





Introduction

Working with civil society is central to working towards the outcomes of the CARE 2020 Program Strategy. This resource aims to provide you with ideas and suggestions for deepening the work with civil society. It complements the guidance on Inclusive Governance by further elaborating ideas and approaches on working with organized citizens, i.e. CSOs at local and global level, as well as expanding spaces for negotiation with duty bearers to make them more accountable. This resource has been developed with our long-term development work in mind, but applies to humanitarian contexts where CARE is increasingly called on to work with, and build capacity of, local civil society actors.

The resource **contains** an outline of roles that CARE can play in relation to other civil society organisations and guidance on steps to take our partnerships to the next level. In the annexes, you will find a set of minimum standards for partnerships and an analysis of global civil society trends.

Background - call for change

The consultation process revealed that CARE Member Partners and Country Offices are beginning to take encouraging steps towards working in strategic partnerships with other civil society organisations and to changing our partnership model. The process also revealed that there is a need for a greater push for CARE to let go of an **outdated model** characterized by a **CARE-centric instrumentalist approach** to working with **partners as 'implementers'** of CARE programmes. Historically, CARE has played a more direct operational role as an implementer, and we have retained a large part of that role with 'implementing partners' delivering our programmes. Rather than being genuine partnerships characterized by shared influence and power, these sub-grant relationships are often driven by CARE agendas and compliance to our systems and policies.

Southern civil society are increasingly vocal in its **criticism** of INGOs and the way we bypass local civil society in humanitarian emergencies. In development, we are criticized for the competing over resources and ownership of agendas with southern civil society who are more legitimate 'owners' of those agendas. This undermines our credibility

DEFINITIONS

Civil society can be defined as: the arena between the state, the market and the family/household in which people organize themselves to pursue shared interests or values in public life.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) include all non-market and non-state organisations outside of the family in which people organise themselves to pursue shared interests in the public domain. This includes formal NGOs, informal groups, faith based groups, social movements, labour unions, trade associations, non-profit media and think tanks. These forms can be more or less democratic and progressive, and can also include extremist groups.

¹The resource has been drafted based on an analysis of civil society trends, consultations with country offices across regions, interviews with external stakeholders, analysis of country presence reviews and input from civil society partners. Input from civil society partners via CARE Denmark partnership survey, CARE Tanzania consultation response, country presence review documents on consultation with partners, interview with CDRA, South Africa

and legitimacy as a development and humanitarian actor. **Donors** are increasingly **signaling** that they would like to **bypass INGOs** and work directly with southern CSOs. There is a clear trend in funding going directly to southern CSOs. Management consultants and private **sector companies are competing** for resourcing with INGOs in other spaces. This poses challenges to our operational model and calls for a change.

There are still some fundamental **barriers** to a new partnership model in our organizational **culture and systems**. These relate to our **funding model** and an over reliance on restricted funding limiting our ability to provide long-term strategic support to partner organisations. The related structures, systems and governance preoccupations make us highly focused on managing **compliance** and **risk**, which results in a narrative that portrays 'partners' as risky and something to be worried about and managed rather than enabled. We sometimes view **other civil society actors as competitors** for the resources that allow CARE to function. This compromises our appetite and ability to collaborate and to promote their interests and agendas. This culture contradicts the CARE programming principle of 'working in partnership', and the Program Strategy ambition to position CARE as a 'partner of choice'.

To give momentum to the progressive change that is happening across CARE, we need to take advantage of the **enablers** and **opportunities** presenting themselves. The **Vision 2020** argues that CI will only remain relevant if it engages more profoundly with civil society actors/peoples movements, and the two-pager on Local to Global Partnerships recognize that CARE has to play new roles in a context where Southern civil society is growing stronger and more vibrant, and 'north-south' and 'south-south' relationships are changing. The **Southern membership agenda** is also changing the identity of the organisation from representing an old world order to a new one with North-South boundaries vanishing.

To move towards a new partnership model requires backing from CARE leaders, managers and staff working in humanitarian and development aid across programme, operations, fundraising, HR and communications. We need to move away from the narrative that CARE is an organization that fundraises in the North to 'help' poor people in the South through projects that we implement. Increasingly we need to see ourselves as part of a global civil society with capacity and responsibility to address drivers of inequality wherever we work, in the global North and the global South in partnership with likeminded organisations and citizen movements.

The focusing of CARE's work around thematic outcome areas pose an opportunity to identify and **sustain strategic partnerships** with CSOs. The strengthening of our **advocacy** provides an opportunity for working more closely with peer NGOs/CSOs as allies. The programme strategy emphasis on embedding **inclusive governance** into all our programming compels us to work in ways that more consistently see us engage with citizens organisations and wider civil society. The **Country Presence Reviews** also fairly consistently signal shifts by Country Offices towards a more progressive partnership model. The investment in a **Humanitarian Partnership Co-ordinator** can be used as an opportunity to expand our partnerships with other local and international humanitarian actors.

The time has come to review our partnership model and embark on a new path more consistent with our vision. If we want to see change in this world, we need to start with ourselves and be the change.

How can the resource be used and followed up?

We need to promote change by **doing things differently**. Guidance and suggestions for working with others and in partnership with civil society organisations can be found in this resource and in the annex.

Along with this resource, we are starting a **Community of Practice** around civil society collaboration and partnership approaches. We have started gathering useful resources on [Minerva](#) where we have created a space for practical tools and case study examples. We need your contributions to make this space a useful knowledge bank.

This is a living document and suggestions for changes and additions are welcome.

Roles for CARE in collaborating with civil society

New roles for CARE

The changing context² calls for a change in the roles CARE plays at local and global level and the CARE Vision 2020 and Program Strategy recognizes this need for continuous adaptation to context. As a global civil society actor, CARE is inherently a part of civil society and does not hover above it. We play different roles in relation to governments and related political actors, to the private sector and in relation to peers and to civil society organisations.

By entering into relations with peers and with civil society organisations who share the same visions of social justice³, we can multiply impact, achieve greater policy influence and increase our knowledge and capacity as an organisation as we are learning from others and from joint efforts to tackle the underlying causes of poverty and social injustice.

