

Overview of Civil Society Organizations

Definitions

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are non-state actors whose aims are neither to generate profits nor to seek governing power. CSOs unite people to advance shared goals and interests.⁴ They have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, and are based on ethical, cultural, scientific, religious, or philanthropic considerations.

CSOs include nongovernment organizations (NGOs), professional associations, foundations, independent research institutes, community-based organizations (CBOs), faith-based organizations, people's organizations, social movements, and labor unions.

Types of Development CSOs

ADB's interaction with CSOs is most likely to occur with development CSOs, which vary significantly in terms of philosophy, purpose, level of expertise, approach, and scope of activities.

1. Operational CSOs versus Advocacy CSOs

An important functional distinction exists between *operational* CSOs and *advocacy* CSOs. This distinction is important in that it relates to the type of interaction ADB pursues with individual CSOs, such as cooperation in project implementation versus policy dialogue. The distinction also reflects the development role undertaken by these organizations.

ADB's 2006 Annual Evaluation Review concluded that among the lessons that can be drawn from successful water projects are that such projects "were formulated through extensive consultations with local government staff and the local community, including NGOs"

⁴ UNDP. *UNDP and Civil Society Organizations: A Toolkit for Strengthening Partnerships*, page 3. New York, NY, USA. 2006.

Through a grant made under the Tonle Sap Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project, ADB engaged local CSOs to mobilize communities in five Cambodian provinces

Types of CSOs

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) – CBOs are generally organized to directly address the immediate concerns of their members. A key characteristic of CBOs is that they can mobilize communities by expressing demands, organizing and implementing participatory processes, accessing external development services, and sharing benefits among members. They have a wide range of functions that encompass activities relating to economic, social, religious, and even recreational issues. Examples of CBOs include neighborhood associations, tenant associations, community development organizations, water-user groups, and credit associations.

Development NGOs (or CSOs) – These organizations address social and humanitarian issues relating to development, individual and community welfare and well-being, and poverty. They also address environmental and natural resource protection, management, and improvement.

Faith-Based Organizations – These are religious-based groups organized around a place of religious worship or congregation, a specialized religious institution, or a registered or unregistered institution with a religious character or mission.

Foundations – These are philanthropic or charitable organizations set up by individuals or institutions as a legal entity (a corporation or trust) support causes consistent with the goals of the foundation. They may also be organized as charitable entities that receive donations for the purpose of financing specific activities that are often of a cultural or socially beneficial nature. Examples include the Ayala Foundation (Philippines), Aga Khan Foundation (Switzerland), Sir Ratan Tata Trust (India), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (United States), and the Ford Foundation (United States).

International NGOs (INGOs) – Perhaps the simplest definition of an international NGO is that provided in Resolution 288 (X) of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (27 February 1950): “any international organization that is not founded by an international treaty.” Typically headquarter-

Types of CSOs

tered in a developed country, INGOs include ActionAid, the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) International, Mercy Corps, Plan International, Save the Children, Transparency International, and World Vision.

Labor Unions - These are formally organized associations of workers who have united to advance their collective views regarding wages, hours of work, and working conditions. Labor unions are often organized on an industry- or occupation-specific basis. They frequently associate themselves with umbrella federations, congresses, and networks such as the Indonesian Trade Union Congress, the India National Trade Union Congress, the Asian Labor Network on International Financial Institutions, Public Services International, and the International Trade Union Confederation.

Nongovernment Organizations (NGOs) – ADB has traditionally used the term “NGO” almost synonymously with “CSO” so as to include all not-for-profit organizations that are independent of the State. Nowadays the term “NGO” refers more narrowly to professional, intermediary, and nonprofit organizations that provide or advocate the provision of services relating to economic and social development, human rights, public welfare, or emergency relief.

People’s Organizations (POs) – These are grassroots volunteer organizations that advance the economic and social well-being of their members. While in some countries the term “PO” is used interchangeably with “CBO,” POs are more likely to be organizations that address concerns relating to a particular sector, such as artisanal fisherfolk, rather than a particular geographic location. Other examples of POs include those formed by farmers, local laborers, or indigenous peoples.

