NDICI-Global Europe - Thematic Programme on Civil Society Organisations
Mid-term Review
CSO consultation report
July 10, 2023 (online)

The session was chaired by the Unit for Local Authorities, Civil Society and Foundations of the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA G2), responsible for the overall management of the CSO Thematic Programme and the coordination of the mid-term review for the same programme. Other EU COM services in attendance were DG INTPA G3 (managing the *Development Education and Awareness Raising* component - DEAR) and DG NEAR A2, overseeing allocations for NEAR countries under the programme. In its introduction COM recalled that an invitation for the consultation, attaching a concept note and a meeting agenda, was sent early June.

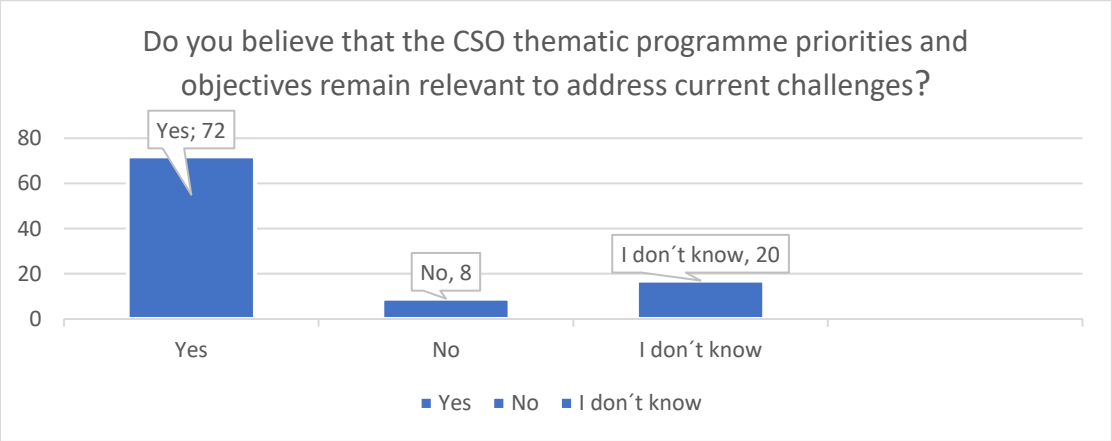
The first part of the meeting was dedicated to a presentation on the state of play of the CSO MIP, followed by a Q&A session. The second part was in the form of an open discussion around key topics proposed for the MTR exercise.

During the first part, participants commented positively on the flagship initiatives under the programme (new Financial Framework Partnership Agreements- FFPA, and EU System for Enabling Environment – EU SEE), however pointed at the reality of smaller CSOs and the difficulties they encounter when trying to access funding from the EU. The importance of the SDG localisation agenda was highlighted, and the need to better integrate this dimension in programme's activities. At local level there are often strong national actors that could support civil society development, but the work is usually "outsourced" to international NGOs. NGOs enquired about plans to deal with this aspect going forward. Observations were also made on the need for greater involvement of social partners at institutional level, including with EU Delegations, and for information on local level dialogue. CONCORD underlined the reportedly still modest ODA directly going to women organisations, despite EU willingness to do more. While examples of good practices were observed in several Delegations, CONCORD emphasized the need to maintain focus on women's rights organisations, feminists' organisations during the next period of implementation of the CSO programme.

COM replied that the CSO programme promotes an inclusive approach, targeting a broad base of CSOs in partner countries. The MIP has a strong focus on reaching out to youth, women and grassroots organisations and this objective is reflected in the guidance provided to EU Delegations. COM referred to the use of the flexibility allowed under the NDICI-Global Europe and Financial Regulation in the application of applicable procedures for small grants and to efforts to encourage sub-granting (financial support to third parties), particularly under local calls for proposals. It pointed at flagship initiatives such as EU SEE that were designed with the objective to strengthen capacities of local actors in partner countries to monitor and respond to situation of deteriorating or opening civil society space. COM adheres to the OECD-DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance of 2020 which has a strong focus on supporting local civil society. COM noted that EU CSO *country roadmaps* are among the tools to localize the EU strategy on CSO support.