Context is key

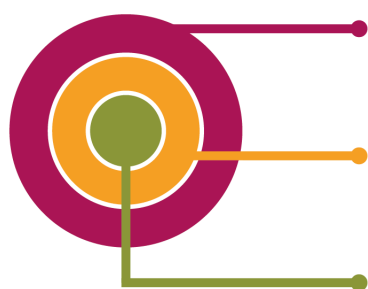
CARE can take up multiple roles in relation to peers, local and global civil society organisations. The choice of strategies must be informed by a thorough analysis of the context including power dynamics and the legal and political space for civil society. We need to mainstream this kind of systematic context analysis in our programs. In our traditional approach to program designs, we often stop at the level of the community as the base of analysis and rarely look at the context in terms of power and stakeholders in civil society. We do not need to invent the tools for these types of analyses. We can use tools and analyses from CSOs like CIVICUS, fellow INGO, or donors such as the EU who develops CSO roadmaps in countries.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to civil society collaboration, and there is always a need to analyse how CARE can collaborate with civil society organisations, even if civil society is weak or highly restricted in a given context. In fragile contexts, CARE will need to take extra care to do-no-harm and to support civil society in a way that promotes peace and dialogue. In situations where civil society space is restricted, CARE needs to find a way to advance human rights agendas and gender equity and push for greater space without posing risks to staff and partners or jeopardizing the ability to work in the country. In situations with relatively open space and increasingly capable civil society actors, CARE needs to speed up the shift from our traditional roles as community workers, project managers and implementers to more indirect and supportive roles to remain relevant and demand-driven.

Below is a non-exhaustive outline of potential roles for CARE. We are already playing many of these roles as evidenced by the consultation input. CARE will typically play a combination of roles depending on the context, and it is not the intention to say that we should play all roles, all the time and in all places. The section focuses on what CARE can bring to the table to address the issue of value addition and relevance. This doesn't mean that we always add value or have a role to play, and it should not in any way diminish the wealth of capacities and skills that other civil society actors have to offer.

CARE frameworks and collaboration with civil society organisations

The CARE International Unifying Framework, the Women's Empowerment Framework and the Governance Programming framework can help structure our thinking around support to civil society. They all take into consideration the following three dimensions, also used to structure this section:



Structures, spaces and enabling environment

* the space for civil society to operate and the support it receives from government, private sector and donors.

Relations and social position

* collaboration with peers and relations with power-holders are key for civil society actors to influence policies and practices.

Empowerment and agency

* the capacity and ability of CSOs to act on behalf of poor and marginalized groups and aggregate and forward demands to influence processes.

²See annex 2

³When we refer to CSOs with whom CARE wants to collaborate, we refer to pro-democratic and human rights based forms of civil society organisations who share our vision of social justice and gender equity achieved through non-violent means.

Key roles for CARE

OPENING SPACES AND CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY



Advocate for civil society

Strong and vibrant civil societies require space, but this space is often restricted by states, as well as by donors to some extent. CARE should use its leverage as an INGO and member of sector/NGO coordination groups to monitor national NGO legislation and advocate locally, regionally and globally for enabling legislation and for the inclusion of civil society as actors in development in policy design, budget monitoring, etc. In many cases, CARE will choose to support existing local and regional civil society coalitions to engage with governments and political parties or lobby donors to negotiate the opening or preservation of existing space. In other cases where such platforms do not exist, CARE should support their creation on an inclusive basis.

CARE can use its connections with authorities and political parties to make them more open to receiving recommendations from civil society. In countries where local authorities do not listen to INGOs, CARE can ally with other local and regional actors (e.g. trade unions, state-related workers' associations, regional state conferences) to include civil society's perspectives. CARE can also approach multilateral institutions, regional bodies and other states for example in donor countries to put pressure on the governments to open up the space through bilateral dialogue or through mechanisms such as the [UN Universal Periodic Review of human rights](#).

In relation to donors, CARE should lobby to make flexible funds available for long-term institutional support to civil society organizations (especially for women's rights organizations that are generally underfinanced); design gender aware results based management systems compatible with the nature of civil society support, and get donors to share financial risks. We should also lobby to improve access to funding for local civil society organizations, including those closest to right-holders at grassroots level.



Political protector

In some contexts, CARE's international status and visibility makes us less exposed to direct pressures and retaliation from power-holders compared to local civil society. In those situations, CARE should offer 'an umbrella when it rains' and advocate on behalf of local civil society, when it is too risky for them to be in the forefront. While remaining politically independent and impartial, the humanitarian imperative and our human rights-based principles invite us to use our leverage to advocate for freedom of speech and protection of human rights activists. This protection role applies as well in relation to private sector such as banks and insurance companies ("customer protection" and workers' rights) or mining companies and similar (e.g. in cases of land rights disputes).

In other contexts, our international status makes it more challenging for us to advocate and our presence and support could delegitimize the work of local civil society actors (e.g. if we are accused of being "foreign agents" by the authorities or if we crowd the space of existing trade unions and consumers' associations). Hence, the extent to which we use the political protection role in relation to local civil society actors should always be demand-driven and based on context and do-no-harm analyses.

"If we want to support a southern voice we can't do that by remaining silent. CARE needs to stand by organizations that are prepared to stand up for holding duty bearers accountable".

CARE Tanzania



Fellow advocate

When requested by our civil society partners, and when the context allows it, we should be willing to step up and stand side-by-side with partners in public to advocate on sticky issues. This can help give visibility and hence make it harder for duty bearers to ignore or silence the voices from civil society⁴. CARE should analyse and use the possibilities for lobbying governments in the Global North (e.g. at EU level) using its international network within and outside of CARE, in coalition with peers and other civil society actors.



Convener of meeting spaces

In line with the third domain in the Governance Programming framework, CARE sometimes has a role to play in creating, expanding and strengthening both formal and informal spaces for civil society actors to meet with each other, and with power-holders and duty bearers including public authorities, political parties and private sector. Creating informal spaces is particularly important in contexts where formal spaces do not exist or where the existing spaces are unsafe, not inclusive to grassroots level civil society organisations (especially women's rights organizations, as well as trade unions) or not efficient. Where spaces cannot be created locally, facilitating access to regional platforms can be an alternative. Our role is to "enable effective and inclusive relations and negotiation between concerned actors" ([CI 2020 Program Strategy](#)).

Context-sensitivity is important, as many factors contribute to define the space, such as the place (no place is neutral), the time (which is a gendered aspect), and of course who is invited or excluded. Being able to convene such spaces requires some authority recognized by those we want to invite, and whether our ability to do so is based on experience, reputation, formal role, funding power, etc. will influence the response we receive. In some cases and in a perspective of strengthening civil society, we should also leave this role to legitimate local actors. To be a good convener, we need to be aware and realistic about our authority, able to analyse our context and to identify key players.



