Civil Society Dialogue Network Funding Instruments Meeting

Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe

Thematic Programme on Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention

Informal consultation on the Annual Action Programmes 2024

8 September 2023, Brussels & online

Meeting Summary

Part 1: State of play of the Annual Action Programmes (AAPs) 2023 and initial thoughts on the AAPs 2024

Following opening remarks by the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS), there was an opening panel where the EC presented the 2023 Annual Action Programmes (AAPs) on Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention and the outline for the 2024 AAPs.

Participants then asked the following questions / made the following comments (left column) which were responded to by the EU presenting panellists (right column):

	Question/comment	Response
1.	Do you have the financial breakdown of the various thematic areas and priorities? Do you plan on having the same general calls or specific thematic calls for proposals?	There is no financial breakdown yet. Regarding the calls for proposals, it depends on what the first outcomes will be.
2.	Innovation in the thematic areas, such as mental health linked to transitional justice and reconciliation processes, the inclusion of a do-no-harm approach, and mental health support on the ground, is greatly appreciated. Is innovation seen as thematic innovation or as technical innovation (tools) from partners? It is important that knowledge management is not only a focus area per se but is also embedded across all other focus areas.	Knowledge management and innovation are examples of new thinking. It should be seen as creating more knowledge that can be used by those who have larger access to funds (e.g. the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) and the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) of the EC). Innovation is also about how to engage with and have access to local knowledge and know-how, including getting access to remote regions.
3.	Is there any plan in the calls for proposals 2024 to enhance the role of local actors? If yes, as a specific focus or as a requirement?	There is an increased focus on the engagement with CSOs (which is a concern especially for some Member States). It still has to be defined how these calls for

		proposals will be managed. They will be designed in a way that will allow the EU to engage directly with CSOs.
4.	On climate action with a focus on hard security, is there space for a softer humanitarian-based focus on the human security impact of climate change? In terms of approach, it is important not to consider hard security measures as the most important aspect. Human security has to be part of the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) toolbox.	Yes, there is space for human security. The global threats component of the thematic programme is focused on hard security. However, looking at the broader engagement of the EU, 30% of the Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI-GE) is related to conflict prevention linked to climate. The EU is trying to keep the balance between hard security and the humanitarian impact on human security of climate change. Climate change and security is a priority of the Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP). We operate on a human security understanding, including wellbeing, physical and mental security, as well as environmental protection and security. There is cooperation with the Directorate-General for Climate Action (DG CLIMA) and DG INTPA of the EC.
5.	In the 2022 AAP, there was a specific geographical focus on some countries. Is it going to be the same in 2024?	In 2022, in-country CSO support was indeed directed towards some regions. In principle the same will apply in 2024.
6.	Taking mine action into consideration is very much appreciated. But if it isn't clearance, what is it? Post clearance intervention with communities? More coordination is not needed. Is the level of attention Ukraine is receiving in mine action limited to Ukraine or can it be extended worldwide? There hasn't been much focus on climate change, though it is becoming increasingly important when we talk about land-use after demining or involving communities in other socioeconomic initiatives. How does that fit in thematically or geographically?	Mine action is expensive for FPI, but it is not in general. Other actors (within and outside the EU) can also play a role in demining. FPI want to focus on the provision of expertise on mine action governance in affected countries globally. Although Ukraine receives a lot of attention in the EU, there is also a clear understanding that the country is not the only one with whom the EU must interact. With this acknowledgment, there is a push to engage in other conflict-affected countries and regions.
7.	How is it possible to get closer contact and engagement (of local communities) with FPI in countries where the EU delegation does not have an FPI focal point? FPI wants more local actors. At the same time, the EU has multi-geographic approaches with tight deadlines which exclude local actors. Is there a contradiction and what can be done to address this contradiction for local actors to access FPI grants?	Engagement with local actors is mostly done by the EU delegations in third countries. They organise consultations with local partners and CSOs. There are sometimes difficulties which preclude the EU from reaching grassroots organisations in some regions. FPI has tried to engage with such organisations through various initiatives. However, often there are intermediaries between the EU and those organisations. Longer duration for the calls

