



REPORT

Enabling environments for civil society

# COMPARATIVE STUDY ON CSO RIGHT OF INITIATIVE IN SIX EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

## **Coordination SUD is the national platform of French NGOs working on international solidarity.**

Coordination SUD was founded in 1994 and currently comprises 184 NGOs, either as direct members or through six networks of associations (CLONG-Volontariat, Cnajep, Coordination Humanitaire et Développement, CRID, FORIM and Groupe initiatives). These organisations work in the fields of emergency humanitarian and development aid, environmental protection, human rights, advocacy and global citizenship education for international solidarity – with a special focus on helping the most disadvantaged groups of people.

In support to the French associative sector working on international solidarity, Coordination SUD and its member organisations carry out four key activities: promoting and defending an enabling environment for Civil Society Organisations' (CSO) action and expression; supporting and strengthening these CSOs; defining and advocating joint positions on international solidarity policies towards public and private institutions in France, Europe and across the world; and finally, monitoring and analysing the sector of international solidarity, its developments and challenges.

## **Coordination SUD, Bringing Together and Acting for International Solidarity**

# INTRODUCTION

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## **Presentation**

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a key role all throughout the world in designing and implementing public policies. By working as closely as possible with the target populations to understand their needs, CSOs contribute greatly to the development of just, inclusive and democratic societies. Coordination SUD – the national coordination network of French international solidarity organizations (ISOs) – upholds CSO right of initiative, which is here defined as their ability to carry out their actions in their respective countries and in partner countries, regardless of their size and nature.

In most countries in Europe, CSOs are free to form and operate independently. But what is the situation there regarding the resources made available to them to do so? And to what extent do the conditions attached to funding from public donors act as a constraint to CSO initiatives? To answer these questions, this study examines the financial instruments used for international cooperation by six European countries and by European Union (EU) bodies. The study especially examines the financial mechanisms that national NGO networks recognize as being more apt to empower CSOs in better responding to local needs in the countries where they operate. In each of its target countries, the study identifies what the umbrella organizations consider to be the most effective mechanisms for ensuring the empowerment of CSOs so that they can reach these goals. This provides us a better understanding of the factors that promote or hinder this empowerment.

More specifically, the study provides an initial overview of public financial mechanisms promoting CSO right of initiative in Europe in the field of development. The definition of “right of initiative” adopted here is that established by Coordination SUD, and the study looks in the target countries for equivalents to that definition which are sufficiently close to the French context, with the purpose of identifying relevant points of comparison and intersection as well as the determinants that promote or hinder CSO initiative in different contexts.

The study is based on desk research of recent studies and is backed up by field research that made use of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews of Coordination SUD members, CSOs in donor and partner countries, umbrella organizations in the target countries of the study and in partner countries, donors and relevant public decision makers. It does not seek to provide an exhaustive inventory of public financial systems for development, nor does it claim to reflect the perception held by all CSOs in the target countries. Nevertheless, the study does offer some avenues for reflection and comparison based on the perceptions of the actors interviewed and the literature available.





# SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

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The study made it possible to determine, in the countries and funding mechanisms studied, several factors to help describe what the “right of initiative of CSOs” is, as defined by Coordination SUD:

- **Dialogue:** institutionalized and in various forms. Federations have a key role in most cases. Its level of quality seems to be based on the co-construction/ownership of the process by CSOs. It takes place mainly with the CSOs of the donor countries, and more randomly in the partner countries.
- **Procedures and reporting:** red tape is the norm for this type of mechanism, prior to the project/programme (through screening, audit and proof of quality), during, and after (e.g. annual and final reports). Some partnerships enjoy procedures allowing for flexible implementation, including relative freedom of adaptation and reporting on results rather than on activities (Belgium and Sweden).
- **Political interference:** geographical and/or thematic prioritization in the name of efficiency (Belgium, Spain, Netherlands), which is sometimes negotiated (Belgium, Spain). Little direct intervention, especially after approval.
- **Duration and frequency:** according to their scope, mechanisms with a longer duration seem to provide more stability and more flexibility in order to put initiatives and creativity into motion. The issue of frequency should be examined: a bid for tender every five years offers fewer opportunities than spontaneous ones.
- **Selectivity:** Although the criteria for selecting or calculating grant amounts are generally transparent, the negotiating capacities granted to CSOs as well as donor arbitration differ from country to country.
- **Transparency:** for all identified instruments, information related to procedures and objectives is public and accessible. However, other useful qualitative information such as partner lists and annual reports are more irregular.

This study also made it possible to identify several current trends impacting CSO right of initiative:

- **Aid concentration:** tendency to use consortia and to have large budgets due to the limited management capacity of the Administration (EU, Spain), or to pool financial management tools (Belgium).
- **A less favourable environment for CSOs in Europe:** rise of the far right, Islamophobia that restricts fundamental freedoms; neoliberalization of public authorities (e.g., top-down power structure, lack of personnel, focus on efficiency), impact of counter-terrorism measures.
- **Putting into question the relevance of CSOs:** unequal relationship with partner CSOs, development of new social and civic movements, growing inequalities, worsening environmental crisis, “impensé colonial”<sup>1</sup>.

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1. “*Impensé colonial*” refers to the persistence, resurgence or reformulation of approaches in the realm of fancy, which were instituted to legitimize the colonial order and which survive in modern [French] republican thought.” Rigouste, M. (2010). “14. L’impensé colonial dans les institutions françaises : la ‘race des insoumis’”. In: Achille Mbembe ed., *Ruptures postcoloniales: Les nouveaux visages de la société française* (pp. 196-204). Paris: La Découverte. <https://doi.org/10.3917/dec.bance.2010.01.0196>

Finally, various practices that support CSO right of initiative have emerged from this study, including:

- Transparency and accountability: especially through the publication of data.
- Dialogue and consultation: through regular and inclusive dialogue.
- The proper functioning and effectiveness of the mechanism: by promoting access to the system (e.g. significant co-funding, access for local CSOs, adapting to a wide range of types of CSOs, consideration of first-time beneficiaries), by making it more relevant and sustainable (e.g. long-term funding, geographical or sectoral opening, role given to CSOs upstream of the strategy, local ownership, promotion of theory of change, feasibility study) and by improving the quality of monitoring (e.g. suitable financial monitoring, support measures).

## MAIN CONCLUSIONS

### ► The right of initiative cannot be determined by isolated factors

- Coordination SUD's definition of the various aspects of the right of initiative does not necessarily apply the same way in all the European countries studied.
- Nevertheless, the study has made it possible to identify or confirm several factors that give framework to this right, even though those factors alone cannot define what the right of initiative is.
- It should also be noted that the form of this right of initiative also depends on the political, social and cultural context of the country in question. Right of initiative is more observable in countries with multiparty, federal and parliamentary traditions (Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden).

### ► There is a paradox in that increase in right of initiative leads to increase in control

- The mechanisms that promote CSO autonomy the most are those which, on the contrary, require the most investment by CSOs if they are to avail of those mechanisms.
- Right of initiative is based more on the quality of the relationship with the donor than on absence of such a relationship.
- The mechanisms supporting the right of initiative can, paradoxically, be restrictive.
- This right of initiative "under control" is called into question by other forms of organizations bursting onto the global stage and that are self-administered, more agile and autonomous (e.g. citizen movements).

### ► The right of initiative of CSOs in the North is putting partnership with local CSOs into question

- Most mechanisms seek to meet local needs and to strengthen civil society as an independent actor of development in partner countries.
- And most of these mechanisms support the intermediary before the end beneficiary.
- There are still few partnerships, frameworks or core funding mechanisms<sup>2</sup>, and even fewer flows that go (directly) to CSOs in the South.
- The quality of the North-South CSO partnership is therefore crucial.

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2. Funding dedicated to the main activity of the organization and helping to cover operating and structural costs that are not directly related to the projects.

► **Right of initiative is based on the quality of the relationship with the donor and not on its absence**

- The thematic, geographical and administrative constraints are unanimously recognized as more or less imposed and cumbersome.
- Right of initiative works better when this relationship is qualitative, flexible and partnership-based, rather than when it is contractual, unilateral, quantitative, financial or rigid.
- However, some CSOs consider these constraints to be necessary. For example, reporting can be recognized as legitimate because it represents attachment to democratic values and transparency.

► **Right of initiative of CSOs is weakened when their legitimacy is put into question**

- The relevance of traditional CSOs, which do not always fit within the political context of the era, is being put into question by the emergence of new social and civic movements in the North and the South.
- The legitimacy of CSOs in the North is called into question with regard to the financial mechanisms whose main objective is to strengthen civil society and particularly of CSO capacities in partner countries.
- The opening of mechanisms to other actors than national CSOs in Europe (e.g. to CSOs of the South, the private sector, or the social and solidarity economy) is creating a process of competition which promotes greater concentration of aid in the hands of the few CSOs considered legitimate – and this is all the more true when funding remains relatively constant.

### Coordination SUD's definition of "right of initiative"

The right of initiative of a civil society organization can concern an action, project, programme or strategy which (I) is initiated as part of a desire of civil society, within the framework of the organization's statutes, stated purpose and/or the analyses it has made, and (II) takes into consideration its stakeholders, in particular the beneficiaries.

The actions concerned can be of any scope, including micro-projects, multi-country programs, or even the organization's overall strategy. They can be of any nature, such as development projects, humanitarian actions, organization of the non-profit environment, education in citizenship and international solidarity, advocacy and research). The actions can be carried out in France or in partner countries and can be financed from private or public funds.

CSO right of initiative can also sometimes concern actions that are subject to calls for proposals or discussed by mutual agreement between CSOs and public authorities without an overly binding framework. This is especially the case if it is the CSO – and where appropriate its partners – that has or have identified the needs and action to be taken. Such cases must be judged on a case-by-case basis. On the other hand, right of initiative generally does not include actions, projects or programmes carried out by CSOs on the sole initiative of public authorities via calls for tender or services.

