



Joint EU NGO statement on the rationalisation of the EC's thematic funding instruments in the field of external relations¹

30 January 2006

0. Introduction

This paper seeks to outline the basic principles and concerns of EU NGOs relating to the overall process of rationalising the EC's thematic funding instruments in the field of external relations.

Our sectors are actively engaged in advising the EU institutions on the future thematic programmes and are in the process of circulating position papers. This joint statement comes in anticipation of a series of communications on each of the proposed new thematic programmes due to be published by the EC in the coming weeks, and seeks to draw together some overarching and common concerns about the process and governance of the thematic programmes.

NGOs hold to these main principles:

- Rationalisation of the thematic programs should lead to **more efficiency and more effective delivery of aid**
- Rationalisation of the thematic programs should be **coherent with geographic and other programs and instruments**
- Rationalisation of the thematic programs should be **consistent with the new Development Policy Statement and other EU development principles**
- Each thematic program should address the **cross cutting issues of Gender, Children, Human Rights (including the right to food), HIV and AIDS, and Environment.**

Our main political demands are to call for:

¹ This is the long version of the joint statement, we have also made a short 2 p. summary.

- **Specific regulations** for each thematic programme to ensure governance, programming and management;
- **More mobilisation of public support** as a vital and cross cutting concern for all thematic programmes;
- **An improved consultation processes** with CSOs in Europe and partner countries;
- **A clear definition of actors** within the thematic programmes;

Overall, we remain broadly in support of the idea of simplifying the EC's existing thematic funding instruments in the field of external relations as long as it remains a means to promote efficiency, transparency and more effective delivery of aid.

1. Governance, programming and management

The revision process is not clear at all, and we fear that the EC is mixing content and political issues with management aspects.

Each of the thematic programmes should be governed by a specific co-decided policy-setting regulation² which cements the legal basis of the programme and outlines the governance, programming and reporting mechanisms. NGOs think that this is the only way to ensure transparency, monitoring, effective management and EP and Member-States implication. Establishing instruments (like the Instrument for Pre-Accession, European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument or Development Cooperation Instrument) without any policy-setting regulations to define the legal basis for thematic programmes could potentially undermine the benefits of rationalisation. The option proposed by the EP rapporteur on the Development Cooperation Instrument³ would already constitute a huge rationalisation of the budget lines that are in place today.

Funds for the thematic programmes should be committed via multi-annual programming. This could be realised through the adoption by co-decision of a Multi-annual Financial Framework⁴. It is important that Commission responsibility for managing the programmes be balanced by appropriate decision-making mechanisms involving the Member States and the European Parliament.

Thematic programmes need to be programmed in a way which mutually supports each programme, incorporating the cross-cutting themes. Lessons-learnt from different programmes should be incorporated between programmes as relevant.

The programming process should be based on a proper assessment and on lessons learnt from past experience, and monitoring and evaluation. Learning from practice should be a central feature of each programme with the involvement of all stakeholders including EC delegations and strategic and implementing partners.

An annual report on each of the thematic programmes should be provided to the Member States' Committee and European Parliament and be posted on the EC website to inform its strategic partners. This should include a description of the implementation and implementing partners, an assessment of how the multi-annual strategy was translated into action, and of how the activities supported contributed to

² As proposed in the Second Draft Report on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a financing instrument for development cooperation and economic cooperation (COM(2004)0629 . C6-0128/2004 . 2004/0220(COD)) from MEP Gay Mitchell.

³ Idem

⁴ Idem

attaining the objectives of the programme on the basis of the expected results and performance indicators identified in the multi-annual strategy.

Evaluation reports should be transmitted to the Member States Committee and the relevant Parliament Committees and discussed in a centralized (headquarters) and decentralized (delegations) way with implementing and strategic partners with a view to improving quality of future operations and measuring impact of the programmes.

Across the board, we are concerned about the lack of capacity in terms of staff numbers, profile and experience within the EC to effectively deal with and benefit from the thematic programmes, both at present and in the future. This severe lack of capacity in Brussels and in Delegations impedes the EC's ability to adequately conceptualise programmes and to dialogue with stakeholders at all levels of governance, programming and management. With inadequate staff numbers to manage the whole project cycle, the EC's default approach will drive it to prioritise rapid disbursement of funds over genuine dialogue, learning and understanding.

Thematic programmes should be a space for innovation, creating a catalytic effect on other aid programmes. A significant budget should be given to create genuine space for impact assessment, learning and dialogue, across the thematic programmes. The objectives would be to improve knowledge, encourage synergies, and provide opportunities for consultation and strategic reflection. It would also be vital to use this as an opportunity to improve the internalization of knowledge within the EC and make the procedures and methods evolve.