Conflict mediator

The shifting of power relations in favour of formerly excluded groups (incl. women) can evoke resistance of those in power and lead to backlash against these groups. In order to avoid doing harm, CARE should expand and strengthen spaces for dialogue and negotiation, in order to channel demands and negotiate competing interests between actors within civil society, or between civil society, state actors (including political parties) and private sector.

In fragile contexts, characterised by mistrust at all levels and between civil society and the state, CARE should play a role in improving trust and re-building social contracts within civil society and between CSOs and the state through dialogue and accountability mechanisms aimed at improving governance and service delivery. As an international non-partisan organization, CARE should sometimes play a mediator role, and help parties to identify solutions that will enable them to move forward. This role can also involve training local conflict mediators and supporting mediator organisations. CARE is privileged to have access to millions of women and to a range of women's organizations and networks who play such conflict mediator roles on a daily basis, and from whom we have much to learn. As part of the context analysis and [do-no-harm](#) approach, CARE can partner with and train local actors in conflict mapping and gender analysis tools to map relations among stakeholders, both between civil society organizations and between civil society and other stakeholders. Considering how stakeholders might be connectors or dividers would be a first step.

POINT ON FRAGILE CONTEXTS

In fragile contexts where CSOs often take up service delivery tasks to respond to immediate needs, CARE can play a role in supporting CSOs to deliver services effectively while linking this to advocacy and capacity building of authorities to restore and improve the government's ability to deliver services. Service delivery can be a necessary entry point to create legitimacy for local and international civil society in these contexts (as well as for authorities), and should always be coupled with a long-term perspective to build civil society and government capacity.

More about fragile contexts can be found in [CARE Netherlands' 2015-2020 Program Strategy](#).

⁴For further guidance on advocacy, please refer to the directions being developed under the "Multiplying Impact" role of the CARE 2020 Program Strategy.



RELATIONSHIP BUILDER

Connector

CARE should continue to enter into alliances and join networks to amplify voice on key issues including climate change, food security and women's sexual reproductive rights. To be a good networker, we need to continuously update our mapping of civil society actors in a given context and be good at forming relevant alliances.

In collaboration with other civil society actors, we can draw on our global network that include peer INGOs, research institutions and other CSOs at all levels. Partners are often expecting us to facilitate access to our networks within and across regions. Our efforts to connect civil society organizations with the relevant local, national, regional and international networks can contribute to expose them to more knowledge, strengthen their profile and enable them to share their experience at new levels and to coordinate better.

Our role should be to seek to strengthen both horizontal and vertical linkages to create greater alignment around common change agendas to increase the influence of civil society. Horizontal linkages can include facilitating new networks and coalitions where they do not exist, by connecting potential members together. Likewise, connecting CS actors in different parts of the world to exchange experience, build solidarity and mobilize citizens is also a role we should play as a global actor in civil society. We can facilitate vertical links by linking grassroots groups or networks to national, regional or international networks and organizations to create flows of information and support. INGOs too often contribute to fragmentation of civil society by creating parallel structures, new groups and networks. Therefore, we should first analyse who and what exists already and then ask how we can support and add value.

“Our biggest value addition is not technical skills or skills in project delivery or donor management (our partners often match or exceed our skills in these areas): it is the fact that behind a CARE manager or staff member in a country office is a global network of colleagues, relationships and knowledge that she or he can interrogate and mobilize for ideas, experience, resources and action.”

CARE ECSA

Case example: CARE has played a role as a constructive supporter of climate policy networks through the Southern Voices Programme. In national networks and coalitions, INGOs such as CARE have legitimately advocated governments side by side with national NGOs representing local civil society voices. Key success factors have been flexible funding for networks to develop their own agendas; added value from INGOs in the form of know-how, tools, and global linkages; and cross learning between networks in the Programme.

Partnerships among civil society organizations and between them and other stakeholders – mainly research institutions, human rights institutes, trade unions, private sector, political parties and authorities – are an important way for civil society actors to increase their leverage. However, collaboration does not always come naturally for CSOs in contexts defined by a lack of trust, patriarchal culture, competition or where partnering with government or private sector actors can be perceived as a threat or as colluding with power holders. **Brokering healthy partnerships** and win-win scenarios is a role that requires specific skills⁶ such as meeting facilitation, interest-based negotiations, coaching and partnership review, which need to be enhanced for CARE to play this role. Focusing on partnership management – and not only on *partner* management – requires new skills, tools and mind-sets.

⁶See for example *The Brokering Guidebook from The Partnering Initiative*
<http://thepartneringinitiative.org/publications/toolbook-series/the-brokering-guidebook/> (login required)



Door opener

In all countries where CARE is present, we build and develop relations with power holders such as authorities and the private sector. There is a great potential for these relations to benefit our civil society partners and local activists. Consultations indicate that partners expect this of us, and see this as our value addition. Working as door openers, we should connect partners and activists with decision makers locally ('South-South'), in donor countries and at international level ('South-North') in order to enhance the direct influence of civil society on policies (including donor policies).

CARE should strive to create space for local civil society to participate in international political fora such as the climate change negotiations, post-2015 negotiations, UNSCR1325 and the Commission on the Status of Women (local to global). We should open the doors for our partners to mechanisms such as the UN Universal periodic review processes, where UN member states assess the adherence to human rights frameworks signed by the state under review. Among the power-holders we want to influence, the private sector plays an increasingly important role, and we should support our partners to engage in dialogue with or advocate with international and national companies. As some of these power-holders (both public and private) can be both donors and advocacy targets, we will need to have a coordinated approach across CARE to balance the risks and prioritize interests.



Public support mobilizer

To truly multiply our impact, CARE should play an increasing role in mobilizing public engagement across the globe, which implies a shift in the way we understand our roles, especially in the Global North. CARE teams should continue to develop strategies and learn from civil society organisations and social movements how to mobilize the public, not only as a proxy to raise funds, but as a strategy to increase awareness on "glocal"⁷ issues, put pressure on duty bearers (government and private sector), and create solidarity between civil society in the Global South and North. We should link up to social movements and global civil society campaigns when these seek to advance the same objectives of social justice and use methods that we agree with (e.g. the One Billion Rising campaign to end violence against women). By mobilizing the public, we can help bring attention to rights violations and gender inequity, and increase international support in times of direct threats against human rights and civil society⁸. As CARE is increasingly dealing with global issues such as climate change and women's rights, this broad mobilization becomes even more critical for us to fully play our role as member of a global civil society.

