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Norad

Support Models for CSOs at Country Level

Zimbabwe Country Report

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Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

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Zimbabwe Country Report

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Foreword to the country reports

This report on country level support modalities to civil society is one of a total of six similar studies conducted in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe between April and July 2007.

The study was carried out by Scanteam, a Norwegian consulting company, on behalf of a donor group consisting of Canada, Finland, Ireland, Sweden, the UK and Norway. The findings were later elaborated and merged into a synthesis report, describing general trends and challenges in current direct support to Civil Society Organisations in the South, through various modalities. The synthesis report is published together with the country studies.

Specific views and arguments in this report are attributed to Scanteam and not to the donors.

December 2007

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (of the OECD)
EC	European Community
INGO	International NGO
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NANGO	National Association of NGOs
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NPA	Norwegian People's Aid
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SWOT	Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
ZMD	Zimbabwe Dollar

1 Background and Introduction

Norad, Norway's Development Cooperation Agency, contracted Scanteam on behalf of "Nordic+" donors Canada, Finland, Ireland, Norway, Sweden and the UK, to review the experiences in six countries of different models for supporting civil society.

The ***purpose*** is to contribute to the development of a strategic policy framework for Nordic+ support to a vibrant, pluralistic and democratic civil society. The ***aim*** is to identify and analyze different support models, while the ***objectives*** are to (i) review possibilities for improving direct support to NGOs/CSOs through country level support models; (ii) shed light on constraints and possibilities of different types of support models, and (iii) increase outreach to a wider range of civil society organisations and reduce transaction costs.

This Country Study Report on Zimbabwe is thus one of the six separate studies that will form the empirical foundations for the overall report.

1.1 Study Coverage and Methodology

The methodology applied for the study is described in detail in the overall Synthesis Report for this study. There the final summary of quantitative trends in the selection of support models and some of the key features will also be presented.

Some of the main issues concerning the data collection are the following:

- Methodology used in the field studies include: in-depth interviews with key donor personnel and CSOs. Those with first hand knowledge of the support models in question were prioritised. For this reason, few government representatives have been interviewed. Questionnaires were sent out by email, and a follow-up survey was distributed after the drafting of the country reports. In addition there have been meetings for debriefing at the end of the field work as well as seminars and focus group discussions held. Emerging findings were presented and commented on at the final debrief and comments included in the country report. The study team (minus national consultants) has conducted three internal workshops during the study to discuss methodology and findings.
- An important part of this study is to review and further develop terminology and categorization of support to civil society. The data collection instruments have been simplified and adapted as the study progressed. Comprehensive questionnaires and Conversation guides were developed prior to the field work, based on a desk study of key documents. The existing categories of support models were not sufficiently clear. Terminology has been further developed during the course of this study. Based on lessons learned in the field and the need for simplification and reduction in scope, a final matrix with a few key features linked to civil society support models was sent out to the Nordic + embassies in the six countries. The response from the embassies to the quantitative part of the data collection has been low for all countries involved.
- This study only looked at support models at country level and does not include funding of NGOs/CSOs from the donor head offices. Nor did it cover funding which is channelled through international NGOs (INGOs), unless the Embassy used an INGO locally as an intermediary channel.

- Furthermore, the study did not attempt to measure the effectiveness of the CSOs in relation to the chosen support model – that is, it did not look at results at community or target group level. The assessment of the quality and impact of the respective support models relied on information from CSO staff and donors.
- Finally, the CSO perspectives included in the study is limited to the organisations receiving support from Nordic+ countries, since the main focus is on experiences with the different support models. The scope of the study did not allow for a comprehensive analysis of the CSO community at large and the views of those not receiving Nordic+ funding.
- The donor perspective on support models is dominant in all country studies as per the Terms of Reference and early meetings with the Nordic+ donor group in Oslo. There are a number of other studies dealing thoroughly with the CSO perspective on civil society ⇔ donor relations in general[1], but the team agrees with comments made to the draft reports that the study would have benefited from a more thorough analysis of the CSO perspectives on the different support models[2].

1.2 Acknowledgements and Disclaimer

The field study in Zimbabwe took place from 23 April to 4 May. The Swedish Embassy was the focal donor, and provided excellent support. The team would like to thank the staff at the Swedish Embassy, and especially Ms. Coleen Katio and Mr. Gøran Engstrand, who made the team's stay a very constructive and productive one. The work done by the Swedish Embassy prior to the consultants' arrival made it possible to meet with more than 15 CSOs, all the Nordic+ donors present in Zimbabwe - Canada, Norway, Sweden, and the UK – as well as the EC, USAID, the Netherlands Embassy, and UNICEF.

The Swedish Embassy, as well as some of the other donors, assisted the team logistically during the stay. The environment in Zimbabwe these days is a difficult one, but the team was met with a constructive approach and readiness to help everywhere. There were challenges in collecting data, which is reflected in missing information along some of the key variables, something that has affected the ability to finalise parts of the analysis.

The conclusions and recommendations are the consultants' responsibility, as are any remaining factual mistakes or misunderstandings that the report may contain.

[1] See synthesis report for further discussion and references.

[2] CSOs interviewed were asked about their views on support models, but in general their responses were of a more general character than directly linked to the comparative strengths and weaknesses of the different models.

2 The Zimbabwe Context

Zimbabwe of 2007 is a country in crisis. The economy is in turmoil with the highest inflation in the world – currently estimated at around 4,500% - there is widespread scarcity of goods and basic services are down to a minimum. Fuel has been scarce since 2000, and this has had an impact on the country's ability to provide public transportation while the national airline is down to providing the minimum of routes, and personal transportation is limited.

The economic situation is affecting all walks of life and economic migration is widespread and profound. Estimates claim more than one third of the country's population is presently outside the country, with an estimated 3 million in South Africa alone. This has made transfers from Zimbabweans abroad one of the main sources of income and foreign exchange in the country, but more alarmingly has drained the country of vital skills and capacity.

The economic situation impacts the work of the civil society in a negative way as well, with the value of their funds decreasing. Even the ones that receive international funding are struggling since the official exchange rate is severely undervalued. While the official exchange rate is USD 1 = ZMD 250, the parallel market early June had USD 1 = ZMD 52,000! Donors are not able to bridge this hyper-inflation gap. CSOs' outreach is decreasing due to the cost and impracticality of transportation and training. Frequent electrical shortages further decreases CSOs' ability to communicate effectively, and the situation is likely to become worse: the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority has proposed power outages of up to 20 hours daily this winter nationwide, in an attempt to ensure that winter farming is not adversely affected. These and other similar distortions have made it increasingly difficult to retain skilled staff.

HIV and Aids is a critically negative factor in Zimbabwe. Official statistics from the Ministry of Health state that at least 21% of the age group 25- 45 are either HIV+ or have developed Aids. The Aids-related mortality rate has more than doubled over the last years and is now at an approximate level of 220/day. Life expectancy in Zimbabwe now is the lowest in the world, 34 for women and 37 for men, and an estimated 1.6 million children – 25% of the children in Zimbabwe – are orphans.

HIV and Aids places an enormous burden on individuals and households. They must care for ill family members, including a large proportion of children, attend and pay for funerals, while many of the sick are key breadwinners in the households. This situation is also impacting negatively on the work of CSOs. The major challenge is that, as donors shift their focus to HIV and Aids related activities, many CSOs move away from their originally chosen core work in an attempt to fit into emerging donor priorities.

