Supporting cooperation between CSOs with different kinds of expertise, experience and capacity

Internal Guidelines

TACSO

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction

In the Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations (TACSO) 2 Terms of Reference, the TACSO team is committed to support "cooperation between experienced/stronger and less experienced/weaker civil society organisations (CSOs), including CSOs in rural areas and sector specific areas" through capacity building and developing partnerships.

The reason for supporting this type of cooperation is that it is broadly recognised that civil society could improve its impact, effectiveness and capacity if CSOs were to work together more strategically. Different CSOs often have different experiences and expertise, but share similar goals. However, far too often, we see them competing with each other and duplicating activities, as opposed to cooperating with each other and pooling their resources to achieve their common goal. In addition, there is an increasing trend that elite CSOs, often based in urban areas, have better access to donors and policy makers, but are becoming increasingly detached from grassroots and civic initiatives focusing on the issues affecting marginalised people and communities.

By supporting cooperation between CSOs, which share common goals, but have different kinds of expertise, experience and capacity, TACSO can help build strong partnerships, based on real complementarity, which have a better chance of achieving societal change.

During December 2011, the TACSO Regional Office organised an internal workshop to develop internal guidelines for TACSO staff on supporting this kind of cooperation. The workshop took place in Istanbul on 2 December 2011, and was facilitated by Zelah Senior, Regional Office CSO Capacity Building Expert and Aleksandra Vesić Antić, TACSO Short Term Expert. The workshop was attended by 10 participants and included TACSO staff from Kosovo, Serbia and Turkey, as well as representatives from CSOs with different kinds of expertise, experience and capacity, capacity building experts, and representatives from DG ELRG and the Euclid Network (a member of TACSO's Programming Committee). More details about the workshop participants and the methodology for developing and implementing the guidelines can be found in Annex 1 and Annex 2 respectively.

2. Purpose

The purpose of these internal guidelines is to standardise the approach of all TACSO offices when implementing activities to support cooperation between CSOs with different kinds of expertise, experience and capacity. These guidelines address what kind of support TACSO should provide, to which CSOs and in what way, in order to encourage cooperation between CSOs.

Please note that more specific guidance on how TACSO should support partnership and networking activities can be found in a separate set of internal guidelines[1].

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[1] Internal guidelines on supporting future partnership and networking activities, TACSO, March 2012

3. Key terminology

Cooperation between CSOs with different kinds of expertise, experience and capacity - Instead of calling this kind of cooperation "cooperation between experienced/stronger and less experienced/weaker CSOs", it should be called "cooperation between CSOs with different kinds of expertise, experience and capacity". This definition is less value-laden and places more emphasis on mutually beneficial cooperation in pursuit of shared goals.

Rural CSOs – CSOs based in and/or specifically serving the needs of beneficiaries living in areas that have low population density and where traditionally most of the land has been devoted to agriculture.

Sector specific CSOs – CSOs that have a specific focus on providing services and/or achieving policy change in a particular sector that is being strengthened during the EU Accession Process. These sectors include rule of law, human rights and protection of minorities, health, women, children and youth, vulnerable groups, people with disabilities, education, training and culture, social policy and employment, agriculture, environment, energy and food safety.

4. Key principles

4.1 Principle 1: What kind of cooperation should TACSO support?

TACSO should encourage and facilitate cooperation that has a two-fold purpose:

- It enables continuous capacity building (i.e. not 'one off' capacity building), that goes both ways and which brings clear benefits to both/all parties. It should not just be "cooperation for the sake of cooperation", but should help both/all parties improve the quality of their work. For example:

    o 'stronger' CSOs can support 'weaker' CSOs to get information and contacts, to 'learn the ropes', to write proposals, do PR, and develop their organisation; and

    o 'weaker' CSOs can help 'stronger' CSOs to have contact with on the ground needs, develop new approaches and think creatively.

- It builds on what is already there (i.e. existing relationships, expertise, experience and capacity) to encourage longer–term partnerships. These partnerships should help CSOs to:

    o improve the quality of their organisational work (e.g. be more professional, improve their work with beneficiaries and other stakeholders etc.)

    o improve the quality of the content of their work (e.g. work together on watchdog activities: developing advocacy campaigns and lobbying policy makers etc.)

    o develop well-written projects, focusing on meeting real needs, which have a better chance of attracting support from donors and other sources of finance.

Cooperation between CSOs should not depend solely on the availability of project funding, but should be seen as an integral part of the efforts that every CSO should make to achieve its goals, build its own capacity and build the capacity of civil society in general.

