

**FINAL REPORT FOR THE REGIONAL
SEMINAR**

**“LESSONS LEARNT FROM
CO-FINANCED ACTIONS WITH NGOs
AND PERSPECTIVES FOR THE FUTURE”**

**SANTO DOMINGO, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC,
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Seminar “*Lessons learnt from co-financed actions with NGOs and perspectives for the future*” was organised by EuropeAid – Co-operation Office, Units 04 and F5, in the context of the management of the programmes “Actions co-financed with NGOs in the developing countries”, budget line 21 02 03, formerly B7-6000, and of the programme on decentralised co-operation, budget line 21 02 13, formerly B7-6002.

Until recently, projects financed from these thematic budget lines were managed by EuropeAid Co-operation Office in Brussels, created in January 2001 by decision of the European Commission. Following the general reform of the EC external aid management, most of the projects were devolved, that is, they are now managed by the appropriate Delegations of the European Commission. These projects are a unique source of experience. Until now, *lessons drawn from and the exchange of views* about these actions have mainly been on an individual basis, systematically sharing those lessons among project partners and EC services, at Headquarters and Delegations had not yet taken place.

The Santo Domingo seminar aimed at offering an opportunity to exchange experiences and at having a common thinking process on the management and the impact of the programme in *the Caribbean, Central America and Mexico*¹. The objective was to identify recommendations in order to improve future interventions. This seminar dealt with both strategic issues and more practical aspects of an administrative and contractual nature. The latter were mainly related to the application of the devolution process for management of the budget lines concerned. *The seminar also provided an outlook towards the new architecture of the EU external aid under the new financial perspectives (2007-2013).*

The Agenda was organised around two main themes:

- “*Presentation of budget lines 21- 02- 03 and 21-02-13. Management Issues: Administration, Finance, Logistics, a new system of Call for proposals, PADOR data base*” and
- “*Challenges facing the stakeholders under the new architecture of external aid in the context of the new financial perspectives*”

During the second day, the Programme “*PRIL - Programa de refuerzo de las iniciativas locales por la sociedad civil*” was presented. This programme aims, among other things, at increased participation by civil society organisations in the political dialogue and development process in the Dominican Republic.

The Seminar closed with a *Panel discussion* on the theme “*Lessons learnt and options for the future*”. It was an opportunity for the panellists to present and debate the Conclusions and Recommendations proposed by the representatives of the European Commission (Headquarters and EU Delegations), the representative of a Dominican NGO Platform and the representative of the European Confederation of Development NGOs – CONCORD.

Through the *devolution process*, the Delegations were given new responsibilities, in particular in terms of more active participation in the policy of co-operation and in managing all the development projects within countries. There was a great deal of investment in strengthening Delegations. Today the process of devolution is complete.

Devolution is perceived by the participants as a positive opportunity that allowed them to revitalise the political dialogue and optimise the ability of various actors to work together, in

¹ Barbados, Belize, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Surinam, Trinidad and Tobago

particular, as regards the Delegations who are available to provide greater support to the local NGOs and who have more opportunities to visit the projects because of the proximity.

The principal challenges and aspects to be improved were raised. Although all the actors acknowledged the importance of the procedures to ensure transparency and quality of co-operation, the need to further improve the procedures in order to make administrative work lighter and give priority to dialogue, partnership and relations between the various actors was raised. Applying new technologies should make this improvement easier.

A new system, Potential Applicant Data On-line Registration (PADOR), will be introduced to improve knowledge management of NGOs and the quality of management, allow for greater transparency, and limit the time spent on the selection procedures of the Call for proposals.

In the new framework of EU external aid under the *Financial Perspectives 2007-2013*, the European Commission proposed a new set of six instruments in order to rationalise and simplify the current legislative set of rules.

The *Thematic Programme "Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in Development"* was presented, in the context of the financial perspectives 2007-2013 as an opportunity to rethink the scope and content of thematic programmes.

In the new architecture, geographical programmes will be the privileged instruments for co-operation with third countries while a specific thematic programme will be available to the NSAs and local authorities. *The programme "Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in Development"* will succeed the NGO co-financing and decentralised co-operation programmes. It will support NSAs' "right of initiative" by providing financial resources for their "own initiatives" when geographical programmes are not the appropriate instrument, and will complement other thematic programmes such as the one on Democracy and Human Rights.

The goal of the recommendations, proposals and options for the future – resulting from the Seminar – was to optimise the relations between the four stakeholders, in order to improve concerted results and impact of future interventions in the region.

The discussions and exchanges were based on a positive and constructive approach and allowed for identifying a set of Conclusions and Recommendations structured around *transversal and specific requests*, which were summarised as follows:

- General remarks and proposals were made regarding *positive aspects, experiences and lessons learnt*.
- *Recognition of the critical role of Delegations*. Devolution brought EC Delegations closer to the reality of the countries concerned what is beneficial for executing projects.
- The issues of the need to improve relations between the European and the local NGOs, greater capacity building for local civil society organisations, increased training & networking, and long-term relations were raised.
- The application of the "*new NSA instrument*" was considered a clear recognition of the role and the added value brought by Civil Society and as a potential reinforcement of local democracy through reinforcement of the Non-State Actors.
- Proposals were made regarding comments to optimise the results and the impact of the actions in the Region.

The Seminar ended with a *Panel discussion "Lessons learnt and options for the future"*. The representatives of four stakeholders were given the opportunity to share and analyse the benefits and the difficulties in relation to their daily experiences. All of them considered that existing good practices show the will of the stakeholders to find solutions to the existing problems, to accompany the procedure and to improve the information.

The Seminar was seen as an arena for exchange. It contributed to analysing the problems constructively, allowing the four actors to improve their working relations and to optimise their results.

