



# Ensuring civil society is heard

Principles and practices to improve government engagement with civil society



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## About Bond

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Bond is the UK network for organisations working in international development. We connect and champion a diverse network of over 400 civil society organisations to help eradicate global poverty, inequality and injustice. We work to influence governments and policymakers, develop the skills of people in the sector, build organisational capacity and share expertise.

## Acknowledgements

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Principles and practices to improve government engagement with civil society  
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# Executive summary

## A strong and vibrant relationship between civil society and government is a sign of a healthy democracy. But the quality of this relationship in the UK is in decline.

This paper is a response to failures in the UK government to adequately engage and consult with civil society organisations (CSO), leaving them excluded from decision-making processes and exposing government policies and programmes to avoidable errors.

CSOs are powerful agents for change. They broaden the government's engagement with diverse groups of society, including the most marginalised. They make governments more effective, accountable and transparent. Without their critical involvement in the decision-making process, government policies and programmes risk poorly serving the very communities they aim to support.

Government programmes and policies are most powerful when they are shaped by a diverse range of civil society voices. CSO participation adds an essential layer of checks and balances into policy-making, and bolsters public debate, helping to ensure that all voices are heard.

Ignoring civil society can be hugely detrimental. We've seen time and time again how CSO involvement results in more impactful and inclusive policy making and programmes. CSOs provide decision-makers and policy-makers with access to valuable insights and diverse expertise.

In reality, engagement between government and civil society has not lived up to its potential, often being limited and unproductive. Despite the UK government's long-established commitment to working with CSOs, many organisations are left frustrated and excluded from decision-making processes. We recognise that many government departments, including DFID, suffer capacity constraints that hinder good quality engagement. Decisions on department head count are political decisions, and civil society engagement on the policy-making process should be factored into decisions on capacity. A further obstacle is that CSOs are increasingly treated as suppliers rather than stakeholders, resulting in a transactional relationship rather than a meaningful one.

At Bond, we work to improve engagement between government and civil society. We want to revive and improve the quality of government relations with CSOs. In this paper, we've identified three core principles that government should adopt to promote positive and productive participation, namely that engagement should be: **meaningful, inclusive and deliberative**.

## We want government to adopt the following engagement principles:

- **Meaningful:** Engagement must be relevant and purposeful. The government should never use CSO participation to reinforce decisions that it has already made. The greater the scope for influence, the more meaningful the engagement process is likely to be.
- **Inclusive:** The best decisions are informed by diverse perspectives and expertise. It is crucial to consider who is in the room and who is not. If you can't invite all the relevant stakeholders, be open and transparent about the criteria for inclusion and exclusion.
- **Deliberative:** Engagement is most valuable when it is rooted in open discussions that encourage participants to work together to identify problems and develop innovative solutions. Deliberation can strengthen the legitimacy of a decision-making process and give people a sense of ownership over the final outcome.

## We want government to ensure effective engagement by adopting the following approach:

- Begin early and give people sufficient time to engage fully.
- Be open and accountable, ensuring participants are kept informed.
- Create a well-structured and consistent process.
- Recognise and commit to invest the necessary time and resources required.

These principles are by no means an exhaustive list, but we hope they will encourage the government to reflect on its approach to engagement in the future. There is no one-size-fits-all approach – rather the process should be developed collaboratively and tailored to both the issues and the needs of all those involved. Our analysis and recommendations draw on our own experience with government, which are detailed further as case studies.

To support both interests, we've included some practical tools that government and civil society can each use to improve engagement. Check out our map of engagement mechanisms and checklist for effective engagement at the end of this paper, which you can tearaway for easy reference.

# Introduction: participation is crucial for positive change

Civil society's participation matters because it enables people to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. Both government and CSOs must ensure the voices of vulnerable and marginalised groups are heard and integrated into their work. When engagement fails, the people who lose out are often those with the least power. After investigating the state of civil society in the UK, the Civil Society Futures report concluded:



Few people feel they are heard, let alone responded to or actually involved in any decision-making. We were told that politics has become something that is done to people and places not by people in places. People feel that those in power don't think that they need to be listened to or, worse, that they are dispensable.<sup>1</sup>



In this paper, we've identified three core principles that government should adopt to promote positive and productive participation, namely that engagement should be **meaningful, inclusive** and **deliberative**. We also look at ways of making engagement more effective. These include ensuring engagement **begins early**, it is **regular and consistent**, **promotes accountability**, and is **adequately resourced**.