4.2 Principle 2: Whom should we support?

There are no typical TACSO beneficiaries (i.e. CSOs with a particular profile) for this kind of support. TACSO national offices should choose the CSO cooperation projects they wish to support based on the findings of the 2011 TACSO needs assessment and other up-to-date data on the local situation.

When thinking about the types of beneficiaries they would like to prioritise, TACSO staff should bear in mind the following:

- Although TACSO national offices may choose to support one-to-one cooperation (e.g. between two individual CSOs) and/or support cooperation to a larger group of CSOs through networks and platforms, TACSO should prioritise to support mutually beneficial cooperation between more than two organisations, which already have a track record of previous cooperation or which have clearly defined reasons for developing a new partnership.

- The Civil Society Facility has developed an approach of supporting CSOs that are oriented towards networking and developing a joint approach to resolving societal problems. It follows that TACSO should support cooperation between CSOs that clearly demonstrate a commitment to networking and partnership.

- TACSO 2's Terms of Reference place an emphasis on supporting rural and sector-focused CSOs. It follows that, as far as possible, these types of CSOs should be included in this support programme.

4.3 Principle 3: Documenting, learning, sharing and reviewing

As with all TACSO activities, it is important that each national office documents and regularly reviews the support that it is providing for this kind of cooperation, in order to share lessons learned and permit adjustments to be made to these guidelines and to the national offices' support programmes.

5. Putting the principles into practice

5.1 Developing Criteria

5.1.1 Introduction

Each TACSO national office should develop its own criteria for selecting beneficiaries, identifying the kind of cooperation it will support, and deciding how that support will be provided, in accordance with their procedures for developing and approving such criteria.

These criteria should be clearly documented and publically available. They should also be in line with these internal guidelines and take into account the resources available for this kind of cooperation.

If the 2011 national needs assessment does not provide sufficient information about cooperation between CSOs with different kinds of expertise, experience and capacity, national offices should also consider starting the process by designing and implementing a more specific needs assessment that could provide

information on a) existing and/or emerging coalitions, networks and partnerships, b) issues/areas in which they need support c) potential 'matches' between organisations.

In the following paragraphs, some suggestions are given about what should be taken into account when developing the criteria.

5.1.2   Selecting beneficiaries

When developing criteria for selecting beneficiaries, TACSO national offices should:

- be careful to avoid stereotypes, such as "bigger organisations know everything"; "rural organisations are not well-developed"; in other words, think about criteria that would provide for an unbiased assessment of the CSOs' complementarity; and

- think about the sustainability of the cooperation they would like support. TACSO's focus should be on nurturing relationships that have the potential to last and produce tangible results; and

- keep in mind that TACSO wants to support cooperation that is beneficial to all the CSOs involved. This means that potential beneficiaries should be able to demonstrate that all partners will derive clear benefit from the cooperation.

5.1.3 Identifying what kind of cooperation to support/not support

When identifying what kind of cooperation to support, TACSO national offices should bear in mind the following recommendations:

- **Types of cooperation that TACSO should support:**

  o   Exchange visits between CSOs (short visits to each other's organisations).

  o   Job shadowing between CSOs (longer visits to each other's organisations, where the visitors work in their host organisation, share good practice and learn new skills).

  o   Coaching, where staff from one organisation with experience, expertise or capacity in a specific area provides one-off support to staff in another organisation to develop their own expertise and/or capacity, through peer-to-peer learning between organisations.

  o   Mentoring, where staff from one organisation with experience, expertise or capacity in a specific area provides longer-term support to staff in another organisation to develop their own expertise and/or capacity.

  o   Meetings for smaller networks (which often lack the money to meet and plan their work face-to-face, and may also benefit from expert facilitation).

  o   Training with concrete follow up activities that will actively develop cooperation between the partners/networks, such as on-the-job coaching, or longer-term mentoring.

  o   Pilot projects that promote partnership in social innovation, and have the potential for replication. For example, encouraging different types of CSOs to work together to develop a solution to pressing social issues in their area.

- **Types of cooperation that TACSO should NOT support:**

- One-off training events, with no concrete follow up activities by the partners/networks which will actively develop their cooperation.

- Big conferences, with no concrete follow up activities by the partners/ networks that will actively develop their cooperation.

5.1.4 Deciding how TACSO will provide that support

It is recommended that, as far as possible, TACSO national offices should consider the possibility of **both:**

- covering the costs of selected activities of CSOs committed to this kind of cooperation; **and also**

- providing technical assistance e.g. facilitation for networks and platforms and/or advice about how to implement activities such as job shadowing, mentoring and coaching, which may not be familiar concepts to many CSOs.

Each national office should decide to what extent they should offer each kind of support. However, it should be kept in mind that many types of cooperation will require both types of support in order to be effective.

