

Policy towards collaboration with civil society

Introduction

To realise its ambitions, SOMO collaborates with a wide variety of civil society organisations and networks at both national and international level. This policy covers SOMO's vision towards collaboration and mutual capacity development with other civil society actors. This policy is applicable to all relationships with civil society organisations that SOMO initiates and maintains within its projects and programmes. The implementation of this policy, as well as the practical protocol¹ for managing the contractual relationship with partner organisations, is the responsibility of SOMO's partner coordinator, who reports on the progress and bottlenecks to the management team.

1. Collaboration with civil society actors

Vision on collaboration

Collaboration with other civil society organisations is one of the key ways how SOMO aims to fulfil its mission to support and strengthen civil society movements in defending human rights and promoting public interests. Through collaboration SOMO contributes to establishing a greater counterforce against harmful multinational corporations and increase the influence and impact of civil society organisations worldwide to hold multinational corporations and governments to account for destructive and unfair business practices and realising economic alternatives, locally and globally.

SOMO embraces collaboration with a wide variety civil society organisations and networks who share a common vision on an equitable, democratic, transparent, and environmentally sustainable global economic, political and legal system. By joining forces and joint strategising, SOMO and its partner organisations will extend each other's access and reach to different levels of impact and decision making and address issues that go beyond borders.

Principles of collaboration

SOMO's vision and policy on collaboration with other civil society organisations are based on the principles of equality, reciprocity and complementarity.

Equality: SOMO aims to work with organisations on an equal basis and with shared responsibilities. Planning and decision-making processes are organised as transparent, flexible and efficient as possible and take into account the priorities and local realities of both SOMO and its counterpart.

Reciprocity: SOMO recognises that civil society organisations are mutually dependent on each other. SOMO has the ambition to learn from and with other organisations to the greatest extent possible.

Complementarity: SOMO works with other civil society organisations to benefit from combining complementary knowledge, expertise, locations and roles and mutually enforce each other's capacities. The complementarity between SOMO and partner organisations can be found at the local, as well as the regional and global level.

To ensure equality, reciprocity and complementarity in the relationship with other civil society organisations SOMO aims to cooperate with organisations which:

- Are or aim to be experts in their own fields of work
- Complement or reinforce the knowledge, expertise and work of SOMO
- Regard the collaboration with SOMO as equally valuable and strategic
- Recognise the importance and relevance of mutual capacity development
- Can and are willing to critically reflect on SOMO's own policy and strategy development
- Are able to run or continue activities independently of collaboration with SOMO

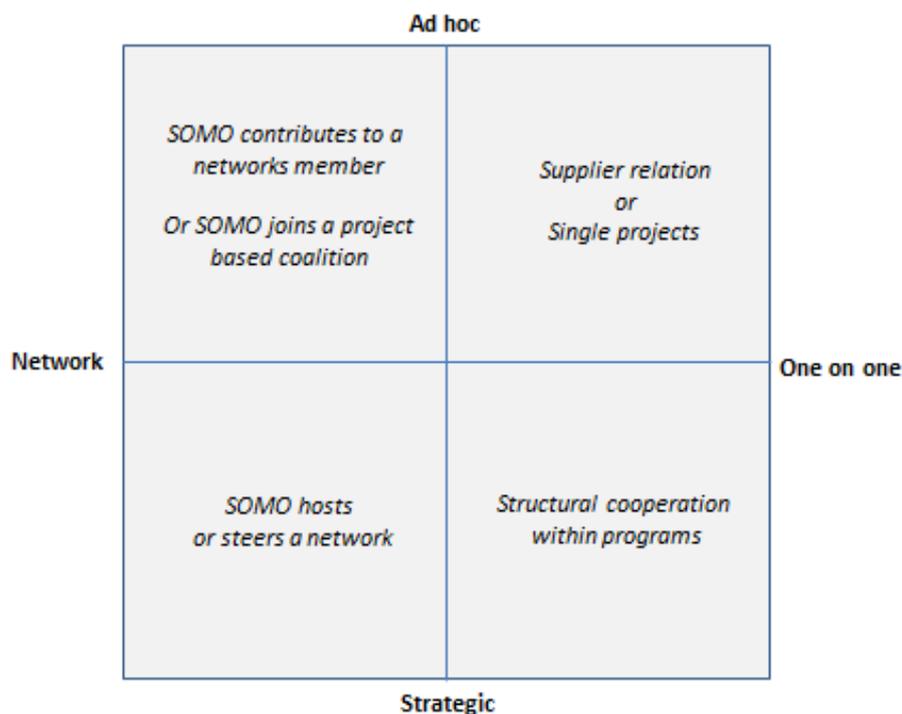
Relationships that cannot be maintained according to the abovementioned principles will be assessed and potentially ended in the most respectful and ethical way possible.