The political situation in the country is difficult. There is widespread distrust between the government and inner circles of power, on the one hand, and most of the rest of the population. There is extreme polarisation on almost any issue and debate in the public sphere. Uncertainty regarding the political succession adds to the cautious environment, and so does heavy handed physical presence by state organs like the police and Central Intelligence Organisation in many situations in daily life.

Civil society struggles to survive in this environment, and especially those who attempt to serve political interests on behalf of constituencies.

2.1 National CSO Policy and Regulation

There has been talk for several years of a new NGO-bill (the first rumours surfaced in July/ August 2004) that in essence would make it very difficult for a number of CSOs to continue their operations. This bill, although often referred to and passed by Parliament has not been signed by the President and so the old Private Voluntary Organisations Act (PVO) is still the legal basis for the work of civil society. In addition, repressive laws first used by the Rhodesian minority white government, have resurfaced and are being vigorously implemented; the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Public Order and Security Act, amongst others, clearly influence the work of civil society in a very negative way. Examples of this influence are the inability to gather for meetings without having applied to the police first (for more than three persons), the use of executive powers against gatherings of people (demonstrations, gatherings, strikes) and the shut-down of newspapers and radio stations not in line with government thinking.

The Government body which oversees the civil society is the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, and all organisations are obliged to register with and report to this line ministry. In addition CSOs also have to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and Urban Development after obtaining letters of consent from the leadership of the local communities within which the organisation intends to operate. The leaders include local traditional chiefs, councillors, the district administrator, the provincial administrator and the provincial governor.

2.2 Civil Society's participation in Zimbabwe's Development Process

The Zimbabwean civil society has historically been one of the strongest, most competent and most versatile in Southern Africa. It still consists of a very able group of organisations operating within most sectors and in most geographic areas of the country, but the present situation has obviously affected the competence, depth and versatility of the civil society. In terms of volume, turn-over and size, organisations providing services of various kinds (e.g. health, HIV/ Aids) still lead the way, often in cooperation with regional and local authorities. More "political" organisations, concerned with human rights, good governance, constitutional issues and democratic development are able and willing, but under heavy scrutiny and possibly influenced by infiltration and political pressure. It is difficult to assess the real quality of some of these organisations, but it seems clear that some of them struggle with independence from government affairs, internal governance issues, lack of or miss-representation and management issues. Another challenge is that the civil society, although still operational in most geographical areas, gravitate towards urban areas in times of crisis; this is logical for a number of different reasons, but it constitutes a challenge because it affects the potential for real representation and outreach.

3 Support Models in Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwean situation is very special since donor support to the nation state and government is virtually on hold (from the traditional, "western" donors). The international support to Zimbabwe in real terms has been reduced since 2002, but for civil society it has increased both in real and relative terms since donors now spend a lot of their funds on the civil society in one form or another (the UN system is the other big recipient). From the "western" type of donors all support to Zimbabwe presently goes either through or to civil society. This is different from the traditional/ normal aid architecture and could have an impact on the ways in which donors are or should be supporting civil society.

3.1 Strategic framework for civil society support

All of the Nordic+ countries present in Zimbabwe have the same type of strategic framework to civil society support. They all have overall policies, developed by their respective Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Departments/ directorates of development assistance. These policies are quite broad and do not contain specificity in terms of results, models and practical approaches, as this is expected to be addressed at country level, in accordance with the different country circumstances. According to the Embassies/agencies interviewed, the overall policies thus do not provide clear directions at country level, except with regards to sector focus.

However, all the embassies/agencies interviewed have either developed or are in the process of developing local strategies for the particular situation being faced in Zimbabwe. While these are specific with regards to sector focus of the work, they lack clarity when it comes to overall and programme objectives, sector specific objectives, indicators, model choices and performance measurement. These strategies also then are focused on the sector results, and what the civil society organisations are going to contribute to within these, rather than any particular objectives or expected results for the CSOs as such. That is, overarching goals such as "a vibrant, pluralistic and democratic civil society" are not included and much less operationalized and given own objectives to work towards.

Three of the four Nordic+ donors in Zimbabwe have the same challenges when it comes to their administrative capacity to follow up on support to CSOs. The trend for some years has been to cut down on staff, focus on cost-efficiency and structure support to civil society more and more according to the principles that are used for bilateral support to the public sector, under the Paris agenda (but obviously decided by each of the respective donor Governments). The exception to this is CIDA, which still retains a Programme Support Unit with a clear mandate to follow up and quality assure at least some of the support given to civil society. This does not mean that the other Nordic+ donors do not conduct follow up and quality assurance, but their capacity to do so in an intensive manner is clearly limited.

3.2 Changes in Civil Society Support Approaches

Most donors in Zimbabwe have changed their approach to supporting civil society in the last three to five years. There are at least two main, though somewhat conflicting, reasons for this change. The first comes from the head offices in the home country to cut down on staff

and look for gains in cost-efficiency, a trend that can be seen across countries and has become an integral part of the new aid architecture.

The second factor is the specific situation Zimbabwe faces, in particular in the areas of Democracy and Governance, including Human Rights. There are a number of CSOs operating in these areas, but little agreement between the organisations as to where Zimbabwe is going and what their own roles should be. The donors' need for information in the present situation, and their different short-term "objectives" and sympathies effectively adds to this fragmentation. It also means that donors have kept some of the direct support models of the past, not because this is the most effective way of supporting but because they need individual contact with the different actors to keep up to date on the range of views and analyses found in civil society. This has resulted in a range of different support models in use among the donor community in Zimbabwe.

One result of the deteriorating environment is a situation where funding for CSOs often is being reduced (although certainly not by all donors), which has led to CSOs having to compete for scarce donor funds. Another result has been that donors in some cases have reduced the time horizon for their support, and thus increased the uncertainty for CSOs as well as the costs to them of constantly having to apply for a new round of funds. These issues are discussed in section 3.6.2, where CSOs have very different opinions than donors both about the description of the situation, but in particular about the consequences this is having on the CSOs and civil society in general.

3.3 Models in Use

The donors use a mix of support modalities when for funding CSOs in Zimbabwe, presented below.

3.3.1 Direct Support Models

Donors still use unilateral direct support to individual CSOs as one of the main support models, despite the trend towards more joint and harmonised support. The direct support from embassies and agencies to individual organisations is usually contracted for one year at a time, and through either Call for Proposals or direct proposals to embassies/ agencies.

The four Nordic+ donors also support individual organisations jointly, in what could be called a coordinated and to a certain degree harmonised support, but which lacks some of the normal characteristics of the traditional joint or basket funding. In this joint direct support model, there is usually no written agreement governing the support, and some donors would like to keep their independence by supporting only one project or one budget line of the organisation in question. Some of the larger organisations working within the areas of Democracy/ Governance and Human Rights fall under this model.

3.3.2 Intermediary Support Models

The four Nordic+ donors use intermediary agents in an outsourcing arrangement. This unilateral intermediary model acknowledges the fact that donors themselves do not have the capacity to grant and/ or manage funds effectively. USAID has adopted this approach as the main support model that they use through an agreement with PACT, and now outsource almost all of their funds in this way. The selection process leading up to the contract with

PACT was based on competitive bidding and was awarded for a frame period. It includes the management of grants and selection of sub-grantees as well as monitoring of finances, results and capacity building to the sub-grantees. None of the Nordic+ donors have taken the model that far, but uses intermediary organisations for efficiency reasons and to reach more CSOs.

