

External evaluation of TRIALOG II

Executive summary

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Nikki van der Gaag, external consultant

The evaluator would like to thank all those who contributed their valuable time and their ideas to this evaluation.

TRIALOG is a small and unique project that has existed since 2000. Over the last three years, TRIALOG II has made a big difference to NGOs and NGDOS in NMS and Accession countries. Many respondents acknowledged that without TRIALOG support, their National Platforms would never have been formed, and all recognize the crucial role of the project in bringing people from NMS and AC countries together and helping them to understand the complexities of development in the EU policies and processes. As one respondent put it: 'TRIALOG is unique in its support of Accession countries and NMS. It has offered a vision for European networking and cooperation backed up by concrete and practical activities.'

The consultant was asked to evaluate the second phase of the TRIALOG project from 2003 – September 2006 against its overall objectives and the quantifiable outcomes, as identified in the project proposal accepted by the European Commission. She was also asked to consider what modifications might be made for TRIALOG III. The overall objectives of TRIALOG II are :

- to raise awareness of development policies in the enlarged EU;
- to integrate development NGOs in the new member states and accession countries into the EU NGDO-community by strengthening "trialogue" and partnerships with the global South.

The evaluator adapted her methodology for the TRIALOG evaluation from an organizational assessment tool called 'Charity Know How', developed between the British Department for International Development and interested Trusts and funding organizations to promote the growth of the voluntary sector in Eastern Europe. She met with TRIALOG staff at the start of the project to agree the methodology and design a questionnaire. Her methods included interviews, a questionnaire, data analysis and some observation.

The majority of respondents in this evaluation think TRIALOG has helped with the first aim, of raising awareness of development policies in the enlarged EU. While development awareness among the general public is still low, among NGOs in many member states it has been improved by the work of TRIALOG. 97 per cent of respondents to the questionnaire said they had found the work of TRIALOG useful. In this sense, it has acted as a catalyst for many other activities. Respondents also recognized the importance of TRIALOG's support in building National Platforms and in acting as a bridge between NGOs in Old and New Member States.

The team in Vienna and Brussels are dedicated and hardworking and credit needs to be given to them for the success of the project. This despite a high turnover which made their work more difficult than it might have been.

TRIALOG has more than achieved most of the general aims and quantifiable outcomes outlined in the original EU proposal, which contribute to the success of its objectives. It has run three central training workshops involving one hundred and eleven NGOs. It has run or helped to run 27 regional and national workshops and, in the first seven months of 2006 alone, funded 166 participants to attend a variety of conferences. All 10 New Member States and two Accession countries have established coordination bodies, though some are still unofficial, and many of these have now joined CONCORD. It has 2,080 recipients for the TRIALOG electronic newsletter – the target was 800. TRIALOG is recognized in Brussels as the point of contact for organizations looking to work in NMS and Accession countries and has successfully worked with other organizations to lobby the Commission and Parliament. On all these levels, it has more than succeeded in what it set out to do.

Given the size of the task, it is not surprising that there were also some difficulties. For the purposes of this executive summary, the evaluator would like to highlight four.

First, the issue of decentralization. The evaluator was asked to look at this specifically in terms of TRIALOG's future. During the first phase of TRIALOG, when the project was working with 10 accession countries, it was of necessity very much driven from the office in Vienna. Moving on from this in the second phase – working towards a more 'decentralized' model based on devolving responsibility and capacity building as well as training was not easy, and TRIALOG III needs to move still further in this direction. In order to do so, it needs to be more transparent in the way that it works. The evaluator has made a number of recommendations on this, to gradually devolve some power and responsibility to National Platforms in New Member states.

Second, the relationship with CONCORD – which during TRIALOG's first phase existed in a different form as the CLONG – has been confused. Some see TRIALOG as a project of CONCORD while others see it as working in collaboration with CONCORD, and this has led to some bewilderment among TRIALOG's partners. This relationship needs to be clarified in the next phase. Again, the evaluator has made some suggestions.

Third, NMS NGOs and Platforms are still finding it difficult to put successful joint projects to the EU. This is something that will take time to achieve and is not in TRIALOG's control alone, but has to do with the context in NMS and AC countries. Many NGOs are very small, and cannot hope to meet EU criteria for the size of funding applications. Co-funding, even 10 percent, is also very difficult in countries where there is no tradition of private fundraising. Together with the Development Education Forum of CONCORD (DEF), TRIALOG successfully lobbied for 10 million euros for development education in NMS and Romania and Bulgaria and is organizing a development education partnership fair in October

2006 to support partners in NMS, AC and Old Member States in finding partners for the elaboration of joint projects to be put to the call for proposals for the 10 million euros. These need to result in a number of successful joint projects. The evaluator has made some recommendations to support this.

Fourth, in terms of relations with the South, the final TRIALOG objective. It was difficult to define what this meant. Inevitably, given that its main focus has been in NMS and Accession countries, the work of TRIALOG has been more of a dialogue than a triologue, in the sense that it has not been able to build 'partnerships with the global South'. This was probably an unrealistic task to begin with given that there were already 10 NMS and at least two Accession countries to work with, and that few of these had any real contacts with the Southern partners. However, TRIALOG has taken several initiatives in this area. It has helped MFAs in a number of NMS countries to select their ODA countries. It has supported visits to the South. In March 2004 TRIALOG took part in the DEPART project in collaboration with DEEEP, which aimed to draw in Southern partners. TRIALOG needs to help to build a wider cohort of people who understand development and who can contribute to a debate about how it should be carried out in NMS and AC countries. Again, there are some suggestions on this in the evaluation.

In conclusion, TRIALOG is a small project that has had a big impact on NGOs in NMS and Accession countries. Without TRIALOG's support, many would not have been able to build their National Platforms and most would not have been able to access the information necessary to begin to understand EU policies and processes. NGOs in NMS and Accession countries have traveled a long way since 2003, and TRIALOG has played no small part in this journey. The next challenge is to adapt the ways that it accompanies them over the next three years.

Glossary

AC Accession Countries – countries hoping or planning to join the EU

CONCORD European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development

DEF Development Education Forum

EC European Commission

ELDC Economically Less Developed Country

EU European Union

MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under which most NMS governments have their Overseas Development Assistance departments

NMS New Member States of the European Union since 2004

NP National Platform of NGOs on development

NGO Non Governmental Organization

NGDO Non Governmental Development Organization

ODA Official Development Assistance