

# **Participation of Civil Society in the Preparation of the the Cooperation Strategy of the EU-ACP Agreement in the Dominican Republic**

**A civil society perspective**

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## **Monitoring the application of the ACP-EU Cooperation Agreement**

In June 2000, the European Union signed a cooperation agreement with the ACP group of African, Caribbean and Pacific states and the 15 members states of the European Union. The Cotonou Agreement, as it is known, provides a framework for cooperation between the European Union and the 78 ACP states until the year 2020. As the successor of the Lomé Convention, the new Agreement covers broader aspects of cooperation between the EU and the ACP states and includes trade, aid and political dialogue.

One of the leading elements of the Cotonou Agreement is the recognition of the role of non-state actors within the general scope of the Agreement. This recognition is backed by provisions for the involvement of non-state actors, including civil society organisations, in all aspects of the Agreement's application. This report is part of an initiative by the civil society organisations to monitor the implementation of this Agreement. The initiative is based on the belief that it is important to reinforce the independence of non-state actors in order to ensure their effective participation.

European NGOs and the civil society organisations in the ACP countries must conduct this monitoring initiative together. The first point examined was the degree of real participation by non-state actors, and in particular civil society organisations, in the setting out of the Country Support Strategies and the National Indicative Programmes for EU support of individual ACP countries.

### **TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ACP	Africa, Caribbean & Pacific
CIECA	Centro de Investigación Económica para el Caribe
CNNC	Comisión Nacional de Negociaciones Comerciales (National Commission for Trade Negotiations)
CSAC	Civil Society Advisory Committee
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSS	Country Support Strategy
EDF	European Development Fund
EU	European Union
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NIP	National Indicative Plan
ONFED	Oficina Nacional del Ordenador para los Fondos Europeos de Desarrollo (office of the National Authorising Agent for the European Development Fund)
RIP	Regional Indicative Plan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WTO	World Trade Organisation

# Evaluation of Civil Society's Participation in the Cooperation Strategy in the Dominican Republic

## Introduction

This report on the Dominican Republic, drawn up by the *Centro de Investigación Económica para el Caribe* (CIECA)<sup>1</sup>, is a summary of ideas and opinions from local civil society organisations in the Dominican Republic that have been evaluating the Cotonou Agreement between the European Union and the ACP countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. This document is an initiative led by the ACP-EU civil society, whose role is to monitor the involvement of civil society organisations in the Cotonou Agreement. In the first instance, the focal point was the participation of civil society in the preparation of the Country Strategy Paper (CSP) and the National Indicative Programme (NIP). The aim is to promote civil society perspectives on the participation process.

The CIECA is a non-profit organisation devoted to economic, social and political research. Since 1997, it has been monitoring relations between the European Union and the Caribbean via the Caribbean Reference Group on External Relations (CRG)<sup>2</sup>. The result of the monitoring exercise was the paper entitled *Discussing the Future*, assessing the positions of a wide range of Caribbean organisations and future relations between the European Union and the ACP group. The document defends the position that any future agreement on development cooperation should have the means to include civil society participants in the structural bodies where development strategies are designed and evaluated.

In May 2001, as part of the follow-up activities, a group of organisations taking part in a workshop in Brussels reached an agreement with *Eurostep* to draw up a report on civil society's participation in the drawing up of the country strategy document, which is required for the National Indicative Plan. To that end, common criteria were discussed for measuring participation and in the end a country report was drafted, which is presented below.

## 1. The Cotonou Agreement, Civil Society participation and the preparation of the Strategic Cooperation Document

The Cotonou Agreement, which will run for around 20 years, has the primary aim of *reducing and eventually eradicating poverty in keeping with the objectives of sustainable development and the gradual incorporation of the ACP countries into the world economy*.

In June 2000, *Eurostep*, in cooperation with the EU-NGO Liaison Committee and INZET, organised a workshop on the theme "Enhancing Civil Society Involvement in the Implementation of the new ACP-EU Agreement". One of the purposes of the workshop was to step up the involvement of civil society players in the application of the new agreement, both in national and regional matters.

