



THE EU AND CIVIL SOCIETY:  
**WHERE DO  
WE GO FROM  
HERE?**

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**CIDSE North-South  
Development Forum**  
**7-8 May 2012**



# Introduction

GEORGE OSEI-BIMPEH (SEND-GHANA)  
ON EU-CIVIL SOCIETY RELATIONS



CIDSE organises a North-South Development Forum at regular intervals to discuss the future of European Union (EU) development cooperation. After Tanzania (2007) and Brussels (2010), the 2012 Forum in Brussels posed the timely question 'Where do we go from here?'. Negotiations on the 2014-20 EU budget are ongoing, while a European Commission (EC) Communication on Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Development is upcoming later this year.

As an international alliance of 16 Catholic development agencies, working with partners in nearly 100 countries worldwide, CIDSE aims to look ahead in such dialogues. As highlighted in the Forum's opening session by René Grotenhuis, Director of Cordaid (Netherlands) the world is changing: emerging economies have increasing confidence, and new actors including social entrepreneurs are changing the face of cooperation. With financial, food and climate crises seriously challenging development efforts, and global governance uncertain, the development agenda has expanded to common goods and inequality across countries. CSOs are increasingly agents of change, both via service delivery and empowerment to demand accountability, and by influencing policies. The future of government-CSO cooperation will prioritise partnership relations, North-South multi-actor cooperation, and civic-driven change strategies.

Previous North-South Forums have shown that providing space for discussion and exchange with major actors like the EU can contribute to positive achievements, such as the recognition of CSOs as development actors, and greater flexibility of cooperation mechanisms in recent years. Also, the EU is proposing to increase external action funding by 20% in its new long term budget. While these signs presage well, they don't go unchallenged.

Some EU Member States challenge budget increases or aim for greater 'value for money', exiting certain middle-income countries in spite of significant poverty and inequality there, and using public funds to mobilise more private investment in the pursuit of growth, though this has not always benefited poor and marginalised communities.

New EC funding instruments will have implications for CSOs in developing countries and for the way CIDSE members work with them. The 2012 Forum therefore provided the right opportunity to review and discuss cooperation mechanisms, within the CIDSE family together with Southern partners, as well as with EU representatives, in order to strengthen partnership.



# Civil society: role and space

CIDSE member and partner organisations believe the EU should help to guarantee a meaningful role and space for civil society in development across the world, including through improved consultation and capacity development.

While excessive bureaucracy should be avoided, dialogue with CSOs must be institutionalized and the consultation process should take place at local, regional and national levels. Selection criteria for participation in consultations are needed, as well as guidelines on their modalities. Decisions about who has a place at the table should be based upon a political mapping of local CSOs, and not left to arbitrary decisions.

The EC should realise that online consultations are often problematic for southern CSOs: Internet access is not available everywhere and is costly. According to the experience in countries such as Thailand, more time should be foreseen to respond to consultations, in which deadlines are often too tight for local organisations. EU delegations in developing countries need to be given a greater mandate in conducting consultations with local CSOs as they have, in principle, more access to them and a better knowledge of the local context. International NGOs (INGOs) and networks like CIDSE have a role to play in reaching out to community-based organisations, facilitating their access to information. This role should be recognised by the EC.

Capacity development is needed for CSOs, especially those at grassroots level, to enable them to translate their day-to-day work into input in political processes. In this respect, forum participants welcome the EC proposal to reform re-granting modalities. EU delegations also need to be informed about and trained on existing tools that can help to identify local CSOs and foster dialogue with them. Positive initiatives such as the Mesodialogue in Guatemala (government, CSOs, EU delegation) and the EC tool for mapping local CSOs should be shared.

The EU envisages a greater role in monitoring government action for CSOs who draw their legitimacy to hold their governments to account from their support to the poorest and most marginalised communities. Civil society often plays a complementary role to governments in terms of service delivery.

