

# The Participation of Non-State Actors in EC Development Policy Background

## **Civil Society Participation: Added Value**

Civil society<sup>1</sup> organisations have a central role to play in European Union development cooperation policies. Civil society organisations can make an important contribution at all stages in the processes of humanitarian aid, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development cooperation. The 'added value' that such participation can bring is not only based on knowledge and experience, but also on their ability to bridge a critical 'gap' between strategic goals and their practical realisation.

## **EC - NGO Dialogue**

In November 2002, the European Commission (EC) released its long-awaited Communication<sup>2</sup> on the Participation of Non-State Actors in EC Development Policy. The Communication comes after a long reflection process between the EC, partner countries and NGOs. An Inter-Service NGO Task Force, including the EC and NGO representatives, was set up and led to the publication in January 2000 of a discussion paper entitled "The Commission and Non-Governmental Organisations: Building a Stronger Partnership", which signalled the start of a consultation process with the NGDO community.

However, the dialogue between the EC and NGOs was abruptly interrupted when the EC decided to suspend the funding of the Liaison Committee of NGOs (CLONG). After overcoming some difficulties, the dialogue was re-started by institutionalising twice a year meetings between the EC Commissioner Poul Nielson and representatives of the NGDO community. NGOs replied to the Commission's Discussion paper with a Reflection Document on the Role of Civil Society in the EU's Development Policy dated June 2002.

## **Aims of the EC Communication**

The Commission Communication aims to aid the implementation of the principles of ownership and participatory approaches in development strategies by taking stock of current practices concerning Non State Actors (NSAs) involvement in developing policies and by clarifying future expectations for their involvement in each stage of the process. The Communication provides an overview of NSAs current involvement by financing instrument and region and concludes that some € 1.4 billions out of the € 7 billions of EC yearly official development assistance (around 20 %) is being managed by or with NSAs. It recognises the Cotonou Agreement between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries as the most advanced example of legal enforcement of a participatory approach to development policy. It contains binding obligations to involve Non State Actors (NSAs) in each and every stage of the development policy dialogue. The analysis of cooperation instruments and practices in the different regions leads to the conclusion that the implementation of the principle of NSA participation in the development process will evolve over time, and that it will require experimentation, identification of best practices and institutional innovation. The Communication indicates nevertheless certain standards of NSA involvement in the development process, applicable to all EC development partner countries.

## **Translating the Rhetoric into Reality**

The challenge is how to translate laudable principles into operational dialogue structures and practical programming orientations, bearing in mind that the concept of "participatory development" implies a cultural revolution for most of EC partner countries. As stated in the Communication, the implementation of the principle of NSA participation in the development process will evolve over time, and will require identification of best practices; flexibility and institutional innovation.

The EC intends to follow-up this communication with two sets of documents addressed to EC Delegations: Delegations in non-ACP countries will get guidelines on NSA involvement in the development process (released); Delegations in ACP countries will get guidelines on implementing Cotonou Agreement provisions relating to NSA access to the European Development Fund<sup>3</sup>, complementing and developing the already existing "Programming guidelines N°6 – The new actors in the partnership".

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<sup>1</sup> 'Civil Society' regroups a wide range of organisation with four main characteristics: They are established voluntarily by citizens seeking to promote their values, concerns or identities; they are organised around the promotion of an issue or the interests of a particular section of society; they are autonomous from the state; they do not aim at optimising profits. Non-State Actors encompass both civil society organisations and the private sector.

<sup>2</sup> 'Communication': a Commission legislative proposal

<sup>3</sup> The European Development Fund covers co-operation with ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) countries under the Cotonou Agreement. The EDF is funded directly from Member States' contributions, which are voluntary and is a separate fund from the Community Budget.

### Key Issues:

- ❖ Definitions of 'civil society' and 'non-state actors'
- ❖ Recognition of the diversity of civil society
- ❖ Role of Non-Governmental Organisations (advocators, awareness/consciousness builders, capacity builders, providers of specialist knowledge, consultants and alliance builders, monitors, service providers?)
- ❖ Relationship between Northern and Southern NGOs in terms of ownership and partnership
- ❖ Lack of knowledge and understanding between Accession Countries and the South
- ❖ Flexibility regarding a country-by-country approach
- ❖ Bureaucratic and inflexible procedures and approaches to funding
- ❖ Transparency, clear documentation and timely dissemination of information
- ❖ Civil society involvement in agenda-setting, indicator identification, monitoring and impact analysis
- ❖ Effect of deconcentration, decentralisation and rationalisation of budget lines on operational follow-up and implementation of the communication
- ❖ Mainstreaming participation of Southern NSAs in all EC Cooperation Agreements and Programmes (ALA, MEDA, TACIS, CARDS etc.)

### References:

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2. Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament – The European Community's Development Policy (November 2000)  
[http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/cnc/2000/com2000\\_0212en01.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/cnc/2000/com2000_0212en01.pdf)
3. European Commission White Paper on Governance (July 2001)  
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4. Joint European NGDO Reflection Document: The Role of Civil Society in the EU's Development Policy (May 2002)
5. Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee - Participation of non-state actors in EC development policy/\* COM/2002/0598  
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6. Joint European NGDO Position Paper: EC Communication to the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee on "Participation of Non-State Actors in EC Development Policy" (February 2003)
7. Committee on Development and Cooperation - Draft Report on the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee on participation of nonstate actors in EC development policy (COM(2002) 598 - C5-0625/2002 - 2002/2283(INI)) - Rapporteur: Richard Howitt  
<http://www.europarl.eu.int/meetdocs/committees/deve/20030611/496881en.pdf>
8. Guidelines on Principles and Best Practices for the Participation of Non-state Actors in the development dialogues and consultations (April 2003)
9. CONCORD Discussion paper: Guidelines on principles and best practices for the participation of NSA in the development dialogues and consultation (June 2003)

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