



Focus Fields CSRF-Tanzania

The following four themes are the current priorities of CSRF - Tanzania (2011 trajectory) on which applicants are encouraged to focus:

1. Indigenous CSO Networks

Southern civil society organizations (CSOs) are currently seeking successive collaboration opportunities to expand the scope of their activities. As a consequence, local civil society is progressively engaged in bridge building activities, resulting in partnership agreements, joint lobby attempts, and umbrella organisations. The rationale for establishing these network structures revolves around issues of increased scope of advocacy attempts and coordinated programmes; intensified cooperation is expected to reduce the number of duplicated initiatives and yield better coordination and effectiveness in terms of advocacy. However, some difficulties arise in establishing these cooperation efforts. Often they are caused by competition among CSOs for the same pool of resources, lack of leadership, insufficient coordination and lack of transparency. Some argue that these newly formed networks are counter-productive as small CSOs are more closely involved in communities and remain sensitive to the needs of their constituencies, whereas others emphasise that a relatively fragile and diffuse sector has less impact than large-scale hybrid organisations. The implications of these developments are also dependent on the sector organisations are engaged in; service delivery demands a flexible tailor-made approach whereas advocacy is believed to benefit from professional bureaucracies. All these developments are not yet fully grasped in the existing body of literature. The following questions are of relevance: Why does local civil society engage in joint partnerships? How do local CSOs engage in networks? How comprehensive are these networks and who are the stakeholders included? Which factors or characteristics determine the structure of a network and how can they be typified (homogeneous or heterogeneous)? What are the benefits and drawbacks of participation in local CSO networks?

2. Institutional Settings

With the increasing presence and proliferation of civil society organizations in advocacy and service delivery activities, serious debates are held on their relationship with governments and the for-profit sector. Their explosive growth in numbers is often explained by highlighting how bilateral donors and Northern NGOs have provided growing (financial) support to Southern CSOs, enlarging the scope and capacity of the latter. Southern government responses, as local CSOs act as service delivery substitutes or pressure government through advocacy activities, range from partnership and incorporation through indifference to antipathy and mistrust, based upon their perceived role of CSOs in national development. Government imposed legislative frameworks are presumed to influence the way Southern CSOs are organized, implement their activities, advocate and gain legitimacy. The links between local CSOs and the for-profit sector also offer some additional insights into their relations with stakeholders. By means of partnerships, both CSOs and the for-profit sector are expected to improve their skills, knowledge, and organisational infrastructure, with the common aim to produce public goods. What is not yet widely known is how their respective organisational structures connect, generate a collective goal, and deepen their collaboration. The following research topics are relevant here: What are the characteristics of national civil society legislation and accompanying context? Which institutional factors determine CSO participation in national planning processes? What is the relationship between particular types of NGOs and their governments? How does the government value the role of CSOs in the development process? How do donors influence legislative frameworks and how does this affect local CSOs? What are the incentives for establishing partnerships between local CSOs and the for-profit sector? What kind of partnerships exist between local CSOs and the for-profit sector? What are the steps in the collaboration process between local CSOs and the for-profit sector?

3. International Networks

The relationship between CSOs and international organisations is often considered a result of the international aid chain, but can be given a wider definition. Because civil society operates between state

and market, it can link up with diverse entities to seek increased influence, extend its knowledge, and develop new skills. The organisational environment and latitude has expanded over the years and provided opportunities for civil society organisations to organise beyond borders, gain better access to resources, and increase their influence. Another reason why CSOs have linked up with international organisations is to gain specific cross border needs and global public goods such as human rights, environmental issues, and international financial arrangements. There is also a growing tendency to emphasise individual responsibilities over state involvement, stimulating transnational cooperation between CSOs and other organisations, such as multilateral institutes, states, and transnational corporations. This establishment of partnerships and international networks has resulted in international discourses between actors on their roles and responsibilities. All these different stakeholders hold diverse perspectives on the international networking, but also on the role of CSOs at various levels of development or international debates. It is therefore interesting to highlight the discourse between local and international actors and to map how local CSOs assess their own role within development. Other questions could relate to the implications of changing donor agendas and the different perspectives between Northern – and Southern NGOs and donor – local CSO relations.

4. Impact and Accountability

Impact and accountability are core concepts within the contemporary discourse on NGO effectiveness. Evaluations are generally considered a good element in non-governmental activities, but all together they have illustrated little about real impact. Evidence is still lacking on the actual impact of civil society programmes; evaluations lack sound methodological structures and often result in descriptive assessments. In addition, measuring impact is almost impossible without considering contextual influences and spill over effects. Nevertheless, citizens and donors are nowadays increasingly demanding transparency in development activities and impact assessments. A broader societal awareness has espoused a refocus on monitoring and evaluation for accountability (and learning) purposes, thereby setting a new accountability agenda. As the accountability agenda trickles down through the aid chain, the question arises as to whether local civil society organisations have monitoring systems in place to account for actions that should reflect the interests of their constituencies. CSOs often advocate good governance, dialogue, and transparency in government at all levels, but are they able to implement these pillars in their own organisational procedures? If so, what kind of difficulties do they encounter? Little is also known about local communities and their (lacking) demand for more stringent CSO accountability and project evaluation activities. How is this interaction structured and valued by both stakeholders? The discourse in this field could also lay bare the following questions: How do local CSOs account for their activities to their constituencies? What is the influence of stringent reporting demands on actual project implementation of CSOs?

Open category

To prevent the call from becoming a tender, an open category is added to offer the possibility to submit research proposals highlighting other areas of focus within the domain of civil society. These proposals will be given due consideration. However, preference is given to applications on the themes mentioned above.