



Global Crossroads:

The Role and Perspectives of CSOs in Development Cooperation

Nicaragua, November 24th –26th, 2010

Conference Background Paper

References are made to the **Reader**: <http://www.trialog.or.at/images/doku/reader2010.pdf>

Introduction

In May 2008, a large international group of CSO representatives gathered in Prague to discuss the basic concepts underlying our understanding and experience of development cooperation, under the title *'Are we on the right track? Paradigm review by CSOs as development actors'*.

This conference was one of a series of two conferences, which aimed to move from an analysis of the paradigms underlying our work to a focus on the role of CSOs in this context, providing a concrete basis on which to assess and re-evaluate our work and recommendations on the way to move forward¹.

A seminar was held in November 2009 in Vienna to bridge the gap between the two conferences, at which questions that were still outstanding from the original event were discussed and steps were taken to start the preparation for the second conference, to be held in a country in the so-called 'South' - Nicaragua.

A number of other processes also fed into the preparation of the conference and synergies should be reached, especially with the global Open Forum on CSO development effectiveness and the European Structured Dialogue process², between different actors in development including the European Commission, European Parliament, EU member states, local and regional authorities and CSOs that is running from the spring of 2010 until the spring of 2011. The Open Forum for CSO development effectiveness³ is searching for a vision on development effectiveness through national and international policy dialogue, taking account of the centrality of the concepts of human rights, gender equality, environmental sustainability, and the capacity of development actors to lead the

¹ In the Reader: 1.1 "Are we on the right track?" Paradigm Review by CSOs as Development Actors -Key Findings of the Prague conference 2008, page 5

² In the Reader: 4.1 Palermo process: a structural dialogue, page 37

³ Read the Proclamation of the 2009 Prague Conference on CSO development effectiveness in the Reader: 1.3 Conference on CSO Development Effectiveness Prague, 23 - 24 June 2009 - Prague Conference Proclamation

changes they seek, as the foundation for situating CSO effectiveness, as well as the effectiveness of donors and governments. The objectives are to reach an agreement on common principles regarding CSO development effectiveness and an agreement on guidelines on how to apply these principles and documentation of good practices for context-relevant mechanisms appropriate to each country and region.

Findings from the Prague conference *“Are we on the right track? Paradigm review by CSOs as development actors”*⁴

The conference report provides a wealth of information on the topics covered, but some main points emerged about the changing paradigms of development:

- The respect of human rights, especially economic, social and cultural rights provides a strong basis with which to overcome poverty;
- The enormous asymmetry of power and wealth in the world must be overcome to provide every person with a dignified life that is not blighted by poverty or exclusion;
- There is a need to move beyond the Millennium Development Goals and create a context within which any level of poverty is simply unacceptable;
- Justice is a precondition for democracy and so democratic participation should be safeguarded by dominant development paradigms;
- Development does not equate to economic growth. Development is cooperation rather than competition; wealth in non-monetary terms; human needs coming before profit; respect for the natural environment and power being used to serve rather than dominate. Change is more important than growth.

Additional elements introduced by the Vienna expert seminar looking towards Managua⁵

- The level of discussion in Managua needs to be defined: it is not always productive to combine academic theories and research topics with the more reality-based experiences of development practitioners.
- If the purpose of the second conference is to move from theory to practice, what will the final results be? If it is to be a global declaration on the role of CSOs in development there are questions around inclusiveness, legitimacy, different perspectives on codes of conduct, and questions around finding agreement on common principles and deciding towards whom the declaration should be addressed.
- A common declaration following the conference needs some preparation but should be open to be shaped by the discussions during the conference. The document could set out the common commitment and strategy of development CSOs from around the world in terms of how we engage with other development actors but this will be a challenge if participation is kept as open as is desirable.

Why Nicaragua?

⁴ Full documentation is available at: <http://www.trialog.or.at/start.asp?ID=155>

⁵ Full documentation is available at: <http://www.trialog.or.at/start.asp?b=74&ID=208>

A number of elements contributed to the decision to hold the second conference in Nicaragua, despite objections raised by some relating to cost, environmental concerns and relevance.