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<sup>1</sup> The CIECA also has long experience in civil society participation in trade negotiations, in particular those for the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA).

<sup>2</sup> The CRG comprises organisations and networks from Barbados, Jamaica, Saint Vincent, Haiti, Trinidad and Tobago and the Dominican Republic.

In the workshop's follow-up phase, *Eurostep* drew up a list of civil society actors with a view to developing a common approach to the strategy for advocacy and to the monitoring of the Agreement. This process generated a number of interesting ideas on how to foster cooperation amongst the different civil society actors and an advocacy action plan for trade matters and monitoring by civil society of education and health matters.

## **2. The European Union and the Dominican Republic**

The Dominican Republic submitted its first formal application to join the Lomé IV Convention in 1984. Three years later, on July 1, 1987, it submitted its second formal membership application to the ACP-EEC Council of Ministers. The Dominican Republic's membership began to generate interest and momentum in the first few months of 1988, reaching a high point with the start of negotiations for Lomé IV in October of that same year. At the same time, the Dominican Republic began to cultivate closer ties with the Caribbean states and took part in meetings in Brussels relating to Lomé IV. Furthermore, the Dominican Republic's embassy, which handled diplomatic relations with Belgium and the European Community, was re-opened.

In Lomé IV's first financial protocol, the Dominican Republic received programmable aid to the tune of 85 million ECUs, to be spent on the priorities set out in the National Plan, i.e. conservation and use of natural resources and, in the social sector, on the priority areas of health and education.

The Dominican Republic benefited from the First and Second Regional Indicative Programmes in the areas of trade, tourism, university studies, mini-projects and transport, among others. The enthusiastic participation and regional leadership of civil society organisations are worthy of note. They expanded their area of action to include the entire Caribbean region. The cooperation projects between the Dominican Republic and Haiti were also quite remarkable.

During the first NIP<sup>3</sup>, significant impact was achieved on the quality of life of the beneficiary groups, with a big emphasis on the territorial delineation of projects. Actions in this phase were pilot experiments that helped later in the development of broader sectoral policies. This was particularly evident in the areas of health, education and state decentralisation.

The second NIP made use of the experience of the first one and underscored institutional reform, both at sectoral level and a more general level of government structure. Particular importance was attached to social participation and state reform. Since these Programmes are still in their execution phase, it is not possible to evaluate their final impact.

In applying these cooperation programmes, the Dominican Republic saw the need to move from a focus on cooperation based on projects and/or programmes to an integral sectoral approach. At the same time, there was a need to strengthen the beneficiaries' social participation and empowerment in the processes.

## **3. Criteria for measuring Civil Society participation**

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<sup>3</sup> National Indicative Programme

In light of the roles assigned to the actors under article 4 of the Cotonou Agreement and bearing in mind the definition of actors in article 6, a group of organisations from various ACP countries decided to set up a number of common criteria for measuring, in a preliminary fashion, civil society participation in the drawing up of the country strategy, which is fundamental for the programming of funds.

A questionnaire was drawn up for purposes of measurement, the main aim of which was to collect data in the three leading areas of the Agreement i.e. information, consultation and dialogue. These same areas are set out in article 4, which also defines the role to be played by non-state actors in the process.

In the Dominican Republic, the questionnaire was sent out to the national European Development Fund office and to the European Delegation in the country, as well as to civil society representatives who were directly involved in the drawing up of the country strategy. Unfortunately, no written responses were received from any of the people or organisations to whom the questionnaire was sent. A few merely responded by telephone. Those results led us to draw two conclusions. The first is the assertion that, although the Agreement states that non-state actors must be informed of the process, a lot remains to be done in that area, given the low level of information that is being sent out. The second conclusion is that the non-state actors require more information about the role they are to play in this new cooperation process so that they can really fulfil the functions they have been assigned.