Swedish Sida has established a cultural fund that covers all their support to culture and the arts. This fund is managed by a Board which is elected independently and which consists of "prominent but independent" individuals.Some of the intermediary agents are international NGOs (INGOs), often from the donors' home countries, and then sometimes referred to as "strategic partnerships". Examples of this include Norway using Norwegian People's Aid and Save the Children Norway in this way. But quite a few are Zimbabwean organisations that often have an umbrella capacity or mandate, where for example a number of donors support the Non State Actors Forum.

3.3.3 Joint Support Models

The four Nordic+ donors using various kinds of joint funding models, particularly when it comes to service delivery in fields like HIV/Aids, orphans and vulnerable children, and education. Here intermediary agents are being used as managers of the funds.

The largest of these models is the funds managed by UNICEF in a system that can be seen as substituting for what would normally have been a sector wide support programme managed by the Ministry of Health. The donors have established a basket fund governed by a code of conduct/Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). UNICEF manages the sub-granting process to 23 larger CSOs. These larger CSOs again sub-grant some 160 organisations country-wide providing local services to vulnerable communities. These funds and the system are accepted widely by most donors, and a large bulk of the donors present in Zimbabwe, including USAID and the EC, contribute to the basket.

3.3.4 Summing Up On Models

A list of alternative support models had been prepared before going to the field. This inventory of models was based on reports by the Overseas Development Institute, Sida and the Christian Michelsen Institute. It seems to have covered the universe of current support models well, since all of the donors were able to relate to the defined models and find their support to be well described by one or more of these pre-defined models.

The Nordic+ donors state that they favour a "balanced approach" to support models when engaging with civil society in the present environment in Zimbabwe. The ones who do not use many different models do this because they do not see that a donor should take the role as grants manager, nor do they have the capacity. USAID is one example of a donor that only uses intermediary models, unilateral or joint.

In practice, this means that the trend is towards coordination, harmonisation and joint models. This is in line with the Paris Agenda on Aid Effectiveness, which all of these donors adhere to when it comes to direct bilateral cooperation. But different forms of direct support and unilateral use of intermediaries is maintained for reasons discussed above, which are primarily linked to the desire for flexibility, the need to spread the risk, and the need for direct access to certain CSOs due to their value as sources of information.

In general one can conclude that joint models are used more frequently in the sectors and in those areas that are not as easily affected by the political situation. Unilateral direct support is favoured when the CSOs are involved in governance and human rights, advocacy etc, where the donors might both be providing some direct support to ensure that these organisations are not being unduly constrained in their work, but also because they often are interesting sources of information and direct contact.

3.4 Activities supported

The largest share of the funding for CSOs is for what can broadly be described as service delivery. In this field the support models are usually joint and/or through an intermediary agent. The funding that goes to advocacy and serving membership interests in fields like Democracy, Governance and Human Rights is smaller. But this area is obviously much more discussed and analysed by both donors, the government and by the civil society itself in the present situation.

All of the donors give project support to CSO activities in the present situation. But three of four Nordic+ donors also give some core or "budget support" to "proven" players that have a track record when it comes to results and that have developed a strategic plan considered worth supporting. Capacity building forms part of most of the support donors give, either as independently funded activities, as part of project support, or as part of core support.

In the specific Zimbabwe situation, other kinds of support, especially non-financial, have become more important from a donor point of view than seems to be the case in a “normal” situation. According to the embassies and agencies, they therefore give moral, diplomatic, political support as well as technical assistance at different levels of involvement.

This view is contested by the CSOs themselves, where at least those CSOs interviewed in general felt that non-financial support has decreased, at a time when this support perhaps is more needed than ever (see section 3.6.2).

3.5 External Influences: the Paris Agenda

The principles of the Paris Agenda on Aid Effectiveness – Ownership, Alignment, Harmonisation, Managing for Results and Mutual Accountability together with the concept of coordination among donors – are well known by donors and often referred to when discussing civil society support in Zimbabwe. Whether the Paris declaration, which was designed for bilateral support through the public sector, is also an appropriate framework for the support to civil society has not been discussed very much. The application of this "good practice" solution set to the different circumstances of CSOs, especially in the current situation of Zimbabwe, merits more analysis and discussion.

Coordination among donors has improved over the last few years. Donors have organised themselves by sectors, and they meet regularly to discuss developments in the specific sector, such as specific support to organisations; who should support what; who the new players are; and news on those CSOs already in the funding loop. Some donors also meet at macro level, with their heads of missions to discuss overall development in the country and the ways forward. This is somewhat difficult, however, since only four of the DAC donors have development agency representation in the country, while the others are represented by

Ambassadors. The traditional differentiation between political objectives and developmental objectives tend to be merged in the present situation of Zimbabwe since it is difficult to see a purely technical, developmental solution to the country's problems. This is probably true for most countries these days, but the potential distinction is certainly more blurred in the Zimbabwean context.

Harmonisation among donors is clearly easiest in the joint models, almost by default. But it is only in a few of the examples seen in Zimbabwe where the models have developed into fully-fledged and completely harmonised baskets governed by written agreements among donors. The key example is the Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) fund administered by UNICEF. This is an important point, since joint funding without a complete commitment from all donors to the principles of these models can have adverse effects on CSOs. Harmonisation is also possible in unilateral direct models, but will take some work on the part of donors. This work has yet to be done in most programmes. Most if not all of the Nordic+ countries could agree on both common proposal templates and reporting requirements without going into formal joint support models. This would make the life of CSOs supported individually by many donors a lot easier, and the effects/ impact of the support could potentially be much larger. There are a few good examples of unilateral, but harmonised support like DFID's Protracted Relief Programme (PRP, a multi-year sustainable livelihoods programme) which is now entering its second phase of five years with a budget of GBP 50 million.

Alignment is the more difficult concept to transfer when it comes to civil society support. CSOs often and by definition have different agendas that should ideally be founded on constituency interests. Any talk of alignment therefore assumes that there is a common goal behind all the activities of CSOs, which is neither so in reality, nor do the CSOs want to appear as if they were in agreement on all key issues: they represent different stakeholders and thus different interests and points of view, and thus necessarily may be in disagreement on key issues.

However, within the CSO community there are a number of "sectors" that have common objectives and thus have gathered around joint agendas, such as gender and women's rights. These sub-groups therefore are able to join forces and can provide a basis for donor attempts to align. A good example of this alignment, by CSOs and donors alike, to national policies is the support to HIV/ AIDS, OVC and Women Affairs which is virtually fully aligned by all.

But overall the alignment concept as an overarching principle may work adversely to the concerns of supporting pluralism, diversity and demand drive from civil society itself.

3.6 The Parties' Views of Each Other

The interviews with the donors and the CSOs reveal quite different views regarding the relations between the two parties, and how they see the evolving aid architecture. The CSOs are quite critical in their comments, with a rather blunt and critical perspective on aspects of donor policies and behaviour.

3.6.1 Donor Views of CSOs

Embassies and donor agencies generally consider that it is important that they have an overview of the CSO universe, and keep track of the changes and developments in the CSO

community, especially in the current environment in Zimbabwe. The Nordic+ donors interviewed believe that they have a good understanding of the CSO community, and in particular of those CSOs that are eligible for their funding. At the same time they note that it has become more difficult to keep updated because of less staff at embassies, but also because of the changing areas of focus among the donors who are still in the country. Only the EC has really mapped the civil society in a systematic way by funding a mapping study in 2007. The other donors use less formal ways to keep abreast of developments.