## Our approach

We looked at how to improve engagement between government and civil society based on the experiences of UK-registered international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) engaging with the Department for International Development (DFID), both before and since the publication of its Civil Society Partnership Review in 2016.

We analysed the various commitments that government has made to working with civil society and supplemented these with feedback from Bond staff and the chairs and members of Bond's working groups on what makes for effective engagement.<sup>2</sup> We also interviewed staff from the Inclusive Societies Department (ISD) at DFID who are responsible for its engagement with civil society.

We include recent examples of engagement between UK INGOs and DFID, and consider how they measure up to these principles. We also provide practical tools for those seeking to improve their approach to engagement, such as a list of different engagement mechanisms and a practical checklist.

There are limitations to our approach. The case studies are a small, non-randomised sample, and so we can't make broad generalisations on all government-CSO engagement processes from the findings. Nonetheless, we are reflecting a common theme of concern and discussion from across our membership and within our thematic working groups. We also acknowledge that our principles are by no means exhaustive. Rather they are based on our discussions with key stakeholders about what they think could improve engagement between government and civil society in the UK.

Although the paper is focused on the experiences of engagement between DFID and UK INGOs, we hope that its insights are useful to civil servants and ministers in other government departments as well as CSOs working in other sectors in the UK and those overseas. We hope that it provides CSOs with ideas, information and tools to encourage civil servants and ministers to improve their engagement with civil society, and to hold them to account if they do not meet these principles.

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1. Civil Society Futures (2018). The Independent Inquiry, Civil Society in England: Its current state and future opportunity, page 40.

2. Bond has 44 working groups covering a range of issues such as Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, Transparency and Aid Effectiveness.

## Limited progress on existing commitments

In 2016, DFID published the Civil Society Partnership Review, which set out how it intends to work with civil society both in the UK and overseas. In the review, DFID expressed a desire to make its engagement with civil society more “meaningful, strategic and efficient” and committed “to involve a broader range of organisations.”<sup>3</sup> The department also made specific commitments to:

- Establish a relationship management programme with key organisations.
- Engage in regular and structured policy dialogue with civil society in specific areas.
- Host annual civil society open days and regional roadshows.

There have been some positive examples of DFID-CSO engagement since the publication of the Civil Society Partnership Review, some of which are case studies in this paper. There are also examples of positive engagement outside DFID, especially with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) on the UK’s international climate change negotiations with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

However, this is outweighed by a strong feeling among large parts of civil society that engagement with DFID and other governments departments has not improved as much as hoped. A prominent example is Brexit (see Case Study 1). We should note in relation to Brexit, that the government’s response to the fall-out of Brexit could further undermine DFID’s already inadequate capacity to engage with civil society, as civil servants are moved from their regular roles to positions that respond to Brexit-related business either within DFID or other government departments.

### Stakeholders or suppliers?

DFID launched its strategic relationship management (SRM) system in January 2018, but it only includes those organisations who receive a set amount of income from DFID. By April 2019, DFID plans to increase the number of organisations covered under the SRM to include the 45 suppliers who receive the largest grants and contracts from DFID. About half of these are CSOs and the remainder are private sector organisations.

The decision to include CSOs in the SRM signals a major shift in DFID’s relationship with civil society. Rather than being partners or stakeholders in development, CSOs are increasingly seen in the same way as any other supplier or contractor, and the relationship is largely transactional.

This one-dimensional approach constrains engagement and undermines development outcomes. A multi-dimensional approach where civil society and the government work together on joint policy objectives, hold each other to account, and share information and learning results in better outcomes for all.