## Recommendation

**Consultations with civil society should not be used as a tick-box exercise to legitimise EU policies. A genuine and inclusive political dialogue is needed that enables CSOs' views to be reflected both in policy formulation and implementation.**

*"The EU has been extremely shy so far on restrictions of public space in Africa."*

Thijs Berman, MEP

## Words from our partners: SEND-Ghana

"With EU funding we are promoting citizen participation in the decentralization process, enhancing grassroots activism and providing a platform for citizens-government engagement in which ordinary citizens are demanding accountability and transparency regarding the delivery of public services. If EU funding processes would be more flexible, Southern NGOs could pursue innovative ideas and increase their impact."

The work of SEND-GHANA aims at establishing effective participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) networks at the district, regional and national levels; monitoring pro-poor health, the District Assembly Common Fund, Local Revenue Utilisation and education programmes; and monitoring impact of trade and agricultural policies and programmes on women and small-scale producers. SEND also works to promote development effectiveness.

[www.sendwestafrica.org](http://www.sendwestafrica.org)



# Working with local authorities and the private sector

NORAYDA PONCE SOSA  
(CONGOOP GUATEMALA)  
ON EU-CIVIL SOCIETY RELATIONS



Experiences of CIDSE member and partner organisations in working with local authorities vary significantly between continents, and even between countries and regions. While there are examples of CSOs actively engaging local authorities to counter poverty and social exclusion, for example in Armenia and Ghana, many organisations feel that rigid procedures and dynamics in local authorities limit potential collaboration.

Electoral turnover also proves to be a stumbling block for the continuity of collaboration, as after each election building trust between CSOs and newly elected representatives starts from scratch. Also, in some countries there is a very complex power balance between different actors involved and a need to distinguish, for example, between officials appointed by the central government and those elected by the communities.

Working with the private sector requires an ethical reflection from CSOs who have to carefully assess how this influences their value based policy work. In India, many companies engage in philanthropic activities and small and medium-sized enterprises, with little resources and understanding of development work, are particularly open to a dialogue with civil society to inform their charitable work.

The private sector is increasingly involved in development, and this calls for efforts by companies and CSOs to understand each other and cooperate where possible. For example, in Rwanda, the private sector receives subsidies to supply medicines to the population.

There are however also strong concerns about the role of the private sector in development. In Guatemala, for example, the private sector is so powerful that there is an increasing risk that it will dominate not only the government and the economy, but also development work. CSOs and the private sector must therefore clearly define what kind of development is aimed for when they join hands.

In Haiti, there is active cooperation between CSOs, farmer and women's associations, government authorities, and private schools to supply schoolchildren with nutritious, locally-produced snacks. Many of the world's poorest people, like small food producers, are part of the private sector. Their role at the heart of sustainable development must be recognised.

## { Recommendation

**The term local authority must be further defined, including an open discussion on traditional authorities and their role of authority in specific contexts.**



## { Recommendation

**The EU should support the establishment of fair market mechanisms, which ensure that small and micro enterprises can fairly compete.**



# Capacity development

In the past, capacity building was a unilateral exercise, transferring knowledge from North to South. Nowadays, local actors are developing links with peer organisations in their region to learn from South-South cooperation experiences. In this new context, the role for international NGOs is to facilitate strategic alliances, offering the space for peer agencies to meet or exchange visits. For example, this has been done with organisations from India, Bangladesh and Nepal in an interregional exchange.

From a donor perspective, there is a tendency to encourage a single interlocutor, like networks or platforms, both in the North and in the South, in order to facilitate communication. For many local CSOs, networks have enabled them to join and learn from interregional activities, such as lobbying and advocacy work. However, in developing countries, networks face substantial economic, social and political challenges. Capacity is more limited and resources are scarcer.

Institutional capacity development will help local organisations to identify capacity gaps and adopt strategies suited to their own context. In El Salvador, CSOs have trained farmers in climate-resilient practices such as the use of indigenous maize, and are now fostering learning between eco-communities, producing local economic opportunities to avoid migration.

