



HIVOS VISION PAPER

ON

CIVIL SOCIETY BUILDING

2008

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Hivos Vision Paper on Civil Society Building

1. INTRODUCTION

In Hivos' vision, strengthening civil society is at the core of social transformation. Over the last 15 years, Hivos has defined its strategy in this respect as 'civil society building' (CSB). This terminology is also used in this paper. 'Building', though, does not mean working towards a clearly-defined end situation, or following a single, standard 'construction plan', and also not imposing these methods and formats from outside. The main drive is to facilitate or enable *endogenous processes* of association among citizens in the South and linking and mobilising support for these processes at the global and national levels.

These principles were already outlined in the general policy note *Full Participation, or Access to Power* (1988). Civil society organisations were regarded indispensable for the protection of citizens' rights and effectuating those rights through pressure on the state. In this way, unequal power relations underpinning the endurance of poverty could be changed.

In its current overall policy document *Civil Voices on a Global Stage* (2002), Hivos has also defined its main objectives in the domain of CSB. These are twofold: participation and accountability. Hivos aims at reinforcing the *participation* of poor and marginalised people in decision-making processes in the market and the political arena; and at strengthening civil society's capacity to hold state and market actors *accountable*. In line with these aims, Hivos supports people's efforts to organise themselves and participate, individually and collectively, in the social and political processes that affect their lives. Simultaneously Hivos aims at improving the institutional, social and cultural environment for participation by supporting activities that further democratisation, pluralism and diversity, and gender equality.

Civil Society Building and Sustainable Economic Development are Hivos' two broad policy domains. Both domains are interrelated. CSB is essential for the eradication of poverty: creating organisations and increasing participation promotes poor people's access to resources to improve their lives and realise their aspirations.

The aim of this paper is to elaborate upon the general vision on CSB as described in *Civil Voices*, building on experiences, lessons learned and contextual changes over the last five years. The paper provides the main guiding principles for Hivos policy in this domain, without going into detail at the level of specific (sub-) programmes.

2. LESSONS LEARNED

Between 2001 and 2005 the Hivos policy and practice in the field of civil society building has been the object of three major independent evaluation studies by Biekart (2003), Zuidberg (2004) and Guijt (2005)¹. Covering 8 countries in which Hivos is working, these studies analyse programmes carried out by Hivos and other Dutch Co-Financing Agencies (CFAs). Together they covered the Hivos support to 63 partner organisations.

These studies have provided a wealth of lessons and insights for all parties involved. Hivos has embraced the most relevant lessons and integrated them in its policy and methods. They are as follows:

Policy formulation

At the policy level Hivos has acknowledged the need for a more elaborate formulation of its approach towards CSB. The authors, especially Biekart, noted that the CFAs lacked a systematic underpinning of their work on civil society building. Hivos was regarded an exception, as its policy documents of 1988 and 2002 provide a solid general basis on CSB. Nevertheless, Hivos has decided to write this present document as an explicit expression and reconfirmation of this policy. This will also address Guijt's warning, based on findings of the Guatemala country study, that the reorganisation of Hivos along thematic lines (since 2005)

¹ Kees Biekart: *Dutch Co-financing Agencies and Civil Society Building*, March 2003. This study is based on country studies in India and Nicaragua, as well as Mali, where Hivos does not work

Lida Zuidberg: *The Role of Women's Organisations in Civil Society Building*, November 2004. This study is based on country studies in Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa,

Irene Guijt: *Assessing Civil Society Participation as Supported in-Country by Cordaid, Hivos, Novib and Plan Netherlands, 1999-2004*, December 2005 (based on country studies in Uganda, Guatemala and Sri Lanka, as well as Guinea and Colombia, where Hivos does not work).

might result in losing strategic notions of CSB as a general compass, and confine this theme to the area of human rights.

Membership organisations

The studies support the emphasis of Hivos on a partner portfolio that extends beyond traditional development NGOs and includes membership organisations and innovative specialist organisations. Biekart's study states that membership organisations are (slightly) more effective in terms of civil society building than other types of organisations. Drawing on the study of Hivos partner network in India, which heavily focuses on membership organisations, the overall assessment of Hivos in this evaluation was quite positive. This focus on membership organisations is also mentioned in the country study on Sri Lanka. While acknowledging the (potential) strength and effectiveness of such organisations, it also hints at the often laborious process of building and supporting them. The increasing emphasis on professionalism and on measurable results that has dominated the aid chain since the beginning of the 1990s has discriminated against such organisations. In its 2007-2010 Business Plan Hivos has nevertheless reconfirmed the importance of membership and grassroots-based organisations in its partner portfolio.