## ANALYSIS SUMMARY TABLE BY COUNTRY AND EU

ASPECTS ANALYSED	GERMANY	BELGIUM	SPAIN
<b>Number of mechanisms identified</b>	1: Private Träger	1: Five-year co-funding programmes	1: Convenios
<b>Budget/year allocated to the mechanism (\$M)</b>	144	228	40
<b>CSO co-funding</b>	25%	20%	Between 5% and 12%
<b>Type of CSOs financed</b>	National	National	National
<b>Number of CSOs</b>	2021 : 200	2022-2026: 86 accredited CSOs	2018-2022: 31 CSOs out of 49 accredited
<b>Project duration</b>	3 to 5 years	5 years	4 years

FRANCE	NETHERLANDS	SWEDEN	EUROPEAN UNION
1: CSO Initiatives Mechanism (Dispositif Initiatives OSC)	4: Strategic partnerships	1: Strategy for support via Swedish civil society	1: Framework Partnership Agreements (FPA) - programme Civil Society Organisations - Local Authorities (CSO-LA) (renamed CSO-Global Europe in 2021)
95.5	251	173	FPA under CSO-LA 2014-2020: 108 million CSO Programme: 1.51 billion projected for 2021-2027
Approx. 25 to 40% (10% for local CSOs)	0%	10%	25% for European CSOs 10% for local CSOs
National and local (CEI 2022)	Open to all in consortium form	National	NGO networks and federations; NGOs practising subgranting
2021: 114 CSOs	2021-2025: 42 consortia including 20 on Power of Voices	2016-2022: 17 SPOs	2014-2020: 25 FPAs out of nearly 300 projects funded by CSO-LAs
3 to 4 years	5 years	5 years	4.5 years (can be extended). No renewal but can reapply after a gap period



ASPECTS ANALYSED	GERMANY	BELGIUM	SPAIN
<b>Consultation / dialogue with CSOs</b>	Regular consultations, bilateral dialogue or via Venro's working groups. CSOs participate in the BMZ strategy.	Dialogue in Belgium is considered satisfactory, fluid and regular, but more irregular at embassies.	Adequate and well-structured dialogue. Significant upstream consultation.
<b>Flexibility (geographical, theme, sectors)</b>	Flexible. No strict geographical or thematic restrictions.	Common Strategic Framework (CSF) within the thematic and geographic priorities.	Master plans and "Country Partnership Frameworks".
<b>Administrative procedures</b>	Calls for applications, emphasis on accountability and compliance.	High entry cost, red tape in the accreditation process.	Qualification process and call for applications.

FRANCE	NETHERLANDS	SWEDEN	EUROPEAN UNION
Regular good-quality and non-interventionist dialogue, but lack of visibility and planning in consultations.	Open and cooperative relationship with the MoFA. Institutional relations via Partos.	Regular consultations, bilateral institutional dialogue and coordination between SPOs.	Formal dialogue mechanisms via the Policy Forum on Development as well as structured thematic or geographic dialogue more or less adapted to the diversity of CSOs.
Flexible. No strict geographical or thematic restrictions.	Thematic priorities, focus on lobbying.	Flexible. No strict geographical or thematic restrictions.	Guidelines for 2018-20: Climate change, gender and youth, crisis and resilience, and root causes of migration. For 2021-27: Youth and women's networks, small CSOs. No geographical priorities.
Heavy compared to the amount of funding available and the duration of the funding.	Calls for applications, emphasis on risk evaluation.	High entry cost. Regular auditing and evaluation, but led by the CSOs.	Procedures rather cumbersome and rigid for CSOs despite efforts to make funds accessible to CSOs on the ground and in the South via delegations.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

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This study proposes an initial overview of public financial mechanisms promoting the right of initiative in Europe, by answering the following questions:

- How is right of initiative understood by national CSO networks, their member organizations, and partner networks in the European countries targeted by this study?
- What forms does right of initiative actually take on in the targeted European countries?
- What determinants promote CSO initiatives in those same countries?

Through this study, a reference framework has been established for determining which financial arrangements fall under “right of initiative” and the determinants that promote free initiative by CSOs. At the end of this report, the relevance of this framework is reviewed based on the information collected.

## DURATION AND RESEARCH TEAM

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The research was conducted between November 2021 and May 2022 by the Brussels-based consulting firm Organisation Development Support (ODS), which specializes in research, monitoring & evaluation, strategy and advocacy, exclusively for the non-profit sector. It was conducted by a five-member team of consultants: Laurène Bounaud, Nabila Habbida, Hande Taner, Andrés Narros and Lisa-Marie Salley.

## SCOPE OF THE STUDY

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### **The organizations interviewed**

The organizations interviewed in this study included, according to the distinction made by the OECD,<sup>3</sup> national networks of international solidarity organizations based in the targeted European donor countries and the CSO member organizations of these networks, as well as CSOs that work at the international level. The views of some national CSO networks and CSOs based in the partner countries were also gathered in order to open up avenues of reflection on their perception of the right of initiative.

### **Financial mechanisms promoting the right of initiative**

Through the national networks of international solidarity organizations in the target countries, the study identified and analysed the financial mechanisms that promote CSO initiatives within the framework of official development assistance (ODA). While other relevant

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3. OECD, *Aid for Civil Society Organisations, Statistics based on DAC Members' reporting to the Creditor Reporting System database (CRS)*, APRIL 2021.

public or even private financial mechanisms may exist, the study did not seek to carry out an exhaustive inventory of all these mechanisms, but rather to make a selection and study their main characteristics. Once identified, these mechanisms were then evaluated directly by some members of these networks that have benefited from them. With regard to the determinants that further CSO initiatives, the study focused on identifying support measures that fall under government authority rather than on those created by CSOs themselves or by other actors in the private sector. Here the purpose was to identify “good practices” that could be implemented by governments in the different target countries.

### **Selected countries and institutions**

A scope of six case studies was adopted, limited to EU countries which have a development cooperation policy and a legal and normative political context favourable to CSOs.<sup>4</sup> This scope facilitates comparisons, thereby helping to situate the French context and to identify relevant practices and avenues for reflection. The target countries (Germany, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden, in addition to France) were selected by taking into account a variety of criteria:

1. Countries comparable to France in terms of demographic and political weight,
2. Similarities in the structure and history of development cooperation (e.g. development agency, linguistic influence, etc.)
3. Organized and dynamic sphere of national CSOs,
4. Significant share of ODA channelled to and through CSOs,
5. Countries where the consultants have access to the working language, as well as direct contacts through CONCORD member organizations.

Finally, the study provides a brief overview of the situation at the European level, focusing on the perceptions of the European CSO networks and the findings of academic work on the concept of the right of initiative in the EU development cooperation framework and the changes that can be observed or anticipated since the adoption of the last Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027).

To conduct the data collection and analysis, the consultants worked in cooperation with Coordination SUD and CONCORD members.

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4. The CIVICUS Monitor is an online research platform which monitors fundamental freedoms in 197 countries and territories based on up-to-date information and indicators on the state of freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression. The countries selected in this study are considered by the CIVICUS Monitor 2021 to have freedom qualified as “open” or “narrowed”. <https://findings2021.monitor.civicus.org/>

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## RIGHT OF INITIATIVE: MAIN FEATURES IN EUROPE

### Historical and political background

#### Origin of the notion of CSO right of initiative in international standards

The notion of CSO right of initiative became institutionalized around the same time that a new official development assistance (ODA) paradigm emerged internationally in the 1990s. This new paradigm took into account the lack of effectiveness and performance of traditional forms of ODA and recognized the aid system's share of responsibility in the failure of development policies. The Paris Declaration of March 2005 gave official recognition to this new paradigm, which focuses on five fundamental principles (ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results, and mutual accountability). It was signed by representatives of some 90 countries and 30 aid bodies. But it was only at the 3rd High Level Forum, held in Accra in 2008, that CSOs were invited to reflect on the application of the Paris Principles from a CSO perspective. Donors and recipient governments also agreed to work with CSOs to promote an enabling environment in the beneficiary countries, especially through models of financial support to CSOs which strengthen their contributions to development, such as the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA).

Later, the Istanbul Principles (2010) and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development (2015) confirmed the need for donor organizations to work with CSOs and recognize their role in initiating and implementing initiatives, both as independent development actors and as implementing partners on behalf of members of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC). According to OECD statistics, DAC members allocated nearly \$21 billion to CSOs in 2018, representing 15% of total bilateral aid. The notion of right of initiative refers to treating NGOs as actors of civil society which are free to suggest and implement their projects, programmes or initiatives, notably through funding mechanisms that promote and encourage such autonomy.

### How “right of initiative” is understood in each target country

- The study shows that this notion is perceived very differently in the various countries, according not only to the conception of civil society there and the role it should play in determining and implementing public policies, but also according to the importance and understanding of the role of CSOs in Southern countries.
- **In France and in Belgium**, this notion is very well understood and has been incorporated into the thinking of actors of development and international solidarity. The terms “autonomy”, “independence” and “empowerment” are used interchangeably and with different frequencies in these two countries, depending on the actor.

- In **Spain**, on the other hand, the actors are not familiar with the concept of right of initiative itself. Instead, a hybrid mechanism for financial support to NGOs has been developed: Convenios (“agreements”), which make it possible for government and NGO initiatives to partner together.
- In **Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands**, different terminology is used. **Germany** has adopted the notion of “subsidiarity”, whereby the government cooperates with an NGO to accomplish tasks that the government itself is not able or expected to do. In **the Netherlands**, the aim is to strengthen the “civic midfield”. In **Sweden**, the government strives to support “civil society in its own right”, with CSOs as fully fledged development actors. The aim is to support a pluralistic and rights-based civil society as a goal in itself. In each of these three countries, right of initiative is also directly linked to that of local partners. Several institutions and CSOs link CSO right of initiative to the notion of local ownership, according to which local NGOs have more knowledge of the local context and are therefore more legitimate actors to develop and implement projects that meet local needs.
- The **European Union** (EU) approach is at a crossroads: depending on the angle, European policies cover several notions raised by this study (enabling environment, civic space, CSO initiatives, CSO independence and autonomy, and democratic space). However, the European approach stands out by making the role of civil society a question of European values and human rights. It makes that role practically a question of identity: right of initiative is (or should be) in the DNA of the European project, which should in principle make support for civil society an EU priority.
- For its part, **France** has recognized CSO right of initiatives since 2021, when its Programming Act No. 2021-1031 on Inclusive Development and Combating Global Inequalities was adopted. Article 8 of the Act states: “VIII.- The State recognizes the role, expertise and added value of civil society organizations, in both the Global North and South, and those of all non-State actors involved in the policy of inclusive development and combating global inequalities. For civil society organizations (French or those established in partner countries) falling under categories defined by decree, it shall implement a system dedicated to development projects that they present to the State, within the framework of their right of initiative, with a view to the award of a grant if needed. The funded projects shall contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the inclusive development policy and the fight against global inequalities.”