This has been further exacerbated by the increased use of fund managers, where grant management is contracted out to private sector consultancy firms. UK Aid Connect is now the only fund which DFID manages centrally, with UK Aid Direct and UK Aid Match managed by MannionDaniels. DFID has established policy dialogues with CSOs on issues such as economic development and the “Leave No One Behind” agenda. One concern is that these dialogues reflect the government’s priorities rather than civil society’s. Participants found these processes lacked a coherent strategy, structure and transparency, particularly regarding participation.

### A “whole of government” approach to engagement?

Concerns about engagement with civil society go beyond DFID. In 2017, the House of Lords Select Committee on Charities strongly criticised the UK government for its approach to participation.<sup>4</sup> The committee recommended that ministers and civil servants review their ways of working with charities to ensure that they feel better informed and have more opportunities to input into the policy-making process.

Peers also noted that there has been a move away from the Compact, a longstanding framework agreement which helps to guide the relationship between government and civil society. The Compact commits both parties to ensuring that civil society is “strong, diverse and independent” and involved in the “effective and transparent design and development of policies, programmes and public services.”<sup>5</sup> However, the House of Lords Select Committee on Charities found that these “principles were not always adhered to in practice, and that awareness of them was not always high.”<sup>6</sup>

The government promised to renew its commitment to the principles of the Compact in its Civil Society Strategy, published in August 2018. In the strategy, the government recognised that “there is a job to do to reach a collective approach across Whitehall in the way that we work with and for civil society.”<sup>7</sup> Ministers made clear commitments to embed open policy-making across departments, give civil society significant opportunities to achieve policy change and “convene a cross-government group to work with civil

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3. DFID (November 2016). Civil Society Partnership Review. Available online at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-civil-society-partnership-review](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-civil-society-partnership-review)

4. House of Lords Select Committee on Charities, (March 2017). Stronger Charities for a Stronger Society. Available online at:

[www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/charities-committee/publications/?type=8#pnlPublicationFilter](http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/charities-committee/publications/?type=8#pnlPublicationFilter)

5. Cabinet Office, (14 December 2014). The Compact. Available online at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-voluntary-and-community-sector-agree-new-compact-for-working-in-partnership](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-voluntary-and-community-sector-agree-new-compact-for-working-in-partnership)

6. House of Lords Select Committee on Charities, (March 2017). Stronger Charities for a Stronger Society, p94.

7. Office for Civil Society, (August 2018). Civil Society Strategy: Building a Future that Works for Everyone, p70. Available online at: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-society-strategy-building-a-future-that-works-for-everyone](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-society-strategy-building-a-future-that-works-for-everyone)

## The case for engagement

society to establish the principles of effective engagement in the policy-making process.”<sup>8</sup> However, little progress has been made since the strategy was released last year.

While it is important that there is a lead for civil society both within government and within individual departments, responsibility for engagement should not be restricted to these teams. CSOs must be able to engage with relevant officials beyond the Office for Civil Society at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Inclusive Societies Department at DFID in an effective and meaningful way. For this to happen, commitments on engagement must be respected and implemented across government as a whole.

While the benefits of open and constructive consultation between civil society and government are clear, failure to include a broad range of voices in the development of policies and programmes can have unintended ramifications. The danger is that engagement can become a tick-box exercise and be seen as an end in itself.

By bringing in different perspectives, CSOs provide decision-makers with access to valuable insights. They draw on grassroots connections and professional expertise within and beyond their organisations to develop evidence and learning that can be used to improve public policy and the delivery of essential services.



### Case study 1: Brexit uncertainty and anxiety

**What:** There has been little engagement between DFID and civil society on development cooperation planning in response to Brexit, leading to uncertainty and anxiety in the sector.

**How:** There has been limited consultation on broader questions of the UK's influence beyond the funding impact on UK NGOs, such as on the future UK-EU partnership on development cooperation, or support to reach out to other departments responsible for the UK's imminent exit from the EU, or systematic consultation into the UK's future priorities for development cooperation without the EU as a major development partner.

For example, DFID published a series of non papers on the future of the UK's relationship with Europe on development cooperation, and the government released a proposed Framework for UK-EU partnership<sup>9</sup> without consulting civil society. Yet there are risks with the UK's proposals that development will become subjugated as a tool for achieving defence and security policy.<sup>10</sup> Civil society would have strong views and expertise on these proposals and yet have been ignored.