5.2 The selection process

As a general principle, TACSO support should be provided on the basis of an open call, with clear criteria designed to attract applications from specific categories of beneficiaries, involved in specific types of cooperation (see 5.1 above).

The open call should require applicants to provide evidence of the following:

- *Previous successful cooperation between the applicants*. Criteria could be based on the length of previous cooperation/relations, and the quality of previous cooperation/relations.

- *The CSO applicants have thought through their cooperation*. Criteria could be based on whether they have conducted their own needs assessment, developed a cooperation plan, or analysed the challenges they might face and how they might overcome them.

- *The CSO applicants are likely to get mutual benefit from the cooperation*. Criteria could be based on the applicants' complementarity, i.e. whether they can each learn from the other and derive mutual benefit from the cooperation.

- *The likelihood that the cooperation will be sustainable and/or replicable*. Criteria could be based on how this kind of cooperation can be sustained/replicated after the end of TACSO's support.

- *The expected outcomes and impact from the cooperation and how they will be assessed.* Criteria could be based on whether the applicants have considered the potential outcomes and impact of the partnership/cooperation both on the partners and their primary beneficiaries, as well as on the general public and wider society. Applicants should also demonstrate that they have thought about how these outcomes and impact could be measured.

If time and resources permit, it is recommended that there should be a pre-selection phase, in which a short list is drawn up on the basis of the criteria, and the applicants are interviewed (ideally during a site visit) to verify that the criteria are met.

Once a final selection has been made, in accordance with the TACSO national office's procedures, a tailored cooperation plan should be developed with the successful applicants, which includes clear and realistic reporting requirements (bearing in mind the nature and duration of the support provided by TACSO). As part of this cooperation plan, recipients of TACSO's support should be required to produce at least one report which covers the following:

- Name of project

- Names of partner CSOs involved in this cooperation

- Brief description of methodology used for implementing the project

- How successful was the cooperation between the CSO partners? If there have been problems, why did they arise and how could they be avoided in the future?

- Did all the CSOs involved in the project benefit from the cooperation? If they did, in what way did they benefit? If not, why not?

- Will the cooperation continue in the future? If yes, how? If not, why not?

- Did the project achieve what it set out to achieve in terms of expected outcomes and impact? What was achieved, and how can those outcomes and impact be verified? What was not achieved, and why?

- Did you encounter any major challenges during the project? If so, explain the challenges and the way in which you overcame them.

5.3 Documenting, learning, sharing and reviewing

5.3.1 Documenting support provided by TACSO

It is important to document the support provided by TACSO for cooperation between CSOs with different kinds of expertise, experience and capacity.

In order to make it easier to analyse lessons learned at a national and regional level, TACSO national offices should develop a short internal report for each supported project which tracks the progress made during the period of TACSO's support. This internal report should be based on reports submitted by the CSOs that TACSO is supporting, as well as on TACSO staff's impressions of how the cooperation is going. This internal report should cover the following:

- Name of project

- Names of partner CSOs involved in this cooperation

- Selection criteria and details of selection process

- Details of support (financial contribution and/or technical assistance provided)

- Brief description of methodology used for implementing the project

- How successful was the cooperation between the CSO partners? If there were problems, why did they arise and how could they be avoided in future?

- Did all the CSOs involved in the project benefit from the cooperation? If they did, in what way did they benefit? If not, why not?

- Will the cooperation continue in the future? If yes, how? If not, why not?

- Did the project achieve what it set out to achieve in terms of expected outcomes and impact? What was achieved, and how can those outcomes and impact be verified? What was not achieved, and why?

- Major challenges encountered during the project, and ways in which they were overcome

- Lessons learned by TACSO

- Suggested follow up actions by TACSO (for example: Should the lessons learned be shared beyond the TACSO team? Should TACSO check in on the impact of the project at a later date? Should these guidelines be amended?)

TACSO national offices can use the information captured in these reports to improve their own support to cooperation between CSOs, as well as to improve the work done across the region to support this kind of cooperation.

5.3.2 Capturing and sharing lessons learned within TACSO

Lessons learned include both good practices, and practices that were not successful and should be avoided in the future. It is important to share both within TACSO through e-mails, discussions during consultative meetings, interim and final reports to the Civil Society Facility, as well as during the review meetings suggested in 5.3.3 below. Lessons learned should also be shared beyond TACSO, to the national Delegations of the European Union and other donors, through the Local Advisory Groups.

5.3.3 Reviewing these internal guidelines and support to cooperation

It is recommended that these guidelines should be reviewed midway through TACSO 2, in line with lessons learned by the national offices. This review could be implemented by the TACSO regional office, with input from the national offices at the Consultative Meeting planned for September 2012.

