

# Toolkit for National CSO Coalition Building

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## About ADA

1. The Asia Development Alliance (ADA) was established on 2 Feb. 2013 at the founding assembly in Bangkok, Thailand. The founding assembly was initiated by four national CSO/NGO platforms – VANI (India), CCC (Cambodia), Code-NGO (Philippines) and KCOC (Korea) – with the support from International Forum of National NGO Platforms (IFP), CIVICUS Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA) and Good Neighbors International (GNI) in partnership with Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) Asia.
2. 2017 is the 5<sup>th</sup> year since its foundation in Feb. 2013 and the second year in the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda / SDGs (2016-2030) and the second year of the EU project (2016-2020) as regional member / partner of IFP and CIVICUS AGNA.

### Vision and Mission

1. **Vision** : ADA is committed to building a just, inclusive, equitable and peaceful community of sustainable societies in Asia and beyond where every citizen and people can enjoy all human rights.
2. **Mission** : Through effective communication, coordination, and cooperation, ADA works to promote and advance justice, equality and peace at all levels of society in the development -process in Asia, in particular in people oriented implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## What is National Coalition

NGO Coalition could be defined as a category of CSOs working on various thematic groups, assembled together in a coordinated way as members of an identified structured coalition formally or informally on the basis of a common purpose and seeking changes to government policies and practices or to national/international laws.

“By building new links among actors in civil societies, states and national and international organisations/ civil society coalitions multiply the opportunities for dialogue and exchange. In issue areas such as the environment and human rights, they also make international resources available to new actors in domestic political and social struggles. By blurring the boundaries between a state’s relations with its own nationals and the recourse both citizens and states have to the international system, advocacy networks are helping to transform the practice of national sovereignty<sup>1</sup>.”

Transnational advocacy networks in international and regional politics, Margaret E. Keck, Kathryn Sikkink, International Social Science Journal, Volume 51, Issue 159, pages 89–101, March 1999

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.globalcoalitions.org/chapter-1>

In other words, these coalitions serve as key connectors to government and businesses, and help to create a strong enabling environment for civil society organisations, democracy, and the rights of citizen action and participation. They also provide a range of services to civil society organisations to help them be more effective, identify the financial and human resources they need to carry out their work, and promote their capacity to work together<sup>2</sup>.

## Key elements for a coalition are:

- Organizational Capabilities
- Flexible structure
- Understand the need for leadership and committed workers
- Always have an action plan and deadlines, with outcome-oriented meetings
- Communication, communication and more communication
- Follow-up and follow through
- Provide expertise and documentation
- Articulate goals and messages clearly and simply
- Focus on the human cost
- Use as many forums as possible to promote the message
- Be inclusive, be diverse, yet speak with one voice
- Recognise that international context and timing do matter
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## Common Characteristics of a CSO Coalition

The civil society coalitions tend to have the following characteristics:

### A Membership

The basic characteristic of all global civil society coalitions is the membership:

- A coalition's membership might include a handful of organisations or several hundred.
- Members might sign up to a charter with specific duties and responsibilities, or the affiliation might simply require endorsement of a common call.
- Members are usually organisations rather than individuals, but there are often ways to include individuals in the coalition in one way or another.

### A Common Call for Change

Global civil society coalitions come together in order to change practice, policy and sometimes laws at the global level:

- This purpose is usually expressed as a call or mission statement and endorsing it is often the core requirement for becoming a coalition member.
- This joint call is often the subject of negotiation among the members; it can be detailed or very broad but in any case it sets the parameters of the coalition's work.

### A Leadership

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<sup>2</sup> AGNA membership guidelines

Many coalitions have in place a leadership to guide the policy and planning of the coalition and help facilitate the activities of the membership

- The roles and responsibilities of the leadership vary greatly among coalitions.
- Terms used to refer to the role of a coalition leadership include: advisory, governance, steering, executive, strategy and management.
- Terms used to describe the structure include: council, committee, board and group.
- Leaderships groups are either elected or appointed. Staff members are often employed to work on behalf of the coalition. Sometimes staff will be part of the leadership group and sometimes they may have a more administrative role.

### **A Common Plan to Achieve Change**

There is often a general plan of action to achieve the global change that the coalition seeks.

- Depending on the level of coherence within the coalition, this plan might be more or less detailed at the global level.
- It could be a set of objectives on which to lobby governments through a campaign of global meetings, or it could be a more detailed analysis of the power dynamics and political targets among decision makers at the international level.
- Members will often determine the best way to effect change in their own national or regional context.