While increasing public support in the Global North and in the South, we have to be aware that CARE is not always in the best position to mobilize people around change agendas. In some contexts we will not be perceived as legitimate actor to do this because of our INGO status. Instead, we can remain in the backseat and support local civil society actors, who can legitimately rally support behind a cause, and who are committed to change agendas and women's rights in the long-term and not only when funding is available.

As several countries in the Global South experience a market of potential local private donors emerging, CARE offices need to learn from the experience gained in the more traditional donor countries to reach private donors and obtain financial support.

INVESTOR IN ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITIES

Capacity builder

The term 'capacity strengthening' can imply that CARE always has the capacity, which is far from always being the case. Increasingly, we are collaborating with organisations with more capacity than us and we have much to learn from them. Sometimes we have expertise that is useful to and requested by civil society actors and we can act as a direct capacity-builder. Other times, it may be through our role as a connector and broker of relations and knowledge, that we can add value. Connecting civil society organizations

"We need to be careful of the 'strengthening' narrative as it is (can be) colonial and condescending. In many countries local civil society might be considerably stronger than CARE is itself." CARE Pakistan



⁷ «Glocal» is a contraction of «global» and «local» to express how domestic issues in any context are related to global processes with local consequences in other countries.

⁸ For this purpose, the UNGA Resolution 68/181 on protecting women's rights defenders is a tool we could use.

in need of capacity building with relevant providers, and building the capacities of these providers is a way to multiply our impact. Coordination between international and local partners seeking to make capacity-building investments can be an important role for CARE⁹. In any case we should consider capacity building as a two-direction process in which we are also learning to think outside the CARE box.

A key aspect contributing to the evolution of CARE's approach to capacity building is the understanding that supporting civil society organizations to be effective development actors goes *beyond what we need from partners in terms of compliance and project implementation*. In other words, strengthening our partners as true actors in civil society – not only as sub-contractors of our programs – needs to be demand-driven and included in any program design. Capacity building needs to take a long-term perspective and not only address immediate gaps. Developing capacity in human rights based approaches, gender transformation, civic education, and accountability should be at the heart of our support as our partners, or social movements and activists, whom we support and collaborate with, are taking up a more active – and sometimes political roles.

In order to decide which capacity development support is appropriate, we need to use participatory approaches respecting the diversity of institutional forms and models that characterize a legitimate and vibrant civil society. We need to avoid creating “small CAREs” by imposing our organizational model on organisations for which it is not relevant.

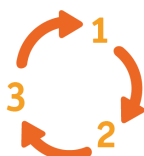


Knowledge broker– learning facilitator

CARE should continuously strive to be a learning organisation, demonstrating openness and transparency by sharing our best knowledge and methods and constantly seeking to learn from others. CARE has access to a wealth of expertise, best practice and innovation from within the CARE family and from our networks and partners. Our role should consist in collecting, documenting and sharing approaches, and adapting and contextualizing knowledge and well-tested models to make them useful to local civil society partners and thereby scale up pro-poor, gender sensitive approaches.

Although CARE has developed a lot of expertise in different areas over the years in collaboration with our partners, we have not always been good at sharing this knowledge within the CARE world, with our partners and with others. One aim should be a well-functioning knowledge management system within CARE, while we should also strive to make our gender, poverty, power and other context analyses as well as key models and approaches available to our peers and partners. We also need to get better at seeing what kind of information and models are out there and can be adopted to avoid duplication of resources.

CARE should play a role in bringing together civil society actors, researchers, INGOs, multilateral organizations, donors, political parties and authorities on specific learning agendas, and we should create opportunities for us and them to learn from each other and together. We can formulate learning questions and facilitate learning processes with others. Our excuse for not doing it is usually related to time and money. Specific learning events require a budget and needs to be considered while budgeting for new initiatives and negotiating with donors. However, learning is also a matter of asking questions when the opportunity arises, and that kind of learning is free.



Civil society grant manager

CARE should keep playing a role as a manager of grants to civil society on behalf of donors in a changing donor landscape with new donors emerging (private sector and foundations) and new forms of funding being available (e.g. pooled funds). Joint donor civil society funds are becoming popular, and large (often expensive) consultancy companies are often contracted to manage the grants. CARE can add value as an alternative grant manager because of our context analysis and knowledge of emerging civil society actors. Thereby, we can help channel resources to small, grassroots organisations who find it difficult to otherwise access donor funds. We can influence funding streams in the direction of long-term investment in initiatives, which build organisational capacity and allow local civil society to undertake advocacy, when the context allows it.

⁹An example of this approach is the Social Impact Incubator developed by CARE in Burundi with the support of other INGOs and private donors (ref. the related [case study](#) on Minerva)



to taking partnership to a new level

CARE as a partner of choice

Partnerships with civil society organisations is a common working modality in CARE, and CARE strategies talk about CARE being a 'partner of choice'. Yet, there is general recognition within and outside of CARE that the term 'partnership' implies a degree of equality and mutuality, which is rarely seen in the relations.

Our 'partnerships' are often sub-contracting relationships tied to a specific funding and timeframe. Our 'partners' often sign a 'sub-contract' agreement with CARE which emphasizes this lead/sub relation and embeds an inherent power inequality. Increasingly, our operating model is being challenged as donors are bypassing INGOs to fund Global South civil society directly or invite INGOs like CARE to take a 'sub' rather than a 'lead' role for example in local EU calls for proposals or in consortia with other civil society organisations.

To be a 'partner of choice' for civil society partners, CARE must be ready to take steps to go beyond relationships characterized by compliance and delivery of CARE designed projects.

The different nature of relationships and influence

An important starting point is to reflect on the nature of our partnerships and partner's influence and engagement. A way of illustrating different types of relationships, influence and engagement is the below continuum starting with *information sharing* e.g. with development allies in networks; to *consultation and dialogue* with implementing partners e.g. in sub-contracting relationships; to *shared influence and joint control* in relations where CARE is providing institutional support in mutual and near equal strategic partnerships.

