## Side Events
## Enabling Environment for CSO Engagement in Development: Lessons from GPEDC 2015/16 Monitoring for Agenda 2030 Implementation
November 30, 2016, 13.30-14.30

### Objective:

This session – co-organized by the [Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment](#) (Task Team) and the [Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency](#) (Sida) – addressed the enabling environment for civil society. Since Accra in 2008, the High Level Fora/Meetings (HLF/Ms) on aid and development effectiveness have affirmed a commitment to enabling environments that allow civil society organizations (CSOs) to maximize their contribution to development, as well as a commitment by CSOs to strengthen their development effectiveness. These commitments are reflected in the GPEDC Monitoring Framework's Indicator Two. The engagement of civil society in implementing development programs, policy dialogue and monitoring will be key to realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Yet the shrinking space civil society is facing in a growing number of countries around the world stands in the way of achieving the SDGs and is a severe obstacle to development effectiveness. The GPEDC's Indicator Two monitoring offers an important complement to the SDG monitoring on inclusive means of implementation as seen in SDG 17 on multi-stakeholder partnerships. It also speaks to SDG 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies and institutions, not only because of civil society's role in pushing governments, other actors and themselves to achieve SDG 16, but because the rights and institutions of SDG 16 are critical components of the enabling environment for civil society.

The Side Event's objective was to review progress made in implementation and monitoring of CSO enabling environments and CSO development effectiveness in line with the GPEDC's Indicator Two framework, toward enhancing CSOs' contribution to achieving the SDGs. The event explored what can be learned from the 2015/16 Indicator Two monitoring about the challenges and opportunities of successful multi-stakeholder monitoring. It proposed steps to accelerate progress – including strengthening multi-stakeholder dialogue, monitoring and guidance on good practice.

### Participants:

**Moderator**
- Julia Sánchez – Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC) and CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE) Co-chair

**Keynote speaker**
- Minister Isabella Lövin – Minister of Development Cooperation/Deputy Prime Minister, Sweden

**Panellists**
- Mariam Haidar – Head of Aid Management and Coordination Unit/National Coordinator GPEDC Second Monitoring Round, Ministry of International Cooperation, Sudan

- Richard Ssewakiryanga – Executive Director, Uganda National NGO Forum, CSO Focal Point GPEDC Second Monitoring Round, Co-chair of the Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment, and CPDE Representative
- Alejandro Guerrero Ruiz – Monitoring Team Coordinator, OECD/UNDP Joint Support Team for the GPEDC
- Jacqueline Wood – Senior Policy Advisor, Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment

**Interventions from the floor**
- Ambassador Morten Jespersen – Under-Secretary for Global Development and Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark
- Regina Opondo – Executive Secretary, Constitution and Reform Education Consortium (CRECO), Kenya
- Ambassador Jeroen Verheul – Special Envoy of the Co-chair of the GPEDC, Ambassador Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, The Netherlands

## Key issues discussed:

### Importance of a strong civil society for the SDGs

In her keynote speech, Minister Isabella Lövin noted that without a strong civil society it will not be possible to realize the SDGs. CSOs are key actors in implementing and monitoring the SDGs, both individually and as participants in multi-stakeholder partnerships. They are a fundamental component of peaceful and sustainable development that leaves no one behind.

The importance of engaging CSOs (including in partnerships) to deliver the 2030 Agenda was echoed by various other speakers. However, it was also raised that there is still discussion on whether civil society is an equal partner. The debate is real, and vigilance is needed from GPEDC stakeholders to ensure there is no backtracking from previous HLF/M commitments. In order for civil society to fulfil its varied roles, it must be respected as an independent development actor in its own right.

### Worrisome trend of shrinking space around the world

Given civil society's critical role in realizing the SDGs, it is worrisome that the GPEDC's 2016 Progress Report points to limited progress in creating enabling environments for civil society. There is shrinking if not closing space for civil society around the world, manifested in various forms including legislation, regulation and policy that restricts civil society's ability to operate and express themselves; negative public relations campaigns that depict civil society as unaccountable; public threats and reprimands as well as continued assaults. Serious threats to civic freedom existed in 96 countries in 2015, compared to 50 in 2012. The shrinking space for civil society constitutes a threat to the realization of the SDGs.