### **Mechanisms promoting right of initiative in Europe**

- Ten mechanisms falling under the “right of initiative” approach were identified in the interviews with the international solidarity networks in the six European countries and with the EU institutions, including the Spanish hybrid approach.<sup>5</sup>
- They differ greatly in their nature and implementation method. The very definition of “financial mechanism” can correspond to a set of mechanisms that are part of a single

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5. While other public funding mechanisms not identified in this study may also exist, the selection made in this study allows for relevant comparisons that can meet the study objectives.



## MECHANISMS IDENTIFIED BY COUNTRY

Country	Mechanism(s) identified
Germany	<i>Private Träger</i>
Belgium	Five-year co-funding programmes
Spain	<i>Convenios</i>
France	CSO Initiatives Mechanism ( <i>Dispositif Initiatives OSC</i> )
Netherlands	Power of Voices; Power of Women; Women, Peace and Security; and SRHR Partnership
Sweden	Strategy for support via Swedish civil society organisations for the period 2016-2022, surnommée “Stratégie OSC”
European Union	Civil Society Organisations – Local Authorities (CSO-LA) thematic programme (in Framework Partnership Agreements (FPA) form)

strategy or that pursue similar objectives (Netherlands) It can also correspond to a specific mechanism with a dedicated budget item and a single (Sweden) or several (France) “financial instrument(s)” to deploy the mechanism and whose purpose is to further CSO right of initiative. Some of the study’s analysis criteria were established to facilitate comparisons between these mechanisms, for example, on the nature of the mechanism itself, taking into account the type of funding, the type of partnership or contract with CSOs and the quality of the dialogue with CSOs, or on (II) the ways in which the mechanism is implemented, taking into account the duration, the maximum budget granted, the flexibility offered to CSOs in the identification of needs or priorities, and the administrative procedures, etc.

- Among the aims of most of the mechanisms identified is the strengthening of civil society, including the institutional or development capacities of CSOs in the North and South. These objectives are based on the intrinsic value of civil society and of the CSOs that are part of it, with recognition of (I) the fact that a dynamic civil society sector is crucial for a democratic political culture and (II) the essential role played by strong and diverse CSOs in development. In this respect, most of these mechanisms differ from other funding mechanisms in that their scope is less directly linked to the government’s sectoral and geographic priorities and leaves more space for NGO priorities and initiatives.
- These objectives are explicitly described either in the framework documents of the agencies or governments, or in the presentation documents of the mechanisms (Germany, France, Netherlands, Sweden, EU). The guiding principles of the Swedish Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) state very clearly that it seeks to “support a pluralistic and rights-based civil society” as “an objective in itself [given that] a strong, independent civil society is an essential part of a democratic society, and is key to inclusive and sustainable development”. The AFD 2022 Call for Expression of Interest (CEI) stipulates that “through the CSO Initiatives Mechanism, AFD provides co-funding to development pro-

jects and programmes that seek to contribute to the strengthening of local civil society partners, in line with the strategic orientations defined in its 'AFD and Civil Society Organizations 2018/2023' strategy."

- They are also reflected in the explicit or implicit selection criteria put forward by the various mechanisms. For Sida, CSO programmes and actions should be based on local partners' priorities (e.g. their own strategic plans) and the actions planned according to their own needs. For example, when local partners are not responsible for the management of funds and/or the implementation of the programme and certain programme activities, this must be duly justified by the Swedish CSO receiving the funding. This attests to the key role of partners in the governance and ownership of the project. Three aspects in particular are taken into account: the quality of the dialogue between national and partner CSOs, the type of funding they receive (core funding or allocated funding) and in what proportion, and alignment with local needs and inclusion.

In the Netherlands, an overall policy framework guides the four funding mechanisms that were identified. It makes the dynamics of working with local organizations in the target countries of the action one of the three key criteria for accessing funding. In this case, the application for funding must include an analysis of the power relations between the members of the consortium and the solutions adopted to counter any imbalances, so as to ensure that local partners can participate in the project design and implementation. In reality, while the project is developed hand in hand with the consortium (the "alliance partners"), it is more difficult to involve the country partners to the same degree. This reflects the frequent tensions in all of these mechanisms between, on the one hand, the far-reaching goal for local ownership in the design of the programme/project and, on the other, the reality of time constraints and tools used to develop the project (which include theory of change and the baseline approach, which are sometimes very abstract and not very accessible to CSOs unaccustomed to this form of organization).

- With regard to the explicit linking of these objectives in the framework documents of the agencies and ministries, as well as their application into selection approaches, the CSOs consider this to be a positive development of these financial mechanisms, despite the fact that they require additional investment that can make up a significant share of their budget and/or of the project budget, at times to the detriment of their own priorities or objectives.
- However, these objectives are sometimes in contradiction with the implementation methods of certain identified financial mechanisms: project implementation periods and/or strategies that are too short and do not allow for real monitoring over time and a response adapted to the structural needs of partner CSOs; no core funding available either directly or indirectly via national CSOs for partner CSOs; or ownership by local CSOs (via an active role in project governance or in defining needs, etc.) which is not sufficiently evaluated by the donor in the project review or final evaluation phase. Some CSOs pursue this objective with private funds. This gives them the time and latitude needed to develop solutions that respond to the expectations of their partner associations, their strategy, and their ideas – and this without the constraint of reporting to donors.

- Most of the mechanisms are implemented and evaluated by a dedicated agency (AFD, Sida, Engagement Global, AECID), under the aegis of a government ministry. Exceptions are the Netherlands and Belgium, where the ministry of foreign affairs of each country plays a central role in managing cooperation policy: a unit for international cooperation in the Netherlands and a directorate general for development (DGD) in Belgium are responsible for the coordination, implementation and financing of development cooperation policy. In most countries, the management of these mechanisms through dedicated agencies does not seem to affect the autonomy of CSOs. However, this may distance some CSOs from relevant interlocutors at the political and decision-making levels (such as in France).

## 2 | USE OF RIGHT OF INITIATIVE IN EUROPE

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### **Duration**

The duration of funding varies from three to five years depending on the mechanism under study. However, some mechanisms offer the possibility of renewal for organizations that are already beneficiaries, thereby allowing the duration of the submitted project to be extended and spread over several phases. This is the case in France, for example, where 50% of funding from AFD's CSO Initiatives Mechanism will finance multiphase or so-called recurrent projects/programmes whose previous phase has already been co-financed by the mechanism.

### **CSO beneficiaries**

The NGOs based in the donor countries are the main and direct beneficiaries of funding through these mechanisms. They are also the preferred intermediaries for transferring part of that funding to other CSOs established in other countries, as is the case with the Swedish mechanism. In some countries (e.g., Belgium, Germany, and Spain), national legal frameworks for development cooperation limit the type of CSOs that can be directly supported.

Reasons why donor organizations prefer working with national NGOs include: the ability of national CSOs to meet the administrative and financial requirements imposed in donor countries, transaction-cost constraints, and the experience and expertise developed by national CSOs which are considered relevant to support for CSO capacity building. For the

most part, financial support to national CSOs is based on a partnership model in which these CSOs work with CSOs based in partner countries. Some mechanisms opt for funding local partner CSOs via national CSOs through core funding (Sweden), while others opt for project funding. While these mechanisms are gradually developing, they are also becoming more selective. In the Netherlands, a non-national (Southern) CSO can lead a consortium, and each consortium must consist of at least one CSO from a partner country and one Dutch CSO. Belgian CSOs, on the other hand, must create synergies between their respective programmes in order to obtain funds. In France, the mechanism will open to CSOs from the South for funding in 2023 for the first time (but with restrictive criteria). A study is underway to possibly open the mechanism to actors from the social and solidarity economy.

Certain common criteria are applied when selecting the CSOs which will benefit from funding: (I) representativeness (the CSO has a rooted national presence and enjoys popularity, as seen by its capacity to mobilize its own funds), (II) soundness (in financial and administrative terms, and capacity for accountability and delivery of activities and supported projects) and (III) partnerships (long-standing partnerships with CSOs in the countries where actions are carried out, capacity to analyse the local context and relevance of the needs identified, and proven quality of the cooperation). Other more specific criteria are unique to the policies and strategies of the donor organizations, whether they (I) favour consortia or synergies (Netherlands, Belgium, Spain), (II) take into account the precedence of relations with CSOs (Sweden, France), or (III) support projects that are vectors of innovation (Netherlands and France for certain financial instruments that fall under the CSO Initiatives Mechanism).

### **Sectoral, geographical or thematic priorities**

Half of the mechanisms studied have no geographical, sectoral or thematic restrictions (France, Sweden, Germany). This is not the case in Spain, where geographic and sectoral priorities are defined by AECID's master plans and country partnership frameworks, and in the Netherlands, where right of initiative is exercised in the context of specific thematic priorities. In Belgium, a list of 30 Common Strategic Frameworks (CSFs) defining geographic and thematic priorities is drawn up by accredited Belgian development actors, with the obligation that the 15 partner countries of Belgian bilateral cooperation be included in this list. However, this obligation must be qualified because, while some countries do not set such criteria, they reserve the right to assess each project according to any other qualitative criterion deemed relevant, including the geographic orientations set in France with the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, via AFD.