Connecting levels

The existence of strong linkages between civil society organisations at the local, national and global levels is crucial for greater effectiveness. The Uganda and Sri Lanka studies confirm that the Hivos partner network is a good mix of local and national initiatives. The Zuidberg study, however, indicated that women's organisations supported by Hivos focussed their lobby work too much on the national level and were rather disconnected from local women's groups (rural as well as urban). This outcome inspired Hivos to explicitly pursue and strengthen the interaction between national and local activities. This has been formulated in the policy document on gender, women and development entitled *Women Unlimited* (2006) and in its Business Plan 2007-2010.

Donor role

The studies also address the quality of the CFAs as donor organisations. In comparison to other international donor organisations, the Dutch CFAs were considered flexible, respectful and loyal donors. The studies stressed the need for high quality non-financial CFA support to partners. At the same time, however, they indicated that the dialogue between CFAs and their partners is often too much focused on financial and administrative matters. Although Hivos is not exempted from this criticism, the studies confirmed the value of two central aspects of the Hivos approach in terms of enhancing dialogue with partners: working through regional offices and thematic specialisation. Zuidberg clearly points to the Hivos gender expertise as an added value in its dialogue with women's organisations in Africa. In Biekart's study the high score given for Hivos' donor role is explicitly linked to its working through regional offices. Biekart also concludes that specialisation on a limited number of themes is inevitable for CFAs to substantiate their added value. This conclusion supports Hivos' policy of specialisation that has been in place since the early 1990s and was further developed with the 2005 reorganisation. The Knowledge Programme envisaged in the Hivos 2007-2010 Business Plan adds a new dimension to the quality of the work of Hivos and its support to partners.

3. VISION

3.1 Power, rights and citizenship

Hivos believes that all human beings have inalienable rights, as guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international treaties. These include political and civil rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights. Both categories are clearly linked: people cannot exercise civil rights if they are merely surviving, and they cannot claim economic rights without a 'voice'.

Many people worldwide are however denied their rights - be it by law, be it in practice, when conditions actually hamper the exercise of those rights. There is a multitude of reasons for this, but they usually boil down to concentration of power in the hands of socio-economic and political elites, cultural traditions and institutional arrangements that protect their own interests. They all conjure in some way to disenfranchise and marginalise large groups of the world population.

To achieve a more just, inclusive and democratic (global) society it is imperative that these unequal power relations be challenged and changed. Individuals cannot challenge vested interests and bring about social change on their own; organised action is necessary. For Hivos this implies the need to strengthen people's capacities to take collective action: strengthening the capacities of individuals and groups to organise, develop visions and strategies, build coalitions, negotiate and lobby for their cause.

Hivos believes that development is not only a question of claiming rights but also of taking responsibility. For Hivos, rights and individual autonomy are firmly linked to people's responsibility to improve their own situation, to seize opportunities, while at the same time contributing to a just and fair society. This link is expressed in the idea of *citizenship*. In Hivos' vision the exercise of citizenship and the promotion of social change are mutually reinforcing.

Hivos' vision is inspired by humanist values. Respect for people's identity, the right to diversity and pluralism in society and the right to self-determination are essential elements in its thinking.

In many countries these rights are far from being accepted, as they often refer to dimensions deeply rooted in cultural and religious traditions. This applies to issues of inequality based on class, race, caste, ethnicity and above all to gender inequality. Women are often denied actual citizenship; their lives and concerns are considered to be part of the private (family) domain, and therefore outside the scope of public politics.

Inequalities in the realm of gender and identity are usually based on ideologies and norms which are legitimised by reference to cultural or religious traditions. Hivos believes that these are not static concepts and challenging these 'internalised' ideologies may be as necessary to achieve social justice as economic or political change. It is this conviction that underlies Hivos' support to women's rights, gays' rights and the emancipation of ethnic groups.

3.2. Civil society

For Hivos, civil society is the sphere – outside state, corporate sector and family – where people *organise* themselves to pursue their individual, group or common (public) interests. Civil society is not restricted to (professional) intermediary, non-governmental organisations; on the contrary, it consists first and foremost of community-based and membership organisations, trade unions, religious organisations, and traditional associations. Individual and informal initiatives may also be part of it. Apart from pursuing interests, all these forms of self-organisation provide mutual support and strengthen self-determination.

