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In this Issue

Experiences of Civil Society Structuring from the Democratic Republic of Congo	2
Internet-based ACP-EU Civil Society Information sharing	4
Developing a Civil Society Support Programme in Togo	5
Annotation - Who's round the table?	7
ACP-EU: Direct Access Funds	8

News and Events

On 8 October 2001, the second e-discussion on "Reforming Technical Cooperation for Capacity Development" started. The event will run for 8 weeks, and is part and parcel of a wider initiative of UNDP to improve technical cooperation. It is hosted and moderated by Capacity.org, and will focus on discussing "Alternatives and Options" to existing capacity development approaches in international development cooperation. (www.capacity.org/undp-forum)

From 13 to 15 December 2001, the International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC) will hold its 10th Anniversary Conference to critically review the use and operationalisation of the concept of Civil Society and its strengthening in international development practice. The Conference will incorporate INTRAC's work on the relationships between Civil Society and the private sector, and also on the nature of Civil Society development in situations of conflict. (www.intrac.org/conference2001.htm)

More News & Events:

www.capacity.org/events.html

Advancing the policy and practice of capacity building in international development cooperation

Structuring Civil Society

Involving non-state actors in the development process has become a major characteristic of international cooperation over recent years. Non-state actors include the private sector, social and economic partners, such as trade unions, and civil society in all its diversity. The development community has recognised that their contribution can go well beyond merely executing development goals set at the national level.

Active involvement and participation in policy dialogue and formulation are increasingly on the agenda and are expected to yield major development benefits, including increased ownership, new public-private partnerships, consolidation of democratisation and improved sustainability. This trend towards "participatory development" calls for new aid coordination mechanisms at the national level. Individual civil society organisations, networks or platforms are increasingly invited to aid coordination meetings to participate in the formulation of national development frameworks, such as the "Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers" (PRSP).

This more inclusive approach to policy formulation has also been introduced in the Partnership Agreement between the European Union (EU) and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, signed in Cotonou in June 2000. It was a major discussion item during the recently held ACP-EU Conference on the participation of civil society in the implementation of "Cotonou". It concluded that enormous efforts need to be made to strengthen the capacities of non-state actors to effectively engage in policy dialogue and formulation.

In this issue of *Capacity.org* we highlight two different approaches of national civil society structuring. The contribution of Pierre Kanika reviews the process leading to the creation of the National Council of non-governmental organisations in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It shows that the creation of sustainable and capable national structures can take many years, but that it can be achieved if nurtured from within a country and strategically supported with external sources. The second article is by René Madrid, who contributed to a participatory process in Togo to develop an EC funded programme to support civil society. It makes clear that capacity development needs to be undertaken among 'recipients' and funding agencies alike, and that support programmes can score results if well planned and approached using participatory processes.

In addition, we also provide information on some European Commission (EC) mechanisms, for enhancing civil society participation within the framework of Cotonou, with information on "Direct Access Funds", and a text on a major ACP-EU civil society information sharing project, coordinated by EUFORIC. Finally, you will find an annotation on civil society participation in aid coordination as well as a list with suggestions for further reading.

For comments and views on this issue, you are invited to e-mail to cb@ecdpm.org

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Experiences of Civil Society Structuring from the Democratic Republic of Congo

The National Council for Non-Governmental Development Organizations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (CNONGD) was set up in response to the need for a body capable of acting as a counterweight in the political arena and offering alternatives that would encourage people to take responsibility for their own development.

