Civil Society Perspectives
Working Dinner discussion among CSOs on 2nd July 2003

1. *Type and scope of type of partnership among CSOs, governments to advance the MDGs.*

▸ Partnership must be based on mutual accountability, confidence and trust. Although in some countries the partnership is well developed in others it is non-existent.

▸ Partnerships between Government, Business and Civil Society, or the so-called Tripartite (negotiating) Forums should be encouraged as a way to adopt a common development agenda, as well as foster participatory processes for all stakeholders.

▸ UNDP should not bring in CSOs at the end of programmes that they have already prepared ('icing on the cake'), but should involve them at the planning stages.

▸ Engaging the *policy space through* analytical work is crucial if CSOs are to be effective players in all processes. We need to get a sense of how and whether people understand the issues. Perhaps an awareness raising campaign is necessary. However the lack of debate could be a result of the way MDGs campaign has been packaged. Perhaps UNDP should repackage the MDGs in a way that they are easily internalized.

2. *Entry points for CSO engagement:*
   ▸ Analytical work
   ▸ Advocacy
   ▸ Dissemination
   ▸ Monitoring and watchdog function

3. *Major constraints faced by CSOs in the MDG process.*
These mainly have to do with mandate and legitimacy issues:
- ‣ Governments tend to view CSOs as necessary evils in the mandatory consultation process, but do not take them seriously.
- ‣ CSOs also often lack an in-depth analysis of the situation and are often ill prepared for meetings, hence their contribution is ineffectual, and their credibility is damaged forever.
- ‣ Some CSOs tend to be too outspoken and their views are often treated as the views of opposition politics. They in themselves are viewed, and they at times behave as if they are a government in waiting. This often outlaws their participation in MDG processes.
- ‣ CSOs are perceived to represent the interests and agenda of donors, which may not be acceptable to the political authorities.

In addition:
- ‣ The inclusion of private sector and business associations in the configuration of civil society results not only in confusion but also serious conflict of interest.
- ‣ The tendency to homogenize civil society and treat it as a monolithic entity can be counterproductive for both governments and CSOs. CSOs differ in their strategies of engaging their mission and vision, depending on where they are placed. Advocacy groups, for example, would be best suited to be involved in the entire process, from planning to monitoring. Others that are technical experts in their areas of operation should be involved in programmatic ways. The latter group includes NGOs in service delivery.

4. *Specific role and expectations of UNDP*:
- ‣ Is perceived to have conflict resolution expertise, particularly when there is a conflict between governments and CSOs.
- ‣ UNDP is an apolitical and neutral player in development and as such has the muscle to remove potential conflict between CSOs and Governments.
- ‣ UNDP has the technical and capacity building expertise for both Government and CSO in development
- ‣ To an extent UNDP can mobilize financial and other resources towards development programmes

5. *Way Forward*
   It was agreed that a Southern Africa CSO experts meeting (composed of the CSOs that attended the Forum) should be held to map out how the partnerships will be built and or enhanced. As a further follow up an Africa Forum for CSOs role in MDG process will be held at a later stage. UNDP will liaise with the CSOs in organizing the Experts meeting.