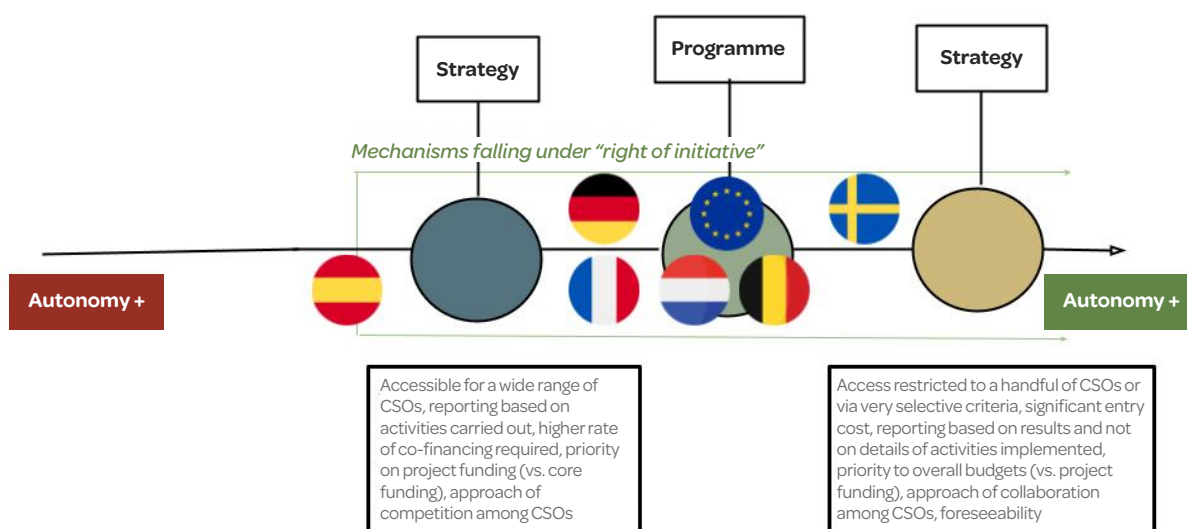
MAKE A CHANGE.



# 3 CSO AUTONOMY WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF SUCH FUNDING

## Types of funding

In this study, a distinction has been made between three types of funding among the 10 mechanisms identified: project support, programme support and strategy support. Each type has different forms of implementation. This distinction should nonetheless be qualified, because the autonomy from which international solidarity organizations can benefit is affected by the combination of various aspects: (I) the context, (II) the approach (from flexible and open to circumscribed and closed) and (III) the criteria for the types of funding (duration, funding of operations or activities, expected results, eligibility conditions, objectives of the mechanism, etc.). Although the notions and definitions may differ from country to country or may not mean exactly the same thing, all three funding approaches have strengths and weaknesses which either support or limit CSO autonomy.



## Selectivity

- The number of CSOs which directly benefit from funding through these mechanisms varies greatly from one mechanism to another, ranging from 17 (Sweden) to approximately 100 organizations (France, Belgium<sup>6</sup>). Some donor organizations give priority to overall budgets and sometimes even to core funding (Sweden), within a limited framework and partnership approach, with a small number of handpicked organizations (Sweden). Others make the number of CSOs funded an objective in itself, such as AFD<sup>7</sup> (France).

6. 85 organizations funded in Belgium for the 2022-2026 five-year programmes and 114 organizations in 2021 for the CSO Initiatives Mechanism.

7. CSO Initiatives Mechanism indicator: "Number of French CSOs supported each year, including the number of collectives/platforms", page 34 of the AFD strategy document *Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations 2018-2023* <https://www.afd.fr/fr/ressources/strategie-lafd-partenaire-des-organisations-de-la-societe-civile-2018-2023#:~:text=Cette%20nouvelle%20strat%C3%A9gie%20vise%20donc,au%20b%C3%A9n%C3%A9fice%20des%20populations%20vuln%C3%A9rables>.

- In general, the aid received through these mechanisms is relatively concentrated among a few medium or even large organizations and in this way does not reflect the diversity of CSOs in donor countries or in the South. Tensions were nevertheless pointed out during the interviews, between the interest in reaching a greater diversity of CSOs and more varied types of organization, beyond the larger and more established CSOs, and the competition approach that this engenders. AFD, for example, is considering opening access to the CSO Initiatives Mechanism to “social and solidarity economy” actors<sup>8</sup> and has opened it to local actors for funding in 2023 under certain conditions.

### Eligibility

This aid concentration is backed up by implementation of eligibility criteria, thereby reserving these mechanisms for certain CSOs that meet the latter:

- Representative organizations that have a good national and/or international reputation – for example, via co-funding criteria that are strict (as in France, Belgium or Germany) or specific co-funding criteria (as in Sweden, where these funds must be raised in the country, notably by developing a policy to promote membership).
- Experienced organizations that have already proven their ability to deliver results and meet the objectives set by these mechanisms. In this way, the precedence of the relationship with the donor organization is taken into account in most of these mechanisms, either to benefit from an extension of projects/programmes within the same mechanism (France, Spain, Germany, Netherlands), or to access other more flexible financial instruments through them. In France, 10% of the budget of the CSO Initiatives Mechanism is dedicated to projects of organizations receiving a grant for the first time. In the Netherlands, one of the three eligibility criteria for advancing to the second phase of the selection process is the ability of each consortium member to demonstrate a positive track record and proven experience in the chosen theme. The lead partner and the other consortium partner(s) must provide a narrative review and two case studies proving their performance in this area over the three years preceding the application.
- Financially and administratively sound organizations, capable of meeting the sometimes very demanding requirements of donor organizations – via very cumbersome accreditation processes to access these mechanisms, as in Belgium and Sweden.
- Some criteria not only present a risk in terms of eligibility but may also restrict the autonomy of CSOs which enjoy it. This is the case, for example, with co-funding, which obliges some CSOs to dedicate a significant portion of their activity to fundraising.
- These restrictions on NGO time and action are part of a trend towards managerialism in the development sector. This creates a separation between policymaking and operational implementation, as well as a necessity for aid performance, resulting in increased reporting and budgetary efficiency requirements<sup>9</sup>. These processes are perceived

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8. *Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations 2018-2023*, pp 6, 29, Agence Française de Développement, Paris, <https://www.afd.fr/sites/afd/files/2018-07-12-05-41/CIS-AFD-OSC-VA-BD.pdf>.

9. Justine Contor, “Saisir la managérialisation de la coopération belge au développement dans sa matérialité”, *Sciences de la société* [online], 105, 2020, published 1 June 2020, accessed 10 June 2022 <http://journals.openedition.org/sds/11404>

as cumbersome by the actors interviewed in all the countries studied and generate a more or less high entry cost, depending on the selectivity of the mechanism.

### **Political interference**

- Most of the CSOs interviewed were reluctant to say that the donor organization exerts political interference in their initiative (e.g. in setting priorities or in design, implementation, monitoring or evaluation). Yet, the NGOs in the target countries explicitly recognized or even challenged geographic and thematic orientations and administrative constraints. In most cases, the NGOs interviewed considered the interventions of the donor organization as being more about monitoring, dialogue, and quality of projects. This is less the case in Germany, where NGOs perceive a high level of interference by the donor organization and the funding agency (Englo) in the application review phase. There seems to be a fine line between an enlightening and useful intervention and interference that is deemed as restrictive. The result depends on a number of factors: the extent to which the suggestions by the donor organization or agency condition access to funding (according to whether the CSO already has a framework agreement or partnership), the content (technical, policy, structural) of the suggested change, and the quality of the dialogue between the CSO and the donor organization.

### **Transparency**

- With regard to the transparency of funding – i.e. access to information on the mechanisms, both prior to application and at a later stage, in terms of reporting – there is great disparity among the various countries. Only the Netherlands, Sweden and to some extent Belgium have easily accessible platforms based on open public data. Their data show and display when, to whom, and for what purpose development assistance funds were used, as well as the results that were achieved. Most other countries publish annual reports which include data on the mechanisms in question, but not always in a structured and usable way (France).



# 4

## DETERMINANTS INFLUENCING THE RIGHT OF INITIATIVE

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### **Official commitment**

There is considerable variation in the types of documents which formally establish the country's relationship to CSOs and/or civil society. These include framework documents and laws (France), strategies (Germany), guidelines (Belgium), principles (Sweden, Netherlands) and master plans (Spain). Commitment also depends on the agency or institution which produces the document (funding agency, foreign ministry, parliament, etc.) and which has the power to give orientation to the dialogue with CSOs. Sweden has adopted two types of key documents. The first is the Guiding Principles for Sida's Engagement with and Support to Civil Society (Sida, 2019); these (I) offer a holistic view of the key role of civil society in contributing to the development of pluralistic and democratic societies around the world and (II) make recommendations for Sida to further improve this relationship. The second is the Joint Commitments to strengthen dialogue and collaboration in the area of development cooperation (Government of Sweden, 2015), which provide a policy-level framework for this dialogue and a set of guiding principles that engage both government and CSOs.

### **Dialogue and consultation with CSOs**

- The level of participation by and consultation of CSOs in drawing up these framework documents is intrinsically linked to the role given traditionally to civil society in institutional and political dialogue. In some countries, upstream consultation on these documents is regular and planned (Sweden, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany) and in others dialogue is more centralized (France, Spain). In general, all donor agencies and/or institutions that supervise or implement funding arrangements have consulted CSOs in the creation of these strategies and framework documents, and efforts to establish an institutionalized and formalized dialogue were observed.
- CSO umbrella organizations are key interlocutors in all the countries studied. Nevertheless, a tendency can be observed concerning their role in advocacy on ODA funding and on CSO right of initiative, which seems to depend on the concentration of funding. In France and Belgium, a very collective approach to these issues and strong representation of a diversity of CSOs exist through Coordination SUD; ACODEV; and NGO Federatie, the CSO coordination network. However, the equivalent in Sweden (Concord Sverige) did not coordinate such dialogue to add the voice of its members during the consultations conducted on the evaluation and renewal of the CSO Strategy. When aid is more concentrated among a handful of large CSOs which already have a solid reputation and strong national roots, those CSOs are more likely to conduct advocacy in their own name.
- In general, the study shows that this dialogue takes place mainly with NGOs based in donor countries and with international NGOs – the main recipients of these mechanisms – rather than with CSOs in the South. Sida nonetheless organized four rounds of consultations with all recipient and non-recipient CSOs, local partners, and embassies be-



fore making its recommendations to the ministry responsible for determining the new strategy. This process made it possible to guarantee a form of inclusiveness in the dialogue and the development of new guidelines, thus responding to the main challenges encountered by CSOs in their dialogue with the authorities. These challenges include consultation schedules which do not always allow enough time for CSOs to prepare or ensure suitable representation, results of consultations not necessarily communicated to CSOs (in donor or partner countries), and lack of follow-up made to demands made by CSOs.