At the same time, civil society is the *public arena* for social and political struggle, discussion, critical reflection on society, and contesting values, interests and ideas. Through this mechanism civil society can also be a *counterweight* to the state and to market forces, providing the necessary checks and balances within a democratic system. By itself, civil society is not inherently democratic and tolerant however, as it also reflects existing social inequalities. People living in poverty, women and minorities often have less access to the formal public sphere. Hivos chooses to support the emancipatory and democratic forces in civil society and embraces a political approach to issues of poverty and injustice.

Democratic civil society organisations (CSOs) have, in Hivos' view, two basic roles: to *represent* people who organise themselves for specific or public interests, and to hold public and private decision-makers *accountable* for their actions. However, sustainable change requires more than people organising themselves to pursue their interests. Only by allying with a broader circle of like-minded individuals, groups and organisations can civil society generate critical mass that will effectively influence politics, markets and society.

For Hivos, civil society building is both an end in itself and a strategy to achieve other development goals. It is an end in itself because it embodies the weight of organised citizens and groups, necessary to counterbalance the powers of state and market forces. Civil society is also the platform for collective action towards the goals that people want to pursue and the platform where people assert their aspirations, their identities and strengthen their self-esteem.

Simultaneously, the strengthening of civil society is also a crucial instrument for the eradication of poverty. The self-organisation of people living in poverty and the emergence of organisations that represent their interests are necessary conditions to change power relations and gain access to decision-making. In the economic domain, civil society building is essential to improve access to resources and capabilities – and thus to the broader question of access to power.

Civil society is the outcome of social struggle within a particular context; hence there is no blue-print for 'building' civil society. External interventions aiming at strengthening civil society will always have to be context-specific and link up with and build on initiatives from within. However, within a context of globalisation, with increased interdependence worldwide, migration and communication, the notion of 'local' civil society has become more diffuse. Hivos regards access to information and contacts with the outside world as important resources for civil society activism. This contributes to new ideas and practices of organisation and relationships of affinity across geographical and other boundaries.

4. POLICY FRAMEWORK/ CONTEXT

With its support to civil society, Hivos aims at promoting participation and representation, accountability, and citizenship – at the global, national and local levels. This chapter briefly describes the relevance of these principles within the political, economic, and socio-cultural domains. It also identifies main entry points for civil society activism, and for interventions by Hivos and its partner organisations.

4.1 Political power and democratic deficits

The absence of democratic rule severely hampers the direct access of poor and marginalised people to processes of decision-making. This is most evident in authoritarian states which do not allow people to organise themselves or deny them access to public spaces and decision-making. But also in (formal) democratic settings there are often major ‘deficits’ that limit citizens’ participation, their representation and the accountability of institutions. At the global level, such democratic institutions are simply absent. At the same time, nationally-based decision-making power is being gradually transferred from democratically elected bodies to international structures that are less accountable.

At the local level, democratic control may also be a problem, due to traditional, informal power relationships. Hivos believes that civil society has a vital role to play in addressing these problems.

Putting democratic rule into effect has become even more arduous after the 9-11 attacks. In many instances, state policies motivated by ‘security’ concerns have led to restrictions of civil rights, including the functioning of civil society organisations.

Global civil society

Civil society activism at the global level has become more important since decision-making power has been ‘leaking away’ from the national political arena. In many cases, developing countries seem more responsive to the dynamics and agendas of global economic arrangements, market forces, and political pressure by dominant states than to domestic needs. Outside the national political realm, decision-making processes are even less transparent and less accessible to people living in poverty.

In response to these trends, a ‘global civil society’ consisting of Southern and Northern CSOs has emerged in the past decade. The policies of international economic institutions (IMF, World Bank, WTO) have fuelled protest on a global scale, by civil movements advocating accountability and pro-poor policies. Facilitated by ICT, this global movement has resulted in new coalitions and new forms of citizens’ action. Civil society organisations have managed to gain authority and get a foothold at the international United Nations forums, such as the summits of Copenhagen on social rights and Beijing on the position of women. The expertise and support base of these organisations are increasingly recognised. The commitment of governments to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has provided civil society organisations in the North and the South with new opportunities to engage in global campaigning aimed at raising public awareness and keeping poverty on the international political agenda.

Hivos wants to play a role in this arena. It supports partner organisations in their efforts to democratize the operations of international institutions. In the absence of global democracy, action and political contestation on poverty issues and injustice through nationally-based civil society organisations remain a necessity. However, for the sake of their own legitimacy and effectiveness, stronger linkages between global civil society and national or local issues need to be fostered and more efforts need to go into generating capacity and knowledge for the development of policy alternatives.