2. Mobilising public support

Mobilising public support for global justice, environment, human rights, peace, and development within the EU external actions is a vital and cross cutting concern for all thematic programmes. It should therefore explicitly be foreseen in all programmes. The main objective of public awareness raising is to contribute to sustainable development, poverty eradication in the framework of fundamental human rights and the promotion of an inclusive and empowered society.

Public opinion can influence European policy and be an important contributor to development and democracy. Public awareness fosters the full participation of all citizens in world-wide poverty eradication, and the fight against exclusion. It seeks to influence more just, equal and sustainable economic, social, environmental, human rights based, national and international policies. It is a vital element in the mobilisation of public support for development and human rights. Our aim is to include the experience of partners in partner countries in the process of awareness raising, to improve the impact of campaigns and lobbying actions on regional and international institutions and fora.

Activities, although mainly focused on European citizens, should be carried out in partnership with CSO organisations in partner countries, who must be allowed to play an active role and run similar activities in their countries. Public awareness is also important in partner countries, to strengthen citizens' capacities to take action, defend their rights and take part in the political debate at local, national and international levels.

Cross cutting public awareness can respond to the EC's aim of rationalisation of budget lines, recommendations and commitments already made by the Commission

and the Council of Europe as well as within the enlargement of the EU. It raises awareness of the actions and their results, and therefore a better understanding of EC policies in developing countries amongst citizens and partners. Public awareness as a cross-cutting issue allows more cooperation with other CSO organisations / stakeholders working in other fields.

3. Consultation process with CSOs in Europe and partner countries

As partners in the EC's development and external relations policies and implementation for over 30 years, we feel that CSO input to the debate should be of particular significance and interest to the European Institutions. It is clear that the ability of the EU to effectively play the role to which it aspires to in the world will critically depend on the support it has from Europe's own citizens. The reform of the EC's funding architecture provides a timely opportunity to launch a broad debate on the role and added value of EC development aid and the comparative advantage and role of various actors within that.

We recommend that measures be taken for CSOs to be genuinely consulted in order to bring to the policy making process their depth of experience and knowledge through years of partnership with the EC on thematic budget lines.

We urge the EU institutions to use this reform process as an opportunity for debate and reflection, especially on the role and value of CSOs in the EC's external policies and programmes.

Flawed consultation in rationalisation process

The processes for consultation with NGOs in Europe and partner countries, as strategic partners and stakeholders in the thematic programmes have been flawed and very problematic across all the thematic programmes. In many cases the EC has not been respecting its own minimum standards for consultation. We appreciate the European Commission's willingness to meet with NGOs and other civil society organisations. It is certainly interesting to canvas opinion through the means of an on-line consultation. However, we do not think that a consultation by internet is an appropriate manner to gather qualitative input and not enough effort has been made to collect representative inputs from relevant actors.

Most problems reflect an ad hoc consultation process suffering in many cases from the absence of continuous, organized and transparent mechanisms of dialogue and of joint learning processes.⁵

Consultation in programming process

⁵ In particular, our concerns relating to this particular exercise are as follows:

- Poor quality of discussion papers, which were all too general, and did not contain specific enough information about the way the programmes will be implemented to make concrete and valuable recommendations;
- Too short delays for consultation not allowing for organizing wide and relevant consultation among CSOs;
- In terms of the consultation meetings, these had unclear agendas and objectives. The meetings were not inclusive enough on both sides (not all EC services concerned were present or actively present, unclear criteria for invitation of CS participants or invitation received so late that participation was difficult to organise);
- Lack of clarity about how the EC intends to take comments and recommendations into account;
- Very limited scope for CSOs in developing countries to make inputs (except in particular cases, FS network) and what about the feedback from delegations.
- EC never managed to make the e-mail address for submissions work on EIDHR

For all thematic programmes, the Commission should establish a permanent mechanism of dialogue with civil society organisations that have a strategic interest and the relevant expertise in participating in the programming, monitoring and implementation of the programme.

Such dialogue process should be fully transparent. Dialogue with CSOs taking place at Brussels level should be mirrored at field level with EC delegations and Member-State embassies. Actually, it is vitally important that regular dialogue is established between the EC delegations and civil society, to discuss individual policy and funding strategies towards civil society development in each country, including both geographic and thematic programmes. CSOs in partner countries should be better integrated in the setting of national agendas.