Both traditional capacity development methods, such as training, and non-conventional instruments and processes, such as promotion of partnerships, will help local CSOs to decide on their own funding strategy formulation, absorption capacity, and implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes. Capacity development should promote local advocacy and lobbying so that local organisations can contribute to the local agenda, as well as monitoring government policies and public expenditures.

Addressing the organisational shortcomings of local CSOs will facilitate the understanding of policy processes in their specific context, giving them the ability to influence policy making. CIDSE members and partner organisations believe that local CSOs can address constraints in three ways: identifying their own needs on organisational capacity development, getting access to the latest information and analysis on policy processes, especially those referring to their local context, and overcoming a lack of donor harmonisation by building their own strategic planning and vision.

## Recommendation

**The EU should stimulate knowledge management by facilitating translation and common criteria so that, for example, an organisation in Latin America can refer to best practices in Africa to support its work, and vice versa.**

## Recommendation

**The EU should support the strengthening of local expertise by lowering the barriers so that knowledge is accessible to all CSOs, including small organisations.**

## Words from our partners: CONGOOP Guatemala

“The challenge is to make sure that EU funding reaches the poorest communities in rural areas. EU relations with civil society and co-financing modalities should be shaped accordingly.”

CONGOOP is a network which seeks to contribute to decent living conditions in the Guatemalan countryside through critical and proactive research to support the popular movement, indigenous populations and peasants for political action.  
[www.concoop.org.gt](http://www.concoop.org.gt)

*“Civil society draws its legitimacy from its ability to reach the poorest and most marginalised people.”*

Safia Abdi Dima, Programme Officer at Cordaid Kenya



# Climate finance

Addressing the cross-cutting challenge of climate change requires understanding of local realities, and political discussion on the right responses. Given that in countries like Ghana, government ministries trade views over which is responsible for climate action, support for coordination across ministries is needed.

From the experience of countries like Kenya, the process of developing Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) and National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) is intensive, and there is no easy blueprint. Participation of civil society, including via climate networks, is essential to inform analysis of local needs and appropriate strategies. For example, promotion of biofuels has in some cases led to land grabbing, harming the livelihoods of the poorest.

Governments should be the central actor in addressing climate change, yet even where climate policies are in place, such as in Ethiopia, implementation is weak, due inter alia to a lack of funds being directed to this purpose. In parallel, civil society is now effectively carrying out climate programmes, such as the Humberto farmers' forest project in Ethiopia.

While the relative priority given to mitigation and adaptation is specific to each country, governments and the private sector often favour mitigation. Thus a balance with adaptation is needed, as is accessibility of public funds including small grants for civil society, whose pilot projects' promising approaches can be scaled up. Regarding private sector involvement, social and environmental safeguards must be in place to ensure profitability is not the only driver.

Climate finance should address loss of livelihoods, including for climate refugees such as those in the Pacific island states, e.g. through social protection measures or crop insurances. Preventive measures include disaster risk reduction and tax incentives for renewable energy investments. Sustainable energy initiatives should consider factors including energy affordability, reliable access and decentralized infrastructure, and locally appropriate technologies. Finally, experience in countries such as El Salvador demonstrates the need to support popular education on energy efficiency and low-carbon lifestyle choices, including eating habits.

## Recommendation

**EU climate finance should set conditions to bring together the parallel efforts of government and civil society, for example requiring cooperating partners at local level. Civil society must be involved early on in defining criteria for allocation.**

## Recommendation

**The EU should make a significant financial contribution to the new UNFCCC Green Climate Fund, and advocate along the above lines on governance and allocation criteria.**

## Dialogue with Klaus Rudischhauser, European Commission, DG Development Cooperation

**Klaus Rudischhauser**, Director for Quality & Impact, explained the EC's new 'Agenda for Change.' However, he underlined that EU governments may not agree to the ambitious EC proposal to increase the development budget, asking how CSOs could help secure this support.