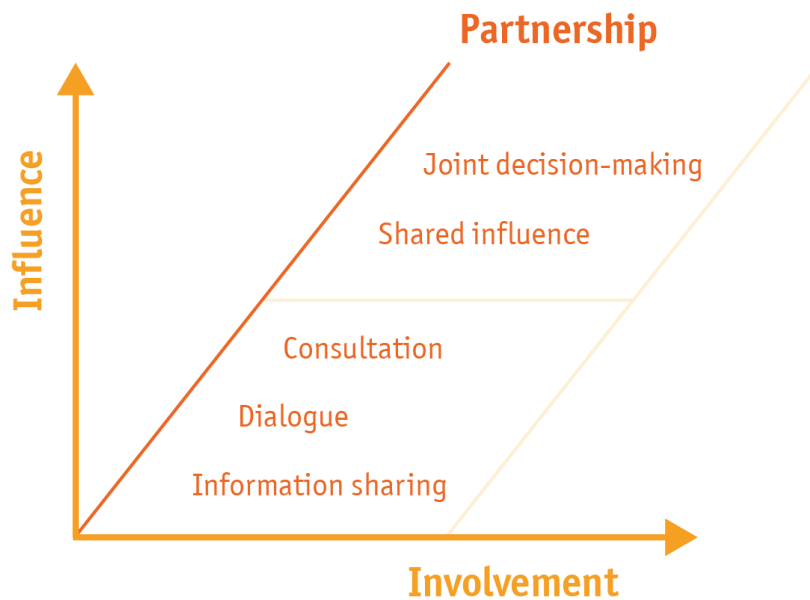


Figure adapted from [World Bank – Civil Society Engagement Review](#)

The degree of partner influence and engagement (depth) increases as the nature of partnerships goes from broad alliances to focused institutional support (breadth). The idea of the continuum is *not* that all relationships move in the direction of full-fledged partnerships. Different relationships serve different purposes. At the same time, there is increased recognition in CARE that we need to take *some* relationships to the next level going from consultation to joint control and decision-making and increase the depth of engagement. To become or remain ‘a partner of choice’ there are certain organizational practices that we need to change. The figure could be extended with a step, which goes beyond joint decision-making. In a trusting and mature partnership, the partner should be making independent decisions, with CARE in the back seat providing advice.

Steps towards more genuine partnerships

START WITH OURSELVES

To be fit for partnering, we need a *culture* that support working in partnerships. Our culture is reflected in attitudes, language and the systems we build. We need *leadership, systems and personal capacities* that support partnerships.



Figure adapted from the [Partnering Initiative](#).



Show leadership CARE directors and senior managers must send clear signals that we need to invest significantly in building genuine partnerships. They can push for the development of partnership strategies, prioritize internal capacity building and systems to enable CARE to be a better partner, but also engage directly with partners. For example, senior CARE staff in country should regularly put aside time to sit with the Executive Secretaries or CEOs of partners for open discussion not linked to project performance.

Make it personal Partnerships are about relations between people and the attitudes and behaviour we bring into the partnership. As the often powerful partner (in terms of funding), CARE needs to go first in the game of trust and change. We need to demonstrate partnership values rather than just talk or write about them. The *stories* we tell about partnerships in our organisation matter.

See examples of [partnership strategies](#) in Minerva.

Be more flexible and efficient To take our partnerships to a different level will require more flexibility on our side. Flexibility as regards formats for reporting and assessments, and funding modalities, i.e. enabling basket funding to civil society partners to harmonize funding with other supporters. An often heard complaint from our partners is that our systems are too slow and bureaucratic. We need to become more flexible and efficient; otherwise we are finding ourselves in a situation where our systems and procedures are undermining principles for genuine partnerships.

Sometimes we are making life more difficult for ourselves and partners than it has to be, but often we are doing this to comply with inflexible donor requirements. Hence, advocating for more flexibility with donors is important. We should explore the space that we have within the compliance requirements and carefully consider *how* we introduce these requirements.

The Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action have called for greater harmonization and alignment for years, and our institutional donors and even we as CARE have signed these declarations, but still need to put the principles into practice. We cannot change our entire system overnight, but we can take small steps, such as meeting with the other organisations who support our partners and agree to do joint capacity assessments or impact monitoring. Increasing the flexibility of our systems is increasingly important when working with informal organisations and movements.

“We have introduced such complicated procedures for partner organization that every activist tends to ignore us.”

CARE Tanzania

There are examples within CARE where we have managed to harmonize and align with others successfully. For example in Nepal, CARE is supporting a partner (a land rights forum) in a basket funding arrangement with other INGOs and donors. The partner sends one audit and one financial and narrative report to CARE and the other supporters. There are also good examples of harmonisation from Ghana (the KASA platform) and Niger. If these things are possible in Nepal, Ghana and Niger it should be possible in other COs. Please help upload these [case studies](#) on Minerva.



CONTINUE TO LISTEN

Keep listening to what our partners are asking for

in terms of capacity building and support. If we listen, capacity support becomes demand driven as opposed to supply driven. Being a good and active listener requires practice, especially if we are used to talking more, or listening for the things, we want to hear. It requires self-criticism and the will and curiosity to go beyond the obvious.

Learn from partners As an INGO, we sometimes tend to think that we have, or should have all the answers and that partners should gather around us. To develop true partnerships, we need to adopt more humble attitudes and learn from our partners' experience and perspectives. A good way to demonstrate this attitude is to go to partner offices for meetings (even if they are on the 'wrong' side of town). Take time to discuss and feedback on reports and ask open questions. Focus on what is going well and why, instead of only pointing out what needs to improve. We need to embrace the fact that our partners have skills and knowledge that we lack, and that complements ours. If we are open to it, we can change our way of working.

Demonstrate accountability and ask for opinions about how we are performing as a partner. Rather than assuming that we add value, we should ask where we can add value and ask to be evaluated based on our contribution. To become more open and accountable, we can use a mix of formal and informal ways to share information, increase participation and retrieve solicited and unsolicited feedback. This can involve sending out anonymous partnership surveys allowing open and honest feedback, regularly inviting partners for a scoreboard exercise to come up with indicators for good partnerships, doing annual social audits where we invite partners, civil society and government representatives to question our work and give suggestions. Annual partner meetings can also be used to reflect on the partnership and get feedback and suggestions, if we pay attention to opening up these spaces for actual reflection and follow up on critical feedback and good ideas.

Tools to assess partnerships give a good basis for evaluating and improving the partnerships and should increasingly be adopted in CARE programmes. It turns the power balance around, when partners are invited to feedback on CARE's support and value addition. It also gives CARE managers and staff clear evidence and incentives for investing in the partnership. There are emerging practises within CARE on this. For example, CARE Peru, CARE Ecuador, CARE Denmark and CARE Tanzania use partnership surveys to get regular and anonymous feedback from partners. Oxfam uses Keystone surveys to get feedback from partners and publishes the results.