¹ An internal document, available upon request

Types of collaboration

SOMO collaborates with a wide variety of civil society organisations, including non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations, trade unions and research institutions. The types of relationship with these organisations range from structural, long-lasting relations to ad hoc and or subcontracting relations. Not all forms of collaboration involve a financial relationship between the partner organisation and SOMO.

The following typology of collaboration with CSOs worldwide characterises the work of SOMO.



Structural collaboration within programmes: With a number of organisations SOMO has structural, long-standing relationships with a strategic purpose and a common goal. SOMO and these organisations often contribute to each other's strategic development as well as strategic and political choices.. The relationship with this type of partner organisation often goes beyond a finance-basis.

Single project or sub-contractor relationship: In addition to structural collaboration with civil society organisations, SOMO works with organisations on a case by case, and sometimes an ad hoc, basis. This type of collaboration is aimed at adequately responding to emerging issues or opportunities. These collaborations are geared towards specific issues or projects, rather than at continuous collaboration. This type of relationship can have a supplier-subcontractor character.

SOMO hosts or steers a network:

SOMO facilitates and supports collaboration and coordination of strategies between civil society organisations worldwide to jointly influence policymakers and corporations by hosting networks or participating in the network as steering group member. The networks in which SOMO assumes such a pivotal role are of key strategic importance for achieving SOMO's objectives. Realising co-creation and mutual learning through joint research; knowledge development and exchange; information provision; movement building; improved advocacy, agenda-setting; and policy influencing opportunities are main reasons for taking up such a central role.

SOMO as network or coalition member

SOMO also works together with other CSOs in many formal and informal (thematic) networks and consortia. This type of collaboration is initiated with the aim to connect and join forces with likeminded organisations. The relationship is based on a shared vision within the network. The intensity of SOMO's participation in these networks varies and ranges from endorsement to active participation. SOMO shares its research and analysis in these networks, thereby strengthening the knowledge base for networking and lobbying, campaigns and activities of other network members.

2. Mutual capacity development

Definition of mutual capacity development

Although not a criteria, nor a goal, when initiating new collaboration, mutual capacity development is often a central element in the collaboration with other civil society organisations, either explicitly or implicitly. SOMO does not have a top-down approach towards capacity development of CSOs, but rather organises mutual capacity development as something inherent to collaboration, joint priority setting and joint activity implementation.

SOMO follows the definition that the Fair Green and Global Alliance, of which it is member, has developed. Mutual capacity development is hence regarded as “a process of strengthening skills, knowledge and network contacts in which all actors, regardless of their country of origin, participate as equal partners.”² Mutual capacity development as SOMO practices it, is a flexible process that recognises and harnesses different expertise, knowledge and skills present to develop civil society’s capacity to research, network and advocate for an improved policy and regulatory context and to provide a counterweight to unsustainable strategies and practices of multinational corporations.

Mutual capacity development in practice

Mutual capacity development can take place in different ways and on different aspects expects. While SOMO also implements forms of direct mutual capacity development, e.g. joint trainings and workshops, mutual learning in SOMO’s approach mostly occurs as an (indirect) effect of collaboration. Since learning is a social process, joint work and interaction inherently create learning opportunities. Together with its partners organisations SOMO defines the priorities for its programmes and objectives and identifies which capacities need strengthening to allow both organisations to achieve maximum results within the collaboration.

In SOMO’s approach to capacity development, active learning, close interaction through joint strategising, research, lobby and advocacy processes, (cross-regional) exchanges and collaboration in networks, increases the capacities of both SOMO and its counterparts to achieve joint objectives. Mutual capacity development not only leads to increased skills, but may also lead to improved access to knowledge, networks and platforms and increased credibility and legitimacy. Capacity development can also occur as a result of changes achieved in the collaboration, e.g. changes in the external context or the behaviour of governments or multinational enterprises. A good understanding of and due respect for the existing capabilities and capacity development processes taking place, together with the belief that that civil society actors and their constituents can best speak for themselves, is key to effective mutual capacity development in the long run.

² Mutual capacity development: A modern and effective approach for fair green and global change. Fair Green & Global Alliance, May 2017