

*Speech delivered by Seamus Jeffreson, CONCORD Europe Director, for the "Sixty years and beyond: contributing to development cooperation" high level conference, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2017.*

## **Sixty years on, new partnerships, tools and actors that ensure EU development cooperation is sustainable and stays true to its values**

First, a word about CONCORD, the European Association of NGOs for relief and Development. We are a membership organisation bringing together civil society organisations from each of the 28 EU member states to advocate for sustainable development based on human rights, justice and gender equality.

### **Partnerships, a forward looking approach from the start**

Before looking to the future, it is instructive to recall the origins of EU cooperation – enshrined unexpectedly and at the last minute in the Treaty of Rome.

Reading the [memoires](#) of Dieter Frisch – one of the doyens of EU cooperation over the years – it is striking how the concept of working together characterized the relationship between the African Caribbean and Pacific partners and the European Community from the beginning. This included joint institutions, joint programming, innovative instruments like Stabex (to top up the income for ACP countries when revenue from exports of primary minerals was down), asymmetrical trade access. In many ways these innovative aspects of EU cooperation were in keeping with the more recent measures to ensure 'development effectiveness' including focusing support on partner countries' own development strategies, donors working in a coordinated way, in short – partner country not donor ownership. "It is your money! You should use it to meet your priorities in the best possible way. We are here to provide technical assistance if you need it" explained the Commissioner for Development Claude Cheysson. I cannot imagine EU member states allowing High Representative Mogherini to say something similar when she negotiates 'migration compacts' with neighbouring countries.

Today, our relationship has taken a 'U' turn – with European perceived self-interest as the primary driver of cooperation. In other words, European governments increasingly want to use development cooperation not only to tackle global challenges like climate change, tax evasion, movements of people, inequality of opportunity and access to decision making of women, but to deal with Europe's own preoccupations – stopping migrants reaching our shores, promoting economic growth including for our own large companies, promoting security cooperation with partner governments. When our

own countries top the list of beneficiaries of our own aid – due mainly to including in-Europe refugee [cost](#) as part of aid figures – there is surely something wrong.

This tension between seeing our development cooperation as an instrument uniquely directed at tackling poverty and inequality in genuine dialogue between people and governments of our partner countries and ‘dipping into’ the aid pot to find resources for own migration, security and economic challenges lies at the heart of the [debate](#) over the new European Consensus for development. We hope this new agenda and the policies that will flow from it will unambiguously support this former vision, one that is more in line with the vision from the earliest days of European development cooperation and be the measure of the challenges of realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### **New partnerships – civil society**

How can we together write a new chapter of EU external cooperation? Partnerships that are true to the values of the EU, which seek to advance the mutual interest and not the national or only the EU interest are key. In the new tools and means of our cooperation – Investment funds, Trust fund, Compacts, Instruments - this principle must be the cornerstone. There also needs to be a renewed conversation with the European public on the need for an outward looking, cooperative policy towards our neighbours and partners. The [Eurobarometer](#) survey recently showing continued high support for development aid is a welcome boost for campaigners and politicians, leaders and activists to speak up for investing in global solidarity – millions of citizens want and expect Europe to act and be a positive player in the world. At the same time, we would be foolish to be complacent in taking public support for granted. The current political climate witnessed by the Brexit vote and rise of nationalist and xenophobic parties is the result of many people feeling profoundly unsettled by globalization and thoroughly mistrustful of the institutions and leaders to protect them and speak for them.

In a Europe in which traditional political opposition (opposition parties, the media) is in many places no longer providing a balance to power or an outlet for protest – civil society organisations and associations become more important than ever. In our domain, the role of civil society organisations in conducting a dialogue with the public on global citizenship, in promoting awareness of the common challenges we and global partners face and on the necessity for multi lateral and collective responses to growing inequality, climate chaos, is more important than ever. NGOs, faith-based organisations, voluntary associations, charities, trades unions, all have a role and an indispensable devoir in this period of our history. So in addition to the essential role of NGOs as implementers, CSOs as stakeholders and partners, civil society organisations as advocates and watchdogs of government policy and action – we are also critical partners in this conversation with people.

CSOs, organisations that represent the people that are traditionally ‘left behind’ by economic and social development by the extension of human rights and the justice system need to be around the table when policies and programmes that affect them are planned, put into action and evaluated. The principle is well summed up by the disability movement ‘nothing about us without us’.

## Multi-stakeholder partnerships

For Partnerships to succeed there needs to be an honest understanding of the respective interests and strengths of the respective [partners](#). Partners have different strengths and different interests – crudely, CSOs argue for corporations to pay taxes – corporations seek to minimize their taxes for example. Farmers and traditional users of the land have a different understanding of the value of seeds and land use and ownership than the private sector. Over the last 20 years, we have seen the triumph of a notion of the free market in which intellectual property and free trade rules trump centuries old traditions, in which a handful of companies now [control](#) global seed supply. This fact is not unrelated to the political mood referred to above and future partnership arrangements need to tackle this imbalance if we are to make harmonious and inclusive headway towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

Here in Rome is a good example of a partnership framework under UN auspices that provides a more level playing fields for a genuine dialogue and partnership between actors with different strengths and different objectives – the Committee of World Food Security at the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) – this may be the more just and ultimately more successful model for partnerships.

## New tools – resources and responsibility

The obvious issue is one of resources. It is clear that official development assistance can be but a small – albeit unique and critical – part of the resources needed to effect a transition to a sustainable future for people and for our planet. In this context the emphasis on investment is welcome if with a big dose of caution. The principle reason for caution is the frequent assumption in development planning that economic growth equals development. Recent economic growth has rather lead to an irresponsible and unsustainable use of the earth's resources and to rising economic, social and representational [inequalities](#). While a number of African countries have experienced buoyant economic growth rates – this has not resulted in declining rates of poverty, although it has led to increases in the very wealthy in countries like Nigeria and [Zambia](#).

When promoting investment through the proposed external investment facility, guarantee scheme and the increased deployment of tax payers money 'blended' with bank loans – the developmental benefits of these investments need to be [demonstrated](#). We have some way to go before we can be confident that these mechanisms will; indeed lead to new investment (not investment that would happen anyway), support sustainable projects and investment (not fossil fuel infrastructure), promote social investment (health, education), promote women's empowerment, promote small scale businesses, local economies. Let's work for quality investment – quantity alone will be self-defeating.

It is for governments to set the framework for encouraging increased investment, but also the right sort of investment that puts people and planet at the centre – not profits, environmental degradation, declining social conditions and basic rights. The private sector needs rules and an even playing field to play its role on the Agenda for sustainable development – [recent moves](#) in different European countries and in the European parliament to ensure companies take responsibility for their supply chains shows the way ahead. Companies should increasingly have the framework and



obligation to ensure their affairs do not promote conflict, unacceptable working conditions including even slavery, destruction of environments through illegal logging or destruction of ecosystems.

Let us look forward 60 more years and beyond in which Europe can lead, innovate and live up to our values as global partners in a common effort towards sustainable development.

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