- The quality of the dialogue also varies depending on the issues raised, because, in the context of the projects themselves (unlike more strategic discussions) most CSOs appreciate the ongoing dialogue – from the review phase to implementation and evaluation – with the donor organization and/or agency responsible for the mechanism. Their involvement in projects is perceived as relatively relevant and improving the relevance and/or effectiveness of the projects carried out. In rare cases, these interventions are perceived as negative, as was seen for some NGOs interviewed in Germany which complain that they are still a little too frequent and unsolicited.

### **Administrative procedures and reporting**

- Administrative procedures may vary in nature (e.g. screening, audit, compliance), but all CSOs interviewed considered them as too cumbersome, despite some progress mentioned (Germany, EU). The requirements vary according to the mechanism, but there are two main distinctions: administrative procedures required to access funding with certain similarities to “strategic” support (Sweden and EU, but without being core funding) and other “project or programme” type funding (France, Germany, Spain, Netherlands, Belgium). In the case of “strategic” funding, the screening process enabling CSOs to access funding is particularly cumbersome; however, once it is obtained, they may enjoy some flexibility in administering the funds. The screening process represents a significant entry cost, which restricts access to such funding for some CSOs. In the case of “project or programme” funding, what is cumbersome is instead the sometimes unbalanced relationship between complicated administrative procedures, which are perceived as inappropriate in relation to the amounts granted and the duration of the funding.
- Added to this are the significant delays between the publication of the strategy or call for expression of interest by the agency or institution concerned, and the time when the CSO or CSO alliance obtains its funding. This can vary from one year (Netherlands) to one and a half years (France) depending on the mechanism. All these procedures pose several problems for the CSOs interviewed: not only do the resources allocated to the tendering process sometimes seem disproportionate, but they also prevent some organizations from proposing projects that respond to an immediate need or are linked to seasonal timing (e.g. for agricultural projects).
- The same is true for reporting, which must place an increasing emphasis on results. This concerns both the type of results that have to be obtained with regard to the objectives

set by the mechanism, as well as the type and frequency of reporting that must be submitted to the donor. In Sweden, one of the key objectives of its CSO Strategy is to help create a supporting environment in partner countries. This objective is experienced by CSOs as resulting from multiple factors and actors, which can hardly be examined in light of the actions of locally deployed CSOs and partners. This makes some CSOs veer away from their initial priorities and objectives, by diverting some of their actions and human and financial resources to the pursuit of an objective that belongs to the donor organization, however relevant it may be. The reporting that has to be made within the framework of the mechanism, and its frequency, may be an impediment when the durations of the funded projects are considered insufficiently long (France, Spain) and when the frameworks are imposed by the donor organization.

- This is less the case for partner and/or local CSOs, which are more protected against the stricter monitoring and evaluation or audit requirements imposed by agencies or ministries, insofar as in most cases they do not have a contractual relationship with the donor organization. In Belgium, for example, the requirements of the mechanisms for CSOs in the South are nearly non-existent: the co-funding programme targets Belgian CSOs, which are required to provide proof of the financial probity of their organization and those of their partners. No other major requirements were reported by the CSOs interviewed. In Sweden, when receiving core funding through a Swedish CSO partner, local partner organizations are exempt from auditing, and it is up to the Swedish partner to countersign the financial reports they send to the Swedish CSO.
- Generally speaking, these increasing requirements for accountability and reporting are seen by all CSOs as major challenges which reduce civic space and therefore autonomy. They divert attention from the achievement of development results that affect CSO partners in partner countries and are part of a movement of neoliberalization and bureaucratization of the relationship with public authorities with top-down exchanges (Spain, France, EU) and a focus on efficiency and auditing (Belgium, Sweden, Netherlands). In its 12 lessons learned from DAC peer reviews<sup>10</sup>, the DAC suggests that donor agencies discontinue automatic evaluation practices. Some donor organizations on the contrary take a flexible learning-centred approach for the CSOs of this type of evaluation by determining an evaluation path that matches the needs of CSOs, for example.

### **Support to CSOs and platforms**

- In addition to financial mechanisms, three CSO support measures were identified in the study as promoting CSO right of initiative. Some of them relate to: (I) the networking of CSOs, such as sharing contacts and networking with relevant contacts in partner countries through embassies (Belgium, Netherlands); (II) the organization of, funding for, and/or invitation to forums for meetings and discussions (EU, France) by donor organizations; and (III) the professionalization and structuring of CSOs through the de-

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10. *Partnering with Civil Society: 12 Lessons from DAC Peer Reviews*, OECD, 2022 (page 47)  
<https://www.oecd.org/fr/cad/examens-pairs/12%20Lessons%20Partenariat%20FRE%20WEB.pdf>

velopment of programmes dedicated to the structuring of the non-profit environment (France), for example. It should also be noted that these measures also target national umbrella organizations or networks, some of which receive significant funding via these mechanisms (90% of Concord Sweden's funding via the CSO Strategy; 60% of Coordination SUD's funding via the CSO Initiatives Mechanism).

## Innovation

- Several mechanisms consider that CSOs have added value in terms of innovation (in technical and social terms) and that supporting their actions allows them to make practical use of this potential with greater agility (flexibility of the mechanism) and relevance (solutions adapted to needs on the ground). Some donor organizations specifically mention this in their mechanism guidelines (Sweden, France, Netherlands) or have developed dedicated financial instruments. AFD, for example, supports innovation through the Sector Innovation Facility for NGOs (FISONG) and the French Global Environment Facility (FFEM), and makes it a selection criterion for the CSO Initiatives Mechanism, particularly for multi-year partnership agreements (MYPAs). In the Netherlands, innovation is one of the eight basic components on which the overall framework<sup>11</sup> for strengthening civil society is built. The aim is to create new ways of working and introducing improvements or adjustments based on lessons learned.
- Innovation can be encouraged upstream: using a consultative approach, the agencies or institutions responsible for the strategy that governs the financial mechanism can incorporate innovative elements into the mechanism. This is the case in Belgium, for example, where CSOs have participated in working on the government's strategic priorities to determine the thematic priorities (e.g. decent work in 2016) in addition to geographic priorities. This freedom given to CSOs to determine priorities upstream not only allows non-profit actors to gain ownership of the political processes underlying development cooperation policies, but also to determine the outlines of these policies. This is an advantage, given their perspective more connected to needs on the ground and the fact that they have fewer constraints, enabling them to reflect on these frameworks with more room for innovative thinking to emerge. However, this requires significant consultation mechanisms and political and administrative personnel who are open to change.
- Innovation can also be encouraged as part of CSO actions and solutions implemented by CSOs. According to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this is how the MYPA – one of the financial instruments available to CSOs under the CSO Initiatives Mechanism – was designed. It gives NGOs more flexibility to test new approaches. The MYPA with Secours Catholique is mentioned as an example on the challenges of a just ecological transition with its partners in Latin America and Africa. These initiatives are moreover seen

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11. *Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society Power of Voices Partnerships, A framework for funding civil society organisations for 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2025*, page 9.

as models to be replicated in French public policies. But fostering this capacity for innovation requires an approach – not only by CSOs but also by donor organizations – which is less standardized, susceptible to change and agile. The current mechanisms do not always allow for this, due to their red tape; risk aversion; very results-oriented approach; and project-type support, which requires reporting on the activities carried out, etc.

## Background

- The metaphor of “shrinking civic space” was widely used by all CSOs interviewed, as well as by some donor agencies, to describe a new generation of restrictions and factors affecting CSO autonomy in their right of initiative. Two often interrelated trends were observed in this regard: (I) restrictions on online freedom of expression and attacks on social networks against certain cooperation actors perceived as “communitarian” and (II) national laws and regulations which obstruct NGO activity (particularly compliance and reporting requirements concerning counter-terrorism). These regulations are often promulgated in the name of increased transparency and accountability in the non-profit sector, yet they are experienced as being coercive.
- In France, the Call for Expressions of Project Intentions for 2022 under the CSO Initiatives Mechanism stipulates that the applicable rate for calculating indirect project costs (e.g. administrative costs) is 12% of the overall project budget, with an exceptional additional 2% for implementing new screening obligations, making a total of 14%. It is against this backdrop that eight associations, including Coordination SUD, complained to the French Council of State to request the urgent suspension of the guidelines adopted in December 2021 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- These guidelines require non-profit organizations to verify that the end beneficiaries of their humanitarian or development aid actions are not on the EU counter-terrorism sanction lists of individuals or organizations. This “screening”, which the eight associations claim has no legal basis, makes being able to receive public funds conditional, including from AFD’s CSO Initiatives Mechanism. More broadly, and in several countries, the work of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) on establishing international standards on counter-terrorism is affecting the way in which CSOs are regulated by States, their access to financial services, and their obligations in this regard (e.g. to avoid proscribed organizations and other entities considered to present a risk of “terrorism”, to screen end beneficiaries, etc.)<sup>12</sup>. This significantly restricts CSO autonomy and right of initiative, particularly in countries considered “at risk”, which are the very ones where actions to promote development are absolutely essential.

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12. *The impact of international counterterrorism on civil society organisations - Understanding the role of the Financial Action Task Force*, Brot Für Die Welt, April 2007.

# 5

## ODA TO AND CHANNELLED THROUGH CSOS IN EUROPE

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### Relative and absolute measures of support “to CSOs” in DAC countries

Data on funding of the right of initiative (and more precisely on the mechanisms under study) are relatively difficult to obtain: with the exception of Sweden, very few countries can provide a comprehensive data set with the detail needed for examination. In some countries, CSOs even ask the relevant authorities to publish these figures. CSOs in Germany, for example, do this with relative success. Some data on the mechanisms under study have made it possible to illustrate the country-based case studies. However, comparisons on this basis are not possible due to lack of certain data and to not being able to verify all the data communicated by the donor institutions or organizations concerned. To shed light on the overall tendencies in funding right of initiative, the study thus used the OECD/DAC reports that make a distinction between “funding to CSOs” and “funding channelled through CSOs”, despite the inaccuracies and limits posed by these data. As mentioned in the introduction on methodology, these include:

- Discrepancies between what donor agencies report to the DAC and what they publish in their own country reports (Connolly notes that the quality of DAC figures depends on reporting and coding accuracy at the donor level<sup>13</sup>). This is especially true when it comes to specific mechanisms (the Swedish mechanism, for example, is reported as “channelled through CSOs” rather than as “to CSOs”, even though it consists of support to CSOs for implementing their own programmes, with objectives and means defined by the CSOs themselves).
- Limits on reported ODA amounts, which may still include:
  - So-called inflated aid, i.e. funding not used for the development of Southern countries but declared as such by EU Member States as ODA. This is typically funds for taking care of refugees in Europe, student aid, debt cancellation, or even the strengthening of migration control. This categorization is challenged by NGO platforms such as Concord<sup>14</sup> and the CNCD<sup>15</sup>, whose analysis of the figures tries to take into account this situation.
  - Tied aid, i.e. aid associated with obligations to use national companies.