### **A Collective Identity**

Coalitions often promote a collective identity for themselves.

- This can include a name, slogan, logo and visual identity.
- Individual member organisations may communicate on behalf of the coalition, or identify themselves as members when undertaking specific actions, such as talking to governments or the media.
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## **Benefits of the CSO Coalition**

- The desire to maximise NGO influence on advocacy targets in different countries, including helping activists overcome obstacles at a national level by drawing on international support.
- The need to make the most of scarce human and financial resources and to avoid duplication of effort among NGOs working on similar issues.
- The desire to ensure effective communications among key NGO actors working on a particular issue and to pool the expertise available to NGOs.
- The desire to avoid NGO disunity on an issue. Opponents will be all too willing to exploit differences in opinion among NGOs in order to undermine the overall goal being pursued.

Working in coalitions also provides a coordinated way for NGOs to forge and maintain strategic partnerships with external actors. It is easier for a government to relate to a coalition as a single partner that represents the range of civil society actors on an issue than to work out whom to interact with from among a host of organisations.

However, coalitions also impose costs and constraints on member organisations. A key trade-off when working in coalition is between the gains in effectiveness (stronger voice and wider reach) on the one hand and the amount of time and resources spent in making a coalition work on the other. Coalitions have been described as a 'necessary bureaucracy' and every coalition an NGO joins brings with it another set of communications, another email list and another set of conference calls and meetings.

“Governments and international organisations such as the UN sometimes see significant benefits in having NGOs organising themselves into coalitions. For example, the ECOSOC Statute for Non-Governmental Organisations states that: “Where there exist a number of organisations with similar objectives, interests and basic views in a given field, they may, for the purposes of consultation with the Council, form a joint committee or other body authorised to carry on such consultation for the group as a whole.”

ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31, 25 July 1996.

citizen action and civil society throughout the world so that there is a worldwide community of informed, inspired, committed citizens engaged in confronting the challenges facing humanity. Its work is guided by the [same principles and values as CIVICUS](#).

AGNA brings together national associations and regional platforms from around the world to foster greater cooperation across national and regional boundaries, increase their ability to collaborate on areas of mutual interest, and respond to the unique needs and challenges they face.

It aims to:

- Address the need for an international citizens’ coalition;
- Reverse the current understanding of capacity-building characterized by a north-to-south flow of knowledge, information and experience sharing;
- Provide a support system for network leaders; and
- Reduce the ‘re-invention of the wheel’ and improvisation of civil society leadership.

## **Starting a new Coalition : Issues , Challenges and Opportunities**

Its very important to think and discuss with the like-minded people and groups before starting a new CSO coalition. This also depends on the urgency of the issues , common agenda for the united action that needs to be advocated or linked to other regional and global platforms and institutions and also have the ability to connect with governments and intergovernmental organisations like the UN.

This also explains the need to build a coalition. The coalition should not be made, just because a set of like minded people want to establish a new network. This will have its own sustainability issues once the ideas and logic of building the coalition fizzles out.

'NGO Federation of Nepal is an umbrella organization of NGOs working in various fields of social welfare and development. Established in 1991 for the promotion and protection of social justice, human rights and pro-poor development, NFN has evolved as a national organization working for the entire NGO movement in Nepal. It is actively working to unite, organize and mobilise civil society to create a peaceful, democratic and just Nepal. NFN is a democratic organization run by a team of NGO professionals who volunteer their services to achieve the vision of NFN'<sup>3</sup>.

At the regional level, ADA was formed

'ADA was established as a Regional coalition in February 2013, after a group of like-minded people from various countries of Asia and globe thought of a need to fill the gap in terms of capacity-building, awareness-building and coordination as well as an interface between global and national NPs in the engagement in the post-2015 development agenda process'<sup>4</sup>.

There are other challenges in being part of a coalition: Fear of dilution of identity of individual organization and hence there is a need to agree on clear messages and collective position. To overcome this, it's important to see, who is doing what, and their potential expertise so that there are clear visibility of individual organizations devoid of the risking their own identity, at the same time contributing vigorously to the CSO coalition.

Another important point of caution is refrain to be part of every coalition that exist in the sphere!! This will add to diluting the mission and vision of individual organization. There are cases, when one finds the same set of people in most of the coalition.

Another challenge that a coalition faces, is the dominance of certain groups/people who would axe the visibility of new comers, and hence, it is all the more important for the founding members, to keep rotating the governing board of the coalition after a certain period in the most democratic ways to avoid the clashes of titans!!