This was the result of a process which was generated at provincial level with the establishment of the Regional Councils for Non-Governmental Development Organizations (CRONGD). These were the secular successors to a mass charitable movement which began when development and welfare offices were set up by the churches in the early 1970s. From 1974 to 1976 a number of secular NGOs were set up in the Democratic Republic of Congo; these gradually became organized and federated through the Regional Councils in the country's 11 provinces, a movement supported, in particular, by civil servants who had become unemployed owing to the breakdown in government. Although the members of the Regional Councils are essentially NGOs, the Councils also include other kinds of civil society organizations such as diocesan development offices, trade unions and farmers' organizations. They received funding from various outside sources, especially European and North American NGOs. Just over ten years later (1987-1988), those in charge of the Regional Councils felt the need for a national organization which would enable their work to be properly recognized and would defend people's interests more effectively. The statutes of a national body were drawn up at a meeting of the Regional Councils in December 1990, and the National Council was subsequently set up.

The National Council for Non-Governmental Development Organizations: goals and challenges

The National Council has four goals:

- to serve as a platform for exchange of information between NGOs and to act as their spokesman in their dealings with the government and private players concerned with development issues;
- to encourage the pursuit of new approaches to development and new forms of cooperation;
- to provide support (at the request of member NGOs) for fund-raising activities, consultation and technical back-up, organization, management and communications;
- to make it easier for NGOs to attend national and international meetings and be involved in decisions concerning development problems in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Council has four main administrative bodies: a general assembly of delegates from each province, a board of management, a board of auditors, and an executive office which is responsible for day-to-day management and is backed up by various technical departments. The National Council receives funding from several different

sources: a financial partnership with the northern NGOs that have supported the Regional Councils, bilateral cooperation with European countries, and international donor agencies such as the European Union (through the NGO SOS Faim), as well as contributions from the affiliated Regional Councils (financial contributions in the form of annual membership fees, and contributions in kind such as organizing meetings).

Once the desired structure was in place, a number of difficulties arose:

Organizational capacity. The various NGOs worked in isolation, did not communicate with each other, and in some cases were unaware of each other's existence. The national meetings gave them an opportunity to look at ways of setting up reliable, effective structures at both national and regional level. It was eventually decided to bring them together in a platform which would serve as a forum for exchange of information, consultation and lobbying, backed up by a communications system linking all 11 provinces.

Capacity building. Unfortunately it became apparent that, despite their commitment, those in charge of the new structures did not have the necessary skills and expertise to carry out their duties properly. Management training courses were held, as well as courses to give the managers a clearer understanding of the political and social context in which they were operating, among other things by sending them on missions to the regions. Professional organizations whose main role was to facilitate training through participatory research subsequently emerged.

A key role in efforts to structure the country

It will be clear from the foregoing that the National Council has acted as a catalyst in setting up reliable civil society structures that operate with legal cover and technical support from the Council. Another of its strengths is that it has successfully avoided being hijacked by the government. The leaders of the movement have done what they can to ward off this danger. The organizations' firmly established tradition of consultation makes it difficult to be manipulated.

This has led to a significant change of attitude, from one based on distrust to one based on trust between the various NGOs. Whereas they were previously isolated, the regular meetings have now brought them closer together, providing a forum in which they can discuss concerted approaches to the problems they face.

One important point needs to be made here. In its struggle for recognition, civil society has held to the view that everyone should be involved in this joint endeavour. Its leaders want to make sure the broad movement does not become dominated by a small group of

people who might eventually weaken its momentum. The member organizations insist on being involved in everything the network does. They want to have access to all the available information and to be involved in all the consultations, so that they can all feel committed to any measures or decisions that are taken. This gives them a sense of "ownership" of the process and reduces the risk of its being taken over by the government or certain non-governmental leaders.

The role of the national government

In order to consolidate this participatory view of development, which is based on the responsibility and involvement of civil society, the government needs to support the process in various ways:

It must understand the role of civil society while maintaining its role as the guarantor of public democratic order.

It must help the movement to assert itself (by allowing it the necessary resources and scope for action) in order to reinforce the process of grass-roots community guidance and assistance, in particular by making it easier for local delegates to attend national meetings.

It must regulate the activities of the movement and ensure that the necessary arrangements (especially legislative ones) are made for their development.

