

EU DELEGATIONS' ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS ON GEOGRAPHIC PROGRAMMING 2014-2020

6 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A MORE STRUCTURED DIALOGUE BETWEEN EU DELEGATIONS AND CSOs:

- Reach out to more CSOs;
- Build capacity, provide relevant information and guide them so all CSOs can speak up and be heard;
- Give CSOs time to prepare and coordinate themselves by sharing (annual) planning documents and announcing consultations more in advance;
- Interact more regularly. Make a follow up a part of the dialogue process in order to come to a truly structured dialogue;
- Be flexible with issues to be discussed. Take on board issues that are outside of the direct scope of EU funded projects;
- Further build the capacity and means of EU Delegations to engage with CSOs.

INSTITUTIONAL PROCESS

In May 2012 the European Union (EU) started the programming process of its development cooperation assistance under the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for the period 2014-2020, including the 11th European Development Fund (EDF). The objective of the geographic programming process is to identify future areas of (geographic) cooperation in each covered country or region for the next 7 years in consultation with national governments, either aligned to National Development Plans or where needed based on separately established Country Strategy Papers. Subsequently, Multi-annual Indicative Programmes for geographic cooperation are elaborated.

Hence, this programming exercise was divided into 2 phases: a first one during which each EU Delegation had to identify three priority sectors for 2014-2020; that phase started in May 2012 and ended in May 2013. A second phase, during which EU Delegations are expected to develop a Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP), detailing the EU support for the three chosen priority sectors, started at the end of May/early June 2013 and is to be completed before the end of October 2013.

For the first time, there is a unified approach to programming for all Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) and EDF countries. However, the country programming has not started in those 19 DCI countries that are proposed to graduate from bilateral EU aid.¹ 40 other countries are subject to joint programming of EU institutions and Member States, including conducting a joint assessment, defining a common EU response and agreeing on a division of labour.²

As part of the programming process, EU Delegations were required to consult Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). Seeing this as a great opportunity for CSOs to have a say in the implementation of EU development aid, CONCORD shared with its members a briefing package to explain the whole programming process in June 2012, together with a template letter for CSOs to send to their EU Delegation to request a consultation.

¹ 19 countries might graduate from bilateral EU aid according to the Commission's differentiation criteria: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Kazakhstan, Iran, Malaysia, Maldives, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Thailand, Venezuela, Uruguay, India and Indonesia.

² https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/aidco/images/a/a6/%289%29_Session_1_State_of_Programming_MK_FC_1806.pdf

CONCORD'S PROGRAMMING SURVEY: METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVE

At the end of phase 1 of the programming process, CONCORD launched a survey to assess whether and how CSOs had been consulted. The objective was to draw lessons from this assessment and formulate recommendations to try to influence and improve CSO consultations in the second programming phase as well as in other future processes and new channels for EU Delegations' engagement with CSOs such as CSO roadmaps, Policy Coherence for Development commitments and Human rights and democracy focal points in Delegations.

The survey included a total number of 21 questions, available both in English, Spanish and French, asking respondents as much about their knowledge of the process as their assessment thereof and the potential for engagement with EU delegations. The survey was prepared across a wide area of CONCORD working groups, therefore mobilising wide support and participation by CONCORD's constituency. In addition, CONCORD organised a webinar on the programming process for its members and for members of members, providing all relevant information for further dissemination to partners and country offices in partner countries.

A total of 138 valid answers were received from respondents spread over 58 different non-EU countries from 4 different regions, yet with certain respondents leaving certain questions unanswered. There is a balance of DCI and EDF countries answering (27 DCI countries and 26 EDF countries). DCI countries had 63 different actors replying, while EDF countries had 44 different actors replying³. 11 different actors answered from 7 European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) countries. Additional answers came from regional organisations from the Caribbean or Latin America. 24 countries (36.4%) among those countries from where answers were received are classified as politically or economically fragile (OECD 2013). Least Developed Countries (LDCs) accounted for 38% of countries responding, Low Middle income countries for 27.3%, Upper Middle Income Countries accounted for 16.7% and Low Income Countries for 6.1% of responding countries.

With regard to the distribution among local NGOs, national affiliates of international families, local representations of INGOs and networks and other actors, the majority of answers were given by local NGOs (31.9%), followed by local offices of and INGOs (24.6%), national affiliates of NGO families represented 22.5% of answers provided. Nearly 16% of answers came from CSO networks, federations or the like. The remaining 5.1% of answers were provided by trade unions, business associations, a provincial council and dialogue platforms, which explicitly describe themselves NOT as networks.