Check the collection of [partnership assessment tools](#) on Minerva!

RECIPE FOR STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY

1. Listen
2. Ask where we can add value
3. Find ways to amplify voices

CARE South Africa





INCREASED SHARING OF POWER

Increase the power and influence of our partners. This is one of the most difficult but equally important steps towards more genuine partnerships. Being ready to invest in partners and *cultivate trust* in partnerships. Sometimes our partners can find new and better ways to reach results although these might look more risky and unfamiliar to us at first sight. Our most common excuse for not giving up control is our compliance agenda in CARE. However, trusting partners is not about blindly transferring large sums of money with no accountability. Genuine trust is not naïve; it is based on performance and should involve rigorous analysis and risk mitigation.

Promote genuine joint decision-making. Increasing the power and influence of partners is not just about funding and financial risk. It is about taking a back seat role and supporting partners to come to the forefront of planning and decision-making. As funding opportunities come up, involve partners in the design decisions and seek alignment with their strategic plans and civil society agendas more broadly. To go even further, try out new models of letting partners make the key decisions with CARE taking a more back-seat advisory role, for example by setting up of project steering committees where partners and stakeholders have the majority of votes, thereby automatically reducing the power of CARE. Such approaches are found within the CARE world, including in Niger and Tanzania, but they require willingness on our side and trust in the partners, often cultivated through years of partnership.

See the [case studies](#) on Minerva!

SELECT THE RIGHT PARTNERS FOR THE RIGHT PURPOSE

Clarify our theory of change for support to civil society partners. It is important to be clear on why we are entering into partnerships with civil society organisations in the given context, and what level of partner involvement and influence (figure above) suits that purpose. This has implications for nature of the partnerships and our investment in partners. We also need clarify our ‘theory of influence’ meaning that we need to analyse how we can best add value and catalyse change.



An example of such a theory of change can be found in the [CARE Denmark’s Strategy 2014-2017](#).

Continuously analyse civil society context as a prerequisite to partner selection and to understand who has the potential to be drivers of change, and who can legitimately provide a voice to the impact groups, whom CARE exists to serve. If we intend to support civil society partners to be agents of change, then we should know who they are and how we can support them, especially with emerging forms of organisation (social movements, etc.). We need to get better at doing such analysis in CARE locally and globally. We can start by using existing analysis e.g. from CIVICUS (including their civil society index) or the EU roadmaps and finding research partners who can help us. Check on Minerva for [context analysis tools](#), an analytical framework in [CARE Norway’s strategy on strengthening civil society](#) and [examples of context analysis](#).

Find the balance between selecting organisations who have *high capacity* and demonstrated ability to influence change and deliver on shared objectives, and those who have *limited capacity* in the traditional sense but score high on integrity, values, and legitimacy in terms of belonging to or representing marginalized population groups, such as women grassroots organisations and social movements. Traditional due diligence and capacity assessment tools alone will not help us make these choices. Context analysis, civil society mapping and programme strategies (for example directing us to work more with grassroots organisations) will.

Our commitment to empowerment, accountability to impact groups and a rights based approach calls on us to increasingly select and groom partners who are *representative of* rather than *working for* the impact groups. Sometimes we might find that CARE can add more value nurturing and grooming emerging civil society forms rather than capitalizing on already high performing organisations. At other times, it might be strategic to select high capacity organisations and support their work. Partnership with weaker organisations requires more risk willingness, time and patience on CARE’s side. Some donors give us the flexibility to work with weaker partners, others make it difficult with their requirements (making donor negotiation necessary), but few would argue with the importance.

Invest in depth. If we want to move up the partnership continuum (page 11) and invest in building deep institutional relationships, then it is an advantage to work with fewer partners and invest in their organizational development efforts for a longer period. We also need to find ways to pursue these partnerships beyond project boundaries through longer-term program commitments (resourced or non-resourced). Some colleagues describe this “like a Program approach for strategic partnership development” (CARE Rwanda). In some cases, we can support a larger number of organisations through small grants (e.g. to women grassroots networks) or coalition building with development allies, but it is difficult if not impossible to nurture relations, invest significantly in capacity development and practice joint decision-making with a large number of partners. At the same time, we need to avoid the risk of being dependent on very few partners, and ensure that we partner with a representative range of civil society actors.

CARE in Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana, Mozambique, Niger, Nepal, Vietnam and possibly also elsewhere have experiences with selecting such strategic long-term partners, and we invite colleagues to upload these experiences to Minerva.

CULTIVATE LEADERSHIP AND CAPACITY

Invest in partners to be effective development organisations who can bring change. Capacity development should go beyond what we need from our partners in terms of compliance and grant management, and focus on helping partners to become autonomous civil society organisations. Capacity building should increasingly be demand driven rather than supply driven. That means that training also needs to go beyond proposal development, financial management, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting, to start looking at more fundamental issues of identity, leadership, and strategy.



Understand what drives organisational change. Capacity development happens from the inside out. It is an endogenous process. The motive for change needs to come from within. We cannot control and predict another’s change or build it like a nice well-functioning machine, but we can cultivate capacity. Therefore, we need to understand the character and the culture of the partner organization and find ways to cultivate leadership and incentives for change. The same principle applies to our own organization. For example, we will not get far with gender training if the leadership is fundamentally opposed to gender equality and inclusion.

Tailor capacity-building support to diverse forms of organisations. When partnering with a diverse group of organisations - from weaker CBOs or social movements to high capacity NGO - we need to be conscious not to try to create CARE-clones based on a one-size-fits-all approach to organizational capacity development. First, we need to understand what the organization wants to be, and then support its endeavour to become the most effective version of itself. The capacity needs of a loose activist network are likely to be quite different from those of an NGO training institute for example. This requires an understanding of partners as civil society organisations in their own right, and not just as implementers of CARE programmes.

Organisational capacity assessment tools can provide a useful basis for discussing organisational change, creating self-awareness about areas of strengths and weaknesses, and for planning capacity-building initiatives. It is important to be honest and clear about the intention of the assessments (i.e. learning and improvement) and to do them in a participatory way, as facilitated self-assessment. If used to determine the size of funding or the decision to enter into a partnership, a high degree of honesty and learning on the side of partners is not to be expected (would we not score ourselves high if our future funding depended on the outcome of the assessment?).

