

MUTUAL ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN EU DELEGATIONS & CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS – LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

Briefing paper

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MARCH 2015

CONCORD is the European confederation of Relief and Development NGOs. Its 28 national associations, 18 international networks and 2 associate members represent over 2,400 NGOs. CONCORD leads reflection and political actions and regularly engages in dialogue with the European institutions and other civil society organisations. For more information go to: www.concordeurope.org

Background

An empowered civil society is a crucial component of any democratic system, and is an asset in itself. Civil society can help make policies more effective, development more equitable and sustainable, and growth more inclusive. In recent years, the EU has strengthened its commitment to supporting an enabling environment for civil society. In its communication on the role of civil society in development (2012), the European commission recognizes the multiple roles of civil society and its important contribution to development and democracy. It also highlights the need for a more comprehensive and strategic engagement with civil society at country level.

CONCORD's recently launched report "[Mutual engagement between EU delegations and civil society organisations – Lessons from the field](#)" analyses how civil society organisations engaging with EU delegations (EUDs) perceive this engagement. Its aim is to identify good practices and put forward recommendations, for both institutional and civil society actors, to improve the EUD-civil society dialogue and to contribute to the enabling environment and political space for civil society.

About the report

- ✓ This report looks at **all dimensions of mutual engagement** beyond funding and consultation in line with new approach through country roadmaps. The report is a tool for awareness raising and identifying good practice
- ✓ The **report is based on a survey**: sample at a given moment, qualitative more than quantitative, reflecting shared and individual experience and expectations from a broad range of CSOs worldwide, allowing to identify good practice and recommendations
- ✓ **How it was done**: On-line questionnaire in 3 languages, piloted with a partner, broadly shared through members and members of members, 3 webinars. 4 EU delegations interviewed by an external consultant.
- ✓ How many **respondents**: 229 responses from 70 countries (138 EN, 41 FR, 50 ES).

Main findings and recommendations¹

The results of the survey and the interviews with the EUDs (one in each continent) show **EUD-civil society dialogue is increasing**. In some countries a well-organised consultation on the programming of EU cooperation took place. In other cases, coordinated contributions from civil society were facilitated through national or thematic civil society coalitions and platforms.

Major challenges remain however:

- Existing ad hoc consultation processes need to be transformed into more permanent dialogue mechanisms that allow for genuine coordination of the broad range of civil society actors and the issues addressed need to be broadened.
- EU delegations' involvement in promoting the political role of civil society still needs to be reinforced and extended. EUDs are expected to play a more active and supportive role in situations where civil society space is at risk.
- The drafting of the CSO roadmaps for EUD engagement with civil society is viewed as a major step in the right direction. Recently, EUDs have managed to outreach more widely and more locally, and they can now build on this by identifying the remaining challenges and exploring options for overcoming them.
- Regarding funding opportunities and aid modalities, the survey shows that dialogue between EUDs and CSOs, and information-sharing remains fairly limited, while engagement with local, grassroots organizations – including those that have not yet benefited from EU funding – needs to be stepped up.
- Applicants whose applications have been rejected should receive better follow-up, and more detailed feedback, so that organisations can improve the quality of their proposals in the future.
- On the positive side, the survey did show some positive experiences of capacity-building activities by EUDs (for example in Congo-Brazzaville) which could be replicated in other countries
- Recommendations are centered on the importance of upgrading, broadening the scope and improving the inclusiveness of EUD-CSO consultation with a view to developing permanent dialogue mechanisms.
- Ensuring good follow-up, increasing support for CSOs involved in structured participation in domestic policies, coalition-building and networking around priority issues and sectors.
- EUDs, INGOs and more advanced national partners/platforms should step up efforts to share information and develop capacity, ensure spaces for dialogue and financial support to ensure that local organisations are better structured and organised.

How can you use this publication? How to promote it?

- **Organize a meeting/information session with your local partners and EU Delegations officials** to present the report and its findings, using the power point presentation elaborated by CONCORD. This will be a good opportunity to present this briefing paper and highlight the below suggestions. Inviting bilateral donors could also be a good idea.

¹ For more details on findings and recommendation see the publication on p. 38-40.

- **Contact other CSOs and local partners** to discuss the findings and lessons learnt and see how to take recommendations forward or replicate good practice.
- Identify and share with the EU delegation the main recommendations relevant to your local reality
- Facilitate common actions (e.g. joint letter, round-table, event, etc.) to **follow up with your EU delegation** and ensure a dialogue on the findings and recommendations.
- **Contact EU member state embassies and/or donor agencies** to discuss the findings and analyse how they could support you in this.
- Enquire the EU delegation about the current status of the CSO roadmap and get information on what next steps will be and how CSO involvement will be ensured; Include references to the report and its recommendations in your own advocacy documents, in order to reinforce the demands and claims.
- Take this as an opportunity to **advocate for strong EU support for an enabling environment for civil society** and maximum impact on poverty eradication.

We would very much appreciate that you send us any information on any actions you will be taking on this and especially any feedback you get from your EU delegations, EU member states embassies or donor agencies.

Your examples and experiences are relevant to help improving mutual engagement between the EUD and civil society.

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