

# UNDP and Civil Society Organizations: A Policy of Engagement



## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The United Nations Charter gives UNDP a powerful mandate to work with civil society organizations (CSOs). At the Millennium Summit 2000, the Secretary-General reaffirmed the centrality of civil society and its organizations to the mission of the United Nations in the twenty-first century:

“Not only do you [civil society organizations] bring to life the concept of ‘We, the Peoples,’ in whose name our Charter was written; you bring to us the promise that ‘people power’ can make the Charter work for all the world’s peoples in the twenty-first century.”

Equally, the UNDP focus on sustainable human development that places people at the centre of development cannot be achieved without the robust engagement of civil society and its organizations. Given the collective power of CSOs in building social, economic and political agendas – both locally and globally – it is clear that strengthening partnerships with CSOs is crucial if UNDP is to remain a relevant and effective development player.

2. World leaders at the Millennium Summit declared the need for more equitable globalization, the most pressing challenge of the new century. A reinvigorated partnership with CSOs is central to delivering the promises of the Millennium Declaration within the context of the increasingly uneven distribution of costs and benefits associated with rapid global economic integration.

3. CSOs are a crucial resource, constituency and partner for UNDP in advancing sustainable human development goals and principles. UNDP has made significant progress in both broadening and deepening its interaction with CSOs at all levels of its work. In particular, UNDP has developed a valued niche in creating the space with governments for CSO perspectives to be heard and incorporated into policy and programmes. In so doing, UNDP recognizes that CSOs are not a substitute for government, but are central to sustainable governance.

4. The evolution of CSOs in recent years, the policy imperatives of UNDP, and the context of the new millennium, call for a renewed framework to guide UNDP-CSO engagement. The policy provides a new set of principles to guide UNDP engagement with CSOs, and highlights policy and programmatic implications. The policy has been reviewed and endorsed by the UNDP-CSO Advisory Committee to the Administrator and has benefited from country office experience.

## II. CIVIL SOCIETY: UNDERSTANDING AND REASONS FOR COLLABORATION

5. UNDP takes a broad view of CSOs, of which non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are an important part. In this perspective, civil society constitutes a third sector, existing alongside and interacting with the state and profit-seeking firms. Many CSOs have been at the forefront of advocating principles of social justice and equity, but there are also organizations with agendas and values – such as intolerance and exclusion – that do not correspond to those of the United Nations system. In practice, civil society is an arena of both collaboration and contention whose configurations may vary according to national setting and history.

6. UNDP collaborates with CSOs whose goals, values and development philosophy correspond to its own. UNDP also engages with CSOs concerned with (inter-)national public policy and governance. The nature of the partnership with CSOs, particularly at the country office level, needs to be rooted in informed analysis and assessment of the country situation including the role, competencies and needs of CSOs.

### **Why does UNDP engage with CSOs?**

7. UNDP interest in forging partnerships with CSOs stems from many considerations:

- Improving the condition of the poor and excluded is the ultimate justification for the existence of UNDP as a development agency. Collaboration with CSOs that articulate the needs and aspirations of the poor is a *sine qua non* of good practice;
- Governments in developing countries cannot on their own fulfil all the tasks required for sustainable human development. This goal requires the active participation and partnership of citizens and their organizations;
- While external support can help, improved governance must ultimately come from within and be owned by a country and its citizens. CSOs therefore have vital roles to play as participants, legitimizers and endorsers of government policy and action, as watchdogs of the behaviour of regimes and public agencies, and as collaborators in the national development effort;
- From the human rights perspective, UNDP, along with Member Governments, bears duties and obligations towards the poor and excluded who are denied internationally recognized entitlements. To fulfil these obligations, the organization must engage with and involve a range of civic actors in its programmes;
- UNDP positions, public support, work and success in the future are dependent on multi-party trust. In the words of the Administrator:

“You do not buy that [poverty reduction] agenda through loans; you win it through trust. And it is the same asset – trust – that allows us to assemble the partnerships with governments, civil society, labour unions and the private sector that UNDP – everybody’s friend – can do.”

