mechanisms to also **assess how States are promoting (or not) civic space** and an enabling environment, and use CSOs to monitor the fulfilment of commitments / deterioration of freedoms.

Context specific design

- Shrinking space may be systemic or sudden onset; it is important to design different ways to react to each.
- Have a system in place that analyses how different threats affect different organisations and different vulnerable groups in order to react in different ways; consider the creation of a system that involves different categories of actors.
- Look at the three levels: national, regional and global.

Ownership, meaningfulness and partnerships

- Tools need to be created together with the partners from the very beginning. Local leadership needs to be ready to react from the local or national level and in a coordinated manner to counter the threat.

- Two specific constituencies were raised in discussion: 1. The need to mainstream disabilities to ensure inclusion of persons with disabilities; 2. How to best include and fund (and for how long) diaspora communities

2) Recommendations for the **Flexible Funding Mechanism**

Flexibility and long-term funding

- Project-based funding does not allow for rapid reactions to changing situations or for long-term interventions. There is need for greater flexibility, rapid financing and action, and creativity; and to ensure long-term impact by, for example, providing core organisational funding and strengthening organisational capacities.

Flexible and lighter funding requirements

- Transaction costs of complying with funding requirements should be simplified. Some concrete proposals include:
 - think through difficulties that CSOs face in getting money from foreign donors and look into ways for organisations to receive money through other alternatives when there are limitations at country level (i.e., alternative legal status, channelling funds via alternative organisations, lottery tickets, etc.);
 - take into consideration the contextual reality;
 - allow more time to focus on work rather than reporting (i.e., consider using annual report and audits rather than onerous reporting);
 - make sub-granting and transfer modalities much more flexible;
 - include contingencies in regular contracts to allow for emergency shrinking civil space issues, including reallocation of funds up to a certain percent to respond to enabling issues and civic space issues.

Access to funding

- Integrate existing funding mechanisms to make it easier for organisations to navigate funding opportunities and their requirements. The EU could play a coordination role in this regard.

Funding relationships

- Greater focus on trust-based funding relationships (versus donor-beneficiary) should facilitate flexibility. Make funding decisions as participatory as possible: Participatory grant making mechanism, where local organisations are part of the decisions around funding and disbursements. This can show other governments the importance of CSOs being a part of society.

3) Recommendations on the **Capacity development pillar**

- Funding towards capacity building of organisations could help address **longer term resilience**. However, capacity development can be a burden for smaller organisations and create anxiety if they cannot absorb opportunities for capacity development or fully participate.
- **Learning from and with others:** Focus on learning from each other beyond capacity building: exchange, sharing and learning together. Offer different levels of engagement, flexibility and innovation. Co-design, co-creation and coordination: not new capacities, but deepen the existing efforts. Designate space and time for creative thinking.

- **Identifying capacity needs:** As situations evolve, learning needs evolve: identify where learning is most needed. Be inclusive and as participatory as possible, including breaking language barriers. Ensure room for more risk-taking, allowing more margin for trial and error, experimentation, and innovation.
- **Specific capacity needs identified:** digital technologies; privacy rights, data protection and legislation (limits to state intervention), procurement processes and requirements, and developing positive narratives on civil society.