Some suggested parameters:

- Open to all who are prepared to commit to it and who share a common agenda for action.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ngofederation.org/about-0>

<sup>4</sup> ADA2030.org

- Form a manageable size, which can in turn agree the parameters by which a wider community can become engaged.
- Mindful of diversity and regional representation issues, which may not be well balanced at first but will need to be considered as the group develops.
- Include sufficient 'worker bees'. Such people can be evidence-gatherers, policy drivers, campaigners and activists – but they need to be people who will take on work.
- Big organisations bring credibility and capacity, but they can also bring challenges in terms of policy constraint and flexibility.
- On many issues it will be important to have members that address the range of aspects that it presents – such as human rights, development, medical, legal etc.
- Open to new committed people in the group without any biasness
- Instilling and building trust among the members should be given priority

## Role of Communication

It's also important to make sure that everybody's voice is heard and no participating organization shall feel left. Hence, its important to engage in effective communication within and outside the membership organization. The mode of communication plays an important role, especially with the invent of various social media platforms.

However, with the shell of similar emails from various coalitions causes bewilderment and hence, its important to be crisp in the subject line while addressing the email content.

Apart from this , regular conference calls, newsletters, website creation/updation are important part of communication part from face to face (F4F) meetings.

## Objectives, Vision and Mission statement

While setting up the CSO platform, there is a need to set a clear objective, mission and vion of the coalition that reflects the agenda of the partners/members.

### Objectives

- 1) Increase civic influence in decision-making and policy formulation in national action planning and monitoring regarding the implementation of 2030 Agenda / SDGs
- 2) Increase civic influence in decision-making and policy formulation in international organizations and processes as well as multi-stakeholder partnerships regarding the implementation of 2030 Agenda / SDGs

- 3) Enhance effectiveness in representation and coordination among Asian NPs at international level (regional and global)
- 4) Strengthen leadership capacity for effective advocacy and campaign through the human rights-based approach to development (HRBA)

The vision and mission statement of the coalition will only add to the clarity

## Leadership and Governance Structure

As discussed earlier, communication is an important part and hence clear and set agenda, regular meetings (web or face to face), documentation of minutes for record to ensure a focused and successful meetings with well-defined outcomes and then follow up and review the outcomes/results in the next meeting.

The decision to create a governing board with a chair and some key persons from diverse background , north /south balance, gender, add to the smooth functioning of the CSO coalition.

## Membership Structure

The establishment and role of governing board play a crucial role in running the coalition successfully. This should be the prerogative of the board to decide the type of membership, whether this should be individual or organizational or both.

Also, there should be proper mechanism to scrutinize the new/existing members before enrolling them into the membership base as the coalition may not be willing to filter the information that needs to be shared with different types of members/partners and other stakeholders.

### ADA Membership

1. ADA members are national or sub-national multi-sectoral independent civil society platforms or umbrellas in Asia, namely South, Southeast and Northeast Asia
2. ADA members shall be civil society organizations (CSOs) engaged in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
3. The members of the IFP and CIVICUS AGNA shall be accepted as members of ADA ex-officio.



Many coalitions, prefer to have a structured/layered membership according to the type of communication/information that is shared.

*Feeling a sense of ownership of the coalition is the most important part of the membership.*

## Dedicated Staff

Hiring of staff is directly subjected to resource availability, however, few dedicated staff , especially a coordinator, in one of the member's organizations initially, will provide a definite direction in pushing the coalition's agenda, to the coalition under the eminent guidance of the board members.

This could developed into having a full fledged secretariat depending on more resources. The coalition Coordinator, could also be an ex-official to the boards.

If there are no resources, volunteers could play an important role to do the day to day secretariat's work, especially in **campaigning, communicating and coordinating.**

### Funding Proposal

Once there are defined agenda, campaigns and staff to work on, there is a need to write the funding proposal, looking for suitable donors to maintain sustainability. It's also very important to have an inclusive proposal not only in its objective, but also for reviewing among the governance board, with the clear line of event/activities and proposed output/outcomes. So the **proposal should be able to reflect the collective voice!!**

The most important part to write a funding proposal is having a good proposal writer and a good networking skills within the governance board to take the proposal up for review to :

- The government,
- UN and other institutions
- Private trust, etc.

## Future of the coalition

**Maintaining the sustainability through guided leadership and committed and engaged members and staff is the key to success of any coalition**