Counterbalance in the national context

The nation-state may be losing influence, but in Hivos’ view it remains crucial for the provision of protection to all citizens, guaranteeing justice, democracy, human rights and welfare. This role of the state was severely undermined in the eighties, as a result of the ‘structural adjustment’ policies of the IMF and the World Bank. In recent years, Western governments and international institutions have come to revalue the role of the state, especially in the post-9-11 era. In these new approaches however, the crucial issues of democracy and redistribution are often used in an instrumental fashion or jeopardised by the effects of the security agenda. Civil society actors who wish to pursue a democratic agenda face increasing difficulties when freedom, women’s rights and other issues are made subservient to security concerns, or are used to justify military interventions.

In this context, civil society has a major role to play by upholding the space for public engagement and exposing undue restriction of civil liberties.

Another area of concern for civil society is the lopsided attention for change in legislation and formal policies, without sufficient attention for implementation. Far from being an administrative, non-political

process, implementation is about the actual enforcement of rights and the real redistribution of resources. Hivos attaches great importance to the monitoring of public policy implementation.

In their relations to the state, civil society actors may be actively involved in policy design and implementation, or fulfil 'watchdog' roles. The national processes related to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), which in theory include civil society participation in order to increase local ownership of poverty reduction programmes, are a case in point. Hivos wants to promote both participation and monitoring by partner organisations, as well as coalition building around these issues.

Where civil war or political and administrative incapacity result in 'fragile' states, civil society organisations operate in a vacuum without formal political structures to relate to. Civil society organisations however, may still be able to deliver services, mobilise the population for political change, and be active in peace processes or in reconstruction of (social) infrastructure. But insecurity, violence and the fragmentation of society severely limit the space for civil society organisations and the willingness and ability of their constituencies to engage in action.

Other dilemmas are inherent to the functioning and development of civil society itself. Many civil society organisations have concentrated on lobby and advocacy for legal and policy reform. Effective lobbying requires a high degree of professionalism and expertise. Although this sometimes has increased their effectiveness, it has also widened the gap between the organisations' leadership and their constituencies. For Hivos, this is a major issue to be addressed as it affects the representation of and the accountability towards these constituencies by civil society organisations.

Decentralisation

In many countries, decentralisation of decision-making to local levels provides opportunities for more direct participation of citizens and their organisations. Decentralised governments may be more responsive to local needs, allow for participatory planning, and shorten lines of accountability. In practice, however, decentralisation does not by itself result in a more just distribution of resources and influence on decision-making. Local elites often use these new opportunities to reinforce their (informal) power, by capturing or manipulating local government structures and use them for their own benefit. In the slipstream of decentralisation, 'traditional' patriarchal rule is often restored and acquired rights are frequently reversed.

For decentralisation to be successful, it requires an active role of central government: delegating power and budget, counterbalancing local elites, and guaranteeing the implementation of human rights. Civil society can play a role as well by providing checks and balances on the ground. This requires the presence of effective civil society actors in the new centres of power. At present, strong civil society organisations tend to be located in (and focused on) the national capital cities; for civil society to play an effective role as a countervailing power, it needs to be rooted throughout the country and to develop effective linkages between local, national and global levels. Hivos will actively pursue the development of these linkages.

4.2. Civil society and the economy

The process of (economic) globalisation has led to reduction of poverty in some regions and to growing inequalities in others. At the same time, the increasing capacity of civil society actors to connect global, national and local issues offers new opportunities to improve the position of poor and marginalised people. Some developing countries such as China, India and Brazil, have become economic and political powers in their own right and challenge the global status quo. The relevance of civil society activism in these countries aiming at more just and sustainable economic relationships becomes all the more important in this new context.

For Hivos, public welfare can only be reached if mechanisms for social redistribution and environmental sustainability are in place. In the economic domain it is civil society's role to counterbalance short-term profit policies, and to struggle for long term production policies which are socially and environmentally sound. It is in this context that Hivos supports *lobby and advocacy for sustainable development*, activities related to *corporate social responsibility* and public accountability of market actors, and *direct participation in markets* by people living in poverty and their organisations.