		for proposals would be a starting point to strengthen direct communication.
8.	Sometimes the more sophisticated the analysis, the harder it is to get local communities and actors involved in the discussion. There is a strong need for a proper understanding and definition of conflict and crisis.	Defining further conflict and crisis can only add value if it is context specific.
9.	6 million EUR are allocated to counter-terrorism. How will the partnership work and how will the funds be used?	6 million EUR was the amount allocated to the EU-UN Counter Terrorism Facility in 2021. Today it amounts to 11 million and is used to provide support to countries on a demand-driven basis. On this, the EU collaborates with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT).
10.	The mid-term review focuses on budget allocation. How is the EU measuring the outcomes of the programme in general, as opposed to project by project?	In terms of evaluation of the thematic programme, it is hard to evaluate the impact of the overall programme, while it is easier to evaluate project by project. Evaluation of the whole programme is a very important step to take forward in the next few years.
11.	What type of action hampers and impedes peacebuilding?	Actions that are not based on solid conflict analysis and that are not conflict sensitive. Actions that face unwilling parties to the conflict have more likelihood to fail.
12.	There is not a lot of discussion around intersectionality. Is there any intention to include it further?	Yes, it is a priority to boost inclusivity and intersectionality in the calls for proposals.
13.	Media coverage in own/local language is important for ownership of the local population.	We agree with this statement.
14.	How is mediation perceived nowadays? Do the current instruments still fit?	On mediation and a risk-taking approach, it is very important to FPI and EEAS to deal with accountability although a degree of confidentiality often has to be applied.
15.	There is the role of foreign influence and the impact on peace sensitive programmes to consider. How to proceed with these missions and what impact?	Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) is looked at carefully with some specific actions undertaken. This is however not an area of specific attention for the thematic programme. Our focus is more on resilience to disinformation overall.
16.	Trauma healing must include all aspects of societies. Is there an ambition from the EC side to create programmes that focus on trauma healing and not only on collecting and spreading knowledge?	Mental health and trauma healing are among the priorities of the AAP.
17.	There must be a mapping of actors getting the money and where the money ends up.	AAPs are published on our website. We generally do not publish lists of projects.
18.	Are there any plans to engage with religious actors on the ground?	There is no intention to exclude religious actors, especially in mediation. They appear to be very helpful.

Part 2: Small group discussions on possible priority areas for AAPs 2024

In four different thematic groups, representatives of CSOs discussed different possible priority areas for the AAPs 2024 and shared their own experiences as well as recommendations and potential risks. In a wrap-up session, a summary of the central points was presented to the plenary.

Group 1: Resilience to disinformation: the role of CSOs

Guiding questions:

1. What roles can civil society play in strengthening resilience to disinformation?
2. What are the main opportunities and challenges you face as CSOs in tackling disinformation?
3. What are some examples of successful/innovative projects involving CSOs which contribute to resilience to disinformation?
4. What elements should the European Commission take into consideration when it supports projects in this area? (What are the pitfalls to avoid?)

Answers and comments:

- There is a need for a community of practice, potentially supported by a guidance note aimed at countering disinformation.
- While acknowledging the significance of media and therefore the need to keep supporting information as a public good, it is also important to recognise the danger posed by social media in spreading disinformation. However, because in some areas social media is less useful for communication, the EU should concentrate on all communication tools (e.g. WhatsApp) and the disinformation environment as a whole.
- It is crucial to build a resilient ecosystem so that disinformation can land on an environment of information that is able to disregard it. Translation and local languages are crucial to help media be more resilient to disinformation.
- Already existing institutions that protect democracy, freedom of speech and independent media should be strengthened, especially in fragile contexts.
- While CSOs are actively addressing the dissemination and consumption of disinformation, more initiatives should be carried out to tackle its production.
- Disinformation is often driven by diaspora actors within the EU who have better access to social media and the Internet. This is an area where the EU could be a leading example.
- Tech companies play a significant role in the disinformation environment and engagement with them poses several challenges.
    - In some countries of the Global South, big tech companies are not making as much of an effort to moderate and contain disinformation. For example, it was proved that in Ethiopia and Myanmar big tech companies were aware of the destabilising effect of disinformation but did not take action to address it.
    - The EU should exert more pressure on big tech companies, which usually operate under American law and do not feel responsible for their content.
    - While engaging with the platforms is vital, ultimately it is crucial to interact with organisations and individuals who are the sources of disinformation (often politicians, political parties and candidates).
- Civil society actors are extremely well placed to understand conflict contexts. Therefore, their expertise should be harnessed in the development of social media agreements.
    - For example, the guidance of CSOs and tech actors who understand the Thai online space was crucial in making the social media agreement with Thailand effective. These actors were also successfully engaged in the monitoring of the agreement, which resulted in the most advanced monitoring system set up to date.
    - The role of civil society partners has proved crucial in monitoring the implementation of code of conduct agreements, communicating directly with conflict parties to mitigate harmful content, and engaging with social media platforms to ensure agreements are implemented.
- It is useful to find synergies between the EU's work on disinformation and education as the ability to critically reflect on the content of media depends on civic education and the educational system.
- There is a need for a more comprehensive approach that links the global and national legislative frameworks. However, while engagement with international platforms is crucial for moderating online content, different approaches adapted to specific local contexts are needed.

