

**“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.”**

**Kofi Annan**

United Nations Secretary-General

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# FOREWORD

Events of the last few years have demonstrated that civil society organizations in various forms – policy groups, peoples’ movements, trade unions, formal and informal associations – have emerged as a powerful force for social justice and equity across and within borders. They have launched campaigns and initiatives that have transformed the development agenda at global, national and community levels.

The power of civil society organizing was clearly evident during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. The summit also demonstrated that sustainable development is an issue that is both too big and too small for governments. While governments are indispensable, the challenge today calls for a multi-stakeholder approach – broad partnerships with different sectors of civil society and indeed every citizen. Such an approach cannot be entirely voluntary, but calls for government commitment and accountability. We need a framework that lets us measure the success of such partnerships with time-bound targets.

The Millennium Development Goals, endorsed by all heads of states and governments at the Millennium Summit of 2000, and resoundingly reaffirmed in Johannesburg, provide us with such a framework, to which all partners are accountable. As a policy framework, it creates space for political debate. It also calls for a broad rather than a compartmentalized approach because, to achieve impact by 2015, we must progress on all the goals simultaneously. As the United Nations embarks on a campaign to realize the goals, it needs strategic and creative alliances with civil society networks not only to help to build political will but also to raise public awareness and sustain momentum for a diverse set of targets on the road to 2015. Civil society skills in driving broad-based mobilization and creating bottom-up demand that holds leaders accountable will be essential to placing the Millennium Development Goals at the heart of national debates and development priorities. UNDP is committed to ensuring a voice for national civil society groups in the preparation of national reports tracking progress on the goals. Civil society organizations with a policy focus are contributing to efforts to ensure that the World Bank poverty reduction strategy papers are aligned with the objectives of the goals. In many of the world’s poorest countries, CSOs are directly involved in the poverty reduction strategy process to bring people’s priorities to the table. Theirs is a crucial contribution that UNDP will continue to support.

The range and versatility of civil society actors in addressing substantive policy and programming issues underscores the relevance of strong UNDP partnerships with civil society. The CSO Advisory Committee to the Administrator, composed of leading development practitioners from around the world, is testament to the importance that we attach to this relationship. It provides us with strategic guidance and policy advice in all our thematic areas and is a key forum for us to debate – and agree or disagree – on our future trajectory.

As the lead United Nations organization in poverty reduction and sustainable development, UNDP has a natural constituency in civil society organizations that are consistent and effective advocates for the poor and marginalized. This report is a snapshot of our long and multifaceted record in helping to empower and work with civil society organizations as they perform this critical task. The changing landscape of development makes it all the more imperative that we broaden and deepen these partnerships in pursuit of our common goals.



**Mark Malloch Brown**  
Administrator



# PREFACE

Partnerships with civil society organizations complement the work of UNDP with governments in essential ways. Civil society is both a vital resource and a critical constituency for UNDP in a world characterized by increasingly complex development challenges. These include rising conflict within and between states, an expanding HIV/AIDS epidemic and rapid depletion of the natural resource base on which future livelihoods depend. It is impossible to envision a future without vibrant partnerships with civil society organizations.

This report is a contribution to the inquiry of where UNDP and CSOs can together maximize their development impact. It presents, with examples, the range of UNDP-CSO partnership initiatives in programme implementation and policy advice throughout our thematic areas – from poverty and HIV/AIDS to environmental governance, conflict prevention and peace-building. The report highlights the multifaceted nature of UNDP engagement with civil society, and points to key roles that UNDP is called on to fulfil – of trusted convener, negotiator and facilitator, a provider of space for policy options and excluded perspectives, an enhancer of CSO capacity and a disseminator of instructive best practice. Drawing from the examples of partnership, the report suggests ways to strengthen UNDP engagement with CSOs for human development. What you have before you is a handbook of best practices for engagement with civil society.

A new generation of innovative policies guides our engagement with a broad range of civil society actors. Two key policies on engagement with CSOs and with indigenous peoples and their organizations were endorsed in 2001. They constitute a formal expression of UNDP commitment to deepen its partnership with CSOs. To assist country offices in applying these commitments, a practical source-book on civil society organizations was published in 2002.

We believe that dynamic partnerships with civil society organizations are essential for generating public awareness and political support for human development priorities, as well as for implementing programmes. Civil society must be at the heart of any sustainable development response. We are committed to creating the political space for CSOs to express alternative views and influence policy dialogue and decision-making, as well as supporting their work in addressing the rights and needs of vulnerable and marginalized people throughout the world.

This report on best practices has been a collaborative effort led by the Civil Society Organizations Division. We hope that you will find this a useful presentation of current interesting practices.



**Bruce Jenks**

Director

Bureau for Resources and Strategic Partnerships

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