



NGO consultation 'improving', says Commission

Consultation with non-governmental organisations has improved significantly over the past few years, the European Commission's top development official has claimed. But Stefano Manservigi, head of the Commission's Directorate-General for Development, has not produced any evidence to support this claims.

Mr Manservigi made his claim in response to a letter from Eurostep, pointing out several shortcomings on contacts with NGOs in programming EU aid to African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries.

Although the Cotonou agreement, underpinning EU-ACP relations, legally requires that NGOs be consulted when plans for spending EU aid are being drawn up, Eurostep could not find conclusive evidence that this is actually taking place. Reports from organisations in the South and the frequent refusal of both Commission headquarters in Brussels and its delegations abroad to share information have led Eurostep to conclude that civil society participation has deteriorated since the previous programming exercise of 2002. A recent Eurostep publication *We decide, You 'own'!*, supported this impression with several case studies on the European Development Fund.

Manservigi recognised *"the vital contribution of Non-State Actors to the EC aid programming in general and to the Country Strategy Paper (CSP) process in particular."* He argued that consultation has improved significantly since 'best practice guidelines for civil society consultation' were sent to all of the Commission's delegations, following a review of the 2002 programming exercise

After studying his letter, Eurostep believes that he did not give any convincing evidence to indicate that consultation has improved.

Manservigi also said that detailed reports on such consultation will be given in the EU's country strategy papers (CSPs) for ACP countries. However, a series of CSPs currently being analysed by the European Parliament do not reflect this commitment. This analysis is part of the process of the new Development Cooperation Instrument, which will come into force later this year.

Sources:

http://www.eurostep.org/wcm/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=178&Itemid=41

http://www.eurostep.org/wcm/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=94&Itemid=41

http://www.eurostep.org/wcm/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=89&Itemid=1

'Bullying by Brussels' to be addressed at WSF

Eurostep will be asking if the EU institutions are bullying aid recipients into accepting development and governance models tailored for European interests, rather than those of the poor, at this year's World Social Forum in Nairobi (20-25 January).

Florent Sebban, a Eurostep policy adviser, is organising three workshops on related themes. These will address if the EU's policy-makers are more interested in securing greater market access for Western firms, than in reducing poverty.

Each of the three workshops will deal with a different geographic region: the Mediterranean, Southern Caucasus and Eastern Europe; Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific; and Asia and Latin America. They are being organised jointly with Social Watch and LDC Watch.

EP votes on revised Cotonou Agreement

On Wednesday 17 January, the European Parliament will formally approve a set of amendments to the Cotonou Agreement. The amendments were agreed by EU and ACP governments in 2005, as part of the first in a series of five-yearly revisions of the accord. The revised agreement provides for a more systematic and formal political dialogue to be held on human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law than had previously been possible. Such a dialogue must now be held before the consultation procedure provided for by Article 96 of the agreement, which can ultimately lead to economic or political sanctions, can be launched.

The amendments also refer to national parliaments as aid recipients for the first time, assert ACP countries' support for the International Criminal Court and state that financial and technical assistance will be granted for cooperation on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Such assistance will not be funded from resources earmarked for development aid.

Combating terrorism is described as a joint EU-ACP aim under the revised accord, which also declares its support for the UN's Millennium Development Goals.

Sources:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?objRefId=134751&language=EN>

Novartis threatens to sue Indian makers of cheap AIDS drugs

The Swiss pharmaceutical company Novartis is threatening to take legal action against an Indian law on providing affordable HIV/AIDS medicines.

Over half the medicines used for AIDS treatment in developing countries originate in India. The country became the leading supplier due to its liberal patent law, allowing makers of generic medicines to compete for cheaper production methods with the firm that originally developed the drugs.

In 2005, India revised its patent law to bring it in line with the World Trade Organisation's Trade-Related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement. But it maintained a ban on patenting compounds relevant to public health. Such a ban is in line with the Doha Declaration on TRIPS and Public Health signed by all WTO countries, which states *that "the [TRIPS] Agreement can and should be interpreted and implemented in a manner supportive of WTO Members' right to protect public health and, in particular, to promote access to medicines for all."*

Novartis is now threatening to mount a legal challenge against these provisions. This has led to fears that – if Novartis is successful – India would cease being a source of affordable generic drugs to treat people in developing countries.

In response, Médecins sans frontières has launched a 'People before Patents' campaign. This includes an online petition urging the Indian government to take a strong stance against Novartis.

Sources: http://www.msf.org/petition_india/usa.html
<http://novartis.com/>

Berlin should champion fair trade, peace and climate - NGOs

Trade justice, climate change and gender issues should be key issues for Germany's EU presidency, according to the Association of German Development NGOs (VENRO).

This call is made in a policy manifesto - mainly dealing with Africa – written in cooperation with organisations from throughout Europe and Africa. As well as identifying seven general themes, it urges the Berlin government to take a number of concrete measures in the first half of this year. The association calls on the EU to

- Promote trade justice by devising safeguards to protect the vulnerable markets of developing countries.
- Prioritise conflict prevention.
- Boost funding for renewable energy as part of efforts to tackle climate change.
- Base its economic and environmental policies more on the 'polluter-pays' policies principle.
- Promote an agenda of universal access to prevention techniques, support services, treatment and care to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- Promote equality between men and women in access to decision-making bodies and processes, as well as the greater involvement of women in their activities.
- Give greater recognition to the role which NGOs play in development.

Sources:

http://www.prospects-for-africa.de/newsdetails.html?&L=1&cHash=c1ed24d0c4&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=1&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=8

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