Although there has been better communication with DFID's Europe Department on funding, this has still been sporadic and usually instigated by Bond. CSOs have had to self-organise to gather information on discrimination against UK organisations for funding, with limited support from DFID. Despite this, there have been some positive steps, including the Europe Department and the secretary of state's work to ensure greater clarity on UK eligibility for EU funding, and underwriting of ECHO funding for UK organisations leading a grant entered into between August 2018 and March 2019. However, information has been

drip fed and there remains a lack of clarity on the funding situation for organisations that do not fit these exemptions.

**Results:** Lack of government engagement has given the strong impression that international development is low down the agenda, but importantly that any new UK-EU future partnership on international development could go in a regressive direction without civil society having a say or influence. Uncertainty has increased anxiety in the sector, with many exploring moving to EU countries post-Brexit without full knowledge on whether this will be necessary.

It has also reinforced the view that DFID primarily sees CSOs as suppliers rather than development stakeholders. We are keen to see much greater collaboration between DFID and Bond on both funding and wider questions of UK-EU partnership on development.

### Principles?

- Engagement has been limited and lacks structure and consistency.
- It has been focused on government priorities rather than wider sector interests.
- The process is neither meaningful, inclusive nor deliberative.
- It lacks openness and accountability.
- CSOs have not been kept informed about developments.

8. Office for Civil Society, (August 2018). Civil Society Strategy: Building a Future that Works for Everyone, p.71

9. Bond, (18 March 2018). Promising signals for UK-EU aid partnerships post-Brexit [www.bond.org.uk/news/2018/03/promising-signals-for-uk-eu-aid-partnerships-post-brexit](http://www.bond.org.uk/news/2018/03/promising-signals-for-uk-eu-aid-partnerships-post-brexit)

10. HM Government, (May 2018). Framework for the UK-EU Security Partnership. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/705687/2018-05-0\\_security\\_partnership\\_slides\\_\\_SI\\_FINAL.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/705687/2018-05-0_security_partnership_slides__SI_FINAL.pdf)

## Three principles for engagement

According to the Open Government Partnership, this results in policies and programmes that “are better designed, more efficiently and effectively implemented, and enjoy greater public support.”<sup>11</sup> A recent example of this is the DFID 2018 Disability Strategy, which was developed in close collaboration with the Bond Disability and Development Group (see Case Study 2).

Failure to cooperate with civil society can lead to policies and programmes faltering and backfiring. They may have unintended consequences, and can meet with strong resistance, which results in them being modified or abandoned at a later date.

A recent example is the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Act (2019), where the Home Office introduced a new measure to the bill as it passed through parliament without consulting relevant stakeholders. The Designated Area Offence, which makes it a criminal offence for UK residents and nationals to travel to certain conflict zones and would have had a significant impact on aid workers and journalists, was widely criticised by INGOs and was significantly amended in the House of Lords.

In most cases, similar backlash could be avoided – and precious resources saved – if civil society is included at the earliest possible stage. Involving civil society can strengthen the legitimacy of a decision-making process and may give people a sense of ownership over the final decision, lowering the possibility that it will be challenged.

For engagement to be positive and productive it must be rooted in the following three principles. It should be:

### Meaningful



### Inclusive



### Deliberative



### Meaningful: Engagement must be relevant and purposeful

Government should never use CSO participation to legitimise or consult on decisions that have already been made. The greater the scope for influence, the more meaningful the engagement process needs to be. Civil society should be able to shape the direction and content of a policy or programme from the beginning. There must be clear opportunities for input throughout the process, which is then taken into consideration when making decisions. The engagement should be designed to facilitate this, and the outcomes should be carefully evaluated and reported back to participants. Where input has not been acted upon, the reasons for this should be explained.

Engagement should also focus on the issues that matter to both parties. Both civil society and government often find



### Case study 2: An inclusive approach to disability

**What:** The Bond Disability and Development group (DDG) has built a good relationship with DFID and has had effective consultation on a number of policy areas, including the Disability Summit and the DFID Disability Strategy published in 2018.