In closing, Mr Bouratsis noted that it was true that some frustration still existed and that there was no monolithic thinking. He also noted that it was necessary to hold discussions on the items on which there was agreement as well as on those that appeared on the agenda. He observed that during the previous three years, the attack on micro-financing was halted, devolution was completed and the new financial perspectives were adopted. He concluded that what was of greatest significance was the fact that dialogue among the four actors had been maintained.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Context

The Seminar “*Lessons learnt from co-financed actions with NGOs and perspectives for the future*” was organised by EuropeAid – Co-operation Office, Units 04 and F5, in the context of the management of the programmes “Actions co-financed with NGOs in the developing countries”, budget line 21 02 03, former B7-6000, and decentralised co-operation, budget line 21 02 13, former B7-6002.

The European Union is committed to supporting the strengthening and involvement of civil society in building up actions in developing countries. Regulation (EC) no 1658/98 of 17 July 1998 on co-financing operations with European non-governmental development organisations (NGOs) in fields of interest to the developing countries (*Official Journal L 213, 30/07/1998 p. 0001 – 0005*) provides a legal basis for related activities that can be undertaken and which are financed under the thematic budget line B7-6000 (up to 2003, and budget line 21 02 03 “*co-financing with NGOs*” from 2004 onwards).

Until recently, projects financed from these thematic budget lines have been managed by EuropeAid Co-operation Office in Brussels, created in January 2001 by decision of the European Commission.

Following the general reform of the EC external aid, most of the projects have been devolved, that is, managed by the appropriate Delegations of the European Commission. These projects constitute a unique source of experience. Until now, *lessons drawn from and exchange of views* about these actions have mainly been on an individual basis, sharing those lessons among project partners and with the EC services, at Headquarters and Delegations has not yet taken place.

In order to promote a “constructive process for dialogue” with the NGOs and to discuss the essential themes related to implementation of the changes under budget line 21 02 03 “*co-financing with NGOs*”, EuropeAid has organised a series of Regional Seminars. A first round of seminars with the stakeholders in charge of implementing projects under the budget line was organised in Addis Ababa in March 2004 and Lima in April 2004. A second round was organised in Dakar (January 2005) and Bangkok (March 2005) and finally a third round took place in Cairo (April 2006), Maputo (May 2006) and Santo Domingo (June 2006).

The Santo Domingo seminar aimed at offering an opportunity to exchange experiences and to have a common thinking process on the management and the impact of the programme in *the Caribbean, Central America and Mexico*, with the objective of identifying recommendations in order to improve future interventions. This seminar dealt with both strategic issues and more practical aspects of administrative and contractual nature mainly related to applying the devolution process for management of the budget line. *The seminar also provided an outlook towards the new architecture of the external aid under the new financial perspectives.*

With respect to strategic issues, the participants had the opportunity to meet, discuss, and exchange views on their aims, practices, difficulties and the constraints they face.

2.2 Agenda and Objectives

In order to get better acquainted with the experiences of the NGOs so as to identify recommendations, which will help to improve future interventions of the Budget Line, *two main objectives* were proposed for this seminar:

- To analyse, study and clarify the aspects related to the administrative and logistical management in the context of the changes occurring in Budget Line 21 02 03 (ex B7-

6000), more specifically those related to the implementation of the devolution process;

- To reflect on and exchange experiences and contributions regarding the implementing modalities of this Budget Line and to suggest possible improvements, for instance, through targeting better the Co-financing instruments used, reinforcing the partnerships between European NGOs and *targeted countries*, and better perceiving the results achieved and difficulties encountered in the Caribbean, Central America and Mexico.

To identify new approaches and new instruments in order to assess and empower the overall programme impact in *the Caribbean, Central America and Mexico*, a set of good practices from NGOs was analysed

A questionnaire had previously been sent to the participants in order to identify their opinions, concerns and questions with respect to implementing budget line 21 02 03. The participants' contributions allowed the speakers to deal with the subjects taking account of the expectations and comments from NGOs.

The Agenda was focused on two main themes:

- “*Presentation of Budget Lines 21- 02- 03 and 21-02-13. Management Issues: Administration, Finance, Logistics, a new system of Call for proposals, PADOR data base*” and
- “*Challenges facing the stakeholders under the new architecture of external aid in the context of the Financial Perspectives*”

During the seminar, the participants worked in two different formats: in plenary for the presentations of the main issues and in four smaller groups to discuss recommendations. The Civil Society programme *PRIL (Programa de refuerzo de las iniciativas locales por la sociedad civil)* which was launched in the Dominican Republic was presented in the course of the second day.

The Seminar closed with a *Panel* on the theme “*Lessons learnt and options for the future*”. It was an opportunity for the panellists (representatives of the European Commission - Headquarters and Delegations -, the representative of local NGO platforms and the representative of the European Confederation of Development NGOs – CONCORD) to discuss the Conclusions and Recommendations proposed by the participants in the Seminar.

2.3 Participants

It was EuropeAid's intention to invite as a matter of priority all stakeholders to exchange lessons learnt. The stakeholders included representatives from organisations currently receiving grants for implementing NGO co-financing interventions, EC Delegations staff, national NGO Platforms and Civil Society organizations and Headquarters representatives.

The 91 participants at the seminar included:

- European Commission services, represented by the Heads of EuropeAid units F5, B3 and 01, the deputy Head of EuropeAid unit 04, eight members of Units 04 and F5, and by 25 officials, contractual and local agents working in the EU Delegations in the Caribbean, Central America and Mexico. Delegation staff from several South American countries had also been admitted.
- One representative from the CONCORD network (European Confederation of Development NGOs);
- 56 Representatives of European NGOs, national and regional NGO platforms and local civil society organizations working with or within the targeted countries.

2.4 Methodology

The Seminar was held over two days and included presentations in plenary sessions and group workshops.

In order to facilitate an active participation, four working groups were created and functioned at the same time throughout the seminar. In addition, on the first day a special workshop was organised that focused on the PADOR data base.

The working groups were composed to promote the complementary nature of the participants' profiles. In this way, representatives of the European Commission and/or of its Delegations participated in each group along with representatives of both the European and the local NGOs. Attention was also paid to the geographical representation of the participating countries so as to balance groups at this level.

This way, the themes, the questions, and the needs and proposals for the future were analysed and enhanced by the diversity of the participants' insights, according to their origins, job functions, responsibilities and experiences.