There is, however, a lot of information sharing among donors, and quite a few studies looking at parts of specific donor support. Donors admit that an important share of the information comes from CSOs that already receive funding or from inter-donor discussions on strengths and weaknesses of individual partners.

Most of the donors interviewed noted that they have a relatively good dialogue with civil society, and especially the recipients of the present funding. The dialogue takes different forms in the different phases of the programme/ funding cycle. There is normally extensive dialogue surrounding the planning phase, whether project, programme or strategic plan-formulation. Discussions during the implementation phase are more sporadic and depend a lot on the donors' ability and capacity to monitor and follow-up. The dialogue becomes more frequent again when CSOs report to donors at the end of a cycle.

Overall, given the staffing constraints that the donors have, they feel that they are able to keep abreast of the important events in civil society. The believe that they have a satisfactory dialogue with the CSO community, and in particular with the CSOs that receive their funding. The intensity of the dialogue is, however, largely tied to the project cycle, so that the discussions are in fact driven by the need for information on the donor side, where the CSOs first have to provide a project proposal that can satisfy donor criteria, and later on report on results.

3.6.2 CSO Views of Donors

The first observation that the team made after the conversations with the CSOs, is that this review was asking questions about what is commonly perceived by CSOs as "the secret world" of donors. The CSOs' knowledge about and views on the donors reflect a very different understanding of the relationship and the flow of information than the one the donors have, and one that is often surprisingly sharp in its criticism.

A total of 18 CSOs were interviewed over a three week period. Of these, six are involved in human rights and good governance issues, four are women's organisations, and the remaining, three are AIDS service organisations, two deal with humanitarian aid, and there is one on environmental issues and another on child rights. The last one is an umbrella organisation for all non-governmental organisations in the country.

Convenience sampling was used to identify the organisations to be interviewed. The major determining factor was availability for an interview within the time-frame of the research. There are therefore a number of relevant organisations that could not be interviewed simply because they were busy during the research period. There was also a bias towards interviewing those organisations that had, or were currently receiving funding from donors. With the exception of five organisations, all the people interviewed were the directors of the

respective institutions. In some cases they invited finance officers or programme managers to take part in the interview if they felt these individuals could shed more light on the issues.

3.6.3 How Donor-CSO Relations are viewed

There were mixed sentiments about the donor-CSO relations in the country. Some CSOs had largely positive things to say about the donor community, in particular the responsiveness to the Zimbabwean economic crisis. Others were less enthusiastic, citing too much donor interference in determining Zimbabwe's development agenda, lack of objectivity among donors, and lack of coordination among the donors that resulted in unnecessary increases in the workload of CSOs. Almost all the organisations interviewed highlighted the fact that there were very few forums where donors and CSOs meet and dialogue.

CSOs felt that their relationships to donors were characterised by great inequity. This derived from the obvious fact that it is primarily a financial-based relationship. Donors have the money while the CSOs want the money and are better placed to implement activities on the ground. This basic fact continues to shape donor-CSO relations despite the recent shift among donors who now prefer to talk about "partnerships'" which implies equality between them and the organisations that they fund. Most of the informants alluded to "donor agendas" and explained that oftentimes, it is donors who determine the CSO agenda, while the latter simply play along because they need funding in order to remain viable.

Donor interference was much more pronounced in the human rights/governance sector than it is in the health sector. One CSO said that many donors in the country would rather support those organisations that take a confrontational approach to solving the political crisis in the country: "they are not interested at all in financing activities that call for 'dialogue' and 'peace-building'", was the claim.

Every organisation spoken with claimed they had experienced what they would consider to be "undue" donor influence. The major point made was that there is no platform for organisations to dialogue with donors. There is also a sense among CSOs that they are only consulted when decisions have already been made, making their role that of rubber-stamping donor decisions. There is often no room for dissenting voices, as the only other option is not to deal with those donors whom one disagrees with. One organisation said that it has had to forego certain relationships after being pressured by a particular donor to take a specific stance on an issue. When the CSO refused since it was not in line with its own mandate and policies, the donor not only withdrew support but evidently tried to influence other donors as well. The options, as experienced by some CSOs, are therefore limited to one of either conforming with donor wishes, or loss of donor funding.

Another instance of inequitable donor-CSO relations was brought out in the nature of the various challenges CSOs encounter under each support model. The humanitarian-oriented organisations noted that donors were no longer supporting long-term development work and were now only giving money for relief-type work. And although these organisations indicated that they had raised their concerns with most of their donors, there was really not much that they could do to shift donor focus away from relief aid. Most CSOs stated that most funding being given today is for six months to a year, and very seldom for any longer than that: very few CSOs have guaranteed funding for more than a year. Even in those cases where funding has been promised for a longer period, the CSOs still have to submit proposals for funding every year. For the CSOs, the conclusion was quite clear: the agendas

and the structure of the financing is driven by the donors, and there is no real dialogue between the parties on these key issues.

This is in stark contrast to a comment made by one of the donors at the debriefing meeting held at the end of the field visit, which was that the donor community is driven by agendas and priorities already set by CSOs.

3.6.4 The Political Environment Impact on Donor-CSO Relations

There is no doubt that both civil society organisations and donors have been greatly affected by the political and economic situation in the country. All the CSOs interviewed traced the major changes in the donor-CSO relationship directly to the year 2000. A significant number of actors – some donors and a number of INGOs – relocated their offices to neighbouring countries, while the remaining donors reduced their funding to USD 30,000-50,000 a year per CSO, and funding periods to between three to six months, sometimes a year. One CSO called this as a "wait-and-see" attitude while another referred to it as "sitting on the fence".

All the CSOs interviewed mentioned donor withdrawal due to the political situation as a major risk that they have to contend with. This uncertainty has resulted in intense competition within the CSO community, which has been further compounded by the fact that donors are seen as not being neutral entities. To increase one's chances of being funded, one therefore has to know which side of the political fence the donor belongs to in order to submit a "relevant" proposal. Suspicion and lack of trust between donors and CSOs were claimed to be the norm, and the general operating environment is one of caution: one always needs to watch what one says.

Every organisation interviewed in this study complained about the politically volatile environment, which forces them to self-censor, or be cautious about their activities. Everything has been politicized and advocacy is now increasingly difficult to carry out, especially for those CSOs working with rural communities. A common challenge brought about by the political environment is that CSOs are now being targeted by the government on the basis of which donors are supporting them financially or in-kind. If the donor is British or American, the organisation is then labelled anti-government, which puts its staff at great personal risk, but also makes it hard for the organisation to operate in its constituencies as well.

Political instability is perhaps the single largest factor that has impacted the most on donor-CSO relations. While in some cases it has had a negative impact on these relations, in other ways it has led to an increase in donor support for human rights and good governance programmes. As most CSOs pointed out, there is now more money for advocacy-related activities than in previous years. Donors are also now much more actively involved and interested in the programmes that they fund, beyond the financial aspect. The health sector, especially the HIV and AIDS sector, was not as adversely affected by the political environment as others CSOs. Funding to the sector has actually increased, mostly due to the UN Global Fund, and also because HIV and AIDS was one of those issues that most donors were still willing to support even after they had scaled down on other areas.

3.6.5 Donor support models

Getting information on this issue presented the greatest challenge. This was because most CSOs are unaware of the models being used to support them, except in very general terms.