**How:** The DDG’s main relationship is with the DFID Disability team, who they invite to attend their group meetings. This has helped embed their relationship, as has the direct meetings between the co-chairs of the group and the DFID Disability team. DFID recognises that the DDG are experts in their area of work and the DDG feels like a critical friend to DFID. The DDG find that their involvement with DFID is more effective when they are given a timely warning for input. It is worth noting that this has coincided with an increased focus and political will to mainstream disability within DFID, with the secretary of state making it clear that it is a priority for her.

**Results:** Recently the DDG have fed into the development and launch of the 2018 DFID Disability strategy, and the planning of and the accountability following the Disability Summit.

### Principles?

- The engagement has been meaningful and deliberative.
- The process is inclusive and is often civil society led.
- Engagement is consistent and ongoing.
- The group is not always given the time it needs to engage fully.

11. Transparency and Accountability Initiative, (11 November 2014). Open Government Guide, p73. Available online at: [www.opengovpartnership.org/resources/open-government-guide](http://www.opengovpartnership.org/resources/open-government-guide)

that focused discussions on certain issues are the most productive. In practice, however, engagement tends to be guided by the strategic priorities of government rather than civil society.

### Inclusive: The best decisions are informed by diverse views and expertise

Civil society provides different perspectives, insights and ideas that can improve the decision-making process. CSOs can also help governments to engage with the groups and individuals most likely to be affected by a decision, whose voices and experiences may otherwise be overlooked. Reaching the most vulnerable and marginalised is not always easy, but the value and impact of engagement increases when decision-makers make the effort to include those who are harder to reach.

When government consults external stakeholders, it needs to be clear why certain organisations or individuals have

been invited to participate in a meeting or dialogue and others have not. There is a danger that government will adopt a default position where it engages with only those stakeholders it knows already, or those who might be more accommodating to its views.

There are established mechanisms that government can use to reach a wide range of people and perspectives, such as the Bond working groups or other existing sector networks. Civil servants should also engage across the various teams within DFID and across Whitehall where necessary. Many of the issues that matter to civil society at present, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), cut across multiple government departments (see Case Study 3 and Case Study 4).

### Deliberative: Engagement has more value when it is interrogative and thoughtful

Engagement is most valuable and effective when it is rooted in deep and open discussions, where parties can express



## Case study 3: Shaping the post-2015 development agenda

**What:** Bond and its members worked very closely with DFID during the post-2015 negotiations, when governments were starting to think about what a post-Millennium Development Goal (MDG) framework could look like.

**How:** Bond hosted the Beyond 2015 UK campaign, which included more than 100 organisations active on this agenda in the UK and over 1000 globally. The group had regular, meaningful engagements with DFID and were able to input into the UK government's thinking about a new sustainable development agenda, as an ambitious agenda was in the interests of both DFID and civil society.

DFID and Beyond 2015 UK had a clear process of engagement which included regular six-weekly catch ups between Bond Beyond 2015 UK representatives and DFID's team working on Agenda 2030. DFID staff participated in quarterly meetings organised by Bond which all interested organisations could attend and openly ask questions to DFID about the government's positions and the status of negotiations.

There were several thematic roundtables organised ahead of international meetings to discuss how those issues could fit in Agenda 2030. The purpose of these meetings was to have cross government engagement with civil society experts on specific themes being discussed in New York to shape the UK Government position.

The meetings were scheduled in advance of official meetings so CSOs could feed into the government's

thinking ahead of international meetings. These meetings included not only DFID policy leads on relevant areas but also leads from other government departments, which helped look at policy coherence and get wider buy in across government.

**Results:** There was a sense of strong national commitment to the SDG negotiations. Civil society and DFID built strong relationships and there was a good level of trust between government and CSOs. It also meant civil society were able to inform DFID's thinking around what a good post-2015 framework would look like. This led to a more ambitious SDG agenda, which incorporated the environment and climate as well as a standalone inequality goal.