Two main objectives were proposed:

- Express, analyse and clarify questions, doubts and concerns to improve future interventions of the budget line in the region;
- Share and exchange practical experiences, identified problems, political options, strategies, suggestions and recommendations which will help increasing knowledge of what is done in the region and what it needs.

In order to harmonise the discussions and the results of the debate, the analysis of the themes was structured around five crosscutting aspects:

- What did we learn?
- What do we need to clarify?
- What are the positive aspects?
- What are the negative aspects?
- What do we recommend?

2.5 Structure of the report - Main contributions of the Seminar

Based on a neutral position, the team in charge of moderation wished to draft this report with the goal of offering – to all the stakeholders – a reference document focused on *lessons drawn and recommendations*, based on the successes and failures exchanged by the participants during the Seminar.

The most significant *contributions, questions and recommendations* have been structured and summarised in an Introduction and three Chapters:

- Chapter two summarises the information regarding *the Presentation of budget lines 21-02-03 and 21-02-13 and Management Issues: The New system of Calls for Proposals, and the presentation of Potential Applicant Data On-line Registration (PADOR)*. This chapter also brings together the lessons learnt, comments and contributions of the participants regarding these issues.
- Chapter three presents the reflections and proposals that were the focus of work during the second day of the seminar on “*Challenges facing the stakeholders under the new architecture of external aid in the context of the financial perspectives*”, in particular, the Thematic Programme: “Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in Development”.
- Finally, Chapter four presents the main recommendations and future challenges of NGO co-financing. These recommendations were proposed by the participants

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during Working Groups and plenary sessions organised during the two-day Seminar and during the Closing Panel. They were developed in order to assess and improve the overall programme impact in *the Caribbean, Central America and Mexico*.

This report can also be considered a reference for the stakeholders who are involved in the implementation of the programme “*Actions co-financed with NGOs in the developing countries*” but who did not have the opportunity to attend the Seminar.

3. PRESENTATION OF BUDGET LINES 21-02-03 and 21-02-13

The Seminar was opened with a welcoming address by the National Authorising Officer for the European Development Fund, Secretary of State Dr. Onofre Rojas, the Head of the EC Delegation in Santo Domingo, Ambassador Dino Sinigallia, and the Head of Unit AIDCO.F.5, Mr Aristotelis Bouratsis.

Ambassador Dino Singallia recalled the longstanding co-operation of the EU with the Dominican Republic and the Caribbean region generally and Secretary of State Onofre Rojas underlined the importance of the participation of civil society as a basis for democracy in developing countries.

He emphasised the challenge of directing the mechanisms and instruments of co-operation adequately optimising the results and establishing a link between co-operation and local communities. The current system of co-financing of civil society is not perfect. Therefore, solutions and improvements would have to be discussed and suggested as decentralised co-operation has a very concrete and everyday social impact that must remain a priority. It was essential to guarantee transparency and ensure that the resources reach their real target, the poorer populations.

On similar grounds, Mr A. Bouratsis, Head of the Unit AIDCO F5 raised the point that for 50 years the European Union has tried to understand the problems of developing countries and to push for solutions. In tomorrow's European Union of 27 Members States, the EU will have to rethink its policy and to deal with the development of its New Members that have not necessarily developed to the same level as the old EU Members (15). The European Union is the biggest development aid donor: 55 percent of the official aid comes from Europe. It does not ask for a political counterpart but only that the beneficiary countries respect the values of Human Rights, Democracy and Good governance. In that sense, the place and the role of civil society is very important monitoring respect of these values. On average, the EU spends 1 billion € per year in aid to NGOs (in the fields of NGO co-financing, HR and democracy, environment, food security, health, education, etc.) The European Union places great emphasis on procedures in order to respect the principles of equity, transparency and efficiency.

3.1 Presentation of budget lines 21-02-03 (ex-B7-6000) and 21-02-13 (ex-B7-6002): history, evolution, new structure, recent developments, on-going dialogue.

The first day of the Seminar was entirely devoted to issues related to the management of the budget lines. The statements and debates were organised on the basis of three themes:

- Presentation of budget lines 21-02-03 (ex-B7-6000) and 21-02-13 (ex-B7-6002)
- Presentation of EC co-financing and "The New system of Calls for Proposals"
- Presentation of Potential Applicant Data On-line Registration (PADOR).

The first theme was presented by the members of the Co-operation EuropeAid, Unit 04, Mr A. Janampa Ramos and Mr. J. Schermesser who conveyed precise and detailed information on the general principles, administrative issues, challenges and prospects for the future. They also provided some statistics, favouring clarification of the changes flowing at once from the application of management rules and procedures and implementation of the process of decentralisation.

The main information and clarification exchanged may be summarised as follows:

- *The Decentralised co-operation with NSA (Non States Actors) Budget line 21.02.13 (ex B7-6002) was established by European Parliament in 1992, as a pilot exercise. Its legal basis was the Council Regulation 1659/98 (extended in 2004 until 31/12/2006)*

- Funding was directly accessible to EU and developing countries NSA. Initially this Budget line focused on capacity-building activities in developing countries in general.
 - Since 2004, focus has shifted to difficult partnerships, countries where co-operation has been suspended, countries that have not been committed to poverty reduction and countries that did not support partnership approaches to development.
 - The amounts granted for this budget line were, between 2002 and 2005, between 3 and 7.1 million euros. In 2006, there was little funding allocated and, for 2007, the new Thematic Programme is still under discussion.
 - Since 2004, the funding allocated by the Commission for each project was 10,000 euros minimum and 100,000 euros maximum. If, in the past, only European development NGOs had access to this budget line, the new financial perspective for 2007-2013 will enable other "Non-State Actors" from the South also to have direct access to it. Rules will however remain, indeed, projects must be implemented in the South and reinforce the capacities of the local actors.
- *The Budget Line Co-financing with NGOs 21-02-03 (ex-B7-6000)* was founded in the context of the general policy of the European Union's development co-operation aimed principally at reducing poverty and at protecting the rule of law and respecting fundamental rights as stipulated in Article 177 (ex 130U) of the Treaty of the European Union. This budget line was created in 1976. Its initial allocation amounted to 2.5 million euros, which increased progressively and in the last 5 years has increased by about 200 million euros (210 million euros in 2006).

