



one world trust

## About CSO sector self-regulation

### What is CSO sector self-regulation?

Self-regulation of CSOs takes place in three primary ways. In most cases, self-regulation is the process through which two or more organisations come together at sector level to either define common norms and standards to which they can be held to account or encourage transparency and sharing of best practice. This can be on a range of issues from how they are governed to, evaluation systems, to what information they should be making public. Self-regulation can also involve a third party such as a peer CSO or watchdog organisation undertaking an external assessment of a CSO. In certain circumstances, CSO self-regulation can involve the government. In these cases power has been partially delegated to an umbrella organisation representing CSOs to regulate behaviour or set standards the sector. The common thread to all forms of CSO self-regulation is that it is not fully mandated by government regulation; at least some aspects of each CSO self-regulatory initiative are the result of voluntary participation by the sector in developing and administering common norms and standards of behaviour.

In the CSO sector, self regulation is a relatively recent innovation with most initiatives originating since the 1990s. Over the past two decades, CSOs have begun to develop common norms and standards because they find that it leads to increased credibility and legitimacy with stakeholders, protects the political space for CSOs to operate, and can lead to greater organisational learning and innovation.

### What are the main types of CSO sector 'self-regulatory' initiatives ?

CSO self-regulatory initiatives exist in a variety of forms. Self-regulatory initiatives may have highly institutionalised (formal) structures or be quite unstructured (informal). An initiative with a highly institutionalised structure spells out the contents and requirements for participation in the initiative in detail. It will also have administrative structures, such as a secretariat, to support its implementation. Initiatives with a more informal structure lack these institutionalised systems. Their principles, standards, and assessment frameworks are also laid out in more general terms. The other primary axis of analysis of self-regulatory initiatives relates to their compliance mechanisms. While some self-regulatory initiative may incorporate strong compliance mechanisms, others leave implementation fully in the hands of individual CSOs.

Sitting along these two axes are a number of types of CSO self-regulatory initiatives.

**Codes of conduct and ethics** tend to detail a set of basic principles that guide the behaviour of members. They are typically quite formalised, but generally do not include a compliance mechanism. **Certification schemes** may involve self, peer or third-party assessment of compliance with principles or standards. They tend to be both highly institutionalised and incorporate relatively strong compliance mechanisms. **Information services** enhance transparency in the sector by sharing information about CSOs with the general public and across the sector. The information that is presented varies widely from what activities an organisation conducts, to a CSO administration costs to CSO financial reporting, to more simple directories of CSOs. In most cases, information services do not have compliance

mechanisms. **Working groups** consist of peer organisations that come together on a regular basis to share and define best practice on a particular issue. To encourage the adoption of best practice they often develop **self-assessments, toolkits and guides**. Peer working groups, though largely lacking in both an institutionalised structure and compliance mechanisms, are often at the origin of more institutionalised and compliance based forms of self-regulation such as codes of conduct and certification schemes.

