



EU COUNTRY ROADMAP FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

BANGLADESH

Introduction

The EU considers an empowered civil society as a crucial component of any democratic system and an asset in itself. Civil Society represents and fosters pluralism and can contribute to more effective policies, inclusive and sustainable development. Civil society is also an important player in fostering peace and in resolving conflict.

While States carry the primary responsibility for development and democratic governance, synergies between States and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) help overcome challenges of poverty, widening inequalities, social exclusion and unsustainable development. By articulating citizens' concerns, CSOs fulfil a growing demand for participatory, transparent and accountable governance. Their participation in policy processes is key to ensuring inclusive and effective reforms, to building more accountable and legitimate states, and enhancing social cohesion and democracy.

The concept of "CSOs" embraces a wide range of actors with different roles and mandates. Definitions vary over time and across institutions and countries. The EU considers CSOs to include all non-State, non-government, not-for-profit, non-partisan structures, through which people pursue shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, social or economic. Operating from the local to the national, regional and international levels, they comprise of urban and rural, formal and informal organisations.

The EU values CSOs' in their diversity and specificities and engages with them to pursue shared commitment for social progress and fundamental values of peace, freedom, equal rights and human dignity.

This vision is at the core of the 2012 Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament and European Council ["The Roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations"](#) which proposes an enhanced and more strategic approach in EU engagement with civil society. The Communication puts forward three priorities for EU support:

1. To enhance efforts to promote a conducive environment for CSOs in partner countries;
2. To promote a meaningful and structured participation of CSOs in domestic policies of partner countries, in the EU programming cycle and in international processes; and

3. To increase local CSOs' capacity to perform their roles as independent development actors more effectively.

To translate these priorities in concrete strategies for implementation, the Communication envisages the **elaboration of Roadmaps** at country level, to be conceived as a joint initiative between the European Union and Member States.

Purpose of the Roadmap

The purpose of the Roadmap is to develop a **common strategic framework** for the engagement of EU Delegations and Member States with civil society at country level, with a view to improving the **impact, predictability and visibility** of EU actions.

It will also improve the **consistency** of EU cooperation vis-à-vis civil society, across sectors and funding instruments, and progressively promote better **coordination** within EU Delegations, Member States and other relevant actors.

EU Roadmap for engagement with civil society in Bangladesh

The *Roadmap for engagement with civil society in Bangladesh* presents EU overarching vision and indicative priorities in the engagement with the civil society in Bangladesh, cutting across EU and EU MS initiatives aimed to assisting Bangladesh in its democratic governance and development process. The priorities have been identified by the EU and EU MS in the context of the EU development cooperation joint programming process and following the outcomes of several studies and consultations carried out with a broad base of stakeholders since 2013, including Government and the civil society.

The *Roadmap for engagement with civil society in Bangladesh* upholds the complementary role of the Bangladeshi Government and CSOs as it is set out in international commitments and national development plans, including Vision 2021, the National Integrity Strategy and the Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, the *Roadmap* will be implemented through synergic cooperation with the stakeholders, capitalising on available instruments and resources and will be a living document that can be updated over time.

Priorities

PRIORITY 1 - ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Promote an enabling environment for the civil society in terms of the institutional and legal framework and its enforcement (or lack of) to ensure basic rights of the civil society (right to association, assembly, information, freedom of expression on line and off-line, and access to funding) in law and practice, and functioning democratic spaces.

Actions

- Enabling environment to remain high in the political, economic, and policy dialogue agenda of the EU with the government and CSOs, as a critical element underpinning international commitments and policies referring to civil society.
- Support legal, policy and institutional mechanisms and structures in line with the commitments undertaken in the framework of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to ensure spaces and unrestricted access to financial resources for civil society engagement in national policy dialogue platforms.
- Continue joint consultations involving Development Partners, Government and CSOs from different sectors to better understand implications of the enabling environment.
- Ensure that EU development cooperation programmes integrate support to the enabling environment and protection of civil society
- Use programmes and projects to open safe spaces for CSOs to advocate for an improved enabling environment by mainstreaming cross cutting issues such as accountability, transparency, access to information and civil society rights in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes and projects.
- Through programmes and projects, ensure high visibility to international commitments defining the critical role that CSOs play in democracy, accountable governance, as well as development.

PRIORITY 2 – CIVIL SOCIETY AS DEVELOPMENT ACTOR IN ITS OWN RIGHT

Support a pluralistic, representative, bridging civil society actively engaged in open debate and advocacy with regard to policy, legislation and decision-making, as well as enforcement and practice, as an interlocutor in its own right and on behalf of the right-holders, particularly from the grassroots.

Actions

- Facilitate civil society participation in existing national policy dialogue platforms in which the EU plays an active role alongside other international development agencies, i.e. the Local Consultative Groups.
- Ensure more pluralistic representation and participation of the civil society in sector policy consultations and in the design, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects.
- Facilitate the role of those CSOs representing the most marginalized groups, in particular children, disabled, women.
- Foster meaningful partnerships of CSOs through participation in networks and alliances, their interaction with other Non-State Actors, public and private sector.
- Encourage, where feasible, participatory planning, decision making and monitoring mechanism within projects and the participation of CSOs in project steering mechanisms.

- Create entry points in programmes and projects to activate accountability mechanisms, i.e Right to Information Act.
- Where relevant, create entry points for the civil society to play a role in conflict prevention, conflict transformation and prevention of radicalization.

PRIORITY 3 - CAPACITY ENHANCEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Contribute to the development of a strong, independent and non-sectorial civil society, vigilant in promoting and protecting human rights, gender equality, diversity, democracy and sustainable development, and working according to the principles of participation, representation, non-discrimination, accountability and transparency.

Actions

- Ensure unrestricted and consistent flow of funding to CSOs.
- Ensure that funding initiatives incorporate capacity development components in support to the strengthening of the institutional and technical capacity of CSOs.
- Envisage leadership in development programmes for young civil society leaders and champions of change accompanying the process of generation change.
- Ensure mainstreaming of rights-based approach throughout all programmes and projects.
- Recognise and support CSOs commitments towards higher standards of good governance, transparency and accountability of CSOs consistent with the National Integrity Strategy.

PRIORITY 4 - UPHOLD HUMAN RIGHTS

Recognising the vital contributions of the civil society as development actor and human rights monitor, raise the capacity of human rights defenders and stand in their protection in line with Article 1 of the 2001 EU-Bangladesh Cooperation Agreement and EU Human Rights Defenders Guidelines.

Actions:

- Ensure adequate flexibility and right of initiative to CSOs when devising programmes for funding in the Human Rights sector.
- Highlight HR issues of vulnerable groups (i.e. religious minorities, indigenous groups...) in the planning of new initiatives and mainstream the rights-based approach throughout the sectors of intervention.
- In cooperation with the Government and the Civil society, address the root causes of democratic deficits in upholding human rights and overall governance and strengthen the institutional environment for better human rights protection - by raising the understanding of basic human rights principles - ; - by promoting more friendly justice systems for the poor and the most vulnerable, for indigenous communities, women,

children and the people living with disabilities - ; - by promoting gender rights and breaking gender stereotypes - ; - by contrasting patronage systems and corruption - .