Financially, NGOs in Congo are too dependent on outside aid. The government could consider ways of subsidising grass-roots development work initiated by the NGOs (co-funding, special taxes, interest on endowments, etc.).

The role of donor agencies and international NGOs

In addition to the government, donor agencies also have a part to play in the Congolese community movement. Indeed, it must be admitted that the current strength of the movement is essentially due to support from foreign partners. Such support remains important and necessary in view of (a) the attitudes of Congo's political leaders and (b) the fact that it enables the movement to maintain the necessary neutrality in its dealings with the government. Nevertheless, certain changes are needed if foreign support is to make a truly effective contribution to the process:

Targeted assistance. Funds are often directed to places and activities that were not requested by the beneficiaries, and sometimes during periods when the assistance provided is not in accordance with people's needs.

More flexible procedures for access to funding. By the time funding arrives, the needs reflected in the projects have often changed. People no longer work on the basis of pre-defined grass-roots priorities, but in order to justify the funding received.

Promotion of capacity-building measures for local NGOs. With their ample resources, northern NGOs operating in the Democratic Republic of Congo tend to present themselves as being more competent and more aware of the problems facing the country. Instead, it would be a good idea to encourage partnerships between Congolese and international NGOs, so as to

ensure that local organizations do not lapse into inactivity and disappear altogether.

Lessons from the experience of the National Council

The following lessons can be drawn from the experience of the National Council in its efforts to help structure civil society in the Democratic Republic of Congo:

The importance of consultation. The regular, ongoing organization of meetings at which representatives of civil society can exchange information and views is a major asset, for it gives civil society a framework of training and information which will help them understand the various problems more fully and draw up coherent response strategies.

A broader range of themes. Civil society has widened the range of themes it uses to arouse and mobilize national and international public opinion. Among the new themes is good governance, which some wrongly see as a political hobby-horse, whereas in fact it is a key factor in development.

Acceptance of civil society organizations as partners in development. In helping civil society organizations to become structured, organized and operational, the National Council has not only helped increase people's awareness of how to tackle community problems, but has established itself as a spokesman in dealings with the government and international agencies.

A clear outlook. A clear analysis of the context in which civil society organizations are operating has helped them to understand what development really involves, and hence to decide what goals they should pursue. Nevertheless, after a successful initial phase in which its main priority was to get the community movement properly established, the National Council now faces an operational challenge to its capacity to serve grass-roots communities. It appears that its financial partners tend to see its role as purely advisory. At the same time, its management capacity has proved limited when it comes to mobilizing broad sectors of the population. Though effective at provincial level, its mobilization techniques are out of date, and the necessary resources are lacking at national level (such as community radio or television stations that deal with development problems).

Limited capacity. Although still backed up by outside funding, the resources available to the movement are no longer as consistent as they used to be. Despite mobilization of domestic resources, funding remains limited, and local organizations have found it difficult to compete with international NGOs. More generally, although this grass-roots movement has been firmly established in the community for a number of decades, it continues to be undermined by the lack of autonomy - especially financial autonomy - of its constituent structures.

¹ Among the European NGOs were SOS Faim (Belgium), Christian Aid (Netherlands), NCOS (Belgium), ICCO and NOVIB.

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Internet-based ACP-EU Civil Society Information sharing

The Cotonou Agreement between African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and the European Union (EU) opens the door for the active involvement of civil society at all levels. The issue now is how to implement this Agreement. It is common knowledge that it will require capacity development. Strengthening information and communication strategies are crucial aspects of this process. Links need to be built between actors in ACP and EU countries, and networking and exchanges of expertise and experiences among civil society need to be strengthened. Information about the ACP countries needs to be mainstreamed in international debates, both in order to provide a balanced overview of policy at the ACP-EU level and to raise the awareness of ACP development concerns within Europe.