- o For example, these issues will be discussed in a dialogue on social cohesion and technology in Mali, engaging relevant local actors.
- CSOs can assist in fostering national frameworks on social media regulation.
  - o For example, in Kenya and Nigeria, workshops with key players allowed for productive reflections on how to draw from the EU's regulatory framework experience to the respective national frameworks.
- In certain contexts, local actors that carry out activities to address disinformation face significant risks. The EU should ensure that these actors are supported with sufficient resources, including funding, technical and risk training, as well as logistical assistance (e.g. fuel, electricity provision, Internet service, etc.). However, it is important to recognise that the EU is not always perceived as a neutral actor in the disinformation environment, and being funded by the EU and thus associated with it can have negative ramifications for local media or CSOs.
- It is important to remember that some CSOs can also be vectors of disinformation, due to lack of training and capacity, as well as the political environment.

Group 2: Trauma healing as part of transitional justice efforts

Guiding questions:

1. What are the links between trauma healing and transitional justice? How can trauma healing support transitional justice?
2. What are the existing gaps for trauma healing as part of transitional justice and what types of actions could address these?
3. What are some examples of successful/innovative projects for trauma healing as part of transitional justice?
4. What elements should the European Commission take into consideration when it supports projects for trauma healing as part of transitional justice? (What are the pitfalls to avoid?)

Answers and comments:

- Trauma healing is crucial given the scale of human suffering associated with conflicts. It is needed for post-conflict reintegration and is often a prerequisite to engage in transitional justice processes.
- There is a need for increased sensitisation around understanding how trauma affects all actors in conflict and post-conflict settings, in order to better appreciate intersectionality and its effects at individual and societal level.
- It is important to understand localisation through the lens of communities because conceptions of trauma often have nothing to do with the Western understanding. For example, they can be strongly linked to religious or gender norms.
- 18-month project cycles are not sufficient and work is often limited to a specific project, therefore missing the long-term objective of trauma healing. In order to engage more effectively on trauma healing initiatives, there is a need for longer term funding, continuity of work, and smoother transitions between donors.
- Transitional justice takes decades as it addresses trauma, including generational trauma. For this, it becomes extremely relevant for the sustainability and longevity of peace processes.
- From a do-no-harm perspective, establishing a mental health support system needs continuity of service.
- Local organisations and communities often do not know how to access relevant EU delegation staff and resources. There is a gap between resources and patients. In addition, the lack of funding complicates making services known.
- Trauma healing is a very delicate field where one-size-fits-all approaches do not respond to diverse needs in different contexts. Thus, it is important to avoid imposing a single set of ideas about trauma and mental health. Approaches should be more survivor-centred and demand-driven (for example, help in finding a job might be more appreciated than counselling sessions).

Medical interventions should also be approached with caution considering how they might be viewed or accepted within local communities.