CSOs were aware that they get funding "directly" from the donor, or that they are accessing funds through "an intermediary" organisation or that they are "an intermediary" organisation themselves. Nearly all CSOs were unaware of the conditions under which they were receiving funding (e.g. whether as part of embassy policies, inter-donor negotiations, in-country agreement etc.) and most did not have information on the technical aspects of support models. There was also great reluctance to comment specifically on each donor, with most CSOs opting to give their opinions in very general terms. Many feared that if they commented negatively, then they might lose their funding. Some CSOs could not understand how the different donors were now suddenly working together on this study. There seems to be a common belief among CSOs that donors are themselves divided and often have conflicting interests. Most CSOs were therefore rather sceptical about this study and were curious to see the results of the review of the donor processes.

The CSOs' experience is that support models are not applied consistently by donors, and seem to fluctuate depending on the specific individuals in the donor organisations, or depending on whether CSO personnel are known in the donor community. This point was raised by a number of the CSOs, some of whom noted that their donor funding dried up when specific members left their organisation. Others observed how some donors continued to fund former staff members in their individual capacities, while simultaneously withdrawing funding from the CSOs concerned.

Another example of subjective donor practices relates to how CSOs receiving funds from the same donors had totally different experience. A donor who was said to be extremely flexible and supportive by one CSO was reported as the exact opposite by another CSO. The conditions under which certain rules are relaxed or tightened for different CSOs were not clear from the interviews (or whether CSOs simply perceive situations differently).

Linked to this point, there were complaints by the women's organisations over how easy it was for some groups to access funding for gender issues, even if gender was not their core business. As a Director of one of the women's groups noted, '*…donors have their darlings…these are the individuals who will always receive funding regardless of the quality of their proposals'*. This was said to be especially the case with international events, such as the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence. During this period, the women's groups noted that just about every CSO was able to access funding from donors to implement activities around gender violence. The women's groups experienced that they had to compete for funding with CSOs who really had no background in the field, and that when funding was eventually provided, it was in small amounts because it had been shared out among too many groups. They therefore questioned donor decision-making processes.

While some of the expressed views might be based on disappointment (donors might not have been satisfied with proposals or performance, or had other reasons for their decisions), they underline the lack of open communication between donors and CSOs that serves to breed tension between the two groups, and also among CSOs themselves.

There was considerable consistency when commenting on reporting requirements. There was general consensus that two of the larger donors have the most stringent reporting requirements compared to all others. Interviewees noted that these two donors were also the least flexible in terms of negotiating on grant conditions. Some CSOs were of the view that these stringent regulations were useful as they actually developed the capacity of CSOs

especially the use of logical frameworks, indicators and results based management tools. Other CSOs, however, were of the view that these demands were not necessary. One example was that the EU has very demanding proposal writing requirements that can take up to a month to complete successfully, as the EU demands a full proposal from the onset. Other donors prefer a concept paper to be sent in first, after which a full proposal will then be requested. USAID reporting requirements, on the other hand, were said to demand 'technical' information, with too much emphasis on statistics and quantifiable results. DFID was mentioned by most respondents as having the most relaxed reporting requirements and for being the most flexible donor.

The dialogue, which the donors praise, is seen as more of a monologue by most CSOs. They see information streaming from CSOs to donors through formal and informal channels. There is less communication back in terms of information on donor policies and strategies, and assistance in the proposal writing. The present situation also enhances this trend: the Government's statements that CSOs are seen as puppets of western interests makes most donors and CSOs cautious about sharing too much information.

Sharing of "good practice" experiences when it comes to cooperation is not well developed. Part of the reason is the concern with regards to the government's negative views on the donor-CSO links. But donors and CSOs admit that this gap could and should be filled. None of the informants could explain why enabling sharing of "good practices" and general learning was not implemented to a larger degree, but all stated great interest in developing this area which everybody saw as potentially vital in the further development of the "sector".

4 Analysis of Support Models

Based on the interviews it appears that none of the donors have carried out a more careful study to review their overall civil society support approach: ***why*** support, ***what*** to support and ***how*** to support. The present support models derive less from such a systematic assessment and are more based on the historical relations that have existed, modified by the current pressures from head offices to reduce costs with down-scaling in staff, and adjustments to the particular circumstances of Zimbabwe.

The aid architecture in Zimbabwe is highly unusual, with no support to the government and most aid channelled either through or to civil society. The fact that the key actor in a normal "harmonious" development cooperation, namely the state and its government, is deliberately taken out of the picture, distorts the commonly known cooperation models and makes the situation difficult for donors and civil society alike.

The fact that the Zimbabwean state is not a "failed" one in the traditional sense of lacking capacity and political will, but rather a relatively strong and repressive force, further adds to the challenges. This means that understanding the consequences of alternative models for supporting civil society ought to be more important than in other settings. There are contradictory concerns that may come up: the relative importance of CSOs is greater than in most other countries, yet the agenda that the donors are pursuing may be more political and thus carry some challenges. The amount of funds available for Zimbabwe is less than it would have been under normal circumstances, but the funding for CSOs is greater, meaning that there may be dangers of building up too many CSOs or letting some CSOs become too big compared with the size and roles that CSOs will be expected to take on once Zimbabwe finds back to a more normal political situation. While CSOs now therefore need to take on important service delivery tasks as exemplified in the UNICEF-managed trust funds referred to earlier, there needs to be some up-front thinking about transition strategies and how to address possible reduction or exit from certain forms of CSO support over time.

At the same time, the advocacy and democratisation function of the CSOs is clearly more important than normally. This may also lead to greater participation and legitimacy of a number of the CSOs. The role of alternative support models in this context may thus merit more attention than in most other circumstances.

4.1 Unilateral Direct Support Model

Strengths

Donors believe that one can expect high level of **accountability** in the unilateral direct model because of the direct interaction between the two parties and thus the control that the donor has on how resources are spent. The **results accountability** is also rated as higher than for the alternative support modalities, and the reason is again the relatively closer contact donors have with their partners. The **quality of dialogue** with civil society is rated as much better under this model than for the two others.

Some donors argued that the **strategic direction** is better addressed under this modality than the joint models because the parties can discuss and agree on the longer-term directions

that underpin the support. Some donors also argue that direct support is the model most likely to support **diversity and** pluralism. This is because the donors are able to provide the additional support that may be necessary for a CSO critical of the government to survive under the current circumstances, so that donors are deliberately trying to support a diversity "voice" in society.

The challenge in direct support versus diversity is the impression that donors are not really well aware of the full universe of CSOs out there, and therefore tend to support those that are better known – and thus support the same ones. This is also likely to occur since donors share a lot of information about CSOs amongst themselves, and thus will easily congregate around those CSOs where there is a shared view that they are good. CSOs see the issue of direct support differently, as their concern with too much donor influence and donors' driving the aid agenda plays out most clearly in direct support relations, where donors can provide or withdraw their support to specific CSOs.

Some donors argued that the **strategic direction** is better addressed under this modality than the joint models because the parties can discuss and agree on the longer-term directions that underpin the support. Some donors also argue that direct support is the model most likely to support **diversity and** pluralism, based on two different kinds of reasoning. The first is that the donors are able to provide the additional support that may be necessary for a CSO critical of the government to survive under the current circumstances, so that donors are deliberately trying to diversity "voice" in society. The other is the assumption that since donors amongst themselves are not very coordinated and thus make decisions on which CSOs to support without knowing which decisions other donors make, they are more likely to support a more diverse universe of CSOs.

