CIVICUS’s Feedback on consultations for the creation of the
Global Partnership for Enhanced Social Accountability

1. What are the key challenges or issues faced by civil society, which the Partnership should try to address?

The key challenges centre around three main issues;

i) Shrinking space for civil society: Civil society continues to operate in difficult and sometimes hostile environments as governments continue to promulgate legislation and policies to restrict the independence of civil society and curb its activities. Among legislative restrictions are constraints on accessing funding from international sources, onerous and discretionary registration requirements to prevent human rights and advocacy groups from carrying out their work, alignment with official plans and the targeting human rights defenders and civil society activists through motivated prosecutions, surveillance, physical attacks and worse.

ii) Negative Funding trends for civil society: the advent of the global financial and economic crisis in 2008 saw a reduction in funding for civil society organisations. This has placed severe restrictions on the scope of some civil society organisations. In the midst of the crisis some donors drastically cut down funding while other strategically fund civil society organisations that focus on donor-driven deliverables. In addition, Evidence suggests that overall progress made amongst key donors in meeting their commitments to increase and reform their aid policies and practices towards CSOs has been sadly minimal and uneven.1 Even though there has been a small increase in the share of ODA (Official Development Assistance) allocated by key donors “to” (for CSO-initiated programmes) and “through” (implementing donor-initiated programmes) national and international CSOs over the last decade, from a 5.5% average in 2001 to a 6% average in 2009, the picture that emerged in relation to their practices and policies, especially following the financial crisis was rather gloomy.2 The emerging trend in many donor countries is characterised by growing pressures to focus and scale-up investments, to reduce transaction costs in the face of shrinking operations and administration budgets, and to produce short-term development results. This has led to restrictive funding modalities that may affect CSOs’ capacities to be effective development actors.”3

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2 Refer to OECD DAC 2011 How Donors work with CSOs report Page 10.

iii) Lack of Access and Genuine Engagement: despite few encouraging reforms, institutions of Global Governance still remain disconnected from citizens and civil society. Exiting engagement mechanisms are insufficient, accountability mechanisms are poor or non-existent and civil society voice is largely ignored. There is need for civil society to bridge existing gaps between civil society and government, between civil society and the World Bank and within civil society itself. Recent trends further indicate that the dynamic nature of civil society formations makes it urgent to bridge existing gaps between organised civil society and citizens.

Other challenges include:

- A pressing need to revisit the concept of civil society as this has implications on who to involve in the process as a member of the sector. The sector should be viewed in its entirety which includes NGOs, faith based organisations, trade unions, social movements, community based organisations, non-profit media groups, individual bloggers and others operating in public spaces outside the market, state or family.
- Civil society-private sector partnerships and links between civil society and the mainstream media are often weak and this makes civil society to be distant from other sectors of society. This sometimes relegates civil society to a peripheral position and makes it difficult for the sector to exert complete influence towards positive change.
- Civil society in too many instances is excluded from independent oversight institutions, which have been co-opted by government representatives. The principles of inclusiveness, transparency and access to information are not being properly implemented to ensure adequate civil society participation in the functioning of these institutions.

2. What type of support should the proposed Partnership offer in order to help civil society address these issues?

The partnership can offer support in the following areas;

i) Producing a framework for cooperation between governments and civil society which emphasizes the need to guarantee an enabling environment for civil society in accordance with domestic and international law as well as other commitments made at multi-lateral forums.

ii) Facilitate of transfers in technology, access to information and other resources (owned and developed by the World Bank and or governments) and dialogue between government and civil society through a better framework for government civil-society engagements.

iii) Resource mobilization for civil society and its involvement in assisting governments fulfill their responsibilities to the people in key areas such as health, education, agriculture, environmental protection, good governance and human rights.
3. **What should be the Bank’s role in providing this support?**

The Bank should;

i) Unequivocally condemn restrictions on human rights and democratic freedoms. It should engage with and influence governments to create an enabling environment for civil society and end persecution of human rights defenders.

ii) Take a leading role in galvanizing support for civil society from other multi-lateral institutions and the private sector.

iv) Increase awareness of the rights of citizens and civil society by laying greater emphasis on the human rights framework in its work.

v) Be at the centre and serve as a conduit for the transfer of good practices, capacity building skills, information and technical knowledge.

4. **What kind of development results should the Partnership seek to achieve? By what metrics or indicator should the success of the Partnership be measured?**

The results should be based on:

i) Clear evidence of accountability within the civil society sector and signs of increased engagement with governments. A reformulation on existing laws which constrain the activities of civil society and fewer attacks on civil society and human rights activists will depict clear signs of impact.

ii) Clear signs showing improvements in governance structures.

iii) Enhanced dialogue between civil society and governments at national level and an increase in information flows between governments, civil society and the World Bank.

iv) Increase in the flow of funds to enable civil society organisations to carry out their work.

5. **The Briefing on Key Concepts outlines emerging ideas on the governance structure of the possible Partnership. What else should be taken into consideration in establishing an effective and efficient governance structure?**

i) A redefinition of civil society to include recent actors and players and cover the spaces and platforms which are traditionally left out. If this is not done, the partnership will have the “usual suspects” and not take into account the changing dynamics in the sector in particular and the global context in general.

ii) A human rights framework should be included in the governance structure as respect for human rights and democratic freedoms is essential to development.
6. What criteria should be used in the selection of civil society and independent experts to participate in the governance structure?

i) There should be transparency first and foremost in the selection of civil society and independent experts.

ii) The selection process should seek to ensure inclusion of diverse voices and representation of various sections of civil society including those representing local communities, citizens groups, service delivery and advocacy groups.

iii) Broad-based and representative associations and platforms including networks and coalitions should be included in the structure.

iv) The initiative should take into account gender considerations and ethnic diversity.

7. What risks are to be expected and how should the Partnership address these risks?

i) There could be mutual distrust of the motives behind the partnership amongst key players. All players should thus be included in the agenda setting.

ii) There could be scepticism amongst civil society of the role and intentions of the World Bank. This can be allayed if the Bank becomes increasingly transparent in its actions.

iii) There is the risk of having the same traditional or elite civil society organisations represented in the facility leaving out other key players from the sector. An inclusive process could ensure representation of all sectors.

iv) The partnership may fail to lay due emphasis the issue of human rights and democratic freedoms and risk being derailed. Thus it must be grounded in the rights based approach.

8. Do you have other suggestions on the proposed Partnership?

The partnership should centre the initiative around good governance, human rights and democratic freedoms as social accountability cannot be achieved without their existence.