The strategic criteria regarding Co-financing of operations with European NGOs have a very wide thematic or geographic focus.

- The Line offered support to sustainable social, human and economic local development processes, institutional support and capacity building for local development structures.
- The Line also supported local initiatives giving particular priority to consolidating a partnership between the EU NGOs and local organisations.
- Mainstreaming capacity building were priorities to operations during the period 2004-2006.
- Co-financed operations must be consistent with EC development policy.
- This Budget Line initially only anticipated financing actions in the South. Since 1979, the budget line has been co-financing projects in Europe to raise awareness in Europe of development issues and problems. Moreover, ten percent of this budget line was intended for these types of actions. It was also expected that the financing of NGO networks like CONCORD would reinforce co-operation and coordination between NGOs from the Member States and between NGOs from the Member States and the Community Institutions.
- Currently, the NGO Co-financing Budget Line is *open exclusively to proposals submitted by European NGOs*. The NGOs from the South wishing to present a proposal must do so through a European NGO, working in partnership. Nevertheless, changes were expected in the new financial perspectives on these criteria, which would allow actors from the South direct access to these subsidies. Moreover, the Line would not be open only to NGOs, but also to other civil society actors, hence reference to "Non-State Actors" like unions, foundations and so on.

Both the presentations and the debates in plenary session allowed clarification and collection of precise information on the evolution of the *roles, responsibilities, and functions*, as well as the new division of tasks between the Commission and its Delegations after financing decisions.

Through the devolution process, the Delegations were given new responsibilities, in particular in terms of more active participation in the policy of co-operation and in managing all the development projects within countries. There was a great deal of investment in all the

strengthening Delegations. The process of devolution has been completed. The 1,000 persons dealing with co-operation in the Delegations has increased to 2,500.

The participants perceived decentralisation as a positive opportunity that allowed them to revitalise the political dialogue and to optimise the ability of various actors to work together, in particular, as regards the Delegations available to provide greater support to the local NGOs and greater chances to visit the projects because of proximity.

The responsibilities of the Delegations and the Headquarters after financing decisions are summarised as follows:

Tasks of Delegations:

- For some programmes (e.g. Micro-projects on Democracy/Human Rights and Decentralised Co-operation), management of local calls for proposals
- Participation in the appraisal and selection of operations proposed for co-financing in the country
- Assurance of a significant role in the contractual implementation: tenders and contracts
- Financial implementation: commitments and payments
- Technical implementation: approval of work-plans, reporting, monitoring, etc.
- Audit of programmes and projects in the country
- Evaluation of programmes and projects in the country

Tasks of EuropeAid in Brussels are:

- Publishing and managing global or regional calls for proposals
- Ensuring the implementation of co-operation by country and by region
- Developing harmonised procedures and working methods (thematic and technical)
- Ensuring the financing and management of non-devolved programmes/projects
- For devolved programmes/projects, ensuring their financing and providing support to Delegations
- Ensuring co-ordination, quality control and management control
- Providing a general evaluation of programmes and projects

Finally, the principal challenges and aspects to be improved were raised. Among these: to improve the system for call for proposals and to focus the system for evaluations more on the ex-post rather than on the ex-ante evaluations. The need to improve the appraisal process and the lack of an effective initial filtering system were also stressed.

Although all the actors acknowledged the importance of procedures to ensure transparency and quality of co-operation, they also stressed the need to continue to improve them to reduce administration and to give priority to dialogue, partnership and relationships between the various actors. Applying new technologies should make this improvement easier.

3.2 EC co-financing and "The New system of Calls for Proposals"

One of the issues that raised particular interest among the NGOs, and for which they requested more clarification, was the new system of Calls for Proposals. Mr A. Debongnie member of EuropeAid/Unit 04 presented the changes that had been made recently *for the new call for proposals procedure*.

The European Commission decided upon a multi-annual programming which would lead to the annual programming and the launch for proposals. Taking into account the difficulties in the administration of Calls for proposals in 2004-2005, the Director General of EuropeAid instituted a working group with the mission of reducing the burden of the procedure, improving the quality, speeding up the process and increasing focus on the quality of the project in order to design the new call for proposals.

About the new procedure²:

- First, the quality of the application is assessed.
- The initial administrative check has been simplified and the rule of eligibility for both the applicant and its partners is made at the end of the procedure.
- In the co-financing budget line, there is no longer a requirement for an EU co-partner applicant.
- *Introduction of the Concept Note* – The Application Form is divided into two parts: the Concept Note and the Full evaluation. The Concept Note consists in a *summary* that aims at giving the assessor a “photograph” of the proposal. The elements that will be evaluated are listed in the Concept Note form and the applicant can may write submit no more than four pages, depending on the questions asked. Based on the results of the evaluation process, a proposal will either be selected for the full evaluation, or will be eliminated. Applicants are informed of the results of the evaluation process.
- *The Full Proposal* is the *detailed proposal* of the Concept Note. The aspects to be assessed (capacity of the applicant, relevance, methodology and sustainability) are the same as for the concept note except as regards *the budget*, which is not part of the Concept Note. Based on the results of such an assessment, some proposals will be *provisionally* selected and the applicants will be requested to submit the supporting documents for verification of their administrative compliance and eligibility as well as that of their partners, according to the applicant’s initial Declaration.
- *Evaluation of the proposals*³
- Once a Call for proposals is launched, the eligibility checks of applicants and partners of applicants are conducted based on a technical evaluation. Since the devolution reform, two evaluations are conducted at the same time for each project: one in Brussels and one in the Delegation. Each evaluation leads to a mark and the average score of these two assessments leads to the ranking of the projects. A Committee in Brussels is in charge, when the ranking is available, to assess the ranking and reconsider the tangential or problematic cases. The Committee formulates a final ranking which leads to the selection or non-selection of the projects. Where the Committee does not agree with the average score, it will fill in a new grid replacing the two originals and the average score.
- *Verification of the eligibility* - NGOs whose proposals have been pre-selected are requested to provide supporting documents that will demonstrate their capacity, relevance, methodology, sustainability and budget. Any information provided at that stage that is inconsistent with the information provided in the Declaration by the applicant that initially submitted the proposal will or may be rejected and the proposal ranked highest in the reserve list will be the object of the eligibility verification.
- Each Call has its specific criteria and applicants are encouraged *to read the guidelines very closely* for each call for proposals.
- Once submitted, the application can no longer be corrected and if some criteria are not respected it will be eliminated.