- Trauma and mental health are often linked to gender norms. Sometimes Western approaches (e.g. emotional disclosure) can be very destabilising for gender norms in certain regions and this risks doing more harm. Integrating gender sensitivity into policy and programming helps to address this issue.
- The perception that only specialised professionals (or doctors) can address the issue can have implications for risks relating to the protection of individuals. Due to the scale of the issue, there is a need to broaden the number and types of actors involved, while not neglecting the importance of safeguarding the survivors.
- It is important not to forget service providers, who might themselves suffer from trauma from working with traumatised communities in (post-)conflict scenarios. For example, the EU could establish a dedicated budget line for psychosocial support for project staff.
- Perpetrators should also be engaged, including through victim-offender mediation initiatives.
- Funding new projects instead of reinforcing existing functioning community mechanisms can sometimes be detrimental. For cost-effectiveness, innovation (for example on gender sensitivity) can be brought to existing initiatives instead of funding new projects.
- The EU's Policy Framework on support to transitional justice has some gaps on issues relating to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and could be complemented with guidelines drawing from the knowledge and expertise of practitioners.
- Trauma-informed MHPSS language should be integrated into policy, including the NDICI-GE mid-term review, as well as across specific project cycles.
- Trauma healing is particularly relevant across all components of the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus. It therefore represents an area where cooperation among different actors can be strengthened.

Group 3: Knowledge management and learning in the peacebuilding and security sectors: what is the current state of play

Guiding questions:

1. What are the main challenges you face in terms of knowledge management and learning in the peacebuilding sector and/or the security sector?
2. What are some examples of innovative/effective approaches to knowledge management and learning in the peacebuilding sector and/or the security sector?
3. How can existing approaches to knowledge management and learning in the peacebuilding sector and/or the security sector be strengthened?
4. Are there examples of approaches to knowledge management and learning that may be conducive to greater co-operation and sharing between the peacebuilding sector and other sectors (e.g. development, humanitarian, human rights, climate adaptation, etc.)?

Answers and comments:

- There is a need for collaborative learning spaces among all actors and stakeholders, both in person and online, to encourage active listening, discussion, and cooperation.
- There is a lack of coordination in learning efforts, especially within the EU, and there is a need to understand and measure what is effective. Additionally, there is a need to bridge the gap between EU methodologies and local methodologies.
- A diversity of knowledge is needed to understand different contexts. Local capacity and knowledge are often underrepresented while 'Western' capacity and knowledge are overrepresented. Working exclusively with elite civil society does not always accurately represent the broader civil society's knowledge and understanding of contexts.

- Outside agencies and practitioners continue to have a large role in shaping knowledge and methodologies despite often having very limited experience and understanding of the local context compared to local actors. Comparatively, local and national organisations receive little support from international actors.
- Funding for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) should be integrated throughout the entire implementation of a project, not just at the beginning or end. Also, there should be more reflections on whose knowledge is collected and produced.
- The EU should invest more in MEL, particularly in the learning aspect, and allocate a portion of each project's budget to it. Learning throughout the project should be mandatory so as to create knowledge across all phases.
- Flexibility in MEL is important, especially in the indicators. Fixed and generalised indicators for monitoring and analysis limit the actual analysis, especially in conflict-affected contexts where unexpected outcomes may provide the strongest evidence of success or failure.
- Flexibility can help reduce the bureaucratic burden (excessive administrative and financial reporting tasks) that impacts both the implementation of activities and the time invested in MEL.
- Certain conditions inhibit the sharing of knowledge:
    - Too standardised indicators prevent the full range of MEL that could be done if each project had its indicators
    - Insufficient staffing leads to heavy workload
    - Lack of systems, spaces, and processes that facilitate sharing opportunities
    - Lack of culture and practice of developing, sharing, and learning knowledge
    - Lack of connection and integration between lessons identified and training and capacity building
    - Lack of resources fully dedicated to research and MEL
- Certain conditions encourage the sharing of knowledge:
    - Leadership and organisational culture that promotes and fosters knowledge sharing and learning
    - Local, national and regional platforms that help to support and facilitate knowledge development and sharing
    - Well-organised and well-facilitated events and spaces
    - Good online platforms that can better support knowledge management and access
    - Flexible and dedicated funding that supports knowledge development and sharing
    - In addition to effective training, retreats, spaces for reflection and collaborative learning processes, including with multiple participating organisations.