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13. Connolly, E. (2007) *Key Trends in International Donor Policy on Civil Society*. Working Paper from a research project on Engagement with Civil Society for Poverty Reduction. Dublin: Centre for International Studies, Dublin City University.

14. <https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?s0bkEx>

15. <https://www.zotero.org/google-docs/?s0bkEx>



## Aid to CSOs and aid channelled through NGOs/CSOs

- ODA to NGOs covers public funds paid to national or international non-governmental organizations, the use of which is left to the discretion of the latter.
- ODA channelled through NGOs covers public funds made available to NGOs on behalf of the public sector, to be used for purposes specified or known and approved by the public sector.

Aid to NGOs refers to official contributions to programmes and activities that NGOs have developed themselves and that they implement under their own authority and responsibility. Aid channelled through NGOs means payments made by the public sector for NGOs to implement projects and programmes that the official sector has developed and for which it is ultimately responsible. The latter includes “joint financing schemes”, by which government agencies and NGOs consult on activities, jointly approve them, and/or share their funding.

Source: (OECD DAC, 2018, p. 58[13]), Converged Statistical Reporting Guidelines for the Creditor Reporting System (CRS) and the Annual DAC Questionnaire.

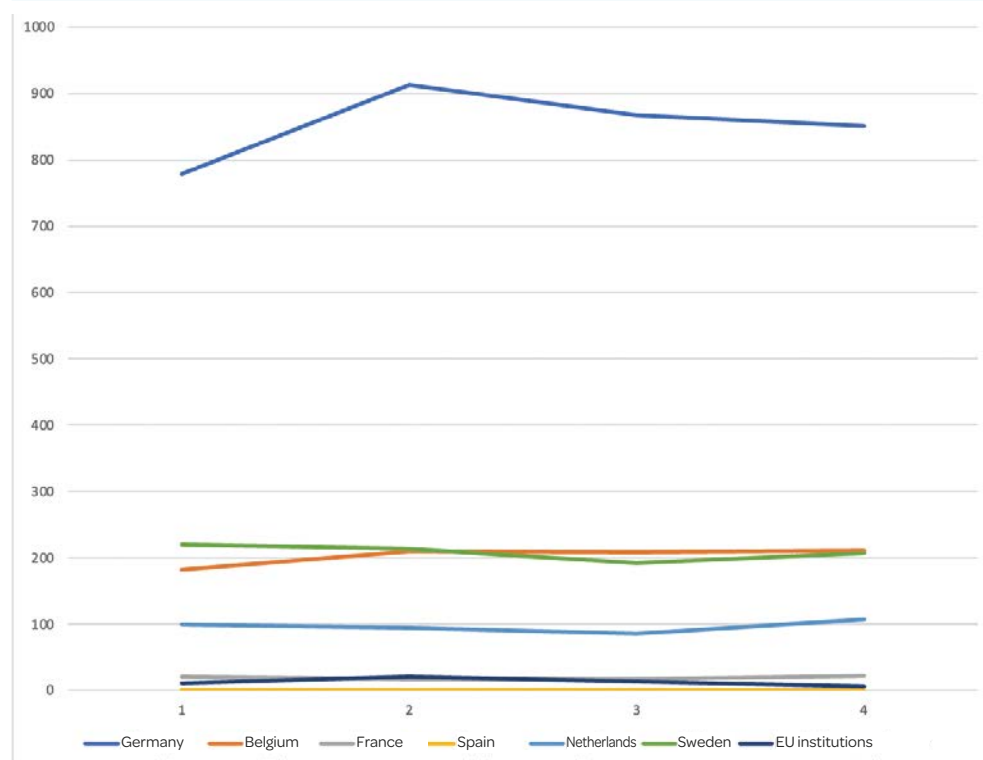
Based on the OECD/DAC report, the following table compares the overall level of resources provided to CSOs in the six countries and the European Union.

### FUNDING TO CSOS (IN MILLIONS OF DOLLARS) “Use left to the discretion of CSOs”

Funding to CSOs (in millions of dollars)	2017	2018	2019	2020
Germany	779.19	912.83	912.83	912.83
Belgium	181.81	209.25	208.24	211.44
France	20.42	16.77	17.23	22.02
Spain	0.77	0.78	1.04	0.44
Netherlands	99.88	94.3	85.09	106.53
Sweden	220.14	213.72	191.86	207.12
European institutions	11.12	20.64	13.11	5.17

A graph with the same data highlights the idea that resources to CSOs were relatively constant between 2017 and 2020, with the exception of Germany (which saw an increase from 2017 to 2018 and a gradual decrease after that).

### TREND IN FUNDING TO CSOs (IN USD MILLION) BETWEEN 2017 AND 2020



The figures presented in the DAC study take into account the inaccuracies mentioned above. They also make it possible to compare the relative share of aid to CSOs and channelled through CSOs in the total bilateral ODA budget.

### SHARE OF FUNDING TO CSOS IN BILATERAL ODA IN % « Utilisation laissée à la discrétion des OSC »

Funding to CSOs (in millions of dollars)	2017	2018	2019	2020
Germany	3.93	4.69	4.69	3.74
Belgique	14.04	15.67	18.32	18.21
France	0.31	0.23	0.23	0.21
Spain	0.11	0.11	0.13	0.06
Netherlands	2.83	2.52	2.48	2.88
Sweden	5.75	5.57	5.53	5.80
European institutions	0.07	0.12	0.09	0.02
Average of the 6 non-EU countries	4.49	4.80	5.23	5.15

The share of funding to CSOs in the total bilateral development assistance budget increased on average for the six countries surveyed, from 4.49% of the total budget to 5.15%. The share remained more or less stable for Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands, whereas France and Spain saw a more significant decline (32% and 45%). Only Belgium saw its share of funding to CSOs out of the total bilateral aid budget increase, from 14.04% in 2017 to 18.21% in 2020, well above the six-country average over 2017-2020, which is 4.9%. The share of funding to NGOs illustrates the importance of these actors for Belgian cooperation.

### SHARE OF FUNDING TO AND CHANNELLED THROUGH CSOS IN BILATERAL ODA IN % *Total funding*

<b>Financement aux OSC (en millions de dollars)</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
<b>Germany</b>	7.51	8.28	9.00	8.47
<b>Belgique</b>	21.03	22.66	24.05	25.43
<b>France</b>	3.99	4.81	6.32	5.77
<b>Spain</b>	72.90	84.19	74.81	79.44
<b>Netherlands</b>	25.45	27.56	27.47	26.47
<b>Sweden</b>	28.19	29.99	32.43	32.67
<b>European institutions</b>	11.92	12.46	13.63	10.91
<b>Average of the 6 non-EU countries</b>	<b>26.51</b>	<b>29.58</b>	<b>29.01</b>	<b>29.71</b>

The share of funding for CSOs out of total bilateral aid – which includes funding to CSOs and funding channelled through CSOs – also increased between 2017 and 2020 on average for all six European countries. This increase is more or less the same as the average increase in aid to CSOs, i.e. 12.07% (compared to 14.69%).

Despite the biases and uncertainties in DAC country reporting to the OECD, indications that member countries' own agendas dominate support for the CSOs they fund are supported by several factors: (I) documentary sources, (II) the low volume of aid to CSOs in bilateral aid reported by donor countries and (III) the small number of funding mechanisms that can be considered to correspond to aid to CSOs according to the platforms and CSOs interviewed for this study. This effectively weakens the independence and initiatives of civil society, as well as the concept of a vibrant and pluralistic civil society as an objective in itself.

# 6 | COUNTRY CASE STUDY

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## GERMANY

In Germany, CSO right of initiative is mainly granted and promoted by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), which funds CSOs through the Private Träger (private service providers) funding programme, in partnership with its agency Engagement Global (Englo). Only German NGOs can apply for funding through this mechanism, in partnership with CSOs in the countries where the project or programme is implemented. BMZ sees the main objective of the mechanism as the development of long-term capacity building for beneficiaries. The CSOs, on the other hand, view it as an exercise in subsidiarity, i.e. the mechanism enables civil society to fill in the gaps when the government is not able to take action and is based on the principle that CSOs are more familiar and better connected to the topics and the local situation. However, these two different viewpoints are in agreement on a basic need for stakeholder ownership of projects and for a bottom-up approach instead of a State-led top-down approach.

The main trends and points of tension in Germany revolve around three points: (1) de-bureaucratization, (2) localization and (3) decrease in the percentage of co-funding from the CSOs. These points are frequently discussed between the beneficiary CSOs, represented mainly by Venro (the German network of development and humanitarian NGOs) and the government. Progress has been made in reducing administrative burden and in putting greater priority on localization. However, headway on the issue of co-funding is difficult, as opinions differ between CSOs and the government on the one hand, and between CSOs themselves on the other.



## BELGIUM

In Belgium, the notion of right of initiative is well understood and is mainstreamed into the way the international solidarity sector operates. However, right of initiative is limited to accredited Belgian CSOs. Right of initiative is based on core notions of financial probity and accountability which structure the Belgian institutional culture and development cooperation. Despite there being no strategic framework for dialogue with civil society, the authorities value Belgian CSOs and maintain close dialogue and clear negotiations with them.

The flagship mechanism in Belgian non-governmental cooperation is the so-called five-year co-funding programmes introduced by Belgian NGOs. These programmes continue to be among the most cooperative and flexible in Europe. Within the scope set by the Common Strategic Frameworks co-developed by NGOs, they allow a certain degree of flexibility for adjusting actions according to changing circumstances. The focus of the mechanism is on transparency, relevance, results and learning. However, the entry cost is high due to a cum-

bersome accreditation process, and the prominence of the scheme in non-governmental cooperation poses a considerable risk of existential dependence for Belgian NGOs, as it represents a significant share of their overall funding.



