



EU-Africa Strategic Partnership: Making the people-centred partnership operational and effective

Brainstorming 17 October 2007

ECDPM report¹

The meeting was attended by over 30 representatives of various civil society organisations. It was organised by EU members of the Joint EU-Africa Strategy and Action Plan drafting committee and present were representatives from the European Commission, the Council Secretariat and the Portuguese Presidency of the EU. The discussions were facilitated by ECDPM.

This report was written by ECDPM and has not been endorsed by any of the actors present. This report is therefore ECDPM's own record of the meeting which is made available to participants so as to share our understanding of the ideas that were voiced in this first discussion on how to operationalise the EU-Africa Joint Strategy's proposed *people to people partnership*. It is hoped this will help stimulate further discussion on this topic. This list summarises some of the key points made on how to develop an operational people-centred partnership:

1. There needs to be a clear policy space and will to take CS input onboard
2. For effective monitoring there needs to be a possibility to hold officials and governments responsible
3. There is a need to learn from past experiences of involving CSOs
4. Measurable objectives were asked for in the Action Plan
5. Reporting should take place on a regular basis in order to facilitate the involvement of grass-root organisations
6. Financial support is needed to enable efficient monitoring both to individual grass-roots organisations as well as to bigger networks who would play a facilitating role.

The meeting was introduced by acknowledging the international day for the eradication of poverty, which is a fundamental part of the EU-Africa partnership.

¹ Disclaimer: Due to tight time frames it was agreed at the meeting that ECDPM would draft its own record of the meeting and would not seek to get it endorsed by any of the actors present. ECDPM therefore remains entirely responsible for the contents on this report.



1 Where do we stand?

The representative of the Commission presented the drafting process and ensured that progress had been made in the previous week's negotiations in Addis Ababa, and that both the Strategy and the Action Plan should be ready for approval by the joint ministerial troika meeting on 31 October.

He highlighted some changes that had been made to the Strategy including an increased role for diaspora as well as civil society organisations (CSOs) in the implementation of the Strategy. Other changes include improved reference to the African governance architecture, a new section on gender equality, a paragraph on cultural cooperation as well as a section on a communication process. The purpose of the latter would be to inform stakeholders about the Strategy, avoid stereotypes of past means of cooperation and ensure transparency in the implementation.

The Action Plan includes several specific partnerships which each provide a place to define the actors for implementation and monitoring. **The section on 'The institutional architecture: making it work' defines several suggestions to enable CSOs involvement in the implementation:**

- mapping of CSO networks in Europe and Africa
- establishing a web portal to facilitate CSO participation
- inviting CSO representatives to express themselves before the ministerial troika meetings
- establishing working groups for each partnership in which CSOs could have a place
- for the EU part there is also a suggestion to develop more systematic meetings between CSOs and different council working groups.

A further suggestion put forward by the Commission representative was the establishment of a contact group composed of EU troika representatives and CSO representatives, which should have regular meetings to discuss the implementation of the Strategy. It was stressed that this group should not be mixed up with the other EC-civil society dialogue initiatives such as the EC Stakeholder Advisory Group.

The CSOs present requested several aspects to be further clarified, including on the CSO mapping, the web portal, the institutional framework and the policy space still available in the Strategy.

1.1 Mapping of CSOs

The purpose of mapping CSOs would be to get an understanding of who is able to do what on each continent, which would also be useful in order to build bridges between them. According to the Commission representative this would be especially important in the separate partnerships.



1.2 Web portal

The web portal is not meant to replace consultations but **be a platform for sharing information and discussion, especially in preparation for key events**. It would for instance be possible to discuss the agenda or a specific issue before a ministerial troika meeting.

The importance of providing **timely information** was brought up by CSO representatives for this to be useful. Problems with access were also pointed out.

1.3 Institutional framework

The Joint Strategy provides a new context and the institutional framework for its implementation still needs to be defined. The Commission representative highlighted the importance of the political aspect of the Strategy which calls for **regular summits** every two to three years. This is of importance for the implementation since it brings a political impetus for progress. In addition the modalities of the ministerial troikas will be improved and more interaction at expert level is also envisaged. The involvement of CSOs and regional and local authorities is essential to make this work effectively.

1.4 Issues still under discussion in the Strategy

Upon request the Commission representative presented which issues were still being discussed in the negotiations:

- cultural goods, which is still a sensitive issue
- energy and climate change, especially concerning nuclear power development
- migration, and specifically a particular fund for this which was proposed in the Tripoli declaration
- EPAs
- debt cancellation, also from the aspect of debt sustainability
- in the section of food security the addition of fisheries will be made

Another question raised by the CSOs was how they had been involved in creating the eight partnerships as outlined in the Action Plan.

2 Factors of success and lessons learnt

It was appreciated that civil society was taken into consideration in the Strategy, but likewise emphasised that this had been done before in various partnerships and agreements, such as the Cotonou Partnership Agreement, without much concrete result. **The willingness to discuss is a start, but there must also be policy space and clear indications that the relevant officials are prepared to listen to CSOs and consider their input seriously**. CSO engagement in the Strategy must be shown to be worthwhile otherwise they will choose to focus on other issues where more policy space is available. There also needs to be some feed back on what is being done with civil society ideas and suggestions.