This latter argument may not be very valid, as the impression is that donors are not really well aware of the full universe of CSOs out there, and therefore tend to support those that are better known – and thus support the same ones. This is also likely to occur since donors share a lot of information about CSOs amongst themselves, and thus will easily congregate around those CSOs where there is a shared view that they are good. CSOs see the issue of direct support differently, as their concern with too much donor influence and donors driving the aid agenda plays out most clearly in direct support relations, where donors can provide or withdraw their support to specific CSOs.

Weaknesses

Donors have noted that in general they do not have clear guidelines for selection of CSOs to support, neither do they have clear strategies that guide these decisions. It is often up to the advisor at the embassy/ agency or their supervisors or manager to make such decisions. This is reflected in the relatively low rating donors give to **transparency in selection and monitoring** under the direct models. It is also relatively clear among donors that the **time-use** and transaction costs are higher under this type of model than under joint or intermediary models, probably both for the donors and for the partners in civil society.

Harmonisation is poor, since each donor in its relations with a CSO will normally insist on own accounting and reporting standards and procedures. Most donors claim that they would be willing to find mutually acceptable practices, but in reality this seldom happens.

Table 4.1 Strengths and Weaknesses of Direct Support Modality

Quality indicators.	Assessment/ratings on the indicator
Transparency	Subjectively decided often, no good systems
Financial accountability	Good, because of direct control
Results accountability	Good, because of direct control, best of the three overall models
Time use	Relatively high, especially at certain periods of the year, both for donors and recipients
Strategic	Not good for cost efficiency, but potentially good for pluralism and diversity, according to some donors
Harmonisation	Poor modality for harmonisation
Dialogue with CS	Donors believe it is good, since they talk directly with CSOs who are engaged in the various issues
Outreach	Generally poor since own staffing is reduced
Diversity	Unclear – contradictory views and argumentation on this point
Donor alignment to recipient objectives	In principle should be good due to direct dialogue, in practice CSOs feel that donors set their own agenda and they either have to accept or not get funding

4.2 Intermediary Support Modality

All of the donors in question use some form of intermediary agents to provide support to civil society. The use of intermediaries takes different forms and is justified differently by different donors. Some of the donors principally use intermediaries because they do not see the role of an embassy/ agency as that of "grants managers" but rather consider the core role of embassies/agencies to be that of giving strategic direction and overall analysis. Some donors use intermediaries because they do not have the resources and capacity left at the embassies/ agencies to follow up on all the CSOs themselves. Yet others use intermediaries because they have specialised skills useful for the sector or types of CSOs they are supporting, strategically. Intermediaries can be both international NGOs and national CSOs. The national CSOs normally have some sort of umbrella mandate or structure while the international NGOs are normally chosen strategically based on their own principles, sector focus and mandates.

Strengths

Both **transparency** and especially **accountability** is taken care of to an acceptable degree when using intermediary agents. Intermediary agents are normally chosen partly because of their capacity and competence in managing finances and funds, and partly because they normally already have relatively good procedures in place for the selection of sub-grantees. While not as open as the sub-granting process in the joint model described below, many of the intermediary agents use public procedures to announce funding opportunities, and some use Calls for Proposals. When it comes to **time-use** and **transaction costs,** the donors spend relatively less time in this model than they do in direct support. Whether this is good or bad is difficult to say since the transaction costs have to be incurred by someone and in this case it is the intermediary agents. Most intermediaries have systems and templates for proposals and reporting, as well as monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and the CSOs benefiting from the grants provided should not have to relate to more than one system.

Other relative strengths in using a model involving an intermediary are the **quality of dialogue** with civil society and the **outreach**. Most intermediaries in Zimbabwe rarely handle more than 20-25 partners or sub-grantees each, and this vouches for a relatively close contact. Donors, on the other hand, are able to maintain close contact with the sub-grantees either directly or through the intermediary, although less so than if they are giving direct support. The intermediaries also have their ears closer to the ground and have a better overview of what is going on than an embassy/ agency would, in the present situation and so are better placed to act upon the principle of outreach than donors can.

Weaknesses

Results are more difficult to verify directly by the donor compared with the direct support model, but there may be more systems and spelled out objectives that the overall funding is to contribute to. But intermediaries often find themselves in the same position as intermediaries for joint funds or boards, in that their role is to sub-grant and manage funds, and not to independently monitor and evaluate results (of which a part would be whether the choices made were the right ones in the first instance).

With regards to **harmonisation,** this modality has a much greater potential for getting the donors to use similar procedures and standards, but this possibility has so far not been fully taken advantage of. The **outreach** tend to be better than with the direct support since the intermediaries know the relevant CSOs much better than any single donor can.

Table 4.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of Intermediary Support Modality

Quality Indicators	Assessment/ratings on the indicator
Transparency	Good, not as rigorous as in joint modalities but still trusted
Financial accountability	Good, not as rigorous as joint but still trusted
Results accountability	Highly dependent on the individual intermediary and what kinds of systems this organisation has, or what has been explicitly agreed to with the donors.
Time use	Reduced for donors after the selection of intermediary, intermediary take on transaction costs but some is transferred to CSOs/ sub-grantees
Strategic	Medium, make both donors and CSOs dependent to a certain degree
Harmonisation	Good potential, but donors and CSOs agree that it has not worked great so far
Dialogue with CS	Relatively good, depends on the size of the intermediary and the size of the fund and how many CSOs are being supported
Outreach	Better than for direct support, and could be very good if this is what the intermediary is being asked to deliver
Diversity	Again could be very good if the intermediary is tasked to ensure this – the modality as such support it
Donor alignment to recipient objectives	Not good, the portfolio of the intermediaries are not “harmonised”, there is no common agenda of the sub-grantees.

4.3 Joint models

The donors’ experiences with the joint model, such as the basket fund managed by an intermediary such as UNICEF, is fairly recent as most of the cases have been in operation for

less than two years. Nevertheless, the general impression is that people appreciate this approach.

Strengths

The joint support model used in Zimbabwe is a basket fund managed by an intermediary, and thus is largely a substitute system for lack of a Government to relate to in specific sectors, such as the UNICEF case. The **transparency** of the joint model is regarded as very good, since the processes and procedures surrounding the model are rigorous and developed in coordination amongst donors. There is complete openness in the process and always public announcements prior to awarding of grants. **Financial accountability** is also ensured, according to donors, due to the same rigorous systems and procedures. The **time-use** in the joint model is high, both on behalf of the donors (in coordinating/ guiding the fund) and the intermediary agent (managing), but possibly less so on behalf of the recipients in the first and second tier. There is no evidence as of yet to claim reduced transaction costs on the part of the recipients, but there should be potential in the model. The joint support models are **strategic** choices in that they have been established to address key issues a number of donors wish to support, such as health service delivery concerns, and the model is well adapted to this.

Joint support models are good for furthering the **harmonisation agenda**. They give clear direction when it comes to proposals and reporting and to some degree the monitoring and evaluation framework. The basis for this is a well-developed MOU between the donors guiding the processes, procedures and expectations of donors prior to implementing the workings of the fund. Such a document should also include a guiding objective for the fund, indicators for measuring results and a baseline, because without this, the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework will be less powerful. The UNICEF fund MOU between donors were not shared with the consultants, but there was some uncertainty as to whether the M&E systems currently in use with UNICEF would be good enough to measure impact at the grassroots level and not only activities and outputs.