In this context, in October 2001 a three-year project was launched to extend and enhance the appropriate use of information and communication technologies by civil society actors in the ACP countries as well as in Europe. The project aims to create knowledge-sharing systems and partnerships on priority issues such as poverty reduction, sustainable development, and international trade arrangements. Its main output will be a knowledge and information base for monitoring cooperation between the two groups of countries, which will be jointly owned and maintained by civil society actors in the South and the North. The project also aims to help civil society in the ACP countries to be better informed about the opportunities available to them under the Cotonou Agreement, so that they can act accordingly. The project is a cooperation of the European Forum on International Cooperation, ECDPM, the ACP Civil Society Forum and EUROSTEP, with Euforic functioning as the focal point.

The Internet offers enormous possibilities for information exchange, awareness raising and advocacy for development. The networking mechanisms that will be created in the project will be primarily Internet-based, including a directory on civil society in Europe and ACP countries, which will also be issued on CD-ROM. A great deal of information on ACP-EU cooperation is already available online and is accessible via the Euforic website. However, the information resources from the ACP countries contained in the Euforic database are limited. Information is often available in print form at the national level, but due to the lack of technical facilities and resources, few documents are published in electronic form. The project will therefore encourage the production and distribution of electronic information by strengthening the Internet-based information and communication strategies of the ACP Civil Society Forum and by creating an institutional website. With its member organisation structure, Euforic is well placed to play an active role in mainstreaming and disseminating inputs on ACP-EU issues from civil society in both the EU and the ACP countries. Euforic is able to combine the strength of its Internet facilities with the expertise, resources and networks of its individual members, who will be able to reach a wide range of target groups through promotional activities.

For further information, see the information of the three-year project (www.euforic.org/about/en/projects/acpcivilsoc.htm) or contact Huub Mudde, coordinator of Euforic (hm@euforic.org).

Further Reading

Mackay, K. and S. Gariba (eds.). 2000. The Role of Civil Society in Assessing Public Sector Performance in Ghana: Proceedings of a Workshop. Washington. World Bank (www.capacity.org/11/issue11_annotation_mackay.html).

The report, prepared by the World Bank's Operations Evaluation Department (OED), provides a synthesis of a one-day consultative workshop on the role of Ghanaian civil society in assessing public sector performance. The participants discussed the role that civil society should play and considered the main impediments to this. Means to achieve greater civil society engagement in this area were also proposed.

Graumans, A. 1999. Experiences of dialogue between civil society and national governments in the EU-ACP partnership: a desk study. Amsterdam: INZET. (www.inzet.nl/projecten/lome/deskstudy1.html).

This desk study aims to give an overview of existing practices of dialogue mechanisms in the ACP group of countries and provides evidence that many initiatives have been taken by ACP civil society in recent years.

Bossuyt, J. 2000. Involving non state actors and local governments in ACP-EU dialogue. (ECDPM Policy Management Brief, 13). Maastricht: ECDPM. (www.oneworld.org/ecdp/pmb/b13_gb.htm).

A wide range of actors are invited to participate in the formulation and implementation of the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement. This brief, based on pilot experiences in several ACP countries, considers key elements in organising dialogue with non-state actors and local governments.

Sako, S. 2001. Capacity Building: a priority agenda for Africa. In: Talents – building capacity of African civil society, (1). (www.mwengo.org/talents1.pdf).

Article by the Executive Secretary of the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) to introduce the inaugural edition of "Talents", a publication by Mwengo (Zimbabwe) fully dedicated to the capacity building of African Civil society organisations.

More resources on: www.capacity.org/11/annotated.html

Developing a Civil Society Support Programme in Togo

The European Commission asked PRECOD (*Programme de renforcement de la coopération décentralisée*) to perform a study with a view to supporting the process of strengthening non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Togo. The PRECOD decided that the study should be process-based and for this reason be divided into two stages. The first stage consisted of a pre-feasibility study (i.e. problem identification), whilst the second stage comprised the feasibility study proper (i.e. training). There was a time gap between the two stages during which the various actors had an opportunity to organise themselves and formulate their views on the nature of the proposed programme. Whilst the study was targeted primarily at NGOs, it was also intended to encompass, right from the very outset, all other civil-society actors.

