



WORKING DOCUMENT

Creating a space for dialogue with Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities: The Policy Forum on Development

The present document proposes to set-up a *Policy Forum on Development* where Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Local Authorities (LAs) from the European Union and its partner countries would dialogue on issues linked to the follow-up of the Structured Dialogue, on the one hand, and on more global policy issues linked to the EC and international development agenda, on the other hand. Its objective is to gather comments and feedbacks from CSOs and LAs after consultations with their respective members and constituencies.

1. Background

Enhancing regular dialogue and consultations with Civil Society (CS) is one of the principles stated in the Lisbon Treaty, with a view to ensuring consistency and transparency of EU policies¹. In the Development field, the European Union has, during the last decade, promoted the comprehensive and progressive participation of Civil Society and, more recently, of Local Authorities in countries' development process and in broader political, social and economic dialogue.

The Cotonou Agreement (2000) was the first legal instrument recognising CSOs as key partners in the EU development cooperation². Over the years, the principles of "participation and dialogue" have been reinforced and extended to other geographic areas. The EC Communication on *Participation of Non-State Actors in EC Development Policy* (2002)³, the 2005 *European Consensus on Development*⁴ and the EC Communication *Local Authorities: Actors for Development* (2008)⁵, reiterate this commitment.

Further steps were taken with the Communication on *Increasing the impact of EU Development Policy: an Agenda for Change*⁶ (October 2011) and with the EU Common Position for the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness⁷ which took place in Busan in December 2011, with stronger commitment on democratic ownership and on an enabling environment for Civil Society and Local Authorities.

¹ TEU, Article 11: "The institutions shall, by appropriate means, give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action. The institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society. The European Commission shall carry out broad consultations with parties concerned in order to ensure that the Union's actions are coherent and transparent [...]".

² Article 4 of the Cotonou Agreement makes it obligatory to inform and consult with CSO on cooperation policies and strategy, and to involve them in political dialogue

³ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2002/com2002_0598en01.pdf

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/development/icenter/repository/european_consensus_2005_en.pdf

⁵ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0626:FIN:EN:PDF>

⁶ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0637:FIN:EN:PDF>

⁷ http://consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/126060.pdf

The outcome document of the High Level Forum recalls the crucial role CSOs and LAs play respectively in development effectiveness and in linking citizens and territories with central governments⁸.

The EU has been putting into practice these principles with partner countries in the implementation of development programmes through the European Development Fund (EDF), the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) and the European Neighbourhood Programme Instrument (ENPI)⁹.

Taking into account huge evolutions in the CSOs and LAs landscapes, notably the emergence of new type of actors beyond traditional NGOs on one side and the perception that a more strategic approach was needed to more effectively involve CSOs and LAs in EU development policies and programmes, the European Commission launched, in March 2010, the *Structured Dialogue (SD) for an efficient partnership in development*. This intensive consultation process ended in May 2011. It brought together more than 700 CSOs and LAs from all over the world and the EU Member States with participants from the European Parliament and the EU Delegations to reflect upon and define ways and means to improve the effectiveness of all actors involved in the EU development cooperation.

2. The Structured Dialogue and its follow-up

The Final Statement of the SD issued what is known as the *Budapest Declaration*¹⁰, which calls upon all parties to take forward, to the extent possible, the recommendations addressed to the different categories of actors. Those addressed to the EC concretely call upon the Commission to "improve the quality of engagement/dialogue processes at all governance levels (i.e. local, national, regional, global)". In Budapest, Commissioner Piebalgs reiterated the importance of enhancing dialogue at all levels, and suggested establishing a stable **space for dialogue in Brussels**, to allow for systematic debate with Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities.

DEVCO organised a first follow-up meeting with the stakeholders of the SD in November 2011. The meeting proposed the continuation of the dialogue at national, regional and international levels. It agreed to deepen discussion on issues¹¹ initiated during the SD process with a special focus on the country dimension in:

- Supporting the implementation of the SD recommendations by providing a room for regular update and peer review on all actors;
- Facilitating and further elaborating on the selected themes discussed during the SD process;

⁸ Art 22 & 21 http://www.aideffectiveness.org/busanhlf4/images/stories/hlf4/OUTCOME_DOCUMENT_FINAL_EN.pdf

⁹ As examples, the DCI (Art 14.1 c) seeks to "achieve more efficient cooperation, foster synergies and facilitate a structured dialogue between civil society, networks and local authorities' associations, within their organisation and with Community institutions" (Art 14.1 c), reflected in the 2007-2013 NSA/LA Programme. The ENPI legal instrument refers to "fostering the development of civil society and of non governmental organisations at national and regional (multi country) and cross-border levels" (Art 2 m and 6).

¹⁰ https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/aidco/images/f/fb/Joint_Final_Statement_May_2011.pdf

¹¹ Debates covered the promotion of an enabling environment for CS and LA, multi-stakeholder dialogues partnerships and complementarities between actors and instruments, the Territorial Approach and its articulation at the local level, the ownership and alignment principles and how they are reconciled with CSO and LA's right of initiative, division of labour/harmonisation among donors and multiple accountability.

- Promoting the exchange of information and experiences on the EU main policies and initiatives, as well as on-going institutional reforms in the countries and constraints to CSOs/LAs participation in development.

