

## **Conference**

# **ARE WE ON THE RIGHT TRACK? PARADIGM REVIEW BY CSOs AS DEVELOPMENT ACTORS**

Prague, Czech Republic, 14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> May 2008  
**Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2008**

**Responses from European NGOs to the  
challenges pointed out by CSOs from the  
South and the East**



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Focus on 4 points which show the EU politics and how we as NGOs can react:

- 1) The EU has a different concept of partnership than we as NGOs have - e.g. the EU-Africa Strategic Partnership and its first Action Plan show a tendency for very short term “ad hoc partnerships” with various actors. As NGOs we have and we should have a different concept - we set value on long term relationships with our partners and on building confidence. We are aware of the necessity to build on existing structures on the ground. On the other hand, we still have to work on this concept of partnership and especially learn how to deal with financial dependencies. We have to go further into the dialogue with our partners.
- 2) The EU follows the Paris declaration and is calling for harmonisation of development cooperation and is also putting pressure on the NGOs. NGOs don't have to follow governments in this respect, because their strength is to step into niches where governments are not active. But what NGOs have to do is to be open and very honest vis a vis their partners about their interests and financial pressures/obligations to donors. On grass-root level there is a lot of competition among NGOs. We have to address that in order to be credible. We have to discuss that openly among ourselves but also with our partners in order to find the best solutions on the spot.
- 3) The EU wants NGOs and non-state actors as implementers of its own politics. It is absolutely necessary that the NGOs claim their right to initiative and that they keep autonomous. But on the other hand, NGOs and CSOs have to be aware that they are only a part of the whole society and they don't have to build a parallel world, as Rajamoorthy said. On the opposite, NGOs have to be catalysts to improve the democratic system. We have to institutionalise the dialogue with parliamentarians, because in the end they are the elected representatives and represent also sectors of civil society. So, institutionalising of dialogue is necessary. NGOs do and try that although it is difficult to overcome the suspicion between politicians and NGOs but we have to work on that and also address accountability.
- 4) The EU struggles for coherence. Development NGOs are very good in the political dialogue in pointing out incoherence and in this respect, NGOs are already working politically. But a way to prove coherence in practice is also to look beyond our garden fences – the problems and challenges of globalisation are very complex and there are other civil society actors with more experiences, power and resources. E.g. if we look

into the labour market: the growing precarisation and informalisation of work, the growing informal economy worldwide, is a real challenge and a systematic poverty problem. NGOs cannot tackle that alone, we need to work together and involve e.g. trade unions with their power to negotiate and knowledge how to organise people but also employer associations and small enterprise associations etc. Together we can tackle the challenge to fight poverty. This applies not only to labour issues, but also to other fields like environmental issues etc. We need to go together with other groups and should never be divided or jealous but look for allies to approach the complexity of issues nowadays.

Whether we are on the right track depends very much on finding in our work the balance between pragmatism and vision! We need that vision!

*Minutes: Anita Bister, TRIALOG*