8. The increasing sophistication of CSOs places new and more complex demands on UNDP. Over the last decade, CSOs, including NGOs, peoples’ movements, trade unions, women’s federations, formal and informal associations, grass-roots coalitions and indigenous peoples’ organizations, have emerged as a powerful force for social justice and equity across and within borders. This is largely a result of the impact of globalization on the intergovernmental system, the changing role of the nation state and the growing impact of the information age. CSOs have mounted successful campaigns that are effectively shaping the content of national and international agreements – on issues ranging from landmines and debt cancellation to affordable medication for HIV/AIDS – and have helped to bring about new institutions, including the International Criminal Court and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. They have also laid the ground for local and global discussions on alternative policy choices – from local ‘citizen hearings’ on poverty and AIDS to parallel NGO forums at United Nations conferences, peoples’ assemblies and social forums to exchange experiences, and debate and propose economic and social alternatives.

9. Most importantly, there is growing recognition, by the United Nations and individual governments, of the role played by CSOs, as well as the private sector, in implementing what is agreed on at the international level. Global governance is no longer viewed as primarily an intergovernmental concern but one that involves intergovernmental institutions, CSOs, citizens’ movements, transnational corporations, academia and the mass media. The emergence of a global civil society reflects a surge in the will and capacity of people to take control of their lives – a fact that governments and intergovernmental agencies cannot afford to ignore.

10. Nowhere is this more evident than in the United Nations over the past decade. The influx and impact of international and national CSOs became highly visible at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and has continued through subsequent United Nations conferences. By the end of 2000, the number of CSOs officially accredited to the

Economic and Social Council had more than doubled – to 1 900 from about 900 in 1992. CSOs have participated closely in all stages of conference preparation and follow-up, holding parallel forums and lobbying for alternative language and initiatives. Most conference programmes of action bear the imprint of CSOs, many of which have then pursued and monitored government accountability to these commitments at national and international levels.

11. These democratic openings have presented women’s organizations, in particular, with extraordinary opportunities for advocacy and policy change. Through the 1990s, feminist ideas of equality and inclusion have had enormous influence across a wide range of areas – the reproductive health movement, political parties and development practice, for example. Women’s organizations at the country and community levels have moved into both service delivery and policy advisory roles, and are increasingly involved in delivering vital social services and helping governments to design and implement gender-sensitive programmes.

#### **Box 1. CSOs monitoring government commitments for women’s empowerment**

Women’s rights organizations have a very important role in making the landmark 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) a key instrument of women’s empowerment, through advocacy and monitoring their governments’ implementation of the treaty. The Convention’s enforcement mechanism is based on a reporting system, which makes it imperative that CSOs understand and use the reporting mechanism to ensure government accountability both inside the country and at the United Nations. In recent years, civil society advocates of women’s human rights have made big strides in their efforts to strengthen CEDAW. A key victory is the wider recognition that the CEDAW Committee now accords to the role of CSOs in monitoring compliance with the Convention. In some countries, coalitions of CSOs, political parties and the government have succeeded in activating CEDAW in domestic political activity and policy formulation.

#### **Why do CSOs engage with UNDP?**

12. CSOs’ interest in engaging with UNDP depends on the extent to which such collaboration generates mutual added value. From a CSO perspective, some factors that warrant engagement with UNDP are:

- At the country level, the *relationship of trust between* developing country governments and UNDP, and the ability of UNDP to broker space for government-CSO dialogue and engagement;
- The *human development paradigm* as a critical entry point and foundation for dialogue, action, joint advocacy and campaigns with civil society;
- The *broad mandate of UNDP*, which is not only more holistic compared to other sectoral, issue-specific agencies, but also more in line with the interrelated manner in which many CSOs look at issues of development and conflict;
- *The coordinating role of UNDP* in the United Nations system and the United Nations Development Group, both globally and at the country level;
- *The potential of UNDP as an ally and source of resources* for CSO human development initiatives;
- UNDP potential to differentiate itself intellectually from conventional policy advice with the aim of promoting *inclusive globalization*.

### **III. WHY UPDATE THE CSO POLICY?**

13. At least four developments justify a new CSO policy. First, CSOs are rapidly evolving. They are becoming more capable and demanding in engaging and negotiating terms with other development actors. Second, there are valuable lessons to be drawn from past interaction between UNDP and CSOs. Third, UNDP is undergoing major institutional reform with significant implications for its interface with CSOs. Fourth, the organization has adopted policies, for example on human rights and indigenous peoples, that have major implications for partnerships with CSOs.