The joint models are also good in terms of **aligning** donor support towards **recipient goals** where these exist. Some of the civil society "sectors" in Zimbabwe have developed common agendas and meet regularly with donors, with common though sometimes slightly vague and high-level objectives. The example referred to above is the organisations working with gender related questions that have joined in a commonly formulated agenda, and some of the donors have found it easier to support the CSOs because of this. There is an important a potential for increased effectiveness in donor-civil society cooperation where civil society can take this step, and the challenges facing donors are reduced accordingly.

Depending on how the joint model is structured, it may also deliver on **results reporting**, since this can easily be specified in the overall model agreement. If the manager of the fund is professional in this field – UNICEF is for example seen to be among the best UN agencies when it comes to developing good indicators and tracking performance – the joint model is thus useful. Since the experience in Zimbabwe is still so young, however, informants did not have very strong views on this dimension. **Outreach and diversity** can easily be strengthened under the joint model – the UNICEF fund with 160 CSOs as directly implementing partners is the best example of this, where both geographic coverage and different technical dimensions are being addressed through the large number of CSOs

engaged and funded. Finally, the **time use** for the donors is very low compared to the size of the task, but this is what the intermediary or funds manager is being paid for.

Weaknesses

The **quality of dialogue** between donors and CSOs tends to declines when using joint support models. This is of course necessarily true in the more complex cases where UNICEF talks to the first tier of 23 larger and more able national and international NGOs who then in turn have the dialogue with the second-tier CSOs that receive funding for local-level activities. This gap between the donor and the actual implementing actors means that the donors have little or perhaps no say in the selection of the CSOs that are to use the funding made available. Whether this is a weakness or not depends on donors' objectives. Some donors experienced this as a problem, feeling that they should have had greater possibilities for voicing opinions and perhaps ensuring that certain actors were properly funded. On the other hand, if the donors are serious about national ownership and leadership, this kind of micro-management may not be helpful. Instead, the parties should agree on the structuring of the modality and the objectives for it, and then let the intermediary get on with the job, and document the results achieved. The lack of or weakness in the dialogue is then a consequence of the fact that the donors in fact should not have so much voice in the overall model – it is the national actors who own and lead the activities, and then report back according to the agreed-upon criteria.

Table 4.3. Strengths and Weaknesses of Joint Support Modality

Quality Indicators	Assessment/ratings on the indicator
Quality indicators	Joint through intermediary ratings
Transparency	Good, systems are rigorous
Financial accountability	Good, systems are rigorous
Results accountability	Potentially very good if the agreement is clear. If this is managed by an intermediary, the quality will in large part depend on the intermediary, and how well the M&E framework has been developed. Experience for the time being is limited
Time use	Increasing for both donors and recipients at first, potential for scale effects
Strategic	Good, as far as the modality is a strategic direction in itself
Harmonisation	Good, joint templates
Dialogue with CS	Not good, reduced frequency and quality
Outreach	In principle could be very good if specified in the agreement
Diversity	In principle could be very good if specified in the agreement
Donor alignment to recipient objectives	Where recipient has clear objectives, alignment is good

Risks

There are a number of risks associated with working with civil society in Zimbabwe. These include the collapse of organizations, increasing corruption, loss of skills and capacity as people leave the country or have to find work elsewhere. Most donors feel that they take calculated risks when dealing with CSOs, but none seem to have a clear approach regarding

what they want to achieve, so there are few good answers to the questions regarding why they take the different risks, at what price, and for what expected impact.

For the joint support model defined there is the benefit of sharing **financial risks**, and reducing the risk by enforcing strict procedures through the management agency and/ or board managing the fund. The **political risks** are also reduced by sharing in a joint support model, although in practice the sectors that receive such support are not political anyway. The **results risks**, on the other hand, are possibly increased in the joint support models since the donors remove themselves from the operations in the field and the intermediary and/ or board have the limitations discussed above. These risks are closely linked to the financial risks since there is always a trade-off between the two objectives of financial control and impact, especially in a Zimbabwean situation.

4.4 Choice of Modalities and Local Partners

4.4.1 Trends

More and more donors are moving towards joint support models, but presently the areas where this support modality is used can be called "apolitical" sectors like health and education. What the sectors have in common is that they mostly provide basic services not provided by the Government, and that they have a common agenda, at least implicitly so. In Zimbabwe, neither donors nor the civil society have found a way to jointly support CSOs operating within the fields of Democracy, Governance and Human rights.

4.4.2 Quality of CSOs

During the interviews, donors were asked how they rated the different partners they worked with according to a number of quality criteria: general management, financial management, technical skills/implementation capacity, results reporting, dialogue with other CSOs, outreach to members and constituencies, and access to relevant fora. Only one donor filled in the requested form, but the statements during the conversations gave a fairly consistent picture across donors.

Donors believe that the CSOs supported in the joint model score higher on most of the quality criteria than the CSOs that are supported unilaterally, either through intermediaries or direct support. It was not clear if the donors explained this as a function of them being more willing to use joint modalities if the CSOs had good management and reporting systems, or if the qualities of the CSOs tended to improve faster as a function of joint modality approach and its more formal requirements.

4.5 CSO Perspectives on Donors and Funding

4.5.1 CSO views on support models

The majority of CSOs interviewed were not well versed with the different support models used by donors and so could only speak in very general ways about their experience of donor support, regardless of the model in use. Many of them were receiving direct support; a few were receiving funds through an intermediary while even fewer were intermediaries themselves. Direct donor support was positively evaluated by many CSOs, who appreciated the opportunities it presents for direct communication and negotiation with donors. The

intermediary model was the least popular with CSOs which argued that it is inflexible and too bureaucratic. They noted that it is much harder to modify project activities and budgets with intermediaries as they often have no authority at this level, and would have to first consult with the relevant donors. A lot of apprehension was expressed with regards to the intermediary role being played by UNICEF under the National Plan of Action for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (NPA-OVC) because of the already bureaucratic nature of the institution. Another challenge associated with intermediaries emanates from the lack of role clarification between the different donors contributing funds through the intermediary. It is often unclear to the CSOs who the focal donor is in such arrangements, and who the intermediary should report to.

4.5.2 CSO views on changes in aid architecture

The rapid changes in the funding picture and donor approaches over the last several years has changed the environment for CSOs considerably. The increased competition for funding, the generally shorter time horizons for allocations, and the stronger donor involvement and views on which issues should be addressed how, pose major dilemmas for the CSOs.

The competition for funding is seen by some as having some positive effects, since it makes the CSOs improve their programming, management, attention to results, reporting, etc. But it has had negative effects as well. One is that organisations turn their focus more towards what they believe donors want at any given point in time, which can often be away from their mandate or core business. But in order to remain viable, they have to conform to the pressures of what is "fundable" at that moment. Another result is that there are organisations that seemingly have been set up to tap into the donor funding available. These organisations have people skilled in areas that are of interest to the donors, such as proposal writing, project management and results based management. They are thus successful in applying for funds though the staff may have limited interest and background concerning actual implementation on the ground (at least as seen by some of the established CSOs).