While these responses do not allow us to draw country-by-country conclusions, they bring forth some positive and negative examples and trends from which we can draw a number of key recommendations which we hope EU Delegations will take into account in phase 2 of the programming process as well as in other future processes. Especially since CONCORD already iterated several of these recommendations on various occasions in the past, such as in the [CONCORD paper 'Bottlenecks to a meaningful participation of civil society in EU development policy and aid processes'](#), the [CONCORD Principles Paper for the Quadriologue process](#), [CONCORD's EU Delegation Watch report](#) and several of the CONCORD briefing papers that were prepared for ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly meetings.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY

First, in the box below, we would like to highlight a few good examples where the EU Delegations should be praised for good efforts or practices in organizing CSO consultations, more specifically in India,

³ Consultation of civil society is an obligation since 2000 as provided for by the Cotonou Agreement.

Senegal, Armenia, Fiji and El Salvador, some of which have taken place within the scope of the programming process, others beyond.

Several respondents from different countries highlight that the consultation included broad and active participation; hereunder for example that EU Delegations consulted local NGOs as well as INGOs and other stakeholders and consulted CSOs from across the country.

India – while potentially no longer eligible for bilateral EU aid - provides a good example of EU Delegation’s engagement with CSOs, where one respondent commended the EU Delegation for adopting an inclusive approach including small and medium sized organizations based outside of the capital in the consultation, which is not easy in such a vast and diverse country.

In **Senegal** the EU Delegation was congratulated for launching a thematic mapping process which started to consult local organisations on the priority sectors chosen, even if those are seen as mostly defined by the EU.

Armenia provides another good example where one respondent highlights that consultation with the EU delegation was well organized and that CSOs themselves were able to conduct seminars on the programming process with participation of 60 CSOs.

Fiji also provides a good example, where one respondent highlights focused group discussions to identify and discuss priority areas.

In **El Salvador** the EU Delegation is reported to maintain a permanent dialogue with other stakeholders including civil society, the government, and other cooperation agencies (embassies) as part of a follow-up to the Structured Dialogue. Indeed, the first consultation was held upon agreement and joint organisation by the EU Delegation and both local and international civil society platforms.

However, in still too many cases CSOs regret not having reached yet such a fruitful dialogue with their respective EU Delegations. There are several reasons for this, which can be efficiently tackled to the benefit of both actors. In general, CSOs highlight the following areas where improvement is needed:

FINDING 1: INCLUSIVENESS

Many respondents could not be part of the process due to a lack of information. Some CSOs had the feeling that EU Delegations often relied on existing partners, and thus did not involve potentially new partners or organisations that have not yet worked with the EU. In other countries, where territories are divided along ethnic or other social lines, it is absolutely indispensable to include voices from all spectra of civil society, including those from rural areas that are not represented in capital cities.

- **In order to ensure maximum and meaningful participation of CSOs, the EU Delegations must make sure to address the various bottlenecks⁴ that could prevent CSOs from participating in the process, thereby allowing for the consultation process to be broadly recognised by all actors.**

FINDING 2: CAPACITY-BUILDING

From the survey, we learnt that in many cases CSOs were not well-informed about or even aware of the programming process. Less than half of the respondents indicated they heard about the programming process via the EU Delegation. There is a clear difference between the knowledge and capacity of different civil society actors, given the difference in size, location, previous experience in working with

⁴ CONCORD (June 2010). *Bottlenecks to a meaningful participation of civil society in EU development policy and aid processes*, pages 1-5.

the EU, human and financial resources, technological skills, etc. Yet all of them should be able to speak up and be heard.