Group 4: Mine action governance: what type of expertise is required

Guiding questions:

1. What type of expertise is required for effective mine action governance?
2. What would be your (civil society actors) recommendations for future EU interventions in mine action?
3. Do you have specific examples of successful/innovative projects relating to mine action governance which would be relevant to the EU?
4. What elements should the European Commission take into consideration when it supports projects in this area? (What are the pitfalls to avoid?)

Answers and comments:

- Given that humanitarian mine action organisations can mobilise large numbers of labourers and medical personnel to conflict-affected areas, and engage with internally displaced people (IDPs), it makes sense that the sector is attempting to forge closer ties with the peacebuilding sector. Traditional peacebuilding actors can also contribute by making humanitarian mine action more conflict sensitive and gender responsive.

- INGOs active in the sector primarily employ locals (90% or more), including illiterate people, thus contributing significantly to local capacity building. As a result, humanitarian mine action organisations play a crucial role in improving the livelihoods of people in conflict-affected areas, and tend to have a long-term presence, often for decades.
- Humanitarian mine action organisations also carry out a lot of risk education, which allows them to establish relationships with both the education and security sectors. Risk education is a great area for engagement because it is non-controversial and inexpensive.
- Because there is currently no clear EU framework on mine action, the EU should develop a dedicated strategy/framework in consultation with other actors.
- The most recent report ('The European Union's Support for Mine Action Across the World') only covers activities from 2012 to 2016. The report showed about ten different instruments that funded mine action across the EU. The EU should carry out an audit on current spending and seek collaboration with key actors involved in mine action efforts, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Geneva International Centre for Demining, and the organisations linked to the Ottawa and Oslo Conventions.
- Mine action could be an area for a suitable example of a Team Europe approach, by combining funding and programming from the EU and Member States, as well as non-EU actors such as Norway, Switzerland, and the US.
- Mine action is very context-specific, both in terms of technical aspects and governance and regulation. Therefore, blueprint models should be avoided.
- The EU should put pressure on countries to take responsibility for their own demining. It is useful and cost-effective for the EU to support the development of national policies on mine action in conflict-affected countries.
  - A positive example is Iraq where the EU supported the creation of national mine action standards and there is now a national approach to mine action.
- CSOs rely on the EU's high-level political advocacy towards national authorities, including on mine action frameworks and land ownership.
  - For example, in the West Bank, land ownership regulations are particularly delicate and clearing land can have consequences, including it being appropriated by the military or settlers. This is an area where EU ambassadors can step in.
- The EU should further consider the socio-economic effects of humanitarian mine action. Mine action is often interpreted as the simple act of demining; however, by releasing land, communities reassume ownership of it, develop new projects (e.g. related to water management or agriculture), or allow IDPs and refugees to return. For this reason, mine action can be connected to environmental protection, business, or industry, creating a multiplier impact with local community engagement.
- Since land is connected to identity, mine action can also be viewed from the perspective of psychological support and victim assistance.
- It is necessary to raise the importance of mine action as a prerequisite for post-conflict economic recovery and reconstruction. However, there should be more awareness about the risk of corruption.
- To enhance long-term effectiveness, the EU should maintain consistent funding levels, recognising that local actors need time to develop projects, capacity and expertise. This is exemplified by the contrast between substantial funds allocated for demining during the ISIS era, and the current limited availability.
- The EU should fund humanitarian mine action directly rather than going through multinational organisations like the UN, which will outsource the work to CSOs anyway, leading to higher costs.

Part 3: What are the ways of working that the EU can already adopt in the next 3 years?

Participants made the following comments and recommendations.

- The EU could examine its procedures and look into ways to make it easier for local organisations to access funds, for example by lowering the entry barriers to have access to calls for proposals. The EU could also look at the financial obstacles for local communities, which lack resources and capacity to even submit a proposal as co-applicant, much less as a lead applicant.
- Another aspect that might help local communities is to avoid having funding cycles that are too long and people working on the projects for very long periods. There should be a more frequent check between donor and grantee. FPI could make things easier in transition periods.
- The EU should always involve local organisations in international dialogues, including by making it easier to apply for visas to enable them to participate in conferences.