² Practical Guide: http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/tender/practical_guide_2006/index_en.ht

Publication of a Call for Proposals:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/cgi/frame12.pl>For Thematic Budget Lines, tick: « Open » + « Grants » and then press « Submit query ».

³ Please refer to point 6.4.7.2 of the Practical Guide (PRAG)

As a summary of the exchanges and shared information on the subjects discussed during the first morning of the Seminar, the following are noted:

- It was observed that there was a need to exchange more information *between the stakeholders* because the answers to most of the questions existed and were available, but the information had not yet reached all the actors. The representatives of the EC showed their desire to strengthen even more the process for disclosure of information. The Delegations' role in this was fundamental.
- The participants underlined the high number of rejections of projects and expressed the necessity to be better informed *about the criteria used* for the selection of projects, the process itself and the reasons for rejecting a project. Many participants also asked for more clarity on the regional distribution of the funds, underlining the fact that the average income of a country should not be criterion for the allocation of funds in the Central American, Mexican and Caribbean regions, which have a very high concentration of incomes that could conceal a high and widespread poverty.
- The differences between the equity in dealing with European NGOs and local NGOs were raised. There is a difference in capabilities, usually financial. European NGOs have generally more capacities, while local NGOs have had the advantage of proximity to the area. Everyone is given the same evaluation form and European NGOs are at an advantage in some criteria while local NGOs are at an advantage in other criteria. It is important to strengthen partnership relations between European and local NGOs.
- The EC explained that every year more than 1,100 applications have addressed to the European Commission through the Calls for Proposals and only approximately 200 projects could be co-financed. Even if many good projects were received, only the best ones could be selected because of budgetary constraints. The high percentage of proposals refused has led the European Commission, responding to the demands of the NGOs, to launch a new type of call for proposals which diminishes the cost of preparation of projects: A shorter Concept Note (of a maximum of 4 pages) will represent the first phase of the application process. Upon receipt of all proposals, only 400 will be pre-selected on the basis of their concept note and they will then be asked to present a full project. Geographical distribution of the projects is not a criterion; projects will be selected *according to their quality*. The transparency of the results will be guaranteed by publication of the approved projects on the website at the end of the process because publication of the projects is authorised only once all contracts have been signed, it takes more time.
- The NGOs were invited to give their opinion on this issue and to suggest new or complementary criteria.

3.3 Presentation of Potential Applicant Data On-line Registration (PADOR)

Mr R. Junghanns, EuropeAid Unit F.5, presented the new system of Potential Applicant Data On-line Registration (PADOR) to the participants. This system is, at present, still being debated within EuropeAid with a view to a testing phase. The Internal Audit Service (IAS) of the Commission in its "Audit on NGOs in AIDCO" (IAS-2004-AIDCO-002) as well as parts of the NGO community and services had recommended introducing a new knowledge management system based on an improved information system. The main objectives of this system are to enable a qualitative improvement of the management, to improve the delays in the selection process, to create greater visibility and transparency to EC applicants, to develop the "Knowledge Management" and to improve the knowledge of organisations funded by the Commission. Summarising the relevant recommendations made by the IAS, Mr

Junghanns emphasised: "We should have more knowledge regarding the mission, members and management of the organisations with whom we work". The introduction of the PADOR database is intended to respond to the recommendations and these needs.

According to this new system – still in the preparatory phase – the Non-State Actors (NSAs) will have to be registered before the closure of the Calls for Proposals launched by EuropeAid. In concrete terms, the applicants will be asked to enter some precise information linked with the profile and experience of the organisation and, based on this data, the new database will probably check automatically conformity of their profile with a specific call for proposals. [*Observation: This option is not valid anymore 01/08/2006 due to decisions taken following the seminar*]. It might be envisaged that the *certification of the applicants* will be performed by a specialised team based at HQ. The certification process will be based on the data linked with the official documents (LEF, Legal Status, Financial and Audit reports, etc.). This information will comprise the "identity fiche" of the organisation, or a provisional number for new applicants.

The service in charge of the CfPs will remain responsible for the decision of the *eligibility of a proposal*. All the data requested by PADOR would have to be entered in specific screens by the applicant. In addition, the applicants would have the opportunity to present their strategies, philosophies, approaches and methodologies on a single page. The person within the organisation who is responsible would also have to give a *declaration on the honour* that the information entered in PADOR is true and complete. Data would have to be updated once a year so that is not necessary to re-transmit the same information upon the publication of each call for proposal.

In order to avoid confusion, Mr Junghanns stressed that it would be crucial to clearly distinguish between the notions of "*certification of the status*" of the NSA and the "*eligibility of the proposal*".

The key added value of this new approach would be *defining a unique identification per organisation, applicants guaranteeing the validity of their own data, reducing the number of documents to be submitted* by NSAs to the Commission, thus saving time in favour of drawing up proposals and reducing the production of copies. A *real-time follow-up of the selection process* would become possible in a second phase of the project.