Below is an analysis of each of the three aspects, which are part of the pilot exercise, that were included in the questionnaire.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Information**

In the Dominican Republic, the *Centro de Investigación Económica para el Caribe* (CIECA) began preparing the country strategy document in January 2001. The CIECA was hired by the office of the National Authorising Agent (Oficina Nacional del Ordenador) of the European Development Fund to prepare the guidelines of the country's national development strategy. The guideline document was drawn up on the basis of a series of consultations and interviews with various sectors of the country and was submitted to a civil society consultation held in March 2001.

However, although a broad consultation was held on the subject of the national development strategy document, the subsequent process for the drafting of the CSS was not accompanied by a broad information and awareness process for civil society in general.

To be more precise, neither the National Authorising Office of the European Development Fund nor the European Delegation disseminated information on the CSS on a wide scale and limited civil society participation to a consultation with five representatives of the government and civil society from each of the two selected sectors: the environment and education.

As a result, little information was distributed and so far the draft document that the national EDF office sent to the European Commission for evaluation in Brussels has not been made public. However, a second meeting is being planned to bring together all of civil society to

assess the final document and to examine how cooperation was programmed under the 9<sup>th</sup> EDF.

## **4.2 Consultation**

The Dominican Republic held a consultation with civil society in March 2001 with the goal of setting out the broad outlines of the national development strategy, which would then lead to the drafting of the country strategy document. Some 300 representatives of non-governmental organisations, government officials and business circles took part in the consultation. The NGO representatives were selected with the support of a number of organisations grouped under the so-called Citizens' Forum (Foro Ciudadano), which is a coordination platform for civil society organisations such as trade unions, grassroots groups, human rights organisations, guilds, academic associations, etc.

The consultation was organised around the country's leading strategic themes with a big impact both in the sectors and nationwide. The themes touched upon included policies in the following spheres: social, economic, international, farming and stock breeding, gender issues, the environment and natural resources, infrastructures and democracy. The consultation was held during a one-day session and the ten themes were each discussed in a separate workshop. Each workshop elected a representative, whose task was to advance in the drafting of the country strategy document. Lastly, once the leading themes had been selected for programming (education and the environment), two commissions were created, one for each area, that continued working on the preparation phase. It should be noted that only one civil society representative was included on each commission. The criteria for selecting these representatives were not made known.

## **4.3 Dialogue**

Although the country strategy document has been submitted to the European Commission, no feedback has so far been received regarding the process. As we have been pointing out, the preparation of the CSS was handled by a Follow-up Committee, in which civil society representatives took part. When the latter were questioned by the CIECA, they explained their lack of motivation by pointing to the fact that most of the recommendations that were discussed were left out of the final document.

Furthermore, neither the European Union Delegation nor the national EDF office responded to the questionnaire that we sent out to them in order to shed light on the process. There was no official response but unofficially we were told that the national EDF office was thinking of holding another meeting with civil society in order to generate feedback concerning the process.

While it is true that the authorities have taken no initiative to generate further feedback from the process, the same can also be said of civil society organisations and other non-state actors, who have not sought an accounting of the process from the authorities.

We also believe that civil society needs to be more familiar with its role in the process and it must demand its share of participation. These roles have yet to be clearly explained and that is why civil society has failed to fulfil the role that the Agreement has assigned it.

## **5. Conclusions and Recommendations**

While the Cotonou Agreement opens new doors for civil society participation in the cooperation process between the European Union and the ACP states, in the case of the Dominican Republic it is fair to say that the Agreement's application is still in its very early stages, at least as far as the functions that article 4 assigns to civil society are concerned.

Although at the start of the preparation of the country support strategy document, or CSS, there was some transparency and a certain degree of participation, only two organisations actually participated in the two areas defined as priority for programming. In addition, one year after the consultation, the organisations that took part have not received any feedback concerning the process.

If the non-state actors are to be informed, consulted and take part in the dialogue for cooperation, a number of actions, described below, must first be carried out. The recommendations presented below are addressed to the European Union, the national office of the European Development Fund and civil society organisations in the Dominican Republic.