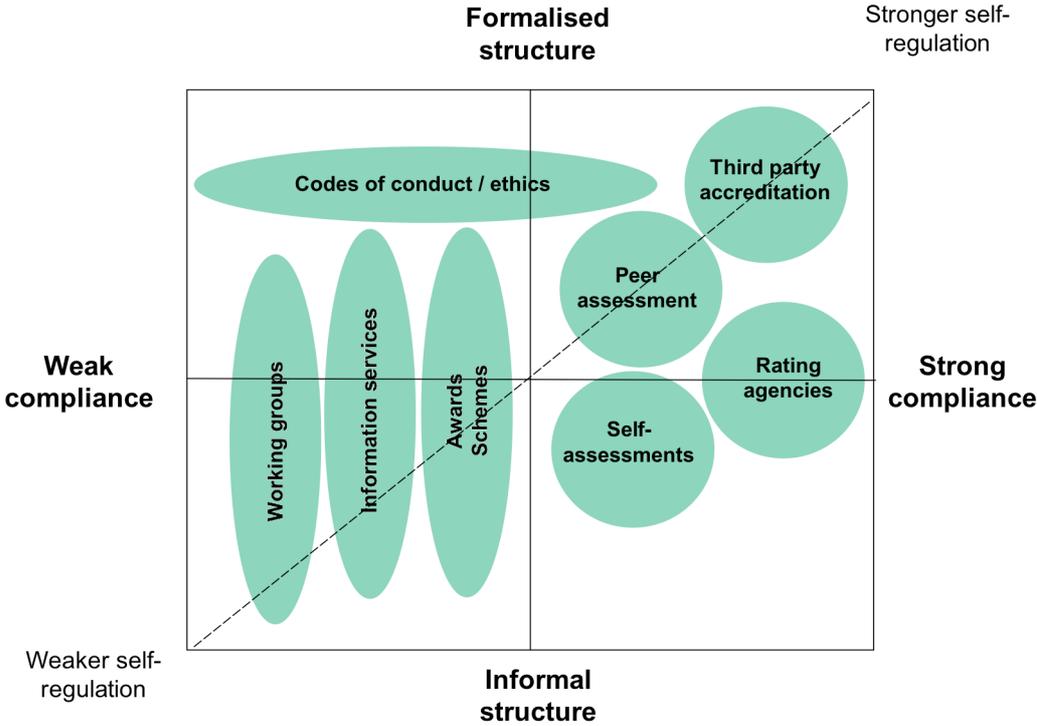


Diagram 1: Types of CSO self-regulatory initiatives

**What types of initiatives are not CSO self-regulation?**

CSO self-regulatory initiatives that apply only within a single organisation, while setting common norms and standards, are, for the purposes of this project, not considered self-regulatory initiatives. Although such initiatives may provide models and examples of best practice to the wider sector, they are internal to a single organisation and do not seek to raise standards at a sector level. Examples of this type of initiative include the Transparency International (TI) *Guidelines for National Chapters of TI* and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) *Standards and Responsibilities of IPPF Membership*.

Principles and standards of practice that are fully enshrined in national law and overseen by governmental authorities, either directly or through government-established and controlled agencies are also not CSO self-regulatory initiatives. For example, national legislation that requires specific good governance practices to be implemented by all registered civil society organisations is not self-regulation.

### **What are the benefits of CSO self-regulation ?**

Self-regulation can help build public trust, raise standards of practice, protect civil society from burdensome and inappropriate government regulation, and generate opportunities for sharing and learning across organisations. In many cases, self-regulation in the CSO sector complements broad government regulatory efforts that often provide for registration and financial accountability of CSOs, but that cannot effectively address quality and accountability issues. CSO self-regulation fills this gap by addressing the distinct challenges faced by actors in the sector and their stakeholders.

### **What are the challenges faced in implementing CSO self-regulation ?**

Developing and implementing CSO self-regulatory initiatives is a difficult task. Agreeing on common norms and standards, a necessarily consultative and time-consuming task, requires human and financial resources that can be difficult to come by, particularly in countries where CSOs receive limited local funding. Stronger compliance mechanisms may enhance the credibility of an initiative, but risk reducing participation to a small group of relatively well-resourced CSOs. As a result, smaller CSOs, often those most in need of support from sector support to improve quality and accountability, may be unable to participate.

In some contexts, CSOs are wary of developing any self-regulatory efforts out of concern that the government will encroach, make them mandatory, and remove the flexible and voluntary nature of the original initiatives that may have made it feasible to implement them in the first place. In others, the CSO sector simply lacks the financial or human resources capacity to develop, implement and manage initiatives that require more than the initial development of a framework.

## **About the CSO self-regulatory initiatives project**

### **What are the aims of CSO self-regulatory initiatives project?**

The purpose of the CSO self-regulatory initiatives project is to provide a thorough inventory and analysis of CSO self-regulation worldwide. Previous research has been limited to specific regions, theoretically focused or relied on the same handful of case studies. No single inventory of CSO self-regulation has previously been completed. As a consequence, some lessons and examples of good practice have not been made widely available, both within the sector and beyond.