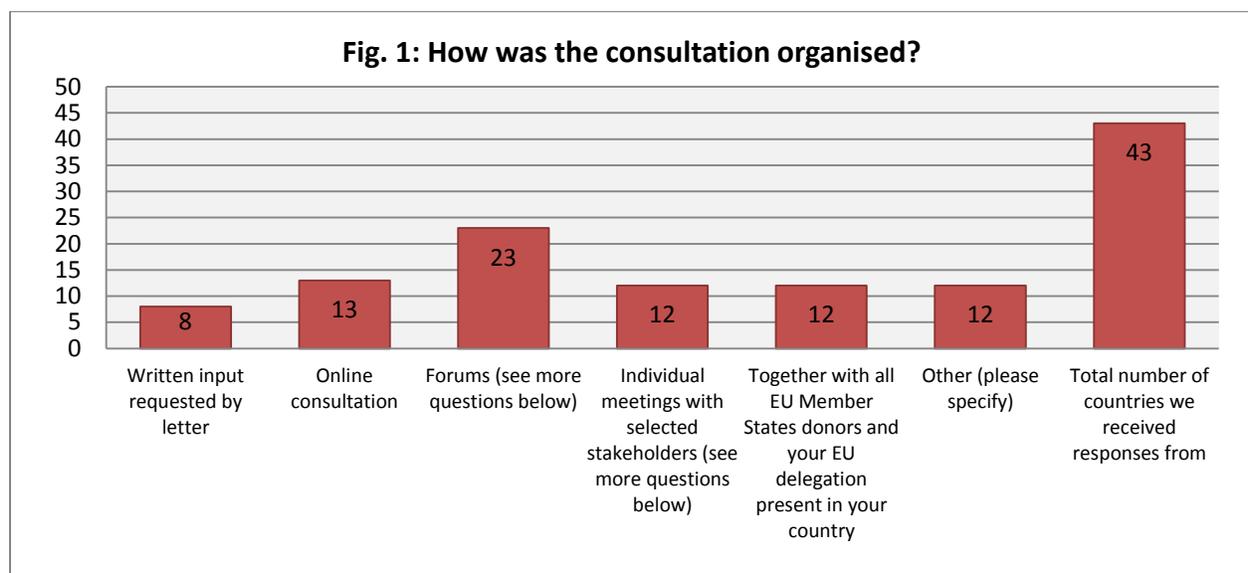
- **A truly inclusive participation should pick up the participants from where they are.**⁵

FINDING 3: PREPARATION TIME

Almost every consulted CSO is eager to receive much more information and much earlier, be it to organise the logistical details of its participation, to properly reflect on the topics to be discussed, or in the case of platforms to consult their constituency.

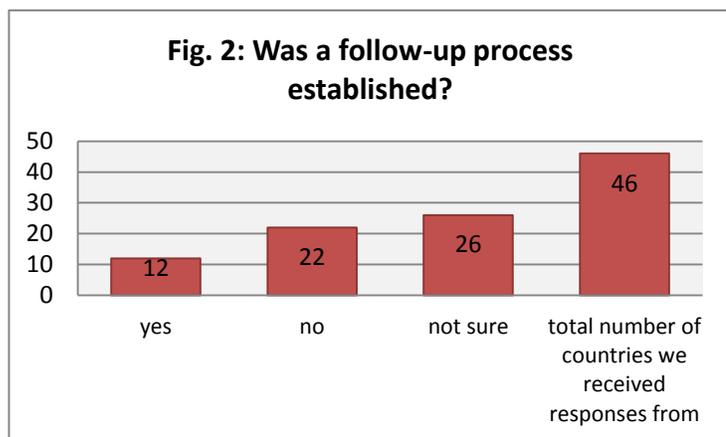
- **EU Delegations should give more time and information to CSOs ahead of consultations, for them to better prepare themselves.**⁶

FINDING 4: QUALITY DIALOGUE



The tool most often used by the delegations was to invite for discussion fora (in 23 countries out of 43 answering to the question). Online consultations were also used frequently (13 reported cases), so were individual meetings with selected stakeholders (12 cases).

Indeed, CSOs were putting much energy in responding to EU Delegations’ consultations, but often had the feeling that dialogue is only happening in one direction. Follow-up was either rarely happening or not communicated, which limits the usefulness of the consultation



⁵ CONCORD (June 2010). *Bottlenecks to a meaningful participation of civil society in EU development policy and aid processes*, pages 6-7.

⁶ *Ibid*, pages 2-4.