The basic goal of the study was to foster a participatory approach to the process of designing a programme for supporting both NGOs and civil society in general. The process was intended to culminate in the production of a financing proposal approved by the principal actors involved (and present) and which, while focusing on NGOs, nevertheless ensured that the programme was coherent with other actions and programmes in operation in Togo. The high profile allocated to NGOs followed from the role and position of NGOs in civil society in Togo.

The first stage took place in November 1999. The transitional phase started in December 1999 and ran until February 2000, and the second and final stage was concentrated in March 2000. The financing proposal was finalised in April 2000. The current position at the time of writing is that the stakeholders are still awaiting a decision on the financing proposal.

Structuring of the support process

The object of the first stage (problem identification) was to define the principles and the broad thrust of the NGO/civil

society support programme. To this end, a general institutional analysis was performed along participatory lines with a view to identifying the main groups of actors that would be potentially affected and interested by the idea of a civil society support programme. This was achieved by organising a consultation workshop, taking account of the process of decentralisation which Togo is currently undergoing. Various possible methods of implementing the support programme were also identified with the aid of a participatory format, on the basis of the relevance, feasibility and viability criteria applying to the programme. In this context, six regional fact-finding workshops were organised with the aim of analysing the current situation and formulating recommendations for a support programme. The process concluded with a final feedback workshop.

The object of the transitional phase was to strengthen the various actors' capacities for debate, information interchange and decision-making as part of the preparations for the workshop during which the training stage would be planned. The prime concern was to ensure that the actors had the information that they needed in order to conduct an in-depth discussion of all aspects of the programme. To this end, the report produced on the first stage was distributed to approximately one hundred people, feedback sessions and debates were held among actors in each region with the aim of discussing both the contents of the programme and the relevance, feasibility and viability criteria. The secondary aim of the transitional phase was to promote debate by collecting the actors' questions and comments on the process (on both contents and methodology), facilitating the exchange of information among the actors (an electronic discussion group was set up for each region) and incorporating the comments in the planning workshop.

The object of the second stage (i.e. training) was to define both the contents of the

support programme and the method of implementation (i.e. both the system and the procedures). To this end, operational methods were selected by means of a participatory process and the logical framework for action was finalised by identifying the activities, hypotheses and instruments that were to be used for implementing the programme. A secondary objective was to identify the operational principles underlying the system for managing the programme. Here, the emphasis was on devising a transparent management system as well as a monitoring structure that would enable each group of actors to administer that part of the programme for which it was responsible and that would also guarantee the representativeness of the interface structures as well as the transparency of their decision-making.

Strengthening capacities: Challenges and opportunities of the Togolese process

From the very outset of the study, the talks held with various actors highlighted the difficulties involved in seeking to strengthen capacity directly at a national level. There were two basic problems here. Firstly, one particular national federation was seen to be performing well, but not to be sufficiently representative and to have a tendency to 'monopolise' NGO representation. Secondly, another national federation was felt to be lacking in both legitimacy and efficacy, to be reliant on national powers and to have the purpose of 'hijacking' the various associations that are active in the non-government sector.

In order to avoid politicising the issue of civil-society support, it was decided to 'move down' one level and to organise working meetings in the various regions of Togo. These regional meetings, which were designed to analyse the current situation and discuss the nature of the proposed support programme, enabled to move forward in two specific areas:

firstly, they allowed to highlight the constraints encountered by the various actors (e.g. lack of information; lack of competence, particularly in terms of project-planning ability; lack of resources; weakness of inter-NGO cooperation, and in some cases even fierce inter-NGO rivalry; mutual suspicion felt by NGOs and ministerial departments; and an unsuitable legal framework); and secondly, they gave an opportunity to establish the broad outline of the aims of the future programme (i.e. strengthening the capacities of the various actors; building an institutional framework for supporting all types of actors; strengthening the regional networks; strengthening links between NGOs and the ministerial departments); upgrading the legal framework and/or speeding up procedures; and establishing a fund for financing the projects).

