



CHANGES IN THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENDA: THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES¹

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During the past years, the development policies and the global development agenda have suffered important transformations that have led to a redefinition of the strategic role of the different development actors. One of the actors who is feeling this reconfiguration more intensively is civil society and its organizations. In this context, civil society organizations (CSO) are being incorporated into new dynamics that affect the way they participate in relevant areas of the development policies and the development agenda, such as the institutional context and framework of development policies; the relationship framework between the governments and CSO; and the financial framework designed for CSO participation within the development policies. In this paper we will analyze some of the most relevant trends in each of these areas.

THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND FRAMEWORK OF DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

Throughout the years, most of the national development systems have granted wide recognition to the participation of CSO in the development policies, regardless of it being institutionalized in a more or less formal or strategic way. In general, all countries have strategic documents, mechanisms and departments that shape different relations with the whole of

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their CSO, and that try to facilitate and regulate the relations between their organized citizens and their respective public policies. Though this doesn't mean that all countries share that strategic recognition or materialize it in the same areas, most of the countries agree that the strategic value that CSO give to the development policies lie in several areas. Strengthening democracy, not necessarily limited to development policies but to the entire political practice; strengthening development policies, whether it's through the definition of this policy and the dialog between policies, the monitoring and supervision of the development policy, or through its implementation; strengthening associative networks and the social capital of partner countries, which together with institutional strengthening is key in great part of the development policies; and social mobilization through the construction of global citizens who are active in and concerned about development issues.

However, this recognition contrasts with other commitments and decisions made by countries that are shaping a scenario in which the strategic role of CSO can be weakened. First, new actors, especially private businesses, have a more relevant role in development as the increasing importance of economic growth within the development agendas is having great impact on the development paradigm and the conformation of the map of development actors. Second, though countries where CSO have had a minor role in managing official development aid (ODA) are tending to increase it, countries where CSO have had an important role in managing ODA are diminishing the aid canalized through them. Third, the trends in the ways CSO are financed show on one hand, a higher concentration of the ODA of various countries in a smaller number of organizations and on the other, a clear influence of the "value for money" logic.

These trends can limit the diversity, richness and strengthening of the associative networks. Therefore, without there being a discursive questioning about the role of CSO in the development policies, some of the changes occurred within the international aid system seem to announce tendencies that can threaten the strategic role played by social organizations in the development agenda.

Conversely, there is an emerging trend of the role of businesses in the development policies in different countries. As the economic growth logic acquires a central role in development policies, and mainly due to this, the actors from the private sector business start to gain leadership within the development policies through different models amongst countries. A common feature is the inlay of commercial interests within the development visions and throughout the development policies and the consequent weight, especially of the export sector, in the conformation of the map of actors of the different development systems. Therefore, supporting the productive system of partner countries and, in some cases, of the donor countries, becomes a priority in the development policies, which in many



cases translates in specific modalities that support investment and internationalization through ODA funds.

This shift in the development policies towards a bigger bond with commercial interests seems to be based on the discourse of neoclassical economic theory, as there is no evidence gathered through evaluation exercises that show that these development modalities are contributing effectively towards development.

THE RELATIONSHIP FRAMEWORK BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS AND CSO IN DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

As actors that can contribute to the strengthening, efficacy, democratization and transparency of development policies, the international doctrinal framework and the practice of great part of the development systems recognize the relevance of CSO participation in the whole of the development policies. In this way, in parallel to acquiring legitimacy and strategic recognition, CSO have achieved large participation spaces within these policies. In this context, though CSO have played different roles, there are two spaces where they have really been engaged in. This is, in defining the policies through dialog and advocacy, and in implementing them through the work carried out in the field and in alliance with the partners from the global south.

In relation to the first one, there is a tendency towards building reactive participation models in response and opposition to the most critical aspects of the governmental agenda. Due to this reactive nature, the model limits the capacity that CSO have to make proposals weakening the dialog between the Government and civil society.

This participation model usually contributes to legitimize the governmental policy and although in some cases it achieves to incorporate modifications in the policy, the achievements are normally limited to the attainment of basic consensus and agreements on the practices or limits of such policy. So, even though in these cases, the participation model seems deficient because it limits the potential of civil society participation as it seriously undermines its proactive capacity to make propositions.

The different participation mechanisms that exist in most of the countries are relevant and well valued due to their contribution to the strengthening and democratization of the development policies. Nevertheless, as a general rule and regardless of the format adopted in each country, they configure a model that is inadequate to overcome the reactive logic that characterizes participation. One of the main weaknesses of these models is the insufficient articulation between formality and flexibility, and the most successful models would be those which make these spaces complementary.



Another important limitation is that the development agenda is normally built under the inter-ministerial dialogue, to which the formal consultative spaces don't have access as they are orientated exclusively to the sphere of development policies. In this way, it seems that the incorporation of civil society participation in the political dialog in the areas that transcend development policies would be a more adequate framework and a more strategically way to tackle all the policies that have an impact on development.

