

CONCORD briefing paper on the EU Country CSO roadmaps

CONCORD is the European NGO confederation for Relief and Development. Its 27 national associations, 18 international networks and 2 associate members represent 1,800 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.

Introduction

As outlined in the 2012 Communication on Civil Society in Development, the EU will be developing country CSO roadmaps to strengthen the strategic cooperation and structured dialogue of EU and member states with Civil Society organizations at partner country level.

The European Union Delegations (EUD) have received guidelines and templates to begin the process of developing country CSO roadmaps to be completed during the first half of 2014. Therefore, it is now the time to build capacity and mobilize local civil society organisations (CSOs) to engage with the EU delegations. This is a unique opportunity for local, national and international CSOs working in countries across the world to engage in dialogue with their respective EU Delegation and to make their and their constituencies' voices heard.

NOW is the time to engage with EU Delegations concerning the development of EU country CSO roadmaps in your country!

In this brief you will find information on the background to and the next steps of the EU country CSO roadmaps, enabling you to engage effectively with your local EU Delegation. This includes information on:

1. **Background:** EU commitment to engaging with civil society
2. **Purpose:** Why CSO Country Roadmaps?
3. **Process:** What has been done and what lies ahead?
4. **Structure:** What will the roadmaps include?
5. **CSO Engagement:** What Next? What CSO action?

1. Background: EU commitment to engaging with civil society

In recent years, the EU has strengthened its commitment to supporting an enabling environment for civil society and stepped up its efforts to include CSOs as development actors in their own right in dialogue concerning policy and programming of EU development aid. These commitments are enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty, as well as in the Cotonou Agreement and the Agenda for Change. In the past, the EU's dialogue with civil society has often been criticized, including EU's court of Auditors¹ in 2009, for not being sufficiently sustained and structured. The Structured Dialogue² process that took place in 2010 and 2011 has confirmed the EU's willingness to establish a stronger partnership and a more regular and strategic dialogue with CSOs, which acknowledges CSOs as

¹ European Court of Auditors, *The Commission's Management of 'Non-State Actors' Involvement in EC Development Cooperation*, Special Report No. 4 (2009)

² Structured Dialogue was a dialogue and consultation process organized by the EU Commission, which involved more than 700 stakeholders and representatives from civil society, partner countries, Member States, the European Parliament and EEAS, including EU Delegations. See more on https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/aidco/index.php/Structured_dialogue

development actors in their own right. In 2012 OECD DAC acknowledged that *“the Delegations’ increased dialogue with CSOs is evident, but is not yet sufficiently structured, systematic or strategic. The Commission should ensure that engagement with civil society is institutionalised and leaves political space for CSOs in policy discussions both in Brussels and in the field”*³.

An important step in that direction was the adoption of the European Commission (EC) and European External Action Service (EEAS) Communication on *Human rights and Democracy at the heart of EU external action: towards a more effective approach* (December 2011) and the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (Council paper adopted on 25 June 2012). Furthermore, in September 2012, these intentions have been translated in an EC Communication on Civil Society: *The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe’s engagement with Civil Society in external relations*. The communication aims to further improve the dialogue with civil society, and in particular to increase engagement with local civil society in EU’s partner countries, and it committed every EU Delegation to develop country CSO roadmaps.

2. Purpose: Why CSO Country Roadmaps?

According to the EC⁴, the purpose of the roadmaps is *“to improve the impact, predictability and visibility of EU actions, ensuring consistency and synergy throughout the various sectors covered by EU external relations. These roadmaps are also meant to trigger coordination and sharing of best practices with the Member States and other international actors, including for simplification and harmonisation of funding requirements.*

Roadmaps should be based on a sound understanding of the CSOs arena and the wider socio-economic context in which they operate. This is a prerequisite for a more strategic engagement of the EU at country level, particularly if relevant stakeholders have to be identified in order to establish or facilitate effective and meaningful dialogue schemes.

The roadmaps should identify long term objectives of EU cooperation with CSOs and encompass dialogue as well as operational support, identifying appropriate working modalities. This exercise should be linked to the programming of EU external assistance, namely bilateral, regional and thematic cooperation. The human rights country strategies currently being developed by the EU will be an important reference.

The roadmaps should be developed taking into account the views of civil society, be regularly updated and where appropriate, made publicly available and shared with national authorities.”

3. Process: What has been done and what lies ahead?

The EC and EEAS have launched the preparation of EU country CSO roadmaps. In late January 2014 guidelines and templates have been sent out to all EU Delegations so they can start developing the EU country CSO roadmaps at country level. **The CSO roadmaps for the period 2014-2017 are expected to be ready by the end of July 2014** and should be prepared, taking into account the views of civil society and. Thereafter, the EU and member states will update the country CSO roadmaps on a yearly basis based on an on-going dialogue with CSOs and other relevant actors, with the next update expected in January 2015.

³ <http://www.oecd.org/dac/peer-reviews/50155818.pdf>

⁴ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2012:0492:FIN:EN:PDF>

The guidelines and templates have also been shared with EU member states, as they are partners in the EU country CSO roadmaps, so that they can participate in the development and management of them through their embassies and/or donor agencies. Together with the distribution of the guidelines and templates, the EC launched a roadmap facility, extending additional resources to the EUDs to support the development of country CSO roadmaps.

The guidelines and templates for the CSO roadmaps were prepared and tested by some 30 EUDs throughout 2013, the delegations having received guidance on the first building blocks of the roadmaps together with the instructions of the second phase of the programming. Following the feedback and comments from these pilot roadmaps, the revised templates and guidelines for the roadmaps were presented to stakeholders at the EC Policy Forum on Development in Brussels in November 2013.

EUDs are expected to draft the roadmaps building on the programming exercise of the new thematic CSO-LA programme 2014-2020, drawing on existing knowledge of the CSO arena, existing channels of dialogue, existing areas of support and existing donor coordination to avoid duplicating work and streamline processes. CSOs' contributions are hence crucial for this phase.

4. Structure: What will the roadmaps include?

The CSO roadmaps will be built on a single template, which will then be adapted to the local context. According to the latest available information, as presented at the EC Policy Forum on Development in November 2013, the basic outline of the roadmap template includes:

1. Analysis. What do we know about the current situation?
 - Enabling environment and political/legislative context
 - Participation and roles
 - Capacity among national and local CSOs
2. Self-assessment: How have we engaged so far?
 - Structured dialogue with civil society
 - Policy dialogue for enabling environment
 - Operational support incl. mainstreaming
 - Coordination with EU Member States
3. Priorities: Where do we want to go?
 - Contextualisation
 - Communication
4. Actions: How will we get there?
 - Analysis
 - Policy dialogue
 - Operational support
5. Dashboard: How do we keep track?
 - Indicators at process and outcome level

Though the EC in its CSO communication has stated that the CSO roadmaps, “*where appropriate, [will be] made publicly available and shared with national authorities*”, it is however important to be

aware that EC does not intend the CSO roadmaps to be merely a document, but a process managed by EUDs in coordination with Member States.

5. CSO Engagement: What Next? What CSO action?

According to the EC, the roadmaps should be developed taking into account the views of civil society, be regularly updated and where appropriate, made publicly available and shared with national authorities. Furthermore, the EC underlines that it will apply an inclusive approach requiring consultation with CSOs and LAs and coordination with Member States. According to the EC the process at country level will include:

- Involvement of EU Member States + other major partners
- Involvement of local civil society is key - using country specific mechanisms
- International NGOs with a strong country presence also useful partners
- Authorities to be consulted – not least on enabling environment
- Approved at country level

Therefore it is important that CSOs are well informed and consulted during the various stages of developing and updating the CSO roadmaps – between now and July 2014, and after that on a regular basis for the annual updates of the roadmaps. This process will provide the basis for a functional dialogue where civil society is included as a strategic and relevant partner in the EU's policy and programming work, promoting an enabling environment for civil society at country level, and ensuring that the voices of a diverse and dynamic civil society are heard. It is therefore a crucial time for all CSOs, not least local, to get engaged in the process in a strategic and structured manner to secure this role of civil society.

CONCORD already conducted a survey of the first phase of the 2014-2020 bilateral programming at EU Delegation level, which led to the following recommendations towards EUDs, which can also be applied for the CSO roadmap exercise:

- Reach out to more CSOs.
- Build capacity, provide relevant information and guidance them so all CSOs can speak up and be heard.
- Give CSOs time to prepare and coordinate themselves by sharing (annual) planning documents and announcing consultations more in advance.
- Interact more regularly. Make a follow up a part of the dialogue process in order to come to a truly structured dialogue.
- Be flexible with issues to be discussed. Take on board issues that are outside of the direct scope of EU funded projects.
- Further build the capacity and means of EU Delegations to engage with CSOs.

ACTION: What can you do to engage with the EU Delegations concerning the CSO roadmaps?

- **Contact your EU Delegation** to get information and inform them of your interest and preferences: What is the EU Delegations exact timeline for the CSO roadmaps process in your country? How do they plan to involve CSOs in a strategic and structured manner? Are Aid Effectiveness Coordination Groups, and therefore Members States, involved in these

consultations? Why is the process important to you? How would you prefer to be consulted? What you can offer in terms of CS inputs and coordination?

- **Contact your EU member state embassy and/or donor agency** to get information on their involvement and to inform them of your interest. How is the embassy involved and what are their priorities in the process? Are they, through the Aid Effectiveness Coordination Group, involved in these consultations? How can you support each other in the process? Why is the process important to you? How would you prefer to be consulted? What you can offer in terms of CS inputs and coordination?
- **Coordinate with other CSOs and include local partners** to ensure broad civil society awareness of the opportunity to influence as well as legitimate and effective CSOs engagement. Facilitate common actions (e.g. a letter to the EU delegation) and inform as many CSOs as possible. It is advisable to organize meetings with CSO networks to come up with a position paper on CSOs' opinion on the CSO roadmaps and how to ensure a structured and strategic dialogue between EU Delegations and civil society at country level in both the short and long term.
- This is also an **excellent opportunity to advocate** for strong EU support for an enabling environment for civil society and maximum impact on poverty eradication. The EU has clearly stated a wish to empower local CSOs in their actions for democratic governance and equitable development in its communication on the role of CSOs, and in subsequent EU Council Conclusions and European Parliament resolution on the same issue.

Further reading/background information:

EC Communication: "The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations" (On Country CSO roadmaps see page 4 and 9-10):

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2012:0492:FIN:EN:PDF>

European Parliament resolution of 22 October 2013 on local authorities and civil society: Europe's engagement in support of sustainable development:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&language=EN&reference=P7-TA-2013-432>

EC presentations on Country CSO roadmaps at the EC Policy Forum on Development:

https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/aidco/images/3/33/%2811%29_Session_3_Roadmaps-work_in_progress_MJO_1906.pdf and

https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/aidco/images/2/25/PFD_Session_5_EU_country_roadmaps.pdf

CONCORD Europe Recommendations for EU Delegations' engagement with CSOs (2013):

<http://www.concordeurope.org/260-concord-s-recommendations-for-eu-delegations-engagement-with-cso-s>

Concord Denmark Report: "Country CSO Roadmaps: How EU delegations can strengthen engagement with civil society" (2013):

<http://www.concorddenmark.dk/?type=page&id=342&itemid=1788>