

Evaluation of the European Commission's Co-operation and Partnership with the People's Republic of China – ref. 1077

Abstract

The European Commission's cooperation approach to CHINA during the period 1998-2006 has been generally relevant to the Chinese policy context and needs and is consistent with long-run EU policy goals. At high levels, the Chinese and European sides share a common language in partnership and the move to a dialogue of equals leading to a progressive phasing out of development cooperation.

Subject of the evaluation

This evaluation assesses the Commission's cooperation and partnership and the broader context of EU strategic interests and policy dialogue with China.

Purpose

The main question of this evaluation is: *What kind of partnership and cooperation programme with China makes sense, now and in the foreseeable future?*

Methodology

The evaluation was based on 8 evaluation questions, relating to the five DAC evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact) plus coordination, coherence and value added of the Commission. The evaluation was carried out in 3 phases: (i) desk (ii) field and (iii) synthesis.

Main conclusions:

1. EC cooperation approach to China is relevant to the Chinese policy context and needs and is consistent with long-run EU policy goals. Despite policy successes, concrete results have been limited by problems at the level of policy administration and implementation. Many of these arise from poor governance, broadly considered.
2. At high levels, the Chinese and European sides share a common language on partnership. At the level of implementation, however, there continues to be friction as the European Commission insists, to the frustration of Chinese partners, that only expertise, and not money, will be provided. Impacts and effectiveness have been adversely affected by delays in project implementation because the EC and its Chinese partners have experienced some difficulty in arriving at an agreement on project goals and modalities.
3. Internal synergies between EC sector dialogue dynamic and the EC cooperation programme are satisfactory as regards the transfer of lessons from the dialogue to the cooperation programme, but much weaker in the other direction. To be precise, projects generate knowledge and expertise, which is not effectively taken up to the policy and strategic, levels by the policy sector experts.
4. Too many promising pilot projects have not been replicated at a national level; in large measure this is due to the fact that Chinese provincial governments operate independently, in competition and as a result information is not shared.
5. Coordination between the EC and Member States, and between the EC and multilateral aid organisations, is strong in form but weak in substance.

Main Recommendations:

1. EC is advised to set up a forward-moving strategy containing still a significant development cooperation component while at the same time planning for its transformation into a programme based on other forms of cooperation, i.e. **phasing out of development cooperation**.
2. Within that development cooperation programme, the evaluation team has recommended greater emphasis on governance issues with a view to addressing problems of policy implementation and administration; persist limiting the EC contribution to expertise and best practice, and stipulating that this EC contribution should be matched by adequate financial and other resource contributions by the Chinese partner. Moreover poverty issues could be better mainstreamed.
3. At the implementation level, there is still room for improved coordination with other donors; the evaluation team recommends to pay attention to the project design and strategic programming phases, as well as to the project evaluation procedures which could improve replication of projects, and finally knowledge (lessons learned) generated in projects could be better integrated into sector dialogue.

Transferable lessons:

1. **Learning from EC supported projects** - In decentralised countries with economically competing sub-national entities, pilot projects are not replicated elsewhere or rolled out to the national level, due to the decentralised governance system of the country - *EC can improve its impact in those countries by designing special mechanisms for planning and joint assessment of pilot projects with central and sub-national entities, targeted on analysing possibilities for replication and roll-out.*
2. **Phasing out of development co-operation** - If a country moves outside of the range of development aid, devising a phasing-out strategy takes an extra effort by those in charge of managing the traditional development cooperation. Planning for the end of development cooperation does not emerge naturally from the work plan, it has to be explicitly put on the strategic agenda and then moved to the concrete level of programming and implementation – *The relevant Commission Services should consider on when and how development programmes should be phased out, resulting in operational guidelines.*
3. **Cooperation among equals** - When the EC reduces traditional development cooperation, the partner country tends to agree at high level on equal partnership principles, but this may create frustration with traditional partners at lower levels. Those operating at the strategic level may express satisfaction with the nature and quality of partnership; those involved with implementation may be much more critical.

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