Lobby and advocacy

Lobby and advocacy activities aim at influencing policies of government and global institutions that (may) provide, implement and enforce measures in the field of sustainable economic development and responsible entrepreneurship. Support to civil society organisations, engaged in putting pressure on these actors, is an important avenue for change. Their work may involve fighting for more chain transparency and a more fair trade system in which economic partnerships do not result in the exclusion of particular groups,

but in the enhancement of the quality of production, such as improving working conditions (for instance with campaigns against child labour or in favour of minimum standards for wages), stimulating environmentally sustainable production processes, and improving access to more remunerative quality markets for small farmers. This category may also include civil society support for Southern governments in their negotiations with(in) for instance the WTO.

Corporate social responsibility

While the private sector in many parts of the world is still operating beyond public scrutiny, pressure of private shareholders, civil society and consumers is gradually bringing about a growing sense of responsibility for social and environmental issues and the notion of 'people, planet and profit' is gaining ground worldwide. Private companies increasingly incorporate sustainability elements into their *modus operandi*, not as a kind of charity, but as part of their philosophy and core business. Nationally and at the global level, civil society organisations promote and monitor the enforcement of agreements and legislation aimed at more sustainable ways of production and trade. They mobilise people in their roles as citizens, consumers, shareholders or producers to counteract unsustainable practices, and lobby for mechanisms of regulation to this effect. When corporate practices harm employees, consumers, people's livelihoods or the environment, they hold them to account through public campaigns and legal action.

Market participation

Eradication of poverty requires poor peoples' access to the resources they need to survive, earn a decent living, and generate welfare for their communities and society. By lobbying governments and the corporate sector, civil society actors can help create the general preconditions for this. Achieving inclusive development however often also requires direct involvement of civil society in providing access to resources and capabilities in the economic domain. Hivos and its partners therefore promote poor peoples' access to finance, business development services, but also to information and markets. Support to microfinance institutions and producers' organisations allows them to acquire loans from a broader range of sources and to benefit from more opportunities. Furthermore, Hivos aims at strengthening the representation of poor groups through trade unions and membership-based interest organisations. Support to these organisations links economic issues to the more general perspective of political power as described in part 4.1.

4.3. Pluralism and diversity

Principles of diversity, the right to express one's identities, and the right to be 'different' from the mainstream, are centre stage in Hivos' thinking. Safeguarding the rights of ethnic, sexual and other minorities has therefore been part and parcel of Hivos work for many years.

The heterogeneous character of civil society implies by itself a plurality of ideas, expressions and organisations. Individual 'voices' are amplified through the self-organising efforts of citizens. Collective action does not only offer individuals a platform to pursue their interests, but it also reinforces their sense of belonging to larger social and cultural formations.

Pluralism is however under pressure in many countries. The expression of pluralism and diversity is affected by the rise of various forms of fundamentalism across the globe. The dogmatic nature of fundamentalisms is hard to reconcile with the right to self-determination, freedom of expression, democracy and respect for individual choices and cultural diversity. Fundamentalism is often associated with religion, but it is also found in the economic realm, for example extreme free market ideologies, and in the political domain, where authoritarian (ethnic, nationalist, fascist) movements proclaim intolerance and dogmatism. The rise of fundamentalisms cannot be reduced to one cause; they are not the 'essence' of certain religions or cultures.

Although fundamentalisms are not new and have various expressions, the phenomenon is presently associated with (mass) movements striving for social or political power. In order to appeal to a mass following, they refer to belief systems, cultural ideas and ideologies to create 'solutions' for complex, contemporary problems. Regimes or powerful groups may also use fundamentalist themes as a means to gain or stay in power. Women and minorities often pay the price for this opportunistic bargaining. Within this context, violence against these groups is often ignored or even accepted.

For Hivos, the challenge is to address both fundamentalist ideas and the structural causes that turn them into a dominant socio-political force.

5. CSB STRATEGY

With its policy on civil society building Hivos intends to support the organised efforts of citizens and their organisations to pursue their (collective) interests, participate and influence processes of decision making and provide the necessary checks and balances to the generally dominant forces of state and market. In Hivos' vision civil society building is therefore not only a means towards poverty alleviation, but also an end in itself.

The Hivos strategy on CSB consists of five trails:

- *Strengthening of the political role of civil society*, with special emphasis on the representation and claim making capacity of citizens and their institutional framework.
- *Promotion of citizenship*, for an active engagement of people in public affairs, through awareness raising, public campaigning and education.
- *Strengthening of the preconditions* (enabling environment) for democratisation, strengthening the rule of law, and the implementation of pro poor policies and practices.
- *Strengthening the (pre)conditions for participation in the economic domain under 'fair' conditions*, by lobby and advocacy towards the public and the corporate sector and by providing essential services where they are not catered for by the private sector.
- *Promotion of pluralism*, contributing to the realisation of 'open societies' characterised by institutionalised tolerance and freedom of expression.