## **1. Disseminating information**

- The national office of the European Development Fund (EDF), with the financial support of the European Union, and that of European organisations, in addition to the organisations on the national civil society platform, must disseminate information to non-state actors, in particular civil society organisations, explaining the role they are to play in the new cooperation and trade agreement in order to ensure that their role is more active throughout the process of applying and monitoring the Agreement. .
- In that connection, information on the Cotonou Agreement for the public at large must be made available and capacity-building workshops should be held with grassroots organisations, NGOs, etc., thereby enabling these organisations to gather strength and play a more active role in their countries' development process.

## **2. Mechanisms for civil society participation**

The national EDF office, along with civil society organisations and other non-state players, must come up with a participation mechanism able to guarantee their broad involvement in the cooperation process. The national EDF office should take as a model the experience that is being gathered in areas such as trade negotiations, where the Dominican Republic has set up a Civil Society Advisory Committee that has achieved success in terms of participation. The Advisory Committee was set up at the end of 1997 by presidential decree and is attached to the National Commission for Trade Negotiations, a state body that is entrusted with all aspects dealing with trade negotiations, especially those pertaining to the Caribbean Community and the Central American Common Market. The National Commission is usually chaired by the Secretary of State for External Relations<sup>4</sup>.

## **3. Strengthening cooperation between civil society and the government**

Cooperation must at all costs be included on the agenda of the national networks of local, national and regional organisations. In order to achieve that, the existing networks must be

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<sup>4</sup> See in an annex the case of the Civil Society Advisory Committee.

reinforced and they must receive the necessary funds from the European Union and the national EDF office to fulfil their role in the process. In addition, regional exchanges between networks should be shored up with the aim of sharing their experiences in the Agreement's monitoring and implementation process. We believe that the Citizens' Forum (Foro Ciudadano) is the ideal platform to carry out that task. The Forum<sup>5</sup> helps to coordinate a large number of civil society organisations in the Dominican Republic. One of its basic principles is to promote improvements in the quality of life, respect for human rights and equal opportunities.

#### **4. Monitoring and transparency**

- The European Union, the ACP Secretariat and the official regional offices should work together with the non-state actors to create a system of indicators for an ongoing evaluation of the process and to compare progress made by the countries in implementing the agreement. This first attempt at evaluation, conducted with the assistance of *Eurostep*, should be acknowledged by other organisations, both national and regional, and the necessary steps must be taken to expand the experience and provide it with continuity. That effort should lead to greater coordination and joint actions at international level so as to take this first experience to the regional level.
- In that connection, it is crucial that the country experiences in this project are made known to a greater number of organisations and joint actions should be conducted with groups such as the Caribbean Reference Group and the ACP Civil Society Forum. In that area, both *Eurostep* and the CIECA have some work to do. Furthermore, the documents produced should be part of a lobbying strategy vis-à-vis the national governments and international organisations, such as the European Commission and the ACP Secretariat.

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<sup>5</sup> See in an annex the achievements of the Citizens' Forum

## ANNEXES

### **CRITERIA FOR MEASURING CONSULTATIONS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ON THE COUNTRY SUPPORT STRATEGY PROCESS**

- 1) Information/awareness of the dialogue process around the Country Support Strategy paper process
  - a. How widespread did ACP and EU government actors distribute information on the Country Support Strategy process and the related foreseen consultations?
  - b. Through which media?
  - c. How timely was this in relation to the scheduling of the preparation of the Country Support Strategy paper?
  - d. What in your view is the best mode for distributing information on this process?
  