The primary aim was to involve southern colleagues more fully in the discussions. Representatives from around the world attended the Prague conference, but the majority of voices were from the European Union. Holding the conference in the so-called 'South' will ensure easier access by southern colleagues.

TRIALOG is a project that focuses on new member states of the EU, where most of the development links are with neighbouring or pre-accession countries. A link was found to be lacking in Prague between EU NMS representatives and those participants from Latin America in particular even if many NMS had a strong cooperation with Nicaragua up to the 1980s. The Nicaragua conference will be accompanied by a series of visits to projects in the country to open the door to creating and strengthening links between the two regions.

A significant number of older EU member states have Nicaragua as an ODA priority country, so many CSOs visit projects in this country on an annual basis. By combining these monitoring visits with the conference, environmental concerns should be assuaged to some extent.

Questions to be addressed in Managua

The title of the conference, which will be held from 24th to 26th of November 2010 is '**Global Crossroads: The Role and Perspectives of CSOs in Development Cooperation**'

This conference will bring CSO representatives together from around the globe to discuss issues related to the role of CSOs in development. Questions covered will include, but not be limited to:

Identity

- Are CSOs prepared to work so effectively that they become redundant? In whose real interest is it to achieve poverty eradication goals?
- What kind of development are CSOs working for? What kind of economic and social development is our ultimate objective⁶?
- Can we agree on global guiding principles that define the identity and behaviour of CSOs⁷?
- Does becoming institutionalised mean becoming part of an unjust system? What is the best way of ensuring the voices of the poor in the global 'South' are heard by those with the power and wealth to share?
- How can grassroots organisations defend their importance in international development cooperation? How can strong links within CSOs from different sectors and with different constituencies be ensured?

⁶ On a possible vision, please see in the Reader the "Final Report" of the European Cross-Networking Meeting, page 56.

⁷ On the issue of Code of Conduct for CSOS please see the Reader: Transparency International's "Developing a Code of Conduct for NGOs", page 26.

Funding

- How can CSOs take a critical position towards their governments' roles in development while depending on them for financial support? What is the risk of genuine agents of change becoming mere puppets on political strings?⁸
- Do CSOs have a right to financial support from public funds? Who should pay for the work that CSOs do?⁹
- How should CSOs react to the increasing share of ODA being provided as budget support?
- How can CSOs influence the quantity and quality of official funding for development?
- From partners to competitors: does the direct access of Southern CSOs to EU funding imply necessary competition with Northern CSOs? Do Northern NGOs have a right to access funds in the South? Is there any sense in Southern CSOs asking for Northern CSO partners in a project and what would be each partner's role?

Legitimacy and Effectiveness

- How can we reconcile differences and tensions between different CSOs active within development? How do we increase effectiveness through cooperation and division of labour?¹⁰
- Are CSOs working in development more effective at eradicating poverty than other actors? Is their work more sustainable and does it achieve more ownership?¹¹
- Can a conference declaration serve as a tool to readdress public perceptions of CSOs and clarify their role in development?
- Are CSOs the most effective actors when responding to the effects of the different global crises on the poor?

Field Visits:

The following week (29th November - 3rd December 2010) will be dedicated to field visits for conference participants, and in particular NMS colleagues to witness the development work being carried out by EU and LA CSO colleagues in the region and provide a first step towards future collaboration. The visits will include meetings with local stakeholders, CSOs, the local target group and beneficiaries, as well as official representatives of the EC-delegations and regional offices of the European national representations.

The Organisers:

⁸ In the Reader: 4.9 Reforming government funding of development NGOs. A comparative analysis of eight European donors, page 48

⁹ In the Reader: 4.6 CONCORD Discussion paper, The future of EC funding of Civil Society in Development, page 43

¹⁰ In the Reader: Marie Leclerc: "Past, Present....Future?", page 13

¹¹ In the Reader: Is NGO Aid Not So Different After All? Comparing the Allocation of Swiss Aid by Private and Official Donors, page 42

TRIALOG

TRIALOG is a project to strengthen civil society and raise awareness of development issues in the enlarged EU by providing a wide range of capacity building measures, information distribution, policy and advocacy support as well as support in national and international networking.