A cross-cutting strategy is *gender mainstreaming*: the empowerment of women and promoting gender equality at all levels. Besides support for women's organisations within the Gender, Women and Development sub-programme, all Hivos programmes specifically address the role and (improvement of the) position of women and girls. This strategy is treated in Hivos policy paper *Women Unlimited* (2006).

The central issue (and often the starting point of interventions) is supporting the emergence and development of civil society organisations, initiatives and networks. Hivos supports their development in particular through its *funding* role and as a *knowledge integrator*. Its third role of *lobbyist and in raising public support* positions Hivos as a civil society actor in its own right on Dutch, European and global stages.

5.1. Strategic choices

Strengthening of the political role of civil society

Hivos aims at enabling civil society organisations to act as drivers of social change. This requires that they succeed in institutionalising their constituency's interests, increasing their bargaining power through coalitions with like-minded groups and implementing effective strategies.

A key element is therefore the organisational and institutional development of partner organisations. This relates to improving their internal organisation, their accountability towards members, constituencies and other stakeholders, and their capacity to engage with actors in decision-making. Apart from organisational development, Hivos attaches great importance to developing strategic capacities to operate effectively in often highly volatile environments, to build alliances, and to ensure financial sustainability. It also aims at quality improvement of civil society organisations in the area of gender perspectives, ICT capabilities and result-oriented management.

Civil society is by definition heterogeneous and multiform. Hivos seeks partnerships with organisations that are strongly anchored within their social environment and pursue social change in the public arena. This may involve partnerships with a variety of organisations – from broad membership-based organisations to pioneering initiatives addressing 'new' issues, and from specialised NGOs to social movements.

Social movements are the expression of broad civic dynamics. They surpass by definition the level of singular organisations. They often represent large-scale collective action on a specific issue by individuals, formal and informal groups, and organisations and are therefore in principle an effective means to achieve social change. They are no longer limited to the level of nation states. The development of communication technologies has facilitated the emergence of transnational, 'virtual' movements and networks, and stimulated a sense of global citizenship. When relevant, Hivos will support these movements through its constituting elements. Support may vary from funding exchanges, the use of ICT, and research or campaigns. In certain cases Hivos itself will be part of these global networks.

Promotion of citizenship

Active engagement of people in public affairs is a key ingredient for a responsive and democratic society. This requires awareness of one's rights and responsibilities. Hivos seeks cooperation with organisations

that actively contribute to and stimulate citizenship through civic education on human rights, political participation and democratic values and practice.

In turn, citizenship is a precondition for civil society activism and active engagement with the public sphere. Organisations working on political, economic or social issues can make a major contribution to citizenship by engaging individuals and groups around specific issues. Their advocacy campaigns can alert and inform people, involve them in discussions and action and influence decisions.

For Hivos, culture, media and other forms of communication are important means to promote citizenship. Enabling access to information and to different perspectives, ICT and media, cultural initiatives and exchanges between citizens and communities are important tools to express oneself and engage with the outside world. Such activities often challenge dominant ideas and potentially broaden the horizon of individuals beyond their communities.

Strengthening of preconditions for democratisation

Hivos attaches great importance to the role of organisations that aim at improving legislation and regulatory frameworks, ensuring human rights in the broadest sense, and more specifically those of marginalised groups. This may involve work to bring about democratic constitutions, free and fair election processes, enforcement of the rule of law (corruption, impunity), and mechanisms to counteract violations of people's rights.

In the economic sphere, both globally and within countries, people have unequal access to markets, commodities, energy, knowledge, technology and capital. One of Hivos strategies deployed is the promotion of process quality. The emphasis will be on promoting the regulation of production systems and markets, integrating issues of social security, gender equality and environmental sustainability in (national and global) policies.

International agreements provide an important instrument for civil society actors to hold government and the corporate sector accountable. The Hivos strategy aims at supporting partners in their endeavours to monitor the implementation of public policies and put pressure on public and market actors to be transparent.

Strengthening socio-cultural pluralism

Hivos wishes to promote platforms for debate that contribute to a free, democratic and pluralist society, as well as dialogue within and between societies in the South and the North. Given the increasing fundamentalist tendencies and the increasing commercialisation of the cultural domain, Hivos will seek specific cooperation with organisations which strive for protection of free expression and societal pluralism.

