

## **Summary report of the regional meetings of the Policy Forum on Development on EU programming**

Virtual meetings held July 17 and 23, 2020

The Policy Forum on Development (PFD), whose annual global meeting was cancelled last March, started its virtual activities with four regional meetings with the aim to prepare a global consultation on **programming** planned on 15 September. Dedicated thematic consultations on selected key priorities, including the green deal, digitalization, sustainable growth and jobs and inequalities in rebuilding better after the COVID crises may also take place in September-November.

The online virtual meetings brought together over 70 PFD members from Europe and the Neighbourhood, Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and Caribbean to discuss questions designed to feed into the ongoing programming exercise. Representatives of EEAS Global 5, NEAR A4, DEVCO A5, A6, C5, G3, F1 also attended and contributed. The objective of these regional sessions was to introduce the NDICI and the programming priorities and process and to listen to preliminary recommendations of PFD member civil society and local authorities.

After presentations and clarifications of the EU policy framework and priorities (Peter Frisch, EEAS Global 5) and the NDICI and programming (NEAR A4, DEVCO A5 and A6), the interactive discussions were organized around the following questions:

- What are the recommendations and key issues that you would incorporate in EU programming, including the most relevant thematic issues for your region?
- What aspects of EU priorities such as the economy that works for the people, green deal, digitalisation are especially relevant in moving forward and “rebuilding better”?
- How do you see the role of multi-stakeholder partnerships in addressing this increase in inequalities and further the priorities of the EU (share specific examples where possible)?

The consultation is still ongoing and written contributions can be sent until 24 August and will feed into the September global virtual meeting.

### **Key initial messages:**

1. Factor in COVID-19 into all priorities and support **inclusive and just transition processes** in the design of recovery plans. Wherever local government and civil society have been involved in tackling COVID-19, communities seem to have fared better, so the involvement of local authorities and civil society will be critical for recovery. Most participants consider the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as a relevant framework and the Territorial Approach to Local Development (TALD) as the way of localising national policies and reinforcing the commitment to subsidiarity implicit in the EU’s move towards “geographisation”.
2. While digitalisation or green deals matter, participants worry about the persistent lack the funds to provide **basic public services or build essential infrastructures**. Besides, most development assistance still goes to central governments, who do not always involve all stakeholders, so the EU should ensure that civil society is duly engaged in assessing priorities and following-up on their implementation. Similarly, the EU should engage in consultations with civil society and local authorities for programming, including via direct dialogue with LAs and national associations. In this regard, the use of the PFD could be a means to promote a multi-stakeholder approach at country level while still promoting the global agenda.
3. **Green Recovery**: biodiversity, climate change, human health and ecosystem health are all interlinked. It is important to consider how all programming is in line with “do no harm” principles - strong environmental and climate screenings to ensure no harm is done via other investments not targeting those priorities - especially in EFSD+ context. Pacific islands raised specific needs for climate change resilience and disease mitigation, noting their extreme vulnerability as island states. The environmental gains of the current situation should be integrated into the “new normal”. In the Asia and Pacific discussion the conflict over global recycling, notably around plastics waste, was highlighted. This is especially relevant as taxation on plastics is one proposed means of financing the COVID-19 response.

4. Promote **decent work and job creation** as a recovery strategy post COVID-19. Promote occupational and environmental health and safety. Support long term investments in health and social protection. Support universal social protection as a global priority that should be addressed by the EU, ensuring that it follows a rights based approach and that it covers both formal and informal workers, thus laying a social protection floor that appears indispensable in the current context of mobility and uncertainty.
5. **Digitalisation** (perhaps the mostly widely emphasised priority thus far; multiple responses and strong support)  
- digitalisation and ICT infrastructure development, including putting in place proper strategies. In light of COVID-19, digitalization is at the core of the future normal, as well as environmental and preventive health and hygiene. Digitalization is part of access to information and participation in decision making so it is strongly linked to all EC priorities.
6. **Migration Partnerships**. Notably among PFD members from Africa and Asia and the Pacific, migration and its challenges and opportunities were raised as a key priority. Migration should be seen as an opportunity instead of a threat and inform innovative policies that involve local authorities, which have a crucial but often underestimated role to play. In Asia, it was noted that the COVID-19 crisis has given way to positive experiences (amnesties, regularisations, etc.) that could serve as a model for the EU. However, the massive return of overseas workers has revealed the poor absorptive capacity of many countries. The poor living conditions and rising abuse of many migrants in Asia was also raised, with emphasis on the link to decent work and the need for migrants to be able to organise. South-south, intraregional and internal migration are all important aspects of the migration discussion.
7. The EU should strengthen the link between trade and investment and development priorities, while opening up its **methods of implementation** to multi-stakeholder cooperation, simplifying its procedures (calls for proposals) so as to lighten an administrative burden that does not take into due account the diversity of CSO actors and their capacities. The “policy first approach” is welcome but needs to involve actors other than central governments and promote a policy-mix that embraces complexity and promotes inclusion as a means to better grasp the multifaceted realities of developing countries. In this vein, Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs) are considered as a good practice of multi-stakeholder partnership and even as a means of supporting local authorities and civil society in its own right. Financial support to local government associations is increasing their capacity to support their members’ engagement in strategic dialogues with EUDs, in line with the EU-CS Roadmaps that are now being adapted to local governments and tested in a number of pilot countries.