#### **Past lessons of engagement with CSOs**

14. UNDP has a rich history of engagement with CSOs in both operational and policy work that cuts across major focus areas. But strategic, mainstreamed partnership, as opposed to episodic, project-driven engagement, remains a central challenge.

15. In the late 1990s, UNDP implemented a global programme dedicated to mainstreaming CSOs in operations and policy development. An internal stocktaking exercise and external mid-term evaluation indicate that, despite major constraints, the programme was largely doing the right things, but lacked adequate engagement with progressive segments of the civil society movement that were required for UNDP “to be relevant, to compete and to survive”. The programme suffered from inadequate integration throughout the organization, further impeded by incentives and procedures that push staff to a utilitarian approach towards CSOs to achieve UNDP goals.

16. A corollary lesson is the need to balance civil society involvement in policy arenas with local accountability and civic mobilization on the ground. It is important to have CSOs present at the policy table. But this must not detract from collaboration with CSOs in downstream work. It implies a CSO approach and practice that actively builds links between macro-level policy and pro-poor micro initiatives.

17. Another lesson is to take explicit account of the fact that engagement with civil society, reducing poverty and promoting human rights and democratic governance are implicitly political in nature and potential sources of tension that must be managed with sensitivity, but not used as an excuse for inaction. The policy framework for CSOs respects UNDP collaboration and obligations towards governments but not at the cost of denying CSO rights as claimants. The UNDP reform agenda reinforces and creates improved space for this partnership.

#### **UNDP institutional reform**

18. The establishment in May 2000 of the UNDP-CSO Advisory Committee interfacing directly with the Administrator is a major advance in establishing formal status arrangements with CSOs. The expressed intention of this step is to ensure that the organization becomes more open and sensitive to the agendas within civil society.

19. The UNDP-CSO Advisory Committee proposed the following priority themes for collaboration:

- Poverty reduction and sustainable debt;
- Inclusive globalization – democratizing trade and finance;
- Conflict prevention and peace-building;
- Human rights and human development;
- Private sector engagement.

It also recommended the development of two new policies for collaboration with CSOs and engagement with indigenous peoples. The committee envisioned a more substantive role for UNDP in cutting-edge analysis and regional debate on the trading regime from a sustainable human development perspective. These recommendations call for country and region-specific CSO agendas.

20. The UNDP reform process has created six focus areas: poverty reduction; democratic governance; crisis prevention and recovery; energy and the environment; HIV and AIDS; and information, communication and technology for development. To realize the authentic strategic partnerships that UNDP reform outlines, it is important to understand and negotiate honestly what does and does not fit on an agenda for real UNDP-CSO partnership. The UNDP-CSO Advisory Committee provides an important new mechanism for doing so in New York that should be replicated at national and regional levels of the organization.

### **The human rights dimension to CSO partnership**

21. The 1998 policy integrating a rights-based approach to sustainable human development and the 2001 policy on indigenous peoples are of particular relevance to the implementation of the UNDP-CSO policy.

#### **Box 2. UNDP human rights policy and CSOs**

UNDP support for human rights will respond to national needs and priorities as identified by governments and NGOs. UNDP will need to devise policies that enable it to work with civil society organizations and NGOs in such countries. Most important, UNDP must develop a firm policy to ensure that its development programmes do not become vehicles for human rights abuses – for example, in countries that exclude women, indigenous peoples or ethnic minorities from the benefits of development. In such countries, economic, social and cultural rights provide the obvious entry point for human rights-based sustainable human development programming. But UNDP will have to guard against neglecting political and civil rights, and difficult questions of how to incorporate them in programmes in such countries will have to be addressed.

*Integrating human rights with sustainable human development: A UNDP policy document (1998).*

22. A major implication of adopting a human rights-based view of human development is that UNDP acknowledges that it shares obligations with the government. CSOs have legitimate entitlements, codified in international conventions, covenants and laws. People have a right to act as claimants on and monitors of UNDP policies and (implementing) actions, alongside, with and through governments as complementary duty-bearers.