The dialogue would take place at three levels:

- Country level: process to be facilitated by the EU Delegations with the political and technical support from the EC Headquarters, through guidance tools, trainings, knowledge-sharing and progress monitoring.
- At regional /sub-regional level: stimulate and stocktaking. The regional dimension is important for taking into account existing regional initiatives, institutions and networks.
- At the EC Headquarters: take stock, learn and monitor the overall implementation of the SD and feed results into policy discussions on international cooperation and development.

3. Setting up a dialogue space at the EC Headquarters: the Policy Forum on Development

A Working Document entitled "*Towards a multi-level dialogue space*", introducing the idea of a "dialogue on policy issues, including high level discussions", was sent to participants ahead of the meeting of November 2011 to gather comments on the follow up of the SD. The proposal for a high level policy dialogue was well received and only confirmed the need to bring together, at the EC Headquarters level (Brussels), relevant stakeholders working on development and cooperation issues.

a. Goal and objectives of the Policy Forum on Development

The overarching goal of the Policy Forum on Development is to provide CSOs and LAs from the EU and partner countries with a space for multi-stakeholder dialogue at the EC Headquarters level, to ensure their effective consultation and contribution to the EU development policies and programmes.

Priority will be given to policy discussions relating to DEVCO's mandate, aligned to its Work Programme, including discussions in the preparation of High Level events. The Policy Forum should not overlap with existing institutional consultations, practices and bilateral discussions, where, among others, programmatic issues are being discussed.

The specific objectives are:

- (i) To enhance knowledge on crucial development issues at stake, including the EU development policies and programmes, through timely meetings;
- (ii) To take stock from initiatives relating to the implementation of the SD and reflexions emerging from national and regional levels;
- (iii) To improve mutual understanding and communication amongst relevant actors engaged in development.

b. Working modalities

- DEVCO is in charge of the overall organisation of the Forum; DEVCO Unit D2 will coordinate the secretariat and the smooth undertaking of planned activities;
- The Forum may involve high level meetings (two seminars/sessions per year at the level of Commissioner/Director General) and technical sessions;

- A yearly agenda will be agreed based on DEVCO Work Plan and calendar of international events; a call for ideas may be organised on a yearly basis;
- Working groups may be set up to prepare thematic discussions (to ensure active participation of members);
- No financial support is foreseen for participants besides refund of logistical costs;
- Active participation and commitment from all members are fundamental for such an initiative;
- The Forum should work in a flexible mode. After the first year of activities, working modalities may be revised.

c. Membership

The following criteria are to be considered as an evolving process. To allow the Policy Forum to become operational, an interim phase has been defined to consult, reflect and analyse the most adequate level of representation which, in the long term, should move from regional to global participation. This will not prevent the organisation of specific regional events recognising for example the specific advocacy role played by European platforms and networks.

Therefore regional representatives, the Ambassadors of the SD¹², will participate in the Forum, during the initial phase to ensure (i) a link with the ongoing SD at the country/regional levels and (ii) a feedback mechanism at those levels.

(I) Representative Regional Networks/Platforms:

- The Policy Forum on development should ensure a balanced representation by region and type of actor (where relevant) and avoid double representation.
- The type of actors currently identified include: (i) Development NGOs, (ii) Trade Unions, (iii) Cooperatives, (iv) Foundations and philanthropies, (v) Local Authorities, (vi) Chambers of Commerce, (vii) Human Rights Organisations, (viii) Relief/Humanitarian Organisations, (ix) Environment Organisations and (x) Youth Organisations;
- The Forum may open up to thematic participation when relevant and invite representatives from the academia, think tank or from the media;
- Ensure participation of all regions where EC cooperation programmes exist: European Neighbourhood Region, Africa, Asia and Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean;
- The Forum will consider participation from sub-regional networks of actors, if there is no issue of double representation;
- The membership of the Forum will be limited to a maximum number of participants (to be defined) to guarantee quality of debates and participation;

¹² During the SD process, participants to the regional seminars (Brussels, Bamako, Amman, Asuncion, New Delhi and Baku) designated their "Ambassadors" to represent them at each session and event of the SD process. The 32 Ambassadors took part to the first follow-up meeting of the SD in Brussels (November 2011)

- To allow transparency and rotation of members, the EC intends to launch a call for expression of interest every 2/3 years to select participating networks (starting in 2013);

(II) EU institutions:

- European Commission: according to the themes, DEVCO from Thematic and Geographic Directorates;
- European Parliament: according to the theme, Secretariats of Development, Foreign Affairs and Human Rights Committees;
- Council and Member States;

(III) Other EU services and bodies:

- European External Action Services (EEAS);
- European Economic and Social Committee (EESC);
- Committee of the Regions (CoR).

d. Next steps and road map for 2012 (tentative)

- 21 February : Draft working document to be sent to relevant CSOs and LAs
- 23 March : Deadline to receive comments from CSOs and LAs
- 31 March : Consolidated working document ready
- Mid-April : Interim-phase: Policy Forum meeting
- Oct/Nov : Interim-phase: meeting of the High Level Policy Forum on Development
- 1 October : Publication of the Call for Interest
- 1 December : Deadline for the submission of the Application
- January 2013 : Publication of selected organisations
- February : Formal setting up of the Policy Forum