Various types of factors contributed to the success of the support process:

emphasis was put on the need for working together with the various ministries involved, at both at national and at regional level;

a number of local workshops were organised in such a way as to enable all participants to have a say;

the actors were informed about the role they were expected to play in the study; the members of the PRECOD mission acted as facilitators rather than expert consultants;

the actors followed a short course on the factors affecting the quality of the programme (i.e. relevance, feasibility and viability); this was intended to help them to conduct in-depth discussions of the contents of the programme;

a debate was organised on key aspects of programme design (i.e. the distribution of responsibilities; the representativeness and viability of networks; links between the various networks; consultations between the various actors);

sufficient time was allotted to this debate (i.e. two months);

e-mail discussion groups were set up enabling everyone's views to be disseminated among all the various participants; a brief course on the management of the

project cycle was arranged (dealing with both the nature of the various stages and the logical framework), enabling the participants to structure the contents of the proposed programme and to ensure that it was consistent with the European Commission's requirements in terms of format;

a planning workshop was organised during which the actors designed their own logical framework and their own programme management system;

the PRECOD finalised the financing proposal and sent it to the various actors for comment and approval.

Links

Euforic's dossier on civil society participation in ACP-EU cooperation, with policy documents from the European Commission, the ACP Secretariat and ACP Civil Society Forum discussed during the "ACP-EU Conference on the Participation of Civil Society in the Implementation of the Cotonou Agreement", July 2001, Brussels. (http://www.euforic.org/resource/en/doss/civil_society/)

Kakarala, S. 2001. Building civil society and direct funding of Southern NGOs: a review of recent literature. Warwick: University of Warwick. The paper reviews experiences of direct funding of Southern NGOs by donors and provides an extensive list of the most recent literature on the topic. (<http://elj.warwick.ac.uk/global/issue/2001-1/kakarala.html>)

There were nonetheless three specific challenges that needed to be overcome: firstly, the deep sense of mistrust among the actors themselves, in terms of both inter-NGO relations and relations between NGOs and other parties. This particular problem was addressed by diversifying the group of actors and raising the transparency of the process; secondly, there were a number of actors who adopted a wait-and-see attitude and sought from the beginning to make money out of their participation in the process (e.g. by demanding a daily allowance and the reimbursement of travel expenses). This problem was responded by insisting that each body was itself responsible for ensuring that

one of its members participated in the national workshop;

finally, there was a risk that the project would be either blocked or 'hijacked' by the political establishment. It was for this reason that it was decided to move down to the regional level, as the risks of operating at a national level were perceived to be too great. Hence, success at a national level would follow from a process of strengthening at a regional level, which would be less susceptible to political pressure.

Key features of civil-society strengthening

There are a number of vital aspects in this connection:

A national structure can be viable only if it is built on solid foundations. Local structures must be strengthened in order to stabilise national structures. This also means defining in clear terms the roles played by the various levels.

In the light of the atmosphere of profound suspicion prevailing among certain actors and the differences in their relative financial positions, it is important to concentrate the process on a programme for strengthening competence (i.e. how to do it) rather than on the way in which activities should be funded (i.e. what to do). The prime benefit for the actors involved should therefore take the form of capacity improvements rather than financial gains. This should help to discourage those actors who are interested solely in financial gain or power.

Similarly, it is vital to ensure that the government does not become marginalised. Governmental actors are parties with whom other actors must learn to work. At the same time, the government needs to learn to work and share power with civil-society actors, and to recognise that it stands to gain from the involvement of other actors.

At a later stage, action will need to be linked to a process of collective learning. This will mean co-financing projects that meet the quality criteria formulated by the actors.