### Principles?

- The process was meaningful and deliberative.
- It was very inclusive.
- Meetings were regular and scheduled in advance.
- Participants were kept fully informed.
- Engagement began early on.
- Representatives participated from all relevant government departments.

their position in a neutral environment. Government should ensure that conversations are inclusive and considered, encouraging participants to work together to identify issues to be addressed, generating new ideas and developing solutions to problems.

For government, deliberative engagement processes can strengthen the legitimacy of a decision-making process and give people a sense of ownership over the final decision, lowering the possibility that it will later be challenged.

Both government and civil society will be invested in the discussion and will have a better understanding of the issues and the constraints of the other party. This does not mean that there will always be consensus, but a deliberative approach should mean that both parties have listened and understood the issues at play, which makes for a deeper and more respectful interaction.



## Case study 4: Gaps in reviewing progress on the SDGs

**What:** The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages governments to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress towards meeting the SDGs. These Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) aim to share experiences including challenges faced and lessons learned, as well as successes. Engagement with civil society and other stakeholders should be central to this process to include a wide range of views, input and honest reflection. The UK government has put itself forward for review at the UN High Level Political Forum in 2019.

**How:** The UK VNR process is being coordinated by DFID, with different government departments taking responsibility for individual goals. DFID has asked each government department to ensure that it includes civil society in the process, but engagement has been patchy and inconsistent.

For example, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) did not host engagement sessions with civil society and requested that DFID organise it for them. The Government Equalities Office organised their session at short notice, invited a select group to discuss a specific question not explicitly linked to the VNR, and only informed stakeholders afterwards that they wouldn't run any more engagement sessions.

A cross-government process such as this should have been coordinated by the Cabinet Office rather than DFID, as the SDGs cover progress in the UK and internationally. This would have ensured a more open and inclusive process, with better cross-government buy-in and greater consistency across how government departments engage with civil society.

DFID's approach to engagement with civil society has also been mixed. Bond and UKSSD have worked closely with the SDG team at DFID on the VNR. The SDG team has actively asked civil society for advice and input to the process through phone and face to face meetings. They have participated in the Bond SDG Group's meetings and provided updates to the group.

However, delays in implementing the engagement process and there appearing to be no clear plan has

led to critical actions not being carried through. Other DFID teams have also slowed down the process. Delays in organising the Goal 17 engagement sessions meant that invitations and agendas were sent out at extremely short notice, and participants lacked information about the process. A planned session on financing for development was also cancelled a week before it was due to take place because of resource pressures linked to Brexit.

The process for selecting participants for the cross-sector engagement sessions organised by DFID lacked transparency. Individuals that wished to take part were asked to register their interest with DFID, who then decided on the final participants list. There were no clear criteria for selecting participants.

**Results:** Civil society participation has been limited. UK and international civil society were well placed to input to the review, but since engagement was announced last minute the potential contribution of civil society and other stakeholders has not been realised. Often only those who happened to be free and based in London were able to take part.

So far, the issues discussed reflected government priorities rather than wider SDG implementation issues or an honest reflection of gaps and challenges. Poor engagement means that the report may not be a true representation of what the UK is doing to deliver the SDGs.

### Principles?

- Engagement has not been meaningful.
- It has lacked consistency across government.
- The process has been rushed and disorganised.
- It has lacked transparency.
- It has not been inclusive.

# Four steps to make engagement more effective

There are four steps that government should adopt to ensure that engagement is effective.

- Begin early and give people sufficient time to engage fully.
- Be open and accountable and ensure participants are kept informed.
- Create a well-structured process that encourages consistency.
- Recognise and commit to invest the necessary time and resources required.

## 1. Begin early and give people sufficient time to engage fully

Engagement is most effective when it begins early. Government should involve civil society early to shape the direction of the process, creating buy in and a shared sense of ownership. Government need to give people plenty of time. Early notice of meetings and agreeing the agenda in advance means the right people are in the room and participants are well prepared. Providing people with adequate time to respond to documents and consultations is also important.

It makes it easier to include a wide range of perspectives and experiences, and improves the quality of responses. This is one reason why the Compact recommends that public consultations run for a minimum of 12 weeks.