We further urge the EU institutions to consider options for improving the mechanisms for structural dialogue and open discussion fora as ongoing and genuine consultation processes.

4. Definition of actors within the thematic programmes

The EC's thematic programmes need to be implemented within the context of its international legal obligations, multilateral commitments and the activities of the international community as a whole. The specific objectives of the EU's programmes, and the specific added value of the EC, need to be clearly defined within this framework so that the expertise necessary for its implementation can be built within these programmes.

On this basis the actors best placed to play a part in their implementation can be defined based on their particular strengths and specificity. In this way what we see as an increasing confusion over the role and added value of CSOs, International Organisations, private sector, local authorities etc. would be addressed. We recognise the important roles of the United Nations and its agencies, other multilateral organisations, and national governments in achieving commonly shared development goals.

However, the EC also needs to ensure it maintains and further develops its own capacity and expertise in the management of its thematic programmes. We therefore recommend that in reforming its thematic approaches the EC clearly defines the expected roles and added value of the different actors, and on that basis then defines the types of partnerships it would like to develop within each programme.

We are concerned about the fact that the EC is increasingly delegating the implementation of its budgets and policies to international organisations (such as the UN) and governmental bodies at the expense of (existing) partnerships with CSOs. This delegation leads to higher costs and less possibilities for political influence.

For us, the added value of civil society organisations lies in their independent, autonomous, non-governmental nature. In representing the interests and needs of their particular interest group, they offer a complementary form of consultation which allows the promotion of active and responsible citizenship.

Need for EC / CSO partnership

The European Commission and civil society are important partners in the achievement of both parties' objectives for democracy, eradication of poverty,

environmental protection, peace, equality, and the protection of human rights. However, the potential for this strategic partnership approach has never been fully utilised, as there has never been a serious debate and reflection about what both parties can achieve through such a partnership⁶.

In addition, it has been hampered as a result of too rigid interpretation and onerous requirements of the Financial Regulations. This has been aggravated by the lack of capacity and consistency in the EC management of funding programmes. Imposing unrealistic demands on civil society organisations in partner countries, presently building their governance structure, blocks their partnership with EU NGOs and counteracts the Commission's Communication on Non-State Actors.

Also, it should be noted that partnership between the EC and CSOs goes beyond mere funding, and that opportunities for true policy dialogue and CSO engagement should be strengthened in the future for CSOs both in the EU and in partner countries. This could be achieved through the opening up of country and regional programmes, where good commitments already exist towards CSOs, but need to be implemented more decisively.

5. Consistency, coherence and gaps

We are very concerned about the mismatch between policies, instruments, programmes and implementation. Policy ambitions are rarely met by appropriate programmes, budgets, or staffing.

Across the instruments we see an absence of real gender analysis and responses to equality and women's rights. Thematic programming should deliver on commitments made in the newly adopted "European Consensus on Development" to carry out strategic environmental and gender-equality impact assessments on a systematic basis, including in relation to budget and sectoral aid, and on the set up of networks of expertise and technical support for each crosscutting issue.

The EC has not made clear how rationalisation is linked to coherence and consistency. Also, the claim that rationalisation will automatically lead to more efficiency should be analysed further.

⁶ CSO participation is in fact one of the criteria for maintaining thematic programmes in the following ways because of:

- A defining characteristic of thematic programmes has been, and should undoubtedly continue to be, their capacity to work with and through CSOs without requiring any endorsement or authorisation from the national authorities of the partner country. This has been a main source of its complementarity with geographic programmes.
- In the case of difficult partnerships with governments, CSO organisations are often the only interlocutor that can deliver on EU aims and objectives;
- In the case of governments being unwilling or unable to allow participatory democracy and space for CSOs, direct access to CSO is crucial
- Innovative actions at small scale level close to the population is the natural domain of many CSOs;
- Actions that are not in line with government policy or fall outside the scope of the CSP but are however important for pursuing EC policy goals can be channelled via CSOs. This can happen in water, environment, HIV/AIDS, children, conflict prevention and resolution...

CSOs provide space for different social and economic groups, in particular those discriminated against, excluded or otherwise not participating in institutional decision-making. Women's movements and gender advocates are important agents in the struggle for gender justice and women's rights in partner countries. Thematic programming should respond to their call and should encourage the use of international human-rights instruments to realise all categories of human rights, including women's rights in problem areas such as HIV/AIDS, older women and widows, sexual violence, traditional practices, participation in cultural policies including religious and cultural fundamentalism, child marriages, FGM, opportunities for persons with disability, etc.