Finally, it is important to set up a team of facilitators combining local knowledge (so as to be able to better understand the

informal relations between the actors, i.e. the relational 'iceberg') with external methodological expertise that can guarantee that the process is facilitated in a neutral manner.

It is worth pointing out that it would have been easy to launch the programme itself as all the actors involved were ready. The problem, however, would appear to lie in the European Commission's approval mechanisms: the documents are with the Commission for over 15 months and no decisions have been taken on them, so far. There is a

risk that the actors who have been brought together will lose interest in the programme and that efforts put into the process by all stakeholders will prove to have been counterproductive. If the results of the study are not followed up and the parties are not given an opportunity to implement the conclusions drawn, it is only logical to expect them to revert to a state of mutual mistrust and to be reluctant to become involved. Nonetheless, the Togolese experience demonstrates that, contrary to received opinion (particularly among donors), a participatory approach to

programme planning can be combined with a process-based strategy and still achieve rapid results.

For more information, please consult the PRECOD website (www.precod.com/), where all the documents produced for the Togo study are available.

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Annotation

Richmond, J. and R. McGee. 1999. Who's round the table? A review of civil society participation in aid. (In-Depth, 10/99). London: Christian Aid. (<http://www.christian-aid.org.uk/indepth/9910tabl/table.htm>)

Over the years, the development community has recognised the need to open up the development process to non-state actors at different levels. The contribution of civil society organisations (CSOs) could go well beyond merely executing development goals set at the national level by government and bilateral and multilateral agencies. The first attempts to coordinate aid with national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) at the country level were made in the mid- to late 1990s. Individual CSOs or representative CSO networks are now being invited to participate in consultative groups (CGs) and round tables (RTs), thus giving shape to the notion of "development partnerships" among all actors involved in the development process. Such mechanisms involve direct consultations with the population to facilitate their participation in aid coordination, thus ensuring local ownership of the development process.

The report offers valuable insights into these new aid coordination processes. It has been produced as part of a wider Christian Aid programme on aid coordination, which aims to enhance the participation of civil society in development by regarding participation as involving shared decision making rather than merely information sharing,

observation and consultation. The report provides illustrations of how civil society organisations in Bolivia, Cambodia, Mozambique, Uganda, Vietnam and Southern Africa participated in CG and RT exercises, and the support provided by their Northern partners. The report is based on information obtained from Christian Aid's international NGO channels, its national partners, and interviews with staff of the World Bank and UNDP. The authors acknowledge that the report presents predominantly Northern perspectives, but note that despite efforts to focus on experiences in the South, these are often difficult to find: "While this is regrettable ... it is an important reminder of the difficulties involved in discerning the voices of poor people and their advocates" (section 1.3).

The results of the review are revealing, and show that there is still a long way to go in developing appropriate and feasible mechanisms to facilitate the full participation of CSOs. Just a few of many bottlenecks include the fact that CSOs are often invited to CG and RT exercises too late, preventing them making adequate preparations, the reluctance of governments and donors to open up the process and to share information, the lack of capacity and analytical skills at the CSO level to deal with complex and sometimes specialised aid coordination processes, and the need to ensure the legitimacy of representatives to speak on behalf of the CSO community. Nevertheless, the report documents some successes, such as the constructive

involvement of Cambodian CSOs in CG meetings. Examples such as this show that to varying degrees the actors involved in aid coordination have tentatively and sporadically begun to broaden the base of participation in these processes to include CSOs. There is hope that such experiences can be built upon and repeated in different contexts.

The report lists the lessons that have been learned, and offers practical recommendations to donors, international NGOs and Southern civil society as to how their participation in aid coordination processes might develop. A wide range of new capacities are needed on the donor side, with governments, international NGOs and civil society in order to provide for a balanced and well-informed partnership approach to aid coordination, such as analytical skills, strategic thinking and the ability to engage in effective dialogue. Not surprisingly, Southern CSOs are called upon to keep up with these new requirements and to extend their traditional project work to include well-planned advocacy and systematic lobbying on behalf of their stakeholders through representative structures or networks. Donors and international NGOs need to support such changes, and are called upon to adapt their ways of working and to provide financial and other support, such as facilitation of dialogue processes, to ensure the effective participation of Southern civil society in aid coordination.

