**Engaging strategically with the local civil society within the TALD framework**

This is a second type of partnerships EUDs should seek to promote in order to obtain outcomes in terms of empowering local authorities and fostering territorial development. As mentioned above (chapter 2) **constructive interactions between local authorities**, on the one hand, and **communities, civil society actors and citizens**, on the other hand, are crucial to unleash the potential of territories, mobilize additional local resources and also to ensure ‘downward accountability’ of LAs towards constituencies –thus giving substance to the concept of local democracy.

From a policy perspective, the EU has committed itself to foster **joint action between LAs and civil society** in two recent EU Communications (see Figure below). Though these two policy documents were produced separately, they converge on the need to better distinguish and articulate the respective roles and responsibilities of local authorities and civil society. This, in turn, should lead to much more coherent EU support strategies, which acknowledge the legitimate role of local authorities in designing and implementing local public policies while empowering citizens to engage in the local political process and demand accountability to their local authority. The *“local space”* provides a potentially enabling environment to test out new forms of collaboration between both set of actors and mobilise additional resources -supporting both local development and democracy processes. The 2012 Communication on civil society invites all EUDs to elaborate **a ”roadmap” for a strategic engagement** with civil society as governance actors, particularly at local level.



In order to foster such constructive interactions between LAs and civil society, **three premises need to be kept in mind when thinking about possible EU support strategies:**

1. *Decentralisation processes potentially create more space for a mutually beneficial interaction between local authorities and civil society actors.* Yet for this potential to be unlocked, two conditions are key. First, local authorities must be made more ‘attractive’ for citizens and organised interests groups. If local authorities are bypassed by donor agencies or lack autonomy to formulate and implement local public policies, there will be limited incentives for CSOs to engage. ,LAs represent a political community and provide the institutional space for citizen participation. That is why the empowerment of local authorities should be a strategic objective of the EU. Second, citizens and civil society organisations have a critical role to play in (re-) constructing the local political space and influencing the local political process for better development and governance outcomes. That is where strategic EU-support to CSO organisations –as governance actors- is equally vital.
2. *Provide incentives to civil society actors to engage in local public policy-making.* In many developing countries there is still often a tradition of distance, if not mistrust between LAs and CSOs, fuelled by competition for legitimacy in the eyes of local populations or funding (including from donor agencies). This *‘divide’* needs to be bridged for sustained territorial development. Several **EUDs have used their** civil society **“roadmap” to identify ways and means to promote joint action between LAs and CSOs**. They have create space and opportunities for different categories of CSOs as well as citizens to meaningfully engage in local affairs.

**Examples of such targeted actions in civil society roadmaps include:**

* Small associations or grassroots organisations are incentivised to abandon the ‘project logic’ and instead invest in the *‘co-production’* of local public policies by intervening in policy-making (e.g. setting priorities, identifying funding sources or adequate management approaches) or ensuring social accountability.
* Intermediary organisations are invited play a useful role in facilitating dialogue between the subnational authority and local stakeholders; they can build alliances with LAs to demand more development-friendly decentralisation reforms from the centre; or they can invest in strengthening the local systems and processes required for LAs to be effective development players.
* Support is envisaged to involve citizens in participatory budget processes at various levels

1. *Respect* a number *of guiding principles when supporting CSOs (as governance actors).* In the past, donor agencies have often contributed to blurring the lines of responsibility between LAs and CSOs. This was particularly the case with projects that funded NGO-interventions while discarding the legitimate role of LAs in providing services or fostering local economic development. There is now growing recognition that the creation of a legitimate, capable and viable local public sector is a key institutional challenge -to be achieved with the help of the local civil society. A set of guiding principles may help EUDs when conceiving support to civil society for enhanced local governance (see Box below).

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| ***Box 3.6 Some tips to engage CSOs in building viable local governance systems***   * Promote the access of local communities to the resources of their *own* local authority (rather than merely to sources of external funding). This is one of the potentially most powerful ways to reconnect citizens with the local state while strengthening accountability relations. It also implies that access of communities to resources should as much as possible take place *within*rather than outside the planning and budgeting process of the local authorities. * Avoid ritualised forms of participation. Better development and governance outcomes are primarily created through political bargaining processes between state and society. This, in turn, requires EUDs to have a clear understanding of the ‘politics’ surrounding the participation of civil society in local public affairs. In the absence of certain levels of political dissent, electoral competence and freedom of expression it will be difficult to promote institutional innovations in terms of participatory development. * Focus on amplifying the local ‘public sphere’ by ensuring an ongoing flow of information on “what actually happens” within the local public sector and by promoting (contradictory) debates on policies, priority programmes, quality of service delivery, results of annual audits, etc. * Avoid ad hoc approaches to capacity development. Attending a few seminars will not change the behaviour of citizens or enable them to engage in local policy-making processes. * Involve local CSOs and local private sector in all phases of the project –conceived as local system experimentation. Testing out and elaborating new local governance practices (e.g. suitable local procurement rules) should not be outsourced to external consultants. By involving all relevant stakeholders in the experiment and learning process, the likelihood of producing adequate local solutions increases. At the same time, the very process of co-producing these new local governance tools may help to strengthen the levels of trust between actors and build more social capital. |