More specifically, support will go to independent media and activities enhancing the freedom of artistic and cultural expression, such as web-based platforms and 'citizen journalism'.

5.2. Hivos roles

Support to civil society organisations in the South involves more than funding. Over the years Hivos has learnt that access to knowledge and information, as well as co-operation between various actors in the development chain, is vital for effectively implementing strategies. Hivos will actively enhance its qualities as an international actor. This involves initiating or facilitating the creation and exchange of strategic information and knowledge. Another priority is to forge linkages, between partners and with other relevant actors, across levels and thematic work-fields.

A. Funding

Hivos preferably provides organisational or core funding to partners. This enables them to set up a consistent programme within a long-term strategy and increase the organisation's flexibility to deploy resources strategically. Within the terms of their agreement with Hivos, partners have considerable freedom of manoeuvring. Negative effects associated with project funding, such as incoherent programming, fragmentation of efforts and unsustainable effects, are thus diminished. Hivos supports strengthening management capacity and strategic quality of civil society organisations, which are important conditions for an autonomous and dynamic civil society. Hivos complements its financial relationships with relevant civil society actors with lobby initiatives and jointly creating access to relevant knowledge. This corresponds with the relatively new role of Hivos as a knowledge integrator.

B. Knowledge for development

The development and use of knowledge related to social change is crucial for effective interventions. Relevant knowledge results from the joint perspectives, expertise and experiences of people on the ground, practitioners and activists, and researchers. Hivos considers *knowledge integration* an organisational and strategic priority. It will strengthen the learning capacity and performance of its own organisation as well as

of its partner network. The wealth of (often informal) knowledge and experience will be made available for (successful) application. If specific knowledge is lacking, Hivos will initiate co-operative relationships with research institutes and other relevant actors, translate research results into suitable strategies and advance their dissemination and application.

C. Lobby and raising public support

Hivos mainly supports lobby activities by partners, but also has a role in this field as a civil society actor in its own right. Together with the mobilisation of public support within Dutch, European and global arenas for more equal relations and sustainable development, this is the third core task of Hivos. It actively encourages (new) groups in the North to participate in international co-operation. They include social venture capitalists, small-scale do-it-yourself initiatives, social or economic activities by migrants in the Netherlands, and programmes aimed at youth.

5.3. Accountability

The role of development NGOs such as Hivos in strengthening civil society in the South also relates to the debate on accountability and legitimacy. These have become central issues in the critique of the role and influence of civil society actors at all levels. This critique focuses especially on the representational character of civil society. This is also expressed by the people whose interests civil society organisations are supposed to represent. For many civil society actors this has become a question of 'practice what you preach' which may also enhance its effectiveness and credibility, and thus its influence. Many dilemmas in this respect follow from the multiple accountabilities of civil society organisations. A bias exists towards 'upward' accountability (toward powerful stakeholders, such as donors and authorities) at the expense of 'downward' responsiveness to beneficiaries or constituencies (of people living in poverty, marginalised groups, and people living in rural areas).

Although representation is important and Hivos stresses the significance of membership-based and community-based organisations, it is not the only basis for legitimacy. For Hivos, the legitimacy of organisations within civil society depends not just on whom they represent, but also on what they represent. Hivos values a diverse civil society for its autonomous role in the public debate, the development of alternative policy options, the defence of the interests of disenfranchised groups, monitoring implementation of policies etc. Many issues that are relevant for development and the position of specific groups in society are considered controversial or taboo, such as legalisation of abortion, freedom of sexual orientation, or issues related to HIV/Aids. Since these relate to its core values, Hivos has always chosen to support partner organisations working in these fields.

6. PARTNER NETWORK

6.1. Partner network

Support for capacity building initiatives aims at developing the capabilities of partner organisations to facilitate social change. In principle, Hivos supports organisations for a maximum of ten years, in order to guarantee innovation of its partner portfolio. Funding beyond this period is limited to organisations that are highly effective or strategically important to achieve the Hivos development objectives. The regular renewal of its partner portfolio corresponds with Hivos' objective to support small, innovative and starting organisations and help them to develop into strong civil society actors. Hivos supports partners that have the potential to grow and helps them diversify their resource base.

Civil society building demands continuity. Many partners are involved in social transformation processes that can yield success only after a long period of consolidated support. In addition, partner organisations with critical or controversial agendas do not always attract other donors easily. Hivos will therefore improve exit strategies, and monitor the development of ex-partners and the sustainability of earlier investments. Former partners will also be included in knowledge networks that involve relationships beyond funding.