A *special working group* discussed more specifically the PADOR project during the first day. Participants were clearly interested in this tool that they would have to use shortly. They asked for more information on the background of the PADOR system: Which unit launched it? Who was consulted for its creation? When will it start being used? Who will ultimately be responsible for it? While recognising the advantage of the reduction of administrative costs and of the time consumption, NGOs also wanted to understand better what the other objectives of the new system were (e.g. better knowledge of its partners by the Commission, means of communication between NSAs). Indeed, the NGOs shared some concerns regarding the system with the representatives of the European Commission: they would like to know more precisely what use the EC will make of their data and how the information will be harmonised for all countries (taking into account the fact that NGOs, depending on their State of origin, depend on different legislation and have different statuses). The NGOs also expressed doubts about the practicability of such a system in the South where the Internet is not always readily accessible. In order to clarify all these concerns, the NGOs recommended to the EC to organise further open and transparent consultations with EC Delegations and NGOs of the South to discuss how the system operates.

4. CHALLENGES FACING THE STAKEHOLDERS UNDER THE NEW ARCHITECTURE OF EXTERNAL AID IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVES 2007-2013

The themes and exchanges dealt with during the second day of the Seminar focused on the future challenges and future prospects. Therefore, two subjects were at the core of the EC presentations:

- Presentation of the new architecture of external aid under the new financial perspectives 2007-2013
- The TP “Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in Development”

Moreover, PRIL “*Programa de refuerzo de las iniciativas locales por la sociedad civil*” presented an experience of reinforcing civil society in the Dominican Republic – as an illustration of good practices developed in the Region.

Mr Luc Bagur, Head of EuropeAid Unit 01, presented the new architecture of external aid under the new financial perspectives 2007-2013, in particular, spending level and instruments intended for implementing official development aid. Globally, the EU (i.e. 25 MS and the Commission) is the first donor, while globally the European Commission is third biggest donor after the US and Japan, and second for Humanitarian Aid.

The European Union external aid has two budgets: the general budget (financial perspectives 2007-2013) and the European Development Fund EDF (co-operation of the EU with the ACP countries). The Community Budget is in the process of being approved by the European Parliament. There are three areas covered: development, humanitarian aid and enlargement policy. The role of EuropeAid is to be responsible for implementing *development aid*. It is in charge of different geographical programmes – like MEDA and TACIS – the European Development Fund (EDF) and thematic programmes – like Food Aid and Co-financing with NGOs. Each of these programmes depends on a regulation – defined by the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers – that defines the modalities of the aid.

The increase in external aid has also led to an increase in the number of instruments. Every year EuropeAid manages more funding. Since 2001, the funding managed by EuropeAid increased 50 percent. As a result, the Commission took the opportunity of the new budgetary framework to simplify the different instruments, which is a risk in relation to the consistency of the rules.

Negotiations are underway and it is known more or less how much money will be available for the 2007-2013 period. What is not known is how the money will be distributed among the different programmes and/or which instruments will disappear or be created.

There should ultimately be 4 geographical instruments, each corresponding to a region and a specific policy: 1) one to support EU enlargement and to help the applicant and the Balkan countries; 2) a second, the European Neighbourhood and partnership instrument, to strengthen links with neighbouring countries: Eastern Europe, Caucasus, South Mediterranean countries, this instrument would replace others like MEDA and TACIS; 3) the 10th EDF; and the 4) Instrument for EU development (bilateral programmes with Asia, Central Asia, East-Jordan, Latin-America and South Africa). It authorises all programmes that aim at eradicating poverty and applying the Millennium Objectives, and comprises provisions on coherence, complementarity and coordination.

Estimates for the 2007-2013 budget⁴ were presented: 43,464 million euros for development and 22,682 million euros for EDF. There will be a slight increase in funding for Non-State Actors.

⁴ More information is available on the CD distributed to the participants: “Financial perspectives”

Mr A. Bouratsis, Head of the Unit F5, presented the thematic programme "Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in Development" in the context of the financial perspectives 2007-2013, and noted that this is an opportunity to rethink the scope and content of thematic programmes.

He started by recalling the new framework of external aid in the context of the *financial perspectives for 2007-2013*: to rationalise and simplify the current legislative framework governing external actions of the Community, the European Commission proposed a new set of six instruments under the Financial Perspectives 2007 to 2013. Three instruments (for humanitarian aid, stability and macro-financial assistance) are *horizontal* in order to respond to particular needs and circumstances. Three instruments (pre-accession assistance; support for the European neighbourhood and partnership policy (ENPI) and development/economic co-operation (DCECI)) have been designed to implement particular policies and cover specific *geographical* areas. In the future, these instruments will form the legal basis for Community expenditure on external co-operation programmes including appropriate thematic programmes and will replace the existing thematic regulations.

In this new architecture, the instrument on geographical programmes will be favoured for co-operation with third countries while a specific thematic programme will be available to the NSAs. *The programme "NSA in development"* is the successor to NGO co-financing and decentralised co-operation programmes. It will support stakeholders' "right of initiative", by providing financial resources for their "own initiatives", when geographical programmes are not the appropriate instrument and will complement the programme on Democracy and human rights.

All civil society organisations and local authorities from the EU and partner countries (NGOs, trade unions, environmental advocacy groups, universities and independent political foundations etc) are, in principle, eligible for funding under this thematic programme. The bulk of the financial assistance will be allocated to supporting interventions in the field carried out in developing countries. However, the programme will also pay appropriate attention to interventions which promote awareness raising and education for development. Activities which facilitate coordination between stakeholders' networks will also be eligible for funding. The different types of *interventions will be implemented in developing countries* covered by the DC(EC)I and in all countries covered by the ENPI. EU Member States and acceding countries are eligible for awareness raising and education for development interventions and for coordination between networks of EU stakeholders. Specific *priorities for action* and more detail on the specific scope of the programme will be set out in a multi-annual programming document (thematic strategy paper).

The objectives of this programme are to support Non-State Actors:

- *Where co-operation via geographical programmes is restricted*, such as in difficult partnerships. In such cases, the programme will enable the EC to remain engaged, to directly support populations, to facilitate aid implementation and access to basic services, to enhance democratisation processes and to facilitate peace-building processes in such situations.
- *Where there is working co-operation and effective partnership*, in order to improve country – or region-based – co-operation programmes, by supporting stakeholders introducing new schemes and approaches, to better integrate cross-cutting priorities holistically, to facilitate grassroots or a specific group's participation, to foster gender equality, to build capacities in new areas such as fair trade, environmental advocacy etc.
- The programme will also be able to back stakeholders' initiatives to support the in-country capacity development process for participating in policy debates and delivering basic services locally where geographical programmes cannot be used or when innovative approaches are necessary. Its ability to involve a broad range of public and non-public actors from both the EU and partner countries is part of the added value of the programme.