Discussions during the second part of the meeting revolved around key questions proposed for the MTR exercise, concerning 1) The continued relevance of the programme's priorities and objectives, 2) The programme's contribution to the EU agenda on multilateralism and 3) The programme's contribution to the fight against inequalities. The discussion was opened by a short introduction by COM on how the programme currently supports these goals.

The first question was addressed by using Mentimeter. A large majority of participants considered that the objectives and priorities of the CSO thematic programme remain relevant to address current challenges.



In discussing the second question participants highlighted the need to:

- Partner with **Regional and Country** based CSO groups. There was a recognition of the importance to engage regional actors on specific issues relevant to multilateralism, and to l**ink** small localized CSOs with the work of local and regional governments;
- Maintain FFPA as key tools to strengthen CSOs´ capacity for evidence generation, advocacy, participation, and representation in multilateral processes.
- Provide long-term support to allow for a **wider range of CSOs to participate in multilateral processes**, in particular **feminist movements, women´s rights and youth-led** organisations from Low/Middle Income Countries, CSOs that represent oppressed groups.
- Support **local CSOs on a more strategic level over longer periods** (including core funding and organisational development), facilitating **CSOs´ access to multilateral advocacy spaces** alongside support for capacity building.
- Increase recognition and better integration of role **of CSOs in the attainment of SDGs**.

In discussing the third question, participants highlighted the need to:

- **Tackle power imbalances** that are at the centre of inequalities.
- Support and foster the **cooperation between CSOs and Local and Regional Governments**

- Promoting the collaboration between CSOs within and between countries and regions, as a key condition to increase influence over public policies and prevent risks of rising inequalities associated to the digital transformation and the green transition.
- Strengthen CSOs capacity to **research, advocate and litigate on digital rights** and issues related to digitalisation. Support CSOs and activists to develop and safely use digital tools, to protect themselves against surveillance, cyberbullying, disinformation, etc.
- Ensure the meaningful participation of CSOs in all their diversity including **marginalised groups and community-based organisations.**
- Provide more funding for grassroot organizations, with focus on **women, youth, indigenous people, and local communities**. Support should be flexible and to core activities of local CSOs to empower them to lead**.**
- Provide more opportunities for local grassroots organisations to work with LAs on local issues-supporting **decentralization process.**
- Some countries still consider language on "gender" as controversial, resulting in the exclusion of some CSOs from national authorities´ approvals necessary for the DEAR projects. EU shall **ensure the integration of a gender component in DEAR projects** by considering alternative support options for those CSOs.
- **Collect disaggregated data** to better monitoring progress made in addressing inequalities. Support partner countries with data collection.
- Provide more space for (inclusive) dialogue and exchange. More support to programmes addressing multilevel inequalities.

At the end of the meeting the floor was opened again for a **final round of general comments**. Some participants stressed that securing CSOs' **financial self-sustainability** can greatly contribute to the empowerment of civil society actors and to a more inclusive and more participatory society. It was also suggested that bringing different institutional representatives together would allow to make faster progress towards shared objectives, i.e., **environmental and social constituencies** together for the SDG and Agenda 2030. Moreover, emphasis was put on strengthening ownership and on the need for local actors to be encouraged to establish the kind of partnerships they consider relevant for the work they to do in their countries. It was observed that *roadmaps* are a powerful tool at country level that these should be made available for consultation. COM indicated that roadmaps can be consulted on the capacity for development website. Confidentiality of *roadmaps* is decided by EU Delegations if it is considered that the document contains information that could potentially hinder relations with the partner country.

Following the meeting, COM invited comments in writing by 21/07/2023. As a result, written contributions were received from the following organisations: CONCORD, DSW-IPPF, Hope and Homes for Children, Light for the World, SOLIDAR. Comments were noted, and it was considered that they relate to aspects already addressed under the programme or that can be addressed within the current CSO MIP. These comments will be further considered as part of the ongoing implementation and monitoring of the programme.