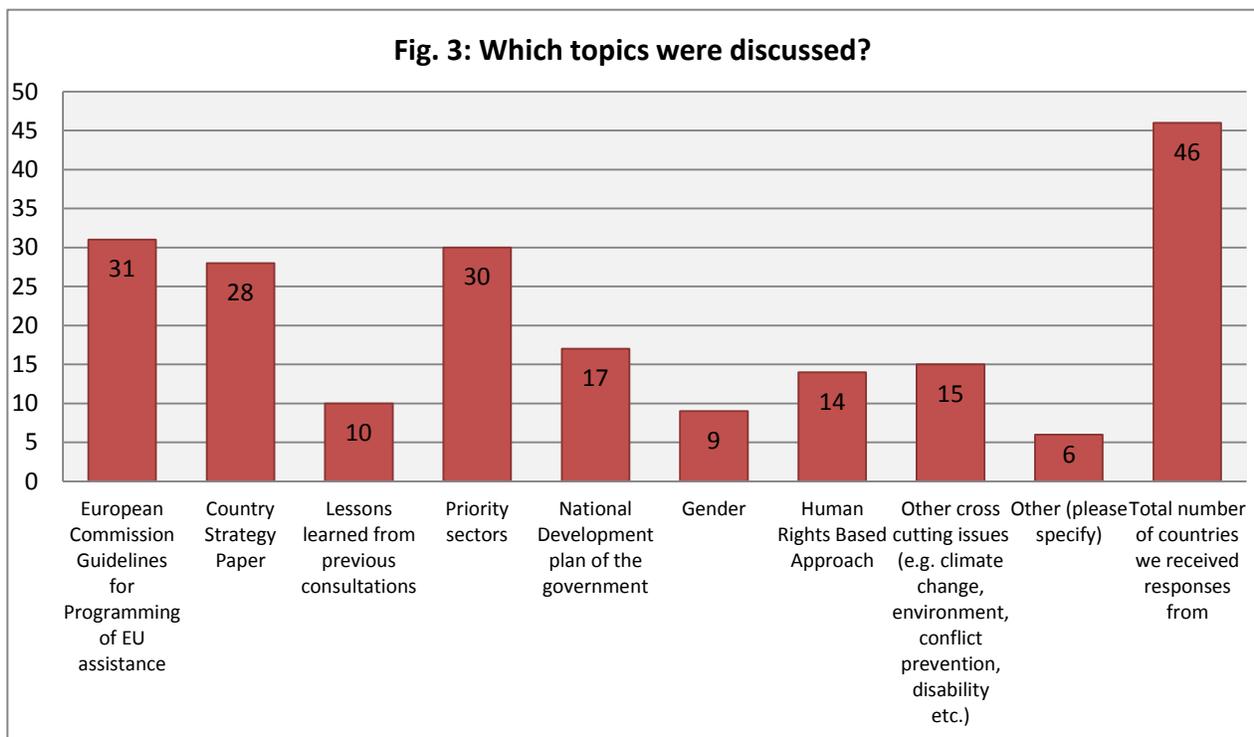
exercise itself (see figure 2) and its potential to help build a more structured dialogue with CSOs generally.

- **To make sure that there is an in-depth and coherent dialogue, several meetings should be organised all along the programming process.**

FINDING 5: TOPICS OF THE DISCUSSIONS

Figure 3 shows which topics were mainly discussed in the consultations that took place during the 1st phase of the programming process. Answers to related questions were received from 46 countries. The evidence from the survey indicates that in two thirds of the cases, the consultations dealt with the planned issues, namely to explain the programming process to civil society, to discuss priority sectors for future cooperation and country strategy papers. In only 17 cases the National Development Plan of the country was discussed, raising concerns about the alignment of priority sectors chosen with national development strategies and thus about country ownership.

The Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) to development had space in still nearly 1/3 of all discussions in countries from where answers were received. More generally, when asked which other issues respondents have already discussed with EU Delegations, some indicate the need for a space to discuss topics outside those made mandatory by the framework of EU funded projects.



FINDING 6: CAPACITY-BUILDING OF EUDS

From all the above, it becomes clear that there is an urgent need to further build the capacity of EU Delegations on how to structurally engage with all kinds of CSOs. Likewise, the survey suggests a need to build capacity among a broad range of CSOs ourselves to engage in a structured dialogue with EUDs.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

EU DELEGATIONS SHOULD REACH OUT TO MORE CSOs

Several tools could be used for this: the dissemination of information could be better strategised, using a combination of electronic and physical means of communication. For example, CSOs suggest the use of public calls or advertisement on the EU Delegations' websites, while physical information sessions and dissemination workshops across the country are also key to reach out to local CSOs ahead of the consultation process.⁷ The use of new media and information and communication technologies can have a multiplier effect when combined with trainings for CSOs to fully use the potential of these techniques. It could be used for example to launch or deepen discussions through online forums, thus facilitating the participation of CSOs that are not based in capital cities.