This programme will primarily *target* interventions in the field and will be primarily implemented in developing countries and regions where geographic programmes do not provide for any support or financial allocation for Non-State Actors and local authorities due to weak political commitment, or in sub-regions beyond the reach of the country programme, or in difficult partnerships, fragile states, post-conflict situations, political instability etc.

Following the presentations, the participants expressed their desire to obtain more information, in particular, on any changes in the framework of the *"Thematic programme: Non-State Actors and local authorities in development"*.

Mr Bouratsis explained that the problem with information on how the new instrument will apply is that the Commission itself does not know yet: *"It is for this reason that input is needed. From now on, the DG Development will be in charge of suggesting how the programme will be applied, and it is under discussion with EuropeAid. It means that the input that was received during the two days will help the future discussion inside the EU"*.

After the discussion between DG Development, EuropeAid and DG Relex, the Commission will suggest implementing rules. At that moment, it is under discussion between European NGOs, CONCORD and representatives of other non-state actors. The same rules will apply for all.

The field of action will change and it will be more focused. Nevertheless, there are large increases in funding from sources other than the EU: the MS, for example. Special groups will not be established for the NGOs to protect them. The last 40 years of co-operation should have taught them how to deal with change.

This programme guarantees innovation and initiative, but if NGOs do not ensure enough sustainability, the project will often disappear in one to three years. This is something that must change; NGOs must think about an exit strategy before starting the project.

The afternoon's plenary sessions on the second day were introduced by the presentations of a local *Programme: "Programa de refuerzo de las iniciativas locales por la sociedad civil" (PRIL)* of initiatives to democratise the political culture in the Dominican Republic, presented by Ms. Rosa Garcia Cubero, PRIL director, and Mr Roman Batista, member of the "Centro de Estudios Sociales".

The programme aims at reinforcing the dialogue of civil society in the Dominican Republic. This experience had three key components: First, to enquire on the notion of democracy in the country, second, to improve formations on the access to funds for civilian education and, finally, to reinforce the dialogue of the civil society at the local level through working with the municipalities.

There is a complementary nature between the two types of groups which makes having them combine efforts advantageous. Specific objectives are: to improve the dialogue between the organisations of civil society and the government and to increase the efficiency of the projects implemented; to increase the capabilities of civil society to negotiate; to create platforms of local organisations and mechanisms to analyse the situation; to reinforce the local powers at the municipal level; and to increase the capabilities of the organisations at the local level.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations, proposals and options for the future – resulting from the Seminar – aim at optimising the relations between the four stakeholders, in order to contribute to improved concerted results and impacts of the future interventions in the region.

The discussions and exchanges were based on a positive and constructive approach and allowed identifying a set of Conclusions and Recommendations structured around *transversal and specific requests*.

5.1 General remarks and proposals regarding positive aspects, experiences and the lessons learnt.

- *The budget line co-financing with NGOs 21-02-03 (ex-B7-6000) is in the process of reorganising and is no longer exclusively for European NGOs. These changes need to be more detailed.*
- The EC is willing to improve the devolution process.
- Existing good practices show the willingness of the stakeholders to find a solution to the problems, to accompany the procedure and to improve the information.
- The partnership between NGO's and EU has strengthened.
- There is greater understanding of the complexity of EU funding and relationships
- Positive changes have been made at the level of the call for proposals system with the aim of reducing administrative work. Adopting the Concept Note is an example.
- There are new instruments and changes that flow from these instruments.
- The introduction of the PADOR database could contribute to improving the quality of management and to allowing for greater visibility and transparency.

5.2 Recognition of the critical role of Delegations

Devolution has made it easier to bring the EC Delegations closer to the reality that is beneficial for executing projects in each country:

- The EC Delegations are more present and have become "local actors".
- This will facilitate a better knowledge of the reality of the country and a better understanding of the problems as well as the ability to evaluate the projects (call for proposals).
- The dialogue and exchange of information with the NGOs has been strengthened.
- Nevertheless, a significant portion of the administrative work has passed from Brussels to the Delegations, which requires strengthening the human resources and logistic abilities. In some cases, these aspects must be improved, in particular for the evaluation of the Call for proposals).
- The expectations of the NGOs as regards the role of the Delegations increased even though they are not always in a position to follow up on these requests.
- Often the criteria for applying the rules vary from one Delegation to the next. The NGOs have requested interpreting and applying the rules in a more uniform way.
- The NGOs proposed organising periodic meetings between the NGOs and the Delegations to overcome these difficulties gradually. This practice is already applied by some Delegations.
- It would be better if changes in the personnel of the Delegations did not have consequences in the follow-up/processing of the files of projects in progress.

CONCORD positively enhanced the negotiations developed between the NGOs and EuropeAid with the goal of clarifying the interpretations of the norms of the Finance regulation. They came to an agreement with EuropeAid on the interpretation of a standard contract. CONCORD will publish a report on this subject in November to disseminate the

information. The meeting held at the same time during the conference between CONCORD and the Delegations was given a positive assessment.

5.3 Relations between the European and the local NGOs

Consolidation and improvement in the relations and the partnership between the local NGOs and the EU NGOs was deeply appreciated and considered as one of the important axes of the recommendations. It included various complementary proposals:

- More capacity building for local civil society organisations (increased training & networking), e.g. at regional level.
- Long-term relations between the local and the European NGOs must be sought and not just for direct access to grants at a given moment.
- The EU NGOs need to increase skills and knowledge through partnerships with local NGOs.
- With the prospect of the new changes, when the local NGOs have direct access to funding, it will be necessary to strengthen communication and consolidate co-operation with the European NGOs to avoid conflicts and unfair competition among them (local NGOs + EU NGOs).
- The local and European NGOs should improve their co-ordination for transferring funds and to know the contract of the projects in its entirety, including the appendices.
- Some basic issues that should be considered in detail were raised: As soon as the local NGOs have direct access to grants, what added value will the European NGOs bring if they are not the ones to carry out the projects directly?