There is also a risk that standard tools can confine us to think narrowly of what an organization should look like if we use it as a checklist, e.g. “does the organisation have a functioning and registered Board”, whereas a more appropriate question might be whether the organisation actually needs a Board in the first place. This risk can largely be mitigated by allowing for tailoring of categories and indicators to individual organisations using more open categories (e.g. ‘internal organisation’, ‘external linkages’, ‘programme performance’) or using local tools developed by and for civil society. Organisational ‘ladders of change’ can be useful to provide an inside perspective on capacity. The [Barefoot guides](#) also give guidance on working with organisations and social change from a bottom up perspective.

As a rule of thumb, CARE should only promote capacity assessment tools that we find useful ourselves. If we do not want to take our own medicine, why should partners?

Check Minerva for a collection of [capacity assessment tools](#)!



Annex 1:

Suggested minimum standards

Leadership

- CARE leaders should help create a **new collective narrative about partnerships** by telling positive stories about the importance of partnerships in bringing change. Challenge stories about partnerships being ‘risky’ or ‘ineffective’.
- Senior managers (including CDs and ACDs), as well as visiting CMP staff and leaders, should regularly set aside enough time to **meet with partners**, preferably in their offices.
- **Partnership skills** should be a core dimension of any staff’s capacity building plan, tailored to their field of work. Incentives for enabling effective partnerships should be included in staff assessments.

Analysis of civil society context and actors

- All CMPs and COs should conduct **civil society analysis** regularly (inspiration can be found in EU civil society road maps, CIVICUS civil society indexes, etc.) and use this as input to design programs.
- CMPs and COs should **map and identify key strategic partners** including allies (e.g. other INGOs, research institutes, think tanks, media) and potential partners including representative civil society organisations (e.g. membership organisations representing the impact groups) that we can support and work with.

Invest in partnerships

- CMPs and COs should explore ways to **invest in depth and over the long-term in a limited number of key partnerships**. Partnerships can be approached like programs i.e. with clear commonly agreed upon goals, dedicated resources (e.g. piecing together funding from different sources) and staff time for the management of the partnership itself, and with systems for review and learning.
- Include **capacity building and core funding to partners or emerging citizen organisations** (e.g. women’s networks or farmers’ federations) in proposals.

Bring partners in to design and decision-making

- **Involve partners and peers in CARE's strategic processes** (e.g. in advisory boards, annual reviews, design meetings)
- **Involve partners from the beginning when developing proposals** (including in analysis, design workshops, etc.)

Be accountable to partners

- Demonstrate the same level of **transparency to partners** as we would expect from them. If we expect partners to do social audit at national or local level, we should do the same.
- **Share project budgets.** It might feel uncomfortable at first, but it is the only way to build trust and power balance.
- Ask for opinions about how we are doing as a partner, and **assess regularly the partnership** itself, rather than just scoring and selecting our partners. This can be done through regular dialogues, review meetings, scoreboards or partnership surveys.

Enable partners to pursue their agendas

- Ask to see partner strategic plans and look for fits when new funding opportunities arise (seek to fundraise for initiatives that are in line with partners' strategic plans). **Support partners to specialize and become experts in their niche** than to expect them to be 'jack of all trades, master of none'.
- Ask what **partners need in terms of capacity building and support**; when necessary, help them identify their needs. Different types of organisations have different needs so our support should be tailored. In capacity building, go beyond what we need for compliance to focus on what partners need to be effective agents of change. We cannot provide all kinds of support so we need to help identify other agencies with expertise complementing ours.





Annex 2:

Global civil society trends

A changing world order

In the past decades, a **new world order** has been emerging, characterized by **multi-polarity** and a shifting of power from the OECD countries to the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) countries and other fast growing economies. Large private sector actors have consistently gained influence and power.

Most poor people now live in middle-income countries, although that might well change again in the coming decades. Levels of inequality are higher than they have been for centuries and rising. Poverty is increasingly understood to be a political rather than a technical issue, which can be fixed with aid. These changes bring the role of civil society to the centre stage of development.

Global issues and global solutions

Global North-Global South¹¹ boundaries in civil society are increasingly becoming **blurred**, with new and different forms of engagement **realigning relationships** nationally and internationally. A 'new' sense of **solidarity** amongst civil society in the North with civil society in the Global South is emerging to counter the fact that a global elite have shared interests, close networks, and enormous influence over national and international political and economic decision-making ([CS@Crossroads 2012](#)). New **global** civil society **alliances** around global issues are emerging in addition to the North-South donor-recipient relations of the past decades. Global North NGOs are beginning to adopt strategies and tactics developed in the Global South to examine domestic policies and practices of their own governments and businesses, and to hold their governments and businesses accountable for the aid they provide in a way that is ethical and consistent with aid effectiveness principles.

¹¹ The terms Global North and Global South are used in the absence of more appropriate terms. North typically refers to the OECD countries and to civil society in these countries. Global South refers to the developing world or civil society in mainly South and Latin America, North- and Sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of Central, South and East Asia.

In today's interconnected world, **poverty is increasingly recognized as a result of international and global processes**. The underlying causes of poverty and inequality often have roots far beyond the individual village or country. Issues of climate change, rising inequality, economic crisis, unequal trade terms, and ongoing conflicts call for international solutions. Large companies that transcend borders defy national controls and tax regulations exploiting the absence of international standards and regulations. Increases in food prices or climate change can push millions of poor people into deeper poverty. Even local civil society organisations who do not wish to engage with international issues or institutions, often find themselves affected by what is going on internationally. At the same time, domestic political actors continue to play a big role in causing or addressing poverty and social injustice.

In response to the global challenges, civil society is increasingly mobilizing around global problems and solutions and are working **across borders** and **from local to global level**, to share experiences in how to overcome common challenges ([CIVICUS 2014](#)). The rapid increase in **Internet, social media** and **mobile** access has connected citizens around the globe and created new opportunities for collective action. Most people now live in cities, offering more opportunities to access information and connect with others and with the world.

A new burgeoning of social movements and citizen uprisings

The recent years have seen a **surge in social movements, mass protests and citizens'** uprisings in many parts of the world ([ODI 2014](#)). The new movements are characterized by informal structures and have often bypassed the more formal civil society organisations. Citizen movements are increasingly using **new tactics and new technology**, especially social media, in campaigns and mobilization.

The mass protests from South and North America, to Europe, North and Sub-Saharan Africa to South and South East Asia reveal a deep dissatisfaction with practices of politics and economics that serve elites, as well as **frustration** with the inadequacy of **formal politics** in which people have few practical opportunities to influence the decisions that affect their lives. Civil society groups have highlighted **rising inequality, corruption**, and declining **civil liberties** as reasons for action. Increasingly, civil society is also organizing to protest and combat the **expansion of the private sector** into many aspects of public life and the privileging of big business in governance ([CIVICUS 2014](#)).

A "third wave" of **women's liberation** has begun in parts of Asia and Africa with women demanding recognition of their human rights and an end to gender based violence ([Scenario 2025](#)). The One Billion Rising movement is one example of a global campaign. Grassroots women's movements in several places are struggling to increase their voice and momentum in conservative environments. Arab countries in North Africa are seeing a surge in **youth movements** challenging the political elites.

Stronger and more diverse civil society

While several undemocratic regimes continue to limit and prevent civil society from organizing and working, the global picture shows a world where **civil society is growing stronger and more diverse** than ever, ranging from formal organisations to huge informal movements across the globe ([CIVICUS 2014](#)). Some civil society forms are democratic and progressive while others are the opposite. Although there are still very real capacity and accountability gaps, CSOs in the Global South are becoming stronger and more capable every year.

The growth of the NGO sector has been exponential, and in many newer democracies, hundreds of new NGOs are registering every year ([ODI 2014](#)). Reliance on short-term international donor funding is still an impediment for sustainability of many development NGOs including INGOs ([USAID CSO sustainability index 2013](#)). While some Global South-based development NGOs are considered urban elitist organisations by grassroots activists, many others are considered legitimate representatives by their constituencies and give a voice to people who are poor and marginalized. Some have grown to be major INGOs in their own right e.g. BRAC, originally from Bangladesh now operating across Africa. Still, millions of poor farmers, landless, agrarian workers and jobless people in urban and rural areas, in especially in Africa and Asia, remain unorganized and have little voice.

Trends in donor support to civil society

GLOBAL COMMITMENTS TO SUPPORT CIVIL SOCIETY

More than 80 developing countries, all 29 OECD donors, some 3000 civil society organizations from around the world and representatives of emerging economies, United Nations, multilateral institutions and global funds, agreed to the **Accra Agenda for Action** in 2008. It **stresses the fundamental, independent role of civil society** in engaging citizens, making their concerns and needs heard, and in helping to ensure that donors and developing countries fulfil their commitments. It emphasizes the need for inclusive partnerships with civil society for development and their full participation in these development partnerships. The Busan agreement from 2011 and the Istanbul principles confirmed the commitment to deepening civil society partnerships. This can be seen as a sign that these governments and global institutions increasingly recognize **CSOs in the Global North and Global South as important development actors** in their own right, and that CSOs increasingly have access to global institutions and government decision-making processes.

In 2015, the new Sustainable Development Goals will be launched. The process of developing the new goals has been fairly open for the active participation of civil society. To ensure efficient and equitable implementation of the SDGs, transparency and accountability is key, and active participation by civil society is needed in all countries for this to happen.



DONOR JUSTIFICATIONS FOR SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY

More and more donors have formulated and updated strategies and policies for support to civil society. Donors with explicit civil society strategies, policies or principles include the EU, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Ireland, the UK, Canada, Australia, and the Netherlands. In case of the US and other donor countries, the approach to support to civil society is integrated into other strategies namely those on democracy, human rights and governance. **Support to civil society** in developing countries is **justified in different ways** in donor civil society policies and strategies, as also pointed out by the [OECD evaluation insight from 2013](#):

1. Many OECD donor governments consider civil society organisations, (i.e. those who receive development aid) important **change agents** who indirectly contribute to development or humanitarian outcomes by **supporting informed and active citizens to make governments more effective and accountable**, to stimulate public debate, influence laws, and promote democratic processes, accountability and good governance. Civil society is also seen as a crucial component of the well-being of society with **intrinsic merit**.
2. OECD donors at the same time consider **civil society actors instruments to achieve** development and humanitarian outcomes directly **by delivering services** to vulnerable groups. These donors as well as many 'Southern' Governments select CSOs as partners because of their local expertise and connections and ability to provide basic services to marginalized communities, often in cost-effective ways.

Often, these **narratives co-exist** in the same strategies and policies pointing to expectations that civil society organisations can play different roles in different contexts. As pointed out by the OECD evaluation insight (2013), it is **not always clear** which of these roles, or combination of roles, donors expect civil society to play. There is often a **tension** between these different roles for civil society support because each role has **different implications** for the type of funding or support that is appropriate, the nature of partnerships, and the way success is measured. The OECD reporting **distinguishes** between *support to CSOs* where the money's final destination is a CSO – for core support or for activities programmed by CSOs; and *support through CSOs* in order to reach the end constituency that the donor country wishes to serve. Future funding for CSOs largely depend on which narrative is predominant.

Increasingly, European donors are beginning to subscribe to the *change agent narrative*, and focus on civil society strengthening because it has an intrinsic value for sustainable development. This is reflected in the policies from the EU, Ireland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands. Common for these policies is, that they specify the **role of civil society** as a **democratic watchdog** which can empower and inform citizens and monitor and influence government and private sector policies. In this approach, **service delivery cannot** be an end in itself or **stand alone**, but must be **used strategically** as a means to influence policies or change structures that keep people in poverty. In this perspective, civil society can still play both roles (service providers and advocates), but service delivery has to be *strategic* i.e. linked with advocacy. Stand-alone service delivery is generally excluded from donor support to civil society except in fragile and humanitarian situations.

This points to a broader trend with the OECD calling on an **increase in the share of core funding and hand over more money and decision-making power** to strengthen CSO ownership and identify. However, donors as well as Global North-based CSOs sometimes struggle to select the **right partners** among Global South-based CSOs. This is not necessarily because of a lack of legitimate civil society change agents to support, but due to regulatory and administrative **requirements, aversion to risk and lack of trust**, coupled with inadequate understanding of the complex world of civil society.

Another trend in the funding environment for CSOs is that while Global North CSOs continue to be a preferred channel for ODA support to civil society in developing countries, there is evidence that this is on the decline ([OECD 2012](#)). There is a tendency that **donors are channelling more funding directly to civil society in the Global South** through their representations in country or through multi-donor civil society funds ([Riding the Wave 2013a.o.](#)). This might bring opportunities for Global North-based NGOs to partner with Global South based NGOs as a sub to the local organisation. At the same time, Global North-based CSOs will have to **prove their value addition** to donors in these partnerships.



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