- 2) Consultation
  - a. Was there an invitation from your government to consult with civil society actors on Country Support Strategy Process?
  - b. Did civil society attempt to initiate consultations with your government on this process?
  - c. Did the European Commission Delegation attempt to initiate or facilitate consultations between your government and civil society actors? If so how?
  - d. If the answer to any of the first three questions is yes, did consultations actually take place? If not, why? What were the obstacles?
  - e. If consultations took place, how wide a grouping of civil society did your government attempt to consult with?
  - f. How timely were consultations in relation to the scheduling of the preparation of the Country Support Strategy papers, i.e. before actual government drafting of the Country Support Strategy papers?
  - g. How long was the period set aside for consultation with civil society organisations for the preparation of the Country Support Strategy papers?
  - h. What modes/channels for consultations were used?
    - i. Systematic set of meetings scheduled before hand
    - ii. Ad hoc meetings
    - iii. A single meeting
    - iv. Written correspondence
    - v. Correspondence via the telephone
    - vi. Electronic discussion via the Internet
  - i. Did your government attempt to create new or utilise existing structures such as committees or taskforces with representation from civil society to inform its position on the Country Support Strategy papers?
  - j. What in your view is the best mode for consultations with civil society on this process?
  
- 3) Level of dialogue and transparency

- a. Was consultation aimed merely at giving information on Country Support Strategy paper process to civil society or was it aimed at exchanging views on input and positions for the Country Support Strategy papers?
- b. Did civil society organisations receive written or oral responses to positions, input or question they put forward for the Country Support Strategy paper process?
- c. Was there an opportunity for civil society to submit written comments/questions/positions on the Country Support Strategy paper process?
- d. Were civil society organisations informed about how the positions they put forward were fed into the system of decision-making by their governments on the Country Support Strategy paper process?
- e. Have civil society organisations been able to see the end product of the consultations with them, i.e. the draft Country Support Strategy paper?

## THE CASE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (CSAC)

The Civil Society Advisory Committee (SCAC), which strives to increase the participation of civil society organisations, was created as part of the Comisión Nacional de Negociaciones Comerciales (CNNC), or National Commission for Trade Negotiations. For the first time, external policy benefited from the active participation of civil sectors. However, precisely because it was a new experiment the mishaps were many.

The government's call for participation reflected two important events. The first was a new attitude from the government that flowed from the recognition that such a complex international agenda cannot be taken up exclusively by the government and requires the active participation of organised sectors. The second event was the development of civil society sectors that demand, and have the necessary skills, to interact with the government, with civil society organisations from other countries and in conjunction with the government vis-à-vis other governments.

However, in practice the Committee has come up against a few problems:

- a) The definition of civil society is very broad. It includes organisations dealing with subjects such as gender issues, the environment, trade unions and businessmen. As a result, one element of the definition of civil society is that it runs counter to civil political society.
- b) There is a lack of participation by the civil society organisations, mainly because the CSAC's themes for discussion are technical in nature and the civil society organisations fail to make the connection between their own reality and the trade issues.

But, despite these difficulties, the CSAC is one of the Dominican Republic's most transparent experiences in participation. Since all negotiations have been brought together under the National Commission for Trade Negotiations, the Advisory Committee will play an active role in trade negotiations with the European Union, which are scheduled to start in September 2002 and run until 2008.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE CITIZENS' FORUM**

Since it was created the Forum has achieved the following:

- Closer ties with over 400 civil society organisations, with a wide diversity that has included religious and youth associations, women's groups, business circles, trade unions, community groups, academics and peasant farmer organisations.
- Contributions via discussion and debate on most important proposals of the national agenda, including political reform, which was taken up in coordination sessions focusing on particular themes.
- Promotion of a sustainable coordination mechanism based on common points and with the idea of contributing to the resolution of the major problems faced by the country.
- Mobilisation of more than a thousand people for democracy and the right to life with the sole intention of attaining active participation of the citizens in the strengthening of democracy.
- Areas for action were established to be promoted by the Citizens' Forum, giving priority to points that are common to all the sectors in the Forum, such as democracy, development and social policies, political reform and monitoring of the economic climate.

The Forum, thanks to its participation in the monitoring and follow-up of the application of the Cotonou Agreement, will no doubt manage to increase its strength, internally, in the regions and at world level, the latter being an area that has yet to be organised.