### Shared responsibility for creating an enabling environment for civil society

The enabling environment for civil society is a multi-stakeholder responsibility. This is reflected in the four-part framework of Indicator Two, which speaks to the roles of governments – both provider and recipient – as well civil society organisations (CSOs). Governments need to create legal, regulatory and policy environments in line with internationally agreed rights that support CSO formation and operation. Principles of development effectiveness or alignment ought not be used to impede a CSO's right to pursue their self-defined objectives or to seek funding from various sources. CSOs themselves are called on to address their legitimacy, credibility and accountability, for instance by considering national and local government plans and priorities and coordinating with other actors and amongst themselves. Providers need to advance the CSO enabling environment in their policy dialogue with recipient governments, while supporting CSOs to operate in a demand driven, accountable and transparent fashion. Further, all stakeholders need to come together to engage in multi-stakeholder dialogue on development policies and plans.

**Value of Indicator Two monitoring to various stakeholders**
The Indicator Two monitoring was welcomed by various panellists representing different constituencies. The exercise is important because it institutionalizes data collection about civil society and can provide credible information. It was noted that a particularly valuable element of Indicator Two is the opportunity it creates for structured dialogue on the CSO enabling environment and CSO development effectiveness. Such dialogue in turn stimulates joint thinking about how to address existing problems. Overall, there was agreement that the Indicator Two monitoring exercise is not just about creating data but about the process itself. It is an entry point to engage in a discussion on issues related to CSOs, effectiveness and cooperation that needs to be further strengthened.

**Challenges in implementing Indicator Two monitoring & overall findings**
Panellists from government and civil society shared reflections on Indicator Two monitoring in their respective countries. Civil society welcomed the opportunity to provide input to the questionnaire. However, the multi-stakeholder approach called for in the GPEDC Monitoring Guide was not applied fully. Civil society's data on Indicator Two was on the whole not well reflected in official Indicator Two reporting, raising the question of the degree to which the reporting conveyed information from all stakeholders. Further, in some countries, the discrepancy between paper and practice, that is, where there are enabling laws but these are not appropriately implemented, was not captured by the Indicator Two questionnaire. The Side Event also touched upon some of the findings of the Task Team's Stock-take of country-level experience and perceptions of Indicator Two monitoring. A key lesson learned was the tendency to overemphasize completing the questionnaire rather than engaging in dialogue. Constraints in time, capacity and awareness identified by the Stock-take were reiterated by the recipient government panellist. So too were the Stock-take findings of insufficient provider engagement, and the need for broader outreach to diverse civil society. Mistrust amongst stakeholders and lack of political were also identified as key obstacles.

**Supporting progress towards Indicator Two**
A key finding of the GPEDC 2016 Progress Report is that though governments have arrangements to engage with CSOs, the quality of the engagement and how systematic it is can be improved. Areas for improvement include the legal and regulatory environment that facilitates activities, funding and registration of CSOs; sustained multi-stakeholder dialogue; and greater transparency. There is low hanging fruit for development cooperation to play a role in strengthening the CSO enabling environment, given that in 40% of countries, lack of training and skills were identified as obstacles to carrying out meaningful multi-stakeholder engagement. Indicator Two could be further refined and developed so that there can be dialogue on the basis of evidence rather than perceptions. There is a continued role here for the GPEDC, but also a challenge to identify how it can act on the evidence obtained. At the country-level there is interest among stakeholders in doing more. For that reason the Task Team will implement a new Global Partnership Initiative (GPI) to help facilitate institutionalizing multi-stakeholder dialogue where there is appetite for it.

**Main conclusions and next steps:**

The Task Team will be implementing a new GPI (Advancing the CSO Enabling Environment & CSO Development Effectiveness) starting in 2017, as listed in the Nairobi Outcome Document Annex 3. The aim of the GPI is to support broader and deeper multi-stakeholder engagement to advance Indicator Two. This GPI will build on findings from the Task Team's Stock-take of the Indicator Two monitoring (see Stock-take Summary). Many Stock-take participants expressed interest in multi-stakeholder dialogue on Indicator Two – in between GPEDC monitoring rounds – as an opportunity to build mutual understanding and trust across stakeholders. This would potentially lead to further cross-stakeholder collaboration and progress toward achievement of Indicator Two and the SDGs over time. The GPI will attempt to raise awareness and provide capacity support and tools (e.g. the Task Team's Guidance on Indicator Two under development) to support multi-stakeholder dialogue at country level on Indicator Two and on development effectiveness principles more broadly.

Side Event speakers expressing interest in collaborating with the Task Team in implementation of the GPI included Minister Lövin (Sweden), Ms, Haider (Sudan), Mr. Ssewakiryanga (Uganda), Ambassador Verheul (Netherlands), and Mr. Guerrero Ruiz (Joint Support Team). Further expressions of interest are welcome.

An abridged video of the Side Event will soon be available on the Task Team's website (www.taskteamcso.com).