## **SPAIN**

When it comes to bilateral official development assistance, Spain is the country which invests the lowest percentage of its ODA in the basic funding of CSOs of the EU. Conversely, it is the country that invests the highest percentage in support to CSO programmes which are aligned with the strategic plans of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID). However, even within this narrow framework, AECID and the CSOs have been able to generate a model of dialogue and consultation in which the initiatives and priorities of the CSOs are in some ways included in AECID cooperation policy. This model takes on concrete form in the so-called Convenios (“Agreements”), programmes in which both the CSOs and AECID seek greater stability in the action and a long-term impact. However, access to these agreements is selective, and not all CSOs meet the conditions required to benefit from the Convenios. Only the CSOs with the greatest capacities are granted access to this instrument. Given the narrow framework and competitive nature of the Convenios, only a few organizations are actually able to exercise a right of initiative.



## **FRANCE**

In France, the right of initiative is recognized by its Programming Act of 2021 on Inclusive Development and Combating Global Inequalities. Coordination SUD is trying to clarify the scope of this Act, by working on its definition and on advocacy concerning it. As for the French international solidarity CSOs, they appreciate this right of initiative in terms of various more or less flexible factors (e.g., flexibility in the administration of funds, role of local partner CSOs, quality of dialogue with donor organizations, duration and amounts of funding, and others). One of the main characteristics is the possibility for a CSO to present a project of its choice, regardless of the sectoral, thematic or geographical priorities of the donor organization. One mechanism is particularly in line with this approach: the CSO Initiatives Mechanism administered by AFD. While the CSO Initiatives Mechanism provides for various financial instruments to meet the diversity of CSO needs and is open to Southern partners to enable them to benefit from them, the share devoted to it is still small compared to other financial mechanisms, all donor organizations combined. Generally speaking, funding is increasing for State-initiated mechanisms and for the main mechanisms supporting the right of initiative, but to a lesser extent for the latter.



## **THE NETHERLANDS**

In the Netherlands, the right of initiative is associated with the principle of “civic midfield”, which promotes multiparty politics and consensus. In government funding programmes, this principle takes the form of strategic partnerships between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and selected NGOs that apply for and receive funding. The idea is to see NGOs as key partners for achieving political objectives and societal change in general. There are four financial mechanisms which promote CSO right of initiative and making it possible to fund projects carried out by a consortium of CSOs for a fixed period of five years: Power of



Voices; Power of Women; Women, Peace and Security; and SRHR Partnerships. This case study does not make a detailed distinction between the four of them, as they are all (I) based on the same overarching “Strengthening Civil Society 2021-2025” policy framework; (II) not mutually exclusive (a CSO may submit multiple projects under multiple mechanisms); and (III) open to CSOs outside the Netherlands, a trend which has further opened up funding programmes to local organizations over the years.

A key question to consider is whether linking grants to the achievement of specific policy objectives and requiring NGO applicants to include their projects in specific themes determined by the government ensures sufficient autonomy for NGOs and promotes their right of initiative. In addition, right of initiative seems limited in areas where legislation imposes strict transparency and accountability measures. This can be seen in cases of counter-terrorism measures and the law on the transparency of civil society.



## **SWEDEN**

In Sweden, the right of initiative revolves around two essential notions: CSOs in their own right and local ownership. The first notion involves systematic support for the civil society sector because a strong, pluralistic and independent civil society is a crucial aspect of a democracy and the key to inclusive and sustainable development. As for the notion of ownership, strengthening the societies in which Swedish CSOs work requires giving local partners the possibility to set priorities and take responsibility for the implementation of activities and the management of allocated funds.

The Sida funding model is based on funding agreements with CSOs and is guided by strategies that are generally valid for a five-year period. These strategies can be thematic or regional, or based on the type of actors funded. However, only the “Strategy for support via Swedish civil society organisations 2016–2022”, known as the “CSO Strategy”, is intended solely for CSOs. Its goal is to strengthen civil society in developing countries, without defining any geographical, sectoral, or thematic priority. Under the CSO Strategy, 17 Swedish strategic partner organizations (SPOs) and a handful of non-Swedish CSOs receive funding to work with partner CSOs in low- and middle-income countries. The entry cost is high, especially for administrative costs, and the mechanism is reserved for just a small number of CSOs. However, once selected, they enjoy a certain flexibility in implementing their programme and in administering their funding.



## **EUROPEAN UNION**

At EU level, the notion of right of initiative is difficult to assess because of the wide range of policies, implementing institutions, and financial instruments. Officially, it is values and rights that prevail in the perception of the notion of right of initiative: the EU supports the action of civil society in the name of fundamental freedoms and European values. In practice, the EU is both one of the most active and important donor institutions in supporting the initiatives and operating costs of NGOs, and also one with the most cumbersome and rigid financial instruments. Many reforms have taken place to address the demand for flexibility, inclusiveness and transparency, but the geopolitical orientations adopted by the new Commission do not suggest an improvement. The instrument designated to promote CSO right of initiative is the Civil Society Organisations - Local Authorities tool (CSO-LA, renamed “CSO” and now merged with the Global Europe instrument).

# 7

## MAIN CONCLUSIONS

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CSO right of initiative according to Coordination SUD's definition does not exist, but some mechanisms come close to it.

Overall, the “right of initiative” – as defined by Coordination SUD – for CSOs to initiate projects or programmes using public funds does not exist in practice. However, there are funding mechanisms that support the right of initiative to some degree, via determinants identified in this study. The Belgian and Swedish mechanisms stand out because their flexibility and time frames take into account CSOs' operating and stability needs. The Dutch, French and German mechanisms are also quite open to CSO initiative, as they maintain broad thematic and geographic orientations and allow possibilities for CSOs in the South. The French mechanism proposes several different financial instruments to adapt to the diversity of CSO needs. However, the French mechanism remains focused on the management of relatively short projects, as NGOs have to submit an application every three years, even in the case of a renewal. The Spanish mechanism provides for joint creation of a conceptual framework prior to the programming cycle (the only case along with Belgium), but right of initiative in Spain does not fall within the definition set by Coordination SUD.

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**A paradox: increase in right of initiative leads to increase in control.**

This study has made it possible to draw up a typology of CSO support and funding mechanisms in the different target countries. Within the mechanisms, factors which play a role in CSO autonomy include long-term funding, a high level of funding amounts, core funding, quality of dialogue between CSOs and donor organizations, and reporting on results rather than on activities, etc. However, these mechanisms which promote CSO autonomy the most are also those which require the most investment by CSOs to be able to avail of them. This is the case of Belgium and Sweden especially, but also the Netherlands, due to the auditing and reporting constraints that must be borne by CSOs. Paradoxically, these mechanisms are therefore restrictive in that they are available to only a handful of CSOs or to highly professionalized CSOs characterized by being representative, solid and well rooted at the same time. In contrast, new forms of CSOs which are self-administered and more agile and autonomous are bursting onto the global stage and putting into question the relevance of this right of initiative that exists “under control”, to meet set objectives.

**The right of initiative cannot be determined by isolated factors.**

This study has made it possible to identify or confirm several determinants that provide a framework for CSO right of initiative. These determinants alone cannot define what the right of initiative is. The mechanisms identified as promoting the right of initiative are very diverse: calls for projects, five-year programmes and framework agreements. Even though the Belgian federal programme is the only one in the sample which is not part of a government policy of dialogue with civil society, it is among those which are the closest to the right of initiative. As for the Spanish Convenios, while they include a phase for co-building a conceptual framework with CSOs prior to the programming cycle and are essentially framework agreements, they do not seem to match the definition of right of initiative. We can thus say that right of initiative is promoted by a synergy of factors and not by the accumulation of isolated factors.

**The mechanisms identified aim at autonomy for independent development actors but do not give those actors the means needed.**

For whichever mechanism, and even though real evaluation and reform efforts are carried out by some cooperation players, there is a gap between the objectives and the implementation methods, between official discourse and practice. The ultimate aim of most of the mechanisms is to strengthen civil society in partner countries, as an independent actor of development. Priority is put on capacity building for CSOs and their partners, including networks and umbrella organizations, in order to enable greater material autonomy. However, there are few partnerships, frameworks or core funding mechanisms, and even fewer (direct) flows to CSOs in the Global South.

**Right of initiative is a political issue and not a technical one: political regimes that legitimize civil society leave more space for CSOs to exercise their own initiative.**

The CSOs which exist in civil society ecosystems rooted locally and/or that have a local base, and which come from a more egalitarian sociopolitical tradition, manage to create a partnership relationship with their government administrations. They also enjoy a right of initiative which is more deeply rooted in their country's culture and institutions. This can best be seen in the cases of Germany, Belgium, Sweden and the Netherlands, whose political systems provide for a degree of decentralization of and autonomy for public authorities, and where the broad and long-standing definition of civil society is both valued and pluralistic, as it includes corporate bodies, trade unions, political foundations, churches, political parties, etc.

They are also appreciated by government institutions as a political and technical asset (e.g., for the image of the country abroad, expertise, etc.).

In France, even though civil society and CSOs also have a long history, the concentration of powers dealing with foreign policy and the top-down institutional relationships mean that the right of initiative is subject to more conditions and to the economic situation. The adoption of the French Programming Act of 2021 on Inclusive Development and Combating Global Inequalities seems to be mitigating this tendency, and in doing so is recognizing CSO right of initiative in official texts. Thus, “professional” CSOs whose main action focuses on Southern countries may suffer an existential dependency on ODA, more than do other CSOs. This affects their bargaining power with central authorities and generates a survival-mode approach rather than supporting the fight against inequalities. Right of initiative is therefore also dependent on the model chosen by CSOs and how well they are rooted in a social fabric.

### **Right of initiative is accessible to medium and large CSOs in the North.**

The mechanisms under study are part of a trend towards consortia and groupings of international solidarity CSOs (Spain, Belgium, France, EU, Netherlands). The government offices responsible for managing the allocation and monitoring of funding have seen their capacity decrease and their performance evaluated based on the disbursement of funds. At the same time, CSOs are calling for a simplification of procedures. While some streamlining of procedures has indeed occurred, it is also sometimes an opportunity for government administrations to allocate larger budgets to a smaller number of CSOs which have a certain amount of financial management capacity.