23. Correspondingly, UNDP must establish formal means to listen to claimants at the country, (sub)regional and global levels. This must be done not on the basis of *need*, but as an economic, social, cultural, political and civic *right* or fundamental freedom. Realistically, citizens who are most deeply affected by UNDP policy or practice have the greatest legitimacy as claimants.

24. A rights-based philosophy of development challenges CSOs, particularly intermediary NGOs, to reflect on their own obligations as duty-bearers. Some CSOs claim a role in policy-making because they are representative of and accountable to certain groups. Others base their claim on their expertise and interest. In their efforts to influence policy, a core issue for CSOs is accountability based on expertise; they should not attempt to act as representatives unless they can demonstrate that they have a constituency that gives them a mandate and effective control over policy positions adopted.

#### IV. PRINCIPLES AND COMMITMENTS OF CSO-UNDP ENGAGEMENT

25. At the heart of this policy are five principles and corresponding commitments that together provide a coherent foundation for partnership.

***Principle and commitment 1. Partnership founded on horizontality (equality), trust, inclusion and mutual capability.***

Partnership with CSOs is founded on the principle of a horizontal relationship between parties which, while institutionally different, are of equal standing in promoting the same development objectives, especially poverty reduction through sustainable human development. The relationship is premised on mutual trust that must be earned by both sides. UNDP is committed to investing in enhancing trust with CSOs that share its goals. In doing so, UNDP acknowledges the frequent asymmetry between its capabilities and those of CSOs with which it wishes to engage. Consequently, the UNDP contribution to CSO capacity development remains a cornerstone of its approach to development and partnership.

***Principle and commitment 2. Recognition of obligations as a duty-bearer***

In adopting these principles and a policy on human rights, UNDP implicitly recognizes its responsibility as a duty-bearer towards member governments, in terms of supporting their fulfilment of public obligations, and simultaneously towards civil society as legitimate claimants on governments and UNDP as a public body. Correspondingly, interacting with civil society is a duty and not an option for UNDP at all levels of its work. UNDP is committed to engaging with CSOs as an expression of their right to development, not simply because of institutional convenience.

***Principle and commitment 3. Negotiation and mutual agenda-setting with individual accountability***

Neither UNDP nor CSOs are required to accept or endorse each other's agendas, interpretations of events or methods. Engagement with CSOs must be founded on the principle of negotiation towards a common interest that recognizes complementarity of roles, not a sharing of institutional responsibilities. Each party is individually accountable for its behaviour to its owners or constituencies. While not imposing its own agenda, UNDP is committed to seeking mutual ground for action that respects the agendas of the civil societies where it is present.

***Principle and commitment 4. Disaggregation, selection and intellectual differentiation***

UNDP recognizes that CSOs are, by their very nature, heterogeneous. This diversity is a valuable development asset that should not be 'homogenized' by CSO engagement with UNDP. To this end, UNDP adopts the principle of respecting CSO diversity. UNDP is committed to enhancing its own insight and capability to differentiate between CSOs while adopting practices that correspond to and respect their differences.

Consistent with its mandate, institutional position and comparative advantages, such as impartiality, UNDP acknowledges the challenge and value added of intellectually differentiating itself in the multilateral system and in its dealings with others. To this end, UNDP is committed to being a distinctive voice and champion of human development based on human rights, continually refining the analytic foundation for its thinking, practice and engagement in dialogue with all its stakeholders. UNDP is also committed to methods of work that are distinctive and that fully realize its comparative advantages, such as respect for national ownership, people-to-people approach, local knowledge and sensitivity and the ability to facilitate constructive interaction between a range of stakeholders.

***Principle and commitment 5. Macro-micro coherence and balance: connecting upstream and downstream***

UNDP acknowledges the importance of the principles of coherence and consistency between engaging with CSOs in its in-country initiatives and in international policy work. It is committed to balanced treatment and investment between CSO engagement at local and macro levels, i.e., in its operations and policy dialogues, within countries, regionally and internationally.

## V. IMPLICATIONS FOR UNDP AND CSOs

26. Adopting and applying the foregoing principles and commitments has practical consequences for headquarters in regional programmes and in country offices. Hands-on tools and methods for engagement are in the CSO source book.