With the enlargement of the European Union 12 new member states (NMS) contribute strategically and financially to the EU development co-operation policy. The priorities, policies and methodologies of the NMS and accession/candidate countries (AC/CC) complement and enrich the present EU approach. A sound integration into European structures and policies is clearly needed. The involvement of civil society organisations (CSOs) in this process and the mobilisation of public support for development cooperation in the enlarged EU is decisive in order to live up to the EU's commitment to eradicate world poverty.

TRIALOG's overall objective is to contribute to the mobilisation of more public support in [New EU Member States \(NMS\), Accession and Candidate Countries \(AC/CC\)](#) for actions against poverty and for equal relations between developing and developed countries through Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) as multipliers.

The specific objective is a stronger European System of international development cooperation by the integration and active participation of CSOs from NMS and AC/CC on European and global level through coordination, networking, advocacy and capacity building.

www.trialog.or.at

HORIZONT3000

HORIZONT3000 is an Austrian NGO working in the area of development cooperation. With the mandate of our member organizations of the catholic development sector we specialize in the monitoring and implementation of projects as well as in the provision of experts in developing countries.

People in focus

Every person is entitled to just and dignified living conditions and to self-determination, irrespective of ethnic origin, gender or religion. Based on Christian values, we offer support to people in our partner countries in their aspirations to improve the quality of their lives.

Respect and Partnership

Through our regional offices, but also through our personnel deployed in the individual projects, we are in constant dialogue and exchange with civil society organizations and decision makers in our partner countries. Our shared approach is characterized by respect, by a fair and cooperative working environment, by participation and by constant willingness to learn from each other. In this way we are able to succeed in optimally fulfilling the needs and requirements of our target groups.

Sustainability

In both the formulation as well the implementation stages of our programs and projects, we orientate ourselves on principles of sustainability, in its social, ecologic and economic aspects. Together with civil society representatives and with our partner organizations we assume joint responsibility for a 'one-world' approach, which also includes awareness about the limited availability of natural and material resources.

HORIZONT3000 is the lead agency of the TRIALOG consortium. In the context of the Nicaragua conference, the HORIZONT3000 regional office in Managua is the cooperation partner.

www.horizont3000.at

The university of the autonomous regions of the caribbean coast of Nicaragua (URACCAN)

Legally founded in 1993, the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua (URACCAN) is a strived started in the 1970s by local leaders and professionals to ensure a quality, pertinent university education for the Caribbean Coast's indigenous and afro descendant young people, particularly. In 2009, the total student population was of 14,168 students, who were distributed in 7 postgraduate courses, 25 undergraduate courses, 14 community diploma courses and 76 continuing education courses. The University has four campuses- in Bluefields, Bilwi, Siuna and Nueva Guinea- and four extensions- in Waspám, Rosita, Bonanza and Waslala. The campuses and extensions have been located in the main ethnic and linguistic areas of the Autonomous Regions to democratize access to higher education opportunities and offset local brain drain. URACCAN also encompasses seven institutes and centers: the Natural Resources, Environment and Sustainable Development Institute (IREMADES), the Traditional Medicine and Community Development Institute (IMTRADEC), the Institute for Research and Promotion of Autonomy (IEPA), the Institute for Linguistic Promotion and Research and Cultural Revitalization (IPIILC), the Institute for Cultural Communication (ICI), the Center for Multiethnic Women Research and Information (CEIMM) and the Center for Socio- Environmental Information (CISA). These institutes and centers are at the forefront of URACCAN's research and outreach work. A network of community radio stations, a TV Cable in Bilwi and TV Cable programs also forms part of the University.

URACCAN is a landmark community, intercultural higher education institution. Its mission is "to form human resources, with scientific- technical knowledge and skills, humanistic attitudes, entrepreneurship and innovative qualities, to contribute in the strengthening of the regional Autonomy system and the country". In 2004, URACCAN was declared "a cultural patrimony of the indigenous peoples and ethnic communities of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua" by the Regional Autonomous Councils of the North and South Atlantic Autonomous Regions (RAAN and RAAS).

www.uraccan.edu.ni

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