The shorter time horizons of the funding means that predictability and ability to actually build capacity and remain a constant force for advocacy is undermined. The criticism that the CSOs are implementers for donor agendas takes on added validity: CSOs in fact have to align more closely with donor agendas, rather than the other way around, and this may weaken CSO legitimacy and credibility inside Zimbabwean society. This distorting influence of the donors was troubling CSOs, where some of them felt that a number of the donors had superficial understanding of the situation and the options available. Strong views were expressed by organisations working in the democracy and human rights sector, who pointed out that donors themselves had particular ideas on how the political crisis should be resolved and would therefore only fund those programmes that mirrored those ideas. A specific example given was that of peace-building, which CSOs said was not as popular with donors, many of whom prefer more confrontational approaches

A further development that the new aid architecture had led to, was more rigid adherence to rules. There was therefore less flexibility in general. This applied to simple things like proposal and reporting formats right through to the activities that donors were willing to fund.

4.5.3 Summing Up and Some Issues for the Future

While donors may feel that the CSOs are unduly harsh in their views, and the CSOs believe the donors are too dominant and interfering, what is clear is that the mutual perceptions reflect very different understandings of the relationships. While CSOs may not always be "objective", what is important is how they *perceive* these relations, which seem to be very different from the way the donors see them.

One key challenge seems to be that the donors on the one hand state that they wish to support civil society, strengthen the voice of CSOs as a means for improving accountability in society and by the public sector in particular – that is, they have a broad societal agenda that requires comprehensive and long-term support. At the same time the donors are using instruments that are short-term, are focused on producing immediate outputs rather than longer-term capacity, do not provide non-financial support which many CSOs say is particularly useful in the current environment, and in general are pulling back from a more direct and mutually accountable dialogue with civil society.

One key reason this situation is at all possible, is exactly the lack of a clear objectives framework on the side of the donors. While CSOs are being pushed into clarifying their objectives and deliverables, preparing more realistic budgets with clear timelines, the donors themselves are not putting forward monitorable objectives for their own funding that would also make apparent if there is a lack of coherence between objectives and means – something the CSOs strongly argue is the case.

There were some key messages that a number of CSOs seemed to agree on:

- **Need for regular donor-CSO forums:** CSOs expressed a strong need for more structured and more intensive dialogue, and that the donors should take a lead on this. The power differences between donors and CSOs need to be acknowledged, and all the talk of "partnership" and "dialogue" should not try to cover up this reality. But on the other hand, CSOs recognise this, and also accept that there may be interest differences between the actors. But there is also an awareness that existing suspicions expressed by CSOs in part could be based on misconceptions and stereotypes, all of which can be clarified through regular donor-CSO discussions. Such forums could be convened by focal donors and umbrella bodies by area, such as NANGO; ZAN; Women's Coalition; NGO Forum on Human Rights etc. Whatever the logistics necessary to implement this, more open and continuous dialogue was felt to be very helpful.
- **Increased involvement of umbrella bodies:** Donors were encouraged to take better advantage of national network or umbrella bodies, and explore how best funding to the different areas can be channelled through these bodies or with their support. Several of these organisations have an impressive number of members: NANGO has 750 registered members while ZAN has over 450 members. They are therefore a critical resource that the donor community has not fully exploited. More importantly, they can contribute to a more coherent and comprehensive funding to address problem areas, rather than the more fragmented and short-term funding profiles many donors seem to have today.
- **Improved donor coordination:** CSOs experience the donors as poorly organised, which creates a lot of unnecessary costs to the CSOs. Greater clarity on donor objectives, more information on funding available and under what conditions, more consistency on criteria, standards and templates would reduce administrative costs to all. There is also

concern about the use of intermediaries, as they preferred to dialogue with donors directly (though the forums could overcome this problem). Many CSOs expressed a preference for donors to pool their resources as this gives the CSO more flexibility to determine exactly how funds are to be spent as opposed to current models where organisations are confined to budget line items, and often have no room to respond to emerging issues during project implementation.

- Finally, CSOs wanted to **acknowledge the positive contributions** of the donors, in particular to the economic crisis. It is clear that without donor funding, most CSOs would have to cease functioning or reduce their level of activity drastically. Donors have been supportive by taking specific steps such as negotiating better exchange rates with banks for CSOs or by allowing CSOs to negotiate for better rates themselves, which allows the limited funds that they receive go further. Conditions in the country are definitely 'extraordinary' and have resulted in donors adopting 'unconventional' support models. It is hoped that donors will be able to revert to more user-friendly models when the 'Zimbabwe crisis' is over.

Annex A: List of Informants

Embassies and agencies

CIDA – Ms. Jennifer Metayer, Head of Aid – Mr. Godfrey Mphande, Head of PSU

DFID – Ms. Helen Richards, Governance advisor

European Commission - Mr. Frederique Hanotier, HR and Governance attaché

Norwegian Embassy – Ms. Kari Thorsen, First secretary, Development

Netherlands Embassy – Ms. Brechtje Klandermans – Ms. Joylyn Ndoro, civil society advisor

Sida – Mr. Gøran Engstrand, Minister for development cooperation – Ms. Izabella Eriksson, first secretary, development

UNICEF – Mr. Roeland Monasch, Country Programme Coordinator – Ms. Muriel Mafico, Chief Social Policy

USAID – Mr. Kevin Sturr – Ms. Deprose Muchena, Democracy and Governance Team

CSOs

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) - Darren, Acting Country Rep – Chandreyee, Head of Programmes

Ecumenical Support Services (ESS) – Mr. Jonah Gokova, Executive Director

Justice for Children's Trust – Ms. Petronella Nenjerama (Coordinator)

MUSASA Project – Ms. E Bote, Programmes – Ms. Chikowore, Finance

Mashambanzou Care Unit – Ms. Margaret, Director – Ms. Catherine, Programme Manager – Ms. Rose, Finance Officer

NANGO – Mr. Cephas, Executive Director – Mr. Njanji – Mr. Ndhlokoyo

PACT – Ms. Perpetua Gumbo (former staff member at PACT, now at NPA)

Population Services Zimbabwe – Mr. T Chiwodze, Chief Executive Officer

The Women's Coalition – Ms. Sandra, Project Officer

The Zimbabwe Aids Network – Mr. Clint Daudi, Accounts Manager

Transparency International Zimbabwe – Mr. K Dembe, Executive Director

Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust (ZIMCET) – Mr. David Chimhini, Executive Director

Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIMCODD) – Mr. Joy Mabhenge, Executive Director

Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) - Accountant and Programmes Manager

Zimbabwe National Environmental Trust (ZIMNET) – Mr. Joseph Tasosa, Director

Zimbabwe Women's Lawyers Association - Ms .Philda Bhamu, Deputy Director – Ms. Masuka, Finance Officer

Zimbabwe Peace Project – Ms. Jestina Mukoko, National Director

ZIMPRO - Executive Director

The country reports constitute the basis for the synthesis report and its findings, conclusions and recommendations. Therefore, while each country report can be read separately, it could usefully be read in conjunction with the synthesis report and other relevant country reports.

Support Models for CSOs at Country Level
Synthesis Report
Norad Report 1/2008 Discussion

Support Models for CSOs at Country Level
Bangladesh Country Report
Norad Report 2/2008 Discussion

Support Models for CSOs at Country Level
Etiopia Country Report
Norad Report 3/2008 Discussion

Support Models for CSOs at Country Level
Guatemala Country Report
Norad Report 4/2008 Discussion

Support Models for CSOs at Country Level
Tanzania Country Report
Norad Report 5/2008 Discussion

Support Models for CSOs at Country Level
Zambia Country Report
Norad Report 6/2008 Discussion

Support Models for CSOs at Country Level
Zimbabwe Country Report
Norad Report 7/2008 Discussion

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