

What is a National NGO Platform (NPF) ?

Historical background of the draft proposal

This working document submitted to the Facilitation Group is the synthesis of several documents discussed within the national platforms movement.

A proposal of a grid for analysis was drafted as early as 2004-2005 by ABONG, Coordination SUD and VANI. This grid has since then been developed following discussions and meeting with other platforms, who enabled drafting a preparatory sheet for the October 2008 International Conference of NPFs. Through questionnaires addressed to platforms ahead of the Conference, some comments were collected to improve this definition. Finally, following the October 27th plenary sessions, ACFID and VANI, the two platforms moderating the debate, forwarded amendment suggestions.

Use of the document with regard to the IFP's future and enlargement

Each NPF is likely to become a member of the International Forum of National NGO Platforms (IFP) created in Paris in October 2008. The IFP should therefore think about criteria enabling to qualify its members, that is, national NGO platforms.

This document defining a NPF could also, in case the Facilitation Group considers it relevant, serve as a basis for IFP membership application forms. That way, at the end of the transitional period and for instance for the movement's next general assembly (late 2010 – early 2011), one can figure that current and future members could fill in these application forms so as to formally join the IFP.

Platforms wishing to become a member of the Forum would also have to subscribe to the future Charter or Declaration of principles of the Forum, that will be drawn up and proposed by the Facilitation group.

Proposals

- 1) To turn this definition into a membership application form which should be filled in by all current as well as future IFP members by the movement's next general assembly ;
- 2) Applications presented by the Facilitation group and validated during the General assembly. The Facilitation Group will not forget to consult the appropriate regional coalition about a platform's application.
- 3) To elaborate an "observer" status.

1 – A representative NPF

A NPF is a national coalition of NGOs working in their country or in another country. While respecting the NGOs' diversity, the NPF should assist them in their quest for common perspectives and their ambition to build a national NGO movement.

The NPF is representative at a national level through the number of its affiliated member NGOs, which enables dialogue and interaction with its government and public authorities. It is also representative of the diversity of the solidarity movement within the country (emergency humanitarian relief, support to development, defense of human rights, environment protection, sustainable resource management, etc.). Any NPF is meant to enlarge and take in all NGOs in the country, that would fit into the admission criteria. NPF is an open and inclusive space.

Membership to the NPF and peer judgment must bring a guarantee about the members' sincerity and reliability, especially that the member NGOs are indeed non governmental, non sectarian and non profit, and that they follow the objectives defined in the NPF Charter.

The NPF's legal existence should be registered in national law when this law grants existence to non profit, general interest associations.

In the case of several platforms to be found in a country, it will be suggested that they should unite in order to join the IFP.

2 – Functioning

The NPF follows several essential principles:

- definition of the membership application process and members' respect for their commitments;
- democratic governance: proper functioning and renewal of governance bodies;
- transparency: information to members, publication of activity reports and financial reports;
- accountability to members, donors and partners;
- members' involvement: NGOs' participation in working committees, governance bodies, the platform's community life;
- institutional independence, action and operating autonomy;
- financial independence: the NPF is seeking the widest financing diversity to reach an actual autonomy.

Most NPFs have a "Charter of ethics" recognized by their members and that defines the membership conditions for NGOs on the basis of common principles: autonomy in relation to the State, to political parties, to sectarian organizations and to economic power; democratic and transparent internal working; legal sources of financing; legal "non profit" status; minimum numbers of years of existence or sponsorship by several older organizations; accounts kept as per accepted standards, transparent and open to external checking; proven competence in one or more fields of action.

Some IFP member NPFs bring together their operating principles in "Codes of conduct", "charters of ethics" or "Codes of ethics", which could be made available to fellow NPFs.

3 – Activities of a NPF

A platform's activities should match its member NGOs' expectations, following collective interest and respecting their diversity.

- Pooling

The platform runs activities serving its member NGOs and strives to arrange information, communication, capacity building, support and expertise services. Members can thus share some services or functions so as to benefit from economies of scale or to improve the quality of their activities.

- Building of joint positions

The NPF must be able to mobilize the member NGOs' expertise or even external expertise and, when necessary, to create specialized working committees related to the different areas of national and international solidarity (environment, defense of human rights, etc.), in order to build and to promote collective stands.

- Advocacy and relations with other actors

On behalf of its members, the platform is organized to be the interlocutor with national, regional or international public authorities, and with other solidarity actors on the national and the global scale.

The NPF is particularly supposed to defend NGOs' space and identity, as well as their interests and their common positions. Such a mandate entails in return defining a process for drafting and spreading collective stands.

Via the regional coalitions it can join, the NPF also represents the country's NGOs and participates in international NPF cooperation.

The NPF can also have a mandate and role in the dialogue and interaction with the media, academics, firms, trade unions, social movements and, broadly speaking, opinion leaders.