Because of all this, it's common to detach the efforts generated by CSO within the framework of development policies aimed at the dialog about policies, from those dedicated to transform all the policies that have an impact on development and that are normally driven outside of the development system, generally through social mobilization and social and political advocacy. This disengagement between the so called insiders and outsiders, seriously limits the capacity of CSOs to contribute to the strengthening and democratization of the public policies. Therefore, it's necessary to reinforce the link between the actions promoted by the two spaces, between the political dialog and the social and political advocacy. It's a link with an enormous potential to reinforce the democratic functioning and transparency of development policies, to the extent that it allows incorporating the demands of civil society to the political dialog.

The other mentioned role that CSO have traditionally undertaken in the development agenda is more related to the implementation and execution of the development policies. In this area, there are symptoms of change in the relationship between governments and CSO that point to a transition from a logic of organizational processes and project support to another one based on the attribution of development results. It's a change induced by the shift from a logic based on the results of the processes to a logic based on the attribution of specific results. This introduces a short term logic that is far from a more process based perspective in which CSO find their true potential. This logic, often named "value for money" can be transforming the strategic role of CSO in the development policies, as they respond more to the needs of administrative efficiency and social acceptance of the donor, needs that are very pronounced in a crisis context, than to a necessary strategic reflection and analysis in terms of effectiveness from a development perspective.

In too many occasions both roles –policy generator and implementer - have been presented as discrete, largely because this is what has happened in practice. However, both strategic areas to which CSO contribute to, suggest that the potential of these organizations as actors of the development policies lies in the adequate inlay of both roles as they complement and strengthen each other. This doesn't mean that all the organizations have to necessarily take on a double profile of policy "generator" and "implementer", but that they must engage in the reflection about the need of an adequate division of roles based on the complementarity and the exchange of knowledge and experiences.



THE FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK DESIGNED FOR CSO PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

Nearly all of the development systems of donor countries have designed and put into practice specific mechanism to fund the work of CSO. However, there is a great diversity amongst countries due to different factors. The size of the funding schemes: normally big funding schemes, with a multiannual nature and based to a greater or less extent on trust frameworks, coexist with smaller funding schemes with a shorter duration and budget. The relevance given to each funding modality: though this isn't too extended in all countries, some give more relevance to the big funding schemes. The eligibility criteria: though a tendency to generate alliances between CSO and multi-actor alliances can be observed, this criterion is different between countries.

Having said this, there are also converging trends. The clearest ones are on one hand, the tendency towards the concentration and generation of incentives to create alliances when applying to different financial calls; and on the other hand, the growing importance of financial modalities based on the "value for money" logic in which the attribution of results is defined more and more by the donor's administration priorities.

These trends seem to indicate transformations that respond to motivations which are more linked to the changing needs of the donor in a context of crisis –administrative efficiency and the need to show results–, than to its commitment to have an impact on development or to create social transformation. Furthermore, these trends can transform the strategic role of NGDO as they weaken the richness of the associative networks and guide organizations mainly towards the areas of service management for development policies.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

If the strategic recognition of the role of CSO is based on a real analysis of the potential of these actors and on the capacity they have to contribute to the quality and democratization of development policies, the decisions oriented to promote other development dimensions and actors shouldn't be in contradiction nor should they limit the role of CSO. Therefore, it's important to build a favorable context for CSO to develop their potential.

This commitment doesn't prevent critically analyzing the role of CSO in order to overcome the deficiencies in their participation nor to develop the potential that other dimensions and actors of the development system could have. On the contrary, it's important to build a map of actors within the development policies based on what complements each other and on the potential of every actor, especially of those whose actions have a bigger impact on development.



Due to the influence of the dominant development paradigm on the architecture of the priorities and actors of the development agenda, there is a need to commit to an alternative narrative opposed to economic growth as the main way to eradicating poverty and to engage the multi-dimensions of poverty eradication and move onto a development agenda based on rights and the pursuit of equality and social cohesion.

The analysis of the relationship and financial frameworks between governments and CSO shows that there isn't a direct relation between political participation and the capacity to access funding. However, it can be seen that whilst the changes in the financing model don't have a direct impact on the strengthening of associative networks, nor on the profile of their organizations, nor their capacity to monitor policies, it does impact directly on their capacity to participate in the political dialog. Therefore, in the short and medium term, changes like the trend to overcome small financial schemes, the trend of concentrating funds in the hands of a smaller number of CSO which leads to the need of generating alliances, and the influence that the "value for money" logic has on the design of funding mechanisms, seem to announce changes in the strategic relations between governments and CSO.

To a large degree, these transformations seem to respond to motivations that aren't always related to the criteria of effectiveness and impact on development. In particular, there are three different logics that are strongly behind the transformation of the different financial frameworks.

The first logic is related to the donor's need for administrative efficiency. This need, frequently coated with arguments of effectiveness and transparency, is in contradiction with the effectiveness logic as the results of such transformations normally weaken the associative networks linked to the development agenda in the global North and South. This has a negative effect on the strategic role that civil society can provide to the development dynamics and policies, diminishing the quality and effectiveness of development policies.

The second logic is based on the need to achieve citizen's social recognition. In times of crisis, citizens are more skeptical or even don't understand the relevance of dedicating resources to development.

Finally, the third logic is the "value for money" logic, where the approach towards development is based more on the productive approach rather than on an approach based on the processes.

For all these reasons, the strategic role of CSO in a medium term might be affected and orientated more towards the areas of managing development policies than towards policy definition and dialog. 