5.4 The application of the "new instrument": definition of the new Non-State Actors.

The Thematic Programme: "Non-State Actors and Local Authorities in Development" was regarded by the participants as a clear recognition of the role and the added value brought by Civil Society. The potential reinforcement that the TP could bring to local democracy through reinforcement of the Non-State Actors was also raised.

Application of the new instrument was an important subject of exchange at the level of the NGOs that raised a number of questions, made a number of requests and expressed concerns about:

- The need to define clearly the established criteria to specify who are Non-State Actors;
- The definition of the objectives of this new NSA instrument
- Specification of the approach and the added-value of the actors. Will the values of participatory approaches, pro-poor actions, etc. be respected by other types of actors?
- Certain specific knowledge / skills / assets of 'poor' people are not sufficiently valued, gathered and used.
- The risk of competition between different types of actors. How to minimise the risk that the funding is used for political or private interests.
- Which mechanisms will be used to avoid politicisation and/or diversion of grants of decentralised aid (local authorities)
- Specifying the criteria for participation and eligibility of the actors
- Clarifying the North/South NGO relationship in the framework of this new instrument.
- Whether the NGOs of the South will have guaranteed access under equal conditions. Do the small NGOs risk being left 'out' of this new instrument?
- Which actors will participate taking account of the specificities of each Latin American country?
- Whether the fact that a greater number of actors will have access to the resources will create competition? Or will it create new opportunities? How can empowerment of Civil Society be assured without a significant increase

in resources? Will there be a risk of increased bureaucracy to adapt the rules to different actors?

The participants prepared some specific recommendations:

- Give access to information and reinforcing the means to obtain the necessary information for the NGOs.
- Take account of the timely publication of information.
- Facilitate consultation of the local actors and/or EC Delegations, in order to involve them in a process to clarify and analyse questions raised.
- Stimulate creation of local networks of actors in Civil Society to promote synergies helping institutional participation, lobbying and dialogue.

5.5 Optimising the results and the impact of the actions in the Region

- The need to pay attention to *sustainability of actions* was indicated:
 - *Sustainability is not only financial*, it is necessary to pay more attention to other components of sustainability, e.g. social transformation;
 - Individuals within organisations and communities should be empowered to create stronger institutions ensuring the availability of the resources so as to undertake its assessment.
- Promote *transfer of good practices*:
 - Skills in documentation by the beneficiaries themselves
 - Dissemination of knowledge
 - Good initiatives by Delegations in bringing people together to share knowledge, skills, etc.
- Necessity to strengthen the *impact of actions* strategically, with the aim of capitalising the experiences, lessons learnt and coordination capacities of the European and local NGOs:
 - Ex-post evaluations should be made possible. Give greater importance to the ex-post rather than to the ex-ante evaluations.
 - Impact is more than numerical measurements/indicators.
 - Many beneficiaries have insufficient skills/awareness for impact measurement.
- Improving monitoring and evaluation procedures:
 - European NGOs that have branch offices in the country of the region should plan the monitoring and periodical project visits to measure the progress made and check to what degree the *impact* is being made.
 - These actions should be part of the budget for the projects concerned.
 - Dissemination of the methods and results of the monitoring and evaluation should be organised.
 - The NGOs and the Delegations should share the methodologies and the terms of reference of the evaluations. The Logic Framework could be used as a reference for the POA⁵ to measure progress.
 - It is desirable to organise periodic meetings to follow up the results obtained and take the necessary decisions.

The seminar was closed with a *Panel discussion: lessons learnt and options for the future*. The representatives from four stakeholders were given the opportunity to share and analyse the benefits and the difficulties in relation to their daily experiences. The four considered the

⁵ Plan Operativo Global

lessons learnt, and enhanced the procedure in progress so that it would be constructive and present new challenges and prospects.

The representative of “Foro Ciudadano”, a Dominican NGO platform, presented the results of a process that has been ongoing in the Dominican Republic since 1999, efforts to put together different organisations (agricultural, religious, social, etc.), a democratic space, and a space for discussion. With other NGOs, there was a leadership of 300 organisations at the national level which meet regularly to discuss orientations and strategies.

The CONCORD representative noted that the process started in Palermo and indicated that after three years they are not yet satisfied because only ten percent of the resources of the 6,000 million euros for the European NGOs come from the European Commission.

They mentioned the necessity to have other mechanisms to help development. European Union development aid does not yet reach the three percent of the European budget promised by the Commissioner Louis Michel in 2005.

The representative of a Delegation raised the point that the role of the Delegations is to be one of intermediary between Brussels and the local actors. The Delegations have to improve their knowledge of the history of projects in future through the development of a better institutional memory. With opening the line up they would also need more human resources.

The different rounds of seminars carried out is testimony to a progressive process (that is moving) even if the progress is small; they are the result of the will of the four actors to enter into talks. There remains some concern, which has recurred since 2004, but there is progress nevertheless.

In each of the seminars the need to optimise the relationship between the local and the European NGOs was mentioned, but there are new proposals to bring forward. The fact that the Delegations are reinforced is an improvement at the local level but local NGOs will still need to be strengthened.

It is important to exchange experiences and the seminar has been considered an arena for exchange. The seminars contributed to analysing the problems constructively, allowing the four actors to improve work relations and to optimise their results.

In closing, Mr Bouratsis noted that it was true that some frustration still existed and that there was no monolithic thinking. He also noted that it was necessary to hold discussions on the items on which there was agreement as well as on those that appeared on the agenda. He concluded that during the previous three years, the attack on micro-financing had been halted, devolution was completed and the new financial perspectives were adopted. He observed that what was of greatest significance was the fact that dialogue among the four actors had been maintained.