### A. Strategic partnership

27. A key challenge in implementing the CSO policy will be effecting a shift from project-driven engagement to strategic partnership. Global and country experience point to the importance of creating an institutionalized forum for UNDP-CSO dialogue and debate on policy directions.

#### **UNDP-CSO committees – global, regional, and local**

28. The UNDP-CSO Advisory Committee seeks to ensure that senior management at headquarters receives proper guidance on policy issues critical to the future directions of the organization. By having the committee report directly to him, the Administrator sends a clear signal to senior managers and staff of the importance accorded to perspectives. The committee comprises 14 CSO leaders selected based on the expertise that they can bring to bear on a set of mutually agreed issues. A series of consultations identified the following broad areas of mutual concern: (a) poverty reduction and sustainable debt; (b) inclusive globalization – democratizing trade and finance; (c) conflict prevention and peace-building; (d) human rights and human development; and, (e) private-sector engagement.

29. There are also structured dialogues between members of the committee and the Executive Board on issues including policy options and perspectives in trade, poverty reduction, monitoring the Millennium Development Goals, human-rights based approaches to development, and gender-mainstreaming. The UNDP-CSO Advisory Committee thus provides a mechanism for mutual agenda-setting, policy debate, individual accountability, and ease of access for exchanges between senior managers and civil society leaders on future directions for UNDP. Together these elements provide a sound basis for building a partnership based on principles of horizontality and trust.

30. Country office experience has shown that the creation of local CSO advisory committees ensures local policy relevance and builds UNDP credibility. In situations where relations between the state and civil society might prohibit the establishment of a formal CSO advisory committee, two options could be pursued: (a) informal dialogue with CSOs; and/or (b) discussion of sensitive issues at the regional level. Regional programmes and sub-regional resource facilities (SURFs) can provide impartial space for dialogue which ‘stands above’ state–civil society tensions and sensitivities that may exist at the country level.

31. Establishing local and regional CSO committees is a critical step in realizing four key principles and commitments of partnership: trust, horizontality, mutual agenda-setting and individual accountability. UNDP is therefore committed to making local and regional CSO advisory committees a regular feature of its partnership of engagement with CSOs at the country and, where appropriate, regional levels. Regional and country office experience has demonstrated the importance of bringing together CSOs to debate and provide both policy and operational advice. Committees or advisory groups have been established around the production and advocacy of national human development reports (NHDR), around particular themes – governance, poverty, human rights, and more recently for the analysis, monitoring and advocacy of the MDGs. The UNDP-CSO Advisory Committee demonstrates the important synergies that are created when a multi-disciplinary committee is established to provide strategic guidance on a range of issues with which UNDP is grappling.

### **Box 3. Zimbabwe Poverty Reduction Forum**

The main goal of the Poverty Reduction Forum in Zimbabwe is to provide CSOs with an arena for debate on issues of poverty reduction with key decision-makers. Created in 1996 with the support of UNDP, the forum has grown to a membership of 300 organizations, bringing together NGOs, academics, community-based organizations, trade unions, donor agencies, chambers of commerce, farmers' unions, and a growing number of peoples' organizations. The forum has influenced a range of national policy issues from poverty reduction strategies to national budgetary processes. It has also provided a critical channel for national debate between civil society and the Government on structural adjustment processes.

#### **Partnership strategy**

32. The revised CSO policy requires a more strategic approach to engagement, of which a partnership strategy is a key component. An effective UNDP-CSO partnership strategy should build on a mutually set agenda and provide clarity on the desired outcomes and processes. A locally relevant strategy, time frame and resource allocations are important preconditions if country offices are to reach out to CSOs in a credible way.

#### **B. Possible entry points for UNDP-CSO collaboration**

33. Drawing from country office experience and a process of UNDP-CSO consultations, the following broad priorities were identified as potential entry points for UNDP-CSO engagement:

- Ø Leveraging the relatively trusted relations of UNDP with governments to create the political space for civil society to express alternative views and influence policy dialogue and decision-making at all levels: local, national and global.
- Ø Taking a stand on international human rights norms and standards and working with CSOs to realize the rights and obligations they entail for people. These include supporting the societal watchdog functions of CSOs in defending and monitoring the commitments of United Nations conferences and human rights.
- Ø Ensuring genuine CSO engagement in the development, implementation and monitoring of key policy processes.
- Ø Initiating multi-stakeholder partnerships among governments, donors and civil society for sustainable human development at all levels (local, national, regional and global).
- Ø Supporting the capacity of civil society to articulate demands, offer options and defend the rights of people living in poverty at all levels. This implies supporting the crucial intermediary role played by CSOs in building bridges between local realities and macro-level policy issues.
- Ø Facilitating the relational capacity of CSOs to negotiate their concerns with government and business sectors of society.
- Ø Jointly identifying 'campaign issues' and mobilizing a broad-based constituency (at local and global levels and especially between South and North) using and advocating greater access to information technology.
- Ø Facilitating traditional and horizontal linkages between CSOs that are critical to determining the quality of relationships between communities (otherwise known as bridging social capital). This has been found to be particularly crucial in both preventing and resolving conflict.
- Ø Recognizing the differentiated impact of development on diverse vulnerable populations, particularly indigenous peoples, and ensuring that they have a voice in key development policy processes affecting their lives.

- Ø Creating an enabling legal and regulatory environment for a vibrant civil society and ensuring the inclusion of CSOs in key legislative processes.

Pursuing these entry points places increasing demands on the range of roles that UNDP is called on to play.

### C. UNDP roles and functions

34. The reform process and the revised CSO policy will make the strongest call on the country and regional capability of UNDP to perform the following broad roles:

- Ø **Trusted convenor, negotiator and facilitator.** Whether negotiating peace and reconciliation processes or facilitating sensitive political dialogues, UNDP is increasingly called on at the country level as a trusted, impartial convenor of multi-stakeholder initiatives. It is at once the organization's strongest asset and most challenging role.
- Ø **Broker of space for policy options and excluded perspectives.** UNDP has an important role to play in ensuring that policy voices and choices are made available to decision-makers. Central to this function is guaranteeing that the perspectives of CSOs and indigenous peoples' organizations are provided the space for expression. In turn, civic engagement in policy processes and choices ensures their eventual sustainability.
- Ø **Competent enhancer of CSO capacity.** UNDP provides a distinct value added not only in developing the internal organizational strengths of CSOs, but in supporting and facilitating their networking – among themselves, with government and with business sectors of society.
- Ø **Enabler of a vibrant civil society.** Beyond creating legal and regulatory frameworks for the operation of NGOs and CSOs, UNDP has a broader role to play in facilitating vibrant civic engagement in key national and regional processes for human development.
- Ø **Disseminator of instructive practice.** In collaboration with CSOs, UNDP plays a valuable role in documenting the rapidly evolving trends and developments in civic engagement at the national, regional and global levels.

### Implications for competencies

35. To be a trusted interlocutor, country and regional offices must balance enhanced technical competencies, for example, in civil society mapping and CSO selection, with greater attention to people factors in dealing with external relations. In addition to allocating sufficient time to the task, staff aptitudes in terms of negotiation, dialogue and facilitation will become more important.

### D. Mechanisms for strategic policy engagement

36. There are several tools and mechanisms to assist in the development of a strategic partnership with CSOs. Briefly, these include:

- Ø **CSO mapping**  
The rapidly changing nature of CSOs with shifting alliances and evolving institutions that grow and contract in response to social, economic and political imperatives often requires a continuous reading of the civic environment if UNDP is to stay abreast of current trends and developments. Periodic mapping of CSOs enables country offices to stay close to the popular pulse on emerging issues. It also provides a country office with the opportunity to reassess and focus the goals of its partnership strategy: with whom does it partner and to what development end?
- Ø **Selection process**  
Wide variations in national CSO history, diverse configurations, inter-CSO relations and state attitude will inevitably require UNDP to select carefully with whom to engage and how. To assist in the selection process, it is important to assess, develop and publish situationally relevant criteria to determine with which actors

from civil society to engage and why. Some significant factors are domestic rootedness, demonstrated mandate, legitimacy as claimant, competence, expertise and accountability.

Ø **Multi-stakeholder initiatives**

Building on its role as impartial convenor, UNDP has a distinct comparative advantage in facilitating dialogue around sensitive issues that bring together different development actors from society, government and the market to work towards a shared solution. Country office experience in conflict and post-conflict reconciliation processes highlight the value added of bringing CSOs, including indigenous peoples' organizations (IPOs), into all stages of the reconciliation and rehabilitation process.