The need to learn from past experiences was raised repeatedly. The Commission representative agreed that this was needed, but could be done in parallel with moving forward. In that framework, it would be interesting to map where the EC consulted civil society, and where CSOs have been engaging. One CSO representative mentioned that they had looked at the Lomé process and found that it had included both good and bad aspects. Three positive things are evident in this new Strategy process are: the political will present, the will to meet the MDGs and the will to include CSOs. A few examples where civil society consultation has worked were brought up, including the recent development of EU guidelines on the promotion and protection of children's rights.

Apart from evident difficulties in the dialogue between the EU institutions and the CSOs, the Portuguese Presidency representative also explained that coordinating 27 member states with different degrees of interest for Africa was not always an easy task. She acknowledged that there had been previous consultations which had not resulted in changes, but requested advice on how this could be done better and a constructive consultation be established.

3 Follow-up

3.1 Strategy content

The draft Action Plan and Strategy should be made available after they have been discussed in the Council ad hoc working group on Friday 19 October. The Commission representative assured participants that reactions would be welcomed especially before the joint ministerial troika on 31 October, but also right up until the Lisbon summit.

One piece of advice from a CSO representative was to root the Strategy and the Action Plan in existing documents, such as the Cotonou Agreement and the EU Consensus on Development. This would make the message in the Strategy stronger.

3.2 Implementation

According to CSOs present civil society could have two functions within the implementation of the Strategy:

1. Take part in setting the agendas and identifying issues of concern.
2. Monitor effective and complete implementation.

Civil society is mentioned in several places in the Strategy, especially in their role of monitoring. How this can be done still needs to be figured out. One suggestion posed by the Commission representative in the initial stages of the meeting was **forming a contact group between the officials and civil society**. CSOs present responded that they would need to discuss this option further with their members in order to agree or not, and in order to be able to give suggestions on how it could be realised. One point made was that the name 'contact group' is already used by the EU-CS contact group. Systems already in place should also be mapped, in order to know whether these would also be relevant for the EU-Africa



Strategy and **for any new mechanism to build on what already exists and works**. Indeed instead of reinventing new mechanisms each time, it is important to support the ones that are already in place. For instance, at the national level, the political dialogue framework provided by Article 8 of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement should be used. Further the Commission representative also suggested steering groups to monitor each of the partnerships separately; these would include CSOs and be tailor made according to the specific partnerships. CSOs pointed out that attention needs to be paid in the partnership for reaching the MDGs considering that implementation would involve a number of different sectors and political endorsement of entire group might prove difficult.

Measurable objectives were asked for in the Action Plan. As it is now it uses language like 'enhance support' which makes implementation difficult to monitor. Another suggestion made was that the monitoring of the Strategy be institutionalised, so governments would have to take that into account. Considering that two years is a short time to implement new mechanisms in the institutions, it was recommended to consider using interim mechanisms in the first phase of the implementation.

The Portuguese representative highlighted again that regular summits would enable regular reports on what was being done and not. It was argued by CSOs that they should have a role in this reporting, and that if this was done on a regular basis it would also make it easier for grass-root organisations to make an input.

3.3 How to genuinely involve civil society

Several CSO representatives pointed to the differences between European and African civil society, and that the latter is made up of governmental organisations as well as independent grass-roots organisations. If an African government consults its civil society, they in general turn to the former, and grass-roots organisations are seldom recognised. In addition they often lack the funds to travel to venues where consultations are held, such as Addis Ababa. The support of African civil society in general was also raised as important in order to ensure that they could take part in the monitoring.

Another aspect of funding was raised concerning the involvement of CSOs in the monitoring in general. CSOs are often dependent on project funding, but in order to monitor the Strategy capacity needs to be built. **Some CSOs will have to take the lead in the monitoring, and explicitly financing this capacity with core funding would be necessary.**

The Commission representative pushed for increased bridging between African and European CSOs, but it was mentioned that this is a difficult exercise. It was advised that EU officials involve both African grass-roots organisations, European-wide networks with partners in Africa as well as purely European NGOs. Communicating the Action Plan to local CSOs is an important part of this, and the Commission representative said that this would have to be built into every separate partnership. The officials also maintained that European CSOs play an important part in informing the African grass-roots organisations. CSOs pointed



out, however, that this was often difficult because a lot of information was confidential, and even if they obtained it their African partners could not use it publicly.

Establishing and using proper channels for dialogue was asked for, and the Article 8 Dialogue was given as an example where CSOs could be further involved by delegations. That regional and local authorities should be involved is also part of the Strategy, but how this should be done was also among the questions raised.

One aspect that obstructs collaboration is the difficulties experienced by African CSO representatives in obtaining visas to attend conferences and meetings in Europe. The Commission representative ensured that this aspect is dealt with in the Strategy.

It was recommended that **identifying the preconditions for meaningful CSO participation could be something the envisaged contact group to start with.**

It was further noted that the meeting showed that there was a hunger for information among CSOs and how to create further space for regular discussion and information sharing needs to be elaborated. It was highlighted that correct information about the aim and agenda of meetings should be shared beforehand, so that CSOs could prepare accordingly.

3.4 Other suggestions made

CSOs further requested an African strategy for Africa on which they could engage.

Finally CSOs asked whether they would be able to participate in the EU-Africa Summit. The Portuguese representative responded that the invitations were not yet finalised, but that requests had come from many different actors and that they were considering restricting it to Heads of State or Government only. She underlined that even if CSOs would not be able to be present their input would be important.

Finally the Commission and Portuguese Presidency representatives indicated that they felt it would be good to hold another meeting to pursue the discussion with CSOs in a few weeks time after the ministerial troika meeting on 31 October.

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