



Engagement Note for FCDO engagement on the future of centrally managed civil society and civic space programming.

The United Kingdom Government has a long history of working with international civil society. The UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) recognises that a vibrant and active civil society promotes inclusion, protects human rights, provides a voice to hold governments to account and delivers better development outcomes. The UK Government's commitment to working with civil society is evident in both the International Development Strategy and the Integrated Review of Security, Defense, Development and Foreign Policy, which both underscore the pivotal role of civil society and reaffirm the government's engagement with it.

Historically, the FCDO has channeled its support for civil society through a range of programming across many themes. Centrally managed funds such as UK Aid Direct, UK Aid Match, and UK Aid Connect have played a key role. These initiatives are ending soon and the FCDO is eager to engage with civil society, both domestically and internationally, to understand how they can best be supported. Recognising the transformative impact of meaningful collaboration with civil society, the FCDO is confident that such engagement will lead to improved outcomes, more effective public policies, and better resource allocation.

To facilitate this process, the FCDO has enlisted the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) and Bond to oversee an engagement process. The consultations are scheduled to take place from September to October 2023, and will gather feedback and recommendations from civil society. The insights collected will be consolidated into recommendations and submitted to the FCDO in November 2023. These findings will be reviewed by the FCDO and taken into consideration as they make decisions about how they fund civil society in the future.

The engagement will consist of a series of engagements coordinated by WACSI and Bond, which will not cover every region, but aim to cover some key regions and a wide range of ODA eligible country types.

There will be two invitation-only in person engagements, one in the UK and the other in Ghana, with eight virtual engagements, to support inclusivity, covering West Africa, Southern Africa, East Africa, Eastern Europe, Indo-Pacific, Central Asia, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There will also be a survey and the opportunity to submit a written response that provides examples of successful approaches to working with civil society.

The FCDO is particularly interested to hear from small organisations, umbrella organisations/networks and those based in the least developed, and low- and middle-income countries. WACSI and Bond will work through their networks to ensure that these organisations are included in the discussions.

The engagements will focus on these questions:

Sustainable Financial Support: The FCDO seeks guidance on how to provide sustainable financial support to a diverse range of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), drawing on the expertise of UK-based International and Non-Governmental Organisations (ICSOs/INGOs).

- How can the FCDO ensure that their funding reaches smaller, local, and more embattled organisations?
- How can the FCDO reform funding relationships, governance arrangements and reporting for CSOs?
- How can the FCDO ensure that their approach to funding reflects best practice in mainstreaming inclusion and sustainability across its design in an integral and meaningful way?

Rebalancing Power Dynamics: The UK's International Development Strategy said "Those who benefit from our work must have a voice in what we do, and how we do it." The FCDO wants its future programming and support to encourage difficult reforms and good policies that drive progress towards local ownership.

- How can the FCDO best work with and support UK civil society, and at the same time meet its goal of investing in local leadership, equitable partnerships, and sustainable outcomes?
- How can the FCDO shift the balance of power in the relationships between UK CSOs and international CSOs?
- When bidding for funding, should the INGOs identify the partnership model that they plan to use with their partners? And if yes, what partnership models should be included?
- How can the FCDO best help to promote and champion the work of civil society partners?
- How can the design of a new match-funding programme for UK public appeals ensure that local leadership and sustainable outcomes are embedded in what is funded?

Enhancing mutual accountability: Exploring strategies for mutual accountability.

- How can the FCDO demonstrate accountability and adaptability to local communities, individuals, and delivery partners?
- What strategies could strike a balance for holding delivering partners accountable to the FCDO, and supporting accountability to the UK Parliament and taxpayer, whilst not over-burdening small CSOs? How could smaller CSOs be supported with necessary reporting?

Measuring impact and metrics for sustainability: Ensuring that the FCDO understands the state of the sector and can measure the impact of their work to become more locally led.

- What metrics should the FCDO use to evaluate changes in sector sustainability and resilience?
- What metrics should the FCDO use to assess changes in local leadership?

Protecting Civil Society in Crisis: Ensuring the safety and resilience of civil society, including human rights defenders, during crises, to enable them to effectively respond to growing risks.

- How should the FCDO best protect civil society in crisis situations?
- How should the FCDO protect human rights defenders so that they are able to respond to growing and manifesting risks, and at the same time ensure that they do not create additional risks?

Network and Umbrella Organisations: Exploring strategies to empower networks and umbrella organisations that offer vital services and support to the wider civil society landscape.

- What sort of support and services do CSOs want from their networks and umbrella organisations, or what support do you feel is missing where these organisations do not exist? What do you find to be the main benefits of being part of a network organisation (or more than one?)
- How should the FCDO support umbrella organisations that work with civil society?

Specific questions for networks and umbrella organisations:

- Which are the most in-demand services you provide to your members?
- Which do you consider most important for building sector resilience?
- How do you see these evolving over the next decade or so to respond to the risks and pressures affecting the sector? What are the biggest risks faced?
- How can governments most usefully provide support to network organisations in a way that promotes independence and sector sustainability?
- Should funding for CSOs and their network organisations be delivered through the same mechanisms, or are there separate requirements to meet?

The recommendations from the engagement process

The FCDO has committed to listening to the views of civil society. Whilst they cannot commit to fully implementing recommendations, any recommendations that are not possible to implement will be taken into consideration to feed into the future of FCDO's approaches. The results of this engagement will not directly formulate policies, allocate immediate funding, or resolve individual cases. **Any suggestion of programme design and future funding models are for illustrative purposes only.** The FCDO hopes that the recommendations will form the basis for their internal discussions on how they work with civil society, informing best practice across the organisation, and in turn other donors as part of the FCDOs bilateral and multilateral engagement.

How to get involved with the engagements.

The survey will be launched in early September 2023. It will be shared through WACSI and Bond's social media channels on Twitter and LinkedIn.

The virtual engagement sessions will be launched in September 2023 through the Bond and WACSI networks, they will take place in September and October 2023. These are open sessions, but places will be limited to one person per organisation. Information on how to sign up to the virtual sessions will be shared through the WACSI and Bond social media channels, the Bond working groups, the UK Alliance, the Shift the Power network and FCDO networks.

The in-person engagements are scheduled for October 2023 and are by invitation only.

If you want to submit examples of good funding practice then please email either Farouk Alhassan falhassan@wacsi.org or Katherine Strasser-Williams Kstrasserwilliams@bond.org.uk

See the table below for the scheduled dates of the engagements.

Schedule of events

The engagements are scheduled for September to October 2023:

No	Type of event	Geographical	Date
1.	Virtual Engagement	England, UK	28 September
2.	Virtual Engagement	England, UK	02 October
3.	Virtual Engagement	West Africa	03 October
4.	Virtual Engagement	Scotland, Northern Ireland & Wales	05 October
5.	Virtual Engagement	Eastern Europe	09 October
6.	In-Person Engagement	United Kingdom	12 October
7.	Virtual Engagement	East and Southern Africa	17 October
8.	Virtual Engagement	Central Asia	19 October
9.	Virtual Engagement	Indo-Pacific	25 October
10.	In-Person Engagement	Sub-Saharan Africa in Accra, Ghana	30-31 October

If you are interested in finding out more about these engagements, please email Farouk Alhassan falhassan@wacsi.org or Katherine Strasser-Williams kstrasserwilliams@bond.org.uk