Representing the direct interests of people concerned is an important basis for legitimacy. Therefore, Hivos will increase the number of membership and community-based organisations in its partner network, and step up support for social movements rooted in a local support base. Hivos will also encourage increased co-operation of other types of partners with organisations that work more directly with primary stakeholders.

Citizens' initiatives

Hivos acknowledges and appreciates the role of individuals in developing new ideas and designing new strategies. Small and starting organisations and new initiatives are still an important focus. In the South,

Hivos supports starting initiatives that have not yet achieved organisational professionalism, and in some cases also individuals. In the North, Hivos will continue to fund 'do it yourself' initiatives by Dutch citizens engaging with development issues.

Encouraging activism

The call of (back) donors for more control and quick results, together with the effects of anti-terrorism policies, may limit the space for political lobby organisations. An increased flow of funding to professional, mainstream organisations contributes to a depoliticisation of civil society. Hivos will continue to fund activist organisations with political aims that critically question dominant norms, assumptions and related policies. They address structural issues of power and inequality and are crucial actors in the realisation of goals of social change.

Increasing support to membership organisations

In order to strengthen the legitimacy and accountability of civil society, Hivos aims to increase the number of membership organisations in its network. Being established by people who choose to be members, pay fees and participate in decision-making, membership organisations possess a basic legitimacy that other associational forms have to realise in different ways. However, not all membership organisations are by definition internally transparent and democratic. Power struggles, internal divisions and gaps between different layers of the organisation, especially when the organisation grows, can be numerous and recurrent. Hivos therefore emphasises internal democracy, accountability, and gender equality in its partnership with membership organisations. In general, Hivos does not provide institutional funding to membership organisations, as the basic structure should be funded by membership contributions, which will also reinforce the organisations' autonomy.

Grass-roots and outreach beyond national capitals

Hivos supports community-based organisations that have a substantial outreach and are also relevant beyond their own community. In contexts of political decentralisation, Hivos will increase both the number of partner organisations outside the national capital and existing partners extending their presence or outreach to larger parts of the country. Another priority is to foster linkages between community-based organisations and organisations active at the (sub)national and international level. The regional offices will continue to play an important role in this strategy.

Thematic specialisation and knowledge

Hivos and its partners have experienced – and responded to – the increasing need for high-level expertise that is necessary for effective lobby and advocacy in various political arenas. Civil society has to deal with global politics and its implications for people worldwide; these are highly complex processes, involving a multiplicity of perspectives, interests and theories. At international platforms for consultation and policy development, civil society organisations face powerful and resourceful opponents. They need more expertise to be able to analyse and address complex policy matters, to unpack interested or biased theories and to develop alternatives. Academic and research institutions can provide relevant in-depth expertise, provided they are able and willing to co-operate with civil society organisations. Together they can identify relevant research priorities from the perspective of people affected by the issues at stake and make results of research applicable for public dissemination, lobby and advocacy. Hivos will support some leading organisations and international networks focusing on developing, translating and disseminating knowledge related to specific civil society building topics in order to increase the expertise and effectiveness of its partner network and its thematic policy strategies.

6.2. Result assessment

The current international aid structure is increasingly following a target-based, result-oriented approach of international co-operation, leading to a focus on projects with quantifiable outcomes. The preference for short-term results does not match with the long-term nature of civil society building activities aimed at structural change. It may lead to stronger donor preference for (MDG-related) direct poverty alleviation, to the detriment of more political CSB-oriented programmes. This may affect the quality and diversity of civil society. Added to this, donor harmonisation could lead to growing uniformity of policies and of approaches to development.

Result assessment of civil society building processes is complex because of their long-term nature, the influence of other actors and contextual developments, and the often intangible nature of results. Hivos believes however that it is necessary to assess the effectiveness of civil society actors and their interventions. This is not always easy, given its emphasis on membership-based organisations and small, starting organisations. In Hivos' view, result assessment should be part of organisational learning and

accountability towards stakeholders, not a bureaucratic mechanism for the sake of the donor. Hivos therefore relates its demands for result assessment to partners' capacities in this respect.

7. Concluding remarks

This paper has summarised the main principles of the Hivos policy on civil society building in light of some major global trends. It was not intended to provide a comprehensive context analysis or elaborate upon specific Hivos policies and practices related to its work field. These elements are already part of the regular multi-annual planning process. This paper expresses Hivos' vision on the role of civil society in political, social and economic processes and as such provides the linkage between the overall Hivos policy and the sectoral policies.