The database will assist CSOs in building and developing more effective self-regulatory initiatives that meet their particular needs and operational contexts. It will also help identify where capacity needs to be built in terms of the processes, content, and enforcement mechanisms of existing self-regulation and offer practical ways forward.

## What are the key outputs from the project?

The main entry point into the project is through the SRI portal page at [www.oneworldtrust.org/csoproject](http://www.oneworldtrust.org/csoproject). This portal contains several resources:

- **Global map of CSO self-regulatory initiatives**  
This map allows users to compare levels of self-regulation globally using a colour-coded map. Users can select a country and view a summary of CSO self-regulation in that country as well as a short list of initiatives, including those still in development. Once the full database is launched, users may click on any of these initiatives to view their full descriptions and details.
- **International and regional initiatives lists**  
These pages allow users to view a complete list of all international initiatives and region-specific initiatives that have been identified. The international initiatives list has been broken down by activity area where possible to assist users in identifying initiatives of interest. Once the full database is launched, users may click on any of these initiatives to view their full descriptions and details as well.
- **Database of CSO self-regulatory initiatives**  
Scheduled for launch in July 2009, this database will enable users to search through self-regulatory initiatives using a variety of criteria (e.g., country or region, type of compliance mechanism, and number of participating organisations). Each initiative page will include a summary, explanation of contents and compliance mechanisms, contact details for the host/sponsoring organisation, and an analysis of how the initiative fits with other similar initiatives. Copies of the original text of initiatives will also be available for download.
- **Briefing papers**  
For those with an interest in how civil society sector self-regulation is developing at a global level, we are producing a series of briefing papers. Briefing paper 119, *Civil society self-regulation: the global picture*, outlines the clusters and gaps in self-regulation that we identified through our global research. Briefing *paper 120 Strengths and weakness in existing NGO self-regulation* will provide through a detailed examination of areas addressed and compliance mechanisms. Subsequent briefing papers will address regional and thematic topics such as the blurred line between government regulation and sector self-regulation in a number of countries.
- **Resources**  
Key CSO self-regulation news items posted to the portal page will assist practitioners to stay on top of the latest developments. The One World Trust is also developing a literature review and listing of key publications related to CSO self-regulation. These will be posted to the resources page as they become available.

## About the CSO self-regulatory initiatives research methodology

### **How did the One World Trust gather information for the project?**

Developing a 'complete' inventory of CSO self-regulatory initiatives worldwide is a significant task. While the research methodology for building the inventory was designed to minimise oversights, it is important to recognise that the inventory is a work in progress and will rely on its users to keep it up to date.

As a preliminary step, research was conducted in a small number of countries to develop an assessment framework for each self-regulatory initiative. This assessment framework has subsequently been modified, and will continue to undergo modifications, as a result of input from key stakeholders such as CSO umbrella organisations, donors, and civil society researchers. A partnership was established with the European Centre for Non-profit Law (ECNL) through which the ECNL provided research previously conducted in Europe as well as civil society contacts globally.

Research globally then began with the identification of CSO umbrella organisations and civil society experts at national, regional and international levels. These organisations and experts were then contacted to determine if they managed or knew of any self-regulatory initiatives in their respective countries and activity sectors.

Once initiatives were identified, they were assessed according to a framework which emphasises three key aspects of each initiative: participating member organisations, areas addressed in the initiative, and the nature of the compliance mechanism.

### **How was the map, and the territories it demarcates, selected?**

The map is a product of ammap.com. The One World Trust takes no responsibility for the geographical and political accuracy, or the international recognition of boundaries, states or territories shown in this map.

### **What is the One World Trust?**

The One World Trust is an independent, non-profit think tank that conducts research and advocacy on issues of global governance. Our work on CSO sector self-regulation is funded primarily by the Ford Foundation.

### **Who should I contact for more information about the CSO Self-Regulatory Initiatives Project?**

[Shana Warren](#), Projects Officer or email [csosr@oneworldtrust.org](mailto:csosr@oneworldtrust.org)