Ø **Creating an enabling environment for CSOs**

While the preparation of a legal framework for the operation of CSOs is often associated with an 'enabling CSO environment', it is not necessarily conducive for creating vibrant civic engagement in key national processes. A legal regulatory framework for CSOs is an important but not sufficient condition. Country office experience points to the valuable role that UNDP can play in brokering and creating space to enable full participation of CSOs in national development processes.

**Box 4. Capacity 21 in Mexico: Creating a space for citizen participation and leadership**

Through the Capacity 21 programme in Mexico, UNDP, the Government and civil society seek to integrate social issues with the production and conservation of natural resources and harmonize human issues with nature, and local matters with national matters, in a decentralized approach that advocates renewed citizen participation. Three key themes were thus prioritized in Huatulco and Sierra Gorda: NGO capacity-building to decentralize power and resources, socialization of development and grass-roots leadership. In close partnership with the Government, civil society and grass-roots peasant-farmer communities, UNDP has nurtured an enabling, participatory environment for the adoption of national and local policies. Citizen participation in environmental management was strengthened through national and regional consultative councils for sustainable development as well as technical councils in the fields of forestry, soils, protected natural areas and river basins. The Capacity 21 programme has contributed to the flourishing of NGOs and to the strengthening of their institutional and administrative planning, evaluation, information, resource management and consensus-building capacities with the promotion of decentralized and inter-sectoral participation.

**CSO engagement in United Nations and UNDP-led policy processes**

37. A number of UNDP-led policy processes have been and will continue to be substantially enriched through CSO engagement and mobilization. Three are highlighted below.

Ø **Human Development Report (HDR).** The global and national HDRs have become the principal UNDP instruments for stimulating policy debate. CSOs have been most effective in generating local debates on findings from HDRs, translating the report into advocacy strategies and campaigns for effecting policy changes, and bringing about policy studies, poverty assessments and regional and national qualitative indices for monitoring poverty. UNDP is committed to expanding the opportunities for CSO engagement in both the conception and development of advocacy messages and strategies.

Ø **Common country assessment and United Nations Development Assistance Framework (CCA/UNDAF).** As the chair of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), UNDP has a central leadership role in ensuring that space and opportunity are provided for genuine CSO partnerships in United Nations-led policy processes – from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the CCA and UNDAF. Though limited to date, country experience with CSO engagement in the CCA/UNDAF process attests to the valued peoples perspective that CSOs bring and their expertise, outreach and ability to build awareness for

human development issues. The new CSO policy requires greater participation and engagement of CSOs in these key policy processes. The degree to which genuine partnership can be achieved will depend in large part on the role accorded to CSOs in the conception, implementation and monitoring phases.

Ø **The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**

Partnerships with CSOs are pivotal to mobilizing public opinion and raising public awareness of the MDGs. In countries across the world, civil society groups have a special interest in one or more of the MDGs. Many have a proven capacity for broad-based mobilization and creating bottom-up demand that holds leaders accountable – skills that will be essential to placing the MDGs at the heart of national debates and development priorities. The role of civil society organizations is crucial not only in campaigning for the goals, but in preparing the analysis for MDG reports, and monitoring progress to generate and sustain political momentum and public interest. They are essential partners for realizing the UNDP mandate of campaign manager and scorekeeper of the MDGs.

**UNDP engagement in CSO-led policy processes**

38. Conversely, UNDP has much to gain in partnering in CSO-led policy processes. This often requires extending engagement beyond well-known organizations of civil society to peoples' movements and grass-roots organizations that are deeply embedded in the creative processes of societal change. UNDP should draw inspiration from peoples' movements and support their initiatives rather than simply engage a known range of civil society actors instrumentally in projects and programmes.