### **The right of initiative of CSOs in the North is putting “partnership” into question.**

The scope of this study has not made it possible to examine in detail what impact the mechanisms have had in the field. Most of the mechanisms support the intermediary (i.e. the Northern CSOs) before the end beneficiary (i.e. the CSOs and the target persons/groups in the countries where the project/programme is implemented). However, the issue of partnerships between Northern and Southern CSOs enables us to establish the following: First, in most cases, the relationship between the CSOs that are partners of the initiatives remains a secondary factor in the funding arrangements and is not examined by the donor organizations as rigorously as are the financial strength or organizational development of the beneficiary CSO. Second, the quality of the partnership relationship between CSOs from the North and the South is crucial to the effectiveness of the initiative.

Thus, CSO right of initiative in the North could have an effect on the effectiveness of activities in the countries of the South and on CSOs that are “partners”, insofar as CSOs in the North have adopted a concerted approach of handover and solidarity with CSOs and other actors in the development of the South. It is therefore up to the CSOs of the North to make their aspirations for initiative take on concrete form in their “partnership” relationship. It is the CSOs of the North which determine if the aspirations and analyses of their Southern partners are the focus of the initiatives funded as part of their right of initiative.

### **Right of initiative is based on the quality of the relationship with the donor and not on absence of that relationship.**

Against a backdrop in which constraints related to public or private funding are systematically imposed by the donor organization, the question is therefore to know which constraints are considered legitimate by the actors involved and which ones hinder their right of initiative.

In any event, the thematic, geographical and administrative constraints are unanimously recognized as more or less imposed and cumbersome. They are often challenged and, when possible, negotiated. The impact of such constraints on NGO initiative is relatively present and observable in some major trends described in this report (e.g. administrative workload, lack of adaptation and planning, duplication, etc.). At the same time, a significant proportion of the organizations interviewed do not perceive those constraints as political interference. Sometimes, those constraints are even judged as necessary. For example, even though most organizations are negatively affected by reporting, some of them have explicitly stated that they are legitimate considering support for democratic values and transparency.

It can be concluded that most organizations recognize that it is legitimate for public authorities to intervene in the context of co-management of funding and that the challenge is rather one of the type and scope of such interventions that may sometimes encroach on their own initiatives. Some of the NGOs interviewed are in fact looking for partnerships with public authorities, so that they can increase their impact on the ground, have access to the diplomatic and political network of donor organizations, and benefit from infrastructure and resources. It is therefore the type of relationship with the donor organization and not the absence of relationship that hinders NGO initiative: right of initiative works better when this relationship is qualitative, flexible and partnership-based, and less contractual, unilateral, quantitative, financial and rigid.

**Right of initiative is weakened when the legitimacy of the CSOs is put into question.**

The relevance of traditional CSOs, which do not always fit within the political context of their time, is being put into question by various social and civic movements in the North and South which are reacting to the urgency of the climate crisis, the rise of the far right, institutional racism, discrimination and growing North-South inequalities. The professionalization and depoliticization of European CSOs concentrating on technical or expertise aspects (the oldest of which were once focused on the self-determination of peoples<sup>16</sup>) is increasingly perceived not as an asset but as an obstacle. This issue of legitimacy also came up in many interviews, with regard to the role played by CSOs as intermediaries in financial mechanisms whose main objective is to strengthen civil society and especially the capacities of CSOs in partner countries. This could limit the autonomy of CSOs in the North, not by restricting their scope of action, but by a lack of relevance of their action to achieve the aforementioned objectives<sup>17</sup>. Some donor organizations are opening or planning to open relatively constant funding mechanisms to other actors than national CSOs (e.g. to CSOs of the South, the private sector, or the social and solidarity economy, with projects focused on entrepreneurial action). However, this creates a process of competition which promotes greater concentration of aid in the hands of the few CSOs considered legitimate

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16. Source: interviews with the CSOs.

17. Peace Direct (2021), [Décolonisation de l'aide et de la consolidation de la paix](#), London, 10 May 2021.



# 8 GOOD PRACTICES IDENTIFIED

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The “good practices” listed below were identified based on two criteria:

- Either they are key elements (determinants or factors) bringing them closer to what Co-ordination SUD considers to be CSO right of initiative,<sup>18</sup>
- or they have been identified as such by the CSOs and umbrella organizations interviewed in the target countries.

It is nevertheless important to consider that these practices are rooted in a particular local context, a history and a culture, and that they are in tune with existing structures, actors and dynamics in this specific context. They therefore cannot necessarily be replicated as such and must be adapted to the complexity and particularities of different contexts if they are to be transposed. And, while they can act as inspiration for imagining other possible solutions, it should be noted that only a process of reflection based on the needs of the communities served by the CSOs can make it possible to build the most suitable and most relevant practices<sup>19</sup>. The non-exhaustive list below therefore includes some characteristics of the mechanisms which were identified and which were assessed positively by the actors interviewed:

## Transparency and accountability

**1** Publication of the list of beneficiaries and partners selected by financial mechanisms, as well as figures on funding on a dedicated website, with open, disaggregated and easily accessible data in the official national language and in English (Netherlands, Sweden).

**Objective:** *to strengthen transparency of allocated funding and to improve understanding of civil society's contribution to the cooperation action of donor countries.*

## Dialogue and consultation

**2** Recognition of CSO right of initiative in laws or in any official strategic document (France).  
**Objective:** *to affirm government commitment to supporting NGO autonomy, for a strong civil society and for inclusive and sustainable development, and to determine the means and the trajectory to do so.*

**3** Establishment of regular dialogue between the CSO (or the consortium of beneficiary CSOs) and the political or financial authorities: workshops with embassies in the countries where projects take place, videoconferences, strategic policy discussions between CSOs and the ministry's policy departments, formal and informal meetings with partners, etc. (Netherlands, Sweden).

**Objective:** *to improve the quality and impact of dialogue with civil society in international cooperation.*

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18. See “Table 1 - Coordination SUD's definition of the ‘right of initiative’”.

19. Voir “Building a different kind of organisation: questioning the wisdom of “best practices”, 23 juin 2022, par Nani Jansen Reventlow, fondatrice du Digital Freedom Fund et de Systemic Justice

**4** Establishment of inclusive dialogue on the evaluation and development of new framework documents or strategies that act as guidelines for the financial mechanisms identified. An example is the participation by local partners in consultation processes (Sweden) designed to go beyond a largely bilateral approach between CSOs in donor countries and international CSOs – the main recipients of these mechanisms.

**Objective:** *to strengthen the representativeness of civil society actors in discussions with the government, and to increase the quality and impact of this dialogue.*

#### **Fonctionnement et efficacité du dispositif**

**5** 100% funding of projects covered by the financial mechanism, without any cofinancing commitment required (Netherlands).

**Objective:** *to facilitate access by NGOs to these financial mechanisms.*

**6** No geographical, sectoral or thematic restrictions in the submission of applications (France, Sweden, Germany).

**Objective:** *to strengthen the autonomy of CSOs, and to better meet their expectations with regard to these financial mechanisms.*

**7** Longer funding periods, up to five years (Netherlands and Sweden).

**Objective:** *to enable greater flexibility and anticipation for beneficiary CSOs or CSO consortia.*

**8** The funding proposal includes the costs of a feasibility study, whose findings can be incorporated into the funding proposal itself and whose costs can be covered by the donor at a later stage (Germany).

**Objective:** *encourage and financially support NGOs so that they can provide for a period of reflection prior to project elaboration.*

**9** CSOs legally registered in the country where the project is being carried out can access these financial mechanisms (Netherlands, France).

**Objective:** *to strengthen the localization of aid and to make the impact of the mechanisms more relevant and sustainable.*

**10** Funding for initiatives based on a theory of change (ToC) developed by the applicant NGO (Netherlands).

**Objective:** *to propose a more flexible approach to CSOs, especially for advocacy initiatives, which are inherently difficult to plan in advance over five-year periods and highly dependent on external factors.*

**11** Priority given to working with small CSOs (EU).  
**Objective:** *to facilitate access to funding for a variety of CSOs, and to strengthen the capacities of local CSOs, youth organizations and social movements.*

**12** Horizontal monitoring of actions and budget, via (I) continuous dialogue between CSOs and institutional programme officers and (II) simplified budget reporting procedures (EU).  
**Objective:** *to improve the quality of financial monitoring.*

**13** Selection criteria which explicitly take into account local ownership (i.e. which ensure that CSO programmes and actions meet local partners' needs) and which may be based on key documents analysing power relations between members of the consortium or explaining solutions adopted to counter any imbalances, with the goal of ensuring that local partners can participate in the project design and implementation, etc.) (Netherlands, Sweden).  
**Objective:** *to strengthen the localization of aid and to make the impact of the mechanisms more relevant and sustainable.*

**14** Share of the mechanism budget reserved for organizations receiving funding for the first time (France).  
**Objective:** *(I) for emerging or less "established" organizations, to provide access to funding that promotes the right of initiative, and (II) for donor organizations, to provide access to knowledge or innovations possessed by these organizations.*

**15** Implementation of measures to support CSOs, through (I) the sharing of contacts and networking with relevant interlocutors in partner countries through embassies (Belgium, Netherlands); (II) the organization of funding for, and/or invitation to forums for meetings and discussions by donor organizations (EU, France); and (III) the professionalization and structuring of CSOs, e.g. the development of programmes dedicated to the structuring of the non-profit environment (France).  
**Objective:** *to participate in strengthening the effectiveness of CSOs in implementing their programmes and strategies within the framework of the mechanism.*

**16** Upstream CSO involvement in determining government priorities within the framework of the mechanism (Belgium).  
**Objective:** *to improve the relevance and sustainability of the effects of these mechanisms, by connecting them to needs in the field and helping innovative thinking to emerge.*



## Enabling Environment working group

For Coordination SUD, upholding and promoting an “enabling environment” is a strategic advocacy priority. Its aim is to:

- enable access by NGOs to public funding which is adapted to their needs in terms of both volume and forms of funding;
- make CSO right of initiative a reality, through regular and productive dialogue with public authorities and the promotion of funding mechanisms that support CSO initiatives; and
- encourage a regulatory framework adapted to NGOs, especially with regard to taxation on donations.

For these purposes, we have an Enabling Environment Unit led by an “enabling environment focal point” from our Board and a project officer. This Unit calls on our various committees according to the subjects that need to be addressed and is backed up by a dedicated working group on CSO right of initiative.

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