Both civil society and government prefer advance notice of a report being published or a public announcement made. This is especially important if you are part of an ongoing dialogue and the report or announcement is critical of the other party.

## 2. Be open and accountable and ensure all participants are kept informed

Government should encourage openness and accountability in its engagement with civil society. This will help to build trust and legitimacy. As discussed earlier, information should be always be circulated well in advance and shared publicly, where appropriate. Making information available to everyone will help to ensure that relevant stakeholders are kept informed and bring in voices of those unable to participate.

Providing feedback is an important part of the engagement process and helps to make decision-making more transparent. CSOs find it useful to know whether and how their input has influenced the development of a policy or programme. It is equally, if not more important, for civil servants to explain why they have not acted upon or taken forward input from civil society. Communicating the reasoning and evidence base for a decision is also good practice.



### Case study 5: A revised approach to cost transparency

**What:** As a result of advocacy by civil society, DFID made a commitment in the 2016 Civil Society Partnership Review (CSPR) that they would revise their approach to cost recovery. Bond and Humentum established a working party to take this forward with DFID.

**How:** Given the technical nature of this area of work, Bond and Humentum decided to form a working party comprised of technical experts from UK-based CSOs to work with DFID to co-create a model for cost transparency. A ToR was agreed, with both sides committing time and resources to work together on a new model. Bond, with the steering committee of the Funding Working Group, developed a process to allow a representative range of CSOs to join the working party. Both the steering committee and DFID were keen that the size of organisations selected was as diverse and representative as possible.

**Results:** By September 2018, a provisional model was finalised and a series of outreach meetings for CSOs were held when DFID and CSO representatives could be interrogated by the wider community. Although CSOs are positive about the change overall, there are still questions and concerns to be worked through before and during the roll out. It was the first time CSOs had worked with DFID in this way and it has

clearly benefited from a clear political and resource commitment by DFID to work on it. There is still much that can be improved upon, especially engagement and communication with the wider sector. The process has no clear feedback mechanism, which has left some organisations feeling like they have not been heard. It is clear that more work needs to be done by the working party to agree a system of feedback for the imminent roll out of the cost transparency policy.

#### Principles?

- The process has been meaningful and deliberative.
- Civil society has been involved since the beginning.
- The process is well structured.
- Both sides have identified and committed necessary resources.
- It is not as open and transparent as it could have been.
- Despite efforts to be inclusive, some CSOs feel they have not been heard.

### 3. Create a well-structured process that encourages consistency

Government needs to ensure that a well-structured engagement process is put in place, where participants know what is expected and are given a chance to input in a timely manner. Creating a Terms of Reference (ToR), which considers the objectives of the engagement, the engagement process and tools to be used, the feedback mechanism and the roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders can help.

Ideally there would be a set number of meetings each year, the pattern of which should be outlined in the ToR. You could agree to cascade the meetings, to have smaller detailed meetings feeding into larger meetings. The representatives from both parties should, where possible, remain consistent. This helps build a trusting relationship between both parties and ensures continuity of the discussions.