A final review of all TACSO 2 support to cooperation between CSOs with different kinds of expertise, experience and capacity should be conducted by the TACSO regional office, with input from the national offices, in May 2013.

Topics that should be covered during these meetings could include:

- an assessment of results achieved/progress made

- a summary of the most successful practices and why they were successful

- a summary of challenges and why they occurred

- a summary of feedback from the beneficiaries on their methodology, practices, how they found TACSO's support, etc.

- recommendations for adjustments/changes to the methodology for implementing the supported project /overall cooperation programme.

Annex 1. – Facilitators and participants at the internal workshop on 2 December 2011.

Facilitators:

Name	Organisation and position
Ms. Zelah Senior	CSO CB Expert, TACSO Regional Office
Ms. Aleksandra Vesić Antić	Trainer and Consultant, Team TRI, Belgrade, Serbia

Participants:

Name	Organisation and position
Ms. Luisa De Amicis	Programme and Policy Manager, Euclid Network, London, UK
Ms Mehru Aygul	Project Officer, TACSO Turkey
Mr. Erik Illes	Civil Society Facility, DG ELRG, Brussels, Belgium
Mr. Milutin Milošević	Director, Adult Resources, World Scout Bureau, European Regional Office, Geneva, Switzerland
Mr. Veton Mujaj	Executive Director, NGO "Syri i Vizionit" Pejë/Pec, Kosovo
Ms Neslihan Ozgunes Oktem	Resident Advisor, TACSO Turkey
Ms Zorka Rašković	Resident Advisor, TACSO Serbia
Mr. Emre Sorkun	Capacity Building Coordinator of Civil Society Development Centre of Turkey, employed under the project supported by European Commission, Supporting Civil Society Development and Dialogue in Turkey Project (2009-2011), Ankara
Ms. Shqipe Svecla	Project Officer, TACSO Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/99
Ms. Vitore Zefi	Member, Board of Youth Centre Ardhmeria, Klina, Kosovo

Annex 2. – Methodology for developing and implementing the internal guidelines

Step 1: Developing the concept for the internal workshop

This process was led by the TACSO Regional Office, with assistance from national office colleagues from Kosovo, Serbia and Turkey, and took place in September and October 2011

Step 2: Selecting expert participants for the internal workshop

This process was led by the TACSO Regional Office, with assistance from national office colleagues from Kosovo, Serbia and Turkey, and took place in November 2011.

Step 3: Implementing the internal workshop

The internal workshop was held on 2 December 2011, in Istanbul, and was organised by the TACSO Regional Office with support from TACSO Turkey. A list of facilitators and participants is provided in Annex 1.

Step 4: Drafting the guidelines

The guidelines were drafted in December 2012 by the two facilitators of the internal workshop, and distributed by the TACSO Regional Office to all participants in the workshop for their comments in early January 2012.

Step 5: Finalising the guidelines

The guidelines were finalised by the TACSO Regional Office in March 2012.

Step 6: Distributing the guidelines

The guidelines will be distributed as follows:

- By e-mail to all TACSO national offices

- Posted on the TACSO Web site

- Attached to the TACSO 2 First Interim Report

Step 7: Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the guidelines.

It is recommended that the TACSO Regional Office should coordinate a review of the guidelines and activities implemented by the TACSO national offices in accordance with these guidelines in September/October 2012, and at the end of TACSO 2.

Contact details

Regional Office
Potoklinica 16
71 000 Sarajevo
Bosnia and Herzegovina
info@tacso.org

T/A Help Desk for
Albania
Rr" Donika Kastrioti" | "Kotoni" Business Centre
K-2 Tirana
Albania
info.al@tacso.org

T/A Help Desk for
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Kalesijska 14/3
71 000 Sarajevo
Bosnia and Herzegovina
info.ba@tacso.org

T/A Help Desk for
Croatia
Amruševa 10/1
10 000 Zagreb
Croatia
info.hr@tacso.org

T/A Help Desk for
Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/99
Fazli Grajqevci 4/a
10000 Pristina
Kosovo under UNSCR 1244/99
info.ko@tacso.org

T/A Help Desk for
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
11 Oktomvri 6/1-3
1000 Skopje
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
info.mk@tacso.org

T/A Help Desk for
Montenegro
Dalmatinska 78
20000 Podgorica
Montenegro
info.me@tacso.org

T/A Help Desk for
Serbia
Spanskih boraca 24 - stan broj 3
11070 Novi Beograd
Serbia
info.rs@tacso.org

T/A Help Desk for
Turkey
Gulden Sk. 2/2
Kavaklidere 06690
Ankara

Yenicarsi Caddesi No.34
34425 Beyoglu
Istanbul
Turkey
info.tr@tacso.org

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