**Box 5. South Africa poverty hearings: People put poverty on the national agenda**

In 1998, a unique series of public meetings enabled the poor throughout South Africa to talk to decision-makers about their experiences of poverty. These meetings were the first stage of the strategy of the War on Poverty Forum, a partnership of CSOs, the Government, UNDP and other donors. The South Africa NGO coalition organized 35 day-long 'Speak out on Poverty' hearings in 29 locations. More than 10 000 people came to the first set of hearings alone. Poor people, most of whom had little or no contact with government representatives, spoke about their experiences and their ideas for improving their lives. Throughout this participatory partnership, the forum put local experiences of poverty on the national agenda. Plans to replicate the 'speak-out' model, which requires little money and is tremendously effective, are now under way elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. It also inspired the 'Speak out on AIDS' hearings in South Africa that brought peoples' personal testimony to national, public and policy attention.

**E. Mechanisms for operational engagement**

39. A series of mechanisms were created in the late 1990s to facilitate the operational engagement of UNDP with CSOs; three are briefly highlighted below. The CSO sourcebook (2002) provides more detailed guidance on the mechanisms and their applications.

Ø **Public information and documentation disclosure policy (IDP)**

IDP is the cornerstone of UNDP operational engagement with CSOs. The policy, in force since 1997 and assessed in 2001, expresses the right of citizens and governments to request that UNDP make available all operational programme and project documents and briefs that UNDP, in the absence of a 'compelling reason for confidentiality', is required to provide. As a custodian of public funds, UNDP is directly accountable to its Member Governments and to the public in programme and donor countries. There is a symbiotic relationship between information sharing and public participation in UNDP-supported development activities and the quality and sustainability of these efforts. Requested information should be provided early and regularly to CSOs, affected parties and the general public. Public access to information and documentation held or generated by UNDP will ultimately facilitate the transparency, accountability and legitimacy of its

operations. Beyond this requirement is the principle of a pro-active approach in which UNDP transparently seeks the participation and partnership of CSOs. A new oversight panel is in the process of being established.

Ø **NGO execution**

Historically, the bulk of UNDP-CSO working arrangements has taken the form of either a sub-contract within an agency, a nationally executed project or a direct grant. With the introduction of NGO execution, CSOs can now be engaged directly as an executing agent with overhead charges. Since the introduction of the modality in 1998, some 300 projects totalling over \$100 million have been executed in this way. The procedures are currently being reviewed for simplification and greater accessibility to a broader range of CSOs.

Ø **Memoranda of understanding (MoU)**

While not a requirement for UNDP engagement with CSOs, MoU can nonetheless be useful in situations which do not require a transfer of resources between the parties but rather a statement of intent of partnership usually around a particular issue or cause. An MoU is an agreement that provides a general framework for collaboration between UNDP and the other party that sets out the broad nature and scope of the engagement.

Ø **Small grant facilities of the Bureau for Development Policy (BDP) and regional bureaux**

UNDP has a long-established track record in providing small grants to community-based initiatives, which in turn have upstream policy impact at the district, regional or national levels. At present, two such mechanisms exist at headquarters: the small grants window of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Local Urban Initiatives for the Environment (LIFE). Both mechanisms are managed by BDP. At the regional level, the Africa 2000 programme and the South Asia Poverty Alleviation Programme provide small grants to vulnerable local communities for sustainable poverty initiatives.

### **Resources for CSO-UNDP partnership**

40. While substantive policy consultations can have high impact at minimal cost, depending on the nature of engagement, availability of resources can hinder or facilitate partnership. Some of the resources available globally for partnership with civil society found outside country and regional cooperation modalities are:

Ø **Thematic trust funds (BDP)**

Each thematic trust fund (TTF) – for poverty reduction, governance, crisis and recovery, energy and the environment, HIV/AIDS, gender and information and communication technology – outlines strategic services that either directly relate to engaging CSOs or include them as one of key stakeholders in a multi-partner initiative. The funds that most directly engage with CSOs are the Poverty Trust Fund (CSOs are closely integrated into participatory processes for poverty reduction strategies and monitoring and direct empowerment for pro-poor budgeting) and the Governance Trust Fund (particularly regarding local governance issues). The TTFs are managed by BDP in close collaboration with the regional bureaux.

Ø **Partnership Facility (Bureau for Resources and Strategic Partnerships)**

This facility provides small grants for quick disbursement to UNDP country offices to support innovative, highly leveraged partnership initiatives. It is an excellent source of funds for creative partnerships between UNDP and CSOs or for multi-stakeholder partnerships in which CSOs are a critical player. The facility is managed by BRSP in close collaboration with the regional bureaux.