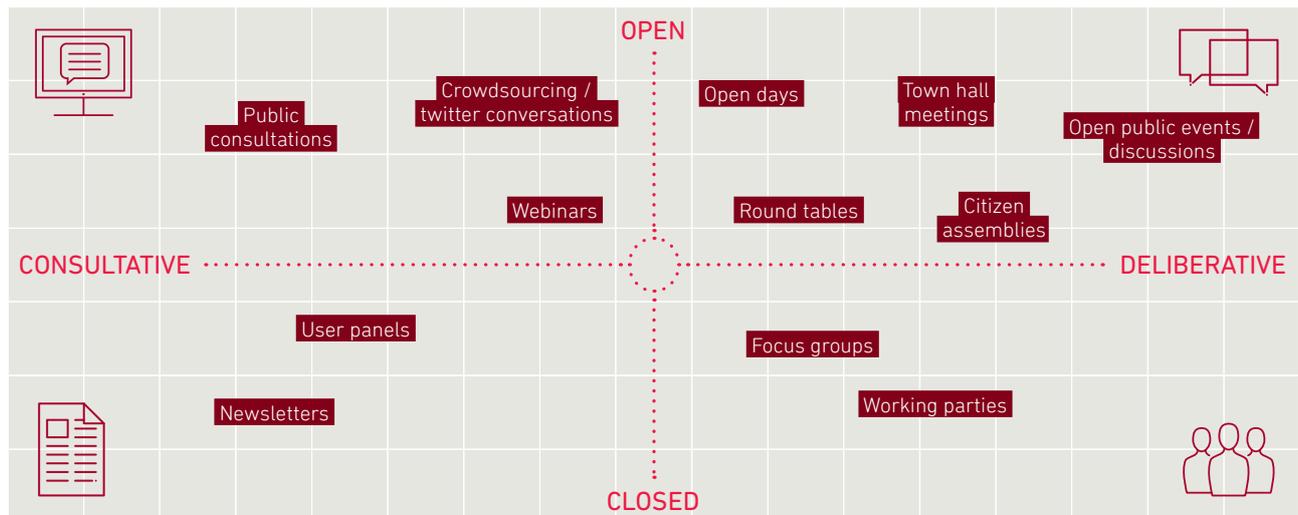
### 4. Recognise and commit to invest the necessary time and resource required

Both civil society and government need to be realistic about what can be achieved through engagement, and pragmatic about the investment required to do it effectively. There should be a commitment from both parties to identify and invest the necessary time and resources required into the engagement, otherwise it risks being tokenistic.

Participants may find it helpful to agree on the scope of the engagement at the beginning of the process so that everyone is aware of the level of commitment and resource required to engage effectively. Some areas of engagement will be time specific and will be disbanded once it has finished, while others will be longer term and will require ongoing resources.

## Mechanisms for engagement

There are many different mechanisms for engaging with civil society, a few examples are listed below. We have placed these mechanisms on a grid, according to how open or closed and how deliberative or consultative they are. In practice, the position of each will vary depending on the topic and approach taken by the parties involved.



## Conclusion: what do we do next?

The UK government has made clear commitments on how they want to engage with civil society. We welcome these promises, but they need to be demonstrated in practice to ensure that CSOs and the people they work with are heard.

However, it is not just government that needs to review their approach. CSOs must improve the way that they engage both with government and beyond its sector. Both sides should be proactive and iterative, and actively consider whether the approach they have adopted is the right one for those involved. They should not be afraid to step back, reshape their approach, and consider whether other mechanisms might be more appropriate for their area of engagement.

Participation is often an afterthought, but it shouldn't be. It is fundamental to effective and inclusive policy and programme design. Including the voices of the most marginalised gives them a say in the decisions that affect their lives and helps to find solutions that work for them. Effective engagement benefits both government and civil society, as well as the people they work with, and helps them achieve their joint aim to reduce poverty and inequality.

# Checklist for effective engagement between government and civil society

Effective engagement between government and civil society needs to be:

Meaningful



Inclusive



Deliberative



Use this checklist of actions and considerations when agreeing an approach to engagement that sticks to these three principles of best practice.

BEFORE

- Agree the scope of the engagement.
- Agree a clear structure for the engagement.
- Develop a Terms of Reference, if appropriate.
- Identify criteria for selecting participants.
- Choose appropriate mechanisms for engagement.
- Agree a timetable for the engagement process.
- Identify and agree resources required for engagement.
- Agree a dedicated focal person for each organisation.
- Include responsibilities for engagement in job descriptions.
- Create a feedback mechanism.

DURING

- Ensure people have enough time to respond to documents and consultations.
- Provide participants with all the information they need to take part.
- Schedule regular meetings and put them in the diary as soon as possible.
- Share participant lists in advance.
- Develop the agenda for meetings through dialogue and share them within a short timeframe.
- Take meeting notes and share them promptly.
- Publish notes and documents online if appropriate.
- Regularly review your approach to engagement and make improvements as necessary.
- Keep others in your organisation informed.

AFTER

- Provide feedback to all participants.
- Publish the results of your engagement.
- Conduct a joint evaluation or learning exercise.
- Make recommendations about how to improve the process and share them.



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