A complementary solution to make sure that nobody is left behind is to systematically get involved with CSO networks or platforms when existing, as these are in a good position to reach out to grassroots organisations.

BUILD CAPACITY, PROVIDE RELEVANT INFORMATION AND GUIDE THEM SO ALL CSOs CAN SPEAK UP AND BE HEARD

This should influence the way consultations are organized. Consultations must bring together all stakeholders and decision-makers around one table, thus enabling CSOs to participate on an equal basis with other actors and improving their visibility and recognition. This can happen from the beginning of the consultation process in the countries where CSOs of very different kinds are used to speak with one voice within multi-stakeholder platforms. However, separate meetings should first be organised for the many cases where local CSOs can have difficulties to voice their concerns on sensitive topics or among stakeholders from various backgrounds and purposes. This is particularly true for CSOs that are faced with the EU wording and technicalities for the first time.

A case-by-case approach is needed to respect a principle of equality between the various stakeholders and make sure that each is enjoying the same freedom of speech. Such an approach must be backed up by the necessary human and financial resources.

The CSO-roadmap initiative is a key opportunity in this regard, as it has the potential to help many CSOs work for development side by side with EU Delegations.

GIVE CSOs TIME TO PREPARE AND COORDINATE THEMSELVES BY SHARING (ANNUAL) PLANNING DOCUMENTS AND ANNOUNCING CONSULTATIONS MORE IN ADVANCE

A minimum period of two weeks should be respected ahead of each concrete deadline: invitation to physical meetings, request to provide written input on specific topics, etc. Written materials should be broadly shared ahead of each meeting, in order for CSOs to prepare more relevant input which are to be better taken into account by EU Delegations and reflected in output documents detailing concrete further steps.

The complete consultation calendar should be shared up to one year ahead of the process so that CSOs can better understand what is at stake and what input is expected from them.

⁷ CONCORD (June 2010). *Bottlenecks to a meaningful participation of civil society in EU development policy and aid processes.*

INTERACT MORE REGULARLY. MAKE A FOLLOW UP A PART OF THE DIALOGUE PROCESS IN ORDER TO COME TO A TRULY STRUCTURED DIALOGUE

CSOs have to remain involved on a much more regular, structured and long-term basis and EU Delegations should make the best use of the documents they produce, having recourse to CSOs' expertise not only during the programming process but also to monitor and evaluate the overall development process in which they fully participate. At the initial stage of the programming process, civil society input should be compiled in a report reflecting the actual needs of citizens and should be used as a preliminary report that EU Delegations could compare with National Development Plans. The country CSO roadmaps hold great potential to be the backbone of improving the quality and frequency of the dialogue with CSOs in order to become a truly structured dialogue.

BE FLEXIBLE WITH ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED. TAKE ON BOARD ISSUES THAT ARE OUTSIDE OF THE DIRECT SCOPE OF EU FUNDED PROJECTS

The dialogue between EU Delegations and CSOs should not only happen ad hoc and/or when instructions arrive from Headquarters, but should be an ongoing dialogue covering issues beyond the topics that are within the direct scope of EU funded projects, including the impact and effects of other EU policies in the country (e.g. Enabling Environment for CSOs, EU policy on agriculture, EU policy on biofuels, EU trade agreements, etc.).

FURTHER BUILD THE CAPACITY AND MEANS OF EU DELEGATIONS TO ENGAGE WITH CSOs

The training for CSO focal points should be further developed and expanded to include also other Delegations' staff to avoid that this is seen as an isolated matter within EU Delegations. It may be useful as well to integrate inputs from and exchanges with civil society representatives in the training itself. The role and functions of CS and its relations with governments should also be systematically integrated in training and guidance relating to governance, human rights and political economy analysis.

In addition we hope that all EU Delegations' staff will take the time and effort to read this paper and apply its recommendations in any future processes. A proper engagement of EU Delegations with civil society requires a clear commitment from the whole team, under the leadership of the Head of Delegation, to work together towards a more structured dialogue and devote time and energy, and where needed, additional human resources and financial means.

This should in no way be seen as an additional burden, but as a way for EU Delegations to get better acquainted with and obtain a better understanding of the societies in order to increase their development effectiveness and development impact.