



# How to build an enabling environment

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Fact sheet 3

**Definition:** An enabling environment is a set of inter-related conditions which impact on the capacity of development practitioners (such as NGOs) to participate in development processes in a sustained and effective manner. These conditions include legal, organisational, financial, information, political and cultural matters.

**Why we need an enabling environment:** A flourishing New Zealand civil society requires an enabling environment as it depends on the actions and policies of all development practitioners, including governments, donors and NGOs.

## How to enable NGOs:

- **Enable NGO recognition:** Political factors and other circumstances such as human rights, peaceful assembly and access to information influence NGO recognition. General legal and judicial systems also affect NGO recognition. Administrative factors affect the way in which governments deal with NGOs.
- **Enable NGO capacity:** Funding mechanisms that promote NGO capacity are important. Regulations and norms can promote NGO transparency and accountability. Governments are not required to do this. Promoting philanthropy and corporate social responsibility is also important.
- **Enable NGO voices:** Processes, structures and mechanisms creating access, space, and capacity are required for NGOs to formulate, articulate and convey their opinion during consultation and decision-making processes, both nationally and internationally.

## How external partners & actors can help build an enabling environment

**Respect NGOs as development actors in their own right:** This is important even when it might be inconsistent with donor and government priorities.

**Prioritise responsive funding:** Programme priorities driven by NGOs foster diversity and autonomy.

**Assure long-term funding:** This is central to strengthen NGOs, including NGO-determined capacity building activities, networking and coalition building, policy development and promotion.

**Limit competition for resources:** Donors should give priority to long-term core financial support for partnerships with NGOs where possible.

**Engage with NGOs in dialogue:** It is important to engage with NGOs on development reduction strategies and priorities.

**Holding governments to account:** Provide support for NGOs to act as watchdogs and hold their governments accountable. Also assist NGOs to support democracy building efforts.

**Operational relationships:** These need to be reviewed and simplified. A focus on long-term core and programme funding, accountability, reporting and evaluation is required.

**Invest more human and financial resources:** This deepens engagement with civil society. NGOs also play a part in fostering good donorship practices as donors and recipients, and as channels of aid funding.

## For more info:

Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness, "Synthesis of Findings and Recommendations", August 2008.  
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/ACCRAEXT/Resources/AG-CS-SYNTHESIS-OF-FINDINGS-AND-RECOMMENDATIONS-ENGLISH.PDF>

Brinkerhoff, Derick W., "The Enabling Environment for Implementing the Millennium Development Goals: Government Actions to Support NGOs", Research Triangle Institute, Washington, DC, 2004.  
[http://www.rti.org/pubs/Brinkerhoff\\_pub.pdf](http://www.rti.org/pubs/Brinkerhoff_pub.pdf)