**Bernd Nilles**, CIDSE Secretary General, replied that while CIDSE and its members mobilise their constituencies in support of development finance, preconditions are serious dialogue with CSOs and consideration for their concerns regarding EU policies, e.g. on access to raw materials.

# Debate: where do we go from here?

To conclude the two-day CIDSE Forum, 150 people joined a public debate about the changing political and institutional context of EU development cooperation and how this impacts the relationship between the EU and CSOs.

**Kristian Schmidt**, Director of Human and Society Development at the EC's Development and Cooperation Directorate General - EuropeAid, opened asserting that the EC is looking to increase space for civil society and work towards a more strategic partnership, vital to meet the human rights and governance objectives of its new 'Agenda for Change'. These plans will be reflected in an upcoming EC Communication on CSOs in Development.

**Chris Bain**, Director of CAFOD (England and Wales) and CIDSE President, said that the test for the changes envisaged by the EC will be their implementation on the ground, through meaningful consultation and participation. The EC should also recognise the importance of partnership between Northern and Southern CSOs, via exchange, facilitation and capacity building, which has received too little attention so far. He also urged the EC to look beyond GDP growth and to focus on concepts such as human well-being.

**Safia Abdi Dima**, of Cordaid Kenya, stressed that the legitimacy for political engagement and monitoring of government actions by Southern grassroots organisations derives from the services they deliver to the poorest and most marginalised people, who governments often fail to reach. These concrete projects must continue to receive sufficient attention, while the EC should also build the capacity of Southern CSOs to hold their governments accountable and create the necessary space to be able to do so.

**Thijs Berman**, Member of the European Parliament, emphasised that elected Parliaments also need to build capacity to fulfil their primary role of holding governments accountable, while CSOs need space to serve vulnerable populations and advocate for policies in their interests, beyond those only of elites. In his view, the EU is doing too little on both accounts.

The panellists also discussed the role of local authorities and the private sector in development, including the need for increased company revenue transparency. Click on the video on this page for highlights from the debate.

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DEBATE



## Words from our partners: Concern Universal, Bangladesh

"It is quite a challenge for small organisations to fulfil the strict EU co-financing procedures. In order not to exclude small but committed organisations, which work closely with local communities, financial thresholds must be lowered."

Concern Universal supports initiatives that improve the daily lives of the poorest people, promoting innovative, low-cost, locally-controlled solutions that bring clean water and adequate sanitation and providing opportunities, such as credit, that enable people to grow or buy the food that they need to support themselves and their families, and live with dignity. Concern Universal Bangladesh works through 80 local partner NGOs in Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India and Nepal.  
[www.concern-universal.org.bd](http://www.concern-universal.org.bd) - [www.concern-universal.org](http://www.concern-universal.org)

# Conclusion

The 2012 CIDSE North-South Development Forum proved to be an excellent and timely opportunity to discuss the changing context of EU development cooperation in view of the 2014-20 EU budget, and to contribute to the upcoming EC Communication on CSOs in Development.

Members of the Forum's Steering Group - CAFOD, Cordaid, SCIAF, Trócaire and Caritas International Belgium - guided and actively contributed to the successful organisation of the event. The CIDSE Secretariat team helped to facilitate and capture the rich exchanges on future directions for North-South partnerships.

During the Forum, participants worked to address many urgent questions on the sides of both the EU and CIDSE member and partner organisations. The Forum unpacked definitions which were long taken for granted, and shed light on the complexity surrounding shifts in power relations in development between states, parliaments, local authorities, the private sector and civil society.

The EU has clearly developed a more political understanding of civil society and how the latter can contribute to reaching governance and accountability objectives. The question is now how the EU's intentions will be translated into concrete action with positive impacts on the ground, and what role CIDSE member and partner organisations can play to help make this happen.



## CIDSE members



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