Professional Associations – These organizations represent the interests of their members who typically engage in a certain occupation, or practice a particular profession. Professional associations may also enforce standards relating to the profession practiced by their members. Examples include associations of architects, certified public accountants, and economists. ADB interacts regularly with the

Through the China Development Marketplace, ADB has supported work of the Qingshen County Women’s Federation aimed at providing education and care for children in poor areas who were left behind by migrant parents

Types of CSOs

International Federation of Consulting Engineers, whose members often work on ADB-financed projects.

Research Institutes – These organizations typically conduct research and analysis relating to public policy issues and disseminate their findings and recommendations in hopes of influencing decision makers and opinion formers. Examples include the Cambodian Development Research Institute, members of the South Asia Network of Economic Research Institutes, and the World Resources Institute.

Social Movements – These large informal groupings of individuals or organizations attempt to effect social change through sustained, organized, collective action. Social movements are not permanent institutions, but instead tend to coalesce, pursue their aims, and then dissolve. Examples include movements to end slavery, capital punishment, apartheid, and economic liberalism. The largest civil society movement calling for an end to poverty and inequality is the Global Call to Action Against Poverty.

In addition to the types of CSOs described above, there also exist coalitions or networks of CSOs united by a common geography, membership, set of objectives, or area of activity. For example, the Caucus of Development NGO Networks comprises six national networks and four regional networks representing more than 2,000 development NGOs, POs, and cooperatives in the Philippines.

Operational CSOs directly deliver, or contribute to the delivery of, welfare services such as emergency relief or environmental protection and management. They embody a wide range of organizational structures, approaches, and areas of operation, both program related and geographic. Operational CSOs work at the community, local, district, national, regional, and international levels.

Advocacy CSOs provide representation to specific issues, concerns, points of view, or interests. They attempt to influence the policies, practices, and views of govern-

ments, development institutions like ADB, other actors in the development arena, the media, and the public at large. From the mid-1990s onward, advocacy CSOs have used modern communication technologies to strengthen national and international networks and consortia that link groups representing common, parallel, or convergent interests. In many cases, advocacy CSOs voice concerns that they feel would otherwise not be articulated via established social, economic, or political processes.

Despite the distinction between operational and advocacy CSOs described above, it is often impossible to neatly categorize a CSO as either an operational CSO or an advocacy CSO. This is because most CSOs are involved in a mix of operational and advocacy activities. It should be noted that ADB increasingly encounters operationally oriented CSOs that engage in advocacy work related to their activities and mission.

2. Level of Operations

Among operational CSOs, one can distinguish between international nongovernment organizations (INGOs), usually headquartered in developed countries; national-level NGOs, whose attention is directed toward issues and interests in the countries in which they are based; and CBOs, which generally address concerns in relatively limited geographic areas.

The operational level at which a CSO works heavily influences the type of cooperation that it can enjoy with ADB. CBOs often comprise memberships that address localized interests. While the technical or implementation capacity of many CBOs is limited, they can play an important role in projects that require identifying the specific needs of local communities, or that require a substantial degree of participation by beneficiaries. CSOs that possess substantial operational capacity can play larger roles, for example, in the identification, design, and implementation of projects or project components, or in consultations relating to policy and program development.

In Pakistan, local NGOs provided health care and family planning services in villages through the Women's Health Project. NGOs helped deliver ambulance services, hospital support, and family planning services at the community level. NGOs also prepared village profiles and conducted participatory rural appraisal activities

Pro Public, an NGO, provided an independent review and reporting mechanism on the Governance Reform Program in Nepal, and disseminated information to stakeholders regarding program goals, plans, and implementation

CSOs operating at the national level—and particularly those operating at the international level—often boast of technical and organizational capacities that are lacking in grassroots-level CSOs. In some cases, larger and more capable CSOs can serve as intermediaries between governments, development agencies, and other CSOs channelling information, resources, and technical support.

Some INGOs and national CSOs have successfully built up capacity in a number of operational areas, including provision of donor support to smaller CSOs. CSOs at every level increasingly collaborate within the context of networks and consortia, and at the national and international levels in numerous sectors.

3. Orientation of Activity

CSOs differ in philosophy, purpose, specialization, and operational approach. CSOs can be classified by characteristics such as (i) purpose (religious versus secular); (ii) operational orientation (relief and welfare orientation versus development orientation); (iii) approach (service delivery versus participatory activities); and (iv) degree of openness (a large degree of openness and public exposure versus a more closed, private character). Such factors influence the extent to which ADB can benefit from collaboration with a particular CSO.

CSO Strengths and Constraints

CSO Strengths

CSOs can make numerous positive contributions to individual projects and to the development process generally. Such contributions include

- (i) mobilizing resources in ways that the state alone cannot;
- (ii) educating and motivating people to address social and environmental challenges;
- (iii) facilitating citizen participation in development initiatives;

Types of CSOs in Terms of Function

Service-delivery CSOs develop, monitor, and implement projects, programs, or services. They tend to work closely with CBOs and are often based at the community level.

Representation CSOs provide a unified voice for the concerns of particular groups of citizens. These groups include CSO umbrella and network organizations, as well as indigenous peoples' groups.

Advocacy and Policy Input CSOs provide expertise and lobbying services relating to particular issues. Included in their ranks are think tanks, research-oriented institutions, and "watchdog" groups.

Capacity-building CSOs support other CSOs in funding, training, and awareness-raising activities. They often include foundations and major, well-established CSOs.

Social function CSOs foster collective social activities. Religious groups are often of this type.

Some CSOs, such as indigenous peoples' networks, fall under more than one of the above types as they perform multiple functions.

Source: United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). 2004. *Natural Allies: UNEP and Civil Society*. Nairobi, Kenya.

- (iv) promoting effective, honest, legitimate, and responsive government through public scrutiny and advocacy-based activities;
- (v) strengthening government's links with the overall population;
- (vi) giving voice and assistance to underprivileged and marginalized populations, and responding to local needs;
- (vii) serving as a partner in cases in which countries are suffering from armed conflict or civil strife;
- (viii) providing frank perspectives on the potential effects of policies and projects, as well as possible measures for improvement;
- (ix) training leaders, disseminating information, and conducting research relating to public policy challenges;

The China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA), an NGO, is overseeing implementation of an ADB-supported pilot project in Jiangxi Province. CFPA has selected NGOs to facilitate village-level poverty alleviation

How ADB Managers and Mission Leaders View the Potential Contribution of CBOs and NGOs

CBOs and NGOs may be able to:

- (i) tap into grassroots opinions, knowledge, and the likely effect of projects on communities;
- (ii) act as facilitators for project stakeholder analysis and community mobilization;
- (iii) help implement people-centered projects, especially in the agriculture and social sectors;
- (iv) assist in designing and implementing process-oriented projects; and
- (v) act as a complementary development partner, especially in cases in which government capacity may be limited.

Source: ADB Operations Evaluation Office. *Special Evaluation Study on the Role of Nongovernment Organizations and Community-Based Organizations in ADB Projects*. Manila, December 1999.

- (x) introducing new development approaches and models;
- (xi) generating a sense of local ownership and commitment to ADB-financed projects and other development initiatives; and
- (xii) flexibly responding to shifts in local conditions that necessitate mid-course shifts in project implementation.

Constraints to CSO Participation in ADB-Assisted Activities

Several traits found to varying degrees in CSOs can inhibit their reliability as partners in dialogue or in an operational context. In particular, CSOs may

- (i) lack a resource base and have weak administrative, financial, organizational, and technical capacity;
- (ii) have limited strategic perspectives and weak linkages with other stakeholders;
- (iii) create only small-scale impacts;
- (iv) focus on idealistic aims rather than on measurable results;

- (v) depend excessively on one or a small number of leaders, and be susceptible to capture by elites;
- (vi) coordinate poorly with other CSOs;
- (vii) be prone to politicization, and suffer strained relationships with governments;
- (viii) apply different standards of accountability and conduct to ADB than to themselves; and
- (ix) be donor driven, pursuing grant opportunities rather than seeking engagement in those areas in which they possess the greatest comparative advantage or expertise.