ACP-EU: Direct Access Funds

In establishing participation as the 'fundamental principle' that underpins ACP-EU cooperation, the new Cotonou Agreement explicitly acknowledges (Art. 2) the need to mobilise all actors - both governmental and non-governmental - to respond to the challenges of development. For the first time, the ACP countries and the European Union have undertaken to involve non-governmental actors at every stage of cooperation and to grant them fuller access to funds available under national and regional indicative programmes (NIPs and RIPs). Recognising that these actors need support in order to be effective negotiators and partners, the Agreement allows easier access to certain types of funding, particularly for capacity-building support purposes (Art. 4, 5, 7 and 33).

Article 4 of the Agreement prescribes that non-governmental actors may receive support of this kind in order to increase their skills, especially with regard to "organisation, representation and the establishment of consultation mechanisms" they need in order to draw up their own strategies and programme proposals. The programming guidelines state that up to 15% of the initial indicative

resource allocation for an ACP country may be assigned to them directly. In that case there must be an agreement between the National Authorizing Officer (NAO) and the European Commission (EC) on the amount to be allocated and the eligibility criteria for the actors. The amount must be indicated in the NIP at the end of the programming discussions, in which non-governmental actors must also be involved. The programming guidelines are quite explicit: once the NAO has approved the overall amount of resources allocated for this type of capacity-building support, non-governmental actors will have direct access to the funds through the EC Delegations.

Although direct access funds open up interesting prospects, it is not clear how they will operate in practice, since this area of activity is still relatively new to all the parties concerned. Rules governing access to these funds and their management will have to be negotiated both within the Commission (notably among the various departments concerned - financial, legal, the Directorate-General for Development and EuropeAid) and with the ACP partners (represented by their authorising officers). Even after these issues have been settled, it

may still be wondered to what extent the EC Delegations will be able to satisfy the expectations and demands of civil society, which will tend to regard them as its own special representatives.

This clarification process is currently taking place, and an initial assessment for the programming exercise of the 9th EDF shows that several ACP countries have planned support programmes for civil society. The positive indications in NIPs and the EC's efforts to find operational answers to the questions of access to and management of direct access funds are encouraging signs that the new provisions of the Agreement are being put to effective use. On the other hand, it must be recognised that it will take some time for such an approach to be adopted systematically, since the involvement of civil society in cooperation policy and the strengthening of the institutional capacity of its representative structures are part of a process which implies a 'new way of doing things'. If, despite the questions they still raise, the new provisions can be successfully implemented, it will be an interesting new departure in the field of international cooperation.

Capacity.org was set up by the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) as a tool for development researchers, practitioners and decision-makers. As both a web site and a newsletter, *Capacity.org* brings together information, ideas, and viewpoints on capacity building policy and practice within international development cooperation. It acts as a platform for dialogue and provides a channel for informed review and synthesis of the complex issues faced by development practitioners and policy makers.

Focusing on both the 'why' and the 'how' of capacity building - debating policy questions and learning from practical experiences - *Capacity.org* seeks to 'unbundle' the complex of ideas and practices that we call capacity building. In doing this, the editors particularly encourage the exchange of perspectives and experiences from the South, to ensure that the discussions are rooted in reality.

Developed by ECDPM, it is our aim to make *Capacity.org* a joint effort in which all of our various capacities and expertise are mobilised and shared. Interested individuals and organisations can help make *Capacity.org* an effective communication tool for people who seek to alleviate poverty through capacity building. Join us by contributing information, lessons, ideas and opinions, and feedback. Offers to co-finance parts of the initiative or to link related initiatives are very welcome.

<http://www.capacity.org>

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