

**United Nations Development Programme**



**VOICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

A UNDP GLOBAL STRATEGY TO  
STRENGTHEN CIVIL SOCIETY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Prepared by the  
Civil Society Division/Partnerships Bureau  
with Oslo Governance Centre/Bureau for Development Policy

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“Our mission recognizes a fundamental truth about democracy everywhere - that it is ultimately the product of a strong, active and vocal civil society. It is such a civil society that fosters responsible citizenship and makes democratic forms of government work.”

**- United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon**

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## Executive Summary

This strategy charts a course to revitalize the engagement of UNDP with civil society and its organizations. It seeks to bring about a fundamental shift in the relationship, geared towards recognizing the evolving nature and growing influence of civil society, drawing on its strengths and capacities, and maximizing the potential of civic engagement for development.

Current trends in development have opened up new opportunities for the participation of a wider array of actors at national and sub-national levels. Increasingly, most governments accept civil society actors not only as essential programme partners but also as policy interlocutors, and see civic participation as critical to building constituencies and consensus, and to promoting inclusion and representation of the poor and marginalized. In all aspects of its engagement with civil society, UNDP sees its efforts as contributing to and supplementing its development interventions with governments.

Strengthening civic engagement for voice and accountability is linked to a number of key UNDP strategic priorities and ways of working outlined in the organization's Strategic Plan (2008-11), including:

- national ownership
- capacity development
- effective aid management
- poverty reduction and achievement of MDGs
- gender equality

To this end, the strategy proposes three priority focus areas for UNDP:

- Investing in an enabling environment for civil society to contribute to development
- Promoting and scaling up citizen action for participatory governance and development and other priority areas in the UNDP Strategic Plan
- Strengthening civic engagement in multilateralism, particularly in the context of the global financial crisis and other serious threats to MDGs and human development in vulnerable developing countries

### ***Rationale for a New Direction***

The strategy is underpinned by the following:

- First, the complex and dynamic development environment of today is characterized by new donor and aid arrangements and pressures for accountable and participatory governance to fight persistent inequality and poverty. To ensure its continued relevance as a development player, UNDP must become a more outward-looking organization that is better equipped to engage with a plurality of constituencies, including a range of civil society actors with distinct strengths. The global financial crisis, with its troubling implications for development funding, long-term planning and sustainability, not only makes this a more urgent task, it also emphasizes the case for strengthening citizen capacities for oversight of state and corporate governance.

#### **Box 1 – Citizens and Civil Society**

"The citizen is the building block of civil society. We need both good civil society and good government, and we need to create the basis for them to work together creatively to address poverty. Increasingly CSOs engage at global, national, and local levels simultaneously as they seek to influence international institutions and policy while also operating nationally and locally."

**- Kumi Naidoo, Honorary President of CIVICUS**

*"Role of Civil Society in Enhancing Aid Effectiveness"*  
(Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, 2008)

- Second, civil society actors at national and global levels have evolved in capacity and influence in a number of areas to an extent that strategically and creatively *partnering with* them can help to maximize UNDP interventions with governments, crucially with respect to neglected and disadvantaged populations.
- Third, the success of development and participatory governance depends on *both a robust state and an active civil society* with healthy levels of civic engagement (**see Box 1**). Empowered and active citizenship, a critical part of social capital, is an end in itself, besides being essential for *inclusive growth and national ownership* – both guiding principles for UNDP as stated in its Strategic Plan. Specifically, civic engagement is key to the work of UNDP in strengthening responsive governing institutions and practices.

In articulating this strategy, UNDP underscores its conviction that a dynamic relationship between state and civil society can set the terms for the quality of governance. Experience in a number of countries has shown that strong human development outcomes result from synergies between the state and civil society. Contrary to common perceptions that civic engagement fills the gap left by a weak state or finds its space and scope reduced in the presence of a strong state, successful participatory governance is predicated on the existence of both a robust state and a healthy and active civil society.

### ***Goals of the Strategy***

The overall goal of the strategy is to provide UNDP with a framework to deliver on its Strategic Plan outcomes by both *empowering* and *engaging* with civil society to achieve greater accountability of all actors and enhanced human development. It proposes three priority focus areas for UNDP over the next four years:

#### **1. Invest in civil society and civic engagement**

This will target three areas: (a) facilitate an enabling environment for civil society (b) support and partner with civil society for policy impact, and (c) revitalize UN(DP) capacity and environment to engage with a fuller range of civil society actors and foster civic engagement.

#### **2. Promote citizen action for participatory democracy and development**

This will support civic engagement to (a) support democratic governance through collective citizen action for accountability, drawing on the expertise and experience of others in this arena to facilitate more productive state-citizen interactions in national processes (b) scale up community actions for local development and upstream impact.

#### **3. Strengthen civic engagement for multilateralism and human development**

The global crises in food, fuel and financial and climate change have revived debate on the quality of global governance and the role and place of multilateral institutions. Citizens and civil society networks are emphasizing principles of human development, accountability and civic engagement, and a strong UN role in solutions to the crises, as being central to the way forward. UNDP, with civil society and other development partners, will mobilize “Platform HD2010” to mark the 20th anniversary of the launch of the UNDP Human Development Report in 2010, and the ten-year anniversary of the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs, as a forum to develop a vision for the next decade that engages civil society for an outward looking multilateralism reinforcing civic engagement and human development.

While the objective of each priority focus area is to strengthen **civic engagement**, the strategy also emphasizes the need for UNDP to develop **synergistic partnerships** with civil society organizations with specific expertise. These can take the form of **flagship initiatives** to contribute to scaling-up and development effectiveness in each focus area. Such flagships will:

- Maximize civil society strengths and resources to advance shared goals, complementing downstream programme implementation with increased emphasis on upstream policy impact
- Support and expand civil society-led platforms that will develop consortiums of donors and other partners to scale up capacities in civil society and government
- Strengthen multi-stakeholder and cross-practice approaches and south-south cooperation
- Expand the space for national and local actors to be heard on issues of global importance

Strengthening internal knowledge and capacities to remedy the deficits in UNDP engagement with civil society is a crucial element of a strategic organizational approach. The strategy emphasizes the importance of practical and quality knowledge resources including learning modules and guidance notes, developed with a cross-practice approach and drawing on civil society expertise. While recognizing the challenges inherent in ensuring adequate financial and human resources, the strategy underscores the urgent need to creatively and incrementally address institutional arrangements, particularly the provision of advisory services to country offices by headquarters and regional centres.

***"Civil society occupies a unique space where ideas are born, where mindsets are changed, and where the work of sustainable development doesn't just get talked about, but gets done."***

***- Former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan***

## Section I. Background and Rationale

### A. Mandate and Country Demand

**Strategic Plan** – The most recent UNDP mandate with regard to civil society and civic engagement comes from the Strategic Plan (2008-11). The Strategic Plan also emphasizes civic engagement in the context of promoting inclusive participation, responsive governance, inclusive growth and national ownership. In practical terms, the Plan endorses opening knowledge networks to CSOs, strengthening civic engagement in local governments and organizations, and national authorities.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, the Strategic Plan recommends: (1) the establishment of networks, including South-South networks, to boost local entrepreneurship in at least 50 countries by 2009; (2) partnering with UNV and other national volunteers to support people's participation in development programming; (3) civil society involvement in AIDS responses and in creating responsive governing institutions.<sup>2</sup>

#### Box 2 – Defining Civil Society

Concepts of civil society elude commonly agreed upon definitions. One accepted consensus is that civil society is an arena of voluntary collective actions around shared interests, purposes and values distinct from families, state and profit-seeking institutions. A key feature of this definition is the concept of civil society as an 'arena,' a term used to describe the space where people come together to debate, associate and seek to influence broader society. In UNDP, the term civil society includes the full range of formal and informal organizations that are outside the state and the market – including social movements, volunteer involving organizations, mass-based membership organizations, faith-based groups, NGOs, and community-based organizations, as well as communities and citizens acting individually and collectively.

- See, e.g., **UNDP and Civil Society Organizations: A Policy of Engagement (2001); Global Civil Society. Vol. 2. Dimensions of the Nonprofit Sector, Lester Salamon, Wojciech S. Sokolowski et al (2004).**

**General Assembly** – UNDP also derives its mandate to engage with civil society from a variety of UN agreements and bodies, including the United Nations Charter and the Millennium Declaration (2000). Current reform efforts geared towards "Delivering as One" call for more understanding and outreach to local actors including civil society to help countries achieve development objectives. Recent General Assembly resolutions have made specific reference to UNDP and civil society, especially as a convener for multi-stakeholder partnerships (2008), fostering democratic governance assistance programmes (2007), and enabling national ownership of development programmes (2005).<sup>3</sup>

**Country Demands** – UNDP has a longstanding record in engaging with civil society (see Box 2 on definitions) at the country level in a range of issue areas. While civil society thus contributes in essential ways to the joint task of achieving national development goals, the UNDP relationship with civil society in countries complements its trusted relationship with governments, without in any way diminishing or undermining the roles and capacities of the state.

Responses from 102 country offices for a 2008 global UNDP inventory showed that the organization engages heavily in "downstream" initiatives with NGOs, especially in the area of programme delivery, channeling \$100m through them. A number of countries also cite as priorities "upstream" efforts: to support civic participation in national policy processes through dialogue and advocacy, expand the space for government-civil society interactions, and strengthen networking and technical capacities.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Of the 36 country programme documents approved by the Executive Board at its January 2007 session, all but four include provisions that fall within the area of civic engagement. The Regional Bureau for Africa is implementing a regional civil society strengthening programme (2006-2008) and a similar programme is being piloted in the Regional Bureau for Arab States.

<sup>2</sup> UNDP Strategic Plan (2008-2011): see paragraphs 17, 28 (e), 63, 83, 86, 89, and 104.

<sup>3</sup> See resolutions A/RES/62/208, A/RES/62/150 and A/RES/59/250.

<sup>4</sup> The **UNDP Country Office Engagement with Civil Society: A Global Inventory (2008)** elicited 102 responses from country offices, and supplemented this data with additional information from regional advisors. The inventory contains data obtained through a global survey

The growing extent of “upstream” demands is further confirmed by regional centres and practices (**Annex A**).

The priority focus areas proposed in this strategy are a response to these aggregate demands.

Specifically, the first priority focus area (invest in civil society and civic engagement) addresses demands related to capacity of and environment for civil society. These include regulatory frameworks, NGO national platforms, civic participation in democratic transition, and a range of capacity initiatives to promote the MDGs.

The second priority focus area (promote and scale up citizen action for development) addresses country demands related to capacity development of indigenous peoples, civic engagement in local governance and public services, and community adaptation strategies to climate change.

The third priority focus area (strengthen civic engagement in multilateralism) is an effort to forge a corporate response to the current global governance crises, in strategic partnership with civil society and citizen networks at local and global levels. This initiative seeks to strengthen UN reform and presence in the global arena and harness civil society goodwill and trust in the United Nations as the heart of the multilateral system.

Country context will doubtless influence the implementation of the proposals contained in the strategy. The nature of civil society and the immediate environment, including relations with the state and ability to function in public life, vary considerably across the world, with particular challenges in fragile, post-conflict states and emerging democracies. UNDP must evidently be mindful of the context and the fluidity of engagement with civil society, and adapt the proposals to different country situations. It may be necessary, for example, to allow for a scale of evolving possibilities while pursuing new forms of partnerships and consultative mechanisms. A UNDP role may be especially valued in expanding the space for state-citizen peer and other review mechanisms, which look at the role of UN(DP) in countries and help to keep the organization on its toes and relevant.

While understanding the importance of different strategic approaches that need to be taken, by different actors, the strategy consistently recommends that country offices take steps to pro-actively engage with diverse civil society partners in diverse arrangements to strengthen development outcomes – always bearing in mind that the UNDAF and DEX/NEX remain the underpinning frameworks and instruments.

### **B. UNDP imperative to work with civil society**

**Constituency and Partner** – Civil society contributions are key to the alternative vision and policy choices that UNDP seeks to offer governments. A world characterized by increasingly complex development challenges makes it essential for UNDP to broaden and deepen engagement with multiple civil society actors, in both supportive and strategic ways, to complement the work of the United Nations with governments, adapt to new voices, and remain a relevant player in a dynamic development landscape.

**MDGs and Inclusive Development** – Equitable and inclusive strategies to pursue MDG-based development call for active involvement of all local actors, especially those representing marginalized groups and indigenous peoples (**see Box 3**) and for actions at sub-national levels to adapt the goals and targets to meet lo-

#### **Box 3 – Civic Engagement, Volunteerism & MDGs**

The opening up of new channels for civic engagement offers enormous potential in helping to meet the MDGs. Volunteerism is an important channel for citizens to engage in development. While governments in many industrialized countries have long sought ways and means to promote all forms of voluntary action, developing countries are now also putting in place policies that expand opportunities for civic engagement in national development through voluntary action. Civic engagement through volunteerism yields many dividends in fostering inclusion, ownership and sustainability, and particularly in ensuring efficiency and accountability in service delivery.

**- United Nations Volunteers (2008)**

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of country Offices carried out between November 2007 and March 2008 on: *contracting modalities; volume of engagement; sectors of engagement; current advisory and support services on offer to country offices*. (Oslo Governance Centre/UNDP Bureau for Development Policy, in collaboration with the Civil Society Division/Partnerships Bureau).

cal realities. Critically, the MDGs are benchmarks for public scrutiny of national policy: the goals and targets provide civil society with a standard of measurement of development performance.

Alongside local actions involving government authorities and citizens, civil society advocacy globally is key to ensure more and better aid, more equity in international decision making, and to work towards globalization that benefits all, as agreed in the Millennium Declaration. It is crucial that UNDP sustain and expand its efforts to support civil society at national and global levels to accelerate progress towards the MDGs.

**Civic Engagement for Voice and Accountability** – Civic engagement can be defined as actions freely undertaken by citizens on an individual or collective basis to identify and address matters of public concern. These actions can take many forms – directly addressing an issue, working with others in a community to solve problems, or interacting with the institutions of representative democracy. Accountability and voice mechanisms that foster sustained civic engagement in national policy and budget dialogues are critical to the success of national development and poverty reduction strategies.<sup>5</sup> Participatory governance through civic engagement today focuses on creating inclusive and responsive democratic institutions and increasing opportunities for citizen voice.

While citizen or civil society-led initiatives are increasingly seen as critical for accountability and transparency, it is equally important to focus on ‘both sides of the citizen-state equation’ to facilitate accountability – i.e., also supporting the capacity of governments to respond to citizen demand.<sup>6</sup> The success of democratic governance depends on the existence of both a robust state and a healthy and active civil society.

**Human Development Paradigm** – The promotion of civic engagement facilitates the creation of an environment conducive for people, individually and collectively, to develop their full potential and to be able to pursue their needs and interests to lead productive lives.<sup>7</sup> Human rights and human development share a common vision and a common purpose—to secure, for every human being, freedom, well-being and dignity. Human rights are an intrinsic part of development and bring principles of accountability and social justice to the process of human development.<sup>8</sup> Rights-based approaches are based on the recognition that real success in tackling poverty and vulnerability requires giving the poor and vulnerable a stake, a voice and real protection in the societies where they live.

### C. Civil society today

**Globalization and Multilateralism** – Recent years have seen the remarkable rise of civil society as a global phenomenon. The forces of globalization have propelled the growth of civil society and citizen action and opened up a global public space for debate and actions; they have also contributed to creating global public opinion, which is shaping the political agenda and generating a cosmopolitan set